Falling Apart

by LadyLyssa

Summary

What would you do? If you found yourself in a dark, mysterious forest, and you didn't know where you were? If you found yourself in a familiar, but completely foreign world? People you know, but at the same time, don't? This is what I think I would do. Warning, this story will touch on dark subjects. Eventual OC/Legolas

Notes

I want to preface this story with a bit of backstory on myself, because I am trying to put myself in the story, not just some OC I came up with and thought would be fun.
I've played cello since I was three and a half years old.
I’ve hiked with my family down Havasupai (The grand canyon) every year Since I was seven years old (Though, not so much in the recent 2-3 years). In sandals when I was eight, because of an unfortunate mix up where my sister’s’ shoes and mine were exactly the same, just a size apart, I grabbed hers, and she didn’t grab any, so she got to wear the boots and I had to hike in sandals. Wooo. Growing experience.
I have a bit of a thing for survival facts, and just love the idea that if something were to happen, I could survive on my knowledge alone out in the wilderness.
I’m part of an sca group, am moderately sufficient at archery (Been doing that on and off for a few years), currently getting into Rapier, belly dancing, and club juggling (I got balls down, thought it would be fun to step it up.)
I have moderate horse riding experience, have an overabundance of love for pretty much all animals, including snakes, most bugs, fish, and all those splendid creatures.
I’m an avid seamstress.
I talk to myself a lot.
This story is going to start off pretty slow. We probably won’t see any known LOTR characters for a few chapters. For the purpose of ease, I am going to pretend Westron is basically old english, cause I kind of always dislike when there’s that huge language barrier. Makes things really difficult to enjoy for me.

Now that you know all that, I hope you enjoy the story, believe me when I say I am not trying to make her Mary Sue, especially in the beginning.
Questions, comments, criticism (can has constructive, not mean?) are all welcome.
I’m writing this for my enjoyment, but I do hope others get enjoyment from it as well, and I would be happy to have input on where I should go with it.
I intend for this to be a trilogy. Falling Apart, Rebuilt, and The Last Goodbye.
Westron - “Words”
Sindarin - “words”
Thoughts - ‘Words’
On to the story. I present to you, Falling Apart.
The first thing I realized upon rejoining the world of consciousness was that I was really cold, kind of sore, and decidedly not in my warm bed that I remembered falling asleep in.
I blinked my eyes open slowly, searching for my blankets.

For a moment, it was dark enough, and I was still waking up, so my surroundings didn’t really register in my mind.
Then my eyes focused, and I yelped, sitting up quickly.

“What the hell?!”

My voice came out a pitch higher than normal, and I was so startled that I warranted the use of a swear word.
Under normal circumstances, I preferred not to swear.
I liked to think that I was eloquent enough and had a large enough vocabulary that I could bring my point across without the use of swear words.
This was not one of those moments.

I was in a forest.
A very dark, creepy forest.
Now don’t get me wrong, I love forests.
One of my favorite places in the world is the coastal redwood forest, because it makes me feel like I’m in a fantasy movie.
Like a unicorn could just come walking around a tree at any moment.

I would put this forest in the same category as the coastal redwoods, just...darker.
Older.

The trees were huge, towering above me and making me feel rather small at my relatively average stature of five feet four inches.
They felt sad, and somehow angry at the same time.

Moss hung from any surface it could, causing everything to seem warped and heavy, branches seeming to lack the energy to reach up and catch the sun.
They were densely planted too, and they looked incredibly old.
Not much light made it through, and what light did manage looked gray, like there was heavy cloud cover.
I sat for a moment more, shivering.

Was this some sort of sick prank?
A tv special thing?
Throw a girl in a forest and see how long it takes for her to die of starvation and dehydration?

That slightly morbid thought helped me to steel my nerves and focus my mind from the slight panic that was attempting to take hold.
They picked the wrong fucking girl.

I took a deep breath, calming myself and gritting my teeth slightly against the whole body soreness that had developed from laying on the cold ground of the forest for who knows how long.
It was covered in small rocks, moss, and leafy debris, so all in all not the worst ground one could sleep on, but definitely not the best, either.

Rising up with a stifled groan at my cold muscles, I spun in a slow circle. The trees told me nothing of what direction I should go, there were no footprints of whoever had left me...How had they gotten me here? Was I drugged..?

Glancing down, I realized one of the reasons why I was so cold.

I was wearing nothing but underwear and a tank top. The underwear had little bits of lace around the top, and were a light mint green with white polkadots. The tank top was a solid deep blue. It was no more revealing than a swimsuit, but the open air of the forest certainly made me feel very vulnerable.

I wasn’t a terribly fit person. Average height, weighing around 135 pounds, most of it in my hips and thighs, a bit in my stomach, and a decent amount in my bust.

I wasn’t in the habit of being self conscious, I had long ago decided that the only opinion that mattered was my own, and that I quite liked myself. That changes when you appear in strange forests wearing practically nothing, apparently.

Another yelp, this one far more horrified than the last, tore it’s way out of me at my discovered state of undress, and the forest once again heard an echoing “What the hell?!”. “What kind of person abandons another person in a dark, creepy forest, with nothing but...but...Underwear?!”

I angrily asked a nearby tree, kicking angrily at the ground, and promptly regretting it as my bare foot hit a tree root and I hopped around for a moment, holding the hurting foot. “Fuck. Not a good idea.”

I set my foot down again, a bit gingerly, painful consequences causing the anger to dissipate rather quickly.

Spinning around slowly in another circle, I tried to see if there was anything I could try to cover myself up with, then promptly decided to fuck that idea. I was in a mysterious forest, if there were people in here, they could ignore their sensitivities, because they probably put me here in the first place.

I was already cold, the smart thing to do, my mind supplied, would be to do some form of exercise to warm up. “Pick a direction...and start walking...” I instructed myself quietly, the eery silence of the forest driving me to my long time habit of talking to myself, though my voice came out soft, not wanting to disturb the eery silence.

I searched the ground for a few moments, finding some rocks to stack together into a cairn to mark that this was where I’d began.

I tried to feel if my mental compass was still in working order, then gave that up. There was no sun or any other indicator to show if I was right, so why bother? I promptly decided to just pick what I thought was south and head in that direction.

Walking was slightly painful, having stupidly kicked a tree root, though having no shoes certainly didn’t make it any easier.
For the first couple minutes of limping along, I grumbled to myself.  
“Practically fucking naked in a creepy fucking forest, in the middle of who fucking knows where.  
There aren’t any forests like this in Arizona.”

That was a startling thought. I was clearly not anywhere near home.  
Quickly, though, my muttered venting gave out to an uneasy silence as I decided it would be easier to save my breath.

The walk was slow going, tree branches seemed to materialize in front of my feet, so I had to stare hard at the ground to make sure I didn’t trip too often.  
Even after my eyes adjusted to the dim light, or lack thereof, it didn’t get any easier.

I was careful to glance back every now and then until I could just barely see my last cairn, then search around and build another one, marking my path in case anyone tried to find me.  
Though the thought briefly crossed my mind that perhaps, if there was anyone in this forest, I might not want them to find me.

I shivered, this time from a spark of anxiety as my eyes darted around the dimly lit forest, now feeling as if I was being watched.  
My steps quickened slightly and the cairns I left after that were considerably smaller, and could pass off as potentially natural piles of rocks.

To say I was uncomfortable would be severely downplaying things.  
Having no form of pants or fabric between my thighs caused them to rub uncomfortably against each other, and I knew it was going to develop a rash if it continued for more than a few hours.

I couldn’t tell how much time passed, or how far I’d traveled, and I quickly fell into a bit of a miserable daze, staring without much comprehension at the ground, only seeing enough to avoid obstacles.  
The little light there was in the forest started fading a few hours after I started out. I created one last cairn as the light faded even faster, then started searching for somewhere to hunker down for the night.  
The universe had other ideas in store for me, though.

As the already dim light faded and my vision was even more limited, I started to hear howls and growls off in the distance.  
My eyes widened, though it did nothing for my sight.  
I quickly lowered myself to my knees, tripping and injuring myself would be bad, I needed my ankles in working order.  
I tried to contain a groan at how sore I felt, and started crawling around as fast as I could, fear at the idea of being eaten by wild animals being a powerful reason to not care when my knees banged against rocks and pointy sticks.

I felt around as quickly, and quietly as possible, though to my ears it sounded like I was making a terrible racket, until finally I found what felt like a very large tree.  
I stood, feeling around for some sort of foothold or branch to use to pull myself up, wincing every time I heard anything, even sounds I made.

It seemed like it took forever, but it must have only been a few minutes of careful feeling and testing before I was sure I was reasonably high up in the tree.  
Hopefully, too high for any people-eating wild animals to reach.
The following night was tense, and sleepless as I huddled, shivering from the cold, against the trunk of the tree, having found a thick enough branch to sit on.

Walking had warmed me up a bit, but now that I’d stopped, the combination of slight humidity, sweat, and lack of clothes were making the chilly air feel even colder than it probably was. It felt like every noise was a monster coming to get me, and a few times I was certain I heard growls and sniffling noises directly under my tree. During those times, I held my breath, hugging the tree harder, as if they might be able to pull me down if I wasn’t secure.

Eventually though, after what felt like hours, the noises seemed to fade, the animals apparently growing tired of growling at my tree. I remained stuck to my tree of safety for a long while still, until the light had returned, dim and murky, the same as yesterday.

It had been a completely sleepless night, without even the opportunity to stop being alert. I was exhausted.

Not that that was a new concept for me.

I had a habit of suffering from completely random wake ups throughout the night, and sometimes there were strings of nights without sleep at all. I had debated whether it was some sort of insomnia, but eventually decided that I didn’t particularly care, as having a name for whatever plagued my sleep likely wouldn’t really help all that much. Either way, I was tired, physically and mentally.

Every now and then, the trees would move and groan, the one I was on in particular, and I got the weird feeling that they were doing it on purpose, unhappy with my intrusion of their forest. I was glad they hadn’t done that the night before, as it would have made it that much more nerve wracking.

Once it was light enough to see decently with my dark adjusted eyes, I slowly, painstakingly climbed down from my tree, surprised with how high I had actually managed to get in the dark. My eyes stung and were blurry from lack of sleep, and I tried not to groan at the aches and pains that were making themselves known. Despite my discomfort, I couldn’t help but feel incredibly grateful that I’d been able to find the tree, and made sure to turn and softly thank the tree once I made it to the ground again.

I felt a little ridiculous doing it, but there was something about this forest that made it seem like the trees weren’t just alive...they seemed...aware. The swaying and groaning seemed to fade a bit from the entire forest at my sincere words of thanks, and despite the oddness of the situation, I felt like it was because of my words, and resolved to be only polite and courteous to the trees, not wanting them to be angry should I need another tree to hide in the next night.

My stomach growled, making its emptiness abundantly clear, and I resolved to look around for some sort of food or water source while I walked.

I stumbled away from the tree, returning to the cairn I’d made last night. Even that few feet I walked felt torturous on my stiff, sore, cold muscles.

I devoted the next couple minutes to painfully stretching, doing a few easier yoga moves in an
attempt to warm up my body a tiny bit before I started walking.
It did seem to help, though not as much as I would have liked.
That done, I took up the same slow, trudging pace from the day before, walking more on the balls of
my feet as I carefully picked my way through the forest.

I resumed my cairn building whenever I could barely see the last one, using it now more to keep
myself in a semi straight line, rather than marking my progress for anyone else.

Walking seemed to take forever, and I could hardly tell I had made any progress at all any time I
made the effort to glance back at my path, though being able to pick out my little jumble of rocks
helped to give me a visual idea of how far I had actually traveled. It was relatively easy to tell where
I’d walked, footprints and smushed leaves trailing behind me, as well as the occasional cairn. At least
I was going in a moderately straight path, and wasn’t walking in circles.
I distracted myself for the next few hours trying to lessen the visibility of my footprints, but
eventually stopped, as it felt like it took an excessive amount of energy.

I had a hard time focusing through the haze of exhaustion, soreness, hunger, and thirst, which made
looking for food difficult.
There was an overabundance of moss, fallen leaves, and small bushes, but none of them looked
familiar enough that I really felt safe eating them.

I carefully nibbled on pieces of moss, evaluating the taste on my tongue before swallowing, and
waiting a while before nibbling more to see if it made me feel unwell.
Eventually the hungry gnawing in my stomach subsided, having not been offered much of anything,
and through my tired haze, I thought I heard the quiet sound of trickling water.

I slowed, and stilled, listening hard.
The forest was still unnaturally quiet.
Almost muffled, as if I was wearing a pair of headphones or earplugs.
Then, ahead, I heard it again. The bubbling sound of water.

I started towards it as quickly as I was able, feeling slightly hopeful for the first time since waking up
in this strange old forest.
Water was good. Water meant survival.
It only took a few minutes, and the sound grew slightly, finally proving to be a small stream.

It trickled cheerfully, seeming slightly out of place in such a foreboding forest.
I wasted no time in rushing to it, lowering myself to my knees, and cupping my hands to drink.

The water was ice cold, probably run off from snow, or a spring somewhere, and had there been
anyone to talk to, I would have told them it was the best water I’d ever drank in my life.
Having no such person, I addressed a nearby tree.
“This is divine! I think it’s the best water I’ve ever tasted!”
The trees groaned in response.

After drinking my fill for the moment, I sat back on my knees, thinking about what the next course of
action should be.
“Well, I’ve found water, mister tree...Or missus, I suppose. I can’t stay here, though...Do I go
upstream? Do I go downstream…? Do I put my left foot out, and shake it all about..?”
Neither tree nor water offered any responses, clearly not appreciating my attempt at humor. I laughed though, feeling a little ridiculous for laughing at my own joke. It felt nice after the oppressive darkness and quiet. Slowly, I stood, muscles already cooling and feeling stiff from my short rest. “Either way, I should stay near the water...And I need to figure out what direction I’m walking, see if there are any buildings around…”

A nearby tree creaked, and I looked at it consideringly. Perhaps I could find a tree to climb that would go high enough to see over the canopy.

It wouldn’t do to walk up or downstream and then find myself stuck by huge unclimbable mountains, or to find that the little stream dried up further down. A bit further up the stream I spotted what looked to be a reasonably tall looking tree with large enough branches to support my weight, so I set off towards it.

I felt quite re-invigorated by the drink of water, and a bit more confident knowing the stream was right there, should I want more.

Climbing the tree proved to be a bit more difficult than I originally thought it would. Having not started out with a great amount of upper body strength to begin with, the general soreness made clambering up a very slow and difficult process.

Eventually I managed though, and once I made it a bit further up the tree, the climb became easier, the branches growing a bit closer together. Despite not really being afraid of heights, I made sure not to look down, not feeling entirely steady so high up off the ground.

A treacherous voice in my head supplied the thought, ‘If I fell from this height, I’d likely break a leg, or possibly more than that. Then I’d really be doomed.’ I nervously tried to shove that particular thought away, and focused on climbing until I reached the top.

For the first time in what seemed like forever, I felt the warmth of the sun on my face. It was glorious.

The light was almost blinding after spending so long in the dark, and despite that logically, I knew it had only been a day, my eyes teared up a little at the warm sunlight. For a long moment, I simply stayed there, clinging to the tree branches and basking in the light.

Then I remembered why I’d spent so much energy climbing up this particular tree, and proceeded to look around. The sun was high in the sky, doing very little to help me orient myself, and telling me that it was roughly around noonish.

Ahead of me was a long expanse of forest, and I wasn’t quite high enough up to see where it ended, just that the tops of the trees continued on for a long while. To my right was even more trees, then what looked like some flat, desert plains, and the occasional mountain here and there. To my left was some more trees, and then some huge, mountains, hidden slightly in mist, despite how close I was to them.

As my eyes continued to the left, a shape managed to catch my eye. Tall and dark. Some sort of building. The top was almost..spikey?
It looked familiar...Where did I know that building from? I couldn’t make out much of what it was made of, and I didn’t see any people around it.

Was it some sort of church? This was a weird place for a church. Maybe it was part of an old abandoned castle or something. It looked like it could be part of a castle.

Of course, that started the line of thought, where was I that there were ruined castles laying around? Whatever it was, first and foremost it was a building. Even if there weren’t any people and wasn’t any food, it would still be a shelter from the cold. Though, it looked rather far away, it was hard to make out any details about it except that it was a black tower.

Right now, it was my best bet. I carefully noted what direction it was in, hoping I wouldn’t go astray while I tried to get out of the forest. More walking. Yay.
Carefully, I started to descend from my tree, stifling a small sigh when the direct sunlight disappeared through the leaves and branches. I was sure I would be cursing that sun at some point once I ventured out of the forest, so I reasoned that I may as well try to enjoy the shade while I had it.

Climbing down was much more nerve wracking than climbing up, so it took a while, as I was overly cautious, not wanting to fall and injure myself. I would never be able to make it out of the forest and to that weird tower if I was injured.

Upon making it to the bottom I sank to the ground, lingering for a moment to control the slight shaking that had started up in my legs, both from exertion, and from what I considered to be very reasonable fear.

I scooted over to the stream, putting my feet in the cool water to soothe some of the aches and cuts I’d gained from walking barefoot.

I’d have laid down in it if I wasn’t already so cold, but it would have lowered my body temperature far too much. Briefly, I wondered what time of year it was, that it was so cold.

Early spring? Autumn? It didn’t seem like winter, but perhaps it was just a very mild winter? While I soaked my feet, I also reached in a little further up to get a few more handfuls of water to drink.

I sat, staring at the water for a few minutes, drinking on and off in an attempt to hydrate myself the best I could, as going towards the tower would mean I’d have to leave the water behind. The hunger was back, though I could tell the water helped a little bit.

It looked like I’d probably still have another week or more of travel before I was even out of the forest, though. People could go longer than that without food, as long as they had water. But this little stream wasn’t going to be with me the entire time.

I got one last drink of water, stood stiffly, and wiped stray dirt and leaves off my legs before looking around. I needed something to hold water.

I started searching the forest around the stream, not quite sure what I was actually looking for. After a short while, I started pulling at the moss that hung on practically everything.

I remembered reading somewhere that moss could hold a lot of water, and that some of it was edible. Maybe this was that kind?..?

It was the same as the moss I’d nibbled on earlier, and I didn’t feel any worse for having eaten it.

It pulled easily from the rocks and tree roots that I pried it off, and wrung out a decent enough drink of water per chunk of moss I peeled up. When I hesitantly tried eating it, it tasted..well..mossy. Kind of grassy and earthy. Overall, not a bad taste. Of course, it wasn't really a good taste either...

I continued walking around, prying up more as I went.
A few hours later, with a couple more handfuls of eaten moss, and more water from the stream, I felt slightly better than I had that morning, though it did nothing for my overall soreness.

Once I could relatively safely say that the moss didn’t seem to be having any negative effects, I spent the rest of the day there at the stream, stocking myself up on moss. I spent a few minutes holding the moss in the stream to try and clean out any bits of dirt or debris that were in it, then stacked it all on the side of the stream on a pile of leaves. I had quite a pile, and for another moment I sat looking at it, trying to think of a way to carry it out of the forest.

With a bit of fiddling and careful knotting, I managed to get the moss into a loose rope, which I looped around my neck and shoulders, hoping there weren’t any bugs waiting to bite me.

I quickly decided that, since it was already at least late afternoon, it would be best to stay here the rest of the day, collecting moss and drinking water, then set off fresh in the morning for the tower. I spent the next few hours collecting more moss and knotting it carefully into the original rope, eating and drinking as much as I comfortably could the entire time.

As the light started to fade, I slung my weird jumbled rope of moss around my shoulders and started searching for a tree to climb, not wanting to go through the same stress of having to find a tree in the dark that I’d had the previous night.

After I was safely in a tree, huddled high up in a bunch of branches that almost seemed to be forming something of a nest, I noticed that the areas of my body touched by my mossy rope were slightly warmer than the rest of me, insulated a bit by the moss. I tried to wrap myself up as best I could, using the trunk of the tree to keep my back as warm as possible, and the moss the rest of me.

It didn’t really work all that well, and the rest of the night was spent shivering, and semi alert to the noises of wandering animals, much like the first. There were more growls and howls, the noise of large feet crunching on the dead leaves that littered the ground. Halfway through the night the noises faded, growing further away, and I dozed lightly for the rest of the night, waking often.

It took another seven days of walking for as long as there was light until I reached the edge of the forest, and the days blurred together to the point where I couldn’t really remember how long I’d been here. It was spent in a miserable daze of cold, hunger, and an assortment of pain and soreness.

The moss helped a bit, and I continued collecting it the entire time, keeping my original rope to hold the stream water, and adding on to it as I went. It was difficult to eat more than a small amount at a time, and it did little to abate the gnawing emptiness of my stomach.

It did keep me moderately well hydrated though, so for that, I was grateful.

The growling and scuffling of nearby animals had faded some time on the fourth night, and had not reappeared on any of the following nights, so I was able to get a little bit more sleep, though it turns out sleeping in trees isn’t exactly the easiest thing to do. I never quite fell into a full sleep, lingering in a state of semi awareness that was entirely unsatisfying.

Apparently it was enough, though, because I never passed out. When I finally made it to the edge of the forest, I was both excited, and disappointed.
Excited to finally be out of the gloom the trees provided, and disappointed to find that between me and the top of the tower was a line of large mist covered hills that eventually grew into large, jutting mountains.

I gathered a bit of extra moss before striking out towards where the mountains, which I was now jokingly referring to as the Misty mountains, gentled into hills.

Getting to hills that weren’t too steep for me to manage took about three days, and if I thought had felt miserable before I the forest, I was kicking myself now for leaving.

The sun became my worst enemy, having nothing to cover myself up with.
It only took a day for sunburns to develop, and after that it only got worse.

The ground outside the forest was less damp, harder, covered in prickly dead looking grass that stabbed into my feet with every step, leaving small cuts behind and making walking much more painful.
My pace slowed, partially from the torture of walking on sliced up and aching feet, and partially because I attempted to choose where I stepped more carefully to avoid the worst of the grass.
That didn’t work.

With no large trees in sight to climb for safety, I ended up having to sleep curled up next to some bushes at the base of the misty mountains, hoping and praying that the animals that had wandered the forest didn’t venture out onto the plains around it.

The first night out of the forest I didn’t manage to find a place to sleep before it had gotten dark, and was unable to see the ant hill I laid down near.
It was also the first night I truly slept, exhaustion from the previous weeks of walking, the lack of real deep sleep in the forest, and the added pain of the sunburn causing my body to give me very little choice in the matter.

I awoke to the sun stabbing at my eyelids, and to intense itchiness from the many, many bug bites I had acquired.
I did not make that mistake again, making sure to give myself ample time to find somewhere hopefully safe, and with as few bugs and rocks as possible.

When I made it to smaller hills and started my ascent, a full two weeks after I had first woken up in the forest, I realized how lucky I’d had it with the mostly flat plains, and small rolling hills.
I was sore, my muscles screaming with every movement, extremely sunburnt, covered in small cuts and scrapes from sleeping on the ground and occasionally tripping as I walked.
I was also covered in dirt, and my feet were cut and scraped on the bottom, some of the cuts visibly infected.

The tank top and underwear I’d had on that were once light green and deep blue were now muddy brown, and torn in many places.

The only part of me that looked even slightly presentable was my waist length, wavy brown hair.
I had taken to unwinding it from the braid I kept it in and finger combing it in those first, tense nights when no sleep was possible, and had continued the tradition even after the animals had seemingly left the area.

I’d also continued the tradition of stretching and doing yoga moves in the morning before I started walking, finding that though it didn’t banish the soreness, it did help the stiff feeling from cold muscles.
I was forced to stop braiding my hair after the elastic I’d been using snapped into two short pieces,
and managed to find a long stick to use as a hair stick. It had a few splintering parts along it that caught on my hair, but it worked decently enough to keep my hair up in a tight bun.

In an attempt to save the moss I had, on the off chance I came across another source of water, I picked and chewed at the tough, prickly grass, not knowing of any grass that was actually bad for you, and feeling relatively safe with that decision. It did little for my hunger, though, which grew worse every day.

My feet were, as ever, extremely painful.

I’d started washing them with water from the moss while I was in the forest, in an attempt to keep them from getting too infected. Once I left the forest, though, I was forced to discontinue that practice, not wanting to get blood or infection into the moss in case I needed to eat it later.

How long would it take for an infection to kill you if left untreated, I wondered. I wasn’t sure, but hopefully it would be long enough to reach somewhere with antibiotics.

The sun was high in the sky on the fourteenth day when I finally made it to the top of what I swore was the worst hill I’d ever climbed, only to stop cold in my tracks at the very top. I swayed in place, staring at what I had thought was going to be an old ruined castle, the tower the only part of it left visible to anything outside the mountains. It was not a ruined castle.

It was a spike of black stone, springing from the earth and ominously sending its shadow over the area around it. It was surrounded by a circle of trees, as well as a large, circular stone wall.

And it screamed familiarity at me. I knew that tower, with its circle of plants and stone wall.

Things like that...they didn’t exist in my world, at least not that I knew. But they existed in Middle Earth.

That was no ordinary tower. That was Orthanc. Isengard.

Middle Earth.

My legs collapsed beneath me, and I didn’t even wince at the hard ground slamming into my knees, still staring in disbelief at the black tower before me. It looked different from the movie, but it was undeniably Orthanc.

I held my breath, looking around in some attempt to find something that would prove to me that it was or wasn’t Orthanc, or tell me whether I was actually in Middle Earth or not. No answer was supplied. The breath I sucked in left me only moments later in a silent sob at what that meant for me, but I quickly shook my head, mentally berating myself that no matter what situation I was in, I could get out of it, I just had to stay calm.

If it wasn’t Orthanc, then maybe it was just someone who really liked Lord of the Rings, and had decided to make a replica of Isengard.
In that situation, it would be a good idea to go see if I could get some help, maybe they would give me food and medicine, and a ride home.

If I was in Middle Earth, then obviously Saruman hadn’t revealed he was dark yet, but I had no way of knowing how early I was in the story. So, going towards the tower might be a bad idea if Saruman was actually real, and was also evil.

I contemplated that for a moment, then decided that if someone had built Orthanc, I probably would have heard about it, and that it might be safer to assume that I was actually in Middle Earth until I had proof that I wasn’t. That way I didn’t go about accidentally handing myself and all my knowledge of the story over to the bad guy. Ya know, if the bad guy actually existed.

Slowly looking around, I found a hint of a river, and slowly rose, quickly deciding that I could think more on the conundrum of where I was and what I was doing after I’d gone and gotten more water, for at this point I was going on two days since my moss had dried up.

I skirted a wide circle around what I had decided was Orthanc, the sight of it causing a mixture of fear and anxiety. What if Saruman was there, and saw me? What if there were orcs around? What if I was just going crazy because I was out in the middle of nowhere with no food or water, and I wasn’t in middle earth at all?

I was parched, and the hungry gnawing had faded, which I felt was probably a bad sign. The bits of grass I managed to pull up and chew on did very little, and it left me baffled as to how any horses could possibly be well fed in the wild.

I had fistfulls of itchy yellowing grass and had to chew them up for at least a minute before being able to swallow without being sent into a coughing fit at the prickly sensation of the smooshed grass going down my throat. It certainly didn’t help the dry feeling in my mouth.

I’d found a few pebbles to suck on to help create saliva, but it wasn’t helping much. It was slowly turning into night as I finally made it down to the river, which, if I were in Middle Earth, my mind supplied, would be the fords of Isen.

It was a relatively shallow, but wide across stream of water, and to my eyes it was the most beautiful thing in the world. I actually started a slow jog when it came into view, dropping to my knees painfully at the edge of the stream and shoving my hands into the cool water to drink as much as I could, before shoving in what little moss I had left to collect some water.

It was cold and delicious, though at that point, any water was going to be delicious, whether it was cold or not. Once my thirst was sated, I rubbed my arms in the water, trying to wipe away the layers of dirt, sweat, blood, and grime that had collected over two weeks of travel.

“I understand now why Aragorn always looks so dirty. I swear if you let me find some actual food, I’ll never mentally tease him about it again. I might audibly, though.” I aimed that particular promise at the sky, because that was the tendency when you were talking to gods.
If I was going to decide I was in Middle Earth, I was going to do it all the way, and that meant deities and all.
If I was going to talk to anyone, who better to talk to than them?

The water was soothing on my horribly sunburnt skin.
I don’t burn easily in general, but with nearly spending all day in the sun in little to no clothes, and no form of sunscreen whatsoever, even I burnt.

My skin was a bright, unhealthy red color one gets from prolonged sun exposure.
It was starting to peel, but the skin underneath was just as red as the skin on top.
I wished this desert plains area could have aloe vera, but unfortunately, I hadn’t seen any.

I slowly rose, wanting to just lay down in the water, but knowing that my night would be a whole lot colder if I did.
Instead, I moved away from the water, dripping moss in hand, and found a place under the trees nearby to curl up for the night.

That night was plagued with moments of wakefulness where, for a brief moment, I awoke not remembering where I was or what I had discovered the day before.

Eventually the realization always came crashing down, and I was forced to stifle tears, and shaking sobs at the thought that I might not even be in my own world anymore.
That I might not survive to even make it anywhere with people and would just die with no one the wiser, no one even knowing I was here.

Worst of all was the thought that I likely would never see my friends and family again.
I wasn’t terribly close to my family, but I would have at least wished to say goodbye if I knew I wasn’t going to be able to see them again.

The thought of not seeing my friends again hurt much more deeply, a stabbing pain that resonated in my stomach and chest, making it difficult to breath.
They were more family than my blood relatives, and I decided that once I was in a safe place and didn’t have to worry so much about survival, I would allow myself to mourn that I might never see them again.

With that decision made, I slowly counted, forcing my breathing into an even, steady pattern of four counts in, six counts out.
Crying would only take precious water. I could not afford to cry.
It didn’t take long for me to fall asleep after that, but it remained a restless sleep, and I awoke easily with the rise of the sun.

The next morning I started my day off with a long soak in the cool water, soothing my sunburns, cuts, and sore muscles.
Laying down in it was divine, though it certainly didn’t help the shivering that had already plagued me.
I even took my hair stick out, leaving it carefully on the edge of the river so it didn’t float away.
The water in my hair and on my scalp was shockingly cold, but it felt amazing.

My skin numbed soon enough, and after about a half hour of just enjoying it, I sat up, leaving my legs in to soak in the cold water for a few more minutes while I put my hair back up into a bun and got out all together.
I felt worlds better.
Well, as good as one can with two weeks of barefoot, nearly naked travel, half of it in full sun, all of it with very little food or water.
Yeah, I hurt.
Everywhere.
The water had at least soothed some of my hurts into submission for the moment, and I now had an idea of where I was, and where I should go, which was as reinvigorating as the cold water.
I stretched slowly, doing a few easy yoga positions to warm up my muscles, and went to drink more water and re-wet my moss.
I gave one last, longing look at the stream, and then turned, setting out again, around the west side of what I now knew to be the misty mountains.
I knew that if I followed them all the way up on the west side, I would eventually, hopefully, run into Rivendell.
Or at least some elves who could take me to Rivendell.
Assuming Rivendell existed.
That seemed the best idea right now.
It was rather far, if my vague mental map was accurate, but it would be equally far to go to Lothlorien, and it seemed like with my knowledge of the world, seeking council from Elrond would be a good idea.
Saruman getting his hands on me would be disastrous, and that thought spurred me into a quicker walk away from the fords of Isen.
I gave a wide berth to the opening in the mountains that displayed Isengard, and was glad once it was out of sight again.
It was a full thirty days after the fords of Isen, and a total of forty five days of travel, when any amount of luck I had disappeared.

It had rained five times, interspersed in those thirty days, allowing me to soak up water in my very valuable moss and keep myself from dying of dehydration over the days without a water source. I mostly ate grass, but a few times I managed to find bushes with berries, or trees with nuts or seeds.

The first berry bush left me vomiting after a couple ingested berries turned out to be not so healthy. Needless to say, I avoided that particular type of berry for the rest of the travel.

The nuts and seeds seemed to have no negative effects, so I collected as many as I could when I saw the plants they lived on, and used the upturned and tied hem of my tank top as a makeshift bag to hold them.

The land I was now traversing was sloping and riddled with hills, which made it difficult at times for me to manage.
My rest breaks became longer and more frequent as the time between finding anything to forage grew longer, and my moss had dried up a few days ago with no new rainfall to renew it.

The hunger that had long ago faded into a numb emptiness, now caused dizzy spells and made me feel even weaker than I already felt.

Getting up from my curled up position was now exceedingly difficult, and some mornings I briefly considered whether it was even worth it to keep going.
At least if I died out here, no one could abuse my knowledge of the story.

I was always quick to banish those thoughts, though, forcing myself to move faster, with more purpose whenever they came around.

Halfway through the forty five days, I had the misfortune of having to deal with my period.
I managed to get my underwear off before too much blood had soaked into them, not wanting them to get too ruined, as they were really all I had.
I spent the next five days in a state of constant misery.
The trickle of blood down my legs was the most unpleasant part, as I’d gotten used to my body cramping up and hurting already from the walking and hunger.

I was glad when it was over, and even more grateful when it rained shortly after, and I managed to clean the worst of the blood off my legs and put my underwear back on.

It was on the forty eighth day of being in Middle Earth that I came across people.
Or rather, they came across me.

I was sitting against a small, thirsty looking tree, commiserating with it quietly at the lack of water.
It showed it just as much as I did, though, obviously in different ways.

It was then that I heard voices.
They were low and gravelly, definitely male, and it sounded like they were arguing.

“What’re we doin out here, eh? Havn’t seen a sign of wildlife for days. We’re not going to find game here. We oughta keep on north, there’s always nice huntin’ up there.”
The first voice, despite being low and gravelly, was obviously whining.
They didn’t sound particularly friendly, but there was little point in running, it was difficult even standing and walking at this point.

I huddled against my tree, knowing it would not offer me protection for much longer, they sounded like they were getting nearer.

“We always get attacked by those pointy ears when we go up there. Territorial about their huntin lands, greedy lot. Aint gonna share with us. a’sides, we’d be travelin another four or five days just to get to the edge, and there’s no promise we’d even find anything worth takin back. We needs to find somethin round here, then once we do, we meet up with the rest at the bridge an’ see if they got any people to bring back to the village. We needs some new women, we do. You lot keep bein stupid and kill’in ‘em.”

The second voice was stronger, definitely in charge of their little expedition.

I was relieved to hear how close I was to potentially being found by helpful elves. Maybe there would be a patrol and I could ask for help.

“Oi, it ain’t my fault, them women weren’t letting me have any fun wit’ them.”

The whiner, as I dubbed him, trailed off, then spoke again, voice excited now.

“What’s this? Those’re footprints. Small footprints. Maybe one’a them pointy ears is about? We could probably sell’em!”

The voices were getting louder, they sounded a bit excited, I could only assume they’d noticed the trail I’d left. Not intentionally, of course, but I was far too tired to make any attempt at hiding it.

“Halfling, maybe?”

The whiner said, voice more excited, “Mayhap we aughts to help the poor Halfling back to his home, might nab somethin’ good outa it. Bree’s not too far off, yeah?”

For a moment, when the leader responded, he sounded irritated, as if he really wished he didn't have such an idiot to deal with while hunting.

“Definitely not, halflings have big feet. Footprints look bare. One a them fair folk, yeah? They’d Definitely give a reward if we pressed.”

The leader sounded much more excited now, and not half a minute later, the whining one yelled “There it is, against the tree! Think it’s sleeping? Caught it unawares!”

That was followed by a yelp and a quiet smack as the leader hit him. “Shut up, if it was sleeping, it isn’t now. Why isn’t it moving? Maybe it’s injured. Might be able to get more out of the greedy folk if they’ve got a time limit for how long it’ll be alive.”

I pried my eyes open from where they’d fallen closed when I started listening, and looked to the side towards them just in time to catch a glimpse of something brown coming towards me. Then I was knocked over as one of the men tackled me.

He let out a triumphant sound at the same time that I let out a pained cry of surprise. He was sitting on my sprawled form, one of his knees on my arm, pressing it against the ground sharply and at a rather painful angle, the other arm held roughly by one of his hands, and the majority of his weight on my midsection.

I felt something in my chest crack, instantly followed by a burning pain where the man’s knee was pressed.

My breath was forced even more from my body in another pained noise. When I sucked in the tiny breath that was all the man’s weight on me would allow, it made the burning pain worse.
I felt my hair pulled violently as he angled my neck to get a glimpse of my ears, and then my hair was released and my neck was grasped hard, cutting off my breath.

Then, a sigh, and I identified the one that tackled me to be the whiner.
“Not fair folk.”

The other one sighed as well as he looked me over, “Ugly thing is practically dead already. Look at it. Starved, been outside too long. No one is going to give anything of value for this whelp. Leave it, we have enough mouths back at the village. It’ll die soon enough as it is.”

The whiner released my neck and I gasped, choking and coughing in an attempt to pull in air faster than I could handle.

He grabbed my hair again, tugging at it, and I felt a hand roughly caress my neck, the whining one’s voice had a leer in it when he spoke again.
“May as well use it while it’s still alive, though. Could take it with us on the way North, make the trip a bit more pleasant. Leave it there when we find game to bring back. Might be able to get a little bit for it, and even if we don’t...It would be enjoyable.”

I bit my tongue hard.

Up to this point, I’d been dazed from being knocked over so abruptly, and having trouble breathing with the weight of the man sitting on top of me and what I was sure was a cracked rib.

Now I started struggling as much as I could, which wasn’t much, given my already weakened state.

The leader laughed, a cruel sound, “Doesn’t even have the energy to fight back. I suppose, we don’t have to feed it. We’ll just toss it off once it dies. You have to carry it though, doesn’t even look like it can walk.”

The weight disappeared, and I coughed a few times, managing to gasp in a few shallow, shaky gulps of air.

Breathing hurt. That was a bad sign.

While north was the right direction to be going, I wasn’t sure I liked the price I might have to pay to get there.

But it would get me there...I just had to stay alive.

One of them, I was assuming the whining one, grabbed my arms roughly and dragged me to my feet, shoving his face against my neck and growling into my ears.

“Try’n struggle and I’ll cut you until you behave. I might even reward you if you’re a good whore.”

Tears gathered in my eyes, both from the rough handling, the threat, and the insult.

Mostly because the insult nailed down in my mind exactly what he wanted me for.

I’d realized before, but had been hoping that I was wrong.

He bit my neck roughly, and I whimpered, but didn’t pull away.

The way he was holding me almost felt like my arms were about to pop out of their sockets.

I was, oddly enough, saved from further assault by the leader yelling, “Hey! Save it for tonight when we make camp! We got a lot of ground to cover. Just get it to your horse.”

The whiner shoved me down slightly, through the haze of pain I could see his face was screwed up in irritation.

He grabbed one of my arms again and started dragging me back the direction I’d heard them come from.
I was horribly unsteady, so it ended up being half dragging and half carrying.  
Or a quarter carrying and three quarters dragging.

He wasn’t gentle.
He threw me to the ground, pulling my wrists behind my back and tying them with what felt like a leather strap.

“What kind of clothes is this, whore?”
He asked me, voice sounding a mix of disgusted and appreciative.

“It knows it’s place, at least. Dressing to show it’s station.”
Drawled the leader.

I couldn’t have talked back if I wanted to, so dizzy and unsteady from being thrown around.
I heard him mount his horse, then my world was turned over as the whiner grabbed me off the ground and shoved me up across the front of his horse, mounting it himself.

I couldn’t tell how long we traveled.
My chest ached.
I hoped it was just bruising, but was quite certain at this point that it likely was a cracked rib, from when the whiner tackled me moments ago.
At some point, I lost consciousness for a while from the pain of bouncing up and down on the trotting horse so continuously.

When I came back to awareness, we were slowing down.
Most of the light had gone out of the sky, and they were discussing where to make camp.

“If we go until dark, we’ll make it to the river, we can camp there.”
The whiner offered, voice much more amiable with his companion that it had been with me.

It seemed his whining days were passed, now that he had gotten what he wanted.
Going up north, and unexpected entertainment along the way…

“Fine, but you’re making camp. Fire tonight only. Closer we get to those greedy elves, quieter we have to be.”
The leader sounded mildly annoyed with the whiner still, but he also had the resigned tone in his voice that made it seem like he was used to it, so they were probably traveling companions quite often.

I took stock of myself, feeling much more aware than I had before.
I was no expert on ribs, so I still couldn’t tell if they were cracked or just bruised.
Either way, they hurt like hell.
My shoulders both ached something fierce, too.

The muscles had apparently disliked the way the whiner had held them as much as I did.
My mouth felt incredibly dry.
I was pretty sure they wouldn’t give me any water, but maybe if I asked after they’d stopped for the night, and eaten something, they would be in a good enough mood to give me some.

They’d already said they weren’t going to waste food on me, though, so I wasn’t liking the chances I had.
Maybe I could try to steal some...
Oh yes, my hands were bound behind me.
If I weren’t so sore, I knew I was flexible enough to curl up and put my feet through the loop my bound arms made, to get them in front of myself. That would at least give me the ability to grab things, possibly try to get the bindings off. Maybe while they were sleeping?

I wondered if one of them would keep watch..That would certainly put a damper on escaping.

I was shoved quite violently off the horse when they stopped, and they both laughed when I cried out again, trying to keep myself from whimpering like a kicked puppy. I bit the inside of my mouth hard, and tasted blood.

This was not a good situation to be in, but I hadn’t come all this way just to be broken by two cruel thugs. I was quite certain there was something wrong with my ribs now, as the drop from the horse left me gasping for breath, seeing spots, and with the burning pain returned with reinforcements in my chest.

From the spot I’d been unceremoniously thrown on and left lying, I watched as they went about setting up their camp. The leader sat back against a tree, relaxing mockingly as he watched the whiner, who I could now see looked to be younger.

He wasn’t lazy, at least. He was quick to tie the horses up, light a fire, roll out a couple furs that I assumed were their bedrolls, and refill their water skins. He then dug in another pack, pulling out a bundle of cloth and opening it to reveal a stack of dried meat strips. They spent what felt like forever chewing on their meat strips and drinking water.

Finally, I could stand it no longer. I shifted my body slightly, trying to get up on my side, or sit up at all. That definitely didn’t feel very good on my ribs.

My voice was scratchy and pitiful when I spoke, “C-could I please have some water?”

The leader glanced at me indifferently, then went back to chewing his meat strip and staring into the fire, clearly having decided that I was the sole responsibility of the younger one. The younger one leered at me and came over, sloshing the water skin in his hand.

“What, are you thirsty, whore? Do you want some?” He shook it at me, spilling a bit of water on my face.

I frantically tried to catch the drops with my tongue, not caring how pathetic it made me look. Whatever it took to survive. That was likely going to be my new mantra until I made it to Rivendell.

He laughed at my attempt to catch the water, and pushed me away with one of his feet, causing most of the water to spill on the ground. I’m not going to lie, I teared up a bit, not that you could tell through the water that escaped onto the rest of my face.

What had I done to deserve this? How was it fair to get transported to Middle Earth with no idea why, and then be tortured and humiliated like this? I gritted my teeth, looking at him with pleading eyes.
“Beg.”
He ordered with a nasty sneer, holding the water in front of my face again.

I wasted no time.
Begging was the least humiliating thing he could ask me to do.
Begging was just words, words didn't matter.

“Please, I beg you! It's been days since I've had water! Please! Please..please..”
My voice still sounded scratchy and harsh, now it was shaky too, as I attempted not to sob at the combination of everything that had been happening to me lately.
I tried to make my expression look pleading, though it likely already looked pathetic.

He grabbed my chin, shoving the top of the water skin into my mouth and upending it.
I tried to swallow, but ended up choking on most of the water, it overflowing and spilling down the sides of my face and onto my body.

He laughed at my struggle and pulled the water away, mockingly asking “Had enough, then?”
He shoved me down again and went to refill his water skin.

I was grateful for the reprieve, coughing violently to try to get the water out of my lungs and catch my breath.
It didn’t work very well, as the coughing ignited the burning pain in my chest, which in turn made it more difficult to breath.

The leader stood up, stretched, and then went over to where one of the furs was laid out.
“You keep watch first, play with your toy. Wake me in a few hours, I’ll take the rest of the night and we’ll get moving at first light.”
Painful escape

I saw the whiner nod through my bleary, water filled eyes.
He was coming back.

I tried to calm my struggled breathing.
If I was going to get any advantage out of this, I needed to be calm, which meant I needed to be breathing.

He grabbed me by the arms, hauling me up again and then dragging me out of the camp towards the river.
We were still within easy yelling distance, and he could no doubt hear if anything disturbed the camp.

I was tossed down onto the slightly muddy banks of the river, and he knelt in front of me, roughly prying my legs apart and ripping my underwear off.
He tossed them aside carelessly and I was momentarily distracted by the thought that one of two things I had in the entire world had just been broken and was likely not usable at all anymore.

Jerk. I had enough problems already.
He shoved two fingers inside me roughly, and I yelped, legs scrabbling to try and pull away, before I mentally kicked myself.
I needed him to believe I wasn’t going to fight. If I could get him to free my hands, I might be able to turn this to my advantage.

He chuckled at my discomfort, holding one of my legs to ensure I couldn’t escape while the other worked to get his trousers off.
With my hands tied behind my back, it put me at an odd angle.

I tried to wiggle towards him, making my face into what I hoped was a seductive smile.
I didn’t think it really did much, partially because my voice was rough from coughing earlier, and because I pretty much had no idea how to act seductive.

I tried to make my voice breathy, nonetheless, “Hey there darling, if you help me, I’ll help you. I can make it so much better for you if you untie my hands.”
To accompany that sad attempt at seduction, I tried to caress one of his legs with the foot he wasn’t holding, reaching up with my toes towards his very erect and now free manhood.
He seemed to have forgotten my unwillingness from earlier, his eyes filled with lust, he quickly reached behind my back, I almost froze in my toe caresses when I felt metal against skin, but somehow, through sheer willpower alone, I managed to continue, feeling him harden further against my foot.

Then my hands were free.
He tossed the knife he’d used to cut the bindings off into the rocks and mud, hands quickly changing to shoving my filthy camisole up so that his hands could roam my body.
I tried not to gag as I arched into them, making a noise that he would hopefully mistake for a moan in his haze of lust.

Thrusting forward, he buried himself in me, grunting as he immediately began thrusting quickly.
My breath caught in my throat in a gasp of pain.
I wasn’t a virgin by any definition, but that didn’t mean it was comfortable to have sex without some sort of attraction or foreplay beforehand.
He didn’t appear to notice, a small blessing, at least.
I twined one hand around his neck, lightly scratching long, filthy nails against the skin of his neck as I tried to make breathy little moaning sounds.

My other hand was thrown out, as if to anchor myself to something in the throes of passion, while in reality, I was frantically searching for the knife he’d thrown. 
God, I hoped it was close enough for me to reach it.

He started grunting louder, his thrusting becoming more urgent.
All I could feel against my fingers was rocks, then I almost yelped.
I’d cut the tip of one finger on something that felt distinctly of metal.
Thank god. Or the Valar. Or anything.

I stretched my arm further, managing to get the tip of the knife between two fingers and pull it towards myself slowly.
His grunts were becoming strangled and I was pretty sure he was close to finishing.

Finally, I got the handle of the knife grasped in my fingers.
I didn’t hesitate, using the hand on his neck to pull his face down to mine for a solid kiss to try and muffle any sounds he made, followed up by plunging the knife through his throat.

He made a sick gurgling sound against my mouth, trying to pull away, but was held fast by my other hand.
I tasted blood against my lips, and felt hot blood spilling down my arm from where the knife was buried in his neck.

His struggling grew weaker.
I twisted the blade a bit, part of me taking pleasure in the twitches of pain it caused in his body, most of me just hoping he’d die a little faster.
Finally, he slumped against me, completely slack.

Resolving myself to not think about what I had just done until I was well away from here, I struggled to push him off me.
I pulled the knife out of his neck and set it aside, making sure to note where it was so I could take it with me.

I struggled to get him out of his clothes, donning them myself after quickly rinsing the worst of the blood off in the river.
The trousers were far too big for my scrawny waist, but he’d had a belt on, so I managed to cinch it so they would stay up.
The boots were too big as well, but at this point I was happy to have anything on my feet at all.

I stuck the knife in its sheath and struggled to push his body into the river.
I watched him float down for a moment before he was consumed by the darkness of night, then turned away, trying to sneak back to the camp as quietly as possible.
If I could get a horse without waking up the other man, it would significantly cut down how long it took to travel.

I glanced at the horses, and then at the other thug, consideringly.
If I left him alive, he might try to find me and kill me for killing his companion.
Or for stealing the horses, if he cared about them more.

Either way, it would probably be smarter to kill him too, which would probably be relatively easy with him asleep.
Slowly, I discarded the boots where I was at the edge of camp, able to stay quiet much easier with my bare feet, no matter how much it hurt. I crept forward, knife in my hand, until I was near the top of his bed roll. Not allowing myself to think it through at all, I plunged the knife down into his throat. He made a strangled kind of gurgling sound, and twitched as if to jump up, but a pull of the knife through the rest of his throat, and he soon stilled.

I debated attempting to drag him into the river as well, but didn’t think I’d be strong enough to move such a heavy person that far, and ended up just leaving him there as I searched the camp for anything I could use on my trip. I rolled up the bedroll the younger one had laid out for himself and never used, tying it back to one of the bags, and stuffing all the food, and both of their filled water skins in it as well before putting it on. It wasn’t terribly heavy, but I still stumbled under the weight.

I then moved over to where the horses were tied. The horses weren’t saddled. Not a huge problem, except it was difficult to get on one without the stirrups, especially in the state I was in. I was sure I could manage, though.

They hadn’t taken off the reins, instead having used them to tie the houses to the tree, so if I could get on one, I could still direct it easily enough. I quickly untied both, whispering to them in an attempt to keep them calm. Hopefully they didn’t really like their riders, and would be okay leaving with me. After that horrible day, I was finally getting some good luck. They seemed fairly calm, and allowed me to lead them over to a large enough rock to use as a step up. With the help of the rock, I managed to painfully scramble onto the back of the smaller of the two horses.

I wasn’t a religious person, but I spent the next couple minutes thanking the Valar, though I did comment that maybe next time they could just give me horses without the horrible experience to go along with them. The horses seemed perfectly happy to meander from the camp at a slow pace, pausing to drink from the stream before crossing. I set them at an easy trot, not really able to take much more than that on my aching ribs, or the rest of my sore body.

Traveling by horseback was infinitely easier than walking, though I had to pause and stuff the boots into the pack I’d stolen after only a few minutes of riding, as they kept almost falling off. The bouncing of the horses gallop didn’t hurt as much on my sore body and aching chest when sat normally on the horse, though it still wasn’t terribly comfortable.

I was thankful I’d stolen the clothes off the younger one, or riding bare back would have been much more uncomfortable. Though, my underwear had been torn off in the encounter with the whiner, so that certainly felt strange and vulnerable.

I spent most of the ride slumped over my horse's neck, trying not to doze and fall off. I stopped for a short time around midday to eat a dried meat strip and drink some water, not able to
stomach much more than that. I tried to offer some water to the horses, but they didn’t seem too keen on tilting their heads up so I could pour it in their mouths, and I couldn’t figure out how to pour it into my hands without spilling all of it. The rest of the day was spent riding at an easy trot.

I found a small outcrop of trees to tie the horses to when it got dark, and curled up against one of the trees to get a few fitful hours of sleep.
Hope at last

I awoke not long after falling asleep with a fearful cry as the events of yesterday replayed in my dreams, and had to struggle over onto my side to retch all the food and water I’d had into a nearby bush. I couldn’t believe I’d done that.

I’d literally killed a person. Two people. I’d actually enjoyed feeling him twitch as I twisted the knife. I felt filthy.

I rinsed my mouth out with some of the water, though it did little for the taste of vomit. My breathing picked up, and I trembled as my emotions threatened to drown me.

I was just as bad as them. For the first time in Middle earth, I was unable to hold back tears from falling, and I gave in, crying wretched sobs of pain, regret, and exhaustion.

Then something touched my shoulder. My head shot up, tear tracks running down my face, eyes wide and fearful, instinctively shying away.

The same something nudged against the side of my face, and I realized it was blowing warm air on my cheek soothingly, and making little huffing sounds. Blinking back the tears, I realized that the horse I’d ridden yesterday had pulled to the end of his rope and was now trying to nudge my face with his muzzle.

I choked out a laugh and stood up shakily, petting it’s nose. “I’m sorry, you’ve been wonderful. Thank you so much for helping me.”

It made the same huffing sound again and nudged it’s head on my shoulder as if to comfort me. I readily accepted, circling my arms around it’s neck and trying not to start crying again.

I distracted myself by talking to the horse more. “You were so wonderful. You need a name. Something strong and noble.”

I looked down to check the gender of the horse, “Male, then. How about Arthur? There was a knight Arthur Pendragon in some stories from where I come from, he was a very noble person.”

The horse huffed again and shook its head a bit. If I had been more coherent, I would have realized that this was not exactly normal behavior for horses. A mixture of exhaustion, pain from all my injuries, older and newer, and the shaky mindset from the nightmares kept me from noticing, though.

“Not Arthur then. He was kind of a jerk sometimes in the tv series Merlin. How about Cicero? A...greek, I think, philosopher person?”

Another head shake.

“How about Valen? I think there was some roman guy named Valentinus, he was well known for something, I think. Didn’t really read up much on him, though...I just remember the name...”

That seemed to gain the approval of the horse. “Valen it is. Thank you for helping me, Valen.”
By this point, the other horse was pulling at his reins where they were tied, trying to join the snuggle fest.
I managed another weak laugh and moved over to untie him as well.

“And what shall I call you, fine…” I checked again, “sir. How about Aran? I have...well...had...a friend that always liked the name Arron. He would probably wish he was he with me. Would have loved to meet Boromir.”
The horse seemed quite content with the name, not so picky as Valen was.

The reminder of my best friend left me choking back tears again.
I looked at the horses, trying to direct my thoughts away from people I would probably never see again.

Now that I wasn’t so stressed, I was able to actually inspect them.
They were both a dark brown color, though Valen was darker, almost black in the little amount of light.
They were also quite large.

I wasn’t a terribly tall person, so most horses seemed large, but these two seemed larger than normal horses.

“You are both very handsome, thank you for your help.”
I told them both, bowing slightly despite the twinge of pain in my chest.
Carefully, I re-tied them to the tree, and laid down, in a different spot this time, further away from where I had vomited so none of us would have to smell it.

I managed to get another few hours of sleep before the sun started to rise, and I had to get up to continue on.
I was feeling in much better spirits, though that didn’t help the hurts and sores.

The next few days went much the same as the last one had, stopping around midday to eat the little I could handle, drinking the water slowly over the days.

The horses seemed a bit more willing to attempt drinking a few times, once we’d been away from the river for a couple days, and I eventually managed to fill up one of the discarded boots partially with water.
It didn’t help much, and I had significantly less water, but I felt better having tried to help them, since they’d been so helpful to me.

Three days after I escaped from the thugs, leaving them dead, I was plagued with cramps and bleeding again.
I cried. The thought had not even entered my mind that there was the danger of pregnancy.
This time I was not unhappy about it, choosing to walk instead of ride, so as not to bloody the horses.
I didn’t bother taking the pants I’d stolen off, though, they were a dirty brown color, blood would show up a little bit, but would mostly fade once it dried.

Five days later the bleeding mercifully stopped.
I was a mess, but despite the growing pain of pretty much every part of my body, I was feeling pretty good about my chances.
I had food, I had water, though I wasn’t sure how much longer either of those would last at the rate I was going through them.
Around late evening on the sixty-fourth day of my journey, I met another river, and the horses got a real drink. I could only remember one river being up this far on the map. The bruinen river.

That was the river the black riders got swooshed away in when Frodo and Arwen were running in the movie. If I was correct about that, that could mean I was really close. Or really far, if I was wrong. I decided to be optimistic, and started following the river upstream.

When I hadn’t found anything at all to indicate that I was anywhere near Rivendell, and it was nearing sunset, I started to lose some of my optimism. Determined not to give up hope, I continued on, singing quietly to myself, one of my favorite songs from the movies that always made me feel more hopeful.

“May it be an evening star
Shines down upon you
May it be when darkness falls
Your heart will be true
You walk a lonely road
Oh, how far you are from home
Mornië ұтълî (Darkness has come)
Believe and you will find your way
Mornië alantîl (Darkness has fallen)
A promise lives within you now”

It did make me feel better. It sounded scratchy and rough, but the familiarity of the words was comforting. Taking in the necessary breath for singing hurt, though, and I was left gasping in short, unsteady breaths as I tried to push back the pain.

What I didn’t realize, was that the horses were not the only creatures listening to me. A short ways away in some trees, there was a patrol of elves. The words alone were cause for interest, but when I sang the phrases in Quenya, they started to observe me, wondering who this scruffy wandering human was who spoke Quenya, and wondering why I was so near to Rivendell.

“May it be the shadows call
Will fly away
May it be your journey on
To light the day
When the night is overcome
You may rise to find the sun
Mornië ұтълî (Darkness has come)
Believe and you will find your way
Mornië alantîl (Darkness has fallen)
A promise lives within you now
A promise lives within you now”

I managed not to cause myself too much difficulty breathing or add too much extra pain with the
second verse, but was rewarded by almost falling from Valen when a silky, melodic voice spoke off to the side of where I was walking.
“That was a lovely song. Might I enquire as to where you learned it?”

Both horses slowed as I clung desperately to Valen’s mane. They’re heads turned to look at him, as did mine, quite frantically looking over to where the voice originated.
There before me, stood a real, live, actual, solid, not fake, not made up, elf.
I couldn’t breathe.
He was absolutely gorgeous.  He had long brown hair, as most Rivendell elves supposedly had, and was incredibly tall.

Blessed with high, defined cheekbones as well.
Damn him. I wanted high cheekbones.

I didn't recognize him, though I supposed there was no way the characters would actually look like the actors who had been chosen for them in the movies.

He shifted his weight to his other leg, watching me with ever growing concern as the silence lengthened. Slowly I straightened a little so that I wasn’t so curled over Valen’s neck, and was no longer in danger of falling off. That was a difficult feat with the pain in my chest, which was much stronger than usual, what with my almost having fallen off the horse.

“I..uh...read about it in a book...and thought the words were pretty, so I sort of just...put a tune to it...?”

Well, that didn’t sound very convincing at all. They were supposed to be able to have a good intuition for when people were lying, too, so now he was probably never going to trust me enough to let me in Rivendell.

Not knowing what else to do, I quickly blurted out my reason for being here, assuming he was part of some sort of patrol and I had gotten to near enough to the entrance of Rivendell to warrant an intervention.
“T’m looking for Rivendell, I’d like to seek an audience with Lord Elrond. If he’s not too busy.”

I tacked on the last bit nervously, unsure of whether they would think it rude of me to presume that I could just walk in and see him.

The elf smiled slightly, apparently finding me rather amusing, though his eyes were wandering over me, taking in the entirety of my horrible appearance.
“T certainly appears you could use a stay in the healing house. I’m on my way back from patrol, shall I show you the way?”

I couldn’t help but look surprised. Was it normal for them to let anyone in willy nilly? I didn’t think so.

Maybe it was a trap?
Maybe he was going to walk me in the wrong direction and when I was suitably turned around and lost, leave me alone?
I tried not to let the shock and slight suspicion color my tone, “T that would be wonderful, thank you.”

He spoke quietly in elvish to the horses, moving towards me and offering up one palm to take the reins with a smile.
I handed them to him, feeling a little numb.
I hadn’t thought it would be this...easy...it didn’t seem like much else in my adventure had gone smoothly at all, except my escape from those two barbarians.
That had been dumb luck.

What I didn’t realize was how completely awful I looked.
My face was drawn and gaunt, deep purple bruising under my eyes showing just how little sleep I'd
gotten over the entire adventure. My visible skin, though there was considerably less of it since stealing the clothes off the rapist I’d ended up killing, was still terribly sunburnt, mottled with purple and green bruising from being tackled so roughly to the ground only a few days before, and littered with an assortment of cuts and scrapes.

From the way I was slightly bent over, one arm pressed around my torso, breathing seeming pained and shallow, it didn’t take a genius to tell that there was obviously something wrong that you couldn’t see beneath the clothes.

And that wasn’t even counting my feet. The bottoms of them were the worst, starting to scab over a tiny bit after a few days of riding and not using them much, they were just pulverized. It looked like someone had taken a spiked meat tenderizer to them, then a knife, then rubbed dirt and small rocks into the wound, and finished it up with a good long spray of infection.

To top that all off, I looked far too skinny, having lost any extra weight I had very quickly. All in all, I looked horrible.

“What brings you to meet with Lord Elrond, if you don’t mind my asking?”

He sounded genuinely curious, and there was an undertone of poorly concealed concern. He didn’t sound like he was interrogating or demanding information at all. Were all elves this nice? I struggled for a moment to think of something appropriate to respond with. It took longer than it should have.

“I need his advice...I..well, I have some information, and I’m not sure what to do with it. I think he’d be able to help me.” My voice sounded hesitant, and I hoped the elf wasn’t offended that I was being so vague.

He simply smiled though, sincere and understanding. “You need not share anything you do not wish to. Lord Elrond is very wise, I’m sure he will be pleased to offer his aid. And perhaps, if you find the answers you seek, you might stay a while and heal. There are very few who rival the skill of Lord Elrond in healing, and it appears you have need of that skill.”

There was a lump forming in my throat at the casual kindness he was offering. After such a long and difficult journey, it felt so amazing to be on the receiving end of any kindness. Not to mention, talking to another actual living being that could respond and wasn’t planning on raping me.

“I had a bit of a..rough journey. Actually, you wouldn't happen to know the date, would you? I've been traveling a while, it got a bit...muddled up.”

I practically held my breath as I waited for him to answer. It wouldn’t do me a huge amount of good because I only remembered very vague dates of when things happened, but it would be good to know, either way.

“Today is the seventh of May. If you don’t mind my intruding, when did you start your journey? And where from? To be in such a state..Did you have no traveling companions to aide you?”

He seemed rather disturbed not only by my state of person, but as well by my state of solitude.
“Ah..I have no traveling companions..No companions at all, really…”
I sidestepped his first few questions intentionally, simply because I wasn’t sure what explanation to give.
That was a sombering thought, though, and having to speak it aloud certainly forced me to consider things differently.
I had no one. I was literally, completely alone.

I knew a few people, yes, but they didn’t know me, and who knew how things would go with Elrond...
He might deem me completely mad and send me away, or lock me up...though that was more Thranduil’s style.

No family..No friends.....
I lapsed into a melancholy silence, and he seemed to realize this, not attempting to initiate a conversation again.

I was forced out of my depressed moping when Rivendell came into view, and the sliver of suspicion I’d held for my elven guide was blown away.
It was amazing. Beautiful.

It brought to mind the word fantastic, for which I preferred the definition, worthy of fantasy.
It was better than the movies by far.

A picture could not capture the peace that you could practically taste in the air, and I could feel myself relax slightly just at seeing it.
Of course, the unfortunate side effect of this was that it brought to the forefront of my mind how pained, worn, and exhausted I felt, and my weariness washed over me like a drug.

My mind felt dull and only half aware.
I vaguely noticed my elven companion speaking to another beautiful elf, both looking over at me with apparent concern.
They were speaking quietly, but any sound that did reach me was the flowing melody of Elven speech.

It was getting dark, and with the darkness came the overwhelming urge to curl up somewhere, protected by my horses, and give in to the temptation to sleep.

I was brought out of the relaxed daze that was falling over me slightly by a kind voice a short distance from where I sat, still on Valen.
It was gentle and breathy, soothing to listen to.

“What’s this? This poor girl looks half dead, and you’re standing there arguing over what should be done?”

I blinked owlishly at the source of the voice, it was breathy and melodic, and it’s owner was the most beautiful creature I’d ever beheld.
Long dark hair flowed down her back, clad in a lovely grey gown that reminded me of the ones Galadriel wore in the movies, I was nearly certain I knew who this was.

My theory was proven correct moments later when my elven guide replied.
“My apologies, lady Arwen. She was coming up the river and expressed that she had need of Lord Elrond’s wisdom. She mentioned not a desire for healing, it seemed to me that it would be prudent to
allow her to seek the answers she desired before bringing her to the healing rooms. Perhaps it is of
great import, and she would rest better having gained insight into her problems.”

It took a moment for me to process that before I nodded my agreement.
Yes, I would probably rest better having talked to Elrond.

Or maybe I’d rest worse….What if he kicked me out for being insane?
Then I probably wouldn’t rest much at all...

“If Lord Elrond isn’t too busy, I would prefer to seek audience with him as soon as possible.”
There, that wasn’t too pushy, but it implied that I’d prefer to talk to him rather than immediately get
healed.
That was okay, right?

The beauty, now known to be Arwen, seemed to have a sigh in her voice, “Very well, I will show
you to him, Maeben, would you see her horses are taken care of? They appear to have been on quite
a journey.”
My elven guide nodded, putting a name to him.
I felt bad for a moment that I’d forgotten to introduce myself.
He offered his hands to me, and for a moment I stared at them without comprehension.

Gentle eyes watched me, and his voice had that same undertone of concern when he spoke.
“May I help you from your horse, Milady?”

Oh.
Well I felt a right fool now, just staring at his hands.
They were very lovely hands, though, well worthy of staring.

I nodded a bit jerkily, and if my skin hadn’t all been red from sunburn already, my face would have
been tinged pink with an embarrassed blush.

I swung my leg over Valen’s back, wincing at the soreness and having to bite the inside of my mouth
not to cry out at the pain in my chest.
Maeben placed his hands at my waist, lifting me down.
The moment I felt the pressure of his hands,
he no longer stood in front of me.
I saw only the brute from the riverside, hands roughly pawing at
me. I flinched back violently, one hand reaching out to push him away, the other still pressing against
aching ribs as my shoulders hunched and I tried to curl away, ducking my head and turning it to the
side.

My response startled all of them, but most of all, the one who had been holding me when it
happened.
My hand barely touched him to push him away when he had set me on the ground as gently as he
could in his haste to back up a few paces.

Two startled voices rang out, asking if I was okay.
Arwen simply watched me, eyes filled with sadness, a sort of knowing in her eyes for what caused
that type of reaction.

She stepped forward, raising a hand at Maeben and his friend to quiet them.
Her voice was quiet when she spoke, and it cut through the terrible confusion and fear that
accompanied the waking nightmare.

“You are safe now. You are in Rivendell. No one will harm you. That was Maeben, he meant no ill
will. He simply has a kind heart and wished to help. My name is Arwen. What is your name?”
Her quiet litany helped soothe the panic in my mind and hesitantly I straightened, though the ache in my chest had grown more painful from my panicked curl.

Hazily, I remembered that she had asked my name. It would be rude not to answer, I told myself, trying to force myself to remember the words. My head ached. Everything ached. “My name is Alyssa.”
Arwen smiled and offered a hand, “Come with me to the healing rooms, Alyssa. I’ll send someone to get my father, you can talk with him while we see to your wounds.”

I hesitantly accepted the hand, honestly tearing up a tiny bit and feeling a little weak at the knees at the warmth of her hand against mine. I hadn’t felt the touch of another person the entire journey, save for the horrific paws of the brute.

I felt both drawn to the touch and repulsed by it, though considerably less having had to go part of the way to receive it. I attempted to shove back a shudder, and slowly stepped towards her, the ever present pain of all my injuries making every movement a test of willpower.

I vaguely noticed Valen being lead away, trying to note which direction they went, though it didn’t do much good in my current state.

The trip to the healing rooms went by in a bit of a blur. In the state I was in, I noticed very little, moving only because of sheer determination and willpower. I would see this through. I would talk to Elrond.

We got a lot of very concerned stares from passing elves, though none interrupted us. I was too caught in the haze of pain and weariness to notice the sadness growing in her eyes every time I stumbled.

We passed over a bridge at some point, and the only reason I remember is because I paused at the edge and spent longer than is entirely appropriate looking over the edge before Arwen gently tugged me on. I stumbled multiple times, but flinched away from Arwen’s helping hands, and was thus left to struggle on myself. Not that I noticed.

By the time we made it to the healing rooms, I was seeing black dots and having to remind myself that breathing was important, and that I should do it, no matter how much it hurt. I was to the point where I had only one thought, a mantra of ‘I will not fall’ that repeated endlessly, mumbled near silently, blurring together in my mind.

There was an elf waiting for us when we arrived, and again, despite not looking like his actor in the movie, I could tell it was Elrond.

He was tall, imposing, and much younger and more handsome than the actor they’d chosen for him in the movies. His face was gentle as he observed me, and he kept his movements slow and easy when he started guiding me inside, and over to a bed to sit.

I didn’t flinch from his hands. There was something calming and non threatening.

I opened my mouth to speak, but he hushed me before I could utter any words, “Rest now. We may speak once I’ve seen to your wounds. You have come a long way, and now is not the time for words. Sleep.”

As he spoke, he guided my feet up onto the bed and laid me back, and I drifted off to the sound of
his voice soothing the worries away.

When I awoke, I felt worlds better. 
I didn’t move, simply enjoying the fact that a good portion of the soreness was gone. 
Slowly, I opened my eyes and propped myself up on my elbows.

I was pretty much one big bandage. 
My chest had been wrapped tightly to help my ribs heal, as had my feet and a good majority of skin, 
the bits that had been the worst sunburnt and had infected cuts. 
What skin I could see was a much healthier color, and appeared to be smeared with some sort of lotion. 
My feet didn’t hurt anymore, though by the numbness, I assumed that there was some sort of painkiller, or weird Elven healing magic at work. 
Not that I was complaining.

Over the bandages was a simple, white nightgown, the fabric of which didn’t feel scratchy at all against the skin that was showing, which was a blessing, because despite that it looked healthier, the skin still felt raw to the touch.

My hair had apparently been washed, combed, and braided into one long braid that coiled next to me on the pillow.
I made a note to ask what they had done to it, because it had never before behaved so well for me.

I usually slept with it braided, but it had a tendency to coil around my neck and try to strangle me. 
Maybe everything was just out to get me? 
I lowered myself back down, breathing shallowly and a little bit hard just from the effort it had taken to sit up like that for so long. 
Despite feeling better, I also felt incredibly weak.

How long had I been asleep? 
What if I missed something important? 
I considered trying to go find someone, and was halfway to an upright, sitting position when the door to the room I was in opened, and Elrond walked in, as if he knew I was trying to get up, and could simply not allow it.

Being in a much clearer state of mind, I only stared for a moment before forcing my eyes to a spot on the floor in front of him.

Rude to stare. Rude to stare. Stop it.

With my eyes on the floor, I missed him smile slightly, watching me with wise, kind eyes.

“Do you feel well enough to speak? Maeben and Arwen implied the information you had was of some import. You seemed to disregard your wellbeing entirely.”

His voice was melodic and deep, and I noticed it had an almost exotic accent, which I had missed in the other elves due to the state of mind and body I had been in.
Elves just weren’t fair. 
Beautiful everything.
Bodies, faces, hair, voices.

I felt like my voice was stuck, and cleared my throat a little uncomfortably, trying to force it up. 
He walked over, picking up a cup from a table next to the bed that I hadn’t noticed.

He sat on the edge of the bed, propping one arm behind my back to gently help me sit up, and then
offering me the cup. I raised shaky hands and managed to drink some, only spilling a little bit, which he promptly wiped up with the edge of his sleeve.

I couldn’t help but stare again, and I think my mouth was open a little bit in outright amazement. Elrond, lord Elrond, of Rivendell, had just wiped up something with his sleeve. Something about that was just very wrong.

He shrugged a tiny bit and smiled, “It’s just water.”

Well there went all my views of the great, amazing lord Elrond. I would never be able to look at him again without remembering that he had done that.

He seemed to understand my stunned silence, “People seem to forget that I have raised four children.”

Damn, he was probably reading my mind.

I wondered briefly if the concept of occlumency from the Harry Potter books would work, and tried to picture a smooth shimmering lake to hide my thoughts under.

I was distracted by his voice again, and movement as he propped a few pillows up against the headboard of the bed, leaning me gently on them.

I realized I still hadn’t spoken.

But he beat me to it.

“You’ve been in a healing sleep for three days. How do you feel?”

I cleared my throat again, voice coming out harsh and a little broken sounding, from lack of use.

“I am feeling much better, thank you, sir.”

Was I supposed to call him lord Elrond? Your highness? My lord?

“Excellant. I’m going to change a few bandages while you tell me what was so urgent that you ignored the deplorable state you were in. Tell me if anything is too uncomfortable.”

With that said, he moved down to my feet, procuring a small bowl of some sort of ointment and a roll of bandages from a chest near the end of the bed.

He started unwinding the bandages from my feet slowly, making sure not to pull at any skin.

It felt odd, and I couldn’t help but watch curiously, wondering what my feet looked like after that unpleasant adventure.

I couldn’t see much, and after a moment of the strange feeling, I looked away, choosing instead to study Elrond.

Now that I was in a more stable state of body and mind, I noted that he was wearing robes very similar to the style that they’d used in the movies, though they looked somehow finer, and more simple at the same time.

His hair was long and straight, and not held back in any way, simply combed back and tucked behind pointed ears.

His face was youthful, and yet it expressed great age.

I debated what to say for a moment before speaking, and when I did speak, I had to stifle a cringe at how strange my voice sounded.

“My name is Alyssa, I’m..not really from here. I’m..well, I’m from a different..universe..I guess? In my world, Middle Earth, and all of the things that happen in it, are part of a fictional book series. If the world I am in now is truly the one from the books I read, then I have a great deal of knowledge of the future that could potentially be very helpful, or very dangerous, depending on who acquires it.”
He was still studiously rebandaging my feet, though I could tell he was listening. He probably thought I was crazy and was deciding if he should finish helping me and then banish me, or just throw me out right now.

“I know it sounds crazy and weird, but I’m not making it up, and I’m not insane. If things go according to the books, I know how certain situations play out. I realize that there is the potential to change things for the worse, but there’s also the potential to save so many lives. Wouldn’t it almost be my duty to save the lives I can? I want to help. I can tell you some things that have already happened, if you need proof.”

I scoured my brain, maybe I could talk about what happened in the hobbit, that was already over at this point, so it shouldn’t be too dangerous. I had just opened my mouth to speak again when he raised one hand, pausing me.

“I do not think you are crazy. If what you say is true, I think it wise to keep your silence for the time being. Should you truly have knowledge of our future, the less you speak of it, the better. Knowledge of the future is a heavy burden for one to carry. There is never any guarantee that it will turn out the way you believe it will, and trying to change that which you believe is destined to happen could have dire consequences. Saving lives, however, is always a noble ideal, and as long as you think carefully about any potential consequences, it would be a good way to use your knowledge. I do think it would be best that you refrain from informing me of the specifics of your knowledge, at least for the time being. This would be something better heard by the Wizards Saruman and Mithrandir, the lady Galadriel, and my close council, Erestor and Glorfindel.”

I cringed and stiffened a little at the name Saruman. Theoretically, they shouldn’t all be together before Saruman’s treachery was revealed, but it would be really risky not to say something. However, if I told them, things might happen sooner, and that would throw off everything I knew.

Though I couldn’t tell, Elrond did notice the way I stiffened slightly at the name Saruman, and how my eyes became cagey and nervous at the mention of telling him of my situation.

He continued on, despite my reaction, curious, if not mildly alarmed.
“Until we are able to all be in one place at the same time, it would be prudent for you to keep your knowledge to yourself and consider as best you can what would and would not be safe to share.”

He had finished my feet, and tended some cuts and scratches on my legs while I sat tensely, trying and failing not to flinch and try to pull away. The warmth of his hands felt foreign and strange after so long without human contact. Or, positive human contact, at the very least.

He didn’t comment on it, simply continuing on with his gentle, easy movements, moving upward and carefully unwinding the bandages on my arms, where he re-applied the lotion that was healing the sunburns, as well as all the little nicks and cuts I acquired along my journey.

“What would you tell me how you came to be here? Of your journey, and how you came to be in the state you were upon arriving here?”

His question was curious, but at the same time, sort of had the same tone a psychiatrist might use to get you to speak of something uncomfortable.

I cringed a little, but started talking. My voice was hesitant for the first bit, telling him about how I woke up in what I now knew to be Fangorn, with no idea where I was, finding water, climbing the tree and seeing Orthanc, though I only realized it later, the realization of where I was and approximately when I was in the story.
I started to speak a little bit easier as I continued, telling him of how I survived by eating moss, finding the little river, which he identified as the Fords of Isen.
I skated around why I didn't go to Isengard for help, saying vaguely that something about it made me feel threatened.
I struggled through telling him of the two brutes finding me, my treatment at their hands, I glossed over being raped and killing them, choosing instead to simply move on to the part where I took the horses and escaped.
He understood, though.
I could see it in his eyes.

When I finished talking, he was just finishing reapplying bandages to my ribs, it turned out the nightgown was entirely open and tied on one side, so it was relatively easy to work around.
We fell into silence for a few moments.
I was exhausted again.

I felt like I’d just had to relive the entire thing again, though I wasn’t nearly so battered as I had been the first time.
It hurt to talk about it, but I did feel a little lighter knowing that someone else knew, even if I hadn't told him all the details.

Once he finished with my ribs, he sat back, watching me with sorrowful eyes and sympathy clear on his face.
When he spoke, his voice was low, tinged with sadness, and gentle compassion.
“I am truly sorry that you had to endure all of that. Nothing will erase that from your past, but dwelling will only stunt your future. Set your mind to other things. Once you are well enough, perhaps some form of combat. If you truly want to make a difference with your knowledge you need to be capable of fulfilling your goals, and you cannot do that if you cannot defend yourself, and others.”

I nodded, having difficulty digesting the fact that he seemed to have no trouble believing me.
Though, I suppose if you lived in a world with elves, dwarves, and magic, it wouldn’t necessarily seem that far out of the question for someone to mysteriously appear with knowledge of your world.

My voice was hesitant when I spoke, and I couldn’t help but glance up at him to see if there was any reaction to my question.
“why...why do you believe me?”

He watched me for another long moment, meeting my eyes solidly, almost searchingly.
I held his gaze, curious and nervous for what his answer might be.

“You have given me no reason not to believe you, and you were not lying when you said you were from another realm. That leads me to believe that either, for some reason you think you are of another realm but in truth are not, or, you are from another realm, and have the knowledge you claim. When one claims to have knowledge of the future, it makes sense to at least listen, should the claim prove to be true.”

He set a small bowl on the table next to the bed, quietly explaining that it was more of the ointment he’d used on the sunburns, and that I should reapply it if my skin felt at all dry or uncomfortable.
“Someone will be by shortly with some food. If you have any needs or desires, don’t hesitate to make them known. Your first experience in Middle Earth was not a pleasant one, but it is not all like that. You are welcome here for as long as you wish to stay.”
With that, he stood, gathering any unused or soiled bandages to take out with him.
I couldn’t help but call out after him just as he got to the door, “Lord Elrond, would it be okay..I mean, if you don’t mind..I was wondering if perhaps I might study Sindarin, while I’m here, at least? Training for the body would be a good distraction from past events, and certainly very helpful for future ones, but I feel like training for the mind would be beneficial as well. I mean, it certainly couldn’t hurt, right?”

I was rambling by the end of it, shaking fingers twisting a piece of my nightgown nervously as I watched the floor in front of him.

What if he took it as an offense? They weren’t exactly in the habit of teaching random people their language.

I probably shouldn’t have asked.

I peeked up slightly to find him smiling softly, and there was a hint of approval in his voice when he responded, “That is a fine idea. Rest a few more days, and I’ll have someone come tutor you. I’m sure you’ll appreciate the distraction. Being confined to bed while healing will not be easy, but it will allow you to heal faster if you do not aggravate your wounds.”

He gave a farewell and bid me rest well as he left, and then I was alone again.
The next few days felt like they went by both very slowly, and very quickly. I slept for a good portion of the day, waking only long enough to have the bandages replaced, eat a little something, and see to any hygiene needs I had.

The majority of the times I woke up were caused by nightmares, or someone coming into the room. I had become a very light sleeper, and any sleep I did manage was plagued by nightmares of men with bloodied necks and groping hands, or waking up in the forest again, as if finding Rivendell had only been a dream. I had quickly ceased making noises in my sleep while on my travels, not wanting to attract any dangerous wildlife, and that habit had not faded upon being in a safe environment.

I often woke up biting the insides of my cheeks or tongue, muscles tensed to keep from any sudden movements. Once, my dreams were so horrific that upon waking, I threw up onto the floor next to the bed, trembling and gasping for breaths that were just out of reach until a healer happened by, heard the quiet, uneven, labored breaths, and investigated.

They were quick to get everything cleaned up, and had a cup of warm herbal tea in my hands soon after, sitting with me until I finished it and managed to fall back asleep. After that, healers started checking in on me every couple hours at night in an attempt to catch nightmares before they could get that bad.

There was a pair of simple wooden crutches leaned against the wall next to my bed for the moments where I had to get up to see to myself, which I made use of even when I had no reason to be out of bed, simply to give myself a bit of movement. Elrond had recommended that I keep minimal pressure on my feet, as they were probably the most injured part of me, aside from the cracked rib.

Once a day for the first couple days, Elrond came to check on me, but after that any interactions I had were with other healers that I didn’t know. They didn’t linger after checking on me, gently telling me I should be resting every time they left.

Occasionally they told me that the lady Arwen had come to visit, but that I had been asleep. I hoped one of these times I would be awake when she came, so I could thank her for helping me.

Like clockwork, there was someone offering food in the morning, afternoon, evening, and night just before they went around putting out most of the candles and torches. They seemed intent on fattening me up, not that I was complaining.

Going for so many weeks without the steady presence of food had certainly changed how I looked at meals. I wasn’t able to eat very much, though.

In the first few days they only offered bland soups and mashes of fruits or vegetables, careful not to give me anything that might cause my stomach upset. Each meal was paired with a cup of herbal tea, most of which I could not identify, often paired with a spoon of honey on the side of the tray, should I want it sweeter.

Five days after my talk with Elrond, I got another unlikely visit. Maeben, the elf who’d pretty much saved me.
I had been folding creases into the blanket and watching them spring apart upon my fingers releasing it, feeling too restless to sleep despite somehow still feeling tired, when I was startled by a cheerful voice at my doorway.

“you are certainly looking much better, miss Alyssa!”
His smile was genuine, and I had to wonder again why they were all being so nice.
He was paused in the doorway, hands clasped behind his back, looking much more at ease than he had the last time I saw him.

I returned the smile, feeling the skin of my face stretch into the almost forgotten gesture, “I do feel much better. I owe it mostly to you, for finding me and helping me get here. I don’t know how much further I would have gotten on my own.”

Compared to his voice, smooth, accented, and joyful, mine still sounded scratchy and dull, used so infrequently recently that it sounded wrong to my ears.

He held up his hands slightly as if in surrender, shaking his head adamantly.
His voice was insistent, though still held the same cheerful note, as if he truly was happy to see me feeling better.

“Nay, milady, you were on the right course, and with the determination you showed, I believe you would have found your way whether I came across you or not. Besides, it was your singing that caught my attention. You are the cause of your own salvation.”

I ducked my head a little self consciously, not having expected that.

“Would you mind if I kept you company for a while?”
He was still standing at the edge of the doorway, and I realized that he hadn’t stepped foot inside yet.

Was he waiting for permission..?
I cleared my throat a little, not having expected that.

“Please, come in. I’d appreciate the distraction.”

He nodded slightly in thanks, and stepped in, moving a chair over to sit next to the bed.

“Do you know how long you’ve got to stay in here? Surely you’re mostly healed by now?”

“I’m not sure. My feet still hurt a bit, and my chest still aches, but everything else seems to be mending well. Lord Elrond said one of my ribs was cracked, and that the only fix for that is time. He said I can walk around outside if I like, but not to over do it.”

I pulled my hair over my shoulder, bandage wrapped fingers fiddling with the braid awkwardly.

I couldn’t help but wonder why he was here.
I mean, he didn’t know me, he’d been the one to find me, sure, but that gave him no obligation to check on me…
It wasn’t until he responded that I realized I’d actually spoken my thoughts.

“Milady, no offence meant of course, but you looked horrible. It’s natural for anyone who came across someone in your state to want to see that they were doing alright.”
He smiled a little sheepishly,

“As well, I was hoping I might persuade you to sing for me again. My wife is very fond of music, and is always looking for new songs to sing while she works. I had hoped that you might tell me the words for the song I heard you singing, so I could present it to her. She’s a seamstress, you see, and Lord Elrond asked her if she’d make you some things, since you had very little of your own that we could find. She’s been working tirelessly, especially after hearing that I found you, and of the state you were in.”
He trailed off a little, looking slightly self conscious. Damn elves, either gorgeous or adorable.

Was there no normal setting?

I couldn’t help but smile a bit wider, “Of course, I’d be happy to tell you the lyrics. Please thank your wife for me, and perhaps when I’m well enough to get out of this room you might introduce me, so I can thank her myself?”

He perked up, smiling again, and nodded excitedly. “I would be most happy to! I’m sure she would be quite pleased to meet you, and to know you were well.”

We made small talk for another few moments before I offered to sing again and he pulled out a piece of parchment and a stick of charcoal, watching me eagerly, charcoal poised and ready to write whenever I began to sing.

We spent the better part of an hour singing and writing, making sure he knew how the tune went and the right inflections to use.

My voice had strengthened considerably since he’d heard me sing days ago, so it was easier to identify the words, and it didn’t hurt my throat or ribs at all, though I was careful to keep my voice soft, not wanting to disturb anyone, or cause myself any pain.

He asked only once about the Quenya words, and did not push when I seemed hesitant to talk about it aside from that I didn’t actually know the language, only those words.

When he left, I felt considerably less confined, though I hadn’t moved from the bed at all, and I was left with a quiet longing for my cello so that I could comfort myself with the familiarity of music. I hummed to myself quietly, until sleep claimed me again.
The next day, there was another knock at my doorway around midday, and I looked over from the window to find Arwen there, holding a tray of food balanced on one arm.

“It is good to see you well, Alyssa.”

She swept into the room, placing the tray on a bedside table, helping me to sit up with a few pillows behind me, and moving the chair as close to the bed as it could go before settling in it. Her gown was a lovely, deep green, decorated with yellow-gold embroidery of birds and flowers looping around the bottom hem of the skirt and sleeves.

“Ah..thank you, Milady. Thank you for visiting. I actually wanted to thank you for bringing me up to your father, as well. I don’t know if I’d have made it without your help. So..Erm...thank you.”

I felt oddly nervous around her, maybe because she seemed so otherworldly, or because she was so beautiful, or because I was speaking to the woman who would eventually be queen, I couldn't tell.

I tried not to wince at how awkward that sounded, thanking her over and over. I was rambling again.

She smiled, amusement clear in her face, “you are quite welcome. Perhaps you might call me Arwen?”

I couldn’t help but give her a mildly surprised look. She’d only just met me, and she was asking me to call her by her name with no titles or anything? This place was turning out to be a lot less formal than I originally thought it would be.

Realizing that I hadn’t responded, I nodded a little dumbly, wondering still why everyone was being so kind. Maybe that was just how elves were…?

The thought briefly occurred to me that maybe the world I had been in before was just broken, and people were supposed to be this nice to eachother all the time. I was distracted from my thoughts by her voice again, smooth and exotic.

“May I call you Alyssa?”

I nodded again, a little faster this time.

“Well then, Alyssa, my father has informed me that you are not of our world. I’m sure he has already told my brothers, Elladan and Elrohir, and his close council, Erestor and Glorfindel. I wanted to speak with you about it, and see if it is something you would prefer kept private, or if it is something that we can tell anyone who asks after you?”

She sat calmly, apparently not terribly bothered by the fact that I wasn’t from middle earth.

I took a moment to consider that. It was potentially a touchy subject, but at the same time I was not a particularly good liar. I tended to laugh a lot when I was attempting to lie, and I didn’t really like lying, either way.

My voice felt strange and foreign when I spoke, still slightly scratchy with lack of use.

“I, ah, I suppose it’s not really terribly secret, as long as that’s all they know?

Lord Elrond said it might be better to not tell too many people that I have knowledge of what might happen. Or at least, not tell any of the knowledge.”

She smiled sadly, “That would be wise, not informing everyone that that you have knowledge,
though you would be quite safe to do so with anyone here, should you wish to. I can assure you that all will be respectful, should you tell them you wish not to speak of it. I think it would be best if you simply inform who you wish of what you wish.”

“Do people actually ask after me…?”
My voice was curious, my mind having stuck slightly on that bit of what she’d said.

Why would anyone ask after me?
No one knew me here...

“Oh yes, quite often. Quite a few people were present when you made your way through, and all were very concerned for your wellbeing. My father has requested that most everyone wait until you are well enough to leave the healing house, as it would cause quite a commotion to have everyone visiting you here.”

“I can..I can leave? It sort of seemed like I wasn’t supposed to. Everyone kept telling me to rest whenever they saw me moving around.”
That was news to me.
The elves who usually brought my food always sounded like they were scolding me if they saw me out of bed.

She seemed mildly startled for a moment before laughing lightly, “of course you can leave, we’ve a room set up for you in the main house where you may stay as long as you like. The healers are simply concerned for you and want you to heal quickly. I think perhaps they so rarely treat anyone not Elven, that they forget how much time it takes to heal for everyone else.”

Her eyes assessed me slowly, taking in my still too thin form, almost completely covered in careful bandaging, which did a surprising amount for both making me look more and less healthy.
The bandages added a tiny bit of padding, making me look slightly less like a skeleton adorned with loosely hung skin, and more like a rather sickly person.

At the same time, no one looks entirely healthy with bandages wrapped around almost all of them. Elrond had only removed a few of the bandages earlier that day, some on my upper legs and arms. The rest of me was still quite mummified.

Keeping the salve on would lessen the scarring, he’d said, and keeping it covered would keep moisture in, allowing it to work better.
My face was entirely bare of bandages, though.
He’d given me a sizable container of the salve and told me to keep applying it to any spots that felt itchy, painful, or dry, which for the first couple days, had been all of it.
After the third day, most of the itchiness or pain had faded.
I wasn’t sure what that meant, as I had yet to see a mirror of any sort, but I kept applying the salve every couple hours whenever it seemed to have fully dried.

Having finished her careful inspection of my appearance, Arwen spoke again.
“i think it would be best you stayed the rest of today, but perhaps tomorrow I could show you to your room and around the main house? you will have to come back at least once a day for quite some time, to continue seeing the healers until your health is returned, and once you leave the healing house, you will have to venture to the kitchens, or join us in the main hall for meals, depending on whether you feel like dining privately or with everyone else. perhaps you would be more comfortable in a room of your own, though. comfort aids the healing process quite a lot.

My eyes stung a little, tearing up slightly, though none fell, and I focused on the blanket that was still bunched slightly in my hands.
Even though I had been here a few days now I still constantly felt overwhelmed, having been alone for such a long time.

I felt like I didn’t know what to expect from people anymore, and out of all the possibilities I had considered on my journey, being treated so kindly and well was never among them.

“Thank you, that would be wonderful.”

Arwen remained silent, perhaps allowing me a moment to reign in my emotions, or perhaps having nothing more to say.
I couldn’t tell.

After a few minutes of silence had passed, spent blinking tears away and mentally berating myself for being unable to control myself, I looked up, glancing over at her.
She was watching me sadly, and I was sure she had been the entire time.
I was about to open my mouth to apologize, when she spoke again, her voice soft and concerned.

“It is alright to feel, Alyssa. No one will think any less of you. Crying is natural, everyone does it. I cry because of beauty, sadness, anger, peace, happiness, pain. It is not a bad thing.”

She leaned forward, removing the blanket from where my fingers had been twisting it nervously, and despite the way I almost shied away from the contact, she took my hands gently in hers.
Her hands were warm, and the feeling of any physical contact made me want to cry all over again.
I hadn’t realized how much I missed it until it was gone for the months of my travels.
The tears still did not fall. It almost felt like they couldn’t.

The only time I had truly cried on the entire journey had been after killing those men.
It had been one of the only moments on the journey that I truly felt I was losing hope.
That I had been able to kill those men and take what I needed had left me feeling like I was already doing evil in a world I only wanted to help, and it had made me question whether it would be better for me to continue on, or to let the world play out as I knew it would, without my potentially disastrous interference.

“Please, let yourself feel. Don’t try to hide or contain that which is part of you. You cannot feel true peace without allowing yourself to feel everything else. You will be happier here once you learn to feel again.”

I swallowed hard, and nodded once, not trusting my voice to hold for a response.

She watched me for another moment before rising from her chair.
For a moment, I worried I had offended her by not vocally responding, and thought about apologizing.

My worries were quickly put to rest when instead of leaving, she settled on the edge of my bed that was not already occupied by a tray of food.

“You should eat, I’m afraid I’ve kept you rather preoccupied. Shall I tell you about some of the things you’ll find while you’re here?”

I wasn’t quite sure what that meant.
Would I be looking for something?

I nodded anyway, it seemed as if she wasn’t expecting too many verbal responses, especially if I was supposed to eat at the same time.

I looked over at the tray, artfully decorated with sliced up fruits and vegetables, as well as pieces of
what appeared to be some type of cooked meat. Likely rabbit, or deer.

I didn’t think they were in the habit of growing livestock for slaughtering. It didn’t seem like a very elven thing to do. The tray was relatively small, and there wasn’t very much food on it, though apparently they thought I could handle solid food again. That was nice.

As I picked at some of the fruit, eating slowly still so as not to overtax my shrunken stomach, Arwen’s melodic voice filled my ears.

“One of my favorite places to spend time is the gardens, just outside the main house. There are gardens everywhere here, but some are particularly lovely. I’ll take you there tomorrow, after I show you to your room. It’s filled with soft grass and flowers, more for enjoyment and relaxation than outright usefulness, though many of the plants have medicinal properties if used correctly.”

She smiled fondly, “My father loves plants that can be used for healing. They are a gift from the Valar, he always says, should you get him talking about plants. So much hidden potential behind the beauty. He’s got a number of gardens for medicinal plants alone, but they are not quite as colorful as the garden that goes around the main house. Though you do have to be careful in that garden sometimes, my brothers, Elladan and Elrohir, like to hide in the trees and pretend they are squirrels, dropping acorns or leaves on people when they walk by.”

She shook her head, almost rolling her eyes at the thought of them, voice mildly exasperated. “Seasoned warriors and they still act like children. They’re quite excited to meet you. I’m certain they’ll attempt to pull you into their mischief.”

She misread my confused look as one of worry, and quickly added, “You needn’t worry, they truly mean no harm, they just delight in creating laughter and merriment.”

She shifted slightly where she sat so she could lean against the pillows next to me, still mostly upright, but more relaxed now. “My father mentioned you wanted to learn Sindarin. He might have Elladan help with that, if Erestor is busy. Erestor taught us when we were children, but he is also one of my father’s chief of council, and they are quite busy in recent times.”

For a moment she looked thoughtful, “Perhaps I could help as well. Elladan is far more studious than Elrohir, but he is also rather easily pulled from them. You likely wouldn’t get very far in each lesson before Elrohir attempted to drag you both away for something more fun. One seldom does anything without the other, and when they do, it is at the behest of our father.”

She glanced at me again, taking in the dark circles under my eyes as she spoke, “He is quite concerned for you, you know.”

I paused in my chewing of a grape, mildly startled. Was she still talking about the twins...?

That didn’t really make sense, they didn’t even know me yet. “Who...?”
“My father. The type of magic or ritual that would be required to bring someone from another world is not something that is known in Middle Earth. He speculates that the spell used to transport you here was quite likely experimental. It must have been a very powerful sorcerer to have harnessed such magic. We have all been speculating why one might bring you here, and the only reasonable conclusion is that, should you truly have knowledge of the future of Middle Earth, the sorcerer likely wanted to use it in some way.”

That thought sent my mind to Saruman, and I considered whether I should tell them all that Saruman had, for lack of better phrasing, gone dark.
I debated it for a moment.

It might cause things to happen at a more accelerated pace, which could be bad, but if I did not tell them, they might inform Saruman of my presence here, which would also be bad, assuming he was the one who brought me here.
I thought it a rather fair assumption to make, since I had appeared so close to Isengard.

I didn’t notice Arwen watching me closely, my troubled thoughts plain on my face.
She stayed for a long while, a silent comforting presence next to me as my thoughts twisted around in my mind.
Eventually, though, she rose, quietly coming around the other side of the bed to pick up the tray of mostly uneaten food before slipping out, leaving me alone with my thoughts.
Leaving the healing house

Later that night after one of the healers had come and gone with another small tray of food, I was visited again, this time by an elf with a stack of books in his arms, along with a bag of parchment, quills, and an ink pot.

He stood at the doorway, as Maeben had, managing to look elegant despite his arms being filled with things.

“My name is Erestor, my lord Elrond informed me that you wish to learn Sindarin. Would you like to start now?”

I startled slightly, from where I had been sitting on the edge of the bed, putting a little bit of weight on my feet to see how they felt.

He had made no noise, and I hadn’t noticed him until he spoke.

Erestor was just as beautiful as all the rest of the elves I’d seen, though in a more studious way, whereas Elrond was beautiful in a kind, regal way, and Arwen was lovely, like a full moon on a starless night.

I nodded, voice soft when I spoke.

It was still quite raspy, though had already vastly improved since the morning.

I wasn’t sure if it was just because I had been talking more, or if it had to do with all the tea they kept offering me with meals.

“Good evening, lord Erestor. I would begin at your convenience, as I’m sure you are far busier than I am presently.”

He smiled, “Well, I am not busy now, so it is quite convenient. May I enter?”

I nodded again, and he came in, moving the bed table slightly and aligning the chair next to it before depositing the items he’d brought onto it.

“I have some books for you. My lord Elrond told me that you are not of this world, so I brought a few in the various languages of middle earth. We will work with what we can in translating and teaching.”

He showed me one book, with lovely, unintelligible script pressed and painted into the front of the leather cover, and his voice was very obviously curious when he spoke.

I recognized the script as some form of Elvish, though I had no idea what it said.

“Can you read this?”

I shook my head, and he took it back, offering another, this time with different symbols, not swirling and beautiful like what I knew had been elvish.

This script was blocky, rather reminding me of gothic calligraphy, the letters looking more like runes than letters.

Dwarvish, maybe?

I shook my head again, before he even bothered asking if I could read it.

He replaced it with another, and almost immediately on seeing it I nodded.

It looked rather like english, just with a few odd letters here and there, some oddly shaped.

Sounding them out in my head came out with real words that did seem to make sense together, though, so I assumed I would probably be able to read the rest of it.

I wouldn’t be able to read it quite as fluently as I would the english I was used to, but I would be able
“You’re tired, you should have said. You will learn better if you are well rested, and no one expects you to master an entire language in one evening. I will take these” He indicated the books, “and seek you out again after the midday meal tomorrow. I understand you are leaving the healing house in the morning?”

I nodded again, “Arwen is going to show me around Rivendell.”
I felt a bit foolish immediately after saying that, and mentally berated myself. He wasn’t going to care what I was doing tomorrow.

He nodded slightly, smile full of amusement, “I had wondered. I came across her talking quite sternly to her brothers about ceasing their mischief tomorrow. I had assumed she simply desired a day of...
peace. The twins do have a habit of poking at her for reactions."

His eyes held fondness, though the rest of his face showed mild exasperation when talking about Elladan and Elrohir.

“Arwen has always been more reserved than them. I suppose she simply wants your first day out of the healing house to be a peaceful one.”

He rose, speaking as he gathered up the rest of the things he’d brought, “Perhaps you should take a few days off, then, and settle in. I’m sure you’ll be able to focus more on your lessons if you’ve had a proper chance to explore.”

Part of me wanted to agree, but most of me wanted to protest, so protest I did.

“But we just started, won’t I learn better if I practice every day?”

He looked at me, a hint of a smile playing at his lips again, “Yes, but I cannot very well schedule lessons in the library if you do not know how to get to the library. Take a day or two to learn your way around, and then seek me out. I can usually be found in the library for an hour or two after the midday meal.”

With that said, he retreated to my doorway, bowing his head just slightly as a farewell, along with a quietly spoken “Good night, I do hope you sleep well.”

Then he was gone.

That night was the best sleep I’d gotten in my entire stay in Middle Earth, let alone in Rivendell. Perhaps because I was kept up by my many visitors, or perhaps because the peace of Rivendell was finally setting in through the nightmares. I didn’t know.

I woke up feeling refreshed and excited to explore Rivendell with Arwen, only to look out the window and find that the sky was still mostly dark.

Sleep would not return to me, however.

So instead, I climbed out of my bed, carefully smoothing the blankets, and evaluated how I felt. My feet still ached a bit, as did my ribs, and there was a small bit of lingering soreness in my entire body.

I felt rested, though, exhaustion no longer clouding my mind.

I slowly fell into the routine of stretches I had taken up on my long journey, easing muscles stiffened with lack of use and regaining some of the mobility I lost due to soreness.

I took my time, not needing to start walking for the day, my stretch was leisurely and thorough.

By the time I finished, the sky was starting to become lighter, and I already felt much improved since waking, some of the sore feeling fading with warmed up muscles.

I was in the middle of combing my long, wavy hair, when there was a knock at my door.

I glanced down at myself, wondering if they would be offended if I let them in while in a nightgown and not covered by blankets.

In the end I decided that I didn’t really care, it wasn’t like I had anything else to put on.

“Come in.”

The door opened to reveal one of the healers, an elven woman with light brown hair and a lovely, warm smile, who I’d learned in the first few days was named Alena.

She entered, hands occupied with a bag filled with various garments.

“Good morning, Milady. I’ve some clothes for you to choose from, the rest will be brought to your room in the main house. Would you like some assistance dressing?”
Her voice was kind and not at all demeaning, as if she really wouldn’t mind having to help me.

I shook my head slightly, “no thank you, ma’am. I’m sure I can figure it out.”

She looked a little hesitant to leave, still, lingering at the door after setting the things on the bed.
“Are you sure, Milady? There are ties on the back of the dress, you might not be able to reach them without aggravating your injuries.”

I smiled, but shook my head once more, “I’d like to at least try to do it myself. Maybe you could stay within earshot, and I can call you if I can’t manage on my own?”

Her look of slight concern turned into a pleasant and reassured smile, “of course Milady. I’ll just be down the hall a bit, taking stock of some herbs. Call if you need any help at all.”

With that, she turned, quietly shutting the door behind me, and I was alone again with a bag full of clothes.

I went through the bag slowly, pulling out what appeared to be some type of underwear that tied at the sides, a long white gown with thin ties at the top and sides which was far too flimsy to be on its own, made of a thin, wispy fabric, and I assumed it was some sort of under slip or petticoat type of thing.

I slid the nightgown off, not really spending any time looking at the mass of bandages that covered me, and tied the underwear thing. It felt like the bottom of a bathing suit.

Then came the white gown, which I tied at the sides carefully, and after that came a dress, as that was all they had offered.

It was a quiet, forest green, it had a long skirt, long sleeves that had ties going all the way up them to offer a bit of fitting, a wide neck that showed rather more of my shoulders than I was used to in dresses, and a set of ties in the back.

It was quite practical, and I very much liked it.
I slid it over my head carefully, arms shaking a little.

The arm ties were a tad difficult, as was the back tie, but I managed.
The lack of a bra didn’t really bother me, as I’d been without one the entire time I’d spent in Middle Earth, so I was used to the feeling, and the white undergown hid any poking out of nipples.

There was also a pair of soft fabric flats that had a bit of ribbon going around the opening that tied in the back, soled with leather, which I managed to slip on over my bandaged feet.

I looked practically normal by the end of it, hardly any bandages showing. A few from my shoulders and neck, and a few at my wrists and on my fingers, but everything else was covered up.
I rather wished for a mirror, wondering what I looked like in authentic elven clothes.

Making my way out of the room was rather strange, as I had never really left it since arriving in Rivendell almost a week ago.
I found Arwen to be walking down the hall towards my room when I exited, and she smiled widely upon seeing me dressed and up.

“Alyssa, you look marvelous. Much better than you did yesterday, and that gown is very lovely on you, the color brings out the green in your eyes.”

She carefully slipped my arm through hers, gently moving past the slight flinch from the contact, and started leading me out.
The first sight of Rivendell was breathtaking.
All the more because I would be able to remember it this time.

The buildings were all lovely stone and wood structures, combined in decorative arches, pillars, and carvings, all leading up to large roofs that covered and protected everything.
The sun was just peeking over the tops of the misty mountains, painting everything in golden light and making it look all the more unreal.

I teared up a little, both at the beauty, and at the sunlight that my eyes weren’t quite used to after having been inside for the past couple days with most of my time spent sleeping.

The day went by slowly, and yet so quickly.
The healing house was really a kind of branch off of the main house, connected with bridges and lovely open walkways covered with stone archways and wooden roofs.
The walk from the room I’d been in, to the room they gave me in the main house only took a few minutes, though I was breathing harder upon arrival, and Arwen decided that perhaps we should wait another day before I ventured out more.

She made sure I was comfortable in the bed before informing me she’d be by later in the evening to accompany me to lunch.
I fell asleep quickly after the slight exertion, napping until Arwen came by for lunch.
I awoke to the knock on the door, and sat up slowly, “Come in”

It opened to reveal Arwen, who greeted me with a small smile.
“Do you feel up to joining me for the midday meal, Alyssa?”

I nodded and rose, rubbing still tired eyes in an attempt to clear them.
“Yes. Thank you. I’m sorry I was so tired.”

“Nonsense. It’s perfectly understandable. You will likely feel that way for a number of days still, until you build your strength up again.”
She twined arms with me again, taking a slow, easy pace.
We went through a few halls, her pointing things out to me that I might use to aid in navigating, before we got to the kitchen.

She started gathering small bits of food into a large bowl, before pausing and looking at me and speaking, voice a bit tentative.
“I thought we might take our meal to the garden.”

“That sounds wonderful. Can I help carry anything?”
I knew it was odd to offer help when I was already having difficulty carrying myself, but it was out before I could think about it.

She offered a smile and a gentle shake of her head, “It’s quite alright, tis only a small amount. Just enough for us.”

We quietly made our way out, and she continued pointing things out and giving directions to other places.
When we finally made it to the garden, she lead me over to a bench that sat among a number of lovely flower bushes, sitting next to me and holding the bowl between us so that we could both get at the bits of cut up fruit and vegetables in it.

We ate in comfortable silence, only broken by the occasional call of birds.
Recovery

After eating, we strolled through the garden, Arwen softly telling me about the plants. It wasn’t long before I started to struggle, though, trembling and internally berating myself at how weak I was acting, tired after a simple stroll.

I was broken from my mental scolding by her voice, “I’m afraid I’ll have to leave you for a while. Shall I accompany you to your room, or would you rather spend some time in the garden?”

I wondered briefly if she had noticed how tired I was and was simply offering me a reason to go back to my room after such a short time, or if she actually had something to do. Deciding all I really needed was a few minutes to rest, I responded. “I think I’ll stay out here. Thank you, though. Maybe I’ll..see you later?”

The last bit was tentative, and I regretted saying it almost immediately. What if she was really busy and now she felt obligated to come tend to the poor injured human….

She smiled, though, “Of course. I’ll find you when I’m done. Perhaps we can take our evening meal in the hall with everyone else.”

With that, she stepped away and gave me one more assessing glance before leaving, back in the direction of the main house.

I made my way over to a large tree, sitting carefully against it and letting my head fall back to rest against the trunk, legs stretched out before me.

I didn’t notice when my eyes drifted closed, or when I started dozing. I had no idea how much time passed before I heard a voice, pulling me slowly from the depths of sleep.

I didn’t move. I doubted anyone would attack me in Rivendell. It was definitely male, still melodic and exotic. “Is she sleeping?”

Another voice, very similar, but obviously responding to the first, “I think so. Look at her…Arwen said it was bad…but…”

I winced a little, did I really look that bad?

The first voice responded, softer this time, almost out of my hearing range, “Hush, you’re going to wake her up. She looks so tired…Maybe we should take her back to her room?”

I slowly blinked my eyes open, pushing myself to sit up a bit straighter from the slouch that I’d fallen into while dozing and looking up to find two identical elves a short ways away. Upon seeing my eyes open, they smiled a bit apologetically.

The one on the left took a few steps forward, then knelt, the other joining him only a moment later. The only pair of twins I knew of were Elrond’s sons, Elladan and Elrohir, and these two did look a bit like Elrond.

The left twin spoke, “My apologies, milady. We didn’t mean to bother you.” Then the right twin spoke, “Perhaps we might accompany you back to your room? You’ll become
chilled if you sleep out here.”

With that pointed out, I realized that I actually was quite cold, starting to shiver a bit.
“I...uh...I’m sorry, for sleeping out here. I didn’t mean to, I was just going to sit a while and enjoy the garden...I didn’t realize I fell asleep…”

The one on the left shook his head quickly, “Tis nothing to worry about, milady. The gardens are for everyone to enjoy, and there are many ways to enjoy them. I have taken a great number of naps out here.”

The one on the right quickly rose, shrugging out of the robe he had on, revealing a tunic and breeches underneath.
He stepped forward, kneeling next to me and offering it to me.

I stared at it for a moment, then him, then slowly reached out to take it.
I kept getting kindness that I wasn’t expecting.
I put one arm through, wincing when my muscles protested movement after so long without activity, and he was quick to reach around, helping me to get my other arm in and then closing it in the front.

Despite that they, and all the elves I’d seen were thin, the robe still dwarfed me.
The sleeves were long, falling well past my hands, the front where it opened incredibly loose, each side able to wrap around me almost to my back.
It was quite long, too, and I felt a bit like a child, playing in grown up clothes.

I tried to stand, ending up accidentally standing on the edge of the robe and stumbling.
The one who’d offered the robe gently caught my arms, helping to right me.
“Are you alright?”

“Yes..Thank you.”
They were both incredibly tall, at least six and a half feet.
The top of my head was about even with their shoulders.

I glanced between them uncertainly, I couldn’t tell which was which.
I was tired of referring to them as the left and right twin.
“Ah..My name is Alyssa.”

The one who’d given me his robe and caught me smiled, “My name is Elrohir, and that is my brother, Elladan.”

Elladan waved slightly, having stood up at some point while I was busy being clumsy.

We stood there for a long, silent moment.
I wasn’t sure what to say to them, and they looked like they felt rather the same way.

Elladan was the one who spoke first, sounding a little bit unsure.
“Are you..enjoying your time here, in Rivendell?”

I couldn’t help but smile, feeling better that these creatures of seeming perfection maybe weren’t so perfect after all.
“Well, it beats dying in the wilderness.”

Elladan winced a little, looking like he wished he hadn’t spoken.
“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to..”

He trailed off awkwardly.
Elrohir was looking at his brother with a rather ‘what are you doing’ expression.

A giggle forced itself out of me, which had both of them looking at me oddly. Elladan actually tilted his head a little, an adorable expression of confusion on his face.

The giggle grew into a full laugh as I pictured a dog or cat tilting their head in the same way, the thought of comparing elves to furry pets enough to have me laughing so hard I had to lean on the tree to remain standing.

I knew I probably looked ridiculous, wearing Elrohir’s giant robe, leaning against a tree, laughing like a crazy person.

I managed to calm down enough that I was just snickering, but one look at their tilted heads and amused expressions sent me spiraling back into laughter.

It was another few minutes before I was able to calm down enough to stop laughing.

“I’m sorry, you just..you look so funny when you tilt your heads like that. Like a confused puppy.”

I snickered again at the way their eyebrows raised at my reason for laughing.

Elrohir’s voice was amused and a bit disbelieving when he spoke.

“You think we look like..puppies.”

I tried to stifle the laughter, wondering if perhaps I’d offended them already, but that fear was quickly stopped when Elladan laughed, a musical sound that made me happy just hearing it.

“Well, I don’t think I’ve ever been compared to a puppy before. If we’re puppies, I think you’re a kitten, little and burrowing.”

Elladan plucked at the shoulder of the robe that ensconced me.

Elrohir peered at me closely, leaning down slightly.

“Or perhaps a laughing fox kit?”

I giggled again, and Elladan nodded, “Yes, I think so.”

And just like that, the awkwardness was gone.

I knew I was going to have fun with them.

I shivered again, despite the added warmth of Elrohir’s robe.

I was no longer skeletally thin, but I still hadn’t filled out enough to have any body fat to conserve heat with.

Elrohir offered his arm, “Well, kit, may we accompany you to the dining hall? It’s nearing the evening meal.

It will be warmer inside.”

I hesitantly slipped my arm through his, feeling a bit self conscious walking next to two giant handsome elves, but it didn’t take long before they were telling me all sorts of fun things to do, and I didn’t even notice the feeling fading, too busy laughing at the funny things they were suggesting.

Arwen found me a short while later sitting at a table in the kitchen, small bits of food left over from our meal, Elladan and Elrohir on either side of me, telling stories of their previous pranks expressively and with many hand motions. She smiled at the sight of me laughing between them, and left quietly, going to the dining hall to eat, choosing not to disturb us.

“Erestor was livid! We’d stacked the books from his study into a book fort and used our robes to make the roof. He found us in there, reading the book we were currently studying. He couldn’t decide whether to punish us for making a mess in his study, or be glad we were actually studying! In the end, he made us put the books back, all where they’d been before, but not before throwing his
robe atop ours and joining us for an hour of reading in the book fort. He never admits it, though.”

I laughed as Elladan finished his story, trying to stifle a yawn a moment later. They exchanged a look, and Elrohir stood, clearing our dishes away.

Elladan was still smiling, though not quite as exuberantly as when he’d been telling the story. “Would you like to retire? You’re still recovering, we’ve been forcefully instructed by Arwen that we aren’t to keep you, if you were tired.”

“I suppose it would probably be a good idea.”
I rose slowly.

Even though I’d been more active that day than I had for the past few days, I wasn’t exhausted. Not like I had been the last few days while recovering. I was tired, but I felt good. I felt like I had recovered more in the last day, being outside with Arwen, and laughing with the twins.

Elrohir returned from cleaning up, “Do you remember where your room is?”

“I think so..Do either of you know where it is? I’m not completely sure I’ll remember all the turns..”
I twisted my fingers together, peering out the kitchen entryway and trying to remember which direction it was in.
It felt like so much had happened since I left my room that afternoon.

Elladan stepped up, “I believe I know which one it is. We’ll go with you, that way if we all get lost, at least we’ll have you there to protect us.”

I laughed again, and we set off.
It only took one wrong turn before I found my way back, and they left me with a parting farewell, and the agreement that we would meet up for lunch the next day.

The next several days went very much the same.
I met Arwen for breakfast, and then we spent a few hours just walking around, helping me to gain back strength and easy mobility.

She’d hand me off to Elladan and Elrohir around lunch, and we’d spend some time exploring, and once I was moving easier, climbing trees, where we’d lounge and Elladan would try to help me make sense of the Sindarin geography book that Erestor had given me, while Elrohir innocently dropped leaves on our heads until he got too bored and decided that it was time for more exploring.

The second time they caught me taking a nap in the garden after Arwen left, they brought a large, heavy blanket.
They proceeded to swaddle me quite securely until I was a bundle of laughter, then they plopped down next to me, stretched out, and we all took a cat nap.

That was an interesting experience. I’d gotten in the habit of clinging to things, branches, bushes, tree trunks, during my travels. Insurance, of types, to make sure I didn’t fall out of the trees I slept in, or roll away from my sheltered hiding spots.
The result of this habit was that, when I awoke from the nap, it was to find that I had at some point scooted closer and was now curled and clinging to Elrohir.

He was awake, of course. Both of them were.
Elladan was on his side facing us, keeping up a soft conversation in Sindarin with Elladan. Both of them looked highly amused with my cuddly behavior, as well.

That seemed to break the personal space bubble from then on, and they had no qualms with physical contact after that.

I met Bilbo during one of my first meals in the dining hall, and broke away from both the twins and Arwen for the first time since leaving the healing house. They watched with matching looks of perplexed confusion as I made a beeline towards him immediately upon seeing him.

There was no mistaking who it was.
He looked quite old, and was very short, but had a look of warmth about him.
Even as he sat next to a few other elves, merrily chatting away, I could tell that interruption would not be seen as a bother to him.

“Excuse me, I..”
What did I say?
I certainly couldn’t just say ‘you’re Bilbo, right? Would you tell me your stories?’

He turned at my hesitant words, offering me a smile.
“Ah, my dear, it is good to see you up and about! I witnessed your entrance into Rivendell, it was quite concerning. Ah, but you must still be recovering! Sit down, sit down. Join me, I love to meet new folk. My name is Bilbo Baggins.”
He motioned at his side where no one yet occupied a few chairs.

I sat carefully in the chair he was indicating.
“Thank you. I didn’t mean to interrupt..It’s a pleasure to meet you, master Baggins. My name is Alyssa.”

“Oh enough of that, call me Bilbo, please. There are no interruptions in good conversation, simply new and interesting topics! There you go, then, pull up a chair. You caused quite the commotion, coming in the way you did.”
He leaned a little closer, lowering his voice in a conspiratory way.
“Between you and me, I think a little bustle every now and then is good for everyone here. Not too much of course, just enough to keep everyone on their toes.”

I blinked at him, feeling a bit blindsided.
“I..I didn’t think it was that bad. Though, to be perfectly honest, I don’t really remember much of my arrival..”

“Not at all surprising, my dear. You were in a poor state. But let us not dwell on misfortune. Let’s get some food in you. You’re far too thin. It’s not healthy.”
He leaned back slightly, motioning at the table of available food.

It all happened so fast, I just wanted to meet him and then suddenly he had me seated comfortably next to him with a plate full of food.
Talking to him was somehow easier.
He was happy, once I curiously asked when he had first come here, to start regaling me with his many adventures, and I was happy to listen, chiming in with questions and curiosities, getting a new, and yet so familiar perspective on the stories I grew up reading.

All the while, Elladan, Elrohir, and Arwen sat quietly conversing amongst themselves and their father.
Occasionally they glanced over to check on me, finding with ever growing curiosity that I seemed more comfortable with Bilbo upon first meeting than I had with any of them.

It wasn’t until the next morning that they got a chance to ask about it, for Bilbo and I spent the remainder of the evening together.
We went first from the dining hall to the hall of fire, where he cajoled me into singing for him, and then sang for me.
We went joyfully back and forth, and I found that I felt almost normal around him, despite that he was so clearly older, and very much shorter.

As horrible as it sounded in my head, he didn’t feel otherworldly and inhuman as the elves did, so I didn’t feel out of place with him.
After spending almost an hour singing back and forth at each other, with much laughter thrown in between songs, I started to yawn incessantly.

He was quick to dismiss the apologies I offered for my easy tiring, and would not take no as an answer when offering to walk me back to my room.
We parted that night with the promise that we would continue sharing stories and songs another time.

By the end of the week, I was feeling much more myself.
A lot happened in that first week out of the healing house.

Maeben showed me to the stables where they were caring for Valen and Arron, and I got to reunite with them.
They actually seemed to recognise me, and rubbed their heads all over me, bringing out a bit of laughter.

I gave them an apple, provided by Maeben, and spent an hour or so being taught how to care for them, with the promise of more the next day when we had to part ways.

Later that week he introduced me to his wife, Athae, who greeted me kindly, and with more concern over my health than I expected.
Maeben and Athae took great joy in showing me their home.

Athae seemed overly pleased when I shared that I had made a number of my own clothes before I came here, and was happy to share her sewing tools and supplies, offering me refuge in her sewing room should I ever need a quiet place to get away.
For the first couple days after the offer had been made, I resisted, thinking I would be a bother.

Eventually I made my way there, hesitantly asking if I could join her for an evening.
She gently pulled me in, offering food and drink should I want it, and we spent the rest of the evening conversing on and off about sewing, how I was healing, what I wanted to do next, and other quiet pleasantries.

As I start feeling more physically recovered, I begin to sleep worse, finding myself lying awake at night, staring listlessly at the ceiling.
By the end of the week, I only slept during my naps in the garden, which grew in frequency.

By the beginning of the second week, the twins had put a wooden chest containing a number of blankets underneath one of the benches in the gardens, and I started sneaking out during the night to sleep under the stars, finding that after such a long time traveling and sleeping outside on the ground, walls and ceiling made it difficult for me to fall asleep, making me feel confined, and the bed was too soft.

I tended to pick hidden places, occasionally curling up in low tree branches.
I was never bothered, though I often found various elves, known and unfamiliar, sitting nearby when I awoke.

The nightmares still plagued me, though I rarely remembered them anymore.

It was a week and a half after leaving the healing house when I finally made my way to the library after the midday meal, Elladan and Elrohir having had to go on their turn patrolling, giving me a bit of leisure time.

Erestor sat at a wooden table near the front entrance, and looked up immediately upon my entering.
I had thought he'd jump right into Sindarin, so was surprised when instead, he smiled and asked after my health.
“You look much better. How are you feeling?”
“Ah..I’m alright. Could be worse.”
I wasn’t sure how much detail he wanted.
At least when the healers or Elrond asked that, I knew they wanted a detailed answer so they could help more.

“I’ve noticed you cavorting with the twins occasionally. It’s good to see that you remember how to smile and laugh after your ordeal.”
He gently closed the book he had been reading, still looking at me.

I tried not to wince, was that supposed to be a subtle warning not to cause trouble with them.? “I’ve never really had difficulty smiling and laughing, a little hardship isn't going to change that.”
Hopefully...

He stood, moving around the table to pull out a chair, indicating I should move from my awkward hover by the entrance.
I did, hunching my shoulders a little as I passed him and sat.

The last time I'd seen him, I’d been sitting in bed, and he had sat next to me in a chair.
Walking by him was a major perspective change from that.

He was, as it seemed all the elves were, very tall.
I felt like a mouse, surrounded by a bunch of very large, graceful cats.

He moved another chair out next to the one I was in, sitting in it gracefully with impeccable posture, and I realized that sitting didn't make him seem any shorter.

He watched me for a moment before speaking, “I did not mean to chide. It truly is good to see you in good spirits. Your condition was..quite dire, when you arrived.”

I hunched a little bit more, feeling bad that I kept automatically thinking the worst of everyone.

He let out an exasperated sigh, “That was not chiding either. Sit up. If you curl any more you’ll be under the table.”

I quickly uncurled, sitting tall, if not a bit stiffly.

“Take a deep breath. Relax. Now, have you been looking at the books I gave you?”
He opened them both to the first page, and started speaking softly, and just like that, the lesson started.
We continued meeting every day for about an hour, and soon found that I had absolutely no talent for learning languages.

My tongue tripped on the pronunciations, and I had a difficult time comprehending the tenses and order of the words.
He was endlessly patient, which was very helpful, as I got frustrated easily with my lack of understanding.

It was another week before I managed to put any more weight on, looking more like a human and less like a skeleton.
I also had the last of the bandages taken off, Elrond deeming my ribs healed enough to start physical training.
I couldn’t help but fidget uncomfortably as he removed the bandages, flinching away every now and then when his fingers grazed skin, vulnerable and fresh from having been covered so long. The bandages came off easily, not sticking anywhere, and for the first time in the last few weeks I’d been in Rivendell, I was completely free of bandages.

I felt exposed.

I trailed a finger down the bare skin of my arm, disliking the sensitive feeling of new skin that it had. The lotions and ointments they’d used on me had done an amazing job, my skin felt fresh, new, and soft.

All the callouses I had built up over my twenty two years of life had been healed away. Hiking callouses on my feet, cello callouses on my fingers.

Many scars I knew I previously had were faded to near invisibility, gone with the layers of skin that had been burnt away by the sun. The ointment, despite having been put on well after the worst of the burns occurred, had been able to keep my skin from tightening and pulling, so I had full mobility.

I was not devoid of scars, however. The bruise from my broken ribs was mostly faded, only a greenish yellow color left. There were a multitude of scratches that had healed into thin, slightly raised white lines, spiderwebbed along my legs, down to my ankles, along my feet, as well as along parts of my arms from the many times I’d fallen.

My hands had tiny white lines running all across them, along with a slight shake.

The bottoms of my feet were littered with slightly raised, thick white lines. Any skin that wasn’t taken up with cut scars was covered with burn scars.

The burn scars were worst on my shoulders and arms, leaving veiny lines and ridges that bulged out slightly, leaving an odd, textured look to the skin. Between the veins and ridges the skin looked a bit waxy, like someone had taken a candle and dripped wax in the recesses of my arm.

My face wasn’t quite as bad, as I’d often tried to keep it angled away from the sun, or used my arms to protect it, but even that wasn’t unscathed. Similarly to my arms, there were white lines of slightly raised skin that reached, like small branches of a tree. They traced down the left and right sides of my face, from my forehead, down along my temples and cheekbones, reaching all the way down my neck and disappearing underneath my dress.

My torso was littered with a few small cut and scrape scars here and there, but it was by far the least scarred. It all looked both a little bit cool, and quite disturbing. I hadn’t realized they were that bad, and suddenly understood why I got so many looks of concern from elves that saw me.

None of the scars were painful or stretched, I was sure I had the ointment to thank for that. I wasn’t sure how to feel about them, and ended up spending the rest of the day sequestered in my room with a small hand mirror, looking at all the scars, tracing them. I felt like I didn’t recognize the person I saw.

The next day when I got up, I resolutely looked at the person in the mirror.
They weren’t ugly or unsightly, nor were they terribly eye catching, blending quite well with my already naturally pale skin.

I made the decision then and there that I would appreciate any scar I acquired, because it meant I was alive to see it.
It made me look oddly..younger, but older at the same time.

I left the room, returning the mirror to Elrond, determined to focus on more important things, like getting something to eat.

It was a day later when I was approached by Glorfindel, while wandering towards the stables to visit Valen and Arron.

For a moment, I thought it was Legolas.
There before me, an elf stood tall and straight, hair shining gold in the orange light of the setting sun, a gentle and joyful smile on a fair, young face, as he watched a group of elves practice archery and swordplay nearby.
Then he turned, smile somehow brightening upon seeing me, and trotted over to me, calling out in that same exotically accented and beautifully melodic voice, “Milady, what a delight it is to see you up and about! Has Elrond stated you well enough to start training yet?”

That, coupled with the incredibly striking figure, was enough to indicate who it was that stood before me, as I only knew of one golden haired elf that regularly took up residence in Rivendell.

He stopped in front of me, clasping both of my hands gently in his and lifting them up slightly, while he himself leaned down to peer in my face.

I moved my head back, eyes widening.
Was that an elf thing?
No personal space?

The twins were very touchy as well.
Arwen was a little bit more restrained…

Maybe it was a male elf thing?
Elrond wasn’t like that…Neither was Erestor..
“Hmm, you’re still quite pale, and your grip is weak as a kitten, but we can work on that. How are you feeling?”

I opened my mouth, then closed it again, stunned to silence for a moment by his rather overwhelming proximity.
He simply watched me, smile never wavering.

If anything, it got wider, the longer I was silent.
I inwardly cursed.
These elves were enjoying toying with me.

“I’m better than I was. I’m sorry, I don’t think we’ve been introduced yet.”
I tried to force my voice to be light, attempting to push past the slight awkwardness that had occurred from my delayed response.

He bowed shallowly, sweeping one arm down and to the side as he introduced himself, “Of course, my apologies. I am Glorfindel, Milady. I will be training you in combat. I hope you don’t mind, but I took the liberty of requesting that Athae make you some garments fit for fighting,
you should find them in your wardrobe tonight. I had hoped you would rise at dawn with me to begin training, you will have to completely recondition your body after so long confined to bed rest. It would be best not to wait too long.”

I was unable to stop that tiny bit of suspicion at how eager he seemed to help me. What was up with everyone being so nice?

“My name is Alyssa, nice to meet you, Glorfindel. Erestor did mention that you had volunteered to train me. I greatly appreciate your help.”
I tried not to fidget awkwardly.

He nodded slightly, accepting the thanks.
“Of course, though I’m sure in the coming days you’ll be cursing my help much more readily than thanking me.”

I let out a surprised laugh at his joking tone, “Challenge accepted, I shall say nothing but cheerful, positive things.”
The way I figured it, I couldn’t think of anything he could do that would be worse than my first few weeks here in Middle Earth.

His smile became slightly predatory in a sly, teasing way, “I shall hold you to that.”

He walked me back to the garden, looping one of my arms through his.
I noticed shortly into the walk that he was forced to shorten his stride, and attempted to compensate by lengthening mine.
It did little to help, his legs being considerably longer than mine.

He did smile, though, not commenting on it.
He left me at the entrance to the main garden, parting ways with a few final words, “I shall call upon you at dawn. Dress comfortably. Good day, Milady.”
As the day wore on, I started to notice that I was feeling odd. I discovered the reason for my not feeling quite right later that night, before I went to bed, when I went to the bathroom to find that my underwear were stained red.

That sent me into a slight panic as I tried to figure out what to do about it, and ended up wrapping bandages extensively around the crotch of another pair of underwear. It felt really awkward, but at least I wasn’t going to stain another pair of underwear while I looked for a solution.

I ended up leaving the relative safety of my room to go ask Athea what I should do, feeling kind of lost without modern luxuries.

That was a rather awkward conversation. For me, at least.

She seemed perfectly comfortable talking about matters of the body. Normally it isn’t something I was squeamish about, but usually the people I talked about it with were people I actually knew better.

She supplied me with a few pieces of thickly layered fabric pads that tied on to the crotch of my underwear, and explained that I could simply wash them out with soap whenever I went to the bathroom.

When I finally made it back to my room it was probably at least midnight, though I had little sense of exact time since being in Middle Earth. I decided to try sleeping inside that night, so that I wouldn’t miss Glorfindel’s wake up call.


The night did not go well. I lay in bed, eyes closed, trying to still my mind enough to sleep for a number of hours. Eventually I drifted off, only to be awoken multiple times through the night, drenched in cold sweat, biting the inside of my cheeks to keep from making noise, and breathing very erratically.

The nightmares had been coming less frequently recently, but they weren’t gone entirely. The first couple nightmares slipped away when I awoke. It was the final one that was the worst.

This time it had been a dream that I found Rivendell, only to find that everyone was dead. At first I hadn’t realized, as the first couple I came across were laying peacefully, eyes open, and I assumed them sleeping. As I got closer to the main house, though, their eyes started closing, their bodies became injured or mangled, and the lush grass in the gardens became stained with blood. Inside the main house I’d found the council, all impaled into their chairs with spears or swords, the hobbits lying in a pool of their blood in the bushes with their throats slit. Elrond, the only of the council not impaled to a chair, lay upside down over the pedestal the ring had been on, back broken and curved over it, his eyes staring at me without sight, the ring resting on his chest innocently.
It was at this point that I woke up, flung my blankets back, and rushed to the window to vomit into the grass that lay just outside.

My breathing was erratic, panic clutching at my chest and squeezing the breath out of me. I threw up again a few minutes later, despite not having anything left to expel.

It was another half hour before I could breath, and another fifteen minutes after that before I could tear myself away from the window, making my way over to the desk in the corner that had a pitcher of water. I had to rinse my mouth three times before the taste was faded enough to tolerate.

For a few minutes I sat on the edge of the bed, knowing that I wouldn’t be able to sleep again that night, despite that it was likely still a number of hours before dawn would come. Eventually, I decided that if I was going to be up, I may as well do something, so I moved over to the wardrobe, finding the clothes Athae had provided for training.

It was a pair of simple fabric breeches, a breast band with ties in the back, a loose shirt, a belt, and a pair of leather boots. I donned them as quickly as I could, still feeling emotionally drained from the nightmare, and trying to ignore the painful ache of cramps.

The feeling of confinement grew the longer I stayed inside, so once I was dressed, I went straight out the window, not wanting to traverse the halls of the main house. I was careful not to step in the mess of vomit I’d made, and cringed a little as I jumped over it, hoping it went unnoticed.

For a while I tried sitting in the garden to calm down, but as the minutes drew on, I found myself fidgeting more and more. Eventually, I could stand the stillness no longer, and I stood, walking quickly to the stables.

The sight of Valen and Arron alive and well was comforting, but also a reminder of the dream, so I spent only a few moments petting them and talking to them before leaving.

It was still quite dark out, so I almost didn’t notice the building a short ways away from the stables. Curiosity struck me, so I moved towards it, needing something to distract myself from my thoughts.

The door opened easily, revealing a room filled with various weapons and armors. Hesitantly, I entered. No one had shown me this building. I vaguely wondered if I wasn’t supposed to be here, then disregarded that thought. They hadn’t told me anything was off limits. Better to ask forgiveness than permission, right?

For a few minutes I simply stepped slowly through the armory, looking at the assortment of weapons and armor. Beautiful Elven swords rested on racks and stands secured to the walls, below them were a number of wooden crates with various daggers, shields, and swords that looked more worn.

Further in were crates with scaled chainmail, plate armor for both legs and arms, gauntlets, and next to those were shelves of plate chest pieces and helmets.

I peeked outside, observing a number of training posts set up nearby, large logs wrapped in a thick layer of hay and tied several times, as well as a few laying down, clearly to replace the current ones.
when they were destroyed.
Well, Glorfindel wasn’t here yet, but there wasn’t any reason not to start training now.

Perhaps hitting something over and over would help me get the nightmare out of my mind.
With that decision made, I stepped the rest of the way into the armory, inspecting rack upon rack of assorted weapons.

I briefly worried that I might break something and they would be unhappy with me, consoling myself with the fact that if they couldn’t break things with their elven strength, I most certainly wouldn’t break things with my normal female strength.
With that thought in mind, I picked one of the many swords that were stacked in a large box.
They looked dulled, and when I tested the edge, I found that they were.
Probably practice swords, my mind supplied.

I selected one, finding it to be heavier than I expected, and made my way out to the training dummy with it.
For a moment, I stood, experimenting with different ways of holding it and different ways of placing my feet.

Eventually I settled on gripping the hilt with both hands, with a few inches between them.
I positioned my right foot in front of me, turning my body slightly at an angle, and swung.

The sword skittered off the wood in an entirely unsatisfying way, so I swung again, trying to put more force into it.
I continued slashing and whacking at the training dummy, losing track of time as I tried to think of ways to improve.

The sky became brighter as I hacked and slashed away, not really noticing my surroundings, or the bunch of lightly armored elves that were trickling into the area, shooting me curious glances before turning to their own training.

I paused, arms burning, breathing hard, but feeling quite good.
It felt like the dummy had been my dream, and now it sat before me, splinters and chunks of wood strewn around it on the ground, the hay that had been tied around it having exploded off quite some time ago.

“That was quite good. Have you been trained with a sword before?”
Glorfindel’s voice came from behind me, causing me to jump, spin around awkwardly, drop the sword, and slip on all the hay that was littering the ground, falling inelegantly with a flail of my arms and a cry of surprise.

Glorfindel jumped forward, catching me around the waist as I fell and hauling me up.
As he helped me get stable again, he spoke, voice rich with stifled laughter, “Well at least now we know you definitely need to work on being alert while you fight.”

I tried not to cringe, this day just kept getting worse. First my period started, then nightmares, now I was making a fool of myself.
Just great.

That day was pretty miserable, but I felt like we made decent progress for the first day.
Glorfindel was strict, but a fairly good teacher.

We started out with basic stretches, not that he needed it, but he explained that he had helped to train Aragorn, so he knew it would help my body cope easier with the training.

After stretches, he gave me a bow and for the next hour or so, all I did was draw it without an arrow, holding the position until he had fixed any problems in my stance and technique. It was a long bow, and though I didn't know the draw weight, I had to assume it was fairly low, because I could draw it fully.

It wasn't easy, but I could do it.

He corrected me every time I did something wrong with footwork or how I held myself. I did an alright job of not snapping at him, which I was quite proud of, because I felt progressively worse as the day wore on, though it evened out somewhere around midday, lack of sleep and cramps making an already difficult activity just that much harder.

We paused for a morning meal at what I guessed was around nine or ten, my arms thoroughly aching from being held up so long. As he herded me over to the side of the training area, he produced a small pouch filled with a variety of fruits, vegetables, and small wafers of soft bread. I flopped onto the grass with a soft groan of pain, mostly from the sore muscles, but also partially because of the period cramps.

He settled next to me, pulling an apple from his bag and starting to slice it up with a small dagger, watching me with an amused smile all the while. "You know, we're taking a break to eat, not to nap. I brought enough for both of us."

I reached an arm towards him feebly, only to find that he'd settled just out of reach, and he was now smiling wider. "You seem tired. Perhaps I'm working you too hard?"

"That's so...so..."
Mean! Unfair! Cruel!
I have restraint, damn it!

He watched me, smiling eagerly.

Happy, come on, channel his optimism.
"So nice of you, to bring extra to share with me! Thank you!"

I groaned again and pressed myself up into a sitting position, crawling the few feet over to him.

He laughed and offered me an apple slice, apparently as a reward for making the effort, and for not snapping at him.

After eating and stretching, we worked exclusively on pulling arrows from the quiver and setting them on the string, without drawing or firing. The sun had reached its peak and was starting to fall when he called a break for the midday meal.

I flopped onto my back on the grass underneath a tree.
He looked like he was trying very hard not to laugh. "Shall I fetch us a meal? I would hate to deprive the ground of such a lovely ornament."

I laughed, and then stifled a groan at how it made my sore abs twinge. "Good plan. I'll stay here and hold down the fort."

He gave a cheerful laugh, leaving with the parting call of, "Don't fall asleep down there."

He allowed a longer break for that meal, but he quizzed me about what sorts of techniques he had been correcting me on all morning, so it didn't really feel that much like a break. After lunch, I was feeling rather like my arms were hotdogs, or very over cooked noodles.

He made me stretch again, and then handed me a practice sword, corrected my grip, and started showing me stances. Holding the sword felt slightly easier since most of the stances allowed my arms to be a bit closer to my body, and therefore easier to hold steady.

My muscles were shaking from the strain, though, so he let me be done only an hour or so after we started working with the sword. I trudged back to my room to clean up, then went to the library for lessons with Erestor.

The next day proved to be even more miserable than the previous one, as I not only had nightmares, but also woke up incredibly sore. I forced myself outside again far earlier than dawn, and spent the early morning beating on another helpless training post.

This time, when the sky lightened and Glorfindel eventually broke my single minded focus, I only jumped and spun around, managing to keep a hold on the sword and not fall this time. This time, he had me try a glaive. It was awkward, but fun to use.

When he first handed it to me, I couldn't help but ask, "Why a glaive?"

His voice was completely serious when he responded, "You are a small person, and not terribly physically strong. Your best chance in combat is something that either kills your enemy before they can get to you, or keeps you out of reach of your enemy. Thus, a bow, or something with a longer reach, like a glaive, or spear."

That was easy logic to accept, so I focused back on his teaching, not wanting to waste energy on speaking. First, he taught me a number of combat ready positions, on the balls of my feet, knees bent, slightly angled to present a smaller target.

Then he made me hold the position for a few minutes, nudging me and trying to make me fall over. I was pretty sure he was enjoying that part far more than he should.

My thighs were burning after only a few minutes of holding the position, I was sweating profusely despite the cool air around us, and I was cursing him in my head.

He smiled, as if he could see my thoughts on my face. "Enjoying yourself?"
I gritted my teeth.
Pleasant things.
Cheerful things.

Damn him to some place eternally bright and sunny, so I didn’t have to see his stupid radiant smile and annoyingly beautiful face!

My voice was slightly strained when I spoke, but I forced a bright smile onto my face, and was able to keep most of the sarcasm out of my voice.
“Oh yes, I’m having a splendid time. Isn’t it just a lovely day for training?”

There, that was pleasant enough.

His smile widened, and he let me stop holding the position.
The sense of accomplishment I got for not cursing him aloud was a far better reward than being able to stand normally again.

He then gave me the glaive, instructing me on how and where to hold it.
The staff of it was made of wood, with a long, slightly curved dull metal blade at the top.
I felt like if I had a black cloak, I could pretend to be the grim reaper.

He taught me a number of different guard and attack positions, explaining that if I were to choose this weapon as my primary weapon, I would be given one with a metal staff to make it more effective as a blocking weapon if needed.
He then made me name and hold the positions for a few minutes, then called them out, making me switch between them.

Then, because my arms and legs weren’t already tired enough, he made me hold the combat ready position, and switch between the guard and attack positions with the glaive.

We paused then, for a morning meal consisting of a few cold slices of cooked meat, and an apple for each of us. He’d brought meals again, planning ahead far better than I had.

After we ate, he took the glaive and gave me the bow from yesterday.
I had to fight really hard with myself not to give him a dirty look.
Glorfindel swore it was easier this way, having warmed up my muscles with the glaive.
I mentally swore that he just hated my dirty, rotten guts, all the while forcing another bright smile.

The bow training went much like the day before, drawing without an arrow for about an hour, which was considerably more difficult with already sore muscles.
Then placing an arrow on the string, for another hour.
I was thoroughly aching and sore by the time he actually let me draw the bow with an arrow.
Of course, he didn’t let me fire it.

When he let me go, shortly after midday, I flopped on the ground and groaned, “I’m dying”
He laughed, “No, you simply need to suffer a bit so that you don’t die later.”

Peering down at me, he grinned a bit smugly, “And I must say, I’m rather disappointed. ‘I’m dying’ isn’t cheerful or positive. Have you failed your challenge after only two days?”

I groaned again.
“‘I’m dying of happiness?’
He laughed again, reaching down to help me up, “I’ll let it go this time.”
A few days after having the bandages removed, I went to Athae to ask if she would make me a pair of gloves and a hat, with the excuses that the hat would help me stay warmer, and that the gloves would keep me from getting so many blisters from training. She obliged happily, making a pair of leather gloves that reached until just before my elbow, with tough leather on the inside so they could be used for archery, and ties running from the wrist to the opening of the gloves, so that I could put them on over whatever I was wearing.

What she made for a hat was actually a short, full circle cloak that went down to my waist, with a large hood. The cloak itself was lined with a thick woolen material, the hood with soft rabbit fur.

I took to wearing them constantly, only partially because of cold. The primary reason was because they conveniently hid the scars that I could see, leaving only my face bare. If any of them thought it odd, they did not comment on it.

Over the next few days, I established a bit of routine. I trained with Glorfindel until midday, then spent an hour or two working on Sindarin with Erestor, and the last couple hours of daylight were usually spent socializing either with Athae, Maeben, or Arwen. Unfortunately, Elladan and Elrohir were still on patrol, and I found that though it was still beautiful, Rivendell felt too quiet without them.

At one point, it came up in conversation with Erestor that I was a musician, and after that he insisted that music of any kind was a gift to the world, practically dragging me to the Hall of Fire and herding me into a small side room filled with various instruments.

There were shelves of painted flutes, rows of beautifully carved harps, the occasional drum, and a few instruments that looked rather like a cello, from my own world. That brought tears to my eyes, at the thought that maybe I could have a little piece of home in the music I remembered. None of the tears fell, though I did snuffle a bit as I picked one of them up. Erestor kindly pretended not to notice, getting me a bow, some rosin, and a chair.

It took a short while to tune it properly, but once it was tuned, the music came almost of its own accord, having been confined in me for so long. The first touch of bow on strings was like going home, and though my fingers were a bit rusty, they quickly loosened up and were soon flying over the strings.

I played the prelude to the first Bach cello suite, then the first movement from the fifth suite, having to stop after that because the stamina and strength I’d had before was faded. As soon as I stopped, however, I was bombarded with praise and excitement from a rather large crowd of elves that had gathered, pausing in a number of tasks to investigate the unfamiliar music. After that, I was asked to play in the Hall of Fire most nights, pulling out all sorts of remembered movie themes, and occasionally just making things up.

I learned some things about myself.
Though I was sore by the end of training, and stiff every morning, it was slowly slipping away as I gained strength and stamina. I was making progress with archery, sword and shield, and glaive work.

Glorfindel had given me some light leather armor, and we had progressed to sparring together. I didn’t do very well with sword and shield, finding the shield clunky and difficult to work with, and often getting distracted by either blocking or attacking, leaving myself very open for attacks, but he insisted that it would be valuable to know how to use them.

My view of elves changed the longer I was around them. Before I had thought of them primarily as graceful, eloquent, and inhumanly perfect, but it didn’t take more than a few weeks to change that.

Elrond, though he came off as regal, imposing, and rather intimidating at first, joked around with Elladan and Elrohir quite often, helped everyone in Rivendell equally no matter who they were, offering kindness in abundance, and was always willing to sit and talk with anyone should they need his advice, wisdom, or just someone to talk to.

Erestor was opinionated, had a deep love of history and languages, and had the patience of a saint, except for with Elladan and Elrohir, who knew all the right things to get a rise out of him. He was also completely terrifying when he was irritated, and I didn’t want to find out what it was like when he was truly angry.

Glorfindel was the embodiment of the saying “Optimism won’t solve all your problems, but it annoys everyone else enough to make it worth the effort.”. He dearly loved to laugh, which I learned after becoming the source of his laughter. He thought me completely adorable in my small stature and sarcastic attitude. He was both a terror and a joy to see with a weapon in his hand, and I was supremely happy he was on our side.

Arwen enjoyed sitting together quietly in the time just before we parted for sleep, and we often spent the time talking softly and brushing each other's hair, or taking long walks in the various gardens. We talked a lot of things that would come, and though I didn’t go into detail, her outside perspective was helpful.

Athae loved freely, could tell when anyone was upset, and had the mothering personality that brought out the small child in people, causing them to accept her care, whether it was really necessary or not. She was an amazing seamstress, and took great joy in making things for people. Her favorite part was when she saw someone using the things she made, even if just in passing.

Maeben loved his wife with all his being, but always had kindness to offer to anyone else. He wasn’t the best at archery, but he was excellent at swordplay and was always happy to spar with me if Glorfindel was busy. I couldn’t ever keep up, of course, but he always paced himself to only a tiny bit faster than I could handle, that way I at least got a few blocks or dodges in and was able to feel good about my progress. He showed me how to care for the two horses I’d had with me upon arriving, and I took great pleasure in spending time with them. He also showed me what plants were acceptable to eat when foraging, and supplied me with some drawing supplies when he discovered me doodling with a charcoal stick on a scrap of paper in his work room. We spent a lot of our time with Athae just singing and enjoying each other's company, and I couldn’t
help but feel that they were some of my favorite moments. Quiet, peaceful, uncomplicated.

Bilbo soon became a good friend, and was almost always a companion whenever I took to the hall of fire for music. He enjoyed putting random instruments in my hands and seeing me pick around on them, as well as sharing songs and stories. He seemed fascinated by the music and songs I played, as oftentimes they were quite different from the songs he or the elves sang or played.

When Elladan and Elrohir returned, Elladan ended up taking over my archery training. He had a splendid time torturing me by trying to get me to hit targets further and further away, then moving targets, then thrown targets. He threatened that later, he would blindfold me and force me to shoot by my other senses alone. I threatened back that if he made me do that I was probably going to accidentally shoot him. He laughed. I did the best with archery, because it was something I’d done before showing up in Middle Earth, so I was able to hit most targets, but when he got into throwing them, I usually tried to tackle him and beat him with the targets. He always kept just out of reach, laughing at my irritation until I either grew tired of our game, or sulkily went back to target shooting, trying and failing to ignore his over exaggerated apologies and pleas. It always ended in laughter, for even before showing up in Middle Earth, I couldn’t keep a straight face to save my life.

Elrohir soon turned out to be a bad influence on my routine, popping in during Sindarin lessons while Erestor was off getting a book and trying to talk me into going outside with him to bother Elladan, or trying to sneakily steal me away from combat training to go swim in the pool created by the waterfall.

I resisted most of the time, but occasionally he would literally pick me up and spirit me away for mischief, and there wasn’t much I could do about it except laugh and go along with it, because it was much more fun than kicking or screaming. Sometimes we climbed trees and threw berries or leaves at people, pretending to be squirrels. Other times he gave me piggy back rides around as I flailed a wooden sword, pretending to be going into battle. Occasionally we played hide and seek, but because he had obvious advantages he started following more and more ridiculous self inflicted rules. He had to wear a blindfold when he was seeking, or something to muffle his hearing. He wasn’t allowed to climb any trees. He could only walk backwards. He had to make animal noises or bird calls every few minutes while he was hiding. The rules got sillier each time we played.

They tended to treat me a bit like a child, though it was never in a condescending or demeaning way. I understood, of course, and was perfectly happy most of the time to go along with their games. It helped that they tended to act rather like children with me, so I didn’t feel bad about being treated that way.

As the nightmares grew steadily worse I took to wandering the halls or the gardens at night, needing
my body to have movement, as my restless mind constantly did.

After the first few nights, I was joined by Erestor, in companionable silence. He would walk alongside me, matching his stride to mine, not speaking save to admire a plant, the stars, or the moon. It was only a few nights after he first started joining me on my late night walks that my tangle of thoughts burst forth.

“I can’t just be here like this! So much is going on, is going to happen! I just feel like I’m not preparing well enough!”

He smiled, a soft, pleased upturn of his lips that conveyed his appreciation that I was finally vocalizing some of what was keeping me up at night. “What are you doing to prepare?”

“Not enough!” My words were accompanied by a stressed flutter of my hands in the air, as though I needed something, but could not grasp what it was that I needed.

He shook his head once, turning with me back into the halls. “That is not the answer I asked for. What are you doing? List it out for me.”

A sigh forced its way out of me as we continued down the halls, turning occasionally, his hands guiding, as I was far too distracted with my thoughts to focus on aimlessly walking. “I don’t know? I’m recovering? Learning combat and defense..failing to learn Sindarin..but those are all to help later! I have all this knowledge and I’m doing nothing with it!”

He stopped then, and I realized that he had walked us right to Elrond’s private chambers. The door was open, and Elrond was seated just inside at a table, along with Glorfindel, and there were two extra chairs just waiting for Erestor and I to join them. It was Elrond that spoke next, his voice soft, and warm. “Then it may be that it is time you spoke to us of your knowledge, and together we can decide what the best course of action is.”

I hesitated at the doorway for a moment, voice soft when I spoke. “I thought..ah..I thought you wanted to wait for Gandalf..and..Saruman..”

I winced. The act of speaking his name made me feel like it would call his attention to me.

Elrond was the one to speak, though all of their keen eyes were on me, witnessing the wince after speaking Saruman’s name. “Your growing distress over the past weeks tells me that the longer you wait to tell us, the more anxious you are becoming, as well that you are uncomfortable with the thought of informing the white wizard. Perhaps it would be best not to wait for Gandalf?”
Revelation and Response

I was hesitant about what was safe to tell, so the first few minutes were spent in quiet contemplation over where to start. Eventually I decided to start at the beginning of what I could remember of the books, and pick my way through that for anything that was useful.

They didn’t press, simply enjoying cups of tea in companionable silence, waiting for me to speak. My voice was hesitant starting out, but grew in strength the longer I spoke.

To help prove that I wasn’t just making things up, I spoke a bit of the origin of the ring, how Sauron was defeated the first time, telling of how Isildur refused to destroy it, and of how Elrond was there to witness it. I recalled as much as I could of the histories of Middle Earth, only turning to the more recent and pressing knowledge when I felt sure that I had conveyed enough to foster belief in my words.

I told them of Saruman’s betrayal, and Gandalf’s subsequent imprisonment at Orthanc. They seemed alarmed and disbelieving at first, but the more I told them of what had already happened, and would potentially come to pass, the more they seemed to believe me.

I explained how Gollum, and then Bilbo came to have the ring, and that eventually it would be in the hands of his nephew, Frodo, who on his eventual journey here, would be gravely wounded by a ring wraith wielding a morgul blade. I spoke of his friends, Sam, Merry, and Pippin, who would be paramount in the quest to destroy the Sauron, and the ring.

I let them know that they would have dwarven guests seeking council about messengers from Mordor, and that some Mirkwood elves would also come with the message that Mirkwood was attacked, allowing Gollum to escape. I recalled what I could of the dreams that Faramir, and then Boromir would have of Isildur’s bane, that would end up causing Boromir to travel here for council, taking a terribly long time because of the many troubles and confusions he would have on the journey. I spoke vaguely of the council of Elrond, where it would be decided that the ring would be destroyed and a fellowship would be formed, made up of the various guests that had all happened to be there at the time of the council, telling them who was chosen, and that it was very important that it be them.

The more I revealed, the more somber their faces became.

Hours passed as I retold what I considered to be the safest of the details of the battles and wars that would take place, of the many thousands of deaths that could potentially be avoided.

Some details remained unspoken. My words were purposefully vague when speaking of much of the fellowships travels, to be sure that they would not try to change things that I felt were necessary, or attempt to keep things the same where I would prefer to change them.

Only when the rising of the sun lit Elrond’s chambers, and I was having difficulty remaining awake, did they send me away to rest, allowing them time to contemplate the information I had given them.
The time it took to return to my bed was a blur, and my sleep was no less troubled than it had been before telling them of the things that would happen.

I awoke only a few hours later, dragging myself out of bed and into my training clothes, for no amount of exhaustion was reason enough to spend more valuable time than was necessary lazing in bed. Glorfindel greeted me with slight surprise at the training fields, but did not bring up anything of which we had spoken the night before, simply falling into our routine of practice. Today, though, he introduced another weapon.

He stationed me a good twenty paces from a training dummy, offering me a few long daggers. “Distance is your friend in combat, for though you gain strength, it will likely never rival that of an orc or man. You have archery, of course, and by far that is the weapon you possess the most talent in. However, unless you become truly gifted at it, you will find that within a certain distance, it is no longer effective. That is where these will come in. They are an effective mid range weapon.”

The next few hours were dedicated to learning the proper grip for the knives, withdrawing them from their scabbards, and how to properly hold and extend my arms when throwing. Arms, plural, because the vicious ray of sunshine made me practice ambidextrously.

We stopped for the day at late afternoon, and he joined our arms to stroll into the halls towards the library. “Lord Elrond wishes to meet again this evening, so you may continue telling us of what you know. We will have something for you to eat this time, and we shan’t keep you from your sleep as long. Erestor will accompany you after your Sindarin lessons.” With that, he offered a shallow bow, leaving me at the door to the library.

Sindarin lessons were quite different this time, for I had barely entered the library before Erestor was herding me over to a table, covered in artistically drawn maps and books filled with beautiful elven scripts. He handed me a blank parchment and a small stick of charcoal, and over the course of the afternoon, we went through the information I had spoken of the night before, writing brief notes on the most important parts and marking where they took place on the map. Throughout this, he had me trying to piece together phrases in Sindarin.

A few hours passed uninterrupted before Erestor deemed that we’d made enough progress, and we gathered up the maps and parchments to take with us to Elrond’s chambers.

Over the course of the next few evenings, I told them as much as I was comfortable telling, and they asked questions and clarifications. They helped me clarify roughly where I was in the story, telling me that Gollum resided in Mirkwood already, but that Saruman had not yet made any outwardly treacherous actions. The evening meetings became something of a routine, and once they knew everything that I thought safe, we started making plans and discussing the repercussions that could occur from changes we might make.

Planning was, unfortunately, slightly impeded by the fact that I couldn’t remember even rough estimates of dates, only the timeline of what events happened before or after others. Because of this, I pushed for us to act on the information I had, sooner rather than later.

A few days after I first spoke of my knowledge, we decided that a party of elves would ride out for the shire to collect Frodo and the ring, Sam, Merry and Pippin, so as to hopefully avoid, or at least
protect against the danger of the Nazgul.

It was also decided that Mirkwood had to be warned of the attack, although I stressed that Gollum’s freedom, via escape or release, was vitally important. That conversation took a while, though in the end we did agree that Elrond would write a letter to Thranduil to warn him. We debated over who should carry it for a short while, before coming to the agreement that in order to make sure they understood the importance of it, it would be taken by Erestor, accompanied by a small party of warriors to aid in the battle, assuming it had not already happened.

I enjoyed the long moments that it took for Elrond to write the letter, watching the feather quill gracefully caressing the parchment and leave behind the beauty of Sindarin writing. Of course, I could still hardly puzzle out what it said, especially not reading it upside down as I was, sat across the table from him. I did try, though, which they all found thoroughly amusing.

In the letter he explained briefly, in a vague sort of way, that he had come upon some new knowledge. That there would, or perhaps already had been an attack on Mirkwood, for which the purpose was Gollum’s escape. He stressed that if the attack had yet to happen, it was of the utmost importance that they release Gollum before the attack, so as to keep as much harm from coming to Thranduil’s people as possible. He wrote as well that there would be a council held in Imladris, and that they would be honored if Legolas would accompany Erestor and the warriors back to Rivendell to take part in it.

The very next morning the two parties rode out, Glorfindel riding at the head of one, with the last minute request to stop in at Bree to see if Aragorn was there yet, and bring him back to Rivendell with the hobbits if he was.

Erestor was at the head of the other, resplendent, and a rather odd sight, bedecked in light traveling armour, a sword at his hip and a bow on his back, letter tucked safely upon his person with instructions that it be handed to Thranduil directly.

The weeks were long and painful, filled with agonizing thoughts and worries that things would go wrong, and stress at the thought that perhaps something might happen to the hobbits and Glorfindel, or Erestor and the elves sent to help Mirkwood.

I kept track of the days passing almost obsessively once they left. Halfway through that time, Elladan and Elrohir had to leave on patrol.

The nightmares grew progressively worse, Saruman featuring in them more often than not. He whispered honeyed words to me as I watched images of horrors that I had caused play out before me.

Elrond opted to halt the evening meetings upon the departure of Glorfindel and Erestor, to give me a small respite from worrying over future events. The longer it took for them to return, the more I avoided him, fearing the worst. That I had cost him both of his advisors. That the hobbits would never arrive.

Arwen and Bilbo ended up taking over my Sindarin lessons while Erestor was gone.
When they proved to be far more lenient than he was, I took to squirreling away books of songs and poems, as well as maps and books of herbs.

In the early and late hours of the morning and night, when I was awoken by nightmares and dreams of failure, I took to reading them by candlelight in an attempt to distract myself from the horrors that attacked me when I slept.
I pored over the maps they had, trying to memorize and plot the routes the fellowship would take, the distances, and dangers that the terrain might hold.
Other nights, when the lines of the maps danced before my eyes, I turned to books detailing various plants and herbs, learning what was and was not edible, what was medicinal, and how to find, prepare, and use them with less than optimal resources.

It was slow going. Most of the books were written in beautiful Sindarin scripts, so my time was primarily spent puzzling out the translations.

Maeben and a few other elves took over sparring with me occasionally once Elladan and Elrohir left, though I ended up training on my own for the most part.
I was merciless with myself, pushing long past what would have been allowed with Glorfindel.
The soreness that had faded after the first few weeks of training started coming back as I overexerted myself, trying to exhaust myself in the hopes of avoiding the dreams that plagued me, and the worries that they had not yet returned.

One night, when the nightmares were particularly bad, I went wandering and somehow ended up at the forges. It was vacant, the forge cold.
The next few hours were spent inspecting the forge listlessly, until an unfamiliar elf interrupted me, just before dawn.

He seemed mildly surprised and perplexed to see me.
“Are you in need of something, Milady?”

His voice, soft and inquisitive, disturbed me from my thoughts and my examination of the forges.
“Oh...Ah...No? I...I’m sorry...I didn’t mean to intrude.”

“Perhaps you should return to your bed? The forge is not the safest place, you might do harm to yourself.”

There was that concern again.
They always looked at me like they thought I was going to break.
Suddenly, the need to prove that I was strong, that I was capable, overwhelmed me.

“Can I help...? I mean, I don’t know anything about this....I just...Is there anything I can do...? Anything I can learn...?”

He paused in his movements, having started to gather the things he would need in the day, and gave me a long, searching look, seeming to see my need to feel useful.

“Tis not a normal skill for a woman to know...You will likely not be physically strong enough for many of the things I could teach you. You certainly are not strong enough currently.”

Seeing that I was still watching him with an almost desperate hope, he gave a mild sigh.
“I suppose I can find something you’re capable of. I will not teach for a passing fancy, though. If you truly wish to learn, you will have to dedicate some of your time.”

I froze for a moment, having expected to be turned away, almost not knowing how to react.
Then a smile lit up my features.
“Thank you! Thank you. You have no idea...how much...Sorry, I’m Alyssa, by the way.”

He glanced at me for a moment, before nodding.
“I know. I doubt there’s anyone here who doesn’t know of you. You may call me Raithon.”

He started about setting up again, this time showing me where things were kept, and what they were used for.

“Nice to meet you, Raithon.”
The name felt foreign on my tongue, especially as I always ended up trying, and usually failing, to mimic the way their accents affected the way their names sounded
“Thank you. For teaching me...I understand that it’s weird and random of me to be here, and to ask...and I’m sure you have better things to be doing...”

He glanced at me with a raised brow.
“I certainly was not expecting to find you here at all, let alone so long before the sun. There is nothing wrong with having the desire to learn a variety of skills. I understand you’re learning Sindarin, as well as a few forms of combat?”

At my nod, he continued.
“Having the ability to use weapons to defend yourself is a useful skill, one that can allow you to save yourself, and others around you. However, having the knowledge and proficiency to create weapons can save many more than yourself, as once they are in the hands of others, no matter where they are, it is in essence, you offering your hand to save them.”

I stared at him for a moment, unsure of what I was supposed to say to that.
I ended up nodding a bit nervously, still watching him as he continued speaking.

“I do not ask that you devote all your time to your teachings here. Lord Elrond has informed us that your training has an important purpose, and I will not stand in the way of it. Nevertheless, I would appreciate if you endeavor to allow at least an hour a day to your learning here, preferably more. If you cannot commit to such time, I feel it fair for me to turn down your request to learn.”

I nodded again, voice colored by apprehensive excitement at the opportunity to learn yet another thing I’d always dreamed of learning.
“T’ll come here first thing every morning. I’m up fairly early, so it shouldn’t interfere with the other things I’m learning.”

He gave a nod of approval, and continued, softly explaining things to me as he worked.
Relief and Retelling.

Chapter Notes

I am terribly sorry for the huge gap between updates. Life has been stressful, and Gandalf has been very uncooperative. I think I'm almost past the writers block that's been making things so difficult, though, so that's something.

As ever, comments, queries, and critiques are always welcome. Thank you for reading, and enjoy the story.

It quickly became a routine to spend the early hours of the morning before the sun had even dawned with Raithon in the forges, learning how to properly care for weapons, sharpen, repair, and the likes.

He often sent me on my way with a knife or dagger to sharpen, gradually offering larger and more intricate weapons as I continued to prove that I was capable of sharpening weapons well, without damaging them.

This proved to be a wonderful distraction from the nightmares that constantly plagued me, and I ended up spending most of my nights reading and sharpening weapons by candle light. Eventually he started showing me how to repair and care for various armors, a skill that my sewing skills oddly came in handy for, as much of the armor used leather strapping to keep it together, or was made entirely of leather.

As the weeks passed, I pushed myself progressively harder in all aspects. The nightmares grew ever worse, to the point where I was lucky if I managed even an hour or two of sleep every night, in painfully short ten and twenty minute intervals.

Without the necessary rest to allow my body to heal from the beating I gave it, the trembling in my hands returned, having slowly faded from my hands as I healed and gained strength.

My strength and accuracy, which had been progressively improving, slowed. I started having a difficult time focusing, often finding my attention fading into an almost unseeing blank stare. The ever present looks of concern from everyone around me grew steadily as the time passed, and my condition worsened.

Two weeks went by, then three, then four, all with no messages, no indication that they were coming back any time soon. I busied myself more and more, until the only free time I had was spent during meals, which were rushed, and occasionally even skipped. Often I was joined by Bilbo, Arwen, or Athae, and the majority of the meal was spent with them trying to gently coax me into the hall of fire for some music, or into a relaxing walk in one of the many gardens. I refused time and again, always finding something else to occupy myself with.
It was twenty eight days after they had left that anything changed.

A knife sank into the target with a satisfying thunk, followed by the remaining four that fit in the sheath.
My accuracy was fairly consistent now.

It wasn’t terribly good, but the knives were now sticking quite nicely in the targets, generally around where I wanted them to be.
So if I did manage to hit a moving target, and it very conveniently didn't have any armor, it might die.
Maybe.
It would probably just be mildly wounded.

That was something, though.

I trotted forward, collecting my knives with lightly shaking hands.
I found that, oddly enough, in the moment of focus when I threw my knives or shot an arrow, the shake became diminished.
It also helped to temporarily block out the growing fear that Glorfindel and Erestor would not return, and that I was ruining Middle Earth, one important character at a time.

As I returned to my place a few long paces away from my target, I realized that the normal bustle of training elves were not here, only a few still present, cleaning and resetting the various targets.
A quick glance to the sky told me that it was nearing midday, and as if to further prove the time, my stomach gurgled.

I hadn’t noticed them leaving.
Glorfindel was right, I still wasn’t alert to my surroundings when training.
I would need to work on that.

It had gotten better for a time, before Glorfindel and Erestor left.
Now it was a struggle just to focus on the target, let alone pay attention to what was around me.

Stifling a sigh at my traitorous body and it’s need for regular sustenance, I went about stowing my weapons and cleaning up so that I could go get something small to eat from the kitchen.
Maybe I could take it with me to the library, in the hopes that I might avoid the routine cajoling of the others trying to force me to socialize.

I didn’t have time to chat or sing.
If I had messed things up, I would need to be prepared to attempt the journey alone, as it was unlikely that I would be offered much help when it was discovered that I had potentially destroyed the world with my meddling.

It was on my way there, that I was pulled from my morose thoughts by several unfamiliar, but incredibly enthusiastic voices.
The voices were jumbled, excited, and talking over one another to the point where I couldn’t make out a single thing any of them were saying.

It was so completely out of the ordinary, such a break in the peace and serenity of Rivendell, that I couldn’t resist the intense curiosity that overcame me.
Plus, I had to go in that direction anyway, so why not see what the commotion was on the way?

I turned to walk towards the voices, finding that they lead me towards the entrance to the gardens surrounding the main house.

Walking a bit quicker, I rounded the bend, arriving just in time to see a veritable parade of people, tall and small, enter the garden, seemingly heading into the hall.

I froze, eyes taking in the sight before me.
Four small, curly haired people were being herded into the main hall, busy staring at their surroundings in awe, and pointing things out to one another in the excited voices that had called my attention only moments prior.

They were a spectacle of colors.
Dressed in a myriad of bright forest greens, chocolate browns, sunny yellows, and maroon reds, all in fitted waistcoats and jackets, looking terribly out of place compared to the looser robes and tunics of the elves.

They each had a neatly packed leather bag slung over their shoulders, though from the easy way they carried them, I guessed the packs had been on horses for the majority of the trip.

Their heads were crowned with curly hair ranging in different shades of brown and blonde, faces young and joyful. Carefree.
Their feet were bare, and covered in curly hair, matching the hair on their heads.

I felt a little bit of warm relief bubble inside me at the sight of them.
They were so happy. None of them were injured, or scared.
They hadn’t had to suffer this time.

I took a step forward, starting to open my mouth to call out a greeting, when I stopped again, stunned speechless once more as my eyes caught sight of the people herding them.

I vaguely noted that Glorfindel was among them, feeling a little of the anxiety that something had gone wrong, loosen.
There were a few of the elves that had ridden out with Glorfindel, though not all of them were there, and I resolved to ask after them at some point.

Those thoughts slipped away quickly though, as my eyes stayed fixed on the person standing next to Glorfindel.

He was tall, though not quite as tall as Glorfindel, and he appeared quite old, sporting a rather long white beard.
There wasn’t really anything overly strange about him, nor attention calling, except that in his hand he clutched an old looking wooden walking stick, on his back he wore a long gray cloak over gray robes, around his neck was wound a long silver scarf, and atop his head sat a pointed gray hat.

“..Gandalf..”

Though his name was but a whisper on my lips, he seemed to hear nonetheless, and turned to look in my direction.
I took a short step back, not having expected his attention.

He said something soft to Glorfindel, though I couldn’t hear what it was, it gained a responding nod
from Glorfindel, causing Gandalf to start towards me with Glorfindel at his side. Behind their advancing forms, I caught the curious glance of one of the brown haired hobbits, only for it to be cut off moments later when they entered the building, and passed out of my field of vision.

As Gandalf and Glorfindel crossed the short distance between us, I allowed my eyes to wander across Gandalf’s face, taking in the small, almost grandfatherly smile, the curiosity and warmth in his sharp eyes, and the easy way he moved, not befitting of his apparent age at all.

I was startled from my inspection by his voice, low and almost a little bit grumpy, though not unkind.

“Am I right to assume that you are the young lady that Glorfindel has refused to tell me anything about?”

“I’m….I’m sorry, what?”

I turned my curious glance on Glorfindel, eyebrows furrowing slightly in confusion.

He seemed to understand my question before I spoke it, and responded almost at the same time that he received the look of confusion.

“I thought it best not to speak of anything of great import outside of the safety of Imladris. After all, you never know who might be listening.”

I let out a shaky breath at that.

Over the time he had been gone, it had started to finally sink in that I was truly and utterly in extreme danger of completely wrecking the entire world.

Nodding slowly, I spoke again, trying to keep the uneasiness out of my voice. I did not altogether succeed.

“That’s fair. Probably a good idea.”

Gandalf watched this interaction with obvious curiosity, waiting until it was clear I intended to say nothing else before he spoke again.

“Well, it is clear that you already know my name. Perhaps I might know yours?”

I forced myself to take a deep breath. It was Gandalf, there was no reason to be nervous.

Of course, I still ended up stuttering a little bit. It was freaking Gandalf. Oh my god.

“Ah, Al...Alyssa. My...my name is Alyssa. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mithrandir. Or, uh, Gandalf. Sir.”

God, what was I supposed to call him?

He looked mildly startled at my use of his elven name, eyes taking on a more considering light as they watched me.

“Hmm...Yes, well, Glorfindel implied that you had something of import to speak of, and that you are the reason for the abrupt delivery of the four young hobbits to Rivendell? Shall we convene with Lord Elrond? You’ve spoken to him, I assume? T’would be a wise thing to do, if it is as important as Glorfindel suggests.”
He continued giving me an assessing look as I nodded along to his questions.
“Yes, I’ve spoken to him. Should we go to his study, or his private chambers..?”

I addressed my question more to Glorfindel than Gandalf, but it was Gandalf who answered.
“His chambers. He is accessible in his study, we will have fewer interruptions in his chambers.”

That seemed reasonable enough, and by Glorfindel’s nod, he agreed, so we set off towards Elrond’s chambers.
As we walked, Glorfindel fell in at my left, briefly putting a hand on my shoulder, clearly meant to reassure.

I kept my eyes trained on the floor, head tilted down, feeling walled in by the two very tall creatures on either side of me.
I couldn’t run if I wanted to.
And I did want to.
A little bit.

Though, realistically, this was probably the safest I’d ever been in this world.

The silence lasted for a few minutes as we walked before Gandalf spoke up again, addressing Glorfindel more than me.
“Perhaps we could have a meal sent to his chambers? I could use some good food after all of that traveling.”

I glanced up at him as he spoke, catching Glorfindel’s bemused expression out of the corner of my eye.
“We did not lack for good food on the road, Mithrandir. T’was a short trip, and plenty of provisions were brought.”

“Yes, yes, I know. It’s always nice to have a nice meal when you arrive at your destination, though.”

The next voice was neither Gandalf’s nor Glorfindel’s, but instead was the smooth velvet of Elrond’s voice, his tone joking.
“You’re starting to sound like the halflings you’re so fond of, Mithrandir. I think you’re spending too much time with them. Soon you shall shrink to their size.”

Elrond stood at the doorway to his chambers, seemingly waiting for us, though I didn’t remember seeing anyone sent off to alert him of Gandalf’s presence.

“Ah, I had missed your humor, Lord Elrond.”
Gandalf’s voice was cheerful, and he offered a slight bow to Elrond as he greeted him.

“So, what is so important that warrants plucking four young hobbits from their homes so suddenly?”

The humor that was once in Elrond’s face smoothed out, solemnity taking it’s place, and his next words were directed to us all.
“Come and sit down. There is much to tell you.”
A Very Mature Meeting

The rest of that day, and a great deal of the night were dedicated to re-telling the knowledge I had already shared with Elrond, and Glorfindel.

It seemed harder the second time.
I stuttered a lot, having difficulty remembering what I had told them, and what I left out. Details got mixed up, some would have been left out entirely had it not been for Elrond and Glorfindel jumping in to aide me in the telling.

We’d written notes and tried to hash out a rough timeline, but had agreed that it would be best if we didn’t write the major things, in case anyone found out about the notes and tried to steal them. Elrond and Glorfindel brought up points they had found particularly important, and nudged when I failed to mention things that I had mentioned during the previous telling.

At first, I spoke more to Elrond than I did to Gandalf, nervous of how the wizard would react to some of the things I was claiming.
He was remarkably calm, though I could tell he was growing rather alarmed with every new bit of knowledge I spoke of.
Over the course of the day, and the story, he asked gentle questions, nudging me calmly from each piece of information to the next, until I was speaking to him directly, and my anxiety had faded.

Food was delivered two times, and tea was in constant supply the entire day, accompanied by small finger foods to fill the hours between meals.

Only when everything had finally been told and re-told a few times over, was I sent off to rest.
I hardly remembered the walk back to my room, and a few short hours later when I was awoken by the slippery voice of Saruman, I didn’t feel any more rested.

I spent the remainder of the night puzzling over a Sindarin book of herbs by candlelight, fighting through the seductive call of sleep that tried to drag my eyelids down.
I only managed a few paragraphs before I started dozing lightly, just as the sun rose.
I floated there, in a semi aware haze where I could hear the activity of the day starting up outside my room, but couldn’t seem to pull together enough energy to rouse myself and start the usual training.

Part of me wanted to force myself up.
It said that there wasn’t enough time for lounging in bed.

The rest of me, though, was slack, exhausted, and too relieved at the return of Glorfindel and the hobbits to continue the forceful and rushed schedule I had set for myself before they had arrived.

I floated there, in the restless void, until my void was shaken by a loud knock at my door, though it sounded far away, disconnected.
Gandalf’s voice called through the door, loud and clear, pulling me the rest of the way from the void. “Young lady, it is time to get up. We’ve much to discuss with the elven lords still. Breakfast has been brought to Lord Elrond’s chambers already. It will be cold if you do not hurry.”

Blinking blearily, I forced myself up off the floor where I’d had my books and candles set up. My candle had long since burnt down, and guilt flared in me over wasting a candle like that.
They were not so easy to get here, as they were in my world.

I tugged a dress out of the chest at the foot of my bed, slipping into it quickly and tying the laces haphazardly. I could fix them later, if it really bothered anyone.

My cloaklette, was added, clearly to hide the mess that was my hair. It was braided still, from the previous night, but there were little fly-away hairs everywhere. I was sure I would get some looks from the 'every day is a perfect hair day' elves.

After that came my gloves, a soft, dark blue fabric pair for my non-training days, though I had very few of those. My hands got cold easily, I reasoned, and it would be better to keep them covered.

I stowed my books and the remains of the candles, as well as the few I hadn’t used, under some clothes in the chest, as I had been doing since I started my tradition of wasting away the night with study. It was very likely that they would disapprove of my extracurricular activities at night. Better for them to just not find out.

A quick push had the lid to the chest falling shut, and I quickly stepped into my flats before opening the door to find Gandalf with his staff raised to rap at the door again.

“Ah, there you are. Come along, there’s still much to discuss.”

I dropped a shallow curtsy.

“Of course. I’m sorry if I kept you waiting.”

“There's no need for that. T’wasn’t but a moment. Breakfast has been brought to Elrond’s quarters, and Glorfindel is currently waiting for us. You are the only one unaccounted for. Apparently Elrond did not expect you to sleep quite so late. He says you are usually a rather early riser.”

He paused, turning to look at me squarely instead of from the side as we walked, and his voice was very serious when he spoke again.

“I believe what you have told me is the truth, or at the very least, that it is very likely that it once was the truth. However important it is, though, it is not of a greater priority than your well being. It is but a simple matter to call pause to a private council. No one of us would force you to continue past when you are capable. Time is valuable, yes, but ceasing our discussion a few hours earlier so you may gain some rest will not cause the end of the world as we know it.”

He gave me another considering look, then turned to continue walking, adding on at the end, “Especially if you do not think it prudent to share every detail of the future. It is a decision I think quite wise, but it also means that you are the only one who truly knows their way in this dark time.”

A frown marred my features at that. Would I become a compass to them? A map to keep safely hidden away, only to be taken out when needed?

“I mean no disrespect, Gandalf, but I am not so weak that I cannot go a night or two with less sleep than usual.”

For a moment, I wondered what they would do if they found out how little I actually slept. Would they drug me? What would happen if they did..?
Would I be gifted full nights of sleep without nightmares or dreams?
Or would I be trapped, unable to escape from the demons that seemed to plague me in this world..?

It would be better not to find out.

“Of course not, my dear, but Elrond told me a bit of the state you were in upon your arrival. I simply wanted to reassure you that you do not have to push yourself so. More than just your knowledge is important.”

I stifled a sigh, turning my eyes away from Gandalf and back onto the floor in front of us.
It seemed that they viewed me as a vessel. A container to keep polished and undamaged, so that the information inside would stay safe.
I couldn’t see fault in it, I supposed.

The information I had held the potential to save or destroy the world.
It was understandable that they wanted to keep me in good condition.

The remainder of the walk to Elrond’s rooms was spent in silence, as I knew that bringing up how unhappy and uncomfortable it made me feel that they seemed to view me as a thing to be protected would probably only make them defensive, and start an argument.

I could feel Gandalf’s stare a few times, but kept my eyes resolutely on the ground.
I was not a thing to be kept.
I wanted to help, and they would not stop me.

We arrived at Elrond’s rooms to find him and Glorfindel poring over one of the maps we had previously marked with Erestor.
The map wasn’t overly large, taking up only about a quarter of the table.
The rest of it was taken up with writing implements, sticks of charcoal, inkwells, a stack of parchment, as well as a tray full of a variety of foods.

The morning was taken up with going back over a few points from the previous night, followed by a retelling of how the journey to get the hobbits went.
It was primarily told by Glorfindel, though Gandalf joined in a bit after Glorfindel got to the part where he was found.

It turned out that the party of elves had come upon Gandalf near the edge of the Shire, which had made collecting the hobbits much smoother.
Gandalf saying they had to go, in addition to a group of elves, was enough incentive for them to quickly pack some traveling necessities and be on their way.

They had received quite a few looks from the rest of the inhabitants in the Shire, but had met no resistance.

Along their way back, they’d stopped outside of Bree so that Gandalf could go in and fetch Aragorn, who had not long before been stationed there to await the hobbits.

That was a surprise, as I hadn’t remembered seeing Aragorn with the hobbits upon their arrival in Rivendell.
Elrond answered that particular curiosity, saying that Aragorn had no doubt escaped off to find Arwen upon their arrival.
I hadn’t been expecting Gandalf or Aragorn, figuring they would have been in other parts of the world at this time, but it had worked out quite well. A happy accident. I was sure I wouldn’t get many more of those.

We then starting to discuss what should be done with the information provided. More than once, they agreed on things that I subsequently shot down, due to the knowledge I kept from them.

They wanted to leave now, I said we should really wait until the entire fellowship had arrived, then, because I had no concept of what date the Dwarves would be arriving in Rivendell, they wanted to leave without the Dwarves.

I urged against that, trying to stress that going on the journey without one of the fellowship could prove to be disastrous.

They wanted to send a messenger to Edoras and gather a force to confront Saruman, I declared that maybe it would be best that we prioritized the ring, and deal with Saruman a little later. They wanted to re-capture Gollum, I tried to find a tactful way of saying that would probably just lead to disaster, and failed.

It went on and on, them thinking of things to do that they just didn’t know the full extent of the consequences for, and me shooting their ideas down.

Occasionally, when I didn’t want to delve into why an idea was bad, I was forced to just tell them, “I can’t tell you why! We just can’t do that!”

They didn’t particularly like that, but after the first few times I was forced to deny their curiosity, they stopped questioning.

I got progressively more bored as I listened to them bounce ideas off each other, and after almost falling asleep in my chair a few times, started fidgeting in the hopes of keeping myself awake. Then I started feeling restless.

After one particular use of “I can’t tell you why!” I stood from my chair, practically trembling with pent up energy and aggravation.

I had to move. I couldn’t just keep sitting still.

My previous weeks had been filled with constant motion and activity. This ‘sitting in a chair all day and talking about stuff’ was an uncomfortable break in routine.

So I started walking.

First, I paced in a line parallel to the table they sat at.

Then, when that got boring, I started circling around the table itself.

The movement soothed the feeling of confinement I had begun feeling, and the trembling in my hands and limbs that had become quite pronounced over the past few hours, started to fade.

At some point, amid Elrond and Glorfindel discussing another idea, I realized that Gandalf was no longer at the table.

That’s when I noticed the soft thunk of his staff, and paused in my circling, looking behind me to find the wizard following me in my circling.

He stopped when I did, seeming lost in thought, and apparently not noticing that he was following me.

I turned to continue walking, catching Glorfindel’s eyes on me, though there was no break in his discussion with Elrond. He looked amused.
Why did they always look at me that way? I wasn’t that funny..

I looked away quickly, returning to my circling, and the thunk of Gandalf’s staff continued.

The walking didn’t feel relaxing anymore now that I had a follower, so I veered away from the table, intent on getting out of the circular path that Gandalf was using.
Of course, that didn’t work.

The quiet thunk continued to follow me, and I glanced behind myself to see that Gandalf still followed me, continuing to look lost in thought.

Over the course of the next few hours, I paced the room, altering my path continuously to see how long Gandalf would keep following me, until I couldn’t take it anymore.
So, in the hopes of getting him to stop, I did the adult thing.

The mature thing.

I ducked under the table and crawled out the other side, hoping that the physical block would wake him from his thoughts enough to stop following me.

I walked a few paces away, turning back to look at him and reassure myself that he was no longer following me, only to be met with three extremely bemused stares.

Gandalf had stopped at the edge of the table, and was watching me with a surprised kind of amusement.
Elrond and Glorfindel had ceased their conversation entirely and were looking at me as a grown up would to a small child who had just done something incredibly silly.

For a moment, I was frozen in the gaze of probably three of the oldest and wisest inhabitants of Middle Earth.
With those expressions locked on me, I felt the age difference acutely.
That I was simply a child.
That there was nothing I could do here that could ever come close to what they could do.
That I should leave this mess to the grown ups.

Then the rest of my brain kicked in.
Just because I wasn’t a billion years old with pointy ears or a white beard, didn’t mean I wasn’t wise or knowledgeable.
I squared my shoulders and gazed steadily back at them, responding to their stares with a shrug, voice surprisingly even when I spoke.
“It worked, didn’t it? I wanted him to stop, he stopped.”

Gandalf chuckled, “I suppose it did, my dear. Though, had you asked, I would have stopped.”

Glorfindel laughed softly, voice warm when he spoke.
“You’ll learn that our Alyssa is a woman of few words, Mithrandir. If she can accomplish something without speaking, she does, in all aspects, save musical endeavors.”

Gandalf smiled slightly at that.
“Oh, a musician? How wonderful. I do love a good song. Perhaps I may hear you sing some time? After we’ve discussed everything that needs discussing, of course.”
Elrond’s voice was dry, and a bit exasperated, as if he was quite used to keeping people on track in conversations of this nature.
“A discussion that perhaps we might return to, if everyone is done climbing under tables and getting off topic?”

Feeling chastened, I whispered out a soft apology and returned quickly to my spot at the table.

Gandalf remained standing, but moved closer to the rest of us, inspecting the map where Elrond and Glorfindel had previously been looking.

Despite feeling mildly scolded for my rather childish method of stopping Gandalf’s following, I didn’t let the embarrassment simpering under my skin keep me from chipping in with my thoughts or bits of knowledge.

The discussions flowed smoothly after that, and though I did rise to walk or stretch a few other times, Gandalf remained in his spot, and did not follow me again.
Merry Christmas, happy Hanukkah, happy Kwanzaa, happy Saturnalia, happy Yuletide, hope your Krampusnacht was exciting, and I hope everyone has a wonderful New Years Eve/New Years day!
I'm sure I forgot some holidays, but those are the ones that I'm immediately aware of, so happy holidays for all the rest!

Forgive my language, but this chapter was a bitch to write.
I re-wrote it at least three times because when I read through it to edit, it was convoluted and confusing.
That being said, if there is anything that is difficult to understand, feel free to send me a message or review and I will do my best to clarify it for you.

As ever, constructive criticism is very much appreciated. I can't improve if I don't realize there's a mistake.
For those of you who reviewed, thank you so much.
You have no idea how much it means to me that you are enjoying this story that much, and that you take the time to tell me.
That is a gift in itself, and it is fabulously motivating for me.

I actually do have a lot of trouble sleeping, as I am portraying Alyssa in the story. (At least she has a good reason)
Focus and motivation can be difficult for me to maintain, but it is amazing how much your feedback, of any kind, helps me to keep at it.
So, thank you.

I hope you all enjoy this chapter. More to come soon.

Over the course of that night, we came to a few agreements.

One of them, one that we had many disagreements on, was that I wanted to be a part of the Fellowship, in order to ensure that a few key moments happened as they should.
I wanted to go, but I also didn’t want to just put my foot down and say ‘I’m going’, because that certainly wouldn’t help the questionable looks they were giving me when they thought I wasn’t looking.

Besides, if they decided I shouldn’t go with the Fellowship, I would just leave before them, or after them.
I would do whatever I had to in order to make sure that the important things happened.

And sure, being with them would certainly make the trip easier, but I could make it work.
I was a lot more prepared than I had been for my trip through Fangorn, to Rivendell.

I expected that they would disagree on the grounds that I was female, and would not be able to keep up with the rest of the Fellowship.
I thought that they would bring up that I was still recovering from my first journey, or that I was scarred, physically and very likely mentally.

I assumed that they would say that I would be a dead weight because I couldn’t defend myself to the same standard that the others could.
I was shocked, then, to find out that they didn’t immediately disagree with me going with the Fellowship.

Gandalf expressed that he thought it best to see how my continued recovery and combat training progressed, but that at this point, I was probably more prepared for the trip than the Hobbits were. That was definitely something I intended to change.

Elrond made a vague comment about wanting to make sure that I was fully recovered, so to give it a bit of time.

Glorfindel stated that he wanted to keep working with me, but that he thought I showed great promise.

All the while, Gandalf watched me, as did Elrond and Glorfindel. There was something in the way they looked at me. I couldn’t put my finger on it. I couldn’t tell if it was wariness, concern, or suspicion…

Once they had decided to, as I pessimistically thought, keep me under observation for a while longer, I didn’t push the subject.

It wouldn’t do to make them realize how important I thought it was for me to be there. If they realized, and then decided I shouldn’t go, they might put a guard on me to keep me from sneaking out after the Fellowship.

I tried not to cringe at the vaguely honeyed and slimey voice that sounded through my head with these thoughts.

How mistrustful I was of these people, who had to this point showed nothing but kindness, compassion, and acceptance to me. They were good people. They were.

Were they..? I just assumed they were the same people in the movies and books… What if they weren’t?

I shook my head slightly, pressing my fingers to my forehead and temple for a moment.

When I looked up, it was to see visible concern in all three of their faces. I forced a smile, playing it off as a thinking pose, and nudged us smoothly into another one of the changes I had been thinking of, trying to put the edge of suspicion out of my mind.

The next major agreement we came to, was that Boromir shouldn’t be left to lose his horse and
wander.

I vaguely recalled that Boromir went through the gap of Rohan, and then wandered around looking for clues and asking people how to find Rivendell for ages.

It seemed logical that he would probably stop in at Edoras before he went through the Gap of Rohan, to make sure he was stocked up on supplies.
Or at least, I hoped it was logical.

So, in the hopes of keeping that from happening, Gandalf and Aragorn would travel to Edoras to wait for him, and then travel back with him.
Along with that, Glorfindel would ride with them, carrying a letter written by Elrond to be delivered to Denethor, in an effort to keep him from going mad.

We decided it would be best to avoid the pass of Rohan, since it would take them too close to Saruman, so they would all use the high pass in their journey.
None of them were particularly happy with that decision, but they did agree that it would be better to go out of the way than to risk a potential run in with Saruman.

From the High pass, they would travel down along the Anduin, with a stop in at Lothlorien for a night to rest and resupply.
During that time, Gandalf and Glorfindel would have a meeting with Galadriel and Celeborn to tell them everything that had been discussed with Elrond.

They would then continue on the rest of the way down to Edoras.

Upon arrival at Edoras, Glorfindel would wait just long enough for Aragorn or Gandalf to procure him some more supplies, per my request, before continuing on to Minas Tirith on his own.

Glorfindel assured me that all three of them were perfectly capable of surviving off the land, but I stressed that I would feel better about them taking the trip if they picked up provisions a few times along the way.
Eventually he acquiesced.

Gandalf and Aragorn would wait at Edoras for two weeks, and during this time Gandalf would seek and attempt to tame Shadowfax.

In the event that Boromir never showed up, Gandalf would make his way to Minas Tirith to either collect him, or be reassured that Boromir had already left.
He would then return to Rivendell, again, by way of the high pass.

While Gandalf was checking Minas Tirith, Aragorn would head back to Rivendell by way of the Gap of Rohan, in case Boromir had passed without stopping at Edoras, with the hope of being able to track him and help him find Rivendell.

If Boromir did show up as we hoped, then Gandalf, Aragorn, and Boromir would return to Rivendell by way of the high pass, with Gandalf mediating any potential disagreements or disruptions that occurred between Aragorn and Boromir.

I didn’t voice these thoughts, but I hoped that by attempting to help Aragorn and Boromir become friends earlier in the story, I might be able to steer Boromir away from falling so heavily to the lure of
the ring. Maybe if he felt he had more allies in the world, he wouldn’t feel like the ring was the only option for success.

Once Glorfindel had delivered the letter, he would leave, hopefully on good terms with Denethor. Whenever either group accomplished their goal, they would travel back the way they came.

I figured that Elrond was a well enough known figure that, by sending an actual elf with the letter, hopefully it would be taken seriously and not just discarded.

Elrond wrote the letter, of course, because although I was getting better at reading and writing the Common tongue, I still hadn’t quite mastered the odd differences that the letters had from English. That, and his handwriting was just gorgeous. People thought elves were just so extraordinary, but I bet if I had a couple thousand years, I’d have beautiful handwriting too.

The letter opened with an explanation that Saruman was corrupt and not to be trusted. It went on to say that both Saruman and Sauron also possessed Palantirs, and that they were capable of negatively manipulating what Denethor saw in the Palantir, showing him only the worst and darkest of what he sought.

The largest of the armies, making them appear unbeatable. The burning villages, to dishearten him. The failed battles, filled with death.

It explained that they wanted to crush his spirit and cause him to give up, but that hope was not lost, and he should keep fighting to the very last.

After that, it warned that the continued use of the Palantir would take a toll on his body and mind, and that he should avoid using it if he was able.

The letter also advised Denethor to bolster the defenses as much as he could at Osgiliath and Minas Tirith.

At my request, Elrond added a few suggestions of the different types of defences Denethor might use, such as Catapults, Trebuchets, and Ballistas on the walls of Minas Tirith, and a defensive mote around the outer walls, with a narrow entry ramp to make battering rams more difficult to get to the gates.

I even suggested they could build another defensive wall, fitted with siege towers, in another ring around the city.

In order to seem less demanding, Elrond added that these were only suggestions that his ‘power of foresight’ showed him could be useful, and he trusted Denethor to know how to protect his own city.

Following that, Elrond implored Denethor not to hesitate in calling for aid from his neighbors in Rohan, should the need arise.
He stated that, while Rohan did have their own struggles to deal with from Saruman, they were still his allies and would help if they were able to.

To finish the letter, Elrond wrote that while measures were being taken on the part of the elves across Middle Earth in an effort to aide in the defeat of Sauron and the protection of all in Middle Earth,
Denethor and his armies were truly needed in this time of crisis, being the main bastion of hope for the people of Middle Earth.

I wasn’t sure how Denethor would receive the letter. He might be as crazy as the movie portrayed, in which case he would very likely refuse to listen to reason, and send Glorfindel away.

I hoped that he would lean more towards the man I remembered from the book. Strong willed, prideful, noble, and intent on the protection of his people.

If he were that man, perhaps he would listen to the advice of Elrond. Or maybe he’d take it as a challenge and use the palantir more, going crazy faster, making bad decisions, and destroying the entire universe?

All three of them looked at me strangely, and with no small amount of concern when I bonked my head against the desk and whispered “stop it” to myself.

“Are you..alright..?”

Glorfindel’s voice was a bit apprehensive, matching the looks I was receiving from all three of them.

I straightened quickly, clearing my throat a little, my voice faltering ever so slightly, “Yes, of course. I’m fine. Just had..an itch..on my face..”

That was reassuring. Not.

They continued gazing at me strangely for a moment before Elrond spoke up.

“Now that decisions have been made and the letter is written, perhaps it is time for you to retire? We will discuss the plans with Aragorn, and have supplies drawn up for the journey. They will leave on the morrow, unless you have any objections…?”

I couldn’t help but look at him a bit warily. It almost sounded like he was asking permission, and that just wasn’t right, on so many levels. Super old, wise elf lord going ‘by your leave’ to a fragile, impulsive human? Nuh uh. Not okay.

Still, he had asked, so I nodded quickly, not really knowing what else to do, and firmly resolved to bonk my head again once I was in the privacy of my room.

“I don’t see any reason they can’t leave tomorrow.”

Gandalf stood, stretching slightly. “I’m going to go speak to Frodo and inform him a bit of what’s going on. You intend to teach him to defend himself while he’s here, yes?”

Both Elrond and I nodded, but I was the one to speak up. “All of them need to learn.”

Gandalf nodded, approval clear in his expression. “Quite right, it wouldn’t do to neglect the rest of them. I will let them all know that, and I’m sure you can find them whenever you intend to start training.”

As Gandalf left, Glorfindel also stood, addressing Elrond softly. “I shall go inform Aragorn and begin preparations for the journey.”
Elrond nodded, responding in the same volume, “Have him come here. We need to discuss a few things before he leaves.”

Glorfindel gave a slight bow of his head, in agreement, and then turned to follow after Gandalf.

Clearly the meeting was finished for the night, the suggestion to retire obviously being a gently worded dismissal.
I rose, moving towards the door before pausing for a moment.
What if Aragorn didn’t want to go..? It was a long journey just to save one man from getting lost…

Elrond’s voice broke me from my thoughts.
“Is something troubling you?”

Slowly, I turned back to look at him. I couldn’t help but hesitate.
What if, in asking the question, he just ended up ordering Aragorn to go against his will, causing Aragorn to dislike me later?

My voice was hesitant when I spoke.
“Will Aragorn be okay with this..?”

Elrond nodded, “We will explain things to him, of course. About what the journey entails, what it’s purpose is, and who you are. Is there anything you would like us not to mention?”

I drew in a breath, about to say ‘not that I can think of’, but paused, mouth slightly open.
My eyes dropped to stare thoughtfully at the edge of the table for a moment, before returning to look him in the eye.
I couldn’t bring myself to speak louder than a tentative whisper, but he seemed to have no difficulty hearing me.
Damn elven hearing. I’d have to remember that later.

“Could...Could you just tell him that..I’m not from here, and I have..knowledge? Would that be alright? If, for now, we didn’t really tell people more than that..?”

The last thing I wanted was more looks of pity and coddling.
I got enough from the elves here.

Elrond watched me, eyes searching for something.
He did not seem altogether satisfied when he stopped his search, but he still nodded.
“I will allow you this time, as him having that knowledge is not imperative for his upcoming journey. However, If he is to be one of the fellowship, as you say he is, he should know more of your situation. If you mean to travel with the fellowship, as you seem to desire, you must trust him, and the rest of the fellowship. They must trust you as well, at least to some extent.”

I must have looked distressed in some way, because his face softened a bit, and his voice was gentler when he spoke.
“You have already stated that some things are not safe to tell, and although I may not be happy about it, I don’t disagree that it is very likely for the best. You do not have to reveal all of your secrets, all of your past, or all of your knowledge. Nevertheless, you cannot expect them to allow a stranger, supposedly from a completely different world, to travel with them without knowing a bit more about her.”

“I know..I meant..well...I meant what happened after I arrived in Middle Earth..but before I arrived
in Rivendell."
I trailed off, hoping he understood what I meant. They didn’t need to know about Fangorn, what
happened on the travel to Rivendell, or the state I was in on my arrival.

They might see it as a potential weakness, and I couldn’t have any of them speaking out against my
going on the journey.

His gaze grew a touch sad, and he let out a soft sigh.
“Ah.. What occurred on your travels is not something you must reveal. That is personal, and you need
not share it with anyone you do not wish to.”

I couldn’t stifle a mildly relieved sigh, though it was quickly cut off by his continued speech.

“However, I do think it would be wise for you to speak to someone about that. You have nothing to
be ashamed of, or embarrassed by, and no one will view you differently because of the things you
went through. You were very sensible and brave in how you handled your journey here. Few others
would have done so well in your position. I am always here if you want to talk, and I’m sure there
are many others that would be happy to listen as well.”

I forced a smile.
“There’s really no reason to talk about it, though, and I just don’t think it’s important enough to tell
people. There are a lot more important things to talk about, and right now we need to prioritize the
stuff that matters.”

There was something in his eyes..I couldn’t tell if it was disappointment or frustration.
Either way, it wasn’t there for long before it had smoothed away into the same gentle smile he
normally offered me.
“If that is how you feel then I shall respect your wish. Just know that there are people who will listen.
Now, why don’t you retire for the night? You look tired, and I would like to speak to Aragorn alone
before he begins preparations.”

That was definitely a dismissal.
I dipped a slight curtsy, mumbled a quick, “Of course. Goodnight.” and turned, making my way to
my room quickly.
Meeting the hobbits

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry for the extreme delay! Good news, though, I got a new job and I can write in my down time! So expect more regular updates!
I apologize for not fleshing out more with the hobbits, but they've been a bit uncooperative, and a major reason why I haven't updated.
I decided to just gloss over them a bit so that I wasn't stuck anymore, but if you guys are really upset that I didn't put more with them, let me know, and I'll try to add a bit more in their introduction.

As always, thank you so much for your reviews! I'm having a fantastic time writing this story, and an even more fantastic time knowing that I'm not the only one enjoying it!
Keep'em coming! Huge motivator!
Constructive criticism is invited, ideas are invited, if there's something that you want to see that I didn't add, just shoot me a message or put it in a review and I'll consider adding it!
Same thing with questions or curiosities!
Enjoy~

Nightmares and terrors plagued the remainder of the night.
Fears swirled around my head at what might go wrong with the changes we were making, and that same honeyed, slimey voice from earlier voiced the majority of them.

After waking in a cold sweat for the fifth time in only a few hours, I decided to get up.
I felt stiff from having so little motion throughout the day, and thinking about what might go wrong made my chest feel tight, so I started slowly going through yoga poses in the middle of my room.
I kept my focus on my breathing, and whenever concerns tried to seep into my mind, I repeated the mantra ‘No matter what happens, I can make this work.’ in my head.

When I stopped, roughly a half hour later, I felt significantly better.
I lighting up one of my remaining candles, I opened up the chest at the foot of my bed and withdrew the map I’d ‘borrowed’ from the library, along with the scrap of parchment that I’d been copying it onto.

The next few hours were spent meticulously recreating lines and markings.
I carefully added in a few markings and landmarks that I could remember from maps I’d seen, before I was mysteriously transported to Middle Earth.
I made them dotted, lines separated slightly to indicate to myself that they were additions that might not actually be there.

I roughly marked major events with a four pointed star, changes that we had already put in motion got a five pointed star, and things that I intended to change on the way got a six pointed star.
I made sure to make them relatively small, so they blended in relatively well with the rest of the markings on the map.
That way, if someone else got their hands on the map, they might not notice the stars, and even if they did, they wouldn’t know what the stars meant.
A glance up at the window showed that it was still dark out.

Elrond had said leaving today, but hadn’t specified what time. At least, he hadn’t specified it to me.

I was a little bit disappointed that I still hadn’t met Aragorn, and now even if I did meet him, it wouldn’t be for very long before he left.

I hadn’t met the hobbits either, but they weren’t immediately going anywhere, and I was sure there would be plenty of time over the coming months to get to know them.

I checked the sky again, and was, again, disappointed to find it still dark. Giving a frustrated sigh, I put my maps away carefully, making sure the ink on the copy was fully dry before I stowed it under some clothes in the chest.

For the rest of that night I tried to occupy myself, only to find that I struggled to focus, and nothing could keep my attention.

I tried reading, practicing my written Common, and even tried practicing both my vocal and written Sindarin. As the night wore on, the struggle to focus grew more difficult, and as my focus failed, my exhaustion grew.

It was just as the sky was starting to lighten that my determination to stay up and go see the travelers off failed me, sleep finally claiming me again.

The terrors crept into my rest, as they always did, and I watched as Aragorn fell on the journey to Edoras, followed soon after by Glorfindel and Gandalf, ambushed by orcs that seemed to take no injuries, while a deep voice laughed, heralding our doom.

I awoke with a start to find the sun high in the sky, and spent the next few minutes trying desperately not to fall into a panic attack from the fears the nightmare induced. When I was finally able to calm myself, I nearly fell back into a panic upon realizing that I’d fallen asleep unintentionally, and might have missed the departure of Aragorn, Gandalf, and Glorfindel. I leapt up, racing to dress myself before quickly making my way out into the rest of the house to hunt down anyone who could tell me what time they were supposed to leave.

Arwen was the first person I found. She was sitting on a bench just inside the garden, looking at a single flower that was held idly in her fingers.

She looked up when I stepped out of the hall, offering me a sweet smile.

“Alyssa, how lovely it is to see you again. Father has kept you hidden away for too long, you need more sunlight. Will you join me?”

As I walked across to her, I asked the question that was burning inside of me.

“Have they left yet, Arwen?”

Her eyes became a touch wistful, and she nodded.

“They left at dawn. I had thought to wake you, but Father insisted that your rest was more important.”

A sigh escaped me as I sat next to her.
“I didn’t get to wish them a safe journey..I didn’t even get to meet Aragorn before I caused him to be
sent off on a journey across the world…”

Arwen set the flower down next to her on the bench, turning us both slightly so that she could take
my hair out of it’s braid and comb through it with her fingers.
“Do you not have to say that you wished them a safe journey for them to know, though I am sorry
that you didn’t get the chance to meet Aragorn. He was quite curious about you. You’ll get to meet
him when they return, of course. The weeks will pass much faster than you think.”

There was an oddly knowing tinge to her voice, but her fingers soothing through my hair quickly
distracted me from my curiosity.

We stayed like that for another few moments before my stomach growled.
It brought a laughing smile from her, though her words were mildly scolding.

“You didn’t eat this morning, did you?”

At the shake of my head, she gave an exasperated sigh, quickly weaving my hair back into it’s long
braid.
“Go to the kitchens, you silly girl. I’ve some matters to discuss with my father, or I would
accompany you. Will I see you in the Hall of Fire tonight? Music might help to lift your spirits.”

My first inclination was to refuse.
There was so much to prepare, did I really have time for music?

Then I caught the faintly hopeful expression she held, and the refusal I’d been considering faded.
She looked hopeful on the forefront, but underneath, she looked sad.
Aragorn had left again, and while I was sure it was something she was used to, it never became easy
to say goodbye to loved ones, knowing that they might not come back.
I was acutely aware of that fact now that I would never be able to say goodbye to my loved ones.
I tried to stifle a sigh, offering a small shrug.
“I don’t know. Maybe?”

The hopeful expression blossomed the slightest bit, and she hugged me gently before pushing me up.
“Wonderful. I hope I see you this evening, then. Now go eat.”

The walk to the kitchen was uneventful, and left far too much time for my mind to create dark
possibilities for what might go wrong with our changes.
They could be captured or killed on the way to get Boromir.
Denethor could be completely crazy and try to kill Glorfindel, potentially causing a war between
men and elves.

Aragorn and Boromir could kill one another on the travel back.
Gandalf could kill both of them, out of sheer frustration at their squabbling.

The dark turn to my thoughts was momentarily derailed when, as I turned the corner to enter the
kitchen, I was met by the four curious stares of Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin, as well as a kindly
smile from Bilbo.

In that moment, I felt warm. I felt oddly at peace in a way that hadn’t happened in my entire time at
Rivendell. They were all laughing and chatting happily.
Apparently the cure to dark thoughts was five happy hobbits.
Bilbo was the first to speak, voice warm and excited. “Alyssa, my dear girl! Come and meet my nephew and his friends! Lads, this is Alyssa, the girl I was telling you about. Alyssa, this is my nephew, Frodo!”

Bilbo rose, moving to gather some more food.

“I’ll get you a plate, dear, you look famished. Well go on, lads, introduce yourselves.”

One by one, they stepped forward to introduce themselves. Frodo was by far the shortest of the bunch, standing a little bit shorter than Bilbo. His hair was a warm mahogany brown, coiling around his slightly pointed ears and framing his strikingly blue eyes. He introduced himself with a puzzled, but overall pleasant smile.

Sam stood an inch or so taller than Frodo, just shy of being even in height with Bilbo. His hair was a bit lighter, more of a dusty blonde, but it retained the same bouncy curls as all of the other Hobbits, framing light hazelnut colored eyes. His skin was tanned a shade darker than the rest of the hobbits, revealing his job of gardening. When he introduced himself, his expression was a touch apprehensive, though he still managed a warm enough smile.

Pippin was a bundle of exuberance, cheerful smiles, all topped off by a crown of dark gold curls, and curious blue eyes. He introduced both himself and Merry before running off into an excited retelling of their journey to Rivendell.

Merry remained silent throughout the introductions, watching me with scrutinizing blue eyes. His hair was a lighter shade of gold, cut an inch or so shorter than the rest of them, and though his face kept a mild and pleasant look, his keen eyes observed, lighting on the small amount of skin that showed and inspecting what he could of the scars, seeing the slightly defensive curve of my shoulders, the downward tilt of my head, and the glisten of tears gathering in my eyes at the sight of them all.

I held back a shiver at his scrutiny, and allowed myself to be guided to the table by Bilbo and coaxed into a conversation about their trip to Rivendell, avoiding Merry’s eyes the entire time.

Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin chattered to one another happily throughout the meal, asking question upon question to Bilbo, and allowing themselves to be guided into conversation with me with a few gentle nudges from Bilbo.

Pippin drove the conversation the most, bouncing from awe at Rivendell, to excitement over their trip, and back. “Did you see all the elves, Sam?” “I did, Pip! It’s amazing here!”

“Have you been on many adventures, Miss Alyssa?” "I wouldn’t really call them adventures.."

"What would you call them?" "..A series of unfortunate events.."
“Will you tell us a story, Bilbo?”
"Of course, my boy! Let me tell you of my travel here, from the Shire! I left just after my birthday party..."

“How long have you been here, Miss Alyssa?”
"A few months? It's a little bit difficult for me to keep track of time here.."

“Do we get to go on adventures?”
"..That's something you each have to decide for yourself.."

“When are we going home?”
"...Why don't you try to enjoy your time here before you look to what the future holds?"

Often times he bounced on to the next topic before we could get hugely into the first one, so I was quite fortunately able to give a lot of one or two word responses, all the while contemplating how I was going to ask them to go on the quest without scaring them so bad they ran for the hills.

I only managed to eat a quarter of the plate Bilbo had prepared for me, and when I pushed my plate away, he gave me a mild look of concern.
“Surely you can manage a bit more than that, dear? You’re skin and bones. At least take an apple with you?”

My smile was a touch forced, and by the looks I received, the lie that came out wasn’t very convincing.
“I should have told you, I actually ate a little while ago. I was just coming to grab something to take with me to the training yard.”

He didn’t look very convinced, but he didn’t push, handing me the offered apple, along with a small, hastily filled basket of various fruits.
He handed the basket to Frodo, giving him a pointed look.
“Why don’t you lads accompany her? You can see a bit of Rivendell.”

Frodo hastily stood, taking the basket, and clearly seeing the suggestion for the order it was.
“Of course, Uncle Bilbo. We’ll see you later?”

“Yes yes, we can talk more at dinner, dear boy.”

Of course, where Frodo went, the others followed, so when he stepped over to me with an expectant smile, Sam, Merry, and Pippin all hopped up to join him.

The walk to the training grounds went far slower than normal, as I found myself bowing to their curious whims very easily. I couldn’t help it, though. They were just so adorably excited, and seeing them like that made it easier to forget that eventually they would all be travel-worn and weary.

We paused to explore the gardens, detoured to look in the Hall of Fire, and generally spent the day wandering through Rivendell.

It didn’t take very long for them to pull bits and pieces of information out of me about my unfortunate introduction into Middle Earth. I steered clear of the worst of it though, avoiding and giving vague responses to their innocent curiosity about my scars.

In proper Hobbit way, though, they shared about three times as much information about themselves in exchange. The conversation flowed with surprising ease, and throughout it all they offered small bits of fruit, while, of course, eating some themselves. They did it so casually that I didn’t notice I was eating until I was halfway through a slice of pear, and the basket was almost empty.

When we finally made it to the training grounds, they were quick to join in with my training. Though, theirs had a distinctly more playful note to it.

They were all flailing swords and outrageous battle cries, interspersed with me correcting their stance or how they held their swords. I had a hard time discouraging it, until eventually I was being chased by four laughing hobbits with wooden practice swords.

From that moment on, it was a normal sight to see me with a duckling trail of hobbits, and despite that my nightmares grew ever worse, when I was with the four hobbits, I didn’t feel quite as tired, or quite as anxious. The gnawing thought of how I was going to tell them of the coming quest would not leave me, though, and I found myself both reaching towards them for the light and warmth they provided, while simultaneously pulling away for fear of becoming too attached.

I allowed myself two days of fun and exploring with them, and then I started nudging them to learn things that would help them on the trip they did not yet know they were going to take. I quickly enlisted the help of any elves who happened to be in the training grounds whenever we were there, to ensure that the four hobbits were learning proper fighting and defense forms.
Maeben was a huge help once he figured out that I was trying to train them. He started including them in our lessons, working with us all in swordplay, teaching them of the plants that could and couldn’t be used, and instructing us all on how to properly ride and care for mounts and their equipment. They struggled with the horses, their size being so different, still, they seemed to enjoy it. I didn’t miss the mumbling between them, though, that they didn’t understand why I was pushing them so hard when we were in such a peaceful place.

Oddly enough, it was Merry, with his watchful eyes, that I got along with the best. He seemed to see that I wasn’t just doing it for nothing, that there was a very real, though mostly hidden desperation behind my drive to have them learn. He quickly became a helpful ally in getting the other three hobbits to cooperating with the training. He found ways to make it seem more like a game than training. He helped to motivate the others, often squirreling away snacks and treats to give everyone during the time we spent resting, helping to keep their spirits up.

He never failed to bring extra food for meals, and was the one who instigated the game of trying to get me to eat without realizing it.

Despite that they were now training with me part of the time, we only spent an hour or two together each day. They grew tired and bored of it far sooner than I did, not having the knowledge of how much it would be needed.

It didn’t help that I started pushing myself harder after the two days of relaxation and exploration with them. This was not the time for play.

The whole world was at stake.
Unexpected squirreling.

My sleep continued to deteriorate at an alarming rate, and I started spending more time in the morning at the forge. At my request, Raithon made me a handful of sharp metal spikes, around the length and circumference of a pencil.

When he curiously asked what they were for, I explained that I wanted something to keep my hair up that could, if necessary, be used as a last resort weapon. After that he engraved them with tiny, swirling designs, so they looked a bit more like decorative hair pieces.

It was a week later when Elladan and Elrohir returned from a scouting trip, each wearing matching grins filled to the brim with mischief.

I was in the middle of viciously hitting a training dummy when they found me, alone in the training grounds mid evening. Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin had left an hour or so ago, having grown bored with training despite Merry’s efforts to keep them all interested.

The two of them trotted over, Elrohir smoothly confiscating my sword while Elladan twined his hands with mine, spinning me around for a moment.

“Alyssa! Tis a wonderful thing to see you so dedicated to our teachings while we were gone! You’ve improved!”

I wanted to grumble at them for interrupting me literally mid-training, but I couldn’t stop the smile that bloomed at the sight of them. Though they’d only been gone a few weeks, I had still missed them. It hadn’t helped that they were regularly in my nightmares, twisted or broken in some form or another, making me fear for their lives when they were out of my sight.

I couldn’t stop the sarcasm from seeping into my voice when I responded. Not that I tried very hard.

“Well, you know I want only to impress you, Elrohir. How was your patrol?”

He laughed merrily, releasing me to Elladan, who helped to straighten out my cloaklette from how twisted it had gotten in Elrohir’s spinning.

“I’m about to go report to Father now. Erestor and his group are nearly back. We ran into their camp this morning as they were packing up.”

“And you stopped to say hi to me first? I’m touched, Elladan! Very moved.”

“Purely Elrohir’s idea, of course. I wanted to go straight to Father, but he insisted.”

He glanced up at Elrohir, his grin widening.

“You get her, I’ll keep Father occupied?”

Elrohir nodded with a wide smile, at the same time that I let out an alarmed, “What do you mean ‘get her’?!”

Elladan turned to trot away, laughing, and suddenly, Elrohir accosted me. Well, more like captured.
An arm curled around my waist, another under my legs, scooping me up despite my yelp of surprise and mild fear.
I flailed, locking my arms instinctively around the neck of my captor so as to lessen the risk of being dropped.

Elrohir laughed cheerily.
“You make the most amusing noises, Kit.”

I forced my breathing to even out and resisted the childish impulse to tug on his hair.

“Come now, kit, there’s no need to strangle me, I’m not going to drop you.”
There was a touch of scolding in his voice, though he was still smiling.

I glared mildly at him, giving in to the urge and tugging on a lock of his hair.
Gently, of course.
He gave me a mildly reprimanding look at the tug on his hair, which I mirrored back at him.
“Why does Elladan need to keep your father occupied?? Why are you carrying me? I can walk. Where are you taking me?”

He was moving quite quickly, practically running out of Rivendell.

“Elladan valiantly offered to distract our father so that he did not send anyone after us for kidnapping you or surprise attacking Erestor! You’ll have to thank him later. And, although I would dearly love to let you walk, Kit, I’m afraid there’s simply no time for that! They’ll be here soon! We simply must hurry if we intend to give them a proper welcome!”

“No time to let me walk…? What are you talking about? What’s going on? What do you mean..proper welcome..?”

“I’m simply helping to educate you on elven traditions!”
He gave me a cheerful smile, the innocence of which made me fear for my life, just a smidgen, as we left the boundaries of Rivendell and entered the forest.

My eyes narrowed suspiciously at him, “What elven traditions are you educating me on..?”

“The tradition of squirreling incoming guests, of course!”

My look of suspicion turned to one of surprise and mild dismay.
“…You want me to squirrel Erestor?! You’re going to get me in trouble, Elrohir! It’s one thing to squirrel random passers by, but Erestor? I have to have lessons with him when he’s back!!”

His grin widened.
“I see you and Erestor have yet to get into the greeting traditions of elves. A horrific oversight that I shall address presently. He won’t be upset with you! You’re simply upholding traditions!”

My eyes narrowed, though I was unable to keep a slight smile from forming, “I don’t believe you. There’s no way that’s a traditional greeting.”

He shot me a mischievous smile, “Oh but it is, my dear Alyssa! And these are not just any guests, these are elves! We always throw acorns at each other when we visit or arrive home. It’s tradition! You don’t want to cause strife between the elven realms by dismissing tradition, do you? Erestor would be so disappointed.”

I gave him a long, disbelieving stare.
He gave in rather quickly, still grinning shamelessly as he carried me through the forest hastily. “Fine, fine, but it would be fun, and it would cause no harm, so why not?”

I sighed again and rolled my eyes, smiling for the first time in the past few days. “Alright, fine. But if your father or Erestor are unhappy with me for disrupting, it’s your fault, and I am blaming you. I was perfectly happy beating the training dummy to death...”
The last bit was grumbled slightly under my breath.

Despite my resistance, it was fun, being pulled away for his mischief. He and Elladan were the primary reason that I was becoming more the person I had been before my harrowing journey. A playful, happy person, who laughed and smiled easily. It was easier to be happy around them. The nightmares and fears were a plague that were difficult to resist on my own, though that did nothing to prompt me into telling anyone of them.

“Nonsense, no one can possibly stay unhappy with you for more than a short moment. You’re far too small and adorable. Who could stay angry at such a cute kitten?”

I rolled my eyes again. He’d been doing this more often recently, comparing me to small cute animals in an attempt to sidetrack the conversation. It had worked once. One time! But after that it became his go to response to switch subjects.

Still, I couldn't help but grumble playfully back. "I'm not a kitten..."

It was nearly thirty minutes of practically full out running before he deemed us far enough outside of the bustle of Rivendell, and another twenty after that was spent collecting fallen acorns, leaves, and other small debris that could be dropped on someone without fear of it hurting them. That time was mostly spent with him flitting around collecting things and depositing them into my hands. Occasionally he had to pick up after me when I accidentally dropped some of our ammo while trying to pick up a stray acorn.

Of course, every now and then I had to throw an acorn at him, as revenge for pulling me away from my training and to show that I was at least resisting the tiniest bit. He always caught them, redepositing them in my hands with a chuckle.

Eventually, my handful of acorns and leaves was deemed a bit lacking because my hands were really quite small to be holding enough ammo for a whole group. We took off my cloaklette, tying the hood closed so that it formed a makeshift cloth bag, and resumed collecting, now filling my overturned cloaklette instead. It held considerably more than my hands could.

Once my cloaklette was full to the brim with acorns, fallen leaves, and twigs, he had me cling to his back like the squirrels we were pretending to be, and climbed a tall tree along the path he knew the group would take. He deposited us both quite high up, making sure I was thoroughly secure before moving to a different branch just across from me.

I grinned, excited despite that I knew we’d likely get in trouble for this.

He matched my grin, voice a bit teasing when he spoke.
“Now then, I find that the best method for squirreling other elves is to wait until they are almost directly below you, and then toss the acorns down in a shower, that way our unprepared guests will have the least possibility of being able to catch or dodge all of the acorns.”

He was still grinning widely, “And I know this is going to be difficult for you, but you must be very, very quiet.”

I gave him a jokingly offended glare, voice an indignant whisper. “I can be quiet!”

I would have hit his shoulder or tugged his perfectly straight brown hair, but my hands were still full of our makeshift bag of acorns and leaves.

Briefly I debated throwing an acorn at him, but quickly decided against it. These were valuable squirreling acorns, after all. They weren’t to be wasted on fellow squirrels.

From our vantage point, I could barely make out the hidden path into Rivendell, the dim light of the sunset not allowing me very good vision through the growth of the trees surrounding us.

As the minutes passed, my crouched position started to get uncomfortable, legs still feeling my continuous weeks of brutal training.

I shifted, settling slightly to lean back against the trunk of the tree we were in, managing to stabilize myself despite my cloaklette filled hands.

Ten minutes went by with no sign of our targets. When another ten went by the same, I started to swing my legs.

Finally, over an hour later, right as I was about to rouse myself from the light doze I’d started to drift into and suggest to Elrohir that we had clearly missed them and should just go back, his smile widened and he made a shushing motion with his hands, peering through the trees.

He pointed carefully with one long finger, voice barely a whisper when he spoke.

“Look there, Erestor is towards the front of the group right there, we’ll aim to drop just before he’s below us.” I shook my head, opening my mouth to tell him we were too far up and I couldn’t see a thing, only to be shushed by another hand motion.

“They’re here, be silent. We’ll attack on my signal.”

It was another few minutes still, filled with both of us getting progressively more excited, until the beginning of the group was beneath us, and after that, only a few moments until Eresstor was as well.

I was just starting to question whether it was the best idea to do this to one of the people who had believed me when I spouted what surely sounded like nonsense, when Elrohir stole the decision away from me.

He surged forward, grabbing the bottom of our makeshift bag and upending it, sending all of the acorns, leaves, and small twigs tumbling through the branches and showering down on the group of elves.

There was a cry of surprise from some of the group of elves, as well as a few laughs, and one exasperated sigh. My eyes followed them, having not expected that, and Elrohir let out a not so quiet snicker as the debris fell.

I vaguely heard a voice say something lovely in Sindarin, though I couldn’t make out what it was.

“Go on, you keep going and get one, I’ll get the one here.”
I was just about to complain to Elrohir that it wasn’t fair for him to do that, but when my eyes returned to the branch he had been on, it was to find that he was no longer there. All I could see of him was his back as he fled across branches, one hand waving behind himself as if to say ‘See ya, wouldn’t want to be ya’.

My eyes grew wide, mouth opening in a silent cry of indignation as I clung tightly to the trunk of the tree I was in. I was really quite high up, and it was nearing dusk, it would likely be getting rather dark by the time I made it down, and that was only if I started climbing right now.

That thought was swiftly discarded when, a moment later, one of our targets appeared in front of me, having climbed up so silently that, for a moment, I wondered if elves could apparate, like in Harry Potter. He was decidedly not brown haired, nor was he any of the elves I had met during my time in Rivendell.

He wore a green travel tunic over brown breeches, the edges of his tunic embroidered with vines and leaves in a lighter accent of green. His hair, which was a startling silver blonde, was littered with leaves, as well as a number of small twigs that had fallen off the trees in the downpour.

I had thought I was getting used to the appearances of the elves, but faced with this annoyingly perfect creature, looking ethereal and otherworldly even with sticks and twigs in his hair, I couldn’t make myself speak. His features were a bit more angular, lacking the familiar softness that I’d come to recognize in the Rivendell elves, and though the Rivendell elves always seemed comfortable in trees, this stranger before me wasn’t just comfortable, he was at home.

Despite the extreme height of the tree we were in, he had no hand holds, balancing easily on the balls of his feet, crouched across from me.

A bow and quiver was tucked on his back, along with a sword at his waist, and he had a very distinct hunter feeling about him.

Maybe this was an emissary from Mirkwood? I wasn't surprised Thranduil wouldn't send his son, though I was a bit disappointed. I suppose that without the need to inform Elrond of Gollum's escape, it wasn't important enough to send him.

I couldn’t tell the color of his eyes in the already fading light, though they seemed sharp. Intent. Despite that, I could see that he was smiling slightly, still looking rather surprised to find me here. He looking around briefly, as if expecting someone else before his eyes returned to me.

I was a rather odd sight, obviously human, garbed in clearly elven training garb, holding a fur lined cloaklette upside down in gloved hands, not to mention my face was marked with tiny scars, criss crossed and spider webbed over any visible skin.

I stared right back, rather like a deer, or perhaps squirrel, in headlights. He was crouched on the branch of the neighboring tree, not more than five feet from me.

“My apologies, milady. I had rather expected someone else. Might I ask your name, and what you are doing so far up in this tree?”

His voice was different than the rest of the Rivendell elves, accented in a slightly different way, somehow sounding almost dark and smooth, rather like the difference in milk and dark chocolate, or velvet and silk. It was still music to my ears, of course.
Because nothing is fair about elves.

“Ah..Well, you see, I was....ah….I was brought here..by a very traitorous squirrel...Just about to leave..think I left my oven on..”

I trailed off into mumbles.
I was stung momentarily with the unexpected betrayal of Elrohir leaving me all on my own to deal with the consequences of our squirreling.

He likely had stayed nearby just to make sure I at least made it down alright, but I was definitely going to be a little miffed at him for a while. Probably.

The strangers smile stayed true, despite that my words sounded mildly crazy, and he tilted his head slightly to the side, reminding me quite vividly of a curious puppy.

“My, it must have been a very large squirrel indeed, to spirit not only you, but also a hoard of acorns so high into the trees.”

The anxious expression I’d held melted a little bit at that, a smile tilting up the corners of my mouth slightly.

I couldn’t help it.

I’d expected him to be mad that we dropped things on them, not to joke about it.

He had leaves in his hair, for goodness sake!

Once I noticed that, my attempts to appear serious and keep from laughing failed quite quickly.

My smile grew a bit wider, though I did my best not to burst out laughing.

“Oh...You’ve got some leaves..”

I motioned vaguely at his hair, and he chuckled softly, running his fingers lightly over his head to tug out any caught leaves as I continued speaking.

“He...I mean...it, is maybe..around..your size...And, well, you see, milord, the summer months are quite harsh on acorn collections. Too much fur to venture out. Much too warm. So it’s necessary to stock up acorns when it’s cooler.”

As I said this, I untied the hood of my cloaklette, shaking out any remaining leaves that were stuck to the inside and tugging it over my head again.

Immediately I felt safer, more secure with the majority of my neck obscured from view, the only skin I was showing now was my face.

He laughed, though his eyes stayed on me, looking curiously over the cloaklette and the scars, “Ah, so your friend is a male squirrel, then. Mayhap you should go down and collect the acorns that were dropped upon me. All that hard work lost, what shall he do for the coming winter?”

I shook my head, widening my eyes and attempting to look innocent, “Nay, milord, the acorns were not dropped, they were thrown by this squirrel! A traitorous squirrel who leaves their friends behind in high up places.”

I was still clinging to the trunk of the tree, not feeling entirely steady.

His smile turned into an entertained grin.

“So it was this traitorous squirrel that threw his hard gathered acorns down on us?”

I nodded quickly, “It wouldn’t listen to a thing I said against the idea.”

I mean, maybe I hadn’t said that many things against the idea, but Elrohir hadn’t paid any attention when I did say things about not throwing acorns at people, so it wasn’t exactly a lie.

He looked decidedly amused, and it came through in his voice, “So you are simply an accomplice to
this squirrel’s dastardly plans? Kept or discarded when convenient?”

Well, that was not very nice of him to say, perhaps blondie wasn’t as nice as he appeared. They couldn’t all be nice, after all. What a shame.

“Actually, I’m a squirrel too. I just have..tree climbing..problems.”
My voice held a distinct note of ‘hah, so what do you have to say about that?’ in it.

His amused smile turned into a rather sly grin, “A squirrel that cannot climb trees? I’ve never heard of such a creature. Perhaps you are instead, a kitten, pretending to be a squirrel. Stuck up a tree, needing to be rescued?”

I scoffed, found an errant acorn that had landed on my branch when Elrohir had knocked them from my the bag, and threw it at him.
He caught it, laughing merrily, and tucked it into the pouch at his side.

I began seeking out another branch to start climbing down from the tree, ignoring the still laughing elf, and grumbled quietly to myself. “I am not a kitten!”

My eyes skated across him for a moment, trying to find something to identify him by, something I could use as a nickname.
they focused in on the embroidered leaves on his tunic.
Who wore an embroidered tunic to travel?
Green leaves, though..
“Just you watch, greenleaf!”

He followed, still snickering softly at my quiet complaints, an oddly delighted smile coming onto his face at my choice of name for him.

His voice was tinged with curiosity when he next spoke.
“So, how long have you been staying in Imladris?”

I paused in my descent to shoot him a mildly startled look. I didn’t remember saying anything about staying in Rivendell.

As if reading my thoughts about how he knew, he motioned one beautiful, slender fingered hand towards me.
“Tis too much of a coincidence to find one garbed as you are so close to Imladris, you must be staying there.”

“Well..yes, I am. It’s been a few months, I think..? Time feels different there. Slower. The days blend together a bit, and I don’t have anything to keep the date with.”

I continued climbing, speaking more to myself now than to him.
“Then again, I haven’t really been able to keep track of the days since I got here..so..not really Rivendell’s fault..”

He gave me a bit of an odd look at the last mumbled words, but didn’t comment, simply matching my descent.
He kept relatively nearby, as if he thought I could fall at any moment, and he had to be there to catch me, and of course he made it look far easier than it felt for me.

A few branches down, he broke the silence that had fallen.
“What is your name, Milady?”

I paused slightly, then responded as I continued climbing.
“My name is Alyssa. What’s yours?”

“Legolas.”
Of course, it was purely coincidence that right after he said his name, and I looked up at him with a very startled gaze, both of my feet slipped from what I had thought to be a secure branch. Purely coincidence.

I was left clinging to the branch I was on, one elbow planted on it, the other hand still holding to the branch above me.
I let out a yelp as I slipped, trying to scramble my feet back onto the branch they’d been on.

I had thought he was a random emissary from Mirkwood.
We’d sent the invitation for Legolas, but without the reason of Gollum escaping, I hadn’t thought Thranduil would actually let him come.

I hardly had time to panic, for he was at my side in an instant, perfectly steady, hands gripping my waist and quickly lifting me onto the branch I was clinging to, as easily as if I really were a kitten. Though of course, I was inwardly panicking a little bit about who was in front of me, that I almost fell to my death in front of him, and about the fact that Thranduil had apparently deemed our letter important enough to take seriously.

He withdrew his hands, but remained crouched on the branch next to me, sounding mildly scolding, and a touch concerned, but mostly amused.
“Perhaps you oughtn’t climb so high next time, Alyssa. Kittens aren’t meant to be in trees.”

I stuck my tongue out at him, still a tiny bit shaky from my almost fall, trying to come to terms with the fact that I had not only dropped leaves and acorns on Erestor, but also on Legolas, and he was now witnessing my terrible climbing skills.
Life was just not fair.

“I didn’t climb this high. I told you, I was brought here by a treacherous squirrel.”

His was voice tinged with enjoyment, rich and warm to my ears.
“I believe it was traitorous before.”

In contrast, my voice sounded practically petulant, and quite sarcastic.
“This particular squirrel is both.”

I glanced down, just barely able to make out the ground in the growing darkness.
Maybe just another couple branches down, then I would be low enough to jump to the ground safely.

“Why did you allow him to bring you here if he is so traitorous and treacherous?”
Legolas’s voice was filled with curiosity, and he still had one hand extended slightly towards me, as if I might fall off at any moment, fragile human that I was.

“Cause it’s fun being a squirrel. You have to take the fun moments when you can get them.”
I glanced up briefly, catching a glimpse of sadness in his face at my comment, though as soon as he caught my eyes, a smile returned to his face.
I climbed down another couple branches carefully, feeling extremely self conscious now that I knew who I was with.
Legolas matched my descent, making it look far too easy, all the while looking rather like he expected to have to catch me again.

What he did not expect was for me to jump out of the tree at roughly six feet above the ground, when there were no more branches for me to climb down.
He made a rather startled noise, and his arms snaked out, reaching for my waist in an attempt to pull me back up.
I'd pushed off quite hard from the branch, though, and the momentum from my jump was too much.

He ended up unbalancing himself from his branch, causing him to fall, and me to be disturbed from my calculated jump.
Somehow, in only six feet, he managed to twist us around so that he could land on his feet, with only a slight stumble.

Of course, that grew from a stumble to a fall when the rest of the momentum from the jump caused me to stumble against him.
We both ended up overbalancing.
For a moment, everything was still and quiet, save for my attempts to catch my breath, having had it knocked out of me on impact.

I was sprawled partially on top of him where he’d tried to catch me, and partially on the ground from where I’d rolled after falling.
It took me a second to realize what had happened and what position I was currently in, and then I jolted up, scrambling to get off him and slide a short distance away.

He stayed still, not moving except a slight rise and fall of his chest, head thrown back slightly, exposing his neck, his hair splayed around him like a silver halo.

His eyes were closed, a very odd expression on his face.
I couldn’t tell if it was pain, bewilderment, or irritation.

After a few long seconds went by without any change, I started to think that he might be seriously hurt, and questioned again everything I knew about elves.
I could have sworn they were more sturdy than that.

They were very thin, though..Maybe they were breakable..?
What if he had a concussion?
Did they have a fix for that in Middle Earth?

Oh god. What if I’d killed Legolas?
Maybe I should just run to Sauron before Thranduil had the chance to torture me for killing his son.

I started to reach out towards him, intent on poking him to see if he was alive or not, a bit of panic starting to grow, when he started chuckling, soft and merry, growing into a rich, musical laugh.

My mouth dropped open slightly at the beauty of his joyful laughter.
It was just not right! People weren’t supposed to be beautiful in so many ways!
How was I supposed to handle this?!?

He pushed himself up into a sitting position, smile filled with bemusement and voice bursting with laughter, “It has been quite some time since I have fallen from a tree. I am certain now, you cannot be a squirrel or a kitten. You cannot traverse trees, nor land on your feet. Perhaps a fox kit, still stumbling around on uncooperative legs.”

I gasped in mock outrage at his proclamation.
“I would have landed on my feet if I hadn’t been unceremoniously grabbed!”
I definitely sounded a little exasperated there.

He laughed again, silvery and genuine, “Ah, we will never know, will we?”

I stood quickly, brushing various leaves and grass off my side as I slunk down the road in the direction I thought Rivendell to be.
I didn’t warrant his teasing with a response, face blushed quite heavily pink, making the white lines of my scars stand out in contrast.
They just weren’t fair, these elves. I always felt ridiculous and clumsy around them.
It’s not like I was denying that I was a ridiculous, clumsy person by nature, but normally I was easily able to laugh at myself, because it was better than feeling bad about it. With them, though, I felt awkward and embarrassed, like every mistake I made around them was all the more reason why I didn’t belong.

I knew I didn’t belong.
It was just nice to pretend sometimes...

He let me get about twenty feet away from him, before he called out to me, tearing me from my thoughts and reminding me of my embarrassment. He sounded like he hadn’t moved at all behind me, and when I peeked back, it was to find him still lounging exactly where we fell. “Milady kit, I believe you’re going the wrong direction.”

That stopped me abruptly. Just not fair.

I let out a sigh of resignation, pressing my fingers against my eyes for a moment in an attempt to drive the sting of exhaustion out of them, and to give me a moment to push away the embarrassment I was feeling.

I heard Legolas rise behind me, and his voice sounded a moment later over the quieter rustling of him dusting his clothes off. “Would you walk back with me? I’m afraid it’s getting rather dark, and I’m quite concerned I’ll get lost without someone to accompany me.”

I could hear the smile in his voice before I even turned, but it still surprised me how playful it looked. He indicated the opposite direction of the one I was going, mirth still woven into his features. I blinked at him for a moment, then let out another sigh and started walking back towards him. “Well, if his highness insists.”

He tilted his head again, looking at me consideringly for a moment before he planted the most regal, and utterly arrogant expression on his face that I had ever seen on an elf since coming to Middle Earth. The expression was followed closely with a voice that was positively dripping with disdain and superiority. “His highness does insist.”

I froze for a moment, not having expected that response, then laughter bubbled out of me. I couldn’t help it! I could only assume it was an impression of Thranduil, and it just looked so wrong on his face! “Thranduil isn’t still like that, is he?”

The question slipped out of me before I even realized, and I stilled, trying and failing not to let myself tense up. That was a lot of familiarity to be using with a king, especially when I was quite clearly a normal, below average, young human.

His pretense of regality broke, his face taking on a more curious expression. Something..darker. Intrigue. Focus.
It made it difficult to breathe.

He took a step towards me, and I struggled to not instinctively take a step back. Now that he was standing before me, not crouched on a tree branch or sprawled on the ground, I could see that he was very, very tall. I was an average five foot five, whereas he was probably at the very least six and a half feet tall, perhaps even taller.

His voice was soft and calm, and nothing threatening or suspicious showed on his face, but the sharp interest in his eyes was enough to make me cringe inside. I should not have said that.

“You speak as though you have met him before.”

I stifled a shiver and squared my shoulders, looking up, so far up, to meet his eyes directly with mine, silently challenging him to push harder and see what happened. If I could survive my first month in Middle Earth, I could survive anything.

“..Not exactly. He wouldn’t know me.”

He took another step forward, looking even more interested than he had started. “But you know him.”

“I know of him.”
One more step, and he was now directly in front of me, peering down at me with a curious tilt to his head.

“Who else do you know of?”

I tried to keep from frowning. This was not a conversation I wanted to have, especially outside of Rivendell. “I think you should speak to Elrond.”

He watched me for a moment longer before a bemused kind of puzzlement came over his face. He smiled again, and though there was still a gleam of interest in his eyes, it wasn’t quite as sharp. I no longer felt threatened. As much.

He offered his arm, asking again in his dark chocolate, silken voice, “Walk with me?”

And really, who could say no to that?
It was Legolas.

Even if I did know that it was purely because otherwise I would very likely become hopelessly lost, or because now he might think I was some sort of weird spy, the way that he asked, as if it were simply a stroll in the garden, made me want to accept.

He looped my arm around his elbow, and as we began walking back towards Rivendell, he spoke, seemingly attempting to start a conversation. “So what brings you to Imladris, Milady?”

“Well...” I tried not to sound too hesitant in my response, though I couldn’t help but pause a bit. I didn’t want to lie, but I couldn’t exactly tell him the real reason... “I needed to seek the council of Lord Elrond..for..personal reasons..”

He glanced at me, down and to the side, “Does it have anything to do with your knowledge of Mirkwood’s king?”
I tried not to let my frown deepen.
Personal reasons were supposed to be personal!

The slippery voice whispered in my head that it was obvious I needed to show him that I couldn’t be pushed around, that I had sensitive information that could be used against him.
I cringed a little bit inside, but couldn’t stop myself from pushing back.
“.Possibly. Is there a reason you don’t refer to him as your father?”

The interest sparked again, his eyes narrowing marginally, though his lips turned up slightly at the corners, as though he felt that this conversation was simply an amusing game.
“I prefer to be recognized by my own name, not his.”

That was a surprisingly honest sounding answer.
I almost felt like I should give something back for that…
“If it’s any consolation, where I’m from, your name is by far more recognized than his.”
Aaahhh!!!!
Why did I say that?!

There was that intrigue again. Damn.
“And where are you from, Milady?”

Well what the hell did I say to that?
Not here? Far away?
What was a good way to put it.
Non-middle earth? Just Earth? Arizona?
The sun state?

“.Ah...The land...Of the sun.”
There, that sounded more poetic than Arizona.

Legolas paused, turning slightly to look at me with a quizzical look, eyebrows drawn, eyes disbelieving, and mildly suspicious.
“You mean Rhun? The land of the rising sun?”

“.What? No. I mean, the sun does rise, but that’s not what it’s called.”
I mean, sure, it technically wasn’t called the land of the sun either, but he didn’t need to know that.
At least, not yet.

He watched me warily for a moment before continuing to walk.
“.How long did you inhabit this place..?”

Oh good, an easier question.
“My entire life. I was born there.”

He gave me another utterly perplexed look.
“And how old are you?”

“.What kind of question was that, coming from an elf that was probably a few thousand years old..?”
“.What month is it..?”

He raised his eyebrows at that.
“July.”
I had to take a moment to consider.
I mean, how do you calculate that when you go between universes?
Was that...whatever happened to bring me over...was it instant? Did it take time?
“Uh..Hm..what year is it...No, that won’t help..”

I shrugged.
For all I know, I could have been floating in some void for a year or fifty.
It’d probably just be easiest to assume it was instant.
“Like, twenty three or twenty four? I don’t know, my..trip here was..unplanned. I don’t really know
how much time passed. Besides, age is just a number anyway, soo...”

His voice was an apprehensive whisper, and his expression was a difficult to read jumble of
uneasiness, incredulity, and the tiniest bit of awe.
“Twenty three...”
“...Yeah...?”

He looked away, possibly for the first time since we’d started conversing.
His voice was a bit uncertain when he spoke next, but undeniably curious.
“How did you come to be here..?”

I stifled a wince.
I couldn’t exactly say ‘Oh, I actually have no idea, I just randomly appeared in Fangorn forest!’ and I
certainly wasn’t about to tell him details about the trip to Rivendell...

“It...was a rough trip. Stormy seas till just before I arrived in Rivendell. I don’t really...it’s
not...pleasant, to talk about. And I mean no offense, of course, but I don’t really know you. It
was...ah...to say it was a painful experience would be speaking lightly. Might we discuss something
else?”

“Oh of course. I do not wish to cause distress.” He was silent for a moment before speaking again,
“How did you come to be in the good graces of Elrond’s sons during your time here? They tend to
be occupied elsewhere, I would not have thought a few months would be suitable time to be so
comfortable with them.”

I glanced curiously at him.
I hadn’t mentioned them, though I supposed with how old they all were, he probably knew them
well enough to guess that it was one of them that was the squirrel behind the acorn shower today.
“What makes you think I’m in their good graces?”

“We’ve had a tradition of squirreling one another since we were very young. I expected the
welcome, that’s why I made sure to be near Erestor so he’d get more debris than usual. He so rarely
travels outside of Rivendell. We have to take the occasions we can to give him a proper welcome
home.”

He gave me a speculative look.
“I would not have expected them to be so close to a guest that they would include her into our
tradition, though.”

If I didn’t know better, that would sound like jealousy.
To be fair, I didn’t really know better. That might be jealousy.
“I’m sorry if I offended you by invading your tradition. I’ll be certain to inform them that you’re not comfortable including anyone else. I’m sure they’ll take it very well.” I raised an eyebrow at him and tried to tug my arm away.

He laughed merrily, allowing me to pull my arm away, but paused and offered his arm again, waiting for me to come back before he continued walking.

“Please, sheath your claws, kitten. I did not mean it like that. I’m simply curious what type of person you are, that has allowed you to become so close to them in such a short time. You must be exceptionally interesting to have caught their attention so quickly.”

I had to suppress another shiver at that. His tone was far too...eager. Dark, and fascinated, as if he’d never quite seen something like me before.

I watched him warily for a moment before returning my hand to the crook of his arm and resuming our walk.

“I think they view me as a funny pet, to be played with when they need entertainment.”

Legolas laughed again, louder this time.

“I’m sure they don’t see you that way.”

I shrugged, unable to keep from smiling slightly at the beauty of his laugh.

“I’m not, but we’ll agree to disagree.”

We walked in silence for a few minutes before he spoke again.

“How long do you intend to stay in Imladris? Surely after having been here a few months you must have received the council you needed from Elrond?”

“..It’s not quite so simple.”

Under my breath I added, “I anticipate being here for a very long time...”

He paused for the slightest moment, watching me curiously before continuing to walk.

“You do not sound pleased about that. Is there something about Imladris that displeases you?”

I kept my eyes trained on the ground, trying to make out anything that might trip me in the growing darkness.

“It’s beautiful.”

It was mildly irritating, how difficult it was for me to navigate the dim lighting, versus how he didn’t struggle at all.

He was watching me near constantly now.

Every time I glanced up at him, it was to find his eyes on me.

“That does not answer the question.”

I was so conflicted. It was amazing, but it was so very wrong for me to be here. I hesitated for a moment before responding again.

“I don’t currently have an answer to that question.”

“Then perhaps you will inform me when you do?”

“..Perhaps.”

We continued in silence for another few moments.

“I’m not gonna lie, it was pretty weird walking back with him.
Even though I’d been learning first hand that the elves seemed to have less of a concept of personal space than I was used to, it was still strange to think about what was happening.

This person who had literally just met me and knew next to nothing about me, was not only willing to walk arm in arm with me, but actually went out of his way to do so.

Just weird.

It occurred to me a few moments later that it was really getting quite dark, and I hadn’t thought we were so far from Rivendell that it would take this long to return. Maybe he was taking me out into the forest to kill me for referring to Thranduil by his first name..?

..He wouldn’t do that…
Right…?
That same slimy voice chimed in that elves were really capable of anything, and shouldn’t be trusted.

I shot another glance at him.
He did seem somehow darker than the Rivendell elves…more mischievous...
Though, the twins were mischievous, so that’s not really something I should judge..

I had nothing to fight him with if he did try to attack me, and even if I did, I’d be no match.
Not a moment later I felt a sting of guilt for thinking that Legolas of all people might hurt me.

What was going on with me recently?

It was only another ten minutes before we were on the outskirts of Rivendell.
It was mostly spent in silence, as I was mostly focusing on not tripping at that point, and he didn’t try to engage me in conversation again.

Despite knowing logically that my concerns for my safety had been unfounded, I still relaxed a little bit when we saw buildings, feeling safer with the prospect of other people being around.

There was a small group of elves gathered around the entrance to the main house when we reached it, though most of them were heading inside.
Two broke away from the group, one identifying himself by voice as Elladan when he called out to us, tone joking.
“What kept you, Legolas? We were about to send out a search party!”

A search party only for him, my mind supplied. It wouldn’t be worth it for me.
I clenched my teeth.
That wasn’t true.

I immediately expected Legolas to say something about how I’d slowed him down, how he would have been there much sooner if he hadn’t had to walk back at a snail’s pace with me.
I was astounded when instead, he responded with the same tone joking tone.
“Ah, Elladan, would you believe that I found a lost fox kit on the way in, stuck up in a tree no less! I simply couldn’t leave it. Far too adorable. Though, one must wonder how she got up there to begin with. It is a troubling thought.”
As he said this, Legolas gave both of them a mildly pointed look.

Elladan looked baffled for a moment before he looked at me, then over his shoulder where Elrohir stood, expression decidedly sheepish.

Elladan’s gaze returned to me, looking a bit appalled now.

“He left you in a tree?! Elrohir!”

He looked over me quickly, reassuring himself that I wasn’t hurt in any way, before turning to trot over and scold Elrohir in Sindarin.

“How high up were you? What if she’d fallen?”

Elrohir rolled his eyes, responding in kind, neatly sidestepping the first question.

“I’m wounded, brother. Don’t you trust me? I wouldn’t have allowed her to fall! I remained close by until Legolas got to her.”

Elladan let out a sigh, lowering his voice a bit more.

“Why would you do that? We’re finally getting her past some of her fears from when she arrived. What if she gets scared again? It’s obvious she hasn’t been caring for herself while we were gone!”

“You know I didn’t mean any harm, Elladan. Look at her! She’s fine! You treat her like she’s going to shatter!”

Elladan frowned as he responded.

“You saw how she was when she got here! I wouldn’t blame her if she did!”

Next to me, Legolas watched the interactions with obvious interest, though at the last statement he verged from interest to mild concern, glancing down to regard me with curiosity.

I caught his glance out of the corner of my eye, then focused on Elladan and Elrohir, trying to pick out words here and there.

I frowned as they continued to argue, unable to catch most of what they were saying due to the low volume and speed of their conversation.

The same voice from before whispered into my mind as they continued talking in Sindarin.

They were probably talking about how weak I was, that I couldn’t make it down the tree, or back to Rivendell without help.

They were going to go to Elrond and tell him they didn’t think I should be a part of the Fellowship, nevermind that they didn’t even know about that yet.

They were going to tell Legolas that I was fragile and needed to be kept safe, and he was going to vote against me going with the Fellowship.

They were going to stop training me because they thought I couldn’t handle it.

I should just leave.

Gritting my teeth, I shook my head a little bit, trying to banish the nasty voice.

They weren’t like that.

Were they?

Suddenly, I needed to be away from them.

I needed to be alone, but I needed the arguing to stop first.

I patted my cloaklette, trying to see if I had anything to use to throw at them as a distraction, and came up with a stray acorn lodged in the pocket.
As I tugged it out of my pocket to throw at them, I caught Legolas watching me out of the corner of my eye. I stilled. It didn’t feel right just leaving without saying anything to him.

After all, he did help me down the tree and keep me from getting horribly lost. I turned towards him slightly, and my voice was soft when I spoke. “Thank you for walking me back. I’m sorry about squirreling you.”

He smiled down at me, voice an equally soft whisper of silk when he responded. “It was no trouble. T’would not be a proper greeting without falling acorns. And Milady...Don’t mind them.” He tilted his head towards the still arguing twins. “They mean well.”

I forced a smile. “I know. It was nice to meet you. Certainly not something I’m ever likely to forget.”

Ever.
Because oh my god. Or Valar.
It was freaking Legolas.

The expression I received in return was of mild fascination. “It certainly was a memorable meeting.”

A moment later, the scavenged acorn was flying at Elrohir.

He caught it, of course. Legolas’s lips twitched up as they both turned to give me matching looks of bafflement.

I frowned at them.
I hadn’t been able to catch any of what they were saying, but clearly it had to do with me. I would need to work harder on learning Sindarin. “Please stop arguing, at least until I don’t have to be here to not understand it. I’m going to bed. Goodnight.”

They both stuttered out apologies as I started to head inside. False apologies, the slippery voice whispered.

When I responded to neither of them, Elrohir snagged my arm as I walked past. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to just abandon you. I promise I did stay nearby until Legolas found you. I wouldn’t have left you to return alone.”

I stared at the ground, responding without looking up. “In case no one has ever told you, it’s a bit rude to speak about someone to their face in a different language. I realize I’m learning, but you’re aware I still don’t easily understand, and you both deliberately used Sindarin to quite obviously talk about me, because you know I can’t understand you yet.”

I tugged my arm out of his loose grip and continued walking, trying to ignore the mildly dejected expression I could see on his face in my peripheral vision. Of course I couldn’t ignore it. It was too sad.

Damn elves and their puppy dog eyes. I paused a few steps away, turning back and looking at him for a moment.
What was appropriate here..?
I was upset, but Elrohir just looked so sad….
“Thank you for taking me squirreling. Goodnight.”

I continued to my room.

Chapter End Notes

To clarify something for you, the Land of the Sun is actually a place in Arda, but I've been able to find next to nothing about it, except that it's a separate continent east of Middle Earth.

For the sake of this story, I am going to have it be that the Land of the Sun is a place vaguely known about in legends.
There are lots of differing rumors about it throughout the world, plenty of which are contradictory, so everyone technically knows it might exist, but not what is on it or how to get there.
The more realistic of the rumors were turned into children's stories, many of which are told to young elves growing up, hence the reaction from Legolas.

If anyone knows anything about this place, I would love the information.
If you magically know that my use of it isn't plausible and you can back it up, I will consider altering it.
Disappointment and Archery Adjustments

Chapter Notes

Good day, fair people!

Let me know if there are any scenes you'd really like to see between Alyssa and anyone else, I'd be happy to add them!
As ever, I enjoy constructive criticism, and your reviews are extremely motivating!
Keep'em coming!
Enjoy the next bit of the story!

The nightmares did not let up that night, so I rose only a few hours after returning to my room. The rest of the night went much like any other sleepless night. I worked on my copy of the map, occasionally got up to do various yoga poses and stretches, and when the sky was finally starting to brighten, I headed out to the forge.

Raithon looked oddly surprised to see me.

I raised an eyebrow at him as I got ready to help him.
“What’s that look for?”

He didn’t reply for a moment, and when he did he sounded almost...hesitant.
“Elrond’s sons returned last night. I had not expected to see you anymore. You only started coming to my forge after they left, I expected you to cease coming when they returned.”

I stillled, hesitantly looking at him, items clutched a bit harder than normal in hands that were starting to shake.
A voice whispered in my head that he seemed like he no longer wanted me here, and it had the same slimy tone that I was starting to become familiar with.
I tried to ignore it, but the uncertainty still came through in my voice.
“Do you...I mean...Do you want me to...stop coming...?”

I tried not to let myself feel the hurt of rejection that was already welling up in preparation of him turning me away.
He was tired of me.
Of course.

I wasn’t devoting enough time to learning with him, so I wasn’t progressing fast enough.
It was fair that he didn’t want to teach me anymore.

That didn’t make it hurt any less, though.

As always, Raithon watched me for a moment before responding.
“I think you might need the break. You look a bit overworked. Why don’t you take a few weeks off to catch up on other things. Erestor is back, you’ll be starting up Sindarin lessons again, will you not?”

I nodded, biting the inside of my cheeks, the tiny sting of pain grounding me for the moment.
He continued, already starting to busy himself with other things.
“Then you should take some time for that. Maybe in a few weeks when you’ve figured out how to balance all of your studies, you can start working in the forge again.”

I forced myself to take a deep breath, but my lungs felt like they were being squeezed.
“Thank you. I’ll come back in a few weeks, then.”

He turned to pick up a different tool, and I quickly exited the forge.

I forced myself to maintain a sedate walk until I was well away from the forge, despite that I wanted to run.

I felt like there were ants under my skin.
I had expected to tire out the restless energy that always came from my nightmares with some physical labor in the forge, now that I wouldn’t get that, it was rearing up more than ever.

I started jogging towards the training ground, feeling the need to beat away some aggression on a log.

By the time I had arrived, I was terribly out of breath, and kicking myself for not adding running to my list of things to improve upon.
How was I supposed to match the fellowship if I could hardly run across Rivendell?

So naturally, instead of beating out my restlessness, I decided to run it out.
I only managed an hour of jogging with sprinting interspersed before I had to stop.

My lungs burned.
My legs ached.
This was terrible!

I couldn’t imagine having to run across Rohan after Merry and Pippin.
They literally had to run without stopping for most of the day!
How was I supposed to get to that point?!

They’d make it twenty feet and I’d just collapse!
Legolas would end up carrying me the rest of the way, and they’d just leave me with the Riders of Rohan cause they didn’t want to carry me anymore!

I ended my terrible jog in the training grounds, intending to go right into my normal training routine, only to be met with four expectant hobbits holding practice swords.

Pippin practically bounced forward, voice far too cheerful for the early morning hour.
“Are you training yet?”

“Unfortunately, yes. I just finished running.”
The word ‘running’ was said with a bit of distaste, along with mildly labored breathing.

I forced myself to straighten, allowing a few moments for basic stretching, and then collecting my weapons from the armory.
Because Raithon had turned me away, it was going to be one of those days where I felt the need to prove myself, to myself, so I pulled out all my weapons.

My short sword got belted onto my left hip, longsword on the other, with the small pouch of throwing knives positioned just in front of the short sword.
My quiver and bow sat comfortably on my back, with my shield strapped over the quiver.
I held the glaive.

They were all still practice grade, so I usually left them in the armory. I’d been assured by Glorfindel that when I was ready for real battle ready weapons, they would be mine, and therefore be under my care wherever I was staying.

The four hobbits stared at me wide eyed as I strapped weapon after weapon onto myself. Frodo piped up as we walked back out to the training field. “Are you going to take most of that off to practice…?”

I responded with a shake of my head. “No. I doubt I’ll take this many weapons with me when I leave, but I need to be used to moving with them.”

I made a note to myself to bring the practice weapons back with me and just start wearing them everywhere. Why hadn’t I done that to start out…?

Pippin trotted along next to me, swinging his sword around as if stabbing invisible enemies, and eagerly asked, “When are you leaving? Where are you going?”

I glanced down, batting at his sword with the staff end of my glaive and instigating a small play fight as we walked, which the other three soon joined in on, with much laughter.

“I’m not sure when I’m leaving. It’ll probably be around the same time as you four. We could go on an adventure together.”

Unless they decided not to come on the quest to destroy the ring.

Then we were screwed, and I would have to see how I was at resisting ring-temptation. While I was pretty sure I’d rank above Boromir in the ‘able to resist it’ category, I didn’t really want to bet on the entire world.

Pippin perked up more than he’d already been, excitement thinly veiled in his voice. “Really? That sounds like fun! What kind of adventure?”

I shrugged, trying to keep my voice steady. “I don’t know, we’ll have to figure out closer to when we leave, I guess.”

I set the four hobbits to practicing blocks and defenses with one another, and I started practicing with my glaive.

I started with a series of slow warm up movements, switching between blocks, guards, and attacks, and held each position for at least half a minute before switching to a different one.

The remaining hour that the hobbits managed to focus was spent on sword work, with me switching between longsword and short sword plus shield. After working with each of them individually, I had them all gang up on me so that I could try to practice fighting multiple enemies. They jumped into that with a vigor, and I ascertained many bruises. It ended with much laughter as they overpowered me and chased me around, waving their swords about dramatically and giving victorious battle cries.

They tired only a few hours after starting, well before midday, and once they left, I switched to archery.
One round of shooting later as I was walking to retrieve my arrows, I felt the sting of eyes on me. I turned, looking for the source, but after a few minutes of careful searching, was unable to find it.

I turned back to the target, shaking my head a little bit. Clearly the lack of sleep was making me paranoid. I added that to my mental list of things that no one else could find out, and pulled the last of my arrows from the target, returning to my place to continue shooting.

I had knocked, drawn, and was just about to release the arrow when a voice off to my side spoke up.

“Might I make an adjustment, Milady?”

I jumped, tensing and fighting the desire to turn and aim my drawn bow at the speaker. I was safe here, I didn’t need to be on my guard anymore, I could relax. I repeated these thoughts to myself for a moment as I slowly relaxed the string of the bow, pointing my still knocked arrow at the ground as I turned to the speaker.

Legolas stood next to me, resplendent in a dark green robe, hair unbraided and shining silver in the morning sun.

I stared at him for a long moment. I thought I’d gotten over how pretty the elves were. This was just ridiculous!

I abruptly turned back to my target, biting the insides of my cheeks to keep myself from either crying over how pretty his hair was, or throwing my bow at him because of how outrageously pretty his entire everything was.

The silence was dragging on, but I couldn’t bring myself to respond. The only options I could think of for a reply were a sullen ‘no, go away, your hair is too shiny’, or a petty ‘I can’t look at you! You’re too beautiful!’.

Obviously neither of those were suitable, so I stayed silent, drawing my bow again and aiming it at the target.

A pair of elegant, long fingered hands came into my field of vision, pausing next to my left wrist, silently waiting for some form of permission. I could feel that he was looking at me, probably to make sure I wasn’t going to be offended or anything, but I couldn’t tear my eyes away from the target. Not when he was right there.

I forced a jerky nod, and the hands moved, gently tilting my wrist the slightest bit, altering my grip on the bow, and putting a slight bend in my elbow.

His voice sounded again, much closer this time, ridiculous silk that it was.

“There. That will suit you better.”

Finally I managed to make my voice work again.

“Glorfindel and Elladan taught me archery. Are you saying their methods are wrong?”

He chuckled, nudging my arm up slightly and then withdrawing his hands.

“No, certain methods are more effective for certain people. They are quite skilled archers, but they do show a preference for sword work. Release your arrow when you’re ready.”

I took another moment to aim before loosing the arrow. It hit to the right of where I’d been aiming, instead of to the left, which was the normal direction I
was off by.

I frowned, relaxing my stance and glancing at Legolas without thinking. As fucking dazzling as ever, and he looked far too pleased with himself. “You were off to the left before. Now you simply need to stop overcompensating.”

I looked at him then, mild suspicion in my gaze. “How did you know I was off to the left before?”

He tilted his head the slightest bit, smiling. “I watched your first volley.”

I frowned, turning back to my target and muttering to myself as I loosed another arrow, “Not paranoia, then.”

Out of the corner of my eye I caught him inspecting the collection of weapons I had currently attached to my body with a quizzical expression. “How long have you practiced archery?”

“I started when I was young, but didn’t really get serious until I arrived here.” I didn’t miss the eyebrow he raised at me. Damned immortal being was probably thinking ‘You’re still young’. Though, technically I was still fairly young by normal human standards too, even if I didn’t feel like it with what I’d experienced and my current sleep issues.

“And the rest of the weapons you carry?”

“. . .I took those up when I arrived here as well.” What was with the interrogation? I knew I was bad, but he didn’t have to rub it in. It’s not like we all got a couple thousand years to practice!

He offered a genial smile. “You’re doing remarkably well for such a short time.”

….Compliments..I’d never been good at accepting compliments.. I could never tell when they were real... “. . .Thank you?”

He bowed his head slightly in response to my thanks, eyes remaining on me the entire time. “Please, don’t let me keep you from your practice.”

I watched him for another moment, trying to figure out what he was here for, since all the other elves that were usually training had gone off for the midday meal.

His expression grew a touch more amused at my continued stare. I realized after about half a minute, that he hadn’t blinked the entire time, his eyes unwavering in their connection to mine. Of course that realization made me blink, and his lips twitched up at the corners. I had to stifle a gasp of mixed shock and outrage. Elves had staring contests?!

I took a step back, pointing at him accusingly with one end of my bow. “You are ridiculous.”
His smile stretched a little wider.
“I haven’t the slightest idea what you’re referring to, Milady.”

I stared at him for another moment, not sure what to make of him, then shook my head and turned back to my target to continue shooting, sure that he’d leave soon.

A few hours later, my arms were starting to tremble, and my wrist ached from the altered position Legolas had shown me.

Of course, I was trying very hard not to show my discomfort, because he had settled himself comfortably on the ground next to where I was shooting, and was joined by Elladan and Elrohir. The three conversed cheerfully in Sindarin, broken occasionally with bits in Common for my benefit, though they seemed to realize that I was trying to focus more on archery than on them.

Elladan seemed to have decided that the best time to practice Sindarin was while I was focusing on something else, so every now and then he’d nudge me, oftentimes right as I went to let off a shot, which caused my aim to be off.

He’d say something in Sindarin for me to repeat and fail at translating, and I’d have to restrain myself from growling at him for messing with my aim.

I was very close to deciding that his arm had a void that only a very sharp arrow could fill.

The thought crossed my mind that it was so much more peaceful while they were gone, because I could practice for as long as I wanted without them commenting on how I overworked myself, but I dismissed it quickly. It was less lonely with them here.

I drew another arrow, trying to still the tremble in my hand and arm. I ended up fumbling and dropping the arrow.

I crouched to pick it up, and when I rose again, my vision blurred a bit, reminding me that the last time I’d eaten had been the previous afternoon.

My stomach had stopped gnawing at me to eat after the starvation from the beginning of my trip. It was simply a hole inside me now that never seemed to go away.

I still couldn’t manage large portions.

I blinked a few times, trying to clear my vision and keep myself from swaying.

“Are you alright?”

Legolas’s voice sounded, and when I glanced over it was to see matching expressions of mild concern from all three of them.

“Of course. I think I’m going to take a break, though. I need to find Erestor.”

I also needed to not collapse in front of them, cause they definitely wouldn’t let me go on the quest if they thought I was just going to drop randomly.

I also still needed to find out how the trip to Mirkwood had gone.

Obviously, not too badly, since Legolas was here.

All three rose, like a pack of very social cats with their absurdly elegant grace.

Elladan and Elrohir reached for my plethora of weapons, looking as if they intended to take them from me.
It was a nice gesture, but I still backed up a step, frowning at them.
“What are you doing?”

They both paused, Legolas simply watching from a few steps away as Elladan responded.
“We’re going to help you return your weapons. Why did you bring them all out today?”

I shook my head slightly in rejection of their help.
“I need to be used to carrying them if I intend to travel with them.”

They all gave me looks of surprise mixed with incredulity, the twins having more surprise, and Legolas having more of an incredulous expression.

“You’re leaving? Why didn’t you tell us sooner?”
Elrohir’s voice was a touch hesitant.
Elladan jumped in before I could respond, “Where are you going? When are you leaving?”

“I don’t think I’ll be leaving for a while, but I need to be prepared to leave. Preparation doesn’t happen overnight. It’s going to take time for me to adjust.”
I shook my head a little bit, intentionally not giving an answer to the question of where I was going as I started to walk from the training meadow.

They fell in on either side of me, making trivial small talk as we walked back, primarily to one another over my head.
We parted ways at the entrance to the main house, where I turned to head towards my room, and they headed off to do whatever elves did in their extensive free time.

After a quick stop in at my room to change clothes and clean myself off with the ever present cloth and basin of fresh water, I commenced my search for Erestor.
I had an apology to make for squirreling.
Hopefully he wouldn’t stop my lessons, like Raithon had.

My search attempt through the Library proved unsuccessful, as did my brief exploration of his study, and for once, it was a good thing I couldn’t read Sindarin, as I would have gotten stuck in each of the book filled rooms to read through all the elven literature I could get my hands on.

I turned my search to Elrond’s study next, and was mildly dismayed to find neither him nor Erestor there.

As a last resort, I went to Elrond’s room, hesitating outside his door.

He had said I could go talk to him no matter the hour, but it still didn’t feel right knocking.
What if he was doing something important that would be bad to be distracted from?

What if he and Erestor were discussing important, world changing things without me…?
That spurred me on to knock.
Quietly.
A bit timidly.

Elves had good hearing, I reasoned, if there was no response to a quiet knock, there probably wasn’t anyone in there.
The door opened a few moments later to show Erestor smiling on the other side.
“Ah, Alyssa. Tis good to see you well. I was about to go looking for you so that I could tell of my
journey to Mirkwood. Will you join us?”

Behind him, Elrond was standing by one of the many desks he had, this one laden with the maps and
notes we were using to chart the things I’d told them.
Elrond briefly looked up from one of the maps, offering me a warm smile.

The next few hours were spent going over everything that happened on the trip to Mirkwood, at
Mirkwood, and on the trip back.

They’d had no setbacks on the journey there, save a brief run in with some spiders in Mirkwood.

Gollum had still been captive by the time they arrived, and though Thranduil had been reluctant to
simply release him, after reading Elrond’s letter and having a very in depth conversation with
Erestor, he had acquiesced.

He even went so far as to create a small pack of freshly caught fish for Gollum to take with him,
hoping that a show of goodwill would ease the creatures cruel tendencies.
Erestor explained that Thranduil had asked a great many questions in regards to the knowledge that
Elrond had come into, and about the need for Legolas to be part of the council.

Thranduil had not been satisfied with the limited answers provided, and had requested more details
before he was willing to send Legolas for the council.
Though, apparently at that point Legolas had barged into the close-door meeting and expressed that
he would go to Rivendell whether his father wanted him to or not, much to the exasperation of
Thranduil and the amusement of Erestor.

At that point, to cool a developing argument between Thranduil and Legolas, Erestor had told them a
few more details, vague things about a woman who knew past and future events, whose only desire
was to use her knowledge to save as many people as she could.

Thranduil had been quite skeptical, but after being assured repeatedly that not only Elrond, but
Glorfindel, Gandalf, and Erestor himself trusted me and my knowledge, he had given Legolas
permission to travel back to Rivendell with Erestor.

I was rather astonished to hear this.
He sounded far more reasonable than he had in the books.
Maybe he mellowed out after the Hobbit books?

The trip back had been just as smooth as the trip there, though they had traveled constantly for the
first few days out of Mirkwood, hence their stopping to rest at the edge of the patrol area around
Rivendell, where Elladan and Elrohir had found them the previous morning.

That spurred me into my apology.
“About that, Erestor..I’m sorry we dropped things on you.”

He simply chuckled, “Tis not the first time that I have had leaves fall upon me, nor will it be the last.
I am pleased to see you enjoying yourself more.”

We conversed for a short while longer, discussing when it would be best to speak to Frodo and the
other hobbits, as well as Legolas, about the quest to destroy the ring.
Elrond felt that it would be better to explain minor things to the hobbits once they were a bit more comfortable with me. That I knew things and they should listen if I asked or told them to do something, that it was imperative that they go on the journey. He also felt that I should explain everything that I had told him, not only to Legolas, but Aragorn as well, so that, assuming they both agreed to go on the journey, they could help me make decisions on the road if necessary.

I was a little iffy about the idea. What if they thought I was a crazy person and decided not to go on the trip? What if them knowing that I knew things made them second guess all their actions and end up ruining everything? What if, knowing the same things that Elrond, Glorfindel, and Erestor knew caused them to make decisions on the trip for themselves, instead of discussing them with me first? What if they destroyed the world?! I took a deep breath, trying to banish those thoughts. Besides, logically, if they did destroy the world, at that point it was no longer my problem, no matter how hard I tried before the point of world destruction.

Oddly, that weird reasoning helped me to put those anxieties aside for the moment.

We conversed for a few more moments before they ended the discussion for the night, and I went off to my room to struggle through a few hours of sleep.

The next week went by somehow both slowly and quickly. Nights were unbearable as always, and without the forge in the morning, my daily routine changed. Every morning, I strapped all my weapons on while it was still dark, and as soon as it was light enough for me to run without tripping I spent the early hours of the day running around Rivendell trying to build up my stamina.

After my couple hour run, I went to the training ground, often met there by the Maeben, or the twins, who occasionally were occasionally joined by Legolas. With them, I spent the hours until midday working all of the different combat styles that I was learning. Maeben typically helped me with sword work, and the twins switched between all my weapons.

It only took a few days before Legolas was regularly joining our daily training, and he had ousted them from my archery practice, taking over in that area.

It took a little while for me to get comfortable with that particular change, but it didn’t take long for me to realize that he was a fairly good teacher.

I found that I almost worked better with him than I did with the twins, as he tended to be more straightforward than any of the other elves teaching me. More direct. He was no less patient or kind, but if he thought something was wrong or needed fixing, he said so immediately, as well as how he thought it should be fixed or changed. Whereas most of the other elves would gently prod me in whatever direction they thought I needed to go, but not outright say they wanted me to go in that direction.
He had a tendency of poking at me, either verbally or physically, in a way that brought out a spark of challenge in me. He was never malicious, simply teasing and joking, but I found that I pushed back much more with him because of it, falling slowly back into the person I was before I’d arrived in Middle Earth.

At midday the four hobbits often joined us with a veritable feast worth of food, nudging me to eat, now with the help of the twins and Legolas.

After everyone had eaten, the hobbits joined our training for an hour or two, and we all mainly focused on helping them. We taught them basic sword work and defense, and started teaching them how to throw knives as well so they’d have something for distance. After the first few days of knife throwing with them, I went to Athae and we put together a small bunch of fabric knives stuffed with leaves and small pebbles to give them a similar weight as actual knives. They weren’t balanced at all, but when I introduced them to our training the next day, we all had a fantastic time throwing fabric knives at one another.

Once the hobbits got tired, they’d wander off to lounge in the Hall of Fire, or chat with Bilbo.

After that I cleaned up from training, and hurried off to Sindarin lessons with Erestor. Usually I could only manage an hour or two of struggling with Sindarin before I started to get frustrated at my lack of progress, no matter how patient Erestor was. I could memorize a word fine, but I couldn’t quite get how to change the tense of it or place it in a sentence.

Whenever I decided to stop, we either joined Elrond in his chambers to discuss things over a private dinner, or Erestor handed me off to the twins, often joined by Legolas, for dinner in the kitchen or the dining hall. After dinner, I was handed off to Arwen, and we either walked around the gardens, or we withdraw to my room where we usually talked quietly while brushing one another’s hair out. She told me about Aragorn, or how it was growing up part of the time in Lothlorien with Galadriel. Typically it was her brushing my hair, as it was soothing for her to do the action of brushing, and relaxing for me to have my hair brushed. She always braided my hair into one long rope before she left, and the rest of my night was spent with nightmares and study.

The only time I was alone was at night, or briefly between training when I cleaned off before Sindarin lessons.
It was the end of the first week since Erestor returned, during the late evening when I was in Elrond’s private study speaking to them both about reforging the shards of Narsil as soon as Aragorn returned with them, when there was a knock at the door of Elrond’s rooms.

Erestor rose, crossing the room in a few elegant strides and opening the door to reveal Elrohir.

He smiled cheerfully, “Pardon the interruption, Father. May I borrow Alyssa? Elladan mentioned her wonderful skills as a musician in our conversation with Legolas, and it seems he now has a great desire to hear her perform.”

Elrond looked over at me, doing the slightest questioning head tilt, “Is there anything else you had a need to discuss this night?”

I considered that for a moment, then shook my head.
“Not that I can think of.”

Elrond looked back at Elrohir.
“Then you may borrow her, if it is her wish to be borrowed.”

Elrohir grinned, trotting into the room and stretching a hand out to offer to me.
I rose from my chair with a stretch and turned slightly towards where Elrond and Erestor were seated.
“Thank you for talking with me tonight. If I think of anything else, I’ll bring it to you.”

They both smiled, though it was again Elrond who spoke.
“Of course. As always, you are welcome here at any time. Now off you go, you mustn’t keep them waiting.”

He added in something beautiful in Sindarin at the end as well, giving Elrohir a pointed look.
Elrohir nodded, taking my hand when I offered it and tugging me excitedly out of the room.

He hooked my arm around his as we strolled towards the hall of fire, while I tried to figure out what Elrond had said.

It didn’t take long for us to arrive at the Hall of Fire, and when we did it was to find a great many Elves, and all of the Hobbits currently residing in Rivendell, chatting, singing, and drinking merrily.

Some of the elves called joyful greetings when we entered, mostly ones that I recognized from any time I performed.
The cello-like instrument was already set up in a corner, bow and rosin waiting on the chair that was placed for it.
They’d discovered fairly early on that I got mildly self conscious about performing for a lot of people, so they usually set me up in corners where I wouldn’t feel so much in the spotlight.
Of course, I couldn’t exactly tell them that it was because it was a bunch of thousand year old elves listening to me. 
Humans listening? I could handle that. 
Hobbits, even.

But elves? How was anything I had learned in my 20 years of playing ever going to compare to a thousand or more years of practice?

I sat at the cello, trying to ignore the eyes of the Legolas, the twins, and the hobbits while I rosined the bow and tuned it.

It had been a few weeks since I had played, mostly because I didn’t think music was a priority when compared to being able to defend myself, so my fingers felt a little bit out of practice.
I started off easy with the Prelude to Bach’s first cello suite.
I ignored the faces of my observers, falling into the music as I always did, with closed eyes so that I could enjoy it as much as them.
I went into the theme from Schindler’s list next, followed closely by the cello solo the Swan, by Saint-Saëns.
It was after the Swan that I stopped, my arm starting to ache, already tired from my training earlier in the day.

I glanced up from my cello, having momentarily forgotten that I had an audience, to find a crowd of enraptured elves.
Many among them were not dry eyed, whispering to one another of the beauty and sorrow of some of the songs I chose.

I put the instrument down, to much lamentation from the gathered crowd, and was making my way over to the twins when I caught sight of Legolas seated next to them.

He was leaned forward in his chair, towards the music, arms propped on his knees to support the forward lean.
What really struck me, though, was that his eyes were closed, and I could just barely make out tear tracks on his face in the firelit hall.
His expression was one of yearning, awe, and when he opened his eyes to look at me as I sat, wonderment.

I looked down quickly, curling my arms around myself and responding quietly to the thanks and praise of the elves who were now filtering away.

He waited until most of the listeners, including the Hobbits, had gotten their thanks out and wandered off to sing or drink with someone else, before rising fluidly from his chair and crossing to sit next to me
“That was magnificent. You are quite beautiful when you perform. How long have you played this instrument?”

I had been about to recite my usual ‘Thank you, I’m glad you enjoyed it’ spial that I used to get around praise, but found it totally derailed by the second compliment, and could do nothing but stammer out, “Wh...what?”

“Tis truly a language, and you speak so comfortably through it. So many emotions were conveyed. How long have you been playing?”

“..aahhh..Since I was three and a half years old.”
He leaned forward slightly, watching me with the same intrigue from the first time we met, though somehow...softer. More gentle.
“Remarkable.”

I looked away, the intensity in his eyes making me want to curl up even more. Looking away had the result of finding the faces of Elladan and Elrohir where they sat across from us, silently watching. They glanced at one another, and then back at us, sharing matching expressions. Peculiar, fascinated expressions.
The fact that they were twins, and looked exactly alike made it just that much more disturbing to see the exact same expression on both of them.
“...What...?”

Elrohir leaned forward a tiny bit, looking at Legolas now.
“Legolas, I just remembered that father wanted to discuss something with us. Would you mind escorting Alyssa back to her room whenever she’s ready?”

Elrohir’s eyes practically twinkled at me with the force of the mischief in his smile.
“‘Tis quite dark out, and she occasionally has difficulty navigating.”

I gave him a dirty look, trying to ignore the amused laugh coming from Legolas.
“I do not have difficulty navigating! It’s just that I’m not some ridiculous cat eyed elf, so I can’t actually SEE in the dark!”

Legolas nodded, laughter still bubbling up in his voice at the disagreement between me and Elrohir.
“Of course, Elrohir. I’d be happy to accompany her.”

I threw my hands up in mild dismay, giving an exasperated sigh.
“I am right here! Have I suddenly turned invisible?”

When all three of them turned to give me amused looks, I raised my eyebrows at them, giving them a pointed look.
“Not invisible, then. I appreciate the thought, but I do not need an escort. I’m perfectly capable of finding my room on my own, thank you very much.”

Legolas tilted his head slightly, voice somehow both casual and playful at the same time.
“Then perhaps I shall simply wish to retire at the same time that you do, and since we’re going to the same area, we will quite coincidentally end up walking together.”

I let out a mildly disbelieving laugh. Seriously, what was with elves?
“You are absurd. What happens if I just decide to stay here all night?”

I glanced over towards Elladan and Elrohir, only to find with moderate surprise that they were no longer there.
When had they left?

Legolas glanced about the Hall of Fire contemplatively.
“Well, I suppose I could assist you in gathering some of the cushions to create a bed. You would likely sleep better in your own bed, though.”

I started to rise, withholding a groan at the sore muscles that never seemed to go away.
“That does sound fun, though. Maybe I’ll make a pillow fort. Not today, but at some point.”
Legolas rose as well, towering over me again. “I made many a pillow fortress in this hall when I was younger. There are blankets in a few chests along the wall that are quite useful, and I can guarantee that if you put the idea forward to Elladan and Elrohir, they would be happy to assist you.”

I hazarded a glance at him, then started walking out of the Hall of Fire towards the main building. “Only they would help?”

He walked alongside me and I caught a touch of surprise in his expression. “Ah, well of course I would help you as well, if you asked.”

He looked contemplative for a moment, “I believe the four Hobbits that have been joining you for combat practice would also assist you, if you needed extra hands. I’m sure Hobbits are quite well suited to pillow fortress creation.”

“Ooh I bet they are! That’s a great idea! What do you think is the most structurally sound pillow fort set up? Maybe a dome of pillows? Like an igloo? Or just straight lines for walls?”

Oddly enough, for the rest of the walk back, we discussed pillow fort ideas. It was a conversation I never thought I would have with an elf, and yet it was an extremely enjoyable experience.

Legolas looked unusually delighted the entire time, and after the first few ideas, he responded with just as much enthusiasm as I did.

We ended up accidentally wandering the halls of the Main House for over an hour, because I was so engrossed in the conversation that I wasn’t looking where I was going, and Legolas didn’t know where my room was.

Eventually, I noticed we were at the hall that my room was in, and I went in that direction, stopping at my door.

“I think there has to be a good mix of pillows and blankets for an optimal fortress, however…”

Legolas paused in what he’d been saying, glancing at the door.

I indicated the door, “Ah..This is me. Thank you for walking me back. It was really fun talking to you.”

I glanced up at him, and briefly caught what might have been a mildly crestfallen expression, though it was replaced so quickly with a smile that I couldn’t be sure that I hadn’t just been seeing things.

“Of course, thank you for allowing me to walk you back.”

With a conspiratorial smile, he leaned down slightly and spoke, his silken voice a bit softer than before, and much more mischievous.

“We shan’t tell the twins, we’ll let them think you struggled and tried to escape the whole way back.”

I let out a soft, surprised laugh, then replied in the same soft volume, “Capital idea. How many times did I escape? We need to have our stories straight, in case they interrogate us separately.”

He grinned, “Oh, I think at least three times. What can I say? You’re really quite sneaky.”

I snickered and smiled at him, reaching to open my door.

“Goodnight, Legolas.”

He returned my smile with a soft one of his own.
“Goodnight, Milady.”

He always called me Milady. What was with that?
I had introduced myself as Alyssa...I don’t think he’d ever actually said my name.
I paused for a moment, then looked up at him again.
“Ah..I’d like it if you’d call me Alyssa.”

He bowed his head slightly, maintaining eye contact, and with that same soft smile, and silken voice, he responded, “Of course. Sleep well, Alyssa.”

I don’t think my name had ever sounded more beautiful.

Another week passed by, much the same as the first.

Oddly enough, I found myself running into Legolas a lot more in his later weeks in Rivendell, far more than in the first one.

Of course, we still interacted similarly in training, though he started asking small questions here and there, about my family, my home, and things I enjoyed.

What I could, I answered honestly.
Though I made sure to steer clear of anything regarding the technology of my world, or anything that would outright give away that I wasn’t from Middle Earth.
Which turned out to be a lot, not surprisingly.

He poked a few times for more clear answers, but eventually stopped when I told him point blank that some things were private, and couldn’t be talked about to people I’d just met.

He’d seemed mildly baffled at that.
“How do you intend to become closer to new people if you cannot talk about the things one would normally use to get to know someone?”

“People can’t become closer overnight, Legolas..”

As the week progressed, my sleep continued to deteriorate, and I found myself snapping at people and having a difficult time with things that had once come easily.

One morning, while training swordwork with Elladan and Elrohir, after having repeatedly had my sword dashed from my hand, much to their amusement, I snapped.
I’d been getting progressively more frustrated as the morning wore on, but their laughter at the way our training was going set me off.
“How am I supposed to learn if all you do is make me drop my sword and laugh at me?!”

I ignored the matching looks of startlement.
“You’re not helping! Go do something else! I need to practice, and clearly you’re only here for your own amusement!”

I turned away from them, trying to ignore the hurt I’d seen on their faces, and stooped to pick up my sword, moving across the training field from them.
They tried to apologize, but I brushed it away, and eventually they left. Clearly they weren’t trying to help me. They didn’t know how important it was that I learn to defend myself. They didn’t think I was strong enough to survive. I would show them.

Another week passed, and my frustration only grew. My eyesight was almost constantly blurry now, eyes aching from the lack of sleep, mind sluggish, reactions slow.

Legolas was confused when I stopped training with the twins, but still continued to train me in archery, nonetheless.

“Why did you cease to learn from Elladan and Elrohir? If you want to learn, would it not be best to accept any teaching you’re offered?”

“They weren’t teaching, they were just playing. I’m just an amusement to them. They don’t take it seriously.”

He raised his eyebrows, reaching up to correct my arm position for what had to be the tenth time that morning.

I exhaled sharply, irritation spiking. Nothing was ever good enough for him. He was always correcting this, fixing that, why couldn’t he just let me shoot?

I missed the target, and Legolas let out the tiniest of sighs.

Perhaps you should take some rest? You’re clearly too tired to aim properly.”

“If you’re so tired of me, you go rest. I have better things to do.”

He watched me for a long moment, a touch of sadness in his expression.

I gave a huff of annoyance and turned away from him, choosing a different target to practice on.

He wasn’t helping either. All of his corrections were contradictory, none of the things he fixed made sense.

He continued trying to help for another few minutes before he excused himself for the midday meal.

Towards the middle of that second week, I started to see shadows move that I logically knew weren’t actually there.

I became jumpy, startling at the slightest thing.

I did my best to hide it, but it only grew worse as time went on.

The twins tried to pull me into the Hall of Fire, I jumped at a pop from the fire burning in the hearth, and fled to my room, knowing I would only keep jumping at any noises.

Legolas turned the corner, coming into sight suddenly, and I startled, gasping in mild fear and having to make excuses for what had happened.

Erestor set a book on one of the tables during our lessons, and the sound made me jerk, hitting my knee on the table and knocking a different book off, for which he scolded me mildly.
The final straw was when, during a break in training with the four Hobbits, after being continually offered food and turning it down due to nausea that grew worse every day, I snapped at them.

“I’m not hungry! Stop trying to fatten me up! I’m not a hobbit!”

The matching expressions of hurt confusion they gave me cut into my heart.
I had to leave. I couldn’t be around them. How could I say something like that?

I stammered out an apology, jumping up and escaping the training grounds.

I began to withdraw again.
My progress in training slowed again, and I ceased practicing with anyone, choosing to go early in the morning or late at night.

I stopped attending lessons with Erestor, and outright avoided Elrond.
When they looked at me, I felt that they could see the dark thoughts in my mind.

Their looks of concern slowly faded from my vision, until instead I saw only looks of suspicion and distrust.

I caught glimpses of family members or friends in the faces of elves I interacted with, and pulled away every time, disturbed that their faces weren’t their own.
A near constant dizziness waited just beneath the surface of my mind, making little things difficult, and big things impossible.
My thoughts darkened as a mild paranoia set in, and I started to question the motives of those around me.

The voice was a near constant presence in my mind, twisted and slippery in it’s vile whispers.

Multiple mornings were spent in the safety of my room, rubbing furiously at the scars on my arms and legs as I started to see them move, as if there were bugs crawling under my skin.

I was determined that no one could know. I had to be strong.
I hadn’t needed anyone before.
I didn’t need anyone but myself now.

It was a little over four weeks after Legolas arrived, and almost six since Gandalf, Glorfindel and Aragorn had left, when Gandalf and Aragorn returned with Boromir.

It was late in the evening, another long, lonely evening of hiding in my room until most people were not about anymore.
I peered around the edge of my door, trying to ignore the dancing shadows, filled with monsters and traps.
The hallway was clear, so I dashed down it, hugging the wall despite the shadows that reached for
I’d started sneaking into the kitchen at night to steal the barest minimum of food for the next day. There was always a plate set out, filled with small, easy to digest things, covered with a soft cloth. I was sure it was for one of the hobbits. It was likely that they snuck into the kitchen, similarly to me, to get a snack. Though, they probably did it for different reasons.

I turned the corner, not slowing at all in my confidence that no one would be up and about, and met an unyielding form at full speed.

A yelp escaped me, my arms flailing a bit as the force of the collision caused me to fall back. Someone grabbed one of my arms, tugging me towards them, and when I looked up, all I could see was scruffy, unshaven, dirty faces, and long filthy hair. It was the face of the dunlender who’d raped me, with the other older one, standing right next to him.

I screamed, shoving as hard as I could and kicking out frantically. My voice was distraught and filled with terror, choked with the growing panic that squeezed my chest and stole my breath away.

“You’re dead! Let me go! I killed you! Don’t touch me!!! Get away from me!!!!!”

The grip was unyielding for the briefest of moments, and then I was free, falling backwards in my haste to get away.

I huddled against the wall, tears blinding me, black spots dancing in my vision. All I could hear was the rushing of the blood in my ears and the harried sound of my own heartbeat. Another hand touched me, and I flinched back violently, shoulder meeting the wall hard in my attempt to get away.

I lashed out with the little strength that I had, meeting nothing but air.

I was sobbing now, harsh, difficult to draw breaths as terror, horror and despair overwhelmed me.

The hand brushed against me again, gentler this time, and another sound started to come through. A soft voice, dark and silken. Words that I couldn’t understand, but that pierced through the panicked haze of my fear.

The hand grasped mine, slowly tugging it away from where it had been curled around my face, and pressing it against another hard surface.

I felt the barest hint of something beneath my hand, more than just the pressure of whatever it touched. A rhythmic beating.

Another hand touched my face lightly, stilling for a moment when I flinched, then slowly brushing some of my tears away and tilting my head up.

My eyes were bleary still, but I could just barely make out a gleam of silver to go along with the silky voice.

He tugged me slowly towards him, still seated and leaning against the wall, and moved my head to his chest to replace my hand. Exhaustion weighed down on me, adrenaline having passed quickly. Consciousness slipped away from me, guided by the beating of a heart that was not mine, and my thoughts slipped away as sleep claimed me, followed closely by a whole new set of terrors and horror.
This nightmare started with the dunlendings, except after I killed them, they turned into the twins, throats open and gushing blood, expressions filled with betrayal and hate.
I turned, to find the caves of Moria, filled with the broken bodies of the elves of Rivendell.
I ran, trying to get away from all the death, only to come upon the bridge of khazadum, where I watched helplessly as Gandalf was caught by the Balrog’s whip, and pulled over the edge, the cries of the fellowship ringing hollow in my ears.

Only this time, when I looked down into the abyss, it wasn’t dark, or endless. There was clearly visible ground, and on it, was Gandalf’s lifeless body, stabbed viciously through with the Balrog’s sword, with the Balrog standing over him.
Flames engulfed Gandalf’s body, and moments later he rose again, burning and dark, as another Balrog.
Their heads turned up, eyes of flame burning through me.

I staggered back from the edge, turning to run out of Moria, only to find the bodies of the fellowship scattered in my path, burnt and bloodied.
Boromir, pierced by countless arrows.
Gimli with his axe stuck in his body.
Merry and Pippin’s bodies broken, and torn, as if pulled apart with great force.
Sam impaled, an orc sword in his side.
Frodo, cut nearly in half by the sword of the Balrog.
Aragorn, head bashed into the ground, a pool of blood surrounding him.

Legolas wasn’t there.
I turned, looking for him frantically, only to see Saruman standing over them all, holding the ring with a look of absolute greed and hunger on his face.
He turned to me, and his face morphed into a strange, almost pleasant expression.
He smiled gently, and extended a hand, speaking softly. Kindly.
“Come away from the edge, my dear. You are safe now. Nothing shall harm you while I am here.”
My body moved on it’s own, taking a few hesitant steps towards him.
I could do nothing.

He opened his arms as if to offer a hug, and my body moved into them as I screamed inside my mind, trapped and broken.
He spoke again, still so kind, so gentle, “There now, dear. They meant to harm you. They meant to turn you against what you know to be true. It was for the best. You did well.”
I looked down at my hands, finding them to be clutching a knife and completely covered in blood, which I knew inside my heart belonged to the fellowship.

Saruman carefully pried my tense fingers from around the knife, taking it from my grip.
“You need not worry any longer. It is time for you to rest.”

With that, he plunged the knife into my heart. I felt no pain, no betrayal. I felt nothing. Cold engulfed me, darkness spreading across my vision.
My eyes lifted slowly to his face, only to find that it was no longer Saruman before me.

No, the person who held the knife was myself, tears in my eyes, blood on my hands.
The false me opened her mouth to speak, and my voice came out.
It was choked and harsh as she cried. “You did this! You caused this! You should have died when you discovered where you were! Why didn’t you die?! Everyone is dead!”
Towards the end of her grief stricken speech, her voice calmed, morphing into that beautiful, silky voice that I was coming to know so well.
The face shifted, and suddenly it was Legolas staring at me, emotions replaced by an emptiness that looked so very wrong on his expressive face.
“Everyone. And there is no one to blame but you.”

Then he smiled, all teeth and anger, hate and disgust.
He twisted the knife in my heart, snarling one word as a spike of pain ran through me.
“Die!”
I thrashed as I came back to awareness, violently pushing myself out of the bed I had been placed in, flailing to free myself from the blankets that constricted around me. My limbs felt weak, and when I tried to step away from the bed, I stumbled.

An echoing call of my name in Legolas’s voice, “Alyssa!”, rang in my ears from the dream, and I felt a tidal wave of nausea flooding over me as I recalled again the knife going into my heart, along with his hateful expression. My chest throbbed painfully in answer to my recollection, as if it had actually happened, and I could hold back the nausea no longer.

A few rushed steps, and I was at the window, scrambling out of it and collapsing in the garden outside.

Tears blurred what little vision I had in the dark, and panic and nausea clouded my mind and choked my throat as bile forced itself from me.

I coughed and choked as the meager contents of my stomach expelled itself, struggling to breathe as the fear crushed my lungs.

Hazily, I felt someone pull my hair away from my face and hold it back gently, so as to keep it from touching the mess of fluids and partially digested food that was coming out of me.

They placed their other hand against my forehead, cool against my fevered skin, not pressing, just holding me, helping me not to fall over as I trembled, struggling for breath and gagging as the images of my dream attacked my mind.

I could vaguely hear speech, though all I could make out through the panicked disorientation was that the voice was soft, low, and soothing to my turbulent thoughts and emotions.

It was a few minutes before my stomach calmed enough that I was no longer gagging and vomiting, and another few after that before my eyes finally stopped tearing up as badly, and my breathing was no longer so ragged and difficult to draw in.

The hands pulled me up gently, supporting practically all of my weight, lacking though it still was, and softly guiding me a few feet away from where I had thrown up, before pressing me back down into a sitting position and leaning me against what I assumed to be a tree.

For a few quiet moments, I sat, trying to focus on breathing and attempting to banish the nightmare from my thoughts.
The voice had faded, and I briefly wondered if perhaps whoever had helped me had decided that I no longer required aid.

Or perhaps they left to fetch a healer…

That did seem like something an elf might do.

Then something damp and cool touched my face, a cloth, wiping gently over my sweaty forehead, across my eyes, and over the rest of my face and neck.

Slowly, I opened my eyes, bringing one still trembling hand up to rub the remnants of tears away and clear my vision.

His form, obscured though it was by the darkness of night, was obviously slender and masculine, garbed in dark colors that I couldn’t make out, crowned with silver hair that even I could see in the shadows.

He knelt next to me, and despite trying, I could discern very little about his expression in the black of night.

Observing him and struggling to make out his features in the dark offered something else to focus on other than my nightmare, though, and over the few short minutes that I watched him, my breathing became calmer.

It also let me hear past the pounding in my head, to hear what he was saying.

“There you go, slow breaths. In, good, and out. Well done. Feel the grass beneath you, hear the rustle of the wind in the leaves, smell the fragrance of the flowers and herbs that grow in this garden. Come back. Come out of your mind. Let your terrors fade into the darkness. They have no hold here.”

Interspersed in his quiet words, were beautiful words in Sindarin that slipped by like the soft touch of the damp cloth on my skin.

There was concern and sadness in his voice, low and silky.

My eyes slipped closed again, focusing on his voice.

For what seemed like the first time in weeks, I could feel the tension soothed away.

He talked me through a few more long, slow breaths before the tightness in my chest subsided the rest of the way, and the last of the panic gradually faded.

I felt the barest of touches on my arm, and slowly forced my eyes to open.
They felt sluggish and heavy.

His voice sounded again, soft in the quiet of the garden. “Do you feel well enough to move? You should go to the healing house, you still look quite pale.”

I shook my head once, regretting it immediately as the headache that always followed nightmares stabbed uncomfortably against my temples.

My voice was shaky and rough when I spoke, vastly different from his smooth, beautiful baritone.

“I don’t need to go to the healing house. It’s nothing serious. I’m sorry if I bothered you.”

He sounded mildly startled when he spoke next, dark voice colored with concern.

“.Bother? Alyssa, you have not bothered me. I did not wish to leave you alone after your fearful reaction to Aragorn and Boromir, and I see that my concern was warranted. I tried to wake you from your dream, but you didn’t hear me.

Are you certain you do not wish me to accompany you to the healing house? That didn’t look like nothing serious.”

My voice came out far more defensive than I intended.

“I’m not sick. It was just.” I trailed off.

Saying it was just a bad dream sounded bad.

Nightmares didn’t usually cause that severe of a reaction.

I couldn’t help it, though.

After the months I’d spent in Rivendell not talking about things, and dealing with the dreams alone, I was just so tired.

Tired of feeling like I couldn’t talk to anyone, and of feeling like the things that had happened to me were some sort of shameful secret.

Tired of trying to hide how bad the nightmares were effecting me, or how scared I was that I wasn’t doing the right thing or making the right choices.

Just so very tired.

Everything spilled out of me.

How I wasn’t from Middle Earth.
My awful trip from Fangorn to Rivendell, and all of the things that had happened during it.

The starving, the despair and hopelessness of having literally nothing, the rape, and the horror at how easy it was to kill the men who hurt and raped me.

The nightmares. The fears of how it could go horribly wrong if I changed things.

My worry about not being allowed onto the fellowship because of how weak I was.

The terror that I would get captured and that my knowledge would destroy the world.

The anguish that I would never see my family or friends again. That I was alone.

I glossed over nothing, save the actual things I knew, and the things I had changed.

Everything else came out.

At some point, towards the beginning of my tearful explanation, he pressed me to his chest again, curling his arms around me, and I told the remainder of it while listening to his heart.

Through it all, he sat with me, never releasing his protective hold on me, or pulling away.

At the end of it, I broke, crying again at how miserable it felt to re-tell it all.

Now that the panic and nausea was gone I was left with a pounding headache on top of feeling drained and exhausted.

He simply held me, whispering quietly to me as I cried.

“You are not alone. You are not weak. You have done nothing wrong.”

When I tried to respond, he only held me tighter, soft voice cutting me off.

“Hush now. Listen to me. Let yourself cry. I have you. I won’t leave you. You shan’t ever be alone.”

Something cracked inside of me, and instead of simply being held by him, now I clutched him like a lifeline, tears and quiet, heart wrenching sobs coming back in full force.

I don’t know how long I cried, but when the tears were gone, and my mind was drifting slowly away from wakefulness, I felt him curl his arms around me again, lifting me up and carrying me somewhere.

He laid me down on something soft, and I couldn't help but let out a soft whine at the absence of his warmth, then I felt his hand take mine again, and finally, the dark claimed me.
When I awoke a few hours later, it was to find the sun starting to rise through my window. I lay there for a moment, mind floating in a haze of exhaustion from the previous weeks.

It was astounding how much better I felt, even after just one night of sleep.

My muscles were still sore and aching, and my head still throbbed, but I could think.

For the first time in a few weeks, my mind was mostly clear, and the voice was blissfully silent.

I was warm, too. Especially my hand, oddly. With some difficulty, I managed to drag my eyes open and take in the room.

Legolas was still seated in a chair next to my bed.

His grasp of my hand had not loosened, which explained the warmth, and he was lounging with his legs over the armrests of the chair, his back pressed against the other side.

A book was tucked in his lap, pages being flipped by his other hand, and it took me a moment to realize that it was one of the books of Herbs that I’d left out on my bedside table.

“I would like to speak about some of the things you told me last night, if you’re feeling well enough.”

I jumped at his voice. He hadn’t looked up at me, still perusing the book, so I hadn’t realized he knew I was awake.

“Ah..I didn’t think you would…well..still be here...Wh-...what do you want to know?”

My voice was scratchy and the slightest bit hoarse from both vomiting the night before, and extensive sobbing.

He looked up at me then, slowly closing the book and setting it aside so that he could sit properly in the chair.

“I tried to leave you to your sleep a number of times, yet you stirred whenever I released your hand.”

He leaned forward to look at me, a surprising amount of hesitance, and a bit of fear clouding his expression and his voice.

“Your..The way that you…..reacted yesterday....we were all very concerned. I was with Aragorn, a
young man who grew up here in Rivendell, and Boromir, the son of the steward of Gondor...they were the ones you were...afraid of. Why do you not react that way to anyone else here?”

I pushed myself up slowly, releasing his hand so that I could sit up and gather the blankets around me, as if they would protect me.

Once I was situated, he sought out my hand again, twining his fingers with mine, thumb stroking along the back of my hand comfortingly.

Though the apprehension on his face made me think that oddly, holding my hand was for his comfort, more than mine.

I swallowed, and despite that my voice was soft, it was surprisingly strong.

“Elves are too different. Too inhuman for me to make that mistake. Plus, it helps that I know that elves can’t...force themselves on others, or have others forced upon them. It’s just not in the nature of elves to be intimidating in that way.”

He let out a soft breath, and gave my hand a light squeeze, eyes closing, an expression of pained resignation forming on his face.

“I am so….” he struggled for words for a moment, his breathing faltering slightly, tears of his own gathering in his eyes when they opened to look at me, “I cannot believe that you could be so strong to live through that. I am so sorry.”

His tears began to fall then, and he moved to sit on the bed next to me, arms reaching to hold me again before he paused, a small, anguish look overtaking his features.

“Do you dislike being held? Am I making you uncomfortable?”

I shook my head, releasing my blanket and scooting over to press into the arms that were already reaching for me.

He curled around me, pulling the blanket to surround me again and stroking his fingers down my blanket covered head while he whispered, over and over, how sorry he was.

We stayed like that for a long while, him silently crying for me, me silently holding him.

I couldn’t help but feel a bit surprised at the intensity of his reaction.

Elrond hadn’t reacted this way when he found out…

Though I suppose Elrond hadn’t just seen me have a panic attack the night before, and I hadn’t actually said directly to Elrond that I’d been raped.

He’d seemed like he could tell, but I hadn’t directly said it.
Legolas was a quite a bit younger than Elrond, as well.

Maybe Elrond had just seen more, and was thus less emotionally affected by things?

Eventually, Legolas’s tears calmed, though he did not cease his hold on me as he spoke.

“You told me last night that you know things. Is it that you have foresight, like Elrond? Are you a seer?”

For a moment I deliberated, wondering what I could tell him, without saying too much.

"I…saw once. Long ago, and far away. It was a story, and every choice that was made caused something to happen. I remember many of the choices, but certainly not all. Things are different now. I have not seen since. Now I just remember. I don’t think I can tell you more without speaking to Elrond first..."

“Will you talk with him?”

I nodded.

“Then I shan’t ask again. What about your home? You say it is not in Arda? You are not from the Land of the Sun..?”

“..Is that an actual place here?”

I felt him nod against my blanket covered head.

“Yes. ‘Tis only spoken of in stories and legends, but we are fairly certain it exists.”

“..Well..No, I’m not from there. The place I grew up was occasionally called ‘the sun state’, but ‘the land of the sun’ sounded more appropriate for this world...I didn’t mean to lie..”

He squeezed me lightly.

“Worry not. It is of little consequence. When you said that you worried you wouldn’t be allowed to be part of the fellowship, what did you mean?”
I hesitated for a moment, listening to his heart.

It was a very reassuring sound.

I wanted to trust someone.

I wanted to trust him.

“The Fellowship will be created in the council you were invited to. I’m worried that...well, that Elrond is going to decide I shouldn’t go because I’m not strong enough.”

He pulled away from me then, looking at me with quiet curiosity.

“You are aware of the council, then?”

“Yes.” the hesitation returned, and I curled slightly in the blankets again, “This is really something I need to talk about with Elrond before I can talk to you.”

“Ah...Of course. My apologies. Is that fear the reason you haven’t informed Elrond of your night terrors?”

I stilled. He was going to force me to tell Elrond.

I’d be off the Fellowship in a heartbeat.

I had to be honest.

I’d been as honest as possible up to this point, if I lied now he might not realize the severity of the situation.

My answer was a bit choked, tendrils of anxiety curling around my throat and making it difficult to speak.

“Y-yes. I don’t think he would let me go if he knew. I need to be there, Legolas. I have to. There are certain things that have to happen, I have to make sure they happen! Lives literally depend on it.”

I was starting to panic now, breathing picking up, voice becoming rushed and trembling.

He held me tighter, pressing my head to his chest again, his voice low and soothing.

“Shhh, shhh, breathe, Alyssa. Breathe.”, I struggled to take a deep breath, feeling my chest loosen a little bit as he continued speaking, “Thank you. Have you not considered that perhaps he would be able to help you with your night terrors?”

“I have. Of course I have. But what if he can’t, and then he thinks I’m weak for not getting over
them?"

He held me tighter, his fingers stroking along my forehead softly in a seemingly random pattern, soothing the last of the panic.

“You’ve been through a number of very terrible ordeals. He would not view it as a weakness that you have night terrors. Your very presence here is proof of your strength. You do not need to prove to anyone that you are strong.”

“I don’t feel strong.”

“Perhaps you simply need someone to help you see. You’ve been struggling for so long that you see it as a normality, not the extraordinary feat of strength and determination that it is.”

“I don’t know how to do that…”

His voice was a bit softer in his next response.

“You will learn.”

We talked for another hour or so, Legolas asking small questions to prompt me into talking.

I told him little bits about my home and family, things I hadn’t said before because they would reveal I wasn’t from Middle Earth.

At one point, I apologized for crying on him so much, and he brushed his fingers across my forehead, voice soft when he responded.

"Crying like that isn't a sign of weakness. It's a sign of having endured too much for too long."

He was just asking about some of the things I enjoyed doing in my world, when there was a knock on the door. I squirmed, trying to get out of his arms and release my blanket so I could go answer the door.

He pressed the blanket back around me, one hand stroking across my forehead again.

“I would like to continue talking, if it’s not something urgent. You needn’t get up.”

With that, he rose, crossing the room in a few long strides and opening the door.
Gandalf stood with his hand raised to knock again, and his brows jumped up upon seeing who opened the door.

Legolas beamed at him.

“Mithrandir! I meant to search you out last night, but you were nowhere to be found, and then I ran into Aragorn! Do you need Alyssa for something? We’re a bit occupied, but I can spare her if your need is urgent.”

Gandalf glanced around Legolas, eyebrows raising a bit more at seeing me completely ensconced in blankets.

“Am I interrupting something?”

I stared back, eyes widening at the realization of what this might look like, and shook my head, opening my mouth to say ‘no, definitely not, nothing is going on, there are no interruptions’.

Of course, then Legolas nodded once, offering Gandalf a slight smile, silken voice amiable and far too cheerful for the early morning hour.

“Well, yes, you are interrupting a bit, Mithrandir. Though ‘tis no huge imposition. We can always continue our conversation later.”

I stared at the side of his head, startled into silence.

Of all the times to be blunt and say ‘yes, you are interrupting’, he had to pick this one?

Thank the Valar people weren’t the same as my universe, or else everyone would immediately assume we were sleeping together.

Gandalf glanced back at Legolas, voice a bit quizzical when he spoke.

“Well..I suppose you can, can’t you..” he looked at me again, clearly not talking to Legolas anymore, “Elrond and Erestor are in Elrond’s study. Please join us...” he glanced briefly at Legolas again, then back at me, “…at your earliest convenience.”

Well damn it all, that looked very much like Gandalf was assuming exactly what I hoped he wouldn’t assume.

Gandalf took one step backing, looking as if he didn’t know quite what to make of what he was
seeing. “I’ll leave you to your...conversation. Good morning.”

With that, he turned, shaking his head slightly as he walked away, and Legolas closed the door.

Legolas was met with a bewildered expression when he turned back to me, and he sounded a bit taken aback when he spoke.

“Is there something wrong?”

I stared back at him silently.

Was sex really such a small part of elven culture that he didn’t realize how that had looked?

Was I making up those reactions from Gandalf, or being more concerned about them than I should?

“...Alyssa?”

Apparently he really was completely oblivious.

I shook my head.

“Nothing, no, everything is fine.”

It certainly didn’t seem like the type of prank an elf would play…

Either way, I needed to make sure this potential misunderstanding didn’t continue to happen, and for that, he had to not be in my room anymore, and ideally, not in it at any later dates, either.

I uncurled from my blankets, carefully straightening them while I tried to collect a bit of calm and stop the burning in my face at the looks Gandalf had been giving us.

“I think I should go. Talk to them, I mean.”

I tugged on the cloaklette that was folded on top of the chest at the foot of the bed, “Earliest convenience and all. Now seems good.”

Legolas turned, his eyes following my path across the room, looking almost as baffled as Gandalf had at the sight of Legolas answering my door.

“....Mithrandir said at your convenience, though. That means we could keep conversing, for a short while at the very least.”

I wobbled awkwardly on one foot, trying to pull on my boots without stopping motion, but also
without falling, a feat which did not work very well, and looked extremely ungainly.

“I know, but they’re like, three of the oldest, most wise people in the entirety of Middle Earth, I feel like it would be hugely impolite of me to keep them waiting. Besides, I’m sure an important guy like you has things to do. Maybe we can talk later when we’re both free?”

I held the door open, standing to the side and looking at him with a politely expectant smile.

Legolas gave me an odd look, but he did walk over, taking considerably longer to cross the room than he had when he answered the knock.

He paused outside the doorway, waiting for me to close the door and then offering me his arm with a slight smile, almost wordlessly saying ‘you can’t escape this conversation quite that easily’.

I pursed my lips, and took his arm with a resigned sigh, gaining a chuckle from him.

“The least I can do is walk you to Elrond’s study.”

I gave him a dry look.

“Come on now, be honest. The least you could do would be leaving me at my doorway with a farewell. This is certainly not the least amount of effort you could put in.”

He laughed outright at that.

“Fair. So tell me, Alyssa, the songs you played the first time I heard you perform, are those from your world?”

“Yes. The first one was the prelude to a cello suite composed by Johanne Sebastion Bach. The second one was called the Swan, I don’t actually remember who composed that one though..”

“The Swan…” the way he said it sounded as if he was tasting the word, testing to see if it was worthy of the song itself. It sounded beautiful in his dark voice.

“I think that was my favorite. Will you play it for me again some time?”

I nodded.

“Probably. It’s one of my favorites as well.”

He continued asking small, rather meaningless in the long run types of questions, all the way to Elrond’s study.
He shortened his stride considerably, ambling along with me at a leisurely pace and seeming in no rush to get me to my destination.

It was actually rather pleasant.

He didn’t bring up anything touchy, or anything I had to be overly vague about, and if he noticed he was broaching into that type of subject, he switched us to a safer topic, oftentimes something about his own life or home.

His sharing made me want to share, and we ended up trading a number of childhood stories.

Obviously I thought his were far more interesting than mine, but it seemed almost as if he felt quite the same about my own life.

Around a half hour later, after I noticed us passing the hallway that Elrond’s study was in, I realized he’d been wandering me around in the main house, not even trying to get me to the study.

I’d been so engrossed in our casual conversation that I hadn’t even noticed.

I called him out on it, and he laughed, turning us around and heading back in the direction of the study.

We could see the door at the end of the hall when he stopped.

I assumed he meant to leave me here, so I pulled away, intending to go to the study.

Or rather, I tried to pull away.

He kept my arm firmly in his grasp, though his grip was gentle and I could tell that if I really tried, he would let me go.

I glanced up at him with a raised eyebrow.

“What are you doing? You’ve already had your continued conversation, and because of that I’ve already kept them waiting much longer than I intended to.”

He looked me in the eyes for a long moment before softly speaking.

“Would you promise me something? Before you go to speak with them?”

I retreated the slightest bit, not fully pulling away from him, but taking a small step back so that I didn’t have to crane my neck back quite so far back to see his face.

I couldn’t quite make out the expression he held.
It was a touch serious, with a dash of determination and a bit of thoughtfulness, but there was something else that I couldn’t quite decipher.

It was entirely disconcerting.

I hesitated to respond for a moment. I’d been taught very firmly growing up that you didn’t make promises you couldn’t keep, and you didn’t make promises without knowing what they were.

“...What exactly is this promise?”

“I would like you to promise that you will return to training with myself, the twins, and the hobbits. I want you to promise that you will return to spending evenings with Arwen, or Bilbo, or anyone really, just that you won’t pull away. Promise that you will start performing again in the Hall of Fire, and that you will begin your lessons with Erestor again. If you do these things, I shall do as you wish and refrain from informing Elrond about your night terrors.”

I stared at him in a mixture of mild shock, and a little bit of amusement.

“...Are you….blackmailing me? Can elves do that….?"

He tilted his head slightly, smiling. “We can do a lot of things. Will you make me these promises, Alyssa? Or shall I join your meeting and inform them of the severity of your night terrors?”

I refrained from glaring. Barely. Would he really tell them? Over little things like that? I pulled my arm away fully, taking another step back and studying his face for a moment. There was nothing but solid determination there. Damn.

“Fine, yes, I’ll do those things. Now off with you, nuisance. I’ve got a meeting that I’m late for.”

Sarcastically I tacked on, “Thank you for that.”

He grinned. “You are most welcome. I would also like you to join me for dinner this evening.”

I eyed him suspiciously for a moment.

“..Is that part of the promise..?”

That gained a chuckle from him, and a head shake.

“No, ‘tis simply a request.”
“.......I’ll think about it. Good day.”

I turned, heading down the hallway.

Just as I was about to knock, he called out.

“Are you going to inform Elrond that you confided in me?”

I sighed. I was not looking forward to that conversation.

Nonetheless, I turned slightly to offer him a brief nod.
I didn't hear him leave, but when I glanced back, he was no longer there.

I turned back to the door, taking a deep breath, and then raising my hand to knock.

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