Beyond Muddy Dreams

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Summary

The commander of Saruman's Uruk-Hai takes Boromir prisoner along with Merry and Pippin, instead of killing him. What begins as a simple instance of a captor taking his pleasure with his prisoner develops into something far more complex. Both Boromir and Lurtz find themselves confronted by desires and hopes beyond anything they had previously imagined.

Notes

I was inspired to write this story by my wish to find tales in which Boromir and Lurtz are not only paired, but eventually manage to live more-or-less happily ever after. Not finding many fics of that description, I at last decided to write my own. I was also inspired and encouraged to write this story by draylon, whom I consider my mentor in the field of Orc/Man romantic fanfiction. Draylon's tales are available here on AO3, and I heartily recommend them. It was draylon's achievement in delightfully and successfully pairing Faramir with Captain Shagrat which helped encourage me to give Faramir's big brother his own Orcish lover.

This is my second work of LOTR fanfiction focusing on Boromir. However, I should state at the outset that this Boromir is a different one entirely from the one who appears in my fan novel "Boromir's Return" (available on fanfiction dot net). That Boromir inhabits the book universe (although it was Sean Bean's performance which inspired me to write the novel). The Boromir of this current work inhabits the film universe--more or less, although this story becomes increasingly book-inspired as it continues onward. (This story has to be at least somewhat film universe, since Lurtz does not exist in the book.) For the record, I should state my belief that the Boromir of "Boromir's Return" would be very unlikely to get into a romance with an Uruk-Hai warrior, as does the Boromir of this current tale.
Another important note is that although this work falls into the category of romance in which a rape ends up leading to true love, I do not support anything like that attitude in real life. Powerful though this type of fantasy clearly is, rape and rape culture cannot be condoned, and I certainly do not recommend capture and taking-by-force as a technique for discovering the love of one's life!

Just in case any readers aren't familiar with this term, the word "Tark," used frequently in this story, is Orcish slang for "Man of Gondor" (or possibly "Man of Numenorean Descent"). Although I haven't managed to find the reference to it in Tolkien's Appendix F while writing this note, according to the Tolkien Gateway site it is "a corrupted version of tarkil, a Westron borrowing from Quenya that literally meant 'High Man.'"
Chapter One: Fire

Beyond Muddy Dreams

A Boromir/Lurtz Lord of the Rings Fanfiction

“You speak of what is deep beyond the reach of your muddy dreams …”

--Grishnákh of Mordor to Saruman’s Uruk-Hai, J. R. R. Tolkien, The Two Towers

Chapter One: Fire

In so many ways, Boromir’s thoughts associated Lurtz with fire.

Fire in his wounds was all he had felt as he swam part-way into consciousness. At the time, he did not understand what was happening. Later, when he thought of it, he realised the searing agony must have come as the Orc slathered healing salve into his two arrow wounds—the wounds that had come so close to killing him.

His body must have tried to wrench itself away from the pain. He heard a snarl—in what he would come to recognize as Lurtz’s voice—and the growling words, “Keep still, idiot Tark! Do you want to die?”

Consciousness left him then, washed away on the tide of fiery anguish. But the next time he was anything like awake, fire was with him again. This time its burning was centred deep inside of him. It was located, in point of fact, at roughly the centre of his backside. And the sounds that reached his mind left him in no doubt as to what was going on.

Those sounds were deep grunts and growls. Time and again, the flames within him sank slightly and then blazed upward to greater heights. In time with the fire’s repeated fall and rise came the sounds, each one of them pounding into his hearing as he felt a fresh surge of flame.

He knew what must be happening to him, but he could not bring himself to care. But one thing he did care about. He could hear something else, beyond the rhythmic grunting above him. Somewhere off to the side, Boromir was certain he could hear sobs. He even thought that he recognized the voice of the person doing the sobbing.
One of the Hobbits, he thought. Probably Pippin.

Please! His thoughts prayed desperately. Make the brutes keep Pippin and Merry safe!

Make them reserve their attentions solely for me.

His consciousness was still drifting. Awareness came back to him more fully with the realisation that the fire had ebbed and the grunting sounds had been replaced by words.

He thought it was the same deep, growling voice he had heard the first time he woke. It said, “I don’t like how much he’s bleeding. Here, runt. Spread some of this up inside him. It ought to make the bleeding stop.”

No one answered for a time. Then a voice that he was certain belonged to Peregrin Took quavered out, “I—I can’t. I’m sorry. I’m afraid of hurting him—”

Snarling laughter answered, followed by the mocking demand, “You want me to rub it ’round inside him? I don’t think my claws would do him much good. Although,” the owner of that voice went on, seeming to give the matter thought, “I could rub it on my knob and get it into him that way. What do you think about it, runt? That what you think I ought to do?”

“No,” Pippin forced out miserably. “No, no, don’t. Please. I’ll do it.” Then, from somewhere near to him, Boromir heard Pippin whisper, “I’m sorry, Boromir. I’m so sorry.”

He wanted to reassure his young friend; wanted to tell Pippin that everything was all right—even though everything assuredly was not. But he couldn’t tell Pippin anything.

All words and thoughts were lost in a blaze of torment, as whatever-it-was reached the injuries inside of him. All he could think of was the agony. All he could hear was the sound of his own screams.

The next time that he woke was more of a true awakening. The fires had subsided, in his chest wounds as well as in his rear.
He blinked as he realized it was daytime. In his two previous wakings, he wasn’t even sure that he had tried to open his eyes. Now he did, squinting against the gleam of sunlight.

He risked the question, his voice ragged and hoarse, “Pippin? Are you there?”

“Yes!” came the young Hobbit’s joyous answer. “Oh, Boromir, yes! I’m so glad you’re awake!”

Dreading what the next answers might be, Boromir asked, “Are you all right? And Merry?”

“Yes,” Pippin assured him. “That is, I’m fine, and I think Merry is, too. He has a sword-cut on his forehead, but they doused it with that ointment that … that the big one who’s been carrying you made me use on you. And the last time I saw Merry, the cut looked all healed up.”

Boromir couldn’t see Pippin. He couldn’t see anything except for a pale expanse of sky. The fact that Pippin hadn’t moved closer to him while they talked suggested that his friend was probably bound.

“The last time you saw him,” Boromir said. “Then he is not with you?”

“The Orc who’s carrying him is somewhere else in their group. I don’t see him very often.”

Knowing he must not waste this moment that was granted to them, Boromir asked, “Can you tell where we are?”

“We’re out on a big, big plain,” Pippin answered. “Grasslands, I guess. I can’t believe how long we’ve been crossing this plain; it seems it’ll never stop.”

Boromir murmured, “The Plains of Rohan.” He asked, “Have we been stopped here long?”

“No … and this is basically only the second time we’ve stopped, since they grabbed us. I was starting to think we wouldn’t stop again at all, ’till we got … to where we’re going; but it’s just about noon, and some of them don’t like the sunlight. So I guess they’ve stopped ’till the sun’s lower down in the sky—”
A sudden shadow blocked the sunlight from Boromir’s gaze. That same rumbling voice came again, “So my Tark is awake. So much the better. Drink some of this, little Tark. It’ll do you good.”

He wasn’t certain he would have the strength to resist. He did not try.

The liquor that trickled past his lips and down his throat brought another form of fire. This fire, he welcomed. It raced through him and gave at least the illusion of strength and well-being, even while it burned.

The owner of the voice chuckled, saying in what sounded almost like fondness, “There, that’s better, isn’t it? All right, now. I’m back for another ride. I’ll see what I can do about not making you bleed so much, this time.”

Peregrin Took, with a great deal more courage than sense, protested, “Do you have to do this to him now? Can’t you see he isn’t healed enough yet to take it?”

Boromir wanted to urge Pippin to shut up, but his captor beat him to it.

“You have two choices, Halfling,” said the Orc, as he lifted Boromir’s bare legs and settled himself between them. “You can shut up and watch, or you can shut up and not watch. The more you bother me with your whining, the less gentle I’ll be with him.”

“All right,” Pippin gave in. He sounded again on the edge of sobs. “All right. I’m sorry.”

Boromir knew he ought to feel something beyond just the burning inside, as the Orc began thrusting into him. He guessed that he should feel … rage. Humiliation. Disgust. He should be plotting his revenge; hanging on to his sanity with thoughts of how he would slaughter the monster that was committing these outrages.

He thought, *Maybe I would think and feel all of that, if I were fully myself. Maybe I'd think and feel it all, if not for the haze from the Orc’s drink and my wounds.*

He did feel something else, besides the fire in his rear: determination that he would not close his eyes.
If I close my eyes, he will think I fear him. He will believe that he has conquered me.

His eyesight adjusted gradually to pick out details of the form above him, silhouetted against the bright sky. The first thing he clearly saw was the huge, white splotch at the top of the Orc’s face.

A handprint, he realized. It was a handprint in white paint, splayed upside down across the Orc’s forehead.

The handprint meant that, in a way, he recognized this Orc.

He’s the same one, Boromir thought. He is the same Orc who shot me and then knocked me out with his sword hilt.

He guessed it made some sense. There was logic in the thought that the one who had captured him now felt he had the right to use his prisoner as he chose.

As his eyes adjusted further, he glimpsed details beyond that white hand. Where the paint had not touched him, the massive warrior’s skin was mottled: dark red interspersed with black. Boromir’s thoughts wandered to the question of what that colouring brought to his mind.

Embers, he thought. Embers in a fireplace. That red is the colour of smouldering embers amid the black of the coals.

Then the Orc’s eyes caught his attention and held it: piercing yellow eyes that gleamed like firelight upon gold.

Boromir thought that the Orc’s eyes seemed almost to glow. They reminded him of the yellow gaze of a black cat in the night.

Boromir and his captor weren’t in quite the type of staring contest in which the loser is the one who blinks first. Still, Boromir thought it was clear that the Orc had made the same resolution as he had. Neither of them was willing to close his eyes.
As their gazes seared into each other, Boromir noticed that the Orc was making far less noise than he had the previous time. His rhythmic grunts were apparently a thing of the past. All Boromir heard from him now was an occasional low growl, sometimes so quiet as to be almost beyond hearing.

*That’s odd,* Boromir thought. *Is he truly acting differently because I’m fully awake?*

It did not seem to him like the actions of an Orc.

*Why would he bother to think that I might find his noises offensive?*

*If he did think of it, why would he give a toss whether I’m offended or not?*

The Orc bared his yellow fangs in what was either a snarl or a smile. Boromir smiled back, a smile of mockery and challenge.

Another realisation hit him: *The Orc’s self-control isn’t the only thing that’s odd.*

He hadn’t been certain that he felt it, at the first. The blazing fire of the Orc’s persistent attentions was enough to steal most other sensations from him. Yet slowly, little by little, he did begin to feel it. At last he could no longer ignore its reality.

The sheer ridiculous absurdity almost made him laugh.

*Apparently, he thought, my body enjoys the feeling of having an Orc up my rear.*

He could not deny that his own member had grown hard, impossible though his situation made it seem.

*Well, what do you know about that?* ran his thoughts. *Here I am, hanging on desperately just this side of death; the survival of our world dangles on the terrifyingly fragile thread of the plot to destroy the Ring—and my body thinks it’s a good thing that an Orc is in the process of ramming himself up my arse.*
The fact more than confirmed for him his long-held belief that the sex act was a joke that Ilúvatar played upon mortals.

Or at the very least, the male anatomy was a joke.

*Honestly, he thought, apart from procreating and pissing, all a man’s privy member is good for is making him act like a fool.*

He had seen proof of that frequently enough. No previous proof had been as startling to him as what he was experiencing now.

Meanwhile, the Orc’s focus on his own enjoyment had not stopped him from noticing the Man’s reaction.

Boromir saw his captor’s snarling grin grow broader. The Orc’s voice purred out, “So my Tarkling is enjoying the ride. Isn’t that sweet. All right, little Tark. Let’s see if I can’t help you along.”

The Orc let go of Boromir’s right leg, leaning forward enough to still hold him in place, and closed one massive hand around Boromir’s member. Boromir thought that the beast was exercising enough care not to let his claws dig into the Man’s flesh, but he wasn’t entirely certain that in his fiery haze, he could feel clearly enough to know if those claws were piercing him or not.

As the Orc vigorously pumped him, Boromir bared his teeth in a conscious effort to mirror the Orc’s snarl. His own fire, blazing and merciless, leapt within him. He insisted over and over in his thoughts, *I will not close my eyes. I will not close my eyes. I will not close my eyes.*

He knew it should be no surprise to him that he finished quickly. It was a damned long time since he had allowed himself this kind of pleasure—and the two arrow wounds in his chest could scarcely be good for his stamina. Boromir wasn’t sure if it was too soon or not soon enough when he snarled in his moment of release, all the while keeping his gaze riveted on the Orc’s yellow eyes.

The jolting that raced through Boromir served to finish things off for the Orc. Still not breaking their eye-contact, he plunged forward, all-but falling onto the Man. In his climax the Orc grated out a string of words in what Boromir guessed was the Orcish tongue. With his limited knowledge of the Black Speech, Boromir did not know if the Orc’s words were curses, endearments, or both.
The Orc lingered inside him for only one brief instant longer, then briskly set about putting himself in order. That done, he gave Boromir’s face a possessive pat, almost as though he was patting the head of a favourite dog. Boromir couldn’t help noticing the sticky wetness—some of it likely traces of his own release—that he felt on the Orc’s hand.

With that moment of seeming tenderness out of the way, the Orc grabbed hold of Boromir’s legs, hauling them upward once more. Just as Boromir was thinking, Oh, sweet Valar, he can’t be about to start going at it again, can he? the Orc put him back down.

“That’s better,” the Orc stated. “Doesn’t look like you bled at all, this time. Good work, little Tark.”

The praise was bizarre, to say the least, but Boromir was not granted time to muse on the oddness of it. The next statement drove thoughts of that strange praise from his mind. It seemed that the Orc actually sighed; then he said in a tone of what seemed to be genuine regret, “I’m sorry we’re so close to Isengard. I’d like to be able to keep you a while longer.”

Apparently the massive Orc leader was only willing to allow himself that one moment of melancholy. In the next instant he surged to his feet and bellowed, “All right, you maggots! On your feet and get moving! Rest break’s over.”

Boromir heard large numbers of groans and complaints in response, to which his own Orc replied without sympathy. “That’s too damn bad. The White Hand is waiting for the prizes we’ve won for him. You know how Saruman feels about being kept waiting. Up, you worms! If you can’t handle it, don’t try to play with the big boys. Never send snaga to do the work of Uruk-Hai.”

Amid further grumblings and sounds which told that the Orcs were obeying their orders, Boromir suddenly found himself scooped up off the ground. His captor slung Boromir effortlessly over his shoulder. The Man’s head and arms dangled at the Orc’s front, and his arse was up at shoulder-level, probably in immediate danger of being bared to the world.

Boromir’s senses and cogency were still far from at their best, but he was starting to piece together a concept of the kind of state he was in. He felt fairly sure that he was still wearing his long outer tunic and all the layers of clothing beneath it—all of the layers down to the waist. But below his waist, he thought he was thoroughly bare. He presumed that the Orc had stripped off of him and discarded his breeches and underdrawers, to provide easy access. All he seemed to be still wearing below his waist, was his boots. Apparently this Orc had no particular interest in his captive’s feet.

Boromir was almost certain that at the moment, his tunic was respectably in place, preserving what was left of his modesty. He sighed a little as the troop of Orcs set off, immediately breaking into a
loping run. His captor grabbed hold of Boromir’s wrists and clamped them together in the grip of one huge hand, to negate the possibility of him making an escape attempt.

He wondered why the Orcs had not actually bound his wrists, as he thought they had done to Pippin. Had they run out of rope?

One other possibility—that the Orc leader had not bothered to bind him simply because he enjoyed holding Boromir’s wrists—seemed too sentimentally ludicrous to be believed.

Although, he asked himself, just how much of all that we’ve been through has been believable, of late?

Every aspect of his life had been bizarre, since the day he rode through the front gate of Rivendell. It had all been bizarre, but he thought that his present predicament was the most bizarre of the lot.

He thought, At least when we were playing nine-walkers-versus-a-cave-troll—and when Aragorn and I were playing snow plough on Caradhras—I still had my breeches on.

What a delightful sight I must make. The Steward’s Heir, Warden of the White Tower and Captain-General of Gondor, being hauled along like a sack and at imminent risk of baring his backside to the gaze of an Orc war-party.

Although, he told himself, at this stage in the game, the prospect of a bunch of Orcs staring at my bum should be fairly low on my list of concerns.

The Orc leader had said they were close to Isengard. That meant he had little time left for pulling off an escape.

Is there any chance? Boromir wondered. Is there anything we can do?

If the Orc hadn’t been clamping his wrists together, he might have been able to seize one of the weapons at the Orc’s belt. But what then?

Even if, through some incredibly lucky blow, Boromir managed to kill his captor in short order, he
would still be surrounded by who-knew-how-many other Orcs. He would still be wounded and in extremely dodgy physical condition, out on the middle of a plain on which there were very few places to hide, and he would still have Pippin and Merry to think of—Pippin and Merry who might not even be anywhere near to him when he made the attempt.

Right, then, he told himself, so you can scrap that idea, anyhow.

The thought came to him that the Orc leader might stop for one last “ride” on his prisoner, before handing him over to Saruman. If Orcs were anything at all like Men, it seemed likely that his concentration wouldn’t be at its most acute while he was having his way with the prisoner. It was possible that Boromir could grab some weapon from him then, and could slay his captor while the Orc was pleasuring himself.

He felt a rush of revulsion. Then it struck him how strange it was that he should feel revolted at the concept of slaying the Orc who was outraging him, when he hadn’t managed to feel much revulsion at the outrage itself.

Valar’s sakes, Boromir, was his exasperated thought, are you depraved enough that you’ve started to feel sympathy for this Orc? Has he got some emotional hold on you, just because he’s stuck his member up your arse?

He mused, Is that all it takes to generate tender emotions—the mere fact of a fellow thrusting himself inside one?

If that’s the case, Boromir thought, then it’s no wonder such enormous numbers of women have tender feelings for thoroughly unworthy men!

Even without his illogical horror at the notion of slaying his Orc in the midst of the act, the plan’s impracticalities were manifold.

He would still be surrounded by the remainder of the war-party. He hadn’t managed to defeat the lot of them before, when he was not yet wounded. What chance of that did he have now, with two arrow wounds to factor into his reckoning?

There would still be the questions of how he, Merry and Pippin could all get away from the Orcs—and of how they could avoid being immediately re-captured, if they did get away. The more he thought of it, the more pathetically impossible it looked.
All right. So you can’t escape. So it’s time to try another tactic.

As his Orc loped with his war-party across the Plains of Rohan, Boromir asked him, “What would it take to convince you to set us free?’

His captor gave a startled-sounding chuckle. “Well, little Tark. You don’t believe in mincing your words.”

“I’ve never seen a point to it. You didn’t answer my question. What promised reward would induce you to switch sides?’”

The Orc answered flatly, “There’s nothing, whiteskin. Don’t waste your breath or your imagination.”

Boromir persisted, “You said you wished that you could keep me longer. You can. I will give myself to you freely if you help the Halflings and me to escape.”

Another brief laugh followed, although this laugh sounded more angry than amused. “You think you can waggle your pretty little arse at me and make me betray my master? Sorry, Tarkling. You do have a very pretty arse. But it’s not as pretty as all that.”

Well, thought Boromir, this conversation now takes pride of place on the list of conversations I never thought I’d have.

Trying another slight shift in tactics, he asked the Orc, “What is it that you want?”

This time amusement did sound in his captor’s deep voice. “What do I want? I want to serve my master and to find for myself a bit of fun along the way.”

More than a little amazed at himself for saying this, Boromir offered, “I will give you more fun than you have ever had, if you will set my companions and me free.”
It seemed that he was providing his Orc with plenty of fun already. “I’ll just bet you could, pretty one!” the Orc chortled. “But I guess you didn’t notice. ‘Having fun’ comes second on that list. *After* ‘serving my master.’”

Boromir knew this was likely wasted effort, but he couldn’t see that he had many other options. “You could serve a different master. A master who would reward you better.”

That suggestion seemed to anger the Orc. He growled, “What do you know about it, Tark?”

Seeing no point in giving up now, Boromir went on, “My father is the Steward of Gondor. He is the wealthiest and most powerful Man in Middle Earth. If you return my friends and me to him unharmed, he will reward you beyond your dreams.”

“Will he just!” snorted the Orc. “I know how your father would reward me, Steward’s Son. He’d reward me by having me killed. Killing’s the only thing your folk think our folk are good for.” He chuckled again and added, “You aren’t as open-minded about us as we are about you. *We* know *your* folk are good for killing, eating and fucking.”

Boromir would not allow that off-putting statement to distract him from his argument. “He will not have you killed if I tell him not to. He will make you a captain in Gondor’s army, with the pay and rewards attendant upon that rank.” Even as he said it, he heard how unbelievable that sounded. He was not surprised to learn that his Orc did not believe it, either.

“No,” the Orc snapped, “he’ll cut off my prick while I watch, disembowel me alive, tear out my heart, and eventually stick my head on a spear atop your city’s gate. I didn’t just crawl out of the mud pit yesterday. I know the kind of treatment a Tark ruler would give the monster who deflowered his son.”

Boromir decided it was time for a different argument. The Lord Steward Denethor might not go in for all of the details the Orc had mentioned, but in its general outlines he thought the Orc’s theory was right. “Forget my father, then,” he urged. “I will reward you for freeing us. *I want* to reward you. Will you give me that chance?”

His Orc snorted with laughter once more—and then briefly let go of Boromir’s wrists to reach up and give the prisoner an affectionate slap on the backside. “Sorry, sweeting,” the Orc declared. “I serve Saruman. Not your pretty white arse.”
The clawed hand clamped around his wrists again, while the astonished Boromir asked himself, *Did an Orc warrior really just call me “sweeting?”*

*Valar,* he thought suddenly, *I hope somehow I survive to tell Faramir about this. It’ll be good to give him something to laugh about. He has little enough worth laughing over, in his life.*

*Hearing him laugh will be worth the aggravation of Faramir deciding his new nickname for me should be “sweeting.”*

Boromir wouldn’t have thought it possible in his present awkward circumstances. But somehow, with the conversation so clearly ended—despite their approaching doom and his concern that his bum might be bared at any moment, and despite the fact that his head kept getting jostled and knocked against his captor’s leathern breastplate—he managed to wander into sleep.

When he woke, he was still jolting along upside down, as the seemingly untiring Orcs ran on.

Two things had changed while he slept. A misty dusk had settled in, with true night near at hand. He thought that the Orc’s definition of “close to Isengard” must be different from his own—since his captor had made that comment around noon, and by twilight they still had not arrived.

The other difference he noticed was that his Orc was now grasping Boromir’s wrists in his left hand—and with his right he had reached up and was fondling Boromir’s behind.

Boromir hissed in a gasp as he realized what was going on.

*And here I thought this couldn’t get any weirder,* he thought. *Instead of just being hauled along upside down and bare-arsed by an Orc I’ve been trying my damnedest to seduce into switching allegiances, now I’m upside down and bare-arsed and the Orc is squeezing my bum.*

For the most part the Orc was leaving his claws out of things, kneading at Boromir’s buttocks with only the occasional brush with his claws to provide an extra spark. But, likely noticing that his captive was now awake, the Orc decided to expand his attentions. He ran one claw lightly up along the central cleft, rested his hand possessively on Boromir’s hip, and then brought his hand down again to rub one knuckle around the opening that he had earlier used so freely. He didn’t bring any claws into play there—yet—but the knowledge that the claws were so near almost made Boromir shiver.
And then a new thought did make him shiver—although he couldn’t honestly have said if he shivered in dread, or in something else.

Valar, Boromir prayed, please don’t let him decide to move from the back to the front!

I know I just acted like the worst of tarts, attempting to seduce him. But please don’t let him pay me back for that, this way. Let me preserve at least some last shred of my dignity!

Don’t make me learn that I am so hungry for a hint of pleasure, that I’ll let an Orc service me just before handing me over to Saruman.

And why not? his mind answered treacherously. Why not take the pleasure, since it’s probably the last you’ll ever get?

Boromir never learned if the Orc would have transferred his attentions to his captive’s front, or not. In a single instant their situation changed.

He heard hoof beats thundering behind them. Somewhere, an Orc screamed, “Horse-boys! Coming up behind!”

The Orc carrying Boromir whirled around, letting go of Boromir’s arse and instead—as Boromir could tell from the way he moved and by the sound—drawing his sword. The Orc leader roared out “Maggots! Why weren’t you keeping watch?” Without waiting for the answer that would do no good, he bellowed, “Bring the other two prisoners to me!”

Noise erupted about them. They were surrounded by screams, hoof beats, clanging swords and whirring arrows, and by shouts both in Orcish and in the tongue of the Rohirrim. Then, in the midst of all of it, Boromir heard a quiet little “oof” just to the left of him, followed by a second, similar grunt.

“Hullo, Boromir,” came Pippin’s voice. “You all right?”

“Hullo, Boromir, Pippin,” Merry’s voice followed. “What’s going on now?”
“Riders of Rohan,” Boromir began, but his Orc interrupted him, “Cut the chatter, you worms! I can do without the lot of you babbling.”

“How will you stop us?” Pippin inquired pertly, causing Boromir to mentally groan in reply. “Saruman gave orders we aren’t to be harmed. I heard you say so yourself.”

The Orc hissed back, “Saruman didn’t say a thing about your pretty-arsed friend. I can harm him all I please.”

“Well,” Meriadoc Brandybuck pointed out, “just now I’d say you’ve got other fish to fry.”

Their captor doubtless had a very high opinion of his fighting prowess. In all probability, that high opinion was justified. But Boromir believed the Orc thought too highly of his skills, if he truly believed he could fight as effectively as usual while he lugged around a Man and two Hobbits.

The Hobbits’ wrists and ankles were most likely bound. But Boromir’s were not. And the clarity of sensation that he’d felt while the Orc was fondling his rear, made him think he could probably get his limbs to obey him now.

That was, he could if they lived long enough for him to try anything. The far-too-near sound of an arrow’s flight was answered by a squeal from Pippin and by Merry exclaiming, “That was way too close!”

It really would be typical of this damn-fool quest of theirs, if he and the two Halflings got killed by the very Men who might have rescued them. Boromir yelled, with all the volume he could muster, “Men of Rohan! Do not shoot! We are captives—friends to Rohan and Gondor!”

Their captor snarled in fury. Again he slammed the hilt of his sword against Boromir’s skull. But the angle was an awkward one, and the Orc did not have the leisure to concentrate on that blow. Boromir thought those had to be the reasons why his vision exploded with stars, but he did not lose consciousness. Those had to be the explanations. It was not that concern for his “Tarkling” had made the Orc strike more gently than he should have done.

Steadily and swiftly, the Orc was backing away. Boromir did not think their captor would willingly retreat, not under most circumstances. So he must believe he had a chance of escaping with the prisoners. Perhaps he knew of someplace nearby where he believed he could hide.
If we can’t stop him now, Boromir thought wildly, we still may get handed over to Saruman!

His own angle was far more awkward than had been the Orc’s angle for striking him on the head. All the same, Boromir managed to wrench himself backward far enough that he could land a kick up between the legs of the Orc.

Probably his kick had little impact. All he heard from his Orc in response was a sort of wheezing grunt. But suddenly the Orc was attacked from another direction.

The massive leader gave a yell of startlement and pain. Boromir felt the Orc’s body jolt. The next yell, higher pitched and terrified, came from one of the Hobbits. It was followed by the roar of the Orc, “Miserable runt! Give me back that dagger, you filthy little thief!”

Boromir realized, Pippin or Merry must have somehow got his hands free. And he must have managed to grab the Orc’s own dagger and stab him with it!

Even the mightiest Orc warrior could not well wield a sword and keep hold on three prisoners while trying to wrest his dagger out of one of the prisoners’ grasp. Boromir seized his chance. Twisting and wrenching himself around, he managed to tear loose from the Orc’s hold—and propelled himself down toward the dauntingly distant ground.

He landed with a stunning thud. That’s probably started my damned wounds bleeding again, he thought. Somehow he got his legs under him. He staggered to his feet, fighting to avoid being trampled by Orcs’ boots or by horses’ hooves.

In the murky dusk he could barely see the bulky shape that was his Orc, with Merry and Pippin in his clutches. But the three of them were close enough to him that he saw it only too well when a spear came sailing at them from the dark. The spear halted, quivering, in his Orc’s right shoulder—precisely where, scant moments before, Boromir himself had been.

The Orc gave another roar of rage. Boromir saw him bring up his sword and slice away the last several feet of the spear’s shaft.

Boromir could not have explained what emotions drove him. Perhaps he simply could not endure the feeling of unfinished business that he knew he would be left with, if the Riders of Rohan cut down his Orc this night.
He yelled out, “Men of Rohan! I am Boromir of Gondor! This Orc is not to be killed. You must capture him alive. This Orc is mine!”
Chapter Summary

As Saruman's Uruk-Hai were overtaken by the Riders of Rohan, Boromir saved Lurtz's life by claiming the Uruk commander as his prisoner. Now, as the rescued former captives set out for the fortress at Helm's Deep, Boromir begins to deal with the repercussions of his impulsive cry, "This Orc is mine!"

Beyond Muddy Dreams

A Boromir/Lurtz Lord of the Rings Fanfiction

Chapter Two: Embers

Boromir told himself it should be no surprise to learn that an Orc war-leader would prove difficult to knock out.

To the Riders of Rohan, his command to take the Orc alive must seem thorough madness. So, too, would Men of Gondor think it, if he gave such an order to them. But Boromir's name and rank were known among these Rohirrim. The knowledge of who he was commanded obedience, unfathomable though his order must seem.

Multiple Riders now clustered about the Orc, striving to break through his guard and to hit him with anything that might knock him out. Boromir prayed that Pippin and Merry would manage to keep their heads down, out of the way of that barrage.

The Orc's great skill notwithstanding, he could not bring his sword to bear in every direction at once. Rider after Rider forced his way past the Orc's guard and pummelled his head with sword hilts, spear shafts, shields. Several cries of Men and one scream from a horse told that not all of the Orc's assailants made it through unscathed.

*Sweet Valar,* he thought, *it's like a joke. “How many Rohirrim does it take to knock out an Orc warrior?” But I'm damned if I can think of a punchline for the joke.*

At last a particularly brutal or lucky blow succeeded in knocking the sword from the Orc's hand.
Even that did not have much power to slow him down. The Orc yanked the Rohirrim spear from out of his own shoulder. He gave a blood-curdling yell and whirled the spearpoint toward his enemies, using their own spear to hold his attackers at bay.

After the day or so that he had just been through, Boromir was not entirely certain his own body would obey the demands he made upon it. But his body had always lived up to his expectations before. He would just have to trust that it could do so again. He lunged for the Orc-leader’s fallen sword and managed to retrieve it from the ground without falling over. Reversing his grip on the strange, angular sword—and grateful for his thick gauntlets which protected him from its blade—he added his effort to that of the Rohirrim, and delivered to his Orc a whack on the back of the head.

Whether that blow made any difference at all, Boromir could not tell. The Orc did begin to stagger slightly, but that could simply have been due to the massive number of blows raining down upon him. Finally, a sword-cut hit the Orc’s already-broken spear and lopped it off, just below the point. Another several blows pummelled down on him. At last the Orc-leader sank to his knees.

He was likely not yet unconscious, but his grasp around Pippin and Merry must have loosened. Boromir saw the two of them fall, or perhaps they hurled themselves away from the Orc. Scrambling over to them, Boromir reached the Hobbits’ sides just at the moment when his Orc finally collapsed. The war-leader toppled, hitting the ground with a thud not unlike that of a reasonably good-sized tree.

Boromir dropped the Orc’s angular, spiked sword. “Pippin! Merry! Are you all right?” he cried out to them, even while the two of them were breathlessly inquiring of him, “Are you all right, Boromir?”

The fact that they could all ask those questions, told him the short answer for all of them was “yes.” He hurried on, “Which one of you managed to stab him?”

“That was Pippin,” said Merry, sounding aggrieved. “So now he’s done something heroic, and I’ll have to come up with some exploit to match his. Thank you very much for that, Pip.”

“Oh, come on,” Pippin objected. “You bit his hand when he was trying to get the dagger back.”

“And that’s impressive, isn’t it?” Merry retorted in exaggerated disgust. “You can call me Meriadoc Orc-Biter from now on. Or not, because I don’t even think he noticed it. He probably wasn’t any more bothered by me biting him, than if I were a midge.”
“Where is the dagger now?” Boromir asked.

“On the ground somewhere;” answered Pippin, “he made me drop it.”

Boromir felt around in the near-dark for the dagger, until he found it standing straight up, blade buried in the ground. When he retrieved it and brought it to his friends, Pippin said, “Here, you’d better let me cut through the ropes, Boromir. I think just now my hands are steadier than yours.”

“You’re probably right. How did you get your hands free to begin with?”

“I managed to loosen the rope around them pretty early on,” Pippin told his tale, whilst gingerly sawing through the rope that bound Merry’s hands. “The Orc who tied it didn’t know the first thing about tying good knots. And then I just kept the rope wrapped around my wrists so they’d think I was still bound.”

“That was very well thought, Mr. Took,” Boromir told him. “Well thought, and bravely done.”

“Yes,” said Merry, with a sigh. “I guess I’ll have to admit it: you were the heroic one this time, Pip. And now I have got some serious catching up to do!”

“Heroic, eh?” Pippin asked, giving a sigh of his own. “Whoever would have thought it? I wish Gandalf were still around, so you could tell him that.”

The three of them might have been on that plain by themselves instead of in the midst of a battle, for all the notice they had paid to what was going on about them. Boromir only thought of that fact when he realized that the battle was effectively over. He heard no more clanging swords, pounding hooves, or any other sounds of combat. All that remained to hear were the sounds of a mopping-up operation: groans here and there, and the occasional scream.

With Pippin and Merry both now freed from their bonds, Boromir got unsteadily to his feet. The two Hobbits hovered near him, probably in the hope of propping him up if he started falling down. He made his way over with the intention of checking the condition of his Orc. Before he could do so, a horseman rode up, demanding his attention.

The Rider halted his horse just before them and leaned forward in his saddle. He squinted to discern Boromir’s features in the gathering dusk.
“Lord Boromir?” he demanded.

“Yes,” confirmed Boromir, “and well met. My comrades and I thank you and your Men for your timely rescue.” He felt almost certain that he recognized this Rider, although with the uniform appearance of their face-obscuring helmets and their long, fair hair, it was difficult to tell one of them from the next. He inquired, “Marshal Éomer, is it not?”

“Aye. I am Éomer. Well met to you and your comrades, My Lord.” From the young marshal’s tone of voice, Boromir wasn’t entirely convinced that Éomer actually believed them to be well met. Gazing down at the fallen Orc beside them, the marshal went on, “This is the Orc you wished captured alive?”

“It is.” Boromir knelt and quickly confirmed that the Orc was still breathing. As he felt his way through the thick mane of hair, his fingers encountered the stickiness of probable blood, but nothing which suggested to him that the Orc’s skull was broken.

Marshal Éomer declared, “It is fortunate that none of my Men or their steeds were slain in the attempt to take him.”

Boromir stood again. He felt dizzier than he liked to admit, but at least he hadn’t yet fallen over. “I give thanks for that as well,” he said. “If they had been, Marshal Éomer, I assure you that I would readily have paid the wergild for them.”

With what sounded like a bitter sigh, Éomer replied, “We will be fortunate if any of us live past these next days, to think of such matters as collecting wergild.” He turned and called to one of his Men nearby, “Bind this Orc’s hands and feet.” Returning his attention to Boromir, he said, “I can see, My Lord, that a lengthy story must lie behind your presence here. But I fear we have not now the time for its telling. My Men and I have further business: we seek to ensure that no other parties such as this remain living to ravage our people’s land unchecked. You are wounded, My Lord?” he asked then.

“I am. I would appreciate the loan of horses, and the aid of some few of your Men, to escort us to the nearest stronghold of your people.”

“There are none near. We are on the borders of Fangorn Forest. But I will lend you Men and horses to bring you to the fortress at Helm’s Deep. That is where all the strength of Rohan may soon make its final stand, if the reports we hear of a vast army mustering at Isengard are true.”
In none of their previous meetings had young Marshal Éomer seemed much of a barrel of laughs, but Boromir thought he could hear an extra note of prim disapproval in the younger Man’s voice this night. He sighed to himself, striving to banish from his mind the probably illusory notion that the marshal suspected all manner of improper intentions in his wish to keep this Orc alive.

Boromir thought, *And speaking of improper intentions—and the results thereof—I will need to make some adjustments to my clothing, if I’m to be riding horseback.* He told Éomer, “I thank you for the loan of your Men and steeds. If I may, there is another request I would make. I am unclad from the waist down. If any of your Men has some piece of cloth to spare, I would be grateful, that I may fashion for myself a breech-clout from it.”

Sudden light flared up to their left, golden and startling. Boromir glanced over and saw that the light came from the beginnings of a bonfire, which the Rohirrim were kindling to dispose of the now heaped-up bodies of their foes. He grimaced slightly as his imagination pictured his own Orc as one of the corpses fuelling that fire.

When Boromir looked away from the bonfire, Éomer reached into a saddlebag and pulled forth a white garment. He held this out to Boromir. “You may use this shirt,” the young marshal offered.

Even without considering the disapproval he’d thought he could sense from this young Man, Boromir hesitated at the concept of wrapping the marshal’s shirt about his nether regions. *Particularly,* he thought, *considering what’s been going on around those regions, of late.* “You are certain?” he asked. “There is nothing of less value I might use?”

Marshal Éomer smiled slightly. “It is all right, my lord. I believe you have more need of it than I. In the days ahead of us, it will likely prove the least of my worries that I no longer have a spare shirt.”

Boromir said, accepting the shirt, “Then, Lord Marshal, I accept with thanks.”

“You are most welcome.” The marshal’s smile grew more rueful as he added, “I, too, would not care to be ahorseback with no clothing about my privates.”

After that observation, Marshal Éomer rode to join his Men beside the growing bonfire. Whilst another of the Riders of Rohan bound the unconscious Orc, Boromir set about constructing for himself a makeshift undergarment. Determinedly he ignored, for now, the dried traces of blood and presumably other substances which the firelight showed him had run along his legs.
Before long he was reasonably pleased with his handiwork. With the arms of the shirt tied about his waist, he brought the shirt up between his legs from the back to the front and tucked it into place beneath the improvised waist band. Hiking up his tunics that he might better examine his efforts, he thought, *It ought to do—although I wish I could feel more certain that those shirt-tails will stay where I have tucked them.*

A sudden, unsuccessfully smothered snort of laughter from Pippin caused him to glance over at the Hobbit, as he allowed his tunics to fall back into place.

“Sorry, Boromir,” Pippin spluttered. “It’s only that I couldn’t help noticing—how much that looks like a nappy.”

Boromir and Merry shared an eye-rolling look, and Merry exclaimed, “Peregrin Took! Must you always bring things down to the lowest possible level?”

Boromir observed, “I think by now, we would be disappointed if he did not.” He went on to Pippin, “If ever you travel in Anórien during the summer, Master Halfling, you will see a good many farmers labouring in their fields clad only in garments much like the one I’ve just constructed—although I imagine none of those garments were fashioned from the spare shirt of a marshal of Rohan.” Smiling at Pippin and remembering his concern that the new under-thing might not stay in place, he added, “If I have inadvertently created Middle Earth’s largest nappy, then it is fitting that this creation be secured with the nappy pin of Lórien.”

He reached up and removed the leaf brooch from its place at the collar of his grey Elven cloak: a garment which he had more-or-less forgotten he was wearing, until now. He discovered now that the cloak had been tucked up underneath his belt. Presumably that was done by the Orc, so the cape would not flap about annoyingly while he had Boromir draped over his shoulder.

This time both Hobbits snorted with partly-suppressed laughs while Boromir used the brooch to bind together his improvised underwear. Boromir cast his two friends a humorous glance, to which Merry gasped out, “We’d better not let Gimli learn about this. He’d challenge you to a duel. He’d say you’ve insulted the Lady of the Golden Wood by using her gift to fasten your unmentionables!”

That was too much for Pippin. He gave a hooting laugh that couldn’t be suppressed at all. The two young cousins fell into gales of laughter. They grabbed hold of each other as though only by hanging on could they stop the laughs from knocking them off their feet.
Boromir easily recognized the signs of post-battle hysteria. It was decades since he had fallen prey to such a reaction himself. But he thought it was only natural for the young Hobbits. For them, this sort of thing was all still painfully new. And this time, his young friends’ desperate hilarity caught him up along with them.

Boromir burst out laughing. He laughed until he was near to weeping. Then he sat down on the ground and opened his arms to his friends. Pippin and Merry threw themselves onto him to sob their laughs against his shoulders and his chest, while he hugged them to him and thanked the Valar that they all three lived to have hysterics.

Finally the three of them had more-or-less laughed themselves out. While they all were wiping their eyes, Pippin managed to say, “Think of how red Gimli’s face would be. It’d go the same colour as his beard.”

Their recent laughing-bout could not shield any of them from recalling the grim events in which they were taking part. Smudging the last of his tears from his face, Pippin looked up at Boromir and asked, his voice little more than a whisper, “Do you suppose Gimli is still alive? Do you suppose any of them are?”

Boromir could think of no way to answer save for a heavy, “I don’t know.” He patted Pippin’s shoulder then and tried to conjure up something like a reassuring smile. “We just have to pray that they are,” he added, hoping that he sounded at least slightly encouraging.

Merry put in quietly, “I’ve been wondering if maybe they’re following the Orcs … if maybe they’re trying to rescue us. But I suppose it’s silly to think that. I suppose they wouldn’t be, would they? It’s more important that they … stick together and working on completing our mission.”

“I’ve thought of it, too,” said Pippin. “I let my leaf brooch drop sometime this morning, thinking if they’re following us, Aragorn would see it and—I don’t know, would know we’re still alive. Or would know they’re on the right track, at least.”

“It was good thinking,” Boromir commended him. But even as he said those words, he felt increasingly sick with dread. His heart had been rapidly sinking as the conversation progressed. Now he felt that it was somewhere in the vicinity of his boots.

“More good thinking?” Merry automatically complained. “For heaven’s sake, Pip, will you slow down with these good thoughts? It’ll take me an age to catch up.”
“Oh, that’s just fine,” riposted Pippin. “All this trip, folk have been telling me what a fool of a Took I am, and now you’re begrudging me a couple of good thoughts?”

Boromir barely heard the young Hobbits’ banter. He was thinking, *I shall have to tell Merry and Pippin how I parted from Frodo.*

_Not now,* he told himself. He despised himself for his cowardice even as he thought it.

_I cannot bear to tell them now._

_It is not only cowardice,* he thought. *We’ve a good many more pressing things to do just now than to sit upon a battlefield talking all the night._

Boromir said, striving to cheer up both the Hobbits and himself, “If they are following, think of how Gimli will grumble when he learns we’ve already been rescued. He will never let us hear the end of it.”

Merry agreed, with a melancholy little grin, “I’m looking forward to hearing that.”

The Rider of Rohan who had bound Boromir’s Orc clearly also believed they’d spent time enough talking. He asked now, “Will you take charge of the Orc’s belongings, My Lord?”

“Yes,” Boromir said, mentally thanking the Man for that reminder that he should bestir himself. In the light from the bonfire of corpses, he found the Orc’s sword on the ground where he had dropped it. He considered for an instant and then wiped the blood from off the sword on the dry grass of the plain, rather than on the Elven cloak of Lórien. Gingerly he stashed the sword in his own empty scabbard. The fit was not good, but he judged it at least more sensible than carrying the Orcish blade around unsheathed. His own sword, which he guessed his captor must have abandoned at Amon Hen, had been both broader and longer than the Orcs’ odd angular weapons. Thus his scabbard was broad enough that the cruel barbs of the Orcish sword should do little damage to the scabbard’s interior—he hoped. It would indeed be ironic were he to attempt drawing that sword, only to find that its barbs had snagged on the inside of his scabbard.

Boromir said to Pippin, “Keep his dagger if you like. It is your prize, fairly taken.” He turned to investigate the possessions that the unconscious Orc bore at his belt. Besides the dagger’s scabbard, which he unfastened and handed to Pippin, these proved to be a hard-sided leathern pouch and two leathern flasks.
The pouch, Boromir found, held some pieces of dark bread and a few strips of jerky. He discarded both pouch and contents, on the theory that Orcish food was nothing with which Men or Hobbits wished any connection. The longer of the two flasks, he shook, to hear liquid sloshing about inside. He thought, *Must be that drink he gave to me.* Taking the smaller flask in his hands, he glanced over at Pippin who stood nervously by him. He asked the young Hobbit, “Is this the medicine he used on me?”

“Yes,” Pippin answered. He sounded more than a little troubled at the memories thus invoked. “That’s it.”

It occurred to Boromir that this Orcish medicine must be potent stuff—on other evidence besides the agony he had felt when it was rubbed around inside him. He thought it must have remarkable ability to forestall infection.

If he had received treatment from Gondor’s healers for two arrow wounds such as he now bore, he would expect to be in a lot worse shape than he was now, just a day or so after his wounding.

He did not feel feverish in the least. He felt no chills, nor did he seem to be doing any abnormal sweating. Normally, he would expect at least a slight fever as a matter of course, after receiving wounds of such severity.

It stung his Gondorian pride to think that the Orcs’ medicine was more effective than the remedies of Gondor’s healers. Yet he would not allow pride to triumph over practicality. He thought, *If I can bring this stuff home with me, mayhap our healers can analyse its contents, and perhaps learn to make a version of it themselves.*

He also had more immediate concerns involving the Orcish ointment. He told himself, *I suppose I owe it to my prisoner to treat his wounds, just as he treated mine.*

He took off his gauntlets, unstoppered the flask and poured some of the dark, viscous substance into his left hand. It didn’t take him long to locate the Orc’s two main wounds. These were a gash in his side just above his left hip—the work of Pippin with the Orc’s dagger—and the spear wound in his right shoulder. Boromir slathered generous amounts of the medicine into both of the wounds. For good measure, he decided to use a bit on the Orc’s head, as well. In their near-dark surroundings, he wasn’t going to take the time to pick through the thick mass of hair to determine where the Orc’s head injuries might actually be. He simply rubbed a little of the ointment into a couple of places on the Orc’s scalp that he thought seemed bloodier than others.
He had noted in the midst of this cursory medical treatment that the Orc’s skin felt hotter than he would expect if the patient were a Man. He wondered if fever from the Orc’s wounds could already have set in. But that didn’t make much sense—although admittedly, how should he know what did or did not make sense when it came to the physiology of Orcs? All the same, he thought it more likely that Orcs’ natural body temperature was simply higher than that of Men.

To his surprise, a feeling like a shudder coursed through him at that thought.

He mused, *If so, then no wonder I thought he felt like fire whilst he was having his way with me.*

The Orc did not stir or show any sign of waking as Boromir rubbed the salve into his wounds. Remembering the effect that same operation had on him, Boromir wondered at the depth of the Orc’s insensitivity.

Was it simply because he’d so recently been pounded into unconsciousness? Was it because the Orcs had greater tolerance for pain than did even the hardiest of Men?

He did not want to think of the third possibility: that his Orc’s head wounds might be too severe to permit of his awakening.

The thought of the Orc waking, in turn, sent a strange, indefinable feeling through Boromir. He imagined those yellow eyes turning their gaze on him, and he felt something that might be anticipation and that might, equally, be dread.

Impatiently he reminded himself this was not the moment to waste time on simpering thoughts about an Orc. In fact, he was starting to ask himself why he’d decreed that the Orc should be captured at all. But for now, he needed not to second-guess his decision, and just to set about getting the ruddy hell out of here. He fastened the Orc’s two flasks to his own belt, then got cautiously to his feet.

It took three Riders of Rohan a good deal of effort, grunting and muttered curses to manoeuvre the unconscious Orc up and across the shoulders of one of their horses. The animal was predictably alarmed at its new burden. One of the Riders was next obliged to do considerable sweet-talking in order to calm the beast down. That Man turned out to be the one who would ride that same horse behind the insensible Orc. He had clearly been chosen for that duty since, as one of the smallest and lightest of the Riders, his weight would be a minimal burden to the horse already encumbered by the massive Orc.
Fortunately for the sake of Boromir’s pride, he managed to get himself astride the horse that the Rohirrim brought to him without requiring anyone’s assistance. He did feel slightly absurd when the Rider who’d brought the horse boosted up Pippin to sit in front of Boromir, and Merry to sit behind him. He felt uncertain if this arrangement was made with the idea that the Hobbits could rescue him, if his wounds caught up with him and he started to fall off the horse, or whether the thought was that he could save the Hobbits should they begin to slip from what must seem to them a beast of daunting height. He also was unsure that the Hobbits would have any luck at saving him, if he did start to fall. He thought they would likely have as much chance of success as if the tiniest of book-ends were propping the most massive tome on the shelves of his father’s library.

Marshal Éomer rode over to them from the bonfire of corpses. He wished them the Valar’s speed and wished Boromir a swift return to his full health. Boromir thanked Éomer once again and wished the marshal and his Men good hunting.

Éomer had detailed six of his Riders to escort the rescued travellers and their prisoner to the fortress at Helm’s Deep. They set out at an easy gallop; the kind of pace that the famed horses of Rohan could maintain without difficulty all the night. Boromir supposed the Riders were using the stars to guide their course. For his own part, he had little work to do along that ride. The triple-burdened steed seemed fully content just to run alongside its fellows.

The Men of Rohan had given the three voyagers flasks of water and a satchel crammed full with loaves of bread. Pippin took charge of the satchel and doled out chunks of bread throughout the ride. In touching evidence of the Hobbits’ concern for their wounded friend, they more-or-less regulated their eating-pace by his. Neither of them was willing to start in on his next lump of bread until Boromir also was starting in on his.

The result was that Boromir ate a good deal more of the bread than he would normally have done, during that night’s ride. He had no wish to bear the responsibility for two healthy young Hobbits being deprived of food.

Apart from munching bread and taking the occasional swig from a water-flask, there was little for Boromir to do as they rode except to think. And his thoughts seemed all to revolve around one massive, insensible Orc warrior.

*What could I have been thinking?* he asked himself. *What could have led me to say, “This Orc is mine”?*  

*What in all Middle Earth did I think I was going to do with him?*
One conclusion he reached was that he hadn’t been thinking much at all. He strove to re-construct his thought processes at that critical juncture. All he came up with was the simple but bewildering fact that he had not wanted his ravisher to die.

*I didn’t want him to be killed upon the heels of having his way with me. But what did I want him kept alive for?*

He knew he’d had the thought that he wanted to talk with the Orc. That led him to question himself on what he had believed they could talk about.

*I really cannot see that we would have much to say.*

*I would ask him why he raped me. He would answer, “Because you have a pretty arse.” And there would be the end of that conversation!*

Boromir tried to convince himself there was some other logical purpose in interrogating the Orc.

They might learn from him of Saruman’s plans; of the numbers and distribution of the Wizard’s army. Boromir guessed that was true enough. But he still felt it was a fairly flimsy argument.

*What could we learn of Saruman’s plans that we don’t already know?*

*We know he wants to claim the One Ring for himself. We know that he knows a Halfling is carrying the Ring. That much was made clear by his order to the Orcs that the Halflings should be brought to him and not harmed.*

*And as for the strength of his army …*

It would be useful for them to learn of that, if they had enough time. If they had the time for the Rohirrim to send for help from Gondor, and for Gondor to muster its southern fiefdoms and to send troops to Rohan’s aid.

But did they have that time? From what Marshal Éomer had said, it seemed that they did not. That young Man seemed to believe that the decisive clash was imminent; that Saruman was poised to
make the throw of the dice and to hurl all his resources into the fight, for the destruction of Rohan.

Of course, young Marshal Éomer could simply be a pessimist. If he was, then so also was Boromir, for he felt a strong conviction that Éomer was right.

He felt certain of it. They stood on the brink of the battles that would mean Rohan’s death or its salvation. And as Rohan went, so might Gondor go, as well. If the power of the Horse-Lords was removed from the north, then Gondor would have a deadly foe set to strike at her unshielded back.

He thought it was too late for anything the Orc might tell them to be of help. Rohan’s scouts would be of more use at this point, in discerning the locations and trajectories of Saruman’s forces. There was little left now for Rohan and its allies to do, except to fight.

_I should kill this Orc_, Boromir told himself.

**Kill him, or let the Riders of Rohan kill him.**

The Riders, of a surety, would be only too happy to oblige. But just as when he’d imagined slaying his captor while the Orc was ravishing him, this thought also filled him with revolted disgust.

*If anyone is going to kill him, it will be me, Boromir thought fiercely. He is mine; mine to slay or to keep alive, as I choose. I will not give him to the Riders of Rohan.*

And the stupid, mad, incomprehensible fact remained that the did not want to slay the Orc.

*But if I don’t plan to slay him, what will I do with him? Do I mean to keep him as my prisoner forever?*

It seemed that those were his only two choices: to slay his captive, or to keep him perpetually imprisoned. It wasn’t as though he could let the prisoner go—for him to trot on home to Isengard and re-join the forces Saruman would soon turn loose for Rohan and Gondor’s destruction. Or, even worse, for him to turn right around and try to recapture Pippin and Merry, that he might fulfil his mission of bringing any Halflings he found back to Saruman.
The hell with it, Boromir’s thoughts snarled impatiently. Why are you bothering yourself with this nonsense? Chances are we’ll all be dead in a day or two anyway, when Saruman's mighty host comes rolling over us. Then you won’t have to worry over what to do about this Orc.

And that, Boromir Son of Denethor, he snapped back in anger at himself, is the most useless thought you’ve had yet.

Rohan will not be over-run—because if Rohan is defeated, then Gondor will be defeated, too. And you are not going to allow that to happen.

Another, arrant thought wandered into his mind: Perhaps I could keep him prisoner forever.

What drivel are you thinking now? he demanded of himself.

Do you really imagine you could take this Orc home with you?

That would go over well with your father, wouldn’t it!

“No, I’m sorry, Father. I didn’t bring home the Ring of Power so you can use it to defeat our ancient enemy and save all of our people. But I did bring home an aesthetically-pleasing Orc warrior to keep my bed warm for me.”

And where in all the Valar’s names did that thought come from?

Wildly he started to wonder if perhaps he was feverish, after all. His face, of a sudden, felt most unexpectedly hot. His mouth was suddenly dry.

And surely, he thought, with a new sense of desperation, surely I would not have such thoughts if I were not feverish!

Would I?

His imagination raced off on paths of unseemly fantasy with such speed that he could scarcely keep
pace with it. With horrifying intensity, a scene appeared in his mind: a scene of himself returning home still coated with the grime of battle, divesting himself of the many portions of his armour as he strode into his bedchamber—and there he would find his Orc, reclining in the bed, for form’s sake held captive with a wrist-iron and a chain attached to the wall at the head of the bed. He wasn’t certain how he imagined the Orc, for his brain supplied him with several potential images in swift succession. Perhaps the Orc was entirely unclad. Perhaps he wore only some scanty, silken tunic. Perhaps he still wore leathern armour, for the sake of the enjoyment that Boromir would take in shifting that armour off him.

He did know that he saw the Orc grin at him as he strode toward the bed. The prisoner would bare those yellow fangs in a snarl of welcome as his lord and master bore down upon him. He knew he would plant himself astride the Orc, still fully clad with the purpose of soon ordering his captive to remove his clothing from him. He knew the Orc would sit up, still grinning at him, and would slowly begin to lick from Boromir’s face the splattered blood that he had left there in the battle’s aftermath, disdaining to wash it from him so that his Orc could perform that duty with his tongue …

By all the sweet Valar, Boromir, his thoughts screamed at him. Stop!

He must have gasped, or made some other distressing sort of noise. Both of the Hobbits were suddenly asking him, “Are you all right?”

“Yes. Yes,” he muttered. “I am fine. Could I have some more of that water, please, Pippin?”

“Yes, of course,” his young friend said worriedly, handing a water-flask back to him.

A couple of quick swigs eased his dry mouth. The water did nothing to relieve him of his other troubling symptoms.

There would be one good thing about it, he told himself, if you were truly to engage in any such depravity. It would give Faramir the chance to have his turn at being the favoured son of the Steward.

There is no way that I would retain Father’s favour, did I reveal to him that I incline in such a direction!

I can hear myself now, he thought.
“Good news, Father,” he would say. “We finally know the true reason why I’ve spent all these years foiling your attempts at inducing me to marry. It’s because I don’t fancy women, after all. I fancy massive Orc warriors, instead.

“I don’t like little white pearls of teeth; I like hideous yellow fangs. I don’t want some slender, delicate beauty; I want a monster who could break me in half as easily as fuck me.”

Boromir, he advised himself, you are having hysterics. You must not think about this now!

You must wait until you’ve had your wounds bandaged and have got some sleep, and you can think about all of this in something resembling calm.

You cannot let yourself be carried away by remembering how you felt when he was inside you.

He handed the water-flask back to Pippin, and he thought, I suppose I have just discovered the weakness in my usual strategy for answering my body’s needs.

His usual strategy was to ignore those needs entirely, when it came to the desire for intimacy—to ignore them or to relieve his desire in the most efficient and emotion-free manner possible.

He had no wish to leave a grieving lover behind him, if or when he should be claimed by the ever-present spectre of death in battle. Nor did he wish to become the grieving lover himself, were he to partake in such tenderness with any of his fellow warriors.

Should he fall, then the army would mourn the loss of its commander, and the country would mourn their Steward’s heir. And his father and brother would mourn for him—but his thoughts, as they always did, shied hastily away from imagining his family’s grief.

All of that would be sorrow enough. He could not bear to think of one who had shared his bed—one to whom he had given his love and who gave him their love in return—being left with the pain of his loss.

Every now and then he relieved his needs with one or other of the better class of courtesans who plied their trade in the White City’s upper levels. But he still took care not to visit any one of them too frequently. He was not so blind as to believe that a woman of that profession was any more immune to love than were her respectable sisters. The grief would be just as real were it a woman of
ill repute whom he left behind to weep for him.

And there was more to it, he knew, than his abiding dread of grief. He knew that he feared any ceding of control to another. He feared the risk of anyone gaining undue influence over the Steward’s Son.

There would be women who sought to ensnare him into marriage, or to build power for themselves as the mothers of his bastards. There would be men who sought advancement in the army or at court; who thought to use his bed and his heart as the ladder-rungs of their careers.

How many careers had been built upon such a footing? He guessed that their number was beyond count. He knew he did not wish the use of his favours to contribute to their number.

For the most part—apart from the relief he occasionally provided to himself—his transactions for the purpose of relieving his body’s needs tended to be business-like encounters with fellow soldiers. They involved the strategic and well-timed application of mutually beneficial hand-work, along with the strict mutual understanding that they would allow themselves no emotional entanglement whatever.

All well and good, he thought. Except that it seems it was not so well or so good. The failure of your strategy is that it has left you so damned starved for intimacy, that all this Orc had to do was stick his member up your arse and he’s got you acting as though you’d swallowed a love-potion!

I should kill him, Boromir told himself. It was a mistake for me to save his life. I should kill him; the sooner the better.

The longer I wait, the more difficult it will be. And what if …

His mouth was dry again. He tightened his grip upon the horse’s reins, praying that neither Pippin nor Merry were noticing the signs of his turmoil.

What if I succumb to my urges and seek further intimacy with him? What if I let myself take him, just the way he took me? What if—oh, Valar give me strength—what if I allow him to take me again?

Do I really believe that I could kill him then? Do I know myself so little as to think that I could make him my lover, and then slay him?
I should kill him before I can fall prey to what I want.

They had reached the bank of a river—the Isen, as Boromir supposed, and as one of the Rohirrim confirmed in answer to Merry’s inquiry. They stopped now to water the horses, and for the Riders to determine their best route for fording the river.

One of the horsemen helped Merry and Pippin down from their steed. Boromir hoped the cautious awkwardness with which he himself dismounted would be interpreted as resulting from his wounds, rather than from the predictable state into which he’d got himself with his fantasies of implausibly scandalous carryings-on with an Orc.

He gained some respite by crouching at the river’s edge and rubbing thankfully chill water over his face. Moments later he lost that respite, when he stood and started back toward his horse.

He walked past the steed over which lay his captive Orc. As he passed by the prisoner, he saw that the Orc’s eyes were open.

His Orc was awake, and watching him.

He discerned no particular emotion in the captive’s gaze. He could see no anger there; no mockery. That gaze seemed steady, impassive—although he thought it might also hold an element of speculation.

If he is wondering what I’m going to do with him, thought Boromir, then it makes two of us who are wondering that.

As he remounted his borrowed horse, the image of his Orc’s eyes glimmered in his mind. He wondered if it were reflected moonlight that made them gleam as they did, or if those yellow eyes truly glowed in the dark.

The memory of those eyes, watching him, stayed with him through the remainder of that long, dark ride.
Chapter Three: To Douse the Fire

Chapter Summary

Taken prisoner by Boromir of Gondor, Lurtz of the Uruk-Hai waits in his cell in the fortress at Helm's Deep for his captor to pay him a visit.

Beyond Muddy Dreams

A Boromir/Lurtz Lord of the Rings Fanfiction

Chapter Three: To Douse the Fire

When is he going to come?

Lurtz was angry. His anger grew with each hour he spent in the Horse-boys’ prison cell. Anger was a common emotion for Saruman’s Uruk-Hai. But the anger he felt now was something different. This was not the standard simmering rage; not the lust to fight and destroy that usually seethed somewhere beneath his thoughts. This time what he felt was anger at himself.

Why did I let them capture me? he demanded, time and again. Why didn’t I escape?

He knew, realistically, that he couldn’t have stopped his capture. With half a troop of Horse-boys bashing him over the head, there was no shame in accepting that eventually he had to get knocked out.

His shame lay in the fact that he had not escaped, during that night-long ride to the Yellow-hairs’ fortress.

There had been only six of them! Only six of the Men of Rohan, plus his Tark and the two Halflings. Lurtz felt almost certain that he could have broken through the ropes that had bound him, if only he had tried. The ropes had not been very thick. He could have broken the ropes, grabbed a sword or a spear from the Horse-boy who was riding behind him, and could have killed that one before the Man even knew what was going on. He had no doubt that he could then have killed the rest of the Men—his Tark included. He would have had the advantage of surprise, and the far greater advantage of the fact that the eyesight of Men—unlike that of the Fighting Uruk-Hai and all the varieties of Orcs—was crippled by darkness. He could have killed all the Men, seized those bothersome Halflings and set off home with them for Isengard. He would have fulfilled his mission in honour and glory. He would have triumphed, alone of all his troop, by bringing the Halflings to his master as Saruman had commanded.

And what had he done instead?

Instead, he had done nothing at all. He had lain there flopped across a horse as though he were a dead stag that the Whiteskins had bagged on a hunting trip. He had made no effort to break the ropes; he had not even strained his wrists against them. And he knew too damned well the painfully pathetic reason why he’d made no effort to escape.

He hadn’t tried to escape because he didn’t want his Tark to die.
Of course, he tried to believe that his motivation had been something less humiliating. He tried to
convince himself that he had been moved by a combination of randiness and curiosity.

He certainly had been curious to learn what the Tark meant with his “This Orc is mine.” He was still
curious about it. He was curious enough that it had him in more-or-less a constant state of arousal,
except for now and again when his anger at himself served to temporarily calm that portion of him
down.

What he had fully expected was that the Tark would repay him in kind for the good, hard fuckings
that Lurtz had meted out to him. It made sense. When they switched who was captor and who was
captive, naturally they would also switch who was doing the fucking.

He’d guessed the Tark wouldn’t try it till they reached their destination. Travelling in such a tiny,
vulnerable party, the first priority for the Men and the Halflings had to be to get some tall stone walls
between themselves and the forces of Saruman.

But now, here they were. Here they had already been for over a day, in some fortress of the Horse-
boys, with Lurtz shoved out of sight and apparently out of most of their minds in a cell in the
fortress’ outer wall.

He’d got a good view of the fortress as they rode up. It was tucked up into an armpit of a mountain: a
tall, round tower keep that was protected at its front by a curving wall and at its back by the mountain
itself. Connecting to the wall that surrounded the keep was a long, straight curtain wall extending for
three hundred feet or so until it ran into another out-thrusting arm of the mountain. His cell was
located somewhere in that curtain wall.

He hadn’t seen his Tark since they reached the fortress. Men of Rohan had walked the horse to the
cell’s door and had heaved Lurtz inside. It seemed the Horse-boys made a reasonably accurate
estimation of his strength, because they knew well enough that the ropes wouldn’t be enough to keep
him bound for long. While four of them stood wary guard, holding him at the points of their spears,
another Man removed the ropes from his ankles and wrists and replaced them with many-times-
wrapped-around and securely locked chains.

They had left him a jug of water and a bowl of pallid, runny porridge. His hands were bound in front
of him, so he was able to eat and drink without much difficulty. On the second morning, when he
had already been in that cell for a day, four heavily-armed Men came to bring him a fresh round of
water and porridge. He would have been amused at their fear which led them to never approach him
in smaller numbers than a force of four, except for the fact that their fear was perfectly reasonable.
They were right to suspect that he might overcome them, even chained as he was. So he saw no
reason to laugh at them.

They could not know, of course, that an entirely foolish consideration held him back from fighting
them. They had—he guessed and hoped—no way of knowing that he waited, choosing not to
struggle against his captivity, because he kept on expecting that his Tark would arrive to visit him.

Why isn’t he here yet? Why doesn’t he come?

I hope he is all right, Lurtz surprised himself by thinking. I hope his wounds haven’t taken a turn for
the worse.

That’s a stupid thing to think, he told himself. The ointment wouldn’t let you down like that. You got
it into his wounds in plenty of time; they were healing up just fine the last time you had a look at
them. There’s no reason to think his wounds would be giving him any problem at all.
No, he thought grimly, the reason his Tark hadn’t come to him yet was because he chose not to.

But why would he make such a choice?

As far as Lurtz could tell, there wasn’t the slightest reason for the Man to claim him as a prisoner unless he desired to claim Lurtz’s body as his prize. He knew his former captive had enjoyed what they’d done together. That had been obvious enough. So now it was a logical conclusion that the Tark wanted more enjoyment. And perhaps he also wanted to wipe out any humiliation he might feel about his capture, by rutting inside Lurtz just as thoroughly as Lurtz had rutted inside him.

So what in blazes was he waiting for? Why was it that Lurtz had been here for a day, a night, and much of another day, and his Tark still hadn’t come?

Dread twined coldly through his guts as the idea occurred to him that perhaps the Man wasn’t even in the fortress at all.

It didn’t make sense that he would dump Lurtz here and then leave. All the same, it could have happened. Maybe he had picked up a larger party of Horse-boys as protection for himself and the Halflings and he had headed south for that home of his, back to his father the Steward of Gondor, “the richest and most powerful man in Middle Earth.”

Maybe, Lurtz thought with a twinge of fear, maybe he left me here as punishment, because he knew being locked up forever would be worse for me than death or any torture.

He wouldn’t do that, Lurtz fiercely told himself. He thought that he and his Tark understood each other better than that. He thought the understanding between them was the respect of one warrior for another; the respect he was sure they both had felt as they fought by the shore of the Great River. He thought they had felt mutual respect, as well, when they’d fucked without ever losing sight of each other’s eyes.

With that kind of connection, he couldn’t believe the Man would just leave him here to rot. He wouldn’t treat a fellow warrior like that. If he did not intend to make some use of Lurtz, then the Tark would simply kill him, not abandon him here.

Lurtz growled quietly as he noticed that these thoughts had brought his arousal to a sudden halt. No surprise there, he thought. Naturally, his erection would make a speedy retreat when he confronted such disturbing prospects as spending the remainder of his life abandoned in a Horse-boy prison cell.

He will be here, his thoughts insisted. He will be here. I simply have to wait.

It wasn’t as though waiting was an unusual experience for him. He had done a great deal of waiting, throughout the months of his life. Saruman of Many Colours felt particular fondness for Lurtz, as the first successful example of the new beings he had created. He enjoyed keeping Lurtz near him. Now and then he would speak to his favoured Uruk, explaining to his creation some detail of his Wizardly genius. Between “now” and “then” Lurtz did a significant amount of waiting; waiting for the next moment when his master would not be too busy to notice him.

For hours at a time Lurtz would stand or crouch in an out-of-the-way corner of the room, while the Wizard pursued his daily work. Lurtz had watched and listened as Saruman tinkered with the recipes for his explosive powders and liquids; as he received reports from, and gave his orders to, that sneaking, pale little Man of Rohan who was betraying his king. Lurtz had been there, silently watching, while his master removed the cloth which covered that strange, shining black orb. He had been there, many a time, when Saruman the Great stood with his hands on the orb and received his own orders from one who was the greater master: the ancient lord in the East who supposedly would
one day rule them all.

Lurtz had never heard the voice of that great lord in the East. He had only heard Saruman’s replies to his master. But he had seen the crimson glow from the orb that bathed the Wizard in its light when the great one spoke to him.

Of course Lurtz knew very well that Saruman intended to betray this great master of his. He knew it because Saruman had told him about it, on many occasions and in loving detail.

One of Saruman’s chief joys was talking about himself. He loved to speak of his plans, and of how brilliant he was. Before Lurtz had been born, probably Saruman had talked to himself, or just to all of the inanimate objects about him.

Lurtz liked to believe that he was Saruman’s favourite listener. He thought the Wizard gained more satisfaction from boasting to him than from talking to furniture or to the walls, and Lurtz never interrupted him with comments of his own, like that little Rohirrim traitor was wont to do. Lurtz never made his own comments unless the Wizard told him to speak; and often Saruman seemed pleased with the answers Lurtz gave him. Each sight of his master’s smug and satisfied little smile was a treasure to Lurtz. So was the way he could feel it in his mind when Saruman was pleased with him.

It might have been objected that the Wizard showed little wisdom in boasting of his plans to betray his own master, when speaking with one to whom he himself was master. But that would be a foolish objection; one which would occur only to someone who did not understand. The knowledge of Saruman’s own treachery would never move Lurtz to commit treason himself.

The lord in the east had not created Saruman, as he of Many Colors had created Lurtz and all his fellows. Lurtz and all the rest of Saruman’s Fighting Uruk-Hai could never betray their master. They had been created solely for the purpose of doing his bidding.

Except, Lurtz thought bitterly, except you are betraying Saruman, aren’t you? You betrayed him by not escaping, and by not seizing the Halflings when you had the chance. You betray him every time you choose not to fight to escape; every time you make the choice to just sit here, waiting, hoping for another sight of a Tark who has eyes like a winter morning’s skies.

That was what his Tark’s eyes put into Lurtz’s mind, even though he knew it was idiotic of him to wax so poetical about it. The Man’s eyes made him think of the sky above Isengard’s mountains, on a morning that was bright with sun despite the clouds that were rolling in, dark with the promise of snow.

Isn’t that just beautiful, he sneered at himself. Because some cursed Tark has sun-and-storm-cloud eyes and an arse that screams out “Fuck me,” you have made the choice to betray the master who created you.

And now he betrayed Saruman again, as he chose to think more about his Tark, instead of scheming plans for how he would escape and serve his master. He let his imagination drift into dreams of what the Tark might do to him, when he finally chose to visit Lurtz in his cell.

It’s going to be a challenge for him, fucking me properly, Lurtz thought, with my ankles chained together. But he felt certain the challenge could be entertainingly surmounted. There were all sorts of manners in which that could be achieved—even though many of them, he regretfully realized, probably meant he would not be able to watch his Tark’s eyes while getting fucked.

Of course, perhaps the Tark would unlock or cut loose the chains. But Lurtz didn’t think that was
likely.

The Man was a warrior who was proud and confident in his own skills, but that did not mean that he was stupid. He had to know how easily Lurtz would be able to conquer him, if the Uruk warrior had his freedom. For the sake of whatever or whomever he fought to protect, the Tark would choose to defend his own life by keeping his captive chained.

So he would leave the chains there in place around Lurtz’s ankles. And what would he do next?

Lurtz knew this was another foolish thought on his part. Even so, he hoped the Tark would not choose to position him on his hands and knees. That would put Lurtz in mind of the one other person who had fucked him in that manner. And he decidedly did not want to think of that person while the Tark was having his way with him.

What other ways might his Tark try?

He thought of one plausible option. It made him grin, close his eyes and hiss with pleasure as he imagined it.

He believed they were the right respective heights for it to fairly easily work. If he remembered aright from the fight at the Great River—the last time they had encountered each other when both of them were standing—the top of the Tark’s head reached to about the level of Lurtz’s chin. With that sort of height difference, he thought it ought to be easy enough for the Man to take him standing up. Maybe a little adjustment would be necessary, but probably nothing too elaborate.

He imagined his Tark pressing him up against a wall; imagined feeling the wall’s rough stone scraping against his face. He tried to imagine just precisely how it would feel when his captor’s cock was shoved up inside him.

That was a challenge for him to imagine, but a very pleasurable challenge. It was a challenge because the body temperature of Men was so much cooler than that of any Uruk or Orc.

It had felt astonishing, fucking his Tark. The Man’s body was not cold enough to dampen his ardour; not by a long stretch. But it had a strange, shiver-inducing coolness, as if somehow Lurtz was fucking a shallow mountain lake at the very height of summer.

How would it feel to have that same coolness piercing him, inside him?

He wondered if the Tark would reach forward and take hold of him. How soft will the skin of his hand feel? Lurtz wondered. It wouldn’t be all that soft, he guessed. The Man was a warrior, after all. But still he thought it would be soft enough for the fiercest grip to feel like some whispering caress.

Unless, of course, the Man kept his gauntlets on. That would make his grasp feel more like that of Lurtz’s own hand. But Lurtz hoped he wouldn’t retain the gauntlets. He ached to feel the Man’s breeze-cool fingers on his flesh.

He thought, It will feel like fucking outside in the rain.

He imagined the Tark’s voice whispering to him—although what words might be said, Lurtz had no idea.

Maybe, he thought, maybe he’ll press his lips to my shoulders, to my neck …

That was something he had heard about in barrack-room gossip. The Orcs, who had years or centuries of life behind them instead of only months, sometimes told stories of how Men went in for
all manner of mouth-play with their lovers. They said Men liked to touch their mouths together; they liked to rub their mouths all over their lovers’ bodies; they liked to close their mouths around—

Lurtz’s eyes jerked open at the rattling, clanking sounds of his cell door being opened.

*It’s too soon for more water and porridge.*

He manoeuvred himself to his feet, doggedly fighting the impediments caused by his chains and by his limbs having gone to sleep.

A lone Man walked into the cell. The door thudded closed behind him.

Lurtz growled low in his throat. He knew that he was smiling like a simpleton as he drank in the sight before him. Hopefully, the Man at whom he was goggling wouldn’t recognize his expression for the besotted foolishness that it was.

*There he is.*

There stood Lurtz’s Tark: alive, well, and *here*. There he stood, winter-sky eyes, “fuck me” arse, and all.

Not that Lurtz could see anything of his Tark’s arse just now, since the Man stood facing toward him and was fully clothed. He had changed his clothes, and Lurtz did not approve of the change. This new outfit had clearly been provided to him by the Men of Rohan. It included a long, green and brown tunic of the kind the Horse-boys wore, with a chain mail shirt visible at his collar and at the cuffs of his sleeves. Lurtz noticed that the Tark wasn’t wearing his gauntlets. He felt a tremor shoot through him at the memory of what he’d just been imagining one of those bare hands doing to him.

He didn’t much like seeing his Tark dressed like one of the hated Horse-boys, but it really didn’t matter. What mattered was that the Man was here.

Still, that change of clothing made for a way to start them talking. Lurtz was starting to suspect that if he did not say something first, they might just stand there staring at each other for days.

He remarked, “Can’t say I care for your new look, Tarkling. Your own clothes suited you better.”

The Tark probably thought it an odd choice of conversation topic. Still, it did its job of getting their discussion started. He walked close enough to Lurtz that they could have grabbed hold of each other, if they chose to—though his chained wrists would have hampered Lurtz’s ability to grab. Then the Man said steadily, “That’s as may be. My own clothes are rather the worse for wear.”

“How are you feeling?” Lurtz asked next.

His Tark studied him with a calm and unreadable gaze—or at least it was a gaze which Lurtz had no notion of how to read. “My arse is a little sore,” was the matter-of-fact reply, “but I’ll live. How are you feeling?” he asked in turn.

“I’ll live,” Lurtz replied, “until your Horse-boy friends decide I’ve enjoyed their hospitality for long enough.”

Now Lurtz did see emotions on the Man’s face that he thought he understood. He saw a hint of anger, and he also saw pride. “The Riders of Rohan will not kill you,” the Tark answered. “If anyone here is to kill you, it will be me.”

Lurtz gave a grin of appreciation. He ran his tongue across his fangs. “Not just yet, though, eh,
“Tark?” he speculated. “I’d guess you’ve got something more fun than that planned for me, first. You could have killed me back there on the battlefield, if that was all you had in mind.”

“Yes,” the Man told him flatly. “I could have.”

“So what are you planning, pretty one? You ready to repay me in kind for that sore arse of yours?”

The Man’s expression tightened into a look of distaste—or at least, that was the kind of look Lurtz thought it was. He said, “Doubtless you will be surprised to learn: the Steward of Gondor’s sons are not brought up to see the raping of prisoners as appropriate behaviour.”

Lurtz let his grin grow broader. He countered with the question, “What makes you think it would be rape?”

Their gazes met and held each other, for the first time since that fucking which Lurtz so treasured in his memory. From the smouldering look in his Tark’s eyes, Lurtz thought—and hoped—he might be about to demonstrate on Lurtz some of that Mannish mouth-play that was among the favourite subjects of Orcish gossip. But the Man made no move toward him. Finally he said, “I regret that I must disappoint you. Taking one’s pleasure with a prisoner is not behaviour in which the Steward’s sons indulge, whether it be rape or not.”

Lurtz hoped he was managing to look amused instead of disappointed. He observed, “That’s too bad. Sounds to me like the sons of the Steward don’t have very much fun.”

His Tark gave some sort of expression that was either a smile or a grimace. “That is an accurate assessment,” he stated. “‘Having fun’ occupies a far lower place on our lists of priorities than it does on yours.”

“Then you should take this chance while you have it,” Lurtz advised him. “Your father isn’t here to see you, Steward’s Son. Nor are the rest of your people. No one is going to know what you do inside this cell.”

The Man’s glance flicked in impatience toward the cell door, with the small, barred window near its top. “No one,” he pointed out, “except for any Man of Rohan who just happens to walk within earshot of that door.”

Lurtz was once again enjoying the hell out of this conversation. He inquired, “Can’t you pleasure yourself quietly, Tarkling? I know I can. Of course,” he added, “I can understand it if you believe I will drive you so mad with passion that you’ll be unable to hold your tongue.”

The look in the Tark’s eyes now suggested he was thinking with greater favour on the notion of slaying Lurtz at once. As an alternative to bloodshed, he said in icy tones, “Unfortunately for your plans of entertainment, I have more pressing demands on my time than dallying with an Orc.”

Lurtz bared his fangs. “I am no Orc,” he snarled. “I am Uruk. Remember that. No mere Orc could fuck you as well as I did.”

His Tark seemed uncertain at first of how to answer that. He collected himself and countered, “I hope never to be in the situation of learning that for myself. Whatever you be, I have not the time to dally with you—Uruk.”

Probably, Lurtz guessed, he ought to feel satisfied that the Tark had made the concession of calling him “Uruk” instead of “Orc.” But it suddenly seemed important to him—absurdly important, if he had taken the time to think of it—that this Man should also know and acknowledge that he had a name.
Belligerently he stated, “My name is Lurtz.”

The other contemplated him in what Lurtz interpreted as a sort of solemn surprise. At last he gave a quiet answer, “Very well. Lurtz. My name is Boromir.”

“I knew that,” Lurtz realised aloud. “That Halfling whimpered it often enough.”

Anger sparked again in the Man’s eyes at the recollection, but Lurtz was far from bothered by that. He made what he thought was an exceedingly reasonable offer. “So you don’t feel like fucking me—Boromir? That is fine by me. I’ll be more than happy to do you again. You say what you want me to do, and I’ll do it.”

Boromir of Gondor stared at him with such fire in his gaze that Lurtz felt certain the Man would take him up on his offer. But his silence dragged on long enough that Lurtz decided his Tark required more urging.

“Here’s your chance, Tark,” he prodded. “You won’t get a better offer than this.”

Instead of acquiescing as any sensible person would have done, the Man abruptly changed the subject. His glance shifting aside for an instant, he said, “I’m glad to see that you’ve had food and water. I had thought the Rohirrim might ‘forget’ to bring you any.”

“They haven’t ‘forgotten’ yet,” Lurtz said, mightily amused at the Man’s blatant subject-changing. “None of them have yet been by to empty the piss-pail,” he went on, nodding at the bucket in question where it sat in a corner, “but I didn’t think they would. I don’t guess that I’m their most welcome guest.”

“Since I see you are being reasonably well tended,” Boromir forged on, “I’ve accomplished all I set out to do here. Good day to you. There is much yet to do in readying this fortress for your friends’ attack.”

Lurtz tried a desperate move to delay his Tark’s departure. “If you’re not going to fuck me,” he challenged, “then why don’t you go ahead and kill me? Or you could do both at the same time. That way you could explain away any noises the folk outside might hear, if I’m dead when you leave this cell.”

The idea for that suggestion had hit him a moment before, when he realized his visitor was wearing a dagger at his belt. Embarrassingly, he hadn’t even noticed the dagger earlier. He had probably been too cursed busy staring into the Man’s bright-sky-and-snowstorm-clouds eyes.

Very briefly, Lurtz considered making a lunge for that dagger. If he could grab it and hold it to his Tark’s throat, he might perhaps negotiate his way out of this cell with the Son of Gondor’s Steward as his hostage …

It took him only an instant to discard that notion. With his wrists chained, he wouldn’t be able to both hold the dagger and restrain his captive. And since his thrice-damned ankles were also chained together, the Tark could escape him with ridiculous ease, simply by giving Lurtz one good shove and knocking him over.

Not to mention the fact that Lurtz had not the slightest intention of slitting Boromir of Gondor’s throat.

The Man’s eyes glittered with what was probably angered disgust, at Lurtz’s suggestion of simultaneous fucking and killing. Coldly he stated, “I will kill enough of your folk before this day is through, without adding you to that number.”
He turned away, strode for the cell door and pounded the door once with his fist. Immediately it was opened by some Horse-boy who must have been lurking just outside. Without one backward glance, Lurtz’s Tark was gone. The door closed with a grimly final thud behind him.

Lurtz could do nothing but stare, overwhelmed with a mixture of surprise, fury and loss.

He thought in astonishment, *Stupid, idiotic Tark! What is that crazy Man thinking?*

Anyone could have seen that the Man of Gondor wanted him. Lurtz didn’t think he’d ever seen a person look so randy who wasn’t in the actual process of fucking.

*He wants me, so what is stopping him from taking me?*

Anyone could have seen what the Man wanted—except for, perhaps, the Man himself.

*Maybe he really doesn’t know,* Lurtz thought with a feeling of wonder. *Maybe he truly spent all of that time in this cell asking himself what he was doing here.*

*What he wasn’t doing is what he ought to have been doing—that is, fucking me senseless!*

At least Lurtz could solve his part of the problem with which Lord Boromir of Gondor had left him. Or he could solve it temporarily, anyhow. Giving a bitter snarl he flung himself against the nearest wall, just as he had earlier imagined his Tark doing to him. He shoved aside the protective flaps of his armour, yanked up his tunic and pulled himself free of his loincloth. The familiar action of taking hold of himself had a new and exciting strangeness to it this time, thanks to the chains about his wrists.

Fiercely he rutted against the wall. He revelled in the feel of the building-stone that scraped his face; in his hands and his chains jerking mercilessly along his cock. He fought to imagine the sweet chill of the Man’s hands, instead of his own heat. He desperately tried to instill in his mind the belief that the Man’s hard coolness was there within him, plunging deep inside him.

Unsurprisingly, it didn’t take long for him to finish himself off. He had been more than hard enough before he even got started. He heard his hisses and growls growing louder, and he thought, *Get yourselves an earful of that, any Horse-boy shits who may listening outside the door!* The end came for him while he thought of the Horse-boys out there, listening. As he spat out his hands and his chains and the wall, he heard himself growl out, “Boromir!”

Impatiently putting himself back together, he felt his passion be replaced by fury. Once again, Lurtz was furious with himself.

*Call him an idiotic Tark all you want,* Lurtz thought. *You are every bit as idiotic as he is.*

*Why the bloody hell did you think it was so important for that Man to know your name? What good is his knowing your name going to do you? It’s not as though he is going to take you home with him and introduce you to his father!*  

He demanded of himself, *What manner of servant of Saruman are you? Over and over you have chances to free yourself and to fight for him again. And over and over you throw those chances away!*

The Tark was absurdly pathetic in resisting his carnal urges, but at least he still was able to fight for the cause he loved. Lurtz, on the other hand, was being just as pathetic as the Man, by letting his lust rule him. And by giving in to that lust, he had sacrificed his ability to serve his master.
He had sacrificed his one true purpose for living.

If the Tark was not fucking him or letting himself be fucked, and if Lurtz was not fighting for Saruman, then what the hell kind of a point was there in Lurtz being alive?

From the way Lord Boromir of Gondor had talked about it, the army of Isengard’s attack on this fortress was likely near at hand. That was good; good in that they were that much closer to achieving one of Saruman’s goals. But it was not good for Lurtz, except in the sense that everything good for Saruman was also good for him.

It was not good for Lurtz that his fellows would fight for their master while he sat uselessly in this cell. It would not be good for him, either, if his fellows found him when they were sacking the fortress. The Fighting Uruk-Hai would not indulge in any Man-like sentimental foolery such as freeing their imprisoned comrade if they discovered him here. No; if they found that he had been so weak as to let himself be captured, they would promptly kill him. And if they did not have too many pressing tasks to attend to in reducing the fortress to ruins, then they would stop and take the time to eat him, too.

It was fitting. It would be an appropriate end for him. If he could not serve his master by fighting, then it was right and proper for him to serve instead by providing food for some of Saruman’s warriors.

But just because it was right and proper, that did not mean Lurtz was happy about the concept.

Anyone could become food for the warriors of Saruman. Not just anyone could fight with the skill which Lurtz possessed.

*With the skill which I possess when I damned well use it, instead of just lingering about making cow-eyes at Boromir of Gondor!*

Lurtz was certain he could give better service to He of Many Colours by freeing himself to fight again, than by possibly making a meal for a few warriors in the midst of their sacking this fortress. Somehow he had to get free, so he could prove the truth of his belief.

He glowered at the chains around his wrists. Strong though he knew his fangs and his claws to be, he had too good a hold on reality to believe that he could gnaw or scratch his way through these chains. And of course the Horse-boys had not conveniently left any chain-cutting tools in his cell.

It seemed to him that the best potential weak points, of the binding at his wrists as well as at his ankles, were the locks. He studied the lock at his wrists. It was a large and formidable-looking example of the locksmiths’ art, but he still believed he would have more luck with it than with the chains themselves. If he worked at it long enough, surely he could smash that lock until it fell apart and he could pull the chains loose from it.

He wondered if some Horse-boy was still outside his cell door, to hear what he was doing and send for reinforcements to stop him. He doubted it. Likely that one outside had only been stationed there while Lord Boromir was visiting his prisoner. But he figured he still should do some reconnaissance before putting his plan into action.

He shuffle-hopped his tortuously slow way toward the door. Finally, he was able to peer out through the window’s bars. In front of the door and to either side, he saw no Horse-boys nearby. The few he could see were far across the courtyard, toward the cliff that formed the fortress’ back wall—predictably, doing something-or-other with some horses.
To make double-sure, he called out quietly, “Hey, Yellow-hairs! Any of you pretty boys out there? When is somebody going to come in here and clean out the slop-bucket? I thought you Men were too bleeding civilized to make a guest of yours live in a latrine.”

He received no answer at all, and decided with satisfaction that this meant the Men were unlikely to hear him smashing his lock.

One bit of his cell wall seemed as good as any other as a location for his lock-smashing project. He shuffled a short ways away from the door again, brought back his arms in the most forceful swing he could muster, and slammed his lock against the wall.

In that activity he spent the next couple of hours. The lock was certainly getting scratched, twisted and flattened. But it was neither twisted nor flattened enough for him to pull the chains free.

Long before those first two hours had passed, Lurtz had developed a thoroughly derogatory opinion of the Horse-boys’ building stone. If he had been slamming this lock against the good, strong black stone of Orthanc, the lock would have been pulverised in no time flat. But here, the wall itself was getting pulverised.

He scowled at the sand-like dust seeping down to the floor from the stone against which he’d been most recently bashing his lock. He thought sourly, If I keep at this long enough, I can beat my way through this damned wall. Not that he believed it could actually become a viable method of escape. Based on the rate at which the stones he’d been hitting were disintegrating, it would take him days at the least to pound out a big enough hole. He thought it vanishingly unlikely that the Men of Rohan and his own comrades would leave him alone for the amount of time he’d need to smash his escape route through the wall.

This lock can’t hold up forever, can it? he wondered. A couple more hours at the most, and it will have to be in pieces!

He went back to his pounding. Gradually he began to realize that something else was pounding through him—something beyond the thud of each time he smashed his wrists’ lock against the wall.

The army of Saruman is close, he thought. They are almost here.

He could feel them almost as clearly as if he were there as one of them. He could almost feel that his feet were hitting the ground alongside theirs, as thousands upon thousands of them marched together toward the walls of the Horse-boys’ fortress.

With the knowledge of their nearness, came something more. Once again, Lurtz could feel Saruman’s presence.

He’d had little sense of his master’s presence throughout most of this painfully unsuccessful mission. Ever since his troop reached about twenty leagues away from Isengard, on their journey to the Great River, most of his sense of Saruman had been gone. All he’d had left of it was the reassuring, constant sensation, somewhere deep in his mind, that told him Saruman was still there.

But now, as his fellows grew closer and closer, his sense of Saruman’s presence also grew. The strength of that presence in the minds of all the others brought him back into Lurtz’s mind as well. Lurtz felt their master’s exultation in the thought that at last, at last, he had made his cast of the dice. The time for skulking secrecy was ended. What lay before all of them now was open, unabashed war.

Saruman’s fierce joy leapt up in his mind, and Lurtz revelled in the feelings it brought him. He
savoured along with his master the knowledge that Rohan’s pride would soon be crushed into the
dirt. Soon their plumed helms and their wind-snapping banners would wallow in gore and mud.
Their glory would be trampled to nothingness. Their vaunting arrogance would become scarcely a
memory, as their remaining few crept pathetically into their new lives as Saruman’s slaves.

Outside his cell, it had grown dark. Lurtz might not even have noticed that fact, except for the new,
golden gleam of torchlight that he could see through the barred window of his prison. The torchlight
showed him something else: rain, a fast, driving torrent, blowing diagonally past that tiny window.

He could hear the army now. He heard, first, the reverberating beat of their drums. Lurtz adjusted the
rhythm of his strikes against the cell wall, so that each blow upon the lock came in time with his
comrades’ drumbeats.

Now he could hear their voices—and he was certain he heard them with his ears, not only with his
mind. He heard the groundswell of their roaring battle-cry, rising up with the deafening might of ten
thousand voices together. Joyously Lurtz flung back his head and roared along with them.

He knew it, when the battle was joined. He knew it from the changing tone of the Uruk-Hai roars,
and from another sound closer to him than the roaring: the strange, hollow, mocking “twang” that
was the sound of hundreds of archers firing as one.

For a time, he kept pounding his lock against the wall, harder even than before. He thought, I have
got to free myself! I must be free by the time our boys break in here. I must fight off any of them who
tries to kill me, and join in the battle myself before all of it is over!

He heard scattered shouts and battle-cries of Men. He heard the roaring yells of his own people: not
in their unison war-cry, now, but the shouting of individual Uruk-Hai in combat.

And slowly the knowledge grew in him that something was hideously wrong.

The shouts of his comrades, fighting so near to him but without him fighting by their sides, began to
stab into his skull as though each shout was a spear-blade. It became harder and harder for him to
keep on slamming that lock against the wall, for his arms so longed to be doing something else: to be
sweeping his sword in great arcs through the bodies of his enemies. Within him burned a consuming,
rampaging lust for the feel of foemen’s corpses trampled beneath his boots; for the beautiful sound of
their screams; for the glorious smell and taste of their bright-spraying blood.

His heart was pounding far harder than he had ever felt it pound in battle. He suddenly realised that
he was sweating, and sweating in a way that he had never done before. The sweat poured off him in
rivulets; near as heavy, he thought, as though his sweat were the rain outside. When he shook his
head in a useless effort to clear it, he saw drops of his sweat spatter over the floor.

The stabbing in his head, the drenching sweat: slowly Lurtz began to understand their meaning.

I need to be there with them! I need to be there with my comrades, fighting and slaying to serve our
master’s will. I need to kill, to destroy, as he commands. If I cannot obey his command—it may
cause me to destroy myself.

He wondered, with a desperate attempt at detachment, if something like this had ever happened
before. Probably it had not. Probably no other Uruk-Hai of Saruman had faced the torment of being
unable to fight at his master’s command. Any who was too ill or too wounded to fight would be slain
out-of-hand. All of the others would fight. They would fight until the last twitches of life were hewn
from them.
His lust to destroy was so ravenous, he wanted to turn his fangs and claws against himself. If it had not been for the leather shoulder-guards of his armour, he knew he would have started biting great chunks of flesh from his own shoulders. Dizzily looking down at them, he realized his chained hands were shaking. His brain and his body screamed in a hunger that commanded him to bring up his hands and rend out his own throat.

*I can’t!* his mind shrieked. *I can’t! The instant I smell my blood, there will be no stopping. I will never stop until I’ve ripped the life from myself.*

*If I tear myself apart, I can never fight for Saruman again.*

Somehow, he started up again, slamming the lock of his chains against the cell wall. Each blow now seemed to fall with ponderous slowness, as though he laboured alone to wield a mighty battering ram. His growls sounded in his ears like sobs. He fought to maintain that one movement, to smash the lock against the wall again and again, so his hands would not be free to tear away his life.

The explosion, when it came, was an exquisite relief. From somewhere off to his left came an incredible noise, as though all the thunder in Middle-Earth’s skies had sounded together at once. The memory flashed into his mind of Saruman, chuckling quietly to himself as he mixed together tiny pinches of different powders in a dish on the table before him, then touching the flame of a candle to the mixture and watching it explode.

As fire and great dark chunks of stone flew at him, Lurtz thought, *Good. The lads have broken through these bastards’ pathetic wall.* In the next instant rubble rained down on him and wrenched his consciousness from him.
Chapter Four: In the Ashes

Chapter Summary

Rescued by Boromir from the explosion of the fortress' wall, Lurtz does not believe that his situation can get much stranger. He soon learns that he is wrong, as his entire world seems to disintegrate around him. Can Boromir help him to rebuild his life out of this destruction?

Beyond Muddy Dreams

A Boromir/Lurtz *Lord of the Rings* Fanfiction

Chapter Four: In the Ashes

His consciousness came back to him in the strangest awakening of his life. Or, it was the strangest awakening apart from the moment of his birth.

Someone was carrying him. He pieced together sensation and sight to realise he was slung across that someone’s shoulders. No one in Lurtz’s life had carried him, but that did not change the fact that it was happening now.

He knew the person carrying him was a Man. He caught occasional glimpses of the Man’s Rohirrim garb. And he recognized the Man’s scent. He recognized the smell from hauling this same Man over his shoulder across the Plains of Rohan, and from two treasured, unforgettable fuckings. The Man carrying him now was his own Tark, Lord Boromir of Gondor.

It was yet night, and the battle still raged. The rain had stopped, but that must have happened only recently; he saw puddles here and there, and the wet cobblestones gleamed in the torchlight. He could hear sword-clangs and the whirring flights of arrows; war-cries of Uruk-Hai and Men; the general yells and screams of combat. The greater part of that noise sounded behind him, and he thought it was growing steadily farther away. Underneath it all, he heard quiet grunts of effort from the Man beneath him.

That one sound brought him fully, abruptly awake. In sudden urgency, Lurtz commanded, “Tark, put me down!”

The only answer was a slightly louder grunt.

“Oh, Tark!” he insisted. “I’m too heavy for you to carry! You’re going to hurt yourself.”

The Tark struggled onward for a few steps further, probably just to prove that he could. Then he halted and shifted Lurtz around, until the Uruk could slide awkwardly down off the Man’s back.

Lurtz’s knees, humiliatingly, buckled as his feet hit the ground. His Tark managed to turn around and support him so that he did not fully fall. Lurtz straightened again almost immediately, but he made no effort to move away from his Tark. Standing there with Lord Boromir’s arms about him, and with the Man gazing up at him, would ordinarily have been a position for Lurtz to relish. Only, just now, there was far too much else going on that required his attention.
A quick glance around him told that they were inside the keep of the Horse-boys’ fortress. Over to his left he saw the curving outer wall. Atop that wall, he could see the backs of archers firing down on the fortress’ attackers. To his right—probably the direction in which the Tark had been heading—was a broad staircase leading upward to the inner tower.

He looked back toward the Man who was holding him. Boromir’s hair was sodden with rain, like the rest of him. He was breathing heavily from the effort of carrying Lurtz, and Lurtz felt suddenly outraged at him for taking such risks with himself.

“Tark, have you lost your mind?” he demanded. “You may have opened up your wounds, over-taxing yourself like that!”

Boromir of Gondor managed a faint smile, likely at the conversation’s absurdity under their current circumstances. “I doubt it,” he said, sounding thoroughly winded. “My wounds are near to healed.”

“Near to healed or not, it was an addle-pated thing to do,” Lurtz snapped. “I must be twice your weight!”

“No quite twice my weight,” the Man answered, once again contemplating him with an expression that Lurtz could not interpret. “You are over-estimating yourself, Uruk.”

It seemed to be only then that Boromir noticed he was still holding Lurtz about the waist, despite Lurtz’s obvious capability of standing on his own. The Man let go and stepped back from him, with a strange and bitter-seeming sort of smile.

Lurtz’s mind was still trying to catch up with the process of how they must have reached this point. Watching Boromir shove wet strands of hair from his face, the realization hit home to Lurtz that the deadly spell of his mind’s battle-frenzy had broken. Or at the least, it was broken for now.

He still felt echoes of that madness. But it was only a longing, now, not the desperate compulsion that before had urged him to destroy himself.

He wondered whether being struck on the head by the exploding wall’s rubble had loosened the compulsion’s hold on him. He thought it was more likely due to that than to the simperingly silly other possible cause that had leapt into his mind. He was nowhere near besotted enough to believe that the bond with his fellow Uruk-Hai had been loosened by his proximity to Lord Boromir of Gondor. He thought sure that his link with his fellows would come back to him. It had to come back. But now, while its hold on him was still faint, he could ask the overwhelming question that was suddenly whirling through his brain.

That question burst out from him, “Tark, when the wall exploded, did you go running into the thick of things to rescue me?”

Once again, he found that the Man’s facial expression was unreadable. “Yes,” Boromir admitted quietly, his gaze meeting that of Lurtz. “That is more-or-less what I did.”

There was nothing he could do except gape at his Tark in astonishment. He heard himself protest, “I don’t believe it!”

The Man glanced away from him, then, seeming to gaze into nothingness as he recounted what had happened. “I was on the wall, near the fortress gate, when I saw the explosion. I knew it must have been very near to your cell—or worse. So I went to find you.”
Still rapt in disbelief, Lurtz repeated, “You went to find me. Just like that. With battle raging all around you, you went to find me.” Slowly he shook his head, as wonder spread through him. “I think you really have lost your mind.”

The Tark gave another, this time rueful-seeming, smile. “You are not alone in that,” he said. “Several of my friends objected strenuously to my going out there.”

Lurtz felt an unexpected and most unwelcome surge of jealousy at the thought of his Tark having friends. *Don’t be such an idiot,* he told himself. *Of course he has friends. He must have friends aplenty. Those two blasted Halflings, for a start; but there are sure to be many more of them.*

*And why should his having friends bother you? You have thousands of friends!* Although just now, his tie to those thousands of friends felt painfully faint. He had to dig deeply into his mind to find that connection again, and to reassure himself that the connection was indeed still there.

In the meantime, as Lurtz thought of this, Lord Boromir’s facial expression had turned frowningly serious. The Man said, “As you have reminded me: we are still in the midst of a battle, and I should get back to it. If I were to undo your chains, would you give me your parole?”

Lurtz thought he might know what the word “parole” meant, but he felt far from certain of it. His uncertainty must have shown on his face. Boromir explained, “It means that you would give your promise to remain my prisoner, and neither to escape nor to take up arms against us.”

Now it was Lurtz’s turn to frown. He doubted the Tark would understand what he was feeling as he answered. He wasn’t any too sure that he understood, himself. He felt a twisted-up jumble of emotions. Of all those emotions, the strongest was regret.

“No, Tark,” he answered. “I’m sorry. I can’t do that. If I’m freed, then I will have to fight against you.”

His Tark heaved a quiet sigh, but then turned briskly to making alternate plans. “Then I must lock you up again. The chamber that Lord Gamling gave me for my use while I am here will serve the purpose. He gave me its key—a gesture of courtesy to any guest, most like. If he had known to what use I intend to put the room, perhaps he would not have given it. I doubt the Rohirrim would think favourably of the notion that a chamber of their castle is to house an Orc—that is, an Uruk.”

Lurtz nodded his thanks to the Man for again remembering that distinction. Then he glanced without enthusiasm toward the tower stairs. He asked, “I suppose this chamber of yours is up those stairs?”

“It is,” Boromir answered, not sounding much more enthusiastic than Lurtz. “I suppose I can try carrying you up there …”

“No, you cannot!” Lurtz snapped out. “You would fall over, drop me, and the both of us would break our necks in falling down the stairs.”

His Tark admitted, “There is a certain amount of probability to that. All right, then,” he went on, casting Lurtz what was likely a humorous look. “If I am on hand to help stop you from falling over, are you prepared to hop upstairs?”

“As prepared as I’ll ever be,” Lurtz decided, eyeing the staircase with dislike. “Everyone else should be too busy fighting for them to notice what an arsehole I’m looking like.”

Thus they made their slow and ridiculous way into the Rohirrim tower, Boromir with one arm around Lurtz’s waist. Lurtz took his every ungainly hop with an exceedingly ill grace, swearing under his breath.
“You know, Tark,” he muttered when they were not quite halfway up the stairs, “it’d be a lot simpler just to kill me.”

“Yes,” the Tark returned, “but keeping you alive is so much more entertaining.”

_That’s something, anyhow, Lurtz thought. “Entertaining” isn’t as good as “irresistibly alluring,” but it’s a start._

He didn’t like to think of how long it took for him to hop up those stairs. It astonished him that the Tark would take all of that time, when he should have been rushing back into battle. But the Tark had already shown that this battle was scarcely his greatest priority, by haring off to rescue Lurtz in the middle of it.

Once inside the tower, Lurtz was not best pleased to discover that this chamber of Boromir’s was up yet another flight of stairs. He groaned as he glowered at them.

“Are you pulling my leg?” he demanded. “You’re sure you can’t just lock me up someplace on this floor?”

“It is only one more flight,” the Man attempted to encourage him. “And it looks like the rise of the steps is pretty shallow.”

Lurtz snarled. They shuffled across the tower’s entry hall and Lurtz commenced ill-temperedly hopping up this next set of stairs.

Once they reached the next floor, he was relieved to learn that Boromir’s chamber was only two doors along the corridor. The Man unlatched the door and shoved it open, and together they made their way inside.

The room proved to hold a small table with a water jug and washbasin, along with one of those odd items of Mannish furniture which—as he knew from some Orcish tales in which they featured prominently—were known as beds. He guessed it should be no surprise to him to see such a thing in here, since supposedly beds were where Men tended to sleep. If the Orcs’ titillating tales could be believed, beds were also where Men tended to perform various intimate and eyebrow-raising acts upon each other.

“There’s water,” Boromir said, “but no food, I’m sorry to say…”

“That’s all right,” Lurtz told him. “That porridge the Horse-boys feed their prisoners really sticks with you.”

The Man let go of him and walked around to the far side of the bed, where he retrieved something from the floor. Boromir returned and placed this item on the table next to the water jug. Lurtz recognized it as his own bottle, holding whatever was left of his carefully conserved supply of Isengard’s Finest.

“This is yours,” his Tark confirmed perhaps a trifle shame-facedly, as he put the liquor bottle down. “As is this,” he went on, touching a smaller flask at his belt. In some surprise, Lurtz saw that this second item was indeed his own ointment-bottle. “I can leave it with you if you’ve any wounds that need tending. Or I can help you with that, if your wounds will be difficult to reach…”

Probably, Lurtz knew, he should take the Man up on this awkward and hesitant offer. The trouble was, he didn’t think he had any new wounds worth mentioning, either difficult to reach or otherwise. And as glad as he might have been for the Tark to linger here with him, he wasn’t willing to achieve that result with as weaselly a subterfuge as pretending to suffer from wounds that didn’t exist.
“No, Tark,” he heard himself saying gruffly. “I think I’ve just got a few scratches.”

“Which is pretty impressive,” his Tark added, with the hint of a smile, “considering that a goodly portion of fortress wall fell on you.”

“Saruman makes his Uruk-Hai tough,” Lurtz stated. “That’s the point of making us.” He saw a frown touch Boromir’s face at his mention of Saruman, and he decided they should not waste their last moments of conversation in talking of the Wizard. “You keep the ointment with you,” he hurried onward. “You’re going into combat; you’re more likely to need it than I am.”

Lord Boromir of Gondor nodded. “I’ll be back when I can, to bring you some food,” he said. “That is, assuming I survive.”

Lurtz nodded back. “Have a good battle.”

“Thank you,” Boromir said to him. And that was that. The Man strode from the room and shut the door quietly behind him. Lurtz stood there staring at the closed door and listening to the hollow thumping sound of Boromir locking him in.

What is the matter with me? he asked himself. Why do I feel so—distant? Why am I not going mad to be out there with my fellows? Why am I not still ravenous to join the fight?

That blow on the head, he answered his own question. It has to be that. It simply … knocked something loose inside of me, for a while. Whatever it is, it will fall into place again. It has to. Won’t it?

He shuffled over to the table and uncorked his bottle of Isengard’s Finest. The swig of it he took felt familiar and comforting to him as it seared its way down his throat; yet even that familiar feeling had a strangeness in it. It felt odd to do so ordinary a thing as taking a drink of Orc-draught, when everything else about his situation was so very far from ordinary.

How could anything be ordinary when he was standing here in a room of a Horse-boy fortress, and when he couldn’t seem to make himself care that his comrades were out there, fighting this battle without him?

Lurtz corked the bottle again and made his way to the peculiar construct called a bed. Weird-looking thing, he thought. It was a four-legged wooden framework long enough for most Men to be able to stretch out on it, with a big, stuffed cloth sack spread over the frame. A pile of blankets lay atop the sack, along with a smaller sack at the far end of the bed from where Lurtz was standing.

Gingerly, he sat down on it. He grimaced at the odd sensation as the bigger sack crinkled beneath him. Must be stuffed with straw, he thought. He reached his chained hands over to the smaller sack and poked at it. It had a softer feeling and it didn’t crinkle. He thought it perhaps was stuffed with feathers.

He had seen beds before, a few times, inside of some buildings in Horse-boy farmsteads and villages that his troop was raiding. He had never paid much attention to them. Generally, he’d just had passing glimpses of them and of the other items of furniture, in the midst of setting the buildings on fire.

Now he wondered, Why would anyone want to sleep on something like this? He thought it felt disgusting. He didn’t see how a person could get any rest, lying on something this soft. The comparison his imagination supplied was that lying down on this thing would feel as if one was attempting to take one’s ease on some gigantic slab of putrid, rotting meat.
And as for fucking on it …

Well, some would claim that nearly any place at all was a good location for fucking. But Lurtz was far from convinced about that. He thought it would be difficult to … well, to get a good hold on things, if you were perched on something as soft as this. How could one get any kind of a proper rhythm going, without some hard, strong surface to push up against?

Then again, he could think of one good thing about this bed.

It was in the room that the Horse-boys had given Lord Boromir of Gondor for his use. And since Men supposedly liked to sleep on these things, the odds were good that Lurtz’s Tark had slept on this one. Which meant that, like as not, it would still smell of him.

Lurtz hesitatingly brought his legs up, shifted himself around, and lay down on the bed.

It still felt revolting to him. He nudged the smaller, probably feather-stuffed bag aside. Its even-greater softness was just taking things too far. His feet dangled off the end of the bed, but he didn’t think that was any kind of a loss.

He closed his eyes, breathed in deeply, and …

Yes. Yes, it does smell of him.

The smell was very faint, as if it were being wafted to Lurtz’s nostrils on a puff of breeze. But it was there. He let himself drift in it, imagining that once again he was running across sunlit plains. Feeling the West Wind stinging at his face; feeling the never-ceasing thud of his feet against the ground; revelling in the smell of the Tark draped over his shoulder and in the tantalizing coolness of the Man’s sweet arse, so smooth and firm yet yielding in the questing grasp of Lurtz’s hand.

“Tark,” he heard himself whisper. “Tark, come back to me.”

Come back to me. That is all that matters. Come back from this battle alive; I don’t care about anything else.

He didn’t even manage to be shocked that he could think something so unthinkable, before he wandered into sleep.

When he woke, he woke into terror.

His body jolted to a sitting position as his voice choked out in a horror-stricken wail.

Everything is wrong.

It was nothing like his earlier realization, when he had started to feel the battle-lust taking hold of him. Then, he had known that something was wrong with him. Now, it was the very world that was wrong.

I am alone!

He cried out in panic and hurled himself off the bed. The impact of his body hitting the cold stone floor should have returned him to reality, but it did not. The walls of the room were receding from him at impossible speed, retreating to form an empty tunnel that would never have any end.
He would never see or hear anyone inside this tunnel. He would never cease being alone.

I will never hear Saruman again.

That was the root of the horror; that was the essence of the emptiness that would never stop devouring him.

Saruman was gone from his mind.

He heard no whisper of the Wizard’s voice. He felt not the faintest hint of what his master was feeling. The beautiful knowledge of Saruman’s presence, that had always, always been there, was gone.

“Don’t leave me!” he pleaded. “Don’t leave me alone!”

The space inside his skull was incomprehensibly huge. All of Middle-Earth was inside there; all of Middle-Earth and every other Sphere of the World. He couldn’t tell if it was silence he heard in his head or a mighty roaring; the roaring of the monster that had swallowed everything and had left him here alone.

“Why won’t you take me?” he begged the monster. “Why won’t you take me, too?”

Like a crippled bug he scooted backward across the floor until he reached a corner of the room. He knew it was stupid to hope that the corner could give him any shelter. Still he huddled into it, fighting to make himself as small as possible, hoping that somehow, if he could make himself insignificant enough, the emptiness might lose interest in him and go away.

He had no way of knowing how long it was before he heard something again.

There was a voice somewhere—though not inside his head, where he most needed it to be. It came to him through his ears, not his mind, but he still felt certain it was real. Somehow he knew it had been speaking to him for a long time before he started to understand its words.

“Lurtz,” said the voice. “Lurtz, come back. Come back to me.”

Come back to me? he thought. That was a stupid thing to say. He hadn’t gone anywhere. It was everyone and everything else that had gone and left him behind.

“Lurtz. Lurtz!”

The voice was shouting, he thought. He liked the sound of it. Shouting was so much better than silence.

He began to feel someone take hold of his chained hands and pull them away from his face. He hadn’t even known that his hands were against his face, until those other hands dragged them away.

His hands felt wet. When he focused hard enough, he realized that his face felt wet to him, too.

I’m outside in the rain, he thought. Or maybe he was sweating again. But no, he decided at last, that wasn’t it, either. He felt one drop of liquid roll out of his right eye and snake its way down his cheek. Another followed, from his left eye. Then, drop after drop, from both eyes, they kept on coming.

He had seen Mannish folk do this sometimes, he remembered, when Saruman had sent forth his Uruk-Hai to hone their skills in raids. Most often it was the women and children who did it, but he had seen the menfolk do it, too. The women tended to do it when you killed their children or their
men, and the men did it when you killed their women or their children. The children seemed to do it a lot, often for no particular reason that Lurtz knew how to identify.

He had never dreamed the Fighting Uruk-Hai could do this, too.

Whoever had taken his hands from his face was still holding onto them. The voice was insisting, “Lurtz, tell me what’s happened to you. Tell me how I can help you.”

He didn’t know any answer to those questions, but now he was starting to wonder about something. He wondered, if he blinked long and hard enough, if he could stop the liquid from rolling out of his eyes. He wondered whether, when the liquid finally stopped, he might see a face that went with those hands and the voice.

It seemed that his plan, finally, worked. He had no idea how long it took him to blink away the mist that shrouded his eyes. Slowly he saw there was a face on the other side of the mist. He even understood it was a face he was glad to see. Somehow, a name came to him. He whispered, “Boromir.”

The face smiled, and Lurtz realised he was glad to see that, too.

“Yes,” said the voice. “Yes. I’m here with you. You’re safe now.”

He wondered what the voice believed it was talking about. “Safe” didn’t make any sense. He was never going to be safe. Never again.

Making no sense apparently didn’t bother the voice. It was still talking. It said to him, “I will keep you safe. I won’t let anything hurt you.”

He decided he liked the sound of it, even though it meant nothing at all. He closed his eyes, hoping the voice would keep on talking to him.

What the voice said next, though, he decidedly did not like. It began, “Let me get you up onto the bed…”

“No!” Lurtz yelled. He cringed back into the corner, as deep into it as he could get. He wondered if he had been imagining the voice, all this time; if it was really just the emptiness, with a different sound.

But then the voice came again, and he decided they couldn’t be the same. They couldn’t be, because the voice spoke to him, while the emptiness never said a thing.

“All right,” said the voice. “All right. You’re all right. Nothing can hurt you. I’m not going to let it hurt you.”

Lurtz didn’t know whether he slept then—or did something close to sleeping—or whether he had simply been sitting there without thinking. The next time he was certain he was thinking, he did know that some goodly stretch of time had passed. He felt it was a sort of a victory to him that he could recognise that fact.

He knew the time had passed, because he remembered it had been full daylight when the owner of the voice had pulled his hands from his face. Now sunset was gazing in through a window far above him, bathing the room in a glow like the glow he used to see on Saruman’s face, when the Wizard spoke with the Great Lord in the East.

Half-silhouetted by the red sunset behind him, seated cross-legged on the floor near Lurtz and
leaning back against the edge of the bed, was Boromir of Gondor. The Man smiled, perhaps a bit tentatively, when he noticed that Lurtz was looking at him.

"Tark," Lurtz croaked out.

“Yes,” his Tark said. “Yes, it’s me. How are you feeling now?”

It took Lurtz a while of thinking before he felt he could answer. At last he said, “Like nothing.”

The Man of Gondor clearly did not find that a very reassuring answer. But he kept his own voice calm and reassuring, however little reassurance he himself might feel. He asked, “Can you tell me anything of what’s happened to you?”

Lurtz thought about that for a time, as well. Then he decided he could say it. The reality was hideous enough, whether he spoke of it or not. He couldn’t make the truth any less painful by not speaking it. He said, “Saruman is gone.”

“Gone?” Boromir repeated quietly, frowning.

Lurtz would have put one hand to his head, to tap a claw against his forehead. Then he noticed his hands were still chained together. He decided it was too much bother to try and make some kind of gesture with them. He explained, his voice sounding weary and dull, “He was always with me. I think he was with all of us. I felt what he felt. I felt it when he was pleased with me. He was always there. Now he’s gone.”

He heard himself give a weird sort of gasp. He felt liquid welling up in his eyes. For a moment he ground his teeth together, fighting to push away that feeling. Then he muttered, “I don’t want to do that again. Not again. I don’t want to do that thing with the water coming from my eyes.”

“Crying,” Boromir told him.

“I don’t care what it’s called!” he snarled. “I don’t want to do it!”

“It’s all right if you have to,” the Man said. “Sometimes there is no way of stopping it.”

“I am Uruk-Hai!” Lurtz growled out. “I will stop it!”

The way to succeed in stopping it, he told himself, was for him to think of something else. He had to think—and talk—of something besides his loss. With what felt like a massive physical effort, he forced himself to ask Boromir of Gondor, “How did the battle go?”

The Man looked uncomfortable at the answer he had to give. “The besiegers were defeated,” he said gruffly. “I am sorry. I believe that most of your folk who were here are now dead.”

This, at least, was an odd enough comment, that Lurtz could find in it some temporary distraction. He eyed Boromir sceptically. “You believe? What sort of a fool thing is that to say? They’re either dead or they aren’t. The Horse-boys have either had to field burial details to bury ten thousand slain Uruk-Hai, or they haven’t.”

“That’s the thing,” the Man tried to explain, with a grim look on his face. “It wasn’t as simple as that. There have been thousands to bury, yes, but . . .”

With an obvious resolve to better tell the tale, he gathered his thoughts and went on. “The battle had turned in our favour. We had received reinforcements, and your forces were in retreat. And then . . .
magic took a hand. There was a forest; a forest of magic. A forest of walking trees. Those trees were not here when the darkness fell last night, but at the dawn, they were here—and they were walking closer. They walked to within a furlong of the fortress walls. And your people—faced with the choice between the reinforcements’ spears and the mystery of those trees, they chose the trees as their better option. I believe they chose wrongly. After we lost sight of them in the forest’s shadows, we heard many screams. The trees are gone again, now,” the Man continued. “They have simply … walked away. But when they departed, they left no bodies behind.”

Lurtz sat there asking himself how he felt about all of this.

He regretted it, he supposed. Certainly he regretted that thousands of Fighting Uruk-Hai should fall victim to enemy magic, rather than dying in honest, honourable combat. But for now, at least, he could not make himself feel much sorrow for his fallen comrades. Their loss felt so much less real to him than the emptiness Saruman had left behind.

He struggled to express some interest in the Man’s story, instead of once again retreating into himself. Finally, he succeeded in asking, “Do you have a Wizard on your side?”

“Yes. Yes, we do. Gandalf. He said that the walking trees were not magic of his making; not as such. But he did admit to playing a hand in their arrival. He said he had spoken with the master of that forest; with, as he said, the shepherds of the trees, and that what he had said to them must have led to their decision that they would join in this fight.”


Boromir seemed a bit startled on hearing that comment, but he nodded. “That makes sense. Gandalf was a member of Saruman’s order, until Saruman decided to throw in his lot with the East.” The Man went on, “Gandalf, Théoden King, Aragorn and some of the others rode for Isengard today, after the battle was ended. They intended to meet with Saruman. Perhaps something they did there caused what has happened to you.”

“Yes,” Lurtz answered flatly. “Perhaps your Wizard has slain my Wizard.”

“Perhaps,” Boromir said, looking troubled. “Or perhaps Gandalf has done something that crippled Saruman’s magic.”

“Perhaps.”

Lurtz did not want to talk anymore. But he also did not want the Man to cease talking.

When Boromir of Gondor spoke, it was easier for Lurtz not to lose himself in the silence of his mind. He was surprised at the desperation in his own voice, when his next words burst from him.

“Is this what it is like for you Men? This loneliness? This silence? Do you never feel anyone’s presence in your mind except for yourself?”

Boromir gazed at him for some moments before reluctantly commencing an answer. “I suppose it is like that for us, generally. Although sometimes, on the journey from Rivendell, I thought that I heard in my mind…”

The Man gave a sudden, vehement shake of his head. Lurtz had the impression that whatever he had almost said was something he found too painful to put into words. Perhaps it was even something that he feared.
Boromir hastened onward in stronger tones. “I have had a vision or two, I suppose. That was like someone speaking in my mind. I don’t have nearly so many visions as my father and my brother do. Thank the Valar for that,” he added. “So,” the Man continued, with a faint, apologetic-seeming smile, “I suppose it usually is just me inside here.” He tapped one hand against his forehead on his closing words.

“How do you bear it?” Lurtz demanded.

Lord Boromir was gazing at him with a look that Lurtz had not expected and did not understand. The sudden, odd thought came to him that the expression reminded him of a way he had seen Horse-boy mothers and fathers gaze at their children—just before he had killed the parents, or the children, or both.

Boromir said quietly, “It just feels natural to us, I suppose. If we’ve never been used to feeling someone else’s presence, then … then it doesn’t feel wrong for us to be in there alone.”

Suddenly the Man got to his feet. Terrified panic sprang up in Lurtz, with a strength he would never have expected. He cried out, “Where are you going?” He tried leaping to his feet, but his chained ankles proved too much for him and he landed heavily on his knees.

His Tark was immediately kneeling by him again, both hands on the Uruk’s shoulders. “It is all right,” came Boromir’s voice. “It’s all right. I’m not leaving. I was only getting up to light a candle. That’s all. It’s getting dark.”

Lurtz managed to nod. He hadn’t noticed the gathering darkness, though of course he could see the difference once the Man had lit the candle. It sat in a holder on the table, beside the water jug and basin and Lurtz’s bottle of Isengard’s Finest.

Once again the Man sat down upon the floor. With a feeling of aching weariness, Lurtz asked him, “Why are you still here, Tark?”

Boromir’s eyebrows raised. “Why am I still here?” was his quiet reply. “A few moments ago, I had the strong impression that you did not wish me to leave.”

“It’s not that I want you to leave,” Lurtz said sullenly. “But why are you here? Why are you spending all of this time on me?”

The Man gazed at him steadily and said, “I suppose it is because you’ve been reminding me of my brother.”

That answer was weird enough that Lurtz had to stop and think about it. It successfully distracted him, from the moment, from the hollow feeling in his mind.

“I’m reminding you of your brother? Now you have really surprised me. That doesn’t fit with the ideas I had formed of … of Men’s family interactions. Is your brother in the habit of capturing you and then fucking you while you’re senseless from battle wounds?”

Boromir’s answering expression was probably a grimace. Lurtz wasn’t certain if the Tark was angered by his words, or not. The Man’s voice was still calm as he replied, “Your ideas of our family interactions were likely accurate on this point. No. My brother is not in the habit of doing that.”

Lurtz waited for his answer to continue. It did.

“When Faramir was a child, he had terrible dreams. They came to him far too often. Sometimes night after night. Perhaps the dreams were actually more of his visions, attacking his sleeping mind. Night
after night he awoke from those dreams, screaming. “When that happened, the only way he could fall asleep again was if I stayed with him. He would fall asleep in my arms, with his head on my chest, while I held him. While I told him he was safe. I was there with him. I would not let anything harm him.”

“You want me to fall asleep in your arms?” Lurtz questioned. His voice sounded heavy with scepticism. “I’m not certain I can do that, Tark.” He went on to admit, “I’m not certain I can ever fall asleep again.”

He thought, *It almost killed me, waking to that emptiness once. How can I ever bear to go through that again?*

“You can fall asleep in my arms if you want,” Boromir of Gondor persisted. “If it helps. I want to do what will help you.”

Lurtz told him, “Then kill me.”

Once again the Man studied him with a look that Lurtz did not understand.

“Kill me,” he heard himself hurrying on. “Please. I’d do it myself, only … only I feel I don’t have the energy to do much of anything at all. I know I could work myself up to it, eventually. But it’ll save time and bother if you just do it yourself.”

Lord Boromir said, “I don’t want to kill you.”

“Then get one of your friends to do it. I’m sure they would all be happy to oblige.”

Surprising excitement sounded in the Man’s voice when he next spoke. He said, “Maybe there is another way.”

Lurtz nearly groaned. “What are you talking about now, Tark?”

“Maybe you don’t need to die. Saruman may still be alive. We can find out what’s happened to him when Gandalf and the others return. If he lives, then I will free you to go to him. If you will swear not to return and attack us again here, and not to make another try at capturing my friends the Halflings, then you can go back to Saruman. Maybe you can free him from whatever has happened to him. You can help him. You can serve him again.”

Lurtz thought of that. He wondered why the thoughts called forth in him none of the excitement he heard in the Man’s voice.

*I ought to want this*, he thought. *It ought to make me happy, thinking of this chance. It ought to feel like he has offered me a chance at salvation.*

But it didn’t feel that way. Lurtz struggled to feel the longing hope he knew he ought to feel. The emotions failed to answer him when he called for them.

“I don’t know,” he finally admitted. “I don’t know if I want to go back. I don’t understand it, but …” Helplessly, he shook his head. “I don’t know,” he repeated. “Now that he isn’t in my mind … I don’t know if I really want to serve him.”

“If you don’t want to, then you don’t have to. You can make your way East, instead. You can join the Dark Lord’s armies.”

didn’t make me. I don’t hear him in my head. Why should I want him to rule over everything, instead of anyone else?” He shook his head. “You just aren’t thinking. You aren’t thinking at all.”

Unaccountably, the Man smiled at him. “What am I not thinking about?” he asked.

“You’re not thinking sense, that’s what! Listen, Tark. I fought for Saruman. I fought for him because that’s what he created me to do, and because it felt good when I did. So what about you? What are you fighting for?”

The Man’s smile vanished. After a pause, he answered, “I am fighting for my people. For my city. For everyone whose lives or livelihoods will be destroyed if Gondor fails to hold the frontier; if our ancient enemy crosses the Great River to make our world his own.”

“All right, then,” said Lurtz. “So you’ve got to remember that. You’ve got to keep that in the front of your mind where it needs to be, instead of spouting all these stupid schemes about me. What if you did let me go free? What if you freed me, and I did go back to Saruman, or I joined the Eastern armies? You would be betraying all those people of yours if you did that, wouldn’t you? Every enemy of theirs that you allow to go free will be another danger to those people you say you’re protecting. So you just do what you ought to do. You keep your people safe by killing me, and have done with it.”

Somehow, again, Boromir’s eyes were glimmering with excitement. He kept his voice steady, but that strange eagerness of his was there in his voice, as well. It shone under the surface like a blade about to be unsheathed. He said, “Then what if I were to set you free, but you did not go?”

Lurtz could only ask him, “What?”

“What if I free you, but you do not join the service of Gondor’s enemies? What if you were to serve me, instead?”

“Tark,” Lurtz said, feeling hopelessly confused, “what are you going on about?”

Boromir’s words raced on. “Back there, out on the plains, I asked you to serve another master. You told me you couldn’t. I think I understand better, now, why it was that you could not. But maybe now you can. Now that Saruman is gone from you, perhaps you are free to choose whom you will follow. And if you have that choice, I want you to choose me.”

With a struggling slowness that might just drive him mad before the emptiness in his head finally conquered him, Lurtz fought to catch up. “You want me to join your service, Tark?” he asked. “How do you want me to serve you? As what?”

“As my bodyguard,” answered Boromir. His glance flickered briefly aside as he added, “With possibly other duties as assigned; but we can work that out later. Much later.” Gazing at Lurtz once again, he continued his eager argument. “I don’t know if I can take the place of what you have lost. I don’t know if anything can take its place. But if you’ll fight for me—if you will fight for my people, for Gondor—then you will give yourself the time you need, to learn the answer to that question. You will have the chance to learn if you can want to live again. To learn whether you can feel again that there is something worth living for.”

“As your bodyguard,” Lurtz said slowly, trying out the sound of the words. He still felt more than half convinced that his Tark was thoroughly insane. He pointed out, “Your friends aren’t going to like you hiring an Uruk-Hai bodyguard.”

Lord Boromir declared, “My friends have nothing to do with this. They will accept my decision, or
they will have no need to endure your presence among them. I shall not be with them, either. If they
cannot accept you, then you and I will make the journey to my home on our own, without them.”

Lurtz admitted to himself that he liked the sound of that idea. But there were other things he had to
say. “I don’t think your father’s going to like it.”

“My father will not care. If I return home, to lead our armies and to fight for our people as before, it
will be of little moment to my father what manner of bodyguard I choose to bring home with me.
Now … if he knew of certain other ties which bind us, he would not approve. But there is no reason
for him to know. He has enough on his plate in striving to save our world from the dark. He will feel
no need to trouble himself with inquiring into the nature of my relations with my bodyguard.”

*And what is the nature of our relations?* Lurtz wondered. *Or, what would it be?* He could not stop
his thoughts from lingering for a moment on Boromir’s words, “possibly other duties as assigned.”

Shoving aside his musings on those possible other duties, he told himself there was at least one
further question he should ask. “And what will your brother think about it?”

Boromir smiled at that. “My brother will be glad for me,” he said. “If he knows that having you with
me makes me happy, Faramir will be glad.”

*Having you with me makes me happy.* Lurtz’s thoughts repeated the words. He asked himself if he
could even truly believe that he had heard the Man of Gondor say them.

He thought of something else: of the words he himself had thought before he fell asleep. Of what he
had thought before he awakened to find his world destroyed.

He had wished for Boromir to come back to him. In his thoughts he had said that he cared for
nothing else, so long as Boromir came back.

If he could think that treasonous thought while Saruman was still with him—before everything fell
away into silence—why should he hesitate at pledging himself to Lord Boromir of Gondor now?

Almost as though the Tark had read his mind, Lord Boromir said, “Please, Lurtz. Tell me that you
will do it. Tell me that you will pledge yourself to Gondor and to me.”

Again their gazes met and held. Lurtz noticed distantly that the Man was clasping his chained-
together hands.

“Very well,” Lurtz said. “I will do it. I will pledge myself as you ask. What must I vow?”

With enough gazing into Boromir’s winter stormcloud eyes, he thought he might not feel so painfully
the emptiness inside. He kept staring into those eyes as Boromir spoke.

“You must swear fealty and service to Gondor, and to me: in need or plenty, in war or peace, in
living or dying, from this hour henceforth, until I release you, or death takes you, or the world ends.”

“I swear it,” Lurtz answered him. “All of that, I swear.”

Boromir spoke in little over a whisper, “And this I hear, and I will not forget it, nor fail to reward that
which is given: valour with honour, fealty with love.”

They were ritual words, Lurtz knew. The words Boromir had spoken just now were likely the
phrases of some ancient Gondorian oath of service. And yet he could not help repeating three of
those words in his mind: fealty with love.
His new master smiled at him and glanced down at their clasped hands.

“The first thing we must do,” said Boromir of Gondor, “is to get you out of these chains.” After a moment’s examination, he exclaimed, “Lurtz, what in all of Middle-Earth have you been doing to this lock?”

“I was trying to break it off,” Lurtz said. “All I ended up doing was breaking the walls of my cell.”

“Well,” Boromir said ruefully, “I think you broke it enough that we’ll never be able to unlock it. I think we will do better to saw the chains off, instead.” The Man cast Lurtz another apologetic sort of look, then gingerly removed the sword from the scabbard he wore at his belt. “Do you mind if we use your sword for that? These Uruk-Hai weapons do look a bit like saws.”

Lurtz gazed in surprise. The weapon Boromir held was indeed Lurtz’s own sword, forged by the smiths of Isengard.

“I don’t care how you use it,” Lurtz said. “Do with it as you will. It is at your command. It, and everything else of mine.”

Boromir smiled at him once more and then set to work, sawing loose the Rohirrim chains with a sword of Isengard.

Lurtz shut his eyes as he listened to the sawing. Beyond that sound, he heard again Boromir’s promise: his promise to reward valour with honour, and fealty with love.
Chapter Five: Flames, Moonlight and Rotting Flowers

Chapter Summary

Lurtz and Boromir continue to figure out the parameters of their new relationship, and begin to deal with others' reactions to it.

Chapter Notes

In this chapter I take a rather abrupt detour from film universe into book universe (although a version of book universe that is still inhabited by the film characters). You see, although I am quite fond of Peter Jackson's "Fellowship of the Ring," and I have, at least, some tolerance for his "Two Towers," I have a pretty overwhelming loathing for his version of "Return of the King." I couldn't stand the thought of writing in a universe in which ROTK happens the way Jackson says it does. Thus in this chapter, you will find elements from the book suddenly appearing, including the arrival on the scene of Halbarad and Aragorn's thirty kinsmen, along with the Elven brethren Elladan and Elrohir. I hope the transfer from film universe to book universe is not too jarring, but it was the only way I could see for me to happily go on with this story.

Beyond Muddy Dreams

A Boromir/Lurtz Lord of the Rings Fanfiction

Chapter Five: Flames, Moonlight and Rotting Flowers

Lord Boromir of Gondor was true to his word. The next morning, when the party that had ridden to Isengard returned to the Horse-boys’ fortress, Boromir informed certain of his previous comrades that Lurtz was now his travelling companion. If they could not accept the Uruk among them, then neither would they have Boromir as one of their company.

Lurtz found his sense of enjoyment sadly hampered by the catastrophe that had befallen him. All the same, he took definite satisfaction in watching those previous comrades react to Boromir’s ultimatum.

After sawing off Lurtz’s chains, the Man of Gondor had declared that both Man and Uruk were in need of a bath. He stated, “In our near future, we will likely hear a sizeable number of complaints about traveling with a ‘stinking Orc.’ At the least we may do something to minimise those comments.
if both you and I are recently bathed. And, yes,” he added, smiling—although Lurtz had not bothered objecting to his use of the word “Orc”—“I’m aware I will need to inform them that, for the sake of accuracy, they should say ‘stinking Uruk.’”

Boromir had briefly left the room to find someone from whom he could request a washtub, hot water and soap. Enduring those minutes of his absence was the first challenge Lurtz faced in his newly redefined existence.

Boromir had said to him, “I will be right back.” Grimly Lurtz fought to make himself believe that.

He paced the small room. To prevent his claws from scoring bleeding tracks into his palms—a result of which he suspected Boromir would disapprove—he dragged his claws across his leather breastplate, instead.

When he returned scant minutes later, Boromir noticed at once the breastplate’s fresh scratches. He took Lurtz’s hands in his. “I am sorry,” the Man said. “I should have known it was too soon to leave you. I will do all I can to stay with you, from now on.”

At that, Lurtz gave a growl of anger at himself.

Boromir was now running his hands in exploration over Lurtz’s hands. The Man traced his fingers along Lurtz’s claws, feeling them, testing their sharpness lightly against his skin.

Lurtz found it undeniably distracting that Boromir was doing that. Nonetheless, he managed to say what he felt he ought to say.

“You shouldn’t have to coddle me,” he muttered. “I am supposed to be your bodyguard—not your offspring.”

“And I am supposed to be helping you,” Boromir countered. “And I will fail in that goal, if I cannot remember what help you require the most. It is not helping you if I say that I will be with you, and then in the very next instant I walk out the door.”

After a cautious-sounding knock at the door and Boromir’s command to enter, two Men of Rohan carried a wooden washtub into the room. One of those two was a greybeard whose face made Lurtz think of an apple almost too withered to eat, while the other looked young enough to scarcely
warrant the title of “man.”

Lurtz was glad to see that the tub they brought was large enough. He thought, *I should be able to sit in that without my knees being jammed against my chin.*

Having deposited the tub, the very old fellow and the very young one departed and shortly returned, bearing buckets of steaming water. This time two additional bucket-bearers accompanied them, these two certainly young enough to officially count as boys. Throughout their three trips to pour water into the tub, all four Rohirrim stared with understandably wide and wary eyes at the occupants of the room.

Or, to be accurate, Lurtz presumed they were actually staring at him. He doubted there was much to make them stare about the sight of Lord Boromir of Gondor undressing—although even in his stunned and shaken state, it was a process that he himself was glad to be able to watch.

When the four Rohirrim took their departure after pouring the final round of hot water, Boromir had removed his tunic and chain mail and was just pulling off his shirt. Lurtz frowned as that action revealed two white bandages: one wrapped around the Man’s left shoulder and the second just above his waist.

“Why are you still wearing those?” Lurtz demanded. “I thought you said your wounds were nearly healed.”

“They are,” Boromir answered him, with a look of surprise. “Our people must simply tend to leave bandages on for a longer time than do yours.”

Lurtz gave a snort. “That wouldn’t be difficult. Our people don’t tend to use bandages at all. With the ointment, you shouldn’t need them.”

Boromir commenced unwinding the bandages, first from around his torso and then from his shoulder. Lurtz saw no trace of blood having leaked onto the cloth. He stepped closer to examine the wounds and then nodded, relieved that the ointment was indeed doing its job.

He smelled no odour of infection. The two wounds had both contracted nicely, with no sign of tearing about them from Boromir’s recent exertions. Both of the wounds looked extremely strange to him, but he knew that was due to the combined factors of the Man’s pale skin colour and the fact of his blood being red.
“Good,” Lurtz said, his voice brusque as he tried to hide the extent of his relief. “When I saw you still had the bandages, I thought the wounds might be doing worse than you’d said.”

Lord Boromir smiled slightly at this evidence of the Uruk’s concern. “That ointment of yours has the wounds days farther along than I would expect at this point. Do you know how the ointment is made? When we get home, I want to set our healers to making it for the use of Gondor’s forces.”

Lurtz frowned in thought. “I know some of its ingredients, I think. I’ve never made it myself, though. That wasn’t my job.”

Boromir nodded. “It’s a start, anyhow,” he said.

Having previously removed his boots, the Man now stripped out of his breeches and whatever the smaller, thinner pair of breeches he wore beneath them might actually be called. Lurtz was treated to his first view of Lord Boromir of Gondor entirely unclad.

He sighed to himself, wishing he had seen this delectable sight before he suffered the trauma of Saruman’s departure. Before that disaster, having such a vision displayed before his eyes would likely have led to an immediate fucking. He might even have been willing to learn if the bed was truly as awkward a fucking-location as he imagined it to be.

But as things now stood, it would remain a lost opportunity, unless Lord Boromir took an exceedingly active role in getting something going. Clearly that was not going to happen, since even now the Man was walking over to the washtub.

At least, Lurtz comforted himself, there was hope for the future. The sight of the naked Boromir had caused him some appreciative twitchings, assuring him that there was still life down there. With enough time, he could probably expect that portion of his body to return to something resembling normal.

Rather than standing and staring like an idiot while the Man of Gondor briskly rubbed a chunk of soap over his body and through his hair, the Uruk set about removing his own armour and clothing. He noticed that Boromir cast quick glances at him from time to time, but did not allow his gaze to linger.

Lurtz guessed this showed consideration on the part of his new master. Boromir was likely
attempting not to show too great an interest in Lurtz’s body, because he realised the Uruk would prove incapable of responding as either of them would wish.

When Lurtz’s armour and tunic had joined Boromir’s clothes in being piled on the bed, he took a moment to inspect his own wounds. They had progressed far enough in their healing process that he had nearly forgotten he had them. The shallow gash that the Halfling had inflicted on his left side with Lurtz’s own dagger—an embarrassing memory that caused him to growl beneath his breath—was now nothing more than a long, black scab. The spear wound in his right shoulder had been deeper, but it, too, was contracting well and seemed like it should cause him no trouble.

The thought came to Lurtz that his spear wound, at least, would be doing a lot worse if it had been left untreated. He asked, surprised to hear the hesitant sound of his voice, “Tark … while I was unconscious on the battlefield, did you put the ointment in my wounds?”

“I did,” the Man confirmed, not turning to look at him. “I thought it was only fair that I should treat your wounds as you had treated mine.”

“Thank you for that,” Lurtz muttered. He tried not to feel too wistful about it as he thought of one other way in which he wished his former prisoner had reciprocated the treatment Lurtz had meted out to him.

As he sought to distract himself from that useless wish, another thought occurred to him. He said, “Maybe I shouldn’t call you ‘Tark’ anymore?”

His new master put down the soap on the table next to the tub. He looked over at Lurtz and smiled. “You can call me that in private, if you like,” he answered. “And ‘Boromir’ will be fine when it is just the two of us, as well. In public, ‘Lord Boromir,’ ‘My Lord’ or ‘Captain-General’ would be appropriate forms of address.”

With that, the Captain-General climbed out of the washtub and set about drying himself with one of the cloths that the Men of Rohan had brought. Lurtz took his place in the tub.

He was no stranger to bathing. He had bathed on a regular basis back home. When Saruman called for his attendance, the Wizard had no wish for him to reek of battlefields or of anything else. Now while he scrubbed himself, Lurtz reflected on the fact that this Rohirrim tub was a thoroughly sorry substitute for the hot springs in the caverns beneath Orthanc.
From the corner of his eye he regretfully noticed that Boromir had once more donned his clothing from the waist down. Lurtz’s attention was focused on working the caked blood and ointment loose from his hair, when Boromir came back to the tub carrying Lurtz’s tunic and loincloth. The Man said, “I’ll give your clothes a wash while we have the chance,” as he dunked the two garments into the water.

Little though Lurtz knew of the habits and customs of Men, he had a strong suspicion that it was not standard practice for the Captain-General of Gondor to be washing laundry. But weird as this seemed to him, he did not voice an objection. Deeply ingrained in his mind was the knowledge that it was not his place to object to anything his master wished to do.

*Although,* he added in his thoughts, *I’m sure it’ll be worlds easier objecting to things with Boromir than it was with Saruman.*

*Boromir did not create me. And he is not sitting there inside my mind.*

“Could you pass me the soap?” Boromir asked him.

So Lurtz handed over the cake of soap, and watched in bemused disbelief whilst his new master vigorously rubbed soap into the fabric of the loincloth and started scrubbing it against the side of the tub.

“It shouldn’t take long for these to dry,” the Man remarked. “The heat of your skin ought to dry them swiftly enough.” He cast Lurtz a strange sort of look as he said that. His expression was almost shy; yet unmistakable passion smouldered within it.

*What do you know about that?* Lurtz thought. He felt pleased, despite his body’s current disinclination to do anything about it. He mused, *So my body’s heat does the same thing to him that his coolness does to me.*

When he had Lurtz’s clothes as clean as it looked like they would get, Boromir wrung them out and then went to hang them on the framework of the bed. Lurtz figured he himself was as clean as he was likely to get, too, in the absence of good, bubbling, ever-flowing hot springs water. But there was one thing more he ought to do.

He scowled at his distorted reflection in the water before him, shown up by the light of the nearby candle. He could see the darkness of his face still marred by the glaring white of the painted hand.
print. He’d been trying for some minutes now to scrub that hand-mark off his skin, with no success.

_It has to go_, he thought. He brought up his right hand and began slicing his thumb-claw along his temple, preparatory to peeling off the skin.

Lord Boromir was suddenly beside the tub. The Man seized hold of Lurtz’s wrist. He demanded, “What are you doing?”

Lurtz looked up at him, puzzled by the strength of his master’s reaction. “The paint won’t come off,” he said. “I should not still bear the mark of Saruman if I am serving you.”

“And so you are planning to skin your entire face?”

“It is not my entire face.”

“Two-thirds of it, anyhow.”

“It will grow back. And with the ointment, it will not get infected.”

In a voice that was quiet but that vibrated strangely, Boromir said, “I would prefer it greatly if you do not strip the skin from your face.”

Lurtz demanded of him, “Is that a command, master?”

“That,” Boromir snapped, “is a form of address I do not wish you to use for me. And, yes. It is my command. Leave the skin of your face alone.” Lurtz’s master continued in something closer to a conversational tone, “It is not a tattoo, is it? It is merely paint?”

“Only paint,” he confirmed.

“Then it will eventually wear off. In the meantime, if it troubles you, you can conceal much of that mark with a helmet, or with your hair.”
It was Lurtz’s turn to snap out his next words. “I will not wear a Horse-boy helmet,” he snarled. He then had to add, “Unless you command me to. And in that case, I will wear it with a very ill grace.”

“No,” Boromir assured him, “you need not wear a helmet of Rohan. We can wait until we reach my own country before we secure for you a helmet. Then … would you have me cut your hair for you, instead? A fringe over your forehead should hide most of the handprint.”

“You may do with it as you will,” Lurtz said, just managing to stop himself from adding, “You are my master.” He thought, This business with my skin shows that Men do concern themselves over some damned unimportant things.

Boromir walked to where his gear lay on the bed, and returned with dagger in hand. He moved segments of Lurtz’s wet hair in front of his face. Then he hesitated. “It will likely not be the most skilful of haircuts,” he said. “I do not do this sort of thing very often.”

From behind his waterfall of hair, Lurtz pointed out, “I was about to peel the skin from my face. I am not going to be troubled by the cut of my hair.”

A glimpse through his hair showed Boromir casting him a look of discomfort and possible apology. The Man explained, “I thought that there might be some … point of honour involving Uruk-Hai hairstyles.”

“If there were, it would matter nothing to me now. Now, I serve you.”

So Lord Boromir took tight hold of a segment of his hair and commenced slicing it off near the line of Lurtz’s brows. The haircutting was swiftly concluded. Lurtz felt slightly ridiculous at the end of it, and he doubted that the haircut would do much to conceal the White Hand of Saruman. But as always, it was for him to obey his master’s commands.

Lurtz was out of the bath and had dressed again in his damp clothes by the time the men and boys of Rohan returned and gave a humorously timorous knock on the door. When Boromir granted them permission, they set about the slow process of removing the bath from the room, in the reverse of the method by which they had brought it: dunking their buckets in the tub and hauling the water away by the bucket-loads, until the tub became light enough for them to lift it.

Boromir requested that supper be brought to the chamber. Shortly after they had lugged away the
tub, the original two Men returned once again with a lidded earthen pot, bowls, a loaf of singularly weird-looking bread, and a bottle and goblets.

Lord Boromir made one further request: that he be notified at once when Théoden King’s party returned to the fortress. The ancient codger promised obedience, and departed hastily with the young fellow on his heels. Boromir and Lurtz were left alone together to partake of their supper.

They did so seated upon the floor, Boromir again leaning back against the bed and Lurtz against the wall. The pot proved to contain a soup that was greatly preferable to the porridge Lurtz had been granted in his cell. It consisted largely of carrots and barley, but a few lumps of meat floated about in it here and there.

The bread, on the other hand, had to be the strangest foodstuff Lurtz had encountered. It was so pale as to be almost white, and it squished. Its softness seemed so peculiarly wrong that it fascinated him. He kept jabbing one of his claws into the chunk he held in his hand, until he noticed Boromir casting him a curious look. At that point he stopped jabbing it and took a bite, thinking that the stuff felt just as odd to chew as he had expected of it.

Saruman had told him, on numerous occasions, that the Men of Gondor and Rohan were weak and soft. He thought, now, that perhaps his former master had over-stated that case. But one thing he was discovering to be true: Men seemed to have a fixation with soft things. First he had encountered that bed, and now their bread. This particular aspect of Mannish life, he doubted he would ever get used to.

Boromir poured from the bottle into the two goblets and handed one of them to Lurtz. The drink which it held was strange to him—although it was nowhere near as peculiar as the bread. He guessed it was some manner of fermented fruit juice, but it was unlike any drink in his previous experience. It bore as much resemblance to the Orc-draught he was used to as a kitten bore to a veteran battle-warg.

“It’s wine,” Boromir told him, in answer to his puzzled look. “Wine from my country. See;” he went on, pointing out a medallion-shape imprinted in the earthenware form, “here is the seal that shows the White Tree, upon the bottle. Most of the wine in Rohan does hail from Gondor. Our climate in Anórien suits the grapes far better than does the climate of Rohan.”

Wine, Lurtz thought. He pondered the taste of it and decided he enjoyed it well enough.

Saruman favoured wine. The Wizard frequently had an open bottle of it near him as he worked, although his goblets were of carven crystal instead of the earthenware from which Boromir and Lurtz
were drinking now. Now that he thought back, Lurtz believed he recalled that sometimes Saruman’s wine had come from bottles that looked precisely like this one.

But Saruman had never offered any of his wine to Lurtz. Such a notion, doubtless, would never have occurred to He of Many Colours.

For him to offer Lurtz any wine might have come too close to meaning that Saruman thought of his creation as a person.

_I cannot believe I just thought that._

Lurtz gulped down a large swig of the wine, startled that the thought had even entered his mind. Never would he have thought anything like it, before.

_Have things changed so much for me in just these few hours since—since it happened? Can I truly question Saruman’s actions, now? Can I question and doubt all the things that I never would have dreamed of questioning or doubting, before?_

When the Man and the Uruk had finished their meal, no word had yet come of the king’s party returning. Boromir started to speak. Then he paused, with a faint, troubled frown.

“I had been going to say that we should get some sleep,” he began. “But earlier, you said that you did not know if you could sleep, after what has happened to you.”

“It’s all right,” Lurtz told him gruffly. “I’m certain I will sleep again—eventually.” By “eventually,” he meant in a matter of weeks—not a matter of hours or days, as the Man might suppose. “Uruks and Orcs do not need as much sleep as Men do. I slept earlier today. I will not need any sleep tonight.”

They had stood up from the floor and were removing their piles of clothing, armour and weaponry from the bed: Boromir placing his on the table beside the remains of their supper, and Lurtz stacking his armour on the floor beside the door. Boromir went on, “You may share the bed with me regardless, though you do not intend to sleep. There is room for both of us.”

“No, Tark. Thanks all the same. Our folk don’t … get along with beds that well.”
Boromir gave a quizzical quirk of his eyebrows. “Yet you slept in it earlier,” he pointed out. “When the battle had ended, I came to visit you, to bring you some food. You were in the bed, sound asleep.”

That thought struck Lurtz strangely—knowing that Boromir had been here while he slept.

It wasn’t that he felt in any way under threat. After that crazy rescue Boromir had pulled off in the thick of the battle, he ought to know and accept that the Man of Gondor did not intend him harm.

No, what he wondered was what the Man had thought about, while watching him.

“I was trying the bed out,” he explained. “I don’t feel the need of doing that again. Unless—”

Belatedly, a possibility occurred to him. He felt ridiculously tongue-tied as he attempted to express it.

_How, he wondered, did I become so mealy-mouthed that I cannot just spit this out?_

“How, he wondered, did I become so mealy-mouthed that I cannot just spit this out?”

“No,” Lurtz muttered. “I don’t think you judged wrong on it. You go on and go to sleep,” he urged,

“Unless—”

It was embarrassingly foolish that he could not simply come out with it and say, “Unless you were planning on us fucking.” Grimly he thought, _I must be afraid to say the word because I’m also afraid that I can’t do it._

He had difficulty figuring out the look that Boromir of Gondor was now casting him. He thought perhaps the Man was trying to give him a sympathetic look, while still not humiliating the Uruk by seeming _too_ sympathetic.

Boromir said, “I had thought that tonight would not be the night for that. Did I judge wrong on this question?”

“No,” Lurtz muttered. “I don’t think you judged wrong on it. You go on and go to sleep,” he urged,
to put a swift end to this topic of conversation. “I’ll … sit here by the door. After all, I’m supposed to be your bodyguard. This’ll be the first chance I’ve had to do any guarding of you.”

The Man nodded, though he seemed reluctant to leave it at that. “Do not hesitate to wake me, for anything. Remember that I am here to help you. I want to help you. That is more important than a few hours of sleep.”

Lurtz nodded back. “I’ll remember,” he said, his voice gruff.

“Good night,” said Lord Boromir of Gondor. He went to blow out the candle, then returned to the bed.

Lurtz, naturally, could see just as well as he had before the candle was blown out. As his new master settled down on the bed, Lurtz was interested—if slightly repulsed—to notice Boromir taking up that small, soft stuffed bag and placing it under his head.

So that’s what you’re supposed to do with it, he thought. Grimacing, he wondered, How can Men possibly think such a loathsome thing feels good?

It took very little time for Boromir to fall asleep. For some while Lurtz simply sat there beside the door, listening to the Man’s breathing and his occasional soft, quiet series of snores. Soft and quiet was how they seemed to Lurtz, although he supposed that any one being’s snores would seem quiet when contrasted with the noises in a hall that was filled with several hundred slumbering Uruk-Hai.

From where he was sitting, he could not see Boromir’s face well. After a time, he stood up and moved to a location further along the wall, where the view was better.

He thought again of Boromir’s statement that he had been in here earlier, while Lurtz slept. He wondered if, in his sleep, he had looked anywhere near as alluring to Boromir as the sleeping Boromir looked to him now.

The moon came to shine in through the room’s lone, high window. Lurtz gazed on, as the moonlight bathed the sleeping Man’s face in a glow that made his skin appear as white as the moon itself.

Marvelling, Lurtz asked himself, Why is he attractive to me?
Most of the time, I find pale-skinned creatures and people disgusting.

Maggots are pale, he thought. Maggots are soft and small and sneaking; they wriggle about in meat and make it not worth the eating. Pale skin reminds me of them—like that soft-voiced Rohirrim traitor who works for Saruman; that pallid, slinking piece of scum who must be the most maggot-like being ever to walk on two legs.

Yet here he was, watching Lord Boromir sleep; gazing at Boromir’s face which seemed a creation of white stone and moonlight. Here he was, and the face of this one pale-skinned Man filled him not with disgust, but with wonder and awe.

It was another wonder, he realised, that Boromir trusted him enough to sleep with seemingly no qualms, leaving Lurtz awake to guard him. It troubled Lurtz a bit to think of that. He hoped his Tarkish master was not ordinarily so trusting.

He could not be, could he? He would not foolishly imperil his own life, and thus imperil the welfare of all the people who depended on him, by so carelessly placing himself at the mercy of one who might seek to destroy him.

How can he know that this is not a trick? Lurtz asked himself. How can he feel certain that I do not still serve Saruman; that I have not lured him into this situation so I may kill him at my master’s bidding?

Then again, he told himself, it was likely that the events of this day and night did not show Boromir of Gondor to be a trusting fool. More likely, those events simply revealed him as a good judge of his fellow beings.

He knows a broken creature when he sees one. He can recognise a being that has lost all its purpose for living.

And, Lurtz thought, he has given me a new purpose.

There was still a roaring deep inside of Lurtz’s skull. It was like the sound of a mighty wind blowing through a vast, empty cavern.
The roaring wanted him. It wanted to claim him. It wanted to seize him and bear him away to its realm, where he would hear nothing but the screams of the wind, ever again.

But Lurtz knew how to fight it. He knew how to hold that roaring at bay.

He listened to the breathing of the Man who had offered him hope. Lurtz listened as Lord Boromir of Gondor slept, and the roaring faded. The emptiness retreated, slinking away to a far, lonely place deep in the caverns of his mind.

The light from the window was pale with approaching dawn when a knock sounded at the door. Lurtz stood up from his place on the floor and went to open the door.

The Man who stood in the corridor was one of the regular Horse-boy warriors; neither the old Man, the young fellow nor the boys from the night before. This Man looked appalled at the sight of Lurtz. The Uruk wondered if the Horse-boy were more likely to draw a weapon on him, or just to run.

He would not learn the answer to that, for Lord Boromir’s voice sounded behind him. “It is all right,” the Tark lord called reassuringly as he got out of the bed. “Lurtz is under my command. What errand brings you to me?”

“My Lord,” said the Horse-boy warrior, managing not to let his voice squeak. “I am sent to inform you that Théoden King and his party are returned from Isengard. They were riding up the causeway even now; by this, it is likely that they have reached the courtyard.”

“Very good,” said Boromir. “You have my thanks. Pray go you to Théoden King and inform him that I will attend him as swiftly as may be.”

“I will, My Lord,” the Man of Rohan answered, not quite running as he started his hasty way down the corridor.

As Lurtz shut the door, Boromir was already dressing, throwing on shirt, chain mail and tunic in rapid succession. Lurtz asked his new master, “Would you have me wear my armour? Or do you
wish that I should not look so much like one of the enemy?"

“Go ahead and put it on,” said Boromir, his voice initially muffled as he pulled his tunic down over his head. “We may be on the road again soon, and must be ready to leave at once. We will acquire Gondorian armour for you when we reach my city; for now, what you have must continue to serve.”

The leather strip which had held Lurtz’s hair in its Uruk-Hai topknot was lying on the table. Lurtz thought, At least that is one way in which I can look less like these Men’s enemy. Instead of reconstructing the topknot, he simply tied his hair back. The newly-cut fringe of hair felt odd to him, sitting there on his forehead. But he told himself no warrior could be troubled by so laughably minor an issue as odd-feeling hair.

With both of them dressed and armoured, Lord Boromir did one final thing before departing the room. He gave Lurtz back his sword.

“I’m afraid it got worn down a bit in sawing your chains,” Boromir told him. “There must be weapons in plenty to spare in the fortress’ armoury, and I will requisition one of those swords for you. But this is yours. There is no reason for me to withhold it from you.”

Lurtz nodded as he took the sword and stuck it through his belt, not quite trusting himself to speak. His gratitude somehow caused him a strange and surprising feeling of tightness in his throat.

He followed his master down the many stairs of the tower keep and outside into the courtyard. There the pallid air of dawning was clouded with steaming puffs of breath from many Men and many horses. Some Men were still dismounting as Boromir and Lurtz hastened toward them. Others stood beside their beasts, stroking the animals’ manes and faces and apparently talking to the horses.

For the first time, it occurred to Lurtz to wonder if the animals followed these Men because they chose to do so, or if the form of their servitude was closer to that of his own former allegiance to Saruman.

Boromir strode toward the party of horsemen. Lurtz held position a few paces behind him. When his master stopped, Lurtz did the same. He stood with his arms crossed over his breastplate, hoping he somehow was managing to look formidable but yet not too threatening.

“Westu Théoden hál!” Boromir called to one of the dismounted Rohirrim, an older Man with
impressive amounts of gilt on his breastplate and helmet. “What news do you bring from Isengard, My Lord?”

“Much news, and much of it strange, My Lord Boromir,” this Man replied, reaching out and clasping Boromir by the shoulders. “And more strange it was to us in the seeing than ever we can express in the telling.” His gaze moved past Boromir to settle disapprovingly on Lurtz. “But much, I perceive, is strange here, also,” he continued, letting go of the younger Man’s shoulders. “I must ask you why it is that this enemy of Rohan is permitted to roam our fortress both free and armed.”

“Lord King,” Boromir answered, “he is enemy to Rohan and Gondor no longer. He was in Saruman’s thrall. Some ill fate, as we guess, befell the White Wizard on this day past—of which I hope that you or some of your party can tell us, to end our suppositions. Whatever the calamity was that overtook the Wizard, it has set Lurtz free from his control. Being free to choose his own course for the first time in his life, he has sworn his fealty to Gondor and to me.”

During this explanation, Lurtz pondered his realisation that the old Man to whom Boromir spoke could be none other than the King of Rohan himself. Lurtz thought that he seemed vigorous enough, and in full possession of his wits. Either the traitor who was allegedly in Saruman’s pay had been lying through his teeth every time he reported to the Wizard, or Théoden King had lately undergone a miraculous recovery.

“Indeed there is much we can tell you that may explain this circumstance,” the king stated. “Yet first I must ask this of you, Lord Boromir. I know there is no Man who holds the weal and safety of his country dearer to his heart than do you. By your love for Gondor, can you swear to me in full confidence of heart that this creature can be trusted, and that no peril will come through him to your country or to mine?”

“In full confidence of heart, Théoden King,” Boromir declared, his voice clear and strong so that all in the courtyard should hear him, “I swear it.”

Lurtz was not certain what effect those words had on him, but they decidedly did something. It felt almost as though that statement of Boromir’s had ignited a glow within his chest; as though he had stumbled across a warming fire after wandering in snow-choked wilderness.

*But that’s a foolish thing to think,* he thought. *I like snow!*

Foolish or not, the warmth of it felt to him like a treasure; a treasure he wanted to clutch close to him and never allow to slip away.
That statement had a different effect on Boromir’s other listeners—different, but seemingly just as strong. A number of the Men glanced grimly at each other and then started conversing in low, angry or troubled-sounding murmurs.

Boromir’s declaration seemed at least to have satisfied the King of Rohan. Théoden announced, “Then, My Lord Boromir, I accept your word—and all those who follow me must do likewise.” He turned to further address the others in the courtyard. “Though Gandalf Greyhame lifted from me the spell under which I long languished, still I am prey to the ordinary failings of age. In these three days past, I have fought, ridden and bestirred myself more, by far, than I did in the three years previous. I must take some few hours of rest, and I urge all who wish, to do likewise. There will be little time for resting in the days ahead of us. At the noon we will dine together in the hall of the keep; then, when the meal is completed, we ride for the weapontake at Edoras. Rest while you may, and make what preparations are needful. Lord Aragorn,” he added, to one of the Men who stood near to him, “I may count on you and your comrades to inform Lord Boromir of those things which took place at Isengard?”

“You may so count on us, Lord King,” that Man replied.

The king strode up the stairs to the keep, and a general milling-about followed. Some Men handed over the reins of their horses to others, some led multiple horses away, and some Men remained in the courtyard and walked closer to Boromir and Lurtz.

*Not just Men, Lurtz realised. There are others among them.*

One of the two Halflings was there: the one that Bolgazog had carried in their journey from the Great River. He wondered where the other one of them, the whimpering one that Darzag had carried, might be.

Among the Men strode a helmed and armoured warrior who was barely taller than the Halfling. But from his huge, bristling beard, Lurtz knew that this warrior was no Halfling. He was a Dwarf; the first representative of that race whom Lurtz had seen, apart from the emissaries who had visited Saruman from the Dwarven kingdom that was allied with the great Orc kingdom of Gundabad.

And there were others. Three others in that party caused Lurtz’s nostrils to flare, his skin to tingle in warning and a rush of loathing and disgust to surge deep within him.

*Elves.*
These three were in truth the first of their race that Lurtz had seen. He would gladly have done without this acquaintance with them. Two of the three were dark haired and as like to each other as two peas, while the third Elf had pale golden hair which made Lurtz think him all the more disturbing. That hair took a being whom Lurtz already found repellent, and added to him the hair of the hated Horse-boys.

The Man Théoden King had addressed as Lord Aragorn—a dark-haired fellow about the same height as Boromir, but who had an almost Elven slenderness about him—was at the forefront of the group that made its way to Boromir and Lurtz. Boromir greeted them, “Welcome to all of you—to comrades both old and new. There are many in your party, Aragorn, whose faces are new to me. Will you make them known to me, that I may thank them in person for adding their swords to our cause?”

“Gladly,” the Man called Aragorn replied. He nodded toward another dark-haired Man standing at his left, and said, “This is my cousin Halbarad of the Dúnedain, and with him he brings thirty others of our kinsmen, all of them Rangers of the North. They overtook our party in the night as we returned here from Isengard. Their coming was a joy to me, but also a surprise. They had received word that I summoned them. Yet summon them I did not, save only in my wish. Halbarad,” he went on, “This is the Lord Boromir, Captain-General of Gondor and the son and heir of the Lord Steward Denethor.”

When Boromir and Halbarad had bowed their heads to each other, Aragorn gestured toward the two dark-haired Elves. “You remember, of course,” he said to Boromir, “the Lords Elladan and Elrohir, the Sons of Elrond, whom you met at their father’s court.”

“Of course,” answered Boromir. “I am glad to see you again, and glad also to welcome the kinsmen of Aragorn. Is it your lord father we have to thank, My Lords,” he asked the Elven brothers, “for the mysterious summoning of Aragorn’s kin?”

“I think not, My Lord,” said one of the identical Elves, “or if it is his doing, he spoke nothing of it to us. More like, I think, it was the work of the Lady Galadriel. From our father we were sent with advice for Aragorn, and to draw our swords in the defence of the free peoples of Middle-Earth.”

The sarcastic thought occurred to Lurtz that they would need to do a lot more than just draw their swords if they were to do the so-called “free peoples” any good. He also wondered if anyone would ever get around to mentioning what had happened to Saruman.

Boromir, perhaps, had guessed what question was uppermost in Lurtz’s mind. That, or he was simply eager to learn the answer himself. He asked, “What can you tell us of that strange news of
which Théoden King spoke, of yesterday’s doings at Isengard?"

Lurtz felt again that surprising warmth in his chest, at hearing Boromir speak of “us” instead of “me.” It seemed that others, as well, had noted that distinction. A concerned-looking frown touched the face of the golden-haired Elf, and the Dwarf growled some angry words into his beard.

The Man Aragorn seemed to be pondering how best to answer that question. Before he could reach any decision, someone else beat him to it.

Stepping forward, the Halfling said, “It was trees, Boromir. Magic trees, just like we saw here. They attacked the Wizard’s fortress! They tore down its outer walls, and some of them went up into the mountains above it, changed the routes of the streams and the river there and flooded the whole courtyard around his tower. The water had gone down again by the time we got there, but the place was still a wasteland; puddles and tumbled stone and wreckage everywhere. Gandalf called Saruman forth, and he came out to the top of the tower stairs. He tried to cast spells on all of us, but Gandalf defeated him—defeated him so easily, it seemed like it caused Gandalf no effort at all. He broke Saruman’s staff, just by holding out his hand and saying, ‘Saruman, your staff is broken.’ And it was! Gandalf said he had taken Saruman’s power from him and was casting him out of their order, and Saruman staggered back into his tower and locked himself inside.”

“Then Saruman still lives?” Boromir asked, with a quick glance over his shoulder at Lurtz.

“He’s alive, but I don’t think he’s very happy about it,” the Halfling answered. “As we rode away from Saruman’s fortress, Gandalf stopped to speak with the leader of the tree-people. Ents, they’re called, apparently, and they take the longest time to say anything of anyone you ever heard! If you thought that Elves are long-winded—no offense intended to the Fair Folk of the Forests; may their songs remain ever as enchanting and their speeches as high-flown and flowery—well, Elves are as hasty as Hobbits compared to these Ents. Gandalf asked the Ents to keep watch on Saruman and not to let him escape, and their leader said”—the Halfling lowered his voice and spoke in a manner that was probably as slow as he could manage—“‘Until seven times the years in which he tormented us have passed, we shall not tire of watching him.’”

The Dwarf snorted. “That was not half slow enough, Master Meriadoc,” he commented.

“Well, no one else can talk as slowly as the Ents!” retorted the Halfling. “If I’d tried, we’d all have fallen asleep before I finished a sentence!”

“Talking of hasty Hobbits,” said Boromir, “where has Pippin got to? And for that matter, where is Gandalf?”
The Halfling—or, Lurtz supposed, the Hobbit—gave an unhappy-sounding sigh. “You got it on your first guess, Boromir,” he said. “Gandalf has carried Pippin off with him, in that mysterious Wizardly way of his. He rode off like the wind on that Lord of All Horses he’s made friends with, Shadowfax—you remember, he told us about Shadowfax during Lord Elrond’s council—saying, ‘I must come to Minas Tirith before the seas of war surround it,’ and he took Pippin with him. Um, that was because of a spot of bother that Pip had got into along the way … a spot of bother which you’d do better to hear about from Strider, or some other wise one more learned in lore than me.”

Despite this suggestion, it seemed that Boromir cared little for learning more details of the Halfling Pippin’s “spot of bother.” Only one portion of this Halfling’s speech seemed to have made particular impact on him.

He exclaimed, “Gandalf has ridden to Minas Tirith? Bloody hell. I must come to Minas Tirith before the seas of war surround it, too; I think my need to reach the White City is at least as urgent as Gandalf’s. I would he had stopped off here to carry me away with him, instead of abducting poor Pippin, who has as much notion of how to hold my city’s enemies at bay as I have of which tavern serves the finest ale in the Shire!”

“That would be the Golden Perch,” the Halfling put in helpfully. Then he hurried onward, before Boromir could give an aggravated reply, “You know how Wizards are. Most of what they get up to doesn’t make much sense to the rest of us.”

Boromir snorted. “That is putting it mildly.”

“Boromir,” put in the Man Aragorn, “I, too, have need to reach the White City in the utmost haste. I must take counsel with my kinsman and with the Sons of Elrond to determine if the advice they bring has bearing on how that may best be possible. But, first, may I speak with you alone?”

Lurtz’s master paused a moment. Then he gave a brusque nod. The two Men walked together some little space apart from the cluster of other Men, Elves, Dwarf and Halfling.

Lurtz guessed that where they stopped, they were indeed out of the hearing of at least most of that group. They were not, however, out of the hearing of Lurtz. Since his master had given him no order to move to some spot where he could not hear them, he did not bother to budge.

“Boromir,” Aragorn said urgently, “do you believe without doubt in the rightness of what you are doing, regarding this Orc?”
Boromir’s stolid response to the other Man’s urgency was to give a brief speech about names. “His people call themselves Uruk-Hai. It is apparently of great importance to him that he be recognised as an Uruk, not an Orc. And his personal name is Lurtz.” Before Aragorn could do more than stand open-mouthed with surprise, Boromir determinedly went on, “And, yes. I do believe without doubt in the rightness of what I am doing.”

Seeming increasingly uncomfortable, his fellow Man answered, “Merry and Pippin have told me that this … Uruk is the same one who captured you. They did not say this in so many words, but from the manner in which they speak of what you endured, I could not help making the inference that he had … misused you during your captivity. If that is so, then I must ask you to consider seriously whether your experiences may have clouded your judgement on this question.”

Lurtz found it something of a challenge not to grin at the embarrassment this Man was so clearly suffering. He thought, At least someone else is having an even more difficult time than I am with saying the word “fuck.”

Boromir made no comment on what he might or might not have endured. He only stated emphatically, “I have considered it. And I can assure you that my considerations were serious ones. My judgement is not clouded.”

The other Man lowered his voice to an even quieter tone, perhaps in the hope that his friends the Elves would not hear him. He said, “There are many among us who will strenuously object to travelling alongside an Orc—or an Uruk. Lords Elladan and Elrohir, I fear, will object the most strongly of all. You may not be aware, Boromir, that the lady their mother was once abducted and held captive by Orcs. Elrond and his sons freed the Lady Celebrian from her captivity, and Elladan and Elrohir hunted down and slew their mother’s tormentors. Yet so great was her suffering that she could not long after abide in this Middle-Earth. She left her husband and children behind, to make the journey across the sea. I hope you can understand why the Sons of Elrond have more taste for eradicating any Orc—or Uruk—they may encounter in their path, than for travelling in amity with one.”

“I can understand it,” Boromir answered in implacable tones, “but I hope that you do not share their attitude upon the matter.” Aragorn started to say something, but Boromir spoke over his attempt. “It was not Lurtz who abducted the Lady Celebrian. And even in the case of the crimes which can be laid to Lurtz’s door—I believe that if you consider the question seriously, you will find there are weighty ethical concerns which prevent him from being held fully to blame. He and his fellow Uruk-Hai were created by Saruman. They were compelled to serve him. So Lurtz tells me, and I find every reason to believe that what he has told me is true. If this is the truth, then it is Saruman who bears the blame for the atrocities his followers committed, not the beings he created to do his bidding.”
Aragorn did not look the slightest bit comfortable with what Boromir had said to him. He did, however, look as though he was thinking about it. “I can see that you have indeed given the question serious consideration,” he admitted, “as I see that I must give it further thought, as well.”

“I hope that you will. As one who may someday be king of Gondor, it is fitting that you should give these matters serious consideration.”

Lurtz wondered how many more times in this conversation he would hear variations on the phrase “serious consideration.” That question, however, was greatly overshadowed by his surprise on hearing that this scrawny fellow had some kind of a chance to one day become the king of Gondor.

_I will have to ask Boromir about that, Lurtz thought, when we are able to talk alone._

Boromir, meanwhile, was continuing to give the apparently-potential-king a lecture. “If you do become king,” he said, “and if by some chain of miracles our forces prove to be victorious, you and your government will face these issues again. I am certain that Lurtz will be joined by many other former servants of our enemies in offering us their allegiance, when their dark masters are defeated. Those who were created by Saruman, or who were compelled into the service of the Dark Lord, may well turn to us in their quest for a new cause which they can serve with honour—and in the hope of our protection against the many who will see them only as vermin to be eradicated. And if we side with those who seek their eradication, will our rule truly be that much preferable to being ruled by the dark powers?”

The other Man seemed to be casting Boromir a measuring look. At length he said, “I do not think you would have spoken thus of these issues, Boromir, a few days in the past.”

“No,” agreed Boromir. “It is likely I would not have done. I hope you do not think it in any way unnatural that a Man’s opinions may change as the result of his experiences. After all,” he continued, “a few months ago I would not have believed that a claimant to the throne of Gondor might appear out of the wilderness—nor, if he did so appear, that there was any chance I would offer such a Man my allegiance.”

The implications of that particular comment, Lurtz thought, were clear. It seemed to him that Boromir had come as near as dammit to telling this fellow Aragorn, “Support the policies I endorse regarding Lurtz and his fellows, or there’s not a chance in hell that I’ll support your bid for the throne.” And unless the Man Aragorn was stupid, Lurtz thought he had to have reached that same conclusion.

Sombre of tone, Aragorn said, “I will think upon all of these matters, Boromir; that I promise you.”
But there are more immediate issues demanding attention. I must take counsel with Halbarad and with the Sons of Elrond; then I will return to consult with you upon the question of how we may make our way to the White City with all possible speed.”

As the supposedly claimant king returned to his other comrades, Lurtz gave a mental whistle of surprise that neither he nor Boromir had again used the words “serious consideration.” After some quietly exchanged words with the larger group, Aragorn, his cousin and the two dark-haired Elves walked together toward the keep. Lurtz was relieved to see that those twin Elves apparently felt no need for private discussion with Boromir.

He found it unpleasant to have even one Elf in his vicinity. One of them, however, was decidedly preferable to three.

That one remaining Elf and the Dwarf, in the meantime, were engaging in argument. The Dwarf growled, “Well, I do not care what anyone says. I, for one, will demand to know what in the name of Durin’s Beard he is thinking, and if his answer is not to my liking—”

The blond-haired Elf answered him, “Friend Dwarf, Théoden King commanded that his people should follow his lead in bowing to Boromir’s choice in this matter. Aragorn, also, has said that for now, he believes all is well. If the decisions of two kings are not enough to guide you—”

The Dwarf blusteringly interrupted, “No Dwarven king would command me to travel with an enemy of our people. Why I should obey any other peoples’ kings, if they so command me, is beyond me —”

“Aragorn has never yet led you or me astray,” was the smooth reply. “And is it not so, my friend, that before our company set forth from Imladris, you believed me also to be an enemy of your people?”

“While you two are squabbling,” declared the Halfling, as the Dwarf was still harrumphing his way toward an answer, “I’m going to talk with Boromir.” The diminutive being strode over to the Captain-General of Gondor. As the Halfling walked past Lurtz, he hesitated a moment and then nodded a greeting to the Uruk. Surprised, Lurtz nodded back.

Boromir knelt down when the Halfling reached him, with the result that their heads were at nearly the same height.
“Yes, Merry?” Boromir quietly prompted.

“Strider says he thinks that you’re doing all right. But I want to make sure for myself. Are things … are things really all right, between you and him?” A glance toward Lurtz on that final word made it clear that “him” referred to the Uruk-Hai warrior.

“Yes,” said Boromir. His smile as he said that somehow did odd things to Lurtz’s insides. “Things are really all right. Lurtz suffered grievous hurt from the defeat of Saruman. I am certain it will be some time before he fully heals. But I have promised him my help—because I want to help him. Yes,” he concluded, “things are well between us.”

“Well,” the Halfling Merry said, somewhat gruffly. “That’s all right, then. It ought to be all that really matters, oughtn’t it?” He cast a glance over his shoulder and then suggested to Boromir, “Shall we go find out if Legolas and Gimli have finished arguing about the two of you, yet?”

“I suppose we should,” Boromir agreed, as he stood up, “although I cannot say I hold high hopes for that.”

The Man of Gondor did not make his way directly to the Elf and the Dwarf. Instead he went to Lurtz and performed an introduction. “Merry,” he said, “this is Lurtz of the Uruk-Hai. Lurtz, this is Meriadoc Brandybuck, a Hobbit of the Shire.”

“Pleased to meet you,” the Hobbit stated, looking up unflinchingly at Lurtz. “And I’m especially pleased that you’re not trying to abduct me.”

Lurtz had no idea how he should reply to that. He decided repetition was likely a safe enough bet. He rumbled an answering, “Pleased to meet you.”

Unsurprisingly, neither the Elf nor the Dwarf seemed pleased. The various Men who were apparently the Man Aragorn’s thirty additional kinsmen had by now departed, leading their horses from the courtyard. Remaining for Boromir and Lurtz to encounter were the gold-haired Elf, the scowling Dwarf, and a few of the Horse-boys, probably lingering to learn if this encounter would prove entertaining.

In terms of the scene’s value as entertainment, the Dwarf got things off to a promising start. He burst out, as Boromir, Meriadoc and Lurtz drew near, “Boromir, I’m beginning to think you’re the one who had an exploding fortress wall land on your head, not him.” On “him,” the Dwarf jerked his
thumb toward Lurtz and then brought his hand back down again, standing with both thumbs hooked through his belt. It was presumably no coincidence that his right hand was thus very near to his axe. “If you imagine for one instant that I am going to travel in company with that—”

What colourful term the Dwarf might have used for Lurtz, they were never to know. Boromir forcefully interrupted, “Gimli Son of Glóin, you are free to choose the people with whom you will or will not travel, just as I am free to make that decision for myself. Lurtz and I will journey to Minas Tirith together. Whether we make that journey alone or with further company remains to be seen. And let me make one matter clear to both of you, my friends,” he continued, the heaviness with which he spoke “friends” imparting a certain irony to the word. “I will not travel in company with you if there is any repetition or discussion of the juvenile pastime in which the two of you indulged during the recent battle. The deaths of hundreds of beings—even though those beings be our enemies, and creatures whom all of us have been taught to view with disgust—should not be reduced to trivialities for the sake of your puerile rivalry; turned from lives that are lost, into mere points in a game. You may be assured that we shall part company if I again hear either of you so much as mention your rival tallies of kills.”

Both the Elf and the Dwarf gazed at Boromir in evident astonishment. The Dwarf’s face turned an intriguing shade of red, but before he could rage out an answer, the Elf instead spoke in a frostily calm tone, “Certainly, Boromir. You have my apology for not realising that you would find the topic offensive.”

“Your apology! He has your apology!” the Dwarf shouted. “Is that all you have to say about it, you infuriating cold fish—?”

The stare that the Elf aimed at his fulminating comrade did indeed have much in common with that of the fish the Dwarf had mentioned. Still in that relentlessly chilly voice, he inquired, “What do you believe that either of us will gain by shouting at him? He is not likely to change our opinions, nor are we likely to change his.”

The Elf next turned his gaze toward Lurtz, causing the Uruk a sensation as if he were being gut-stabbed with a spear-point carved from ice. “We would do better to consider the practicalities,” said the Elf, “if all of us are soon to set forth in company together. Have you ever ridden a horse?” he demanded of Lurtz.

“No,” Lurtz answered. He took pride in the fact that he was able to meet and endure the Elf’s ice-blue stare. “Apart from having been slung over the back of one, with my hands and feet bound.”

“Then we had best set about rectifying that omission, in these hours before we are summoned to dine with Théoden King,” was the Elf’s recommendation, “that our departure may not be delayed by the need for last-minute riding lessons.”
A youngish-seeming Horse-boy, who had near as much gilt on his helmet and breastplate as did the
King of Rohan, put in, “Since the Lord Aragorn’s kinsmen brought his own horse from the north
with them, Hasufel whom I had loaned to Lord Aragorn is now again without a rider. Will you take
the loan of this steed, Lord Boromir, that Hasufel may not be separated from his comrade Arod—that
is, if Arod has proved a satisfactory mount for you, My Lord Legolas?” the Man added, turning
questioningly toward the Elf.

“Satisfactory indeed,” the Elf replied. “Arod and I suit each other well. I shall be glad not to part
from him.” The Elf, whose name apparently was Legolas, cast a smug-seeming glance at Lurtz as he
spoke. Lurtz guessed he was likely preening himself over his ease with horses, in contrast to Lurtz’s
not knowing the first thing about them.

Boromir bowed to the Man of Rohan and said, “I thank you for the loan of Hasufel, Marshal Éomer.
And I shall be glad of your aid in selecting a steed for Lurtz, as well.”

The Man nodded. “We will go to the stables now, if it is convenient to you,” he stated, “and learn of
the master ostler which steeds under his care are now without riders.”

So Boromir, the Man of Rohan and Lurtz set out across the courtyard, with a small entourage
consisting of the Halfling, the Elf and the Dwarf. Lurtz assumed the Elf and Dwarf were tagging
along in the hope that Lurtz would make an idiot of himself during his first lessons on interacting
with horses.

They skirted their way around the tower keep toward the stables. These proved to be located in a
back wall of the fortress, up against the mountain.

As they walked, Lurtz wondered if the Elf felt as sick to his stomach being in close proximity to
Lurtz, as he felt being in proximity to the Elf.

_I hope he does_, Lurtz thought. _I'd like to think I'm giving as good as I get._

This Elf—and presumably the other two of them, as well, with whom he had thankfully not yet been
in such close contact—had a startlingly disturbing effect on him.

Lurtz was grateful that he did not tend to remember his dreams after waking. He thought it
unpleasantly likely that, whenever he finally managed to sleep again, he would now start having
nightmares about Elves.

_ I never saw any beings so disgusting! _ he thought. His musings about maggots, in the night that had just passed, came nowhere near to expressing the discomfort he felt concerning these Elves.

It wasn’t simply that their dead white skin made him think of maggots. The sight and smell of them caused him to feel as though the maggots of his imagining were wriggling about beneath his own skin.

_ I know why they feel so vile to me, _ he realised. _ It’s because they seem so close to being Orcs._

_ They seem close, but not close enough. They seem only close enough to make me sick with horror._

The tips of the Elf’s pointed ears, peeking out between locks of his shimmering hair, were like pallid mockeries of Orcs’ ears. The Elf’s reed-like slenderness made him seem like an Orc who had been starved for months and held in chains that stopped him from moving his limbs, until his muscles dwindled and left him as little more than a skin-draped skeleton. And the Elf’s smell …

_ His smell, _ thought Lurtz, _ is like the smell of an Orc. Only it’s the smell of an Orc turned desperately, hatefully wrong._

_ The smell of the Orcs, as of we Uruk-Hai their brethren, is like the smell of earth._

_ But with these Elves … _

_ The smell of these Elves takes the odour of earth and grafts onto it the stink of rotting flowers. It is like a marsh that reeks of yellowed water lilies, petals drifting loose from their seed pods, sinking onto the petals from bygone years in layer upon layer of slime-ridden, watery muck._

With a feeling of sudden understanding, he recalled what his former master had said of the origin of Orcs.

It had been the first time Saruman had sent for him, shortly after Lurtz’s birth. Lurtz still remembered the Wizard’s words, although at the time he had barely understood what Saruman was telling him.
Saruman had told him the first Orcs were once Elves. A ruined and terrible race, the Wizard had termed the Elves. Now that he had encountered them for himself, Lurtz heartily agreed with him on that.

Saruman said those Elves had been taken by the Dark Powers—*whatever those may be*, Lurtz thought—and changed. Their weaknesses and imperfections were taken from them in their transformation into Orcs. And now Saruman had done the same thing for the Orcs. He had taken Orcs and he had transformed them further. He had created a new, perfected being, his Fighting Uruk-Hai.

*Not his*, Lurtz reminded himself. *I am not his; not now. I am Saruman’s no longer.*

He glanced at Boromir of Gondor walking beside him, and he thought, *I can endure this for him.*

*He is my master now. To him I have pledged my loyalty and service. For him, I will endure all—even though “all” must include stomaching the company of Elves.*

*And horses,* his thoughts added, as they walked through the broad doorway of the Horse-boys’ stable. The powerful scents of several hundred horses, Lurtz found to his relief, did much to overwhelm the rotting-flowers odour of the Elf.

*I can do this,* Lurtz told himself. *The Elf said he and the horse he’s been riding suit each other. Well, he will learn that I can get along with horses just as well.*

*If Orcs are Elves perfected, and Uruk-Hai are Orcs perfected, then anything an Elf can do, I can do, too.*

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