**Of Storms and Surprises**

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**Of Storms and Surprises**

by [HerAwesomeShinyness](http://archiveofourown.org)

**Summary**

In the early Fourth Age, Elrond's sons are tricked by their brother into scouting the northernmost coast of Harad for him, and get caught in a storm, from which they find refuge with two friendly travelers who reveal themselves to be quite more than that.

Maglor and Daeron, in their defense, didn't know those two young men seeking shelter were their grandsons (it's complicated) and that the encounter would upset the carefully-curated calm of their life.

They make it work.

A birthday present for nerdvnel, who liked the idea when I came up with it six months ago.

**Notes**

See the end of the work for [notes](http://archiveofourown.org).

It was a dark and stormy night.

Normally, this would have added some unnecessary yet welcome drama, but on this particular night it was extremely inconvenient.

Their brother, Elladan thought, had better appreciate the favour they were doing him.
Elrohir, having just finished his turn of complaining about the weather, concentrated on finding a place, any place, that might be marginally dryer than the wind- and rainswept beach they were running along, where every drop of water blown in from the ocean could do nothing but bounce off the cliffs to their left and fill the air with water flying in every possible direction.

If it hadn’t made seeing where he was going so hard, it would’ve been fascinating, beautiful.

“-and the next time Estel asks us to go scouting for him I am going to make him pay us, it’s ridiculous that we still behave like he’s an adorable child who needs our help to get the cookie jar, he’s a king if he wants us to go run in a storm for his precious diplomatic meetings he can treat us like we’re scouts and give us something in exchange,” Elladan muttered, his near-continuous stream of complaints about the weather turning to the person whose fault it actually was they were getting drenched in the middle of nowhere, “I can’t believe him, ‘the border with Harad is a very beautiful place’ he says, ‘so different from what you’re used to’ he says, ‘you’ll enjoy it’ he says. If I don’t drown on this beach right now I will strangle him with my own two hands.”

Elrohir tuned him out again, and prayed he could find shelter soon. He wouldn’t last until their next shift change without attempting to murder his brother, and that would probably be bad, if worth it.

“-did I want to spend the next few years getting wet sand out of every crevice in my body? No I did not, but guess what I’m going to be doing?”

If it had been day, at least he would’ve been able to look at his surroundings and distract himself, the area was very beautiful, but instead he had to strain his eyes through a sheet of water and one of the darkest nights he had ever seen, because of course they wouldn’t be lucky enough to get stuck in a storm with dramatic and convenient lightning, and somehow find some sort of minuscule hole that could hold them both, without letting his attention be stolen by Elladan’s ever more rambling complaints.

His eyes were actually getting tired, peering through the rain like this, he was starting to see things. A flash of movement, like a bird flying by them, what looked like the slow wave of a willow branch, something shifting in the corner of his vision, a light in the cliff…

No. The light was real.

“Dan, shut up and tell me what you see there.”

“-can’t see why he needed to scout, really -- what?” Elladan paused, then actually processed what his brother had just said, and followed the line that was probably his arm to see… a small light in the cliff face, like a deep crack illuminated from within by a small fire.

“Oh, thank all the Valar, we’re not going to drown tonight,” he said, before grabbing Elrohir’s arm and starting to pull him towards the light.

“Dan,” he hissed, “careful! I am not dying because you startled someone just as we got out of this storm.”

“Shush, I’ll do the talking, I’m good with people,” Elladan said, completely ignoring his brother.

Stepping into the small cavity, they saw a figure, maybe two, move behind a small fire, probably surprised by their entrance. The only positive thing about the whole affair was that in the small space the light was obscuring everyone’s vision, not just their own, and wouldn’t leave them at too much of a disadvantage.
“Ah, greetings,” Elladan said, in his best approximation of Gondorian Westron, “we are terribly sorry to disturb you, but this is a very harsh night, and yours is the first shelter we have seen since the storm started, so we would beg you to allow us to share it until daybreak, or until the rain lightens somewhat.”

“We? How many?” a probably male voice answered, strangely accented even when taking into account where they were.

“There's two of us, sir, but we can take up very little space, and will not disturb you,” Elrohir said, from behind his brother.

“Two is fine, there is space for you,” a second voice, softer and more melodic, said, “we are happy to help when we can.”

“Please do not feel like you have to leave as soon as possible, the coast can be treacherous in the dark,” the first voice said, “you are more than welcome to stay until morning, rest and dry off properly, it is no trouble.”

Something about his tone was very familiar.

Which of them had had that thought? It didn’t matter. They both smiled, and carefully sat down as far away from their hosts as possible without being in danger of getting soaked. Wouldn’t do to bother them, so it was probably also best, they decided, to wait until morning to eat.

So how are we doing this, Ro?

I’d say watches, but they feel trustworthy, and…

And he wasn’t sure they could stay awake, he didn’t think. Elladan heard it anyway.

Only one of us really sleeps? It was fine last night.

Dan, don’t remind me of last night. Just because it was fine doesn’t mean I’m not upset you fell asleep on me. And no I don’t care you weren’t sleeping deeply.

I had my eyes open, I would’ve woken up if anything had happened.

Sure you would have.

You think you can do better?

Do you really think that’s going to be enough to convince me to stay awake through the night and let you sleep like we aren’t in the middle of nowhere?

Elladan didn’t answer.

Thought so. But as I said, they feel trustworthy. Just go to sleep, I’ll keep my eyes open tonight and we’ll deal with it in the morning.

That was my idea, Ro. Why are you just repeating it?

Because I actually thought about it, and for once you made a moderately intelligent suggestion. Don’t get smug.

He could feel Elladan’s smirk as he slid down the cave wall to rest against his shoulder, and determinedly ignored it as he drifted towards the paths of elvish dream.
Elladan woke up in a wonderful mood, considering he’d used his brother’s shoulder as a pillow, but that was probably the result of finally sleeping through the night.

He simply didn't understand how full elves did it, never resting all parts their body and mind at once. The Gift of Men, he and his brother felt, wasn't death, it was sleep.

Elrohir was also stirring, and quickly stood up, to survey the outside of the small cave, and try to figure out where they were. Thankfully, the storm had broken overnight, and the patch of sky visible from the inside was blue and cloudless, the air streaming in fresh and soothing.

*Have fun outside, I’ll deal with our hosts.*

The message was answered by a vague feeling of assent, which Elladan took to be permission to do whatever he wanted. The two of them tried to interpret as many things as possible like that, it made life so much easier.

The best thing to do, he mused as he stood up and carefully ignored the condition of his clothes, was make breakfast. Hobbits had the right of it, food fixed most things.

Thankfully, they had brought along more than enough to make a decent breakfast, even for four. It would be rather ungrateful to not share, after all, and getting someone vaguely local to like and/or trust them sounded decidedly useful.

One of their hosts stood up just as he finished setting up some of their supplies among the last embers of the fire. He'd probably woken them up, but food should, in theory, soothe any trouble that brought.

“Ah, good morning,” the one who had spoken first earlier said, “you are cooking?”

“Yes. I hope you'll let us thank you for your hospitality, there is more than enough for all of us,” he answered, speaking Quenya as the other had.

Wait, what?

The man had spoken it in the same fashion his father did, and now that Elladan had jerked his eyes away from the fire and towards him, it was obvious why.

In the dim light of the hollow, the Elda’s eyes shone, made more obvious by how they were widened in surprise.

He had not been expecting an elf, obviously, not when he was clad like one of Estel’s scouts, and crouched on the ground in a way that hid his height.

“Who are you?” The shock was evident in the stranger's voice and face. More than he would have expected, to be honest.

*Dan, what's wrong?*

*I don't know, come back, please.*
Giving his name to a stranger he had found in a cave would be an incredibly stupid thing to do. Historically, it had had many bad consequences. And yet it wouldn't be the stupidest he had ever done, and the man did feel trustworthy.

More so than he had ever felt before from a stranger, in fact, and yet it did not feel unnatural.

“My name is Elladan, my brother is named Elrohir, why do you want to know?” Ideally, this would be worth it.

“You look a lot like an old friend of mine. I was surprised. I am sorry for my rudeness, Elladan. I... forgive me.”

“What's wrong?” the other one, also an elf, said, but in Sindarin, “Magpie, what's going on?”

Magpie.

That was... He had heard that particular nickname before. But how? He couldn't remember.

“Dan?” his brother's voice from the entrance shook him out of his thoughts, and startled the strange elves as well.

Magpie’s eyes somehow widened further as he looked between them, did he find significance in their being twins? Did he know their father and uncle, maybe?

The other one, he really would have liked to know their names, the other one had stood up, and was staring at Elrohir.

They were both extraordinarily old, that explained how unsettling they were, but it didn't make it pleasant.

The one staring at you is called Magpie? Elrohir thought at his brother.

Elladan focused on his memory of the brief exchange, allowing Elrohir to see it.

A nickname, I assume.

Obviously. Elrohir thought, having come to the obvious solution to what was going on. He decided to act on it.

“Maglor? You're so lucky our father already left, he was dreadfully worried about you, he would have kicked your ass,” he said, with his famous tact, “could you stop staring at my brother? It's usually considered impolite these days, you see.”

“I...” Maglor started, but as he tried to string words together he was interrupted by his companion.

“Believe me, I tried to convince him to go talk to Elrond so many times over the years, he would have deserved it.” He spoke with a different archaic accent than Maglor did, closer to their grandfather's. Doriath? Why would someone from Doriath be travelling, or apparently living, with Maglor Fëanorion?

“If we are making introductions, I am Daeron, his husband.”

“I'm sorry, his husband? -”

“The Daeron? -”
Both brothers shouted their questions, trying to override each other, and be answered first.

“The Daeron, his husband, yes,” he said, looking supremely unimpressed.

Maglor tried to speak again, and failed. Again.

“Well then, Grandfather, may I call you Grandfather? Grandfather, Ro, maybe we should wait until after breakfast to have this sort of conversation. Oh and someone give Granddad a hug, he looks like he needs it,” Elladan said, trying to stay calm, which wasn't easy, not when they had just found two of their long-lost relatives, who had apparently married, and one of them seemed to be barely stopping himself from crying, if the way he was trembling was any indication.

Ro he thought, Grandpa is going to kill someone.

He is Elrohir answered dully, that might help though, we have too many grandfathers.

Maglor had sat down next to the fire, and quietly wrapped his arms around his knees. He was still staring at them, and only barely acknowledged Daeron sitting down next to him and pulling him into his side.

“You called me grandfather,” he finally said, when they had all finished eating. He didn't look like he'd noticed.

“I called you Granddad, actually, Daeron was Grandfather,” Elladan said. He had a feeling he knew exactly what Maglor was trying to ask, but it seemed important to get all the facts right.

“Why?”

“Well, Atar considers you his father, so…” Elrohir answered, shrugging, “we can always call you cousin, or by name, if it makes you uncomfortable. We're just used to thinking of you like that.”

“Oh.”

Maglor blinked, apparently so stunned by this revelation that he couldn't summon up more of a reaction. Daeron, Elladan, and Elrohir looked at his dumbfounded expression for a second, before they all burst out laughing.

Apparently, he did not like this.

His offended expression, it turned out, was even funnier than his stunned one, so it took quite some time before they could all sit up straight and breathe evenly.

When they did, however, Maglor stood up and, as they wiped tears from their cheeks, walked around the former fire to grab them both into a hug.

“I'm really glad to meet you both,” he said, “but are you sure you aren't Elros’?”

“Pretty sure, yes,” Elladan said, not very usefully.

“Now that you've mentioned Elros’ descendants, however, you've reminded me of something important,” Elrohir added.

“Which is?”

“We're going to need you to come with us, or our siblings are going to murder us.”
Aragorn, His Majesty the King Elessar of the Reunited Kingdom of Gondor and Arnor, and so on and so forth, was somewhat worried.

It wasn't that he didn't trust his brothers to stay safe, but they had been out during a rather terrible storm, and a beach really wasn't the safest place to be in such weather.

As with many things involving the twins, it had seemed like a good idea at the time. One of the lords of northern Harad had asked to meet at the border for some important trade negotiations he couldn’t be bothered to recall at the moment, and it would have been insulting to bring more than the bare minimum of guard, and stupid to walk into nearly unknown territory with no true defenses. Asking his brothers to come along and accidentally wander around a few days before the meeting had been, he still felt, the best possible compromise.

How that had resulted in the distinct possibility that he might have to deal with being responsible for something happening to Elladan and Elrohir while in an isolated camp with their sister and grandfather he couldn’t imagine.

He knew Arwen had been the one to suggest making it a family trip, but he couldn’t for the life of him remember why he’d thought that could ever be sensible.

Oh yes, because Celeborn had already been visiting and looking depressed.

He sighed into his porridge.

So did Celeborn, at the other end of the table. Probably they were having much the same thoughts, it would be best to try and distract him.

Arwen, busy with her diary (really letters to her parents, not that she would admit it), was obviously going to be no help.

He was saved from having to figure that out by a small commotion outside, which was resolved before he could even try to stand up by Elladan and Elrohir triumphantly striding into the tent.

“We have returned!” one cried.

“You didn’t manage to drown us, brother!” the other added.

“You know,” Aragorn said, “I was starting to get worried, but I’ve suddenly forgotten why I would have wanted you safe.”

“Oh, we love you too, Estel,” Elladan said.

“Even if you did just try to kill us. Again,” Elrohir added. Their habit of finishing each other’s sentences increased with their mood, so they weren’t actually upset. Thankfully.

He could feel himself starting to grin as he stood up and went to greet them properly, and they obviously felt much the same, because their more or less serious expressions instantly dissolved into smiles as they bounced forward to crush him into a hug, and stayed like that while they gave the same happy, if not very clean, greeting to everyone else.
“Now,” Elrohir said when they were done, “we do actually have something to tell you.”

Everyone stilled as a thought, so common around the twins, passed through their minds. *What did they do this time?*

“We see your accusing faces, and are incredibly hurt and offended. This is entirely your fault, Estel,” Elladan said, “and anyway, we weren’t going to report anything bad. Quite the opposite in fact.”

“What happened, you see, is that we found refuge from the dreadful storm you sent us running into, we didn’t see anything suspicious by the way, we found refuge with some very kind and helpful locals.”

“Who were very willing, dear baby brother, to come here and help you out.”

Aragorn was about to try and find an appropriate reaction to this piece of news, when Arwen spoke, being moderately less willing to deal with her brothers’ dramatic tendencies.

“So who or what did you find that is making you look so insufferably smug, and why did you think it was a good idea to bring them here?”

This was, even though Aragorn and Arwen didn’t know, exactly the question the twins had been looking for.

“Oh they’re very trustworthy!”

“Practically family.”

The tent’s flap opened, and two tall figures walked in. They were elves, with long dark hair and that slight fuzziness of the truly ancient, which was only enhanced by the slightly ragged, strangely flowing robes and mantles they were wearing. One of them, who seemed slightly uneasy at the attention, appeared to be glowing slightly, especially his eyes, so he had to be-

“YOU!” Celeborn shouted, jumping up from his seat, “How dare you come here?”

“Your grandsons asked him to, Celeborn, they’re very convincing,” the one who hadn’t been addressed said, moving in front of his companion protectively.

“You!”

“Yes, I understand, you learned a word, that doesn’t mean you have to only use that one.”

“Daeron, what the *fuck*?”

Daeron prepared to answer, and wasn’t *that* a sentence no one had been expecting to think. Aragorn knew someone should probably stop them, but how?

“Grandpa,” Arwen said, “please don’t try to murder the guests my brothers brought, at least not until they’ve had a chance to introduce themselves.”

Everyone turned towards her, Celeborn surprised, and somewhat hurt, the twins and Aragorn grateful, and their guests somewhere in between. Daeron, in particular, looked absolutely stunned for a second, before smiling brightly at her.

“I’m sorry to interrupt, but,” Aragorn said, unable to contain himself any longer, “*Daeron?*”
“Yes,” the elf said, turning towards him and going into a small but sweeping bow, “I nearly forgot introductions, my apologies. My name is Daeron, formerly of Doriath, and this is my husband, Maglor Feanorion.”

“But we have permission to just call them Grandfather and Granddad,” Elrohir said, smiling his brightest smile.

Celeborn collapsed back into his chair, his face a rather fetching shade of grey that clashed horribly with his hair. “What.” he said.

“I really don’t see what the problem is,” Maglor, Maglor, said, “I never complained when you married my cousin, why are you upset that I married yours?”

“Shut up.”

Maglor laughed and turned to Aragorn and Arwen, smiling.

“So you're Arwen and Estel? It's lovely to meet you, your brothers have told us a lot about you.”

The two, knowing their brothers, froze. This could mean so many things, most of them horrible. So many stories the twins could have shared. And who knew how long ago they’d found Maglor and Daeron, they might well have had time for a lot of them.

Maglor laughed again, “Don’t worry! It was nothing too embarrassing, just a few cute childhood stories,” he spun in a circle, looking at all four of them, “you know, you remind me a lot of Elros. Just… calmer, maybe, or less-”

“Oh don’t you start again,” Daeron interrupted, “as much as I love it when you brag about your sons, there is a point where it becomes impolite.”

“What happened to you, Daeron?” Celeborn said feebly. He was still quite pale, but seemed to be making an effort to be kind, “I thought you were ‘married to music’?”

Daeron blinked, surprised.

“But I am,” he said, as if he were stating the most obvious truth in the world.

Maglor made a small, choked sound as he blushed so deeply his freckles disappeared.

Daeron turned to him and smiled, “What, it’s tr-”

Maglor jumped and kissed him, silencing whatever string of compliments was going to follow.

Celeborn and the twins averted their eyes, the latter squealing in obviously fake disgust. Arwen laughed sweetly, giggled really, and Aragorn was overtaken by a brief burst of panic. She had never seemed to want such public displays, but what if she did? She was obviously delighted at seeing the love of others, was she just unwilling to ask the same for herself?

“Must you really?” Celeborn asked sharply, interrupting his thoughts. Still, he didn’t seem to be as upset as he could have been.

“Look, Celeborn, you kiss a Noldo, I kiss a Noldo. It seems fair to me,” Daeron said, as Maglor continued to blush, staring at him as if trying to come up with a better compliment.

“It’s not the same and you know it.”
“You’re right, mine is prettier,” Daeron said, before leaning up to leave a quick kiss on Maglor’s forehead. This seemed rather inaccurate, considering Galadriel had been called the most beautiful member of her family for millennia, but it was well known that poets never cared about accuracy.

“Dai, no,” Maglor said, with what had to be the least believable innocent expression ever seen, “obviously the difference is that I married a prettier Sinda than Galadriel did. And a smarter one. Who has more skill in music, poetry, languages… I think Celeborn married the prettier Noldo and you got the one with better taste. That has to be it.”

Aragorn started to feel like he should be taking notes.

He also started to feel like someone should intervene before an actual fight broke out.

“Maybe we can talk about this after we’ve all eaten and our intrepid scouts have given me a slightly more detailed report?” he said, mildly desperate.

“See what I meant when I said he's our brother?” Elladan exclaimed, “we have the same stupid ways of derailing a conversation!”

“The same useful ways, you mean,” Elrohir said, smiling, “breakfast sounds lovely, Estel.”

-

In the end, breakfast went very well, and so did the twins’ report.

Aragorn's meeting was a comfortable and smooth affair as well, so everyone could dedicate their efforts to making sure none of their grandfathers killed each other, which was surprisingly easy, considering.

That had taken a lot of effort on said grandfathers’ part, of course. Getting caught arguing would have upset the children, which they all agreed was bad.

This didn't mean they hadn't argued.

-

“How could you?” Celeborn whispered, from his hiding place behind the apple barrel, “he and his brothers and his people were, are, murderers, they destroyed our home. They killed our people, time and time again. Don't you remember what they tried to do to your sister?”

“I don't, actually, because that was after she ran off to die for her precious little Man she'd just met in the woods,” Daeron hissed back, continuing to pretend he was looking for the cheese, “and even if I did, that wasn't him, and it was all millennia ago.”

“Why did you even think this was a good idea?”

“What, marrying him? I didn’t think it was a good idea, and neither did he, or we would have done it a lot earlier. We were just in love, and alone on a beach, with no one who knew us and would
bitch about it anywhere close to us,” Daeron answered, nearly snarling as he tried to keep quiet.

“I… What?” Celeborn nearly shouted, before clapping a hand over his mouth, as if that would retroactively make him speak less loudly.

The two spent a few minutes in silence, waiting breathlessly for a hint that they had been discovered. Maglor was supposed to be distracting the twins, and Aragorn and Arwen were busy, but who knew what could happen. Daeron spent the entire time glaring at Celeborn, for risking the secrecy of their conversation, but mostly because he wanted to have a decent argument with him and couldn’t.

“You wouldn’t remember, because you were too much of a coward to talk to your wife’s family and didn’t come, but I first met Maglor at the Mereth Aderthad,” he said quietly, when he felt the danger had passed, “it was hate at first sight, of course, we were both very skilled, very smart, and very beautiful, and everything about the situation meant we were in direct competition. But he knew a lot of things I didn't, and vice versa, and he was witty and quick to learn and to teach. Talking to him, playing with him, it was the most fun I'd ever had in my life.

“We never saw each other again after that, Ada wouldn’t let me leave again, and asking him to let Maglor come to Menegroth would’ve been foolish. But we wrote often, and we were good friends. I only realised it was something more a few weeks before Ada heard about Alqualonde, and let me tell you that explained a lot of things Maglor didn’t want to talk about.

“So of course we couldn't do anything, Ada, Thingol, he would've been furious and I couldn't deal with that. So we spent a few centuries writing each other when we could, and I kept falling for him more and more.

“And then I met him again on a beach an Age ago or so, and of course I knew what he'd done, but he was so alone and in so much pain, I couldn't just leave him, and of course I still loved him.

“There was no one around to judge us, and we were both happier than we'd been in forever, why wouldn't we marry?”

“That's what I don't understand. How could you still love him? Is it because you didn't see what he did? Do you just not understand it?”

“I'm not sure I understand it, you're right, but… that's not who he is, Celeborn. He's kind and sweet and yes, he has a violent streak when it comes to his family and their magically binding oath, but you could never hate him for it as much as he does.” He shook his head. “He loves his family, and his children, and his friends, and I love him, and I don't want him to hate himself. I didn't think you would understand that, but at least the desire to stay with him. Can't you understand that?”

“I can,” Celeborn said, bitterness entering his tone in a way it hadn't before, “even if, as you can see, I didn't stay with mine.”

“Yes, yes. But you know what I mean,” Daeron said, grabbing Celeborn by the shoulders and nearly shaking him as a desperate light entered his eyes.

Celeborn smiled gently, and put a comforting hand on his cousin's shoulder

“I do.”

Daeron sighed deeply, relieved. The two stayed silent for some time, thinking about the past, and the future.
A grunt made them look down. Maglor’s head had suddenly appeared from under the tent’s cloth wall, and he wiggled until his entire upper body was inside, before gesturing at them to bend towards him.

“Hey, I'm sorry to interrupt,” he whispered, “but the twins are looking for you, Celeborn, and I told them you were here.”

“So Daeron will have to escape with you, will he?” Celeborn said, without the cruel edge Maglor had already come to expect. He actually sounded… amused.

“Well, yes, ideally. I mean, I won't be the one who gets in trouble if they catch you arguing, but…” Maglor said, confused by the relative lack of hostility.

“Go on then! Run! Flee from our grandchildren, while you still can!” Celeborn whispered, nearly laughing, as he pushed Daeron down.

Their escape was quick, and they ran back to the tent they had been given.

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During the ride back to Minas Tirith, Celeborn, Daeron and Maglor were all very cordial towards each other. The children were hilariously confused by this.

“Maybe they're not feeling well?” Elladan loudly whispered to Elrohir.

“If you know of an illness that results in getting along with age-old enemies we should be writing a list of people we need exposed to it,” Elrohir hissed at him, not much more quietly.

Their grandfathers looked at each other and laughed.

If they told the children about their talks they would probably understand, Celeborn mused, especially in light of how positively it had affected them. But their confusion was just so funny.

He would probably never like Maglor, no matter how likeable and charming the bastard was, but being kind to him was doable. For the childrens’ sake, for Daeron’s sake, probably for Galadriel’s sake as well. And of course, Thranduil would never be able to talk to him without trying to at least injure him, and having the moral high ground on Thranduil was a necessity.

He shook his head, trying to clear it of thoughts that would only upset him. Or worse, be picked up by his companions, and upset them.

He focused instead on his destination.

Minas Tirith was shining from across the Fields of Pelennor, the warm noon sun sending light up Anduin and casting dark shadows on their green grass. With every year that passed, they became more beautiful and verdant, flourishing under the love of the people of Gondor.

From their current vantage point, the bridge in Osgiliath, one’s gaze could sweep over the plains, the farms and homesteads, the streets and the walls, the travellers, the workers, the guards, to the great white city that was the jewel of Gondor, up through the circles of her walls, to the Tower of
Ecthelion, where the white banner of the stewards was flying, silhouetted by the mountain behind it, and shining in the light as it had for centuries before.

If he knew that boy Faramir half as well as he thought, his relief at their safe return and at the optimal result of their talks would be greatly overshadowed by his joy at being allowed to return to his Ithilien. He had good taste.

The fact that that joy would itself be overshadowed by his sorrow at not being able to meet Maglor and Daeron was… understandable. The boy was a historian, after all.

Maybe he could use that to try and convince them to visit Minas Tirith. The two had refused, citing unease with people after their long solitude, but there would still be time to convince them to stay for Faramir, he sounded exactly like the kind of person whose happiness they’d risk their comfort for despite being a total stranger.

No. That would be cruel. It was best to let them go ahead with the twins, and maybe they would be able to come back.

“It’s beautiful,” Maglor said, interrupting his thoughts with typical noldorin awe at impressive architecture.

Aragorn turned towards him, a small proud smile on his face, as always when someone complimented anything in his realm.

“She is, isn’t she,” he sighed adoringly, “the second most beautiful sight in Gondor and Arnor combined.”

“The second?”

“The first is Arwen, of course,” he said, matter-of-factly, before turning toward her and inclining his head in one of the small gestures of affection the two always shared when around other people.

She smiled, very slightly, at her husband’s sappy displays. She was a lot like her grandmother in that sense, very private about how she showed love, but infinitely sincere about it.

“If we didn’t know you we’d think you hated each other, you know?” Elrohir yelled at them, jolting them out of their mutual adoration.

“Elrohir, please!” Maglor said in response, almost frantic, “you mustn’t scare them, these are elusive hard-shelled romantics, it takes a lot of bravery for them to reveal they are capable of emotions to other living beings. This is behaviour you should be encouraging.”

“I take it you have previous experience with this rare breed, then?” Elladan asked, in his most pretentious and academic of tones.

Maglor met his gaze, looked at his husband and rolled his eyes. This, it seemed, was going to be his only answer.

“As if you were any better.” Daeron said, before riding away from him, wearing an expression of such supercilious disdain that the children, Arwen and Aragorn included, couldn’t help but laugh.

The good mood lasted for the next hour or so, everyone laughing and joking, or at least smiling, until they reached the wall that had been called the Rammas Echor, and the new road that ran outside it to bypass the city.
There, they had decided they would separate.

“Well,” Arwen said, “here we are. Are you absolutely sure we can’t persuade you to stay for just a few days? It would really be delightful to be able to spoil you as you deserve.”

Maglor smiled at her, “I would love nothing more, Arwen, but Minas Tirith is really more than I think I could face right now. I’m sure your brothers will insist on us coming back South to visit you as soon as possible.”

The twins nodded enthusiastically.

“And you’ll have Grandpa to tide you over in the grandfather spoiling department until then!” Elladan added.

“I will stay here and be spoiled in your stead, yes,” Celeborn said, nodding solemnly, “truly it is a great sacrifice, but hopefully one I will survive.”

Daeron kicked him in the shin as he rode by, in what seemed a rather friendly manner. Apparently just being marginally polite to his… husband… was enough to make him lose a lot of his bite.

“We'll be going then,” he said, “fare well, we'll be back very soon to actually spend time with you, so I think it would be best if you started preparing a collection of embarrassing stories about the twins now, so you won't be too outmatched.”

Both Arwen and Aragorn smiled, before starting the rather long and involved process of hugging everyone goodbye without getting off their horses.

“Stay safe,” she said to her brothers, before turning to Daeron and Maglor, smiling, “I hope you will like Imladris, we are all very proud of it.”

“That speaks very highly of it, I think I love it already,” Maglor said.

“Indeed,” Daeron said, “it’s probably too stunning for our imaginations to come even close.”

“If you really want to go,” Aragorn said, somewhat reluctantly, “it's best if you do so now. It would be a bit pointless to leave much later than this.”

“Ah, you're right Estel.”

“For once.”

Everyone ignored the twins.

“Farewell then.”

“Goodbye!”

“See you soon!”

They stayed on the road, watching, until the even the dust they raised in their wake disappeared behind the curve of the road.

“I really do hope they come back soon,” Aragorn said, “those were some of our best horses.”
Imladris was as beautiful as expected, and as devoid of potentially unpleasant interactions with people as they’d hoped. Mostly through Elladan and Elrohir’s interference to be completely honest, but still.

Daeron and Maglor were sitting in one of the more isolated corners of the grounds, doing what they always did when they were bored: composing.

It wasn’t something distinct, there was no meaning yet, they were just taking turns mindlessly putting together pleasant sound combinations on Maglor’s harp, or humming along to the other’s small creations.

Meaning, a direction to the music, would come eventually, but it wasn’t needed, they were just spending time together, and getting used to the idea of being around others.

The soft melody had just started being worthy of the term when Elrohir and Elladan burst out from… somewhere.

“Granddad! Grandfather! Come with us!” Elladan shouted.

“We’d like to talk to you, follow us!” Elrohir added, before grabbing his brother and running away again.

Children.

Yes, they can be like that, come on Dai!

Maglor jumped to his feet, harp in hand, and started running down the garden path, only barely making sure that Daeron was behind him.

It was not, Daeron thought, particularly fun, but then again, he had never liked running, waste of breath that it was, not even as a child. And, well, indulging Maglor and their new grandchildren was worth it, if a somewhat painful reminder of other family members he used to spend time with running through trees and bushes and branches that got stuck in his clothes and cunningly hidden mud puddles and every single other annoying part of nature.

All he had to guide him at the forks in the path was the vague feeling of excitement and joy radiating from Maglor, but that was more than enough, so that when it turned into mild worry it took him only a few seconds of frantic acceleration to reach his husband where he and the twins had stopped.

It was a small building, barely more than a shed, really, with a gently sloped roof and whitewashed walls that hadn’t been touched by a brush in centuries, probably. It was hidden behind a wall of tall bush in the Southeastern corner of the valley, and had obviously not been used for its intended purpose in living memory.

Somehow, though, it was upsetting Maglor enough that even Daeron bursting through the bushes, panting and red-faced, wasn’t enough to cheer him up.

“Magpie? What’s wrong?” he asked.

Maglor turned towards him, trying to smile reassuringly, and failing, if Daeron’s face was anything
to go by.

“Everything is wrong, Dai!” he exclaimed, as melodramatically as he could, “the children led us here because they want to have a heart-to-heart on the roof! What do they think I am? Twenty? A squirrel? Please stop them, love.”

“If you’re too old and creaky to climb we can help you, you know,” said Elrohir, before Daeron had a chance to answer.

“You as well, of course, Grandfather,” said Elladan.

Daeron froze.

“Excuse me?” he asked, in a comically offended tone, which Maglor thought was just hiding real offense, “you are offering to help me climb a puny building like this one? I have never been so insulted in my life.”

He squared his shoulders, cracked his knuckles, and, after a few quick, fluid, and extremely attractive movements, hauled himself onto the roof, before crossing his arms and glaring down at the twins.

“‘We’ll help you climb’, I can’t believe this,” he said, sniffing, “I may be the least athletic Sinda to have ever existed, but I do have a dignity.”

Maglor had needed help to climb onto the roof, in the end, but they’d managed it together, and now they were all sitting on a pile of pillows the twins had brought there, looking down at Imladris in the late afternoon light.

It was beautiful, the way the sun shone on the roofs and the trees and the river and the mountains, her light always the same, yet changing every part of the landscape in different ways.

Another thing it did, however, was highlight just how empty the city was.

It had obviously never been built for a large permanent population, and how could it, in such a small valley, yet the streets and gardens of Rivendell were cold and forlorn, echoing with the voices of people who had long ago left it.

It was still taken care of, there were clearly enough inhabitants remaining that they could keep the city running smoothly, but there was a sense of mild doom, as if Imladris itself could sense that that would soon change, it would be left empty and desolate.

It was, Maglor thought, both strange and achingly familiar. The feeling of a city slowly emptying, that was new, but the empty space left by people who had been part of a system, of a community, and then had left, left everyone else to deal with their absence? That was always with him.

*Magpie, stop, please.*

*I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to worry you.*

*It’s alright. I love you.*

Daeron smiled at his husband, and gently put an arm around his shoulders, as usual thankful that Maglor was less skilled at seeing into others’ minds than he was. Seeing him in pain always hurt, and the combination of emotional and physical pain was the worst one.
He probably thought he’d managed to hide it, but it was obvious, even to the twins, that the reason he hadn’t been able to climb unassisted wasn’t that he didn’t know how. He just didn’t know how to climb when one of his hands couldn’t hold his weight.

It’s your turn to stop brooding, Dai. was the thought that Maglor lightly sent his way, smiling softly against the skin of his neck, as soon as he noticed that Daeron had been staring at the horizon with an expression that was more lost than absent.

Daeron had been about to respond, when they were interrupted.

“So, as we said, we have a question for you, Grandfather,” Elrohir said, leaning on his brother.

“Why Magpie?” Elladan asked, quick in an obviously planned way, “it’s a very sweet nickname, but you’d think there would be other birds to compare him to.”

A fair question, if one they’d probably started with as a distraction.

“Well,” Daeron started, “it’s a bird that likes stealing shiny things and can’t sing all that well, but which I am unaccountably fond of. It seemed perfect.”

“Mostly it’s because I used the magpie as an emblem, back in the day, and we weren't properly introduced the first time we met.”

“Why did you use the magpie as an emblem, then?” Elrohir, asked, turning from one grandfather to the other.

“They're very beautiful, deceptively intelligent birds who fit my preferred colour scheme,” he paused, dramatically, “and they're known for stealing shiny things and not for singing. I wanted people to remember who I was, not just what I was good at.

“Of course, the end result was that I proved I could be, and be regarded as, the best musician in existence, even without being associated with a songbird.”

“I... admire your humbleness, Granddad,” Elrohir said, raising an eyebrow approximately to his hairline. He was a good boy, Daeron thought.

“It’s the truth,” Maglor said, shrugging, “No use being falsely humble about it.”

Elladan snickered, while Elrohir somehow looked even more incredulous.

“What- what about you, Grandfather? Any nicknames or symbols hiding an arrogance bordering on hubris for you?” Elladan asked.

“Of course not,” Daeron said, “I don’t need symbols or nicknames, everyone of note knows who Daeron is and how admirable he is. I would also prefer to avoid bird imagery, there’s already enough of that in the family.”

“Ah. Yes. Good point. Of course.”

The twins looked at each other, with what Maglor recognised as the expression of young people realising that their older relatives might be so deeply, inescapably, proud of their abilities that they would eventually convince everyone around of their excellence.

“Um. About that,” Elrohir said, somewhat awkwardly.

“If it’s not, uh, a problem, of course. Um,” Elladan added.
“What exactly, ah, happened, er...” Elrohir said.

Daeron sighed. He had been expecting this.

“With Luthien?”

“Um...”

“...Yes?”

Daeron didn't look too upset at the question, but Maglor carefully touched his mind anyway.

*Dai? Would you like me to ask them to avoid that subject? I could even say it's for my sake, I can come up with a reason.

No. Just give me a second.*

Very well. I love you.

There was a faint sense of reciprocation, then their bond fell silent, and Maglor started waiting with Elrohir and Elladan.

Suddenly Daeron took a deep breath, and started talking.

“The main point is, Luthien was my sister. I was adopted, yes, but she was still my sister, and I loved her dearly.

“So, when she ‘fell in love’ with some random Man who'd found her in the forest I was... worried. It wasn't normal, and for all that Luthien wasn’t normal in any respect, I wanted her to live her best possible life, as she deserved, and a destiny-driven instant infatuation, like the one our parents had, it didn't seem like the best way to find one's life partner to me.

“So I tried to dissuade her, but it didn't work, and when it became obvious that she was truly in love with him, even though she knew nearly nothing about him, I thought the best way I had to help her was to find someone who might give her advice on what to do when afflicted by sudden forest love. Our parents.

“Melian understood what I wanted, and she was ready to help. Whether because she saw something of their future or because she just wanted to help her daughter I don't know, but I assume it was both. Thingol however...

“I simply hadn't accounted for the fact that our father could apparently be such a gigantic hypocrite! Not being in favour of it I could understand, he'd nearly abandoned his people because of his own encounter with Melian, it made sense that he would be skeptical and more focused on possible negative consequences. But he just...”

He made a sharp, rough gesture with his hands, which Maglor felt was a very understandable reaction to Thingol doing anything.

“I just didn’t want my big sister to run off and die for some idiot who called her pretty! Why does everyone think I was in love with her, she was my sister!”

Daeron fell silent, not looking at anything.

“I'm sorry,” he said, “I shouldn't have... Especially not when... I'm sorr-”
Maglor hated seeing his loved ones in pain, he loathed it, actually. So Daeron wasn’t at all surprised at being grabbed and pulled into a tight hug against his husband’s chest.

He sighed, and tried to relax as a gentle hand petted his back, as if taking away all the tension that had gathered there.

Silence fell again, as they all tried to avoid thinking about their own foolish families, who had been, would be, the source of the greatest joys and sorrows.

“We, um, we also hoped to ask for advice?” Elladan said, after a while.

Maglor turned to him, smiling, “On what?” he asked.

“On... what to do? I guess?” Elrohir said, “We never really considered that we might have to choose, you know?”

“We knew about the concept, of course, but we didn’t really think it would happen, and in any case we didn’t think-”

“We thought we’d have time to talk about it with Atar and with Arwen and figure it all out together and maybe cry about it together for a few years, if necessary, and instead-”

“And if we do choose to stay here, to accept the Gift, Atar and Naneth are going to have to find out from who knows who giving them a letter and we couldn’t do that to them.”

“But they wouldn’t want us to make such a big choice just because we wanted to make them happy, of course.”

“And now we just keep second-guessing ourselves and every time we ask someone they just say ‘oh you’ll figure it out’ but what if we don’t?” Elladan finished, somewhat desperate.

It seemed the twins had been waiting to ask this question for some time.

“I don’t know if I can help,” Maglor said, after some thought, “but if you like, I can give free rein to my ideas on big choices and on sailing West for a bit, and you can determine your opinions on those, and so have a base from which to start.”

“That’s more than literally anyone else has ever offered to do to help,” Elrohir said.

“So yes, please,” Elladan finished.

“Very well. Now, this may be a bit incoherent, but I should be able to fit in everything I want to say, one way or another. Anyway, personally, I think I would eventually end up going West, I miss my family and, well it’s not really my home anymore, but I miss it. And I, there are things I am avoiding, obviously, and one day the guilt of avoiding them is going to become greater than the pain of dealing with them. It’s inevitable.

“But I wouldn’t necessarily go then, because I cannot go alone. I refuse to leave the love of my life again so my leaving would depend on him being willing to come with me, and we will deal with that when the time comes. My point is, someone else being a factor in your decisions isn’t necessarily a negative thing, you don’t exist in a vacuum.

“The big choice for you, though, isn’t whether to sail or not, it’s what kindred you want to be a part of, and that isn’t something I have personal experience with, so I can only offer two, three actually, pieces of advice. The first is that you have to take the time to think about things, avoidance feels
good, but it’s not the most useful use of your time, which is important, for people who are supposed to make a decision as quickly as possible.

“The second is that you talk to Cirdan. Unless he has changed a lot since the last time I met him, he’s like a very wise and kind grandfather who gives great hugs and even better advice, I don’t know how he does it, it’s like he likes helping young idiots. Additionally, he has extensive experience both with Peredhel and with people sailing West, so he might have actual answers to some of your doubts.

“And lastly, if you want, I’m not sure how helpful it would be, but I am always willing to tell stories about Elrond and Elros’ youth. Who knows, you might understand something of their thought processes, or you might decide there’s one of them you desperately need to blackmail with his childhood hijinks.”

The twins’ eyes started shining as soon as the word ‘stories’ left his mouth, and Maglor realised he might have made a mistake. Well, he did love talking about his sons, they would have to deal with the consequences themselves.

Daeron, also seeing the dangerous glint in their eyes, leaned forward and waved, to catch their attention and hopefully save his husband.

The twins turned towards him in unison, like wolves spotting fresh prey, like sharks smelling a wounded whale, like kittens hearing something jingle.

“I wanted to elaborate on something Maglor said, about choices. While it’s true he isn’t the best example of this, taking into account everything impactful he has ever done, he is very much right that sometimes making a choice out of love, any kind of love, also means making a choice for yourself and your own wellbeing.

“Look at your sister, look at my sister, you think they didn’t choose thinking of their loves? Just because it was also a choice for themselves, something that also made them happy, doesn’t mean they didn’t look at everyone who loved them and found that they were more influenced by the possible happiness of one of them than anything else.

“It doesn’t mean they loved, love, them more than the other people in their lives, just that their path to being happy most closely coincided with, respectively, Aragorn and Beren’s path to being happy, and that’s really all any of us can hope to work towards.”

The four of them sat in silence, contemplating this, and Daeron started feeling like he had said too much, hurt them for the sake of near-useless advice. It had seemed like a necessary contribution in that instant, but how many had said that before him? How many had done things that seemed like good ideas at the time and been right?

Maglor could sense Daeron’s doubt and regret, again, but this time he had a better idea, he felt, than chastising him in the privacy of their own minds.

“I have another piece of advice, in fact,” he said, “talk to Celeborn. I can’t tell if he’ll have anything useful to say, but he is almost certainly going to be the first member of this family to sail, and that means he will be the first true, reliable source of news about your wellbeing to reach your parents. Whatever you choose, whether you will have made your choice by then or not, they will ask him how you are doing, especially emotionally, and enabling him to give them the most accurate possible news is something you can do.”

They finally smiled again at that. Being able to do something for their family was, apparently, as
much of a relief for them as it would’ve been for him.

“Thank you, Granddad, but,” Elladan said.

“How exactly did you come to that information regarding Grandpa?” Elrohir asked.

“Ah,” Daeron said, embarrassed, “he told me. It was supposed to be in confidence, but I shared it with Magpie anyway. Please don’t tell him.”

The twins snickered, sharing glances that indicated a serious discussion on the subject of whether to doom them.

“Of course not!” Elladan said after a few seconds, probably honestly.

“And you're right, thank you. This is a very difficult choice we face, but with the support of our family we will find a solution, in the end,” Elrohir said, smiling at them.

“Well said!” Daeron said.

“We will be there to give you that support as long as we can, boys,” Maglor added, turning towards them and spreading his arms.

Elladan reacted first, scrambling up from where he was still sitting and sliding on one knee till his chest hit Maglor’s, throwing one arm out to drag Daeron into the hug.

Elrohir wasn’t much slower, jumping over his brother to end up in Daeron’s arms, one of his own wrapped around Maglor and Elladan.

It took a few seconds for everyone’s limbs to be out of danger of being crushed, but as soon as they had managed that, everything fell into place.

Daeron, formerly of Doriath, and his husband, Maglor Feanorion, sat on a roof in the valley of Imladris, holding two of their grandsons in the tightest, most comforting hug they could, and watched as the Sun set, far away in the West, beyond plains and mountains and seas.

End Notes

Happy birthday Em I am very sorry it took me so long to write this but also not sorry because it meant I had the chance to write it now.

Many, many, many thanks to legitopal for keeping me going when I got stuck and betaing I wouldn’t have made it without you.

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