**We Meet Again in Imladris**

by *Ulan*

**Summary**

Even reborn heroes can be fools in love. This story features clueless Elves, gossiping Elves, wagers - oh, and a marriage.

**Notes**

Who doesn't love marriage tropes? Go away now, we can't be friends.

I went with the alternative timeline here in that Glorfindel lands early in the Third Age, well after Imladris was established. I apologize to the purists, as I have no excuse save that the plot needed a period of peace.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

It was one of those slow days. Glorfindel favored such days, even more so now that he discovered this corner of the garden. He was pleased to find that Imladris had the gentlest of breezes, not far from the coolness of Gondolin, but without its sharp chill.

Glorfindel had arrived only a little more than a year ago. Everything was different, as they were expected to be after the passing of millennia. He wondered what that must be like, to live and watch the changes unfold instead of waking to an unfamiliar world like he had. He remembered little of Mandos’ Halls or even of the gardens of Lórien, if he had indeed set foot in it, much less felt the passing of time. One would doubt if it truly had been that long, but it only took one look around him, a wift of the new air, a peek at the unfamiliar patterns gracing the night sky, to prove that Gondolin indeed had come and gone ages ago.

It had been a surreal experience coming to the library and being shown maps of the old world, long gone and never known by many who now walk this new earth. Gondolin was gone, so was the evil dwelling in Angband, and so were many other places that Glorfindel had once known. Beleriand as he knew it was no longer there, destroyed in the Great War and swallowed by the sea. It made Glorfindel's heart ache with longing, and he would not deny the tears that fell from his eyes upon hearing the news, although he regretted the distress it caused his guide at the time.

So much loss and yet here he was again, called to aid against the same darkness. Such a high price they all have paid, yet the one thing he would change and would have seen gone from the world was the one thing to remain. It was difficult to comprehend.

A particularly strong breeze disturbed the air around him, bringing with it the scent of apples that now weighed the tree branches from where they hung. A shift of color amidst the sea of green leaves around him made him look up.

There were many things he liked about this spot in the gardens, not least of which was this. High up in one of the windows now stood Erestor -- Chief Counselor Erestor now, apparently, second to Elrond Half-Elven, son of Eärendil. Glorfindel was not surprised that the young scholar he knew in Gondolin had risen to a high position after all this time, but Glorfindel had also known him more intimately than through mere political titles.

Words cannot express how pleased Glorfindel had been at finding Erestor in Imladris. He was told little of what would be his new life, and so expected little, much less hoped for this. And so he had only stared, mouth open and eyes even wider, when he was introduced to the chief counselor. Erestor, bless him, led him through the standard greetings to which Glorfindel was only glad to follow, and then politely excused himself and thus allowed Glorfindel's tour to continue.

That encounter had been fine compared to the more personal introduction he experienced shortly after that. He shut his eyes at the memory but could not help the blush of embarrassment that heated his cheeks. About five months after his arrival, Imladris was visited by Celeborn of Doriath and Galadriel, daughter of Finarfin, now Lord and Lady of a realm called Lothlórien. Glorfindel knew of them from a time long, long ago, but had not known them personally.

The Lady Galadriel, it turned out, proved to be more mischievous than her regal appearance belied. After that first meeting with Erestor, Glorfindel had tried to catch him alone, but that had proven impossible. Erestor seemed to be constantly surrounded by other Elves, fellow counselors it would seem, and always seemed to have somewhere important to be. Glorfindel, on the other hand, was
shocked to find himself a legend, and was surrounded by curious Elves who constantly wanted a first-hand account of his life in Gondolin.

And so it was that it was none other than an esteemed visitor, the Lady Galadriel herself, who broached the subject, surprisingly lacking... well, for lack of better terms, First Age sensibilities.

"The stars truly smile upon this meeting," she greeted him when they met, kissing his cheek. "You are a most welcome sight, dear Glorfindel."

"Do you know one another?" asked Elrond, who had been the one to introduce them.

Galadriel had a breathy sort of laugh. "Oh, my dear. Nothing so formal, I am afraid. I doubt our renowned lord here remembers this, but we have met in Aman."

Surprised by this, for he remembered no such meeting, Glorfindel shook his head.

"I am not surprised. You were so young then," Galadriel laughed again. "Quite a tiny thing, you were. You ran away when I tried to take your hand."

Glorfindel blushed and ducked his head at the story. It was when he averted his gaze from the lady that he caught the eyes of Elrond's chief counselor, who stood at the side of their little group with his mouth behind his hand. He seemed to be hiding a smile.

Quick as a hare, the Lady Galadriel caught this brief exchange and, if possible, brightened even further. "Truly, my heart sings at the joys of this return! You must be thrilled, my lord, that Master Erestor is here."

Glorfindel's breath caught at this announcement. Did she know? But how could she? Helplessly, he watched as the lady pulled Erestor to join their little circle, and did not know what to feel when he saw the discomfort clear on Erestor's face, an expression possibly mirrored by his own.

"What is this?" Elrond asked again. "What does my chief counselor have to do with Glorfindel's return?"

Galadriel looked taken aback -- or, at least, made a show of it. The unimpressed look Erestor gave her told Glorfindel that perhaps the lady was merely enjoying herself and that this was not an accident, nor was it the first time something like it had happened. "You do not know, Elrond?" she asked. Yes, that was definitely delight.

"My lady, please," began Erestor. "We are yet to--"

"Tell me," cut in Elrond, ignoring Erestor. Glorfindel was nearly panicking. Surely not-- there were more appropriate opportunities for such announcements. He turned to Galadriel.

The lady's smile turned pleased, much too pleased, as she looped her arm around Erestor's. "My dear Elrond, why, Erestor here is none other than Glorfindel's husband, of course!"

Silence descended in the grand hall, filled only by the rush of water from the falls hidden behind the stone walls.

Or perhaps that was Glorfindel's blood, rushing through his ears.

Elrond was the first to recover. "Husband? He is your...?" He looked at Erestor, who remained quiet, before looking back at Galadriel. "How come we have never known this?"
"Oh, you know how historians can be. They never did take good records of the interesting things. Although I suppose if we recorded all the marriages that occur in an age, it would be quite a hefty tome, wouldn't it?"

A fresh flush of heat suffused Glorfindel's face and he cast his gaze on Erestor, as one in search of sympathy. Erestor's eyes did not meet his, but there was color on his cheeks as well.

"Ah, of course not," said Elrond. "And when was I supposed to hear of this?" He addressed this to his chief counselor, who had somehow regained his composure once Galadriel had let him go.

"Soon, my lord. After we..." Here he looked at Glorfindel, who tensed at that piercing gaze. Fortunately, that gaze quickly turned back to Elrond. "We have not had the opportunity to speak at length to one another just yet. I would have told you, but the sudden arrival of Lord Celeborn and Lady Galadriel had taken precedence. We have been busy."

"I see that it is not common knowledge then?" asked Galadriel, her eyes shifting from one Elf to another. "In that case, I apologize. It seems I have preempted a rather momentous announcement."

"It is no secret, my lady," said Erestor. "Merely not, as you say, common knowledge. Eventually, though, I expect someone would come forward and mention it -- as it has been mentioned now."

Galadriel smiled, nodding solemnly. "Ever the diplomat, our dear Master Erestor." Her eyes now turned to Glorfindel. "He is ever so useful, you know. You can take him anywhere and you will be sure that even unexpected encounters turn out to be quite pleasant. You should keep him."

Taken aback for the umpteenth time that day, Glorfindel's eloquent retort was, "Aah..."

"Do not tease him, my lady," chided Erestor gently. "Did you not have pressing matters to discuss? I have requested the summer room to be prepared for you. The other members of the council will join you shortly."

This was rewarded by another smile from the lady. She gently pat Erestor's cheek before turning to Elrond, looping her arm around his as they walked down the hall, delving right to matters of trade as if the events of a few moments ago had not just occured.

Glorfindel released a breath he did not know he was holding.

"I am sorry."

He turned to Erestor, who had spoken and was looking at him with an expression Glorfindel could not read. Erestor sighed. "That could have gone more elegantly. I suppose that is what I get for not speaking to you or Elrond sooner."

Glorfindel shook his head. "I am all right," he said. Then, he smiled, remembering the exchange. "Although, I agree. There were better ways to break that news, especially to Lord Elrond."

This was met by a smile from Erestor, just a small upward curve of his lips. "You grow accustomed to Lady Galadriel after a while. She does get things done, as you can very well imagine. She has no qualms saying things that make weaker souls hesitate."

"I can see that." Glorfindel looked at the turn in the hall where Elrond and Galadriel had disappeared. "After arriving without anyone mentioning it, I just assumed that it has been so long and nobody anymore knows. I wonder then how she knew. Perhaps, somehow you...?"

Erestor shook his head. "I have long stopped wondering how she knows even half of the things she
"Does," he then said with an elegant shrug, just a tilt of his head and a slight lift of a slender shoulder. "She is very fond of stories. It is not difficult to imagine someone from Gondolin coming to one of the realms she established and passing on the stories. She has a good memory for such things, too."

Erestor excused himself after that, and that had been thus far their longest conversation. Despite his many attempts to speak with the other precisely about their status, Glorfindel found that in the light of that exchange, with the very topic he had in mind so casually thrown about and picked at, he found he lost the appropriate question with which to begin.

It did not seem as if Erestor found the idea of their being married still to be bothersome. Elrond had taken to accepting this new detail in stride, and had Glorfindel's room assignment moved to one beside Erestor's. It was yet another awkward affair when Erestor found him standing helplessly at his new door after receiving the news that his things had been moved to a new set of quarters.

"Ah, Elrond did this?" asked Erestor.

Glorfindel nodded. "I have not had the chance to... I was at the training fields," he tried to explain.

Erestor's face twisted in a slight wince. "He does that," he sighed. "He imagines himself to be hospitable."

This unexpected slur at his new lord surprised a laugh out of Glorfindel. "It was thoughtful of him, really."

Erestor smiled up at him then, though his eyes were a hint embarrassed. "I apologize. This is moving out of my control. I know I said I would speak to Elrond about it, but--"

Glorfindel lifted a hand in a gesture of peace. He smiled at Erestor and aimed to comfort him. "It is quite all right. Are the rooms at least comfortable?"

He was rewarded with a laugh. "Quite comfortable. I am very fond of mine, and yours share the same design."

"Thank the Valar, then."

And that had been that.
Friends came slowly for Glorfindel at first, for many of Imaldris' inhabitants were wary of him. For a while, his days were filled working at the barracks, observing and familiarizing himself with the ways of the warriors in the valley. Elrond had assigned him as captain of the guard a few months after his coming, which met with surprisingly little resistance. Again, an advantage of his reputation, it turned out.

He met the minstrel Lindir as he was walking along a pathway that led past the barracks. He heard the sound of a flute being played and immediately searched for it, for it had a cheerful melody that was pleasing to his ears.

He found the flute player seated under a young willow tree, its leaves just beginning to cast a curtain around itself, but not so long nor so thick that one seeking its refuge would be hidden completely from view.

"I had a friend who played the flute," called Glorfindel as a way of greeting.

The music stopped as the musician, an Elf with a pale, smiling face and light brown hair, looked up at his visitor. A grin spread across his youthful face as he raised an eyebrow at Glorfindel. "Is your friend any good?" he asked.

Glorfindel smiled at the question. "He played about as well as you do."

"Then he must be very good indeed," declared the flute player with a wide, confident smile. "Lindir. Minstrel by profession, although you'll find I am also many other things. You are Glorfindel?"

"That is my name." Encouraged by Lindir's openness, Glorfindel sat to join the minstrel. "What song were you playing?"

At this, Lindir grinned. "Something I learned from the minstrels from the Grey Havens. Did you like it?"

Indeed, Glorfindel did and told Lindir so. Lindir seemed immensely pleased by this and did not need much convincing to finish the song.

Lindir turned out to be a good friend to have. He did not seem as wary of Glorfindel as others seemed to be, and was quick to bring him to the Hall of Fire and introduce him to the other Elves there. With Lindir's encouragement, as the minstrel seemed to be well respected by those in the Hall, they began to ask Glorfindel about life in Gondolin and the songs they played. Glorfindel sang them a few, which they quickly learned and soon, and for a while, the valley was filled with the songs of the First Age.

Once, Erestor passed by just as Glorfindel had bidden the minstrels good night. "I thought I heard a familiar song," said the chief counselor upon seeing Glorfindel. "I should have known you would be behind it."

Glorfindel smiled at him. "They learn fast."

"Indeed, they do," agreed Erestor, returning the smile. "It was nice to hear those songs again. I have not heard them in a very long time."

Glorfindel smiled, pleased by these words. They bade each other good night and went their separate
ways, although once or twice Glorfindel's eyes might have strayed, watching Erestor until he disappeared from sight.

"This is what I do not understand," said Elrond one day. They had just finished a meeting about Glorfindel's report on a week-long patrol and the lord of the valley invited him for tea. It was a pleasant day in summer, so they sat outside in Elrond's balcony, which overlooked the mountains.

Somehow, the conversation turned to personal matters. Elrond, Glorfindel quickly learned, seldom divided work from things of a more personal nature, and he could shift topics about one and the other within the same conversation. It explained much of the warm atmosphere in the valley, which was an initially strange but eventually pleasant contrast to the courts Glorfindel previously knew.

"What I do not understand," said Elrond again when Glorfindel did not respond, "is that your eyes follow him when he is in the same room. Yet, you do not approach him. I have not even seen the two of you join hands, or walk together when the weather is fair. Why is that?"

Glorfindel sighed. He took a drink from his cup, stalling. "It was an arranged marriage, my lord," he said eventually. "Short-lived as well. We said our vows only two years before... before the Fall. We barely knew each other."

"I see. When Galadriel had said it, I thought... well, nevermind. I am right, though, am I not? You watch him."

Glorfindel knew he flushed at this. He had not thought too much about the way he was when it came to Erestor, and so must not have hidden it well if his lord noticed the attention he paid to his bondmate. "He intrigues me. He is very different now from how I knew him," was all he said in explanation.

"I imagine he would be. Thousands of years have passed and, from what I gather from him, he was very young in Gondolin. He was born there, was he not?"

"He was. Even then though, he was very good, already serving the king just shortly after his first century. And--" Glorfindel chuckled "--he just rose in rank like you would not believe. In no time at all, his name became known even in other Houses. Everyone thought ours had been a good match. They approved of matches across the Houses, and fortunately for mine, it even turned out that Erestor had a head for managing one. He just did well wherever you put him."

Elrond laughed at this. "Sounds like Erestor," he said with amusement. "Unbelievably capable once he sets his mind to something. Galadriel tried to steal him for herself once or twice."

Glorfindel smiled. "But he did not go?"

"Erestor claims that Galadriel's cunning and all-knowing ways exhaust him, and that he prefers the climate of the valley." Elrond smiled a fond smile. "While that can also be true, I do not doubt that had he served her from the beginning, he would be loath to leave her either. He is extremely loyal."

Glorfindel's smile widened, oddly warmed by the compliments paid to his husband even though the title seemed to be but in name only nowadays. He had had few opportunities to speak with Erestor of late, and their work thus far rarely overlapped.

"What I meant to ask," Elrond began again when Glorfindel did not speak, "is whether you were planning to do anything about it. Will you carry on as you have done so far, passing one another as you would any other Elf here in Imladris? For it is a strange thing to witness, knowing what I know now."
"Does it bother you, my lord?"

Elrond sighed. "Glorfindel, again, call me Elrond. And no, it really is not my business, is it? I am merely curious," he said, though his smile did return. "Erestor has been a good friend for a long time now; we have seen and endured much together. I would trust him with my life and I would like to see him happy. While I like to think I know him well, this aspect of his life he does not speak often about. All I knew was that he was bonded once, with one I expected to meet when the time comes for us to sail. Imagine my surprise when it turned out his bondmate would be the one to sail to these shores."

Glorfindel laughed. "I gather it does not happen often."

"It has never happened at all! Not to my knowledge, at least. But I am glad that you are with us, Glorfindel. We have seen much sadness at the end of the last age, and it will be a while before we will be truly free from our sorrows. While your coming tells us that the darkness has not fully left us, it is also true that you have brought with you the fresh winds of Aman, and with it new hope. I thank you for the joy and the songs you have brought the people here. It has been badly needed."

Warmed by such a heartfelt speech, Glorfindel could only nod at Elrond. "You are welcome, my friend."

Elrond, sensing Glorfindel's discomfort, smiled again. "So, we go back to Erestor," he prompted.

Glorfindel ducked his head, at a loss for what to say. "I am... I do not know. We were not together long, and so much time has passed that it is difficult to find our footing now, here in Imladris. I would understand if he feels as lost as I do about the whole thing."

"It is curious, though," said Elrond with a thoughtful look in his face. "You said that the marriage was arranged. Are such things not bound to be dissolved if, for instance, the union did not work, or one party has died? Yet, your bond with Erestor endures. It was not broken upon your death?"

Suddenly uncomfortable at the turn of the conversation, Glorfindel looked away, even as he was forced to speak. "No, there was no such clause placed in our bonding contract."

"That is strange for a political marriage, is it not?"

"It did not cross my mind then to even consider it," said Glorfindel, evasively, and he hoped Elrond would not ask more. "I am not one to do things half-heartedly. I did not think I would be parted from a mate no more than I considered being parted from my House."

"An admirable quality. Loyalty, it seems, is a trait you both share."

Glorfindel smiled. Elrond did not seem to have further questions about Erestor after that, and had moved to asking Glorfindel about his stay thus far in Imladris. Relieved at this change in topic, Glorfindel answered his new lord as best as he was able, and for the rest of the afternoon was able to evade further questions about his bond with the chief counselor.
The festivities for the winter solstice was well on its way, with many already crowding the floors to dance. Fires from the hearth and lights from what seemed like a hundred candles warmed the room and lit up the merry faces of Elves dancing through the night.

Much as Glorfindel used to enjoy such things, that night he stood at the wayside, just watching others move around him. Once again he was reminded of how things have changed and how Imladris was much different than Gondolin. While not normally shy, it was because of these many differences that his first year had thus far been about acclimating to the ways of this age and observing the world around him, figuring out where to place himself.

"Will you not dance, my lord?"

Glorfindel quickly turned at that voice, and sure enough it was Erestor who stood behind him. He had been looking for the counselor the entire night, but the other had remained elusive until now. Around Erestor's head was a simple circlet, under which his dark brows were raised at Glorfindel in question. Clad in dark blue robes with accents in silver, he matched the occasion appropriately and looked, in Glorfindel's mind, a sight to behold.

"You look interested," said Erestor, and stunned as he was by the counselor's arrival, Glorfindel had to pause a moment to understand what the other meant. "I was wondering why you were not joining the Elves on the floor. What is the matter?"

Despite his initial surprise at the unexpected meeting, Glorfindel somehow managed to smile at Erestor. "I would love to dance," he said, "but none of the steps are familiar to me. I thought to watch for now."

Erestor turned his eyes back to the center of the room where the dancers were, regarding them thoughtfully. "It is not as formal as the dances in Gondolin," he said before turning back to Glorfindel. "Steps are made up as they go. Did you notice that their movements do not match?"

Glorfindel blinked at that piece of information, and then laughed. "I noticed that, yes, but wondered still if there was some unspoken rule that I was not catching. It made it more difficult to follow, to be honest."

Erestor smiled one of his small smiles and shook his head. "There is nothing to follow, my lord."

"Aye, I see that now."

They were quiet for a while, just watching the other Elves. Glorfindel looked at them with new understanding, the way they swayed and turned, the few jumping pirouettes, wide smiles all around. Off to the side, among whom he judged to be younger Elves, there were those passing around a garland of twisted vines in complicated turns in time with the music. A little to his left were a few couples in dances more subdued, moving in ways that were more familiar to Glorfindel.

In a rare moment of daring, he turned back to the Elf beside him. Their encounters thus far had been fleeting, just short exchanges of pleasantries in the hallways and other such things when the situation called for them. While Erestor seemed perfectly content with such exchanges, Glorfindel, if he were to be honest, would have wished such things lasted longer. He struggled to prolong them, grasping at
other things to say, but Erestor was always quick to take his leave every time.

Tonight, though, holding to some hope given that it was Erestor who approached first, he said to the other, "Show me? You could lead."

Erestor looked surprised at first. He did not seem to expect the request, but Glorfindel also understood why, for it was always he who led them in such dances. Erestor was much younger and Glorfindel was the head of their House, so such a setup just felt more natural then. Regardless if Glorfindel wished it were otherwise, their match had never been that of equals. At the time, Erestor seemed comfortable just following Glorfindel's lead, always taking a step back where Glorfindel would naturally step up and take the helm.

None of that was so evident anymore. Erestor's eyes were older now, wiser and sharper. He had lived while Glorfindel resided in the Halls of Mandos and saw nearly the same number of years Glorfindel had when they met. It showed in the way he carried himself: straighter, head higher, even a little taller. Gone was the quiet youth of Glorfindel's past, for in his place was this high official -- reserved still, but more calculating, more intimidating, and there was an air of mystery that surrounded him in his more confident silence.

And so no, thought Glorfindel as he looked at this Erestor. He would not mind being led by this Elf. Erestor's gaze seemed to search Glorfindel's for a while. Seeing no guile, or whatever it was that made him wary, he tipped his head once and folded one arm behind his back before offering the other to Glorfindel. Glorfindel, surprised by this but also immensely pleased, accepted the proffered hand with a slow slide of fingers.

Erestor pulled him to the floor, where they faced one another just as a new song began. Glorfindel waited patiently as Erestor's head turned to the side, just listening to the beginnings of what looked like a familiar song to him. Finally, he offered a smile.

"Remember the 'Loté' and 'Lover's Dance'?” he asked.

Glorfindel nodded. They were dances for the spring equinox, popular among lovers and two of what they used to dance together in Gondolin. Of course he remembered.

"It may not be for the correct season, but the music would dance well to some of their steps." Erestor's voice had risen to be heard above the building beat of the music as he guided Glorfindel to a slow turn. "Keep those in mind for we can work with them, but be open to changes as we go. You will find that in the Third Age, one must know how to improvise." There was a challenge in the way he looked at Glorfindel. Intrigued, Glorfindel accepted the look with a smile and a slight tilt of his head.

When they faced each other again, they made a slow bow to one another, in time with the music. Erestor then took Glorfindel's hand and guided him through what looked like the beginning steps of the Loté. Glorfindel was glad to start with a familiar pattern and was quick to warm up because of this, and so he was only half a step away when Erestor whispered in his ear, "Turn here."

As the music rose at the sound of flutes, Glorfindel followed the tug on his hand and made the turn. Erestor was waiting upon his return, gracefully catching Glorfindel's hand again as his other hand slid along Glorfindel's waist, pulling him gently to a wide arc across the floor. The footwork had been tricky for that one, but Glorfindel followed all the same, and Erestor seemed pleased with his effort.

That had been their way through the song. Erestor, Glorfindel was pleased to find, was a considerate
partner and a graceful lead. His hold was light but instructive, allowing movement but also warning Glorfindel with gentle pulls, taps of a finger where he knew Glorfindel could feel them, and subtle looks at a given direction so he would know where to move. But while the light touches were indeed helpful in communicating their next steps, they also did much to distract Glorfindel, whose skin tingled where Erestor had touched him even after the touches were long gone. There were therefore a few missteps along the way, but even those were flawlessly caught by Erestor and he improvised every time so there was never any awkward stumbling or stepping on feet.

A few more times he whispered in Glorfindel's ear, challenging him through a tricky step. It was those times that brought the flush from Glorfindel's cheeks to the tips of his ears, so often were they assailed by Erestor's deep voice and the heat of his breath, but if Erestor noticed any of these things, he did not say anything.

Still, despite such distractions, soon Glorfindel was able to lose himself in the dance, for he loved dancing and it was not long until the movements felt natural to him. He mourned the end of that first song. Filled still with the energy of the dance, he did not even think twice about pulling Erestor to a second song even when the counselor made to step away.

Erestor laughed when Glorfindel pulled him with both hands to join him in another dance, yelling out, "Another!" so he could be heard above the music. Erestor nodded at him indulgently, and they shared smiles over a now faster song.

Erestor led them again through the second song, but by the third song, a slower one that allowed the dancers some rest, Glorfindel still did not let go. He pulled Erestor to him, holding one of his hands with the other sliding around the counselor's waist, cheek nearly pressed against that dark head as he listened to yet another unfamiliar song.

There were words to the third song where there were none in the first two, and Glorfindel listened to its story about a love found and lost by the Sea. It was a lonely song, its lines filled with longing, so that Glorfindel soon found himself holding Erestor's hand tightly between their pressed shoulders.

"Are you all right?" asked Erestor, noticing Glorfindel's shift in mood.

"It is a sad song," Glorfindel said in explanation, to which Erestor smiled.

"It is," he said. "I like this song." There was something in the way he said it that seemed to hint at a personal meaning, and it made Glorfindel want to ask what he was thinking then. He then wondered: did Erestor ever think of him when he heard songs like this one? Or, with Glorfindel gone, did he meet others through the passing ages that inspired even just fleeting thoughts of love?

He thought about these things for a while. In the end, however, he did not have the heart to ask any of these questions, so he kept his silence.

Carefully, but bravely, he let the music guide him to lean his cheek against Erestor's dark head, which, though the other stood taller than most Elves in the valley, was still a few fingers' width shorter than Glorfindel's. He took a deep breath, meaning to sigh, and nearly flinched as a familiar scent beneath a faint perfume of jasmine and cedarwood wafted from Erestor's hair and robes, stirring memories of a time long ago, rare but deeply treasured. Not for the first time did Glorfindel wonder at their situation, and worried about how he could possibly ask for things to change.

The sad love song ended much too soon for Glorfindel. He was sorry to let go, but Erestor seemed tired and looked like he could use a rest.

"Thank you, Erestor," said Glorfindel after they stepped out of the dance floor. They were now
standing near one of the many pillars that stood around the Hall of Fire. "I truly enjoyed dancing with you tonight."

Erestor nodded modestly. "You are welcome, my lord. I thought it was a shame that you did not seem as if you would dance or invite someone on your own. I remember you enjoyed dancing."

Glorfindel smiled at this. "I do, but apart from not knowing the dances, I did not see you before you found me, and I have stopped dancing with others after our bonding."

At this mention of their bond, which they have not discussed since that time after Glorfindel's return, the smile slipped from Erestor's face and he turned away. "I apologize. You are, of course, free to dance with anyone."

"You misunderstand me," said Glorfindel before Erestor could say anything more. "It is not that I wanted to dance with another, for it has not even crossed my mind at all. It was only that I was unsure if you would welcome such an invitation from me. I like dances; you, on the other hand, never showed much fondness for them."

"Not particularly, no," said Erestor. "But many occasions called for them, and I can understand how others can enjoy them. I find I enjoy them, too, once I am already in the middle of it all."

Glorfindel laughed. "I am glad. Otherwise I would wonder what in Arda you were doing with me out there tonight."

Erestor shrugged at that, just a slight lift of his shoulder. "I knew you were a good dancer and so it would not be a hardship to help you join the festivities. Had I known you to be a poor one, or merely adequate but a slow study, I would have left you to your own devices, lover of festivities or no."

Glorfindel shook his head with a bemused sort of smile. Although it was likely said in jest, knowing Erestor as he did now, he would not put it past him. He noticed that Erestor's independence and quiet temperament as a youth seemed to have grown into him being an Elf-lord of few words and, likely, judging by the way a few of the younger Elves cowered in his presence, little patience for the company and the slowness of others.

Fortunately for Glorfindel, Erestor had only ever treated him with politeness and, at times, a careful sort of kindness. There were times like tonight when he would check on Glorfindel to see if he wanted for anything, but beyond these he mostly kept his distance.

"My lord?" called Erestor, pulling him away from his thoughts. "I meant what I said. You need not hesitate to do things for my sake. Enjoy your new life; dance with whomever you wish." He paused and seemed to hesitate only for a moment before continuing to say, "I realize there is no purpose now to our bonding, seeing as Gondolin is long gone and there are no Houses to unite. While it is true that our contract still stands despite this, I will not deny you what life you can live, whatever you choose for it to be, now that you have returned."

He said it all with a solemn, almost kind smile, but somehow his words did not give Glorfindel the comfort they seemed to intend. Rather, it only reminded him of the distance between them, which he had almost forgotten in the deceptive sweetness of the night. He was reminded again of how he and Erestor never became the kind of spouses their bond intended them to be, and how the unfortunate events of their age led to the now fractured connection they now had.

He wondered what Erestor meant by his words. Did he mean only that Glorfindel need not worry about being granted permission for doing things he wished to do or, as Glorfindel was beginning to fear, did he mean that there was nothing to think about because the bond need no longer be
acknowledged between them at all? Are they to leave each other be, then, and live their lives separately?

But before Glorfindel could even open his mouth to speak, Erestor had already turned away. "You should return. The festivities do not really end until dawn," he said, looking back past his shoulder at Glorfindel. He gave him a slight bow. "Good evening, my lord."

Glorfindel watched him go, an uncomfortable lump in his throat. He found he no longer had the heart for merriment, but neither did he wish to leave the Halls and find Erestor outside still. So he found a seat somewhere just to the side of everyone else, and listened to the music, though his mind had turned grim with thoughts of other things.

Chapter End Notes

"Loté" is the Quenya word for "flower". The two dances mentioned here were inspired simply by themes around the spring equinox, which I believe is usually associated with rituals around love, lovers, and family. I imagine these would be dances that bonded couples would be expected to dance together during feasts and important events.
"Tell me, friends," began Lindir the following evening, after a lull in the conversations. "If Glorfindel were to embark on a daring mission to court the chief counselor, would he prevail?"

Glorfindel choked on the miruvor Lindir had just offered him.

"Are you starting a new wager?" asked one of the minstrels, a light-haired female named Anoriel. She brightened as she turned to Glorfindel. "Because I think he has a chance. Are you planning on it then, my lord?"

"You danced beautifully last night, Glorfindel," said another Elf - Doronir, if Glorfindel remembered correctly. "It was a pleasure to watch, especially since we do not often see the chief counselor join the festivities the way he did last night. How ever did you manage that?"

Shifting his gaze uneasily from one eager face to another, Glorfindel decided that something close to the truth would be best. "He saw me watching the dance in confusion and offered to teach me. They were different from what I was used to and he seemed to sense this."

Despite his care, he was not sure if that had been the right thing to say given the oddly excited smiles on the others' faces.

"He would never do that for any other visitor, would he?" asked one Elf, who also frequented the Hall of Fire to join the minstrels, though he did not often sing. "The chief counselor has always been a bit reserved about such things. Usually he and Lord Elrond would just sit together and watch the festivities while enjoying their wine."

"Let us not be hasty," said another. "Perhaps the counselor wanted to dance and thought Glorfindel would be a suitable partner. He could both dance and entertain the newcomer."

"Oh, but the chief counselor? Dance? All of a sudden?"

"I think there is something there," declared Lindir, joining the fray. "Erestor has never been one to engage in acts of impulse, nor does he extend hospitality beyond the call of his duties. He will not dance unless required, and he considers his job done once a guest is in their rooms." He turned his grin at Glorfindel. "There is something about our friend here that has piqued the interest of our long coveted advisor."

"Long coveted?" asked Glorfindel, schooling his features to show only what he hoped to be surprise and curiosity. "You call the good counselor this?"

"Glorfindel," said Lindir with a dramatic swoon. "Do not tell me you have not noticed!"

"Noticed what?"

"The moonlight in his skin, the deep woods and the forest in his eyes," sang the minstrel. "You danced with him for a good part of the evening, which is more than what any child of Eru I know could boast, by the way. Did you not even feel a hint of attraction, a tingle in your spine?"

The question took Glorfindel by surprise that he was not able to keep his reaction from his face.
Lindir smiled a very pleased smile.

"Ah, so you have noticed! Welcome to the fold, my friend. Ever had our dear Erestor gathered admirers throughout the centuries. I cannot say if it is for his beauty or something else, something in the way he is. He moves gracefully, does he not? He just pulls you in, even if it is not his face first that you see. He makes you look at him."

Glorfindel frowned. "I am not really comfortable describing him thus," he said. People thought this about Erestor?

"Oh, stop it, Lindir," said Anoriel in a chiding tone. "Can you not see that Glorfindel is a gentleman? He will not discuss such things with you. Besides, if the chief counselor hears you again, you will be copying tomes after tomes among the scribes again, and we all know how dreadful that is for you."

Lindir sniffed. "Erestor is a beast and a slave-driver. Mind you, it is not as if he took offense." This Lindir said to Glorfindel. "Embarrass him, I dare you. It is impossible. Once, he even meant to embarrass me by having me repeat what he overheard me say about him, with him right there just staring at me in the eye!"

Glorfindel raised an eyebrow at that, but the picture in his mind made his mouth twitch upward. "And did you?"

"Of course! A challenge is a challenge, and let it not be said that Lindir is a coward. It was fun, like mocking a troll. Thrill-seekers ought to do it, insult Erestor to his face. Oh, but he laughed, too - kind of, I thought his lips kind of moved up a bit, and I swear his eyes twinkled. But then he told me to report to the baker. He had me kneading bread the entire day!"

Anoriel sighed at Lindir. "He and the chief counselor have a strange understanding," she said to Glorfindel. "He always gets himself in trouble, our Lindir, and Erestor assigns him to assist in one trade or another as a form of punishment whenever he catches him. It is a strange friendship, but friendship it did develop to be eventually, however odd." She smiled kindly at Glorfindel. "Be not offended with the things Lindir says about Erestor. Just ignore him, and rest assured that Erestor knows about them all himself."

"Anyway, all this talk, it is all for naught anyway," said one of the ellith beside Anoriel. "Wasn't it said that the chief counselor has someone in Aman? A mate who fell in battle, that is, whom he will meet again when he sails."

Much as Glorfindel did not wish to engage the Elves in any further talk about Erestor, he could not stop himself from turning at that, for there was a promising rumor if he ever heard any. He asked, "He is bonded? How do you know?"

"Oh, worry not, my friend," said Lindir. "That is a rumor from way back in the last age. I'm not so sure anymore about its source, now that I think about it, but it is a rumor never proven, likely fed by the fact that he just never seemed interested in anyone. Of course, over the years there have been fools who chose not to heed our advice and tried their luck."

"Have there," said Glorfindel. Erestor had admirers? Admirers who pursued him? He should not be so surprised, for Erestor had fine qualities that he himself noticed long ago, but all the same, hearing it all said like this left a bitter taste in Glorfindel's mouth. "What happened?" he asked despite himself.

"Well, nothing!" exclaimed Lindir. "Like I said, he was never interested. Not with ellith nor ellyn, nevermind if they were widely sought after themselves."
One minstrel giggled. "Do you remember Gildor?"

"He tried for quite a while, didn't he?" asked Anoriel. She turned to Glorfindel. "He and his company are wandering Elves, mostly minstrels. Gildor is their leader, a prince, they say, from the House of Finrod long ago. They stayed in Imladris for quite some time, as Gildor was so taken with Erestor. Would you like to know what happened?"

Glorfindel truly did not. He was uncomfortable about the topic of Erestor to begin with, but to hear such things about him filled Glorfindel with a different sort of discomfort.

Anoriel, however, did not seem to see this and continued without waiting for a reply. "They became friends!" she declared in a fit of giggles.

"Oh, Gildor tried," said the elleth from earlier. "They got along well, the two of them, for they were of like minds, only they had different intentions with one another. As it turned out, the chief counselor is the more stubborn of the two. He has an odd way of getting rid of persistent suitors. He speaks to them, but none know what he says to them for it is as if he has them sworn to secrecy. Gildor was one among whom this has happened. One day he just stopped making romantic overtures, and his company left shortly after that. They return from time to time, but he does not seem to approach Erestor that way anymore."

Glorfindel was comforted by this and took it to heart. It was not that he wanted to test Erestor, but guiltily, he listened to the stories like a greedy child, for he wished to know everything he could learn about his mate. A good part of him, though, knew that he should be hearing these things from Erestor himself, if he were truly interested.

"There is an on-going wager as to what it is that Erestor says to these admirers that stop them so effectively," declared Lindir happily.

"Those wagers again that I keep hearing about?" asked Glorfindel, jumping at a chance for a different topic. "What was it that ended last week? How did you even find out the answer to that one? I hear it was quite the scandal."

"It was Galadir!" cried Doronir from the back. "Glorfindel, you could tell that second of yours to stick his nose where the Sun does not shine. My sister will have none of his elflings, do you hear me?"

The wager, as Glorfindel knew but pretended he did not, was how long Galadir, his second-in-command, would court Doronir's sister. The wager had ended with the involved parties caught kissing by the stables after only one month of courting.

The Elves around the table then launched into convincing their friend of Galadir's fine qualities, which Glorfindel joined, for he knew Galadir, and because he was glad that they have turned finally to safer territory.

Chapter End Notes

Regarding Gildor Inglorion, I thought it's funny that the reason he can't be the son of Finrod Felagund himself is because he would have a claim to the High King-ship. I don't know though, I just think there could have been a cool story for Gildor that the professor did not pursue, but I wanted to pay homage to what he almost was, hence my
use of "prince" to describe him.

Sindarin words used (because they translate awkwardly in English):

* elleth (s)/ellith (p) - female Elf
** ellon (s)/ellyn (p) - male Elf
Chapter 5

One summer came when Erestor had to travel to Lothlórien to assist in the plans to construct several mills along the Anduin. It also involved a system to channel waters from the river and its tributaries to more areas in the northern wood - Glorfindel was not too sure he understood much of the details. It was only that Erestor worked on a similar project before, Elrond said, which was why the Lord of the Wood was requesting for him. Although his presence was most needed in the planning stages, he would likely stay and further assist in the execution of the project itself. All in all, Celeborn, in his letter to Elrond, estimated that Erestor would be gone a few years short of a decade.

Glorfindel, of course, had to arrange for his escort, but could not come himself as his duty was with Elrond, who would be staying in Imladris. Erestor would instead be taking a few more Elves with him, specialists of trades needed in the Golden Wood, three scribes as requested specifically by the Lady Galadriel, and a few guards to accompany them.

It was early morning when they were set to depart. Glorfindel spoke with his second, Galadir, who would be leading the journey.

"Take always the safe paths, Galadir. Do not stray. Keep them safe," bade Glorfindel. Galadir, a dependable Elf by his own right, gave a good-natured grin and saluted him.

"Aye, Captain," he said. "Worry not. We will have them reach the Golden Wood safe and sound, and then returned to us on schedule, unless the good master himself calls for an extension."

Glorfindel hoped that they need not come to that, for as it was his heart mourned the distance between the two realms. It would be a while before he would see any of these Elves again. One, especially, he would painfully miss.

"May the Valar be with you on your journey, Counselor," he said to Erestor when he came to check the bridle on the chief counselor's mare. "I will not rest easy until I receive tidings of your arrival at the Golden Wood."

For a moment, Erestor seemed surprised as he looked down at Glorfindel. They did not exchange much words in those days, and such words in particular had never been said between them. Glorfindel knew, however, that they were safe to say. He was, after all, still Erestor's spouse, not to mention captain of the guard. He was responsible for the safety of all inhabitants of the valley, and Erestor was a high official there, high enough to be Elrond's deputy in times when the lord was absent. Even without their unique circumstances, it would be perfectly understandable for him to be concerned.

Erestor must have also reached the same conclusion, for the moment passed and the look of surprise was replaced by a small smile, warm and with a hint of amusement. "We will be all right, Captain. 'Tis not the first time that we have traveled to Lothlórien."

"It is a first for me to see you do so, and I am not even included in the escort."

Erestor shook his head, though his smile remained. "I am pleased with the guards you have given us; they will suffice." He raised an eyebrow at Glorfindel. "Or shall I send runners as soon as we cross the Celebrant?"

At this, Glorfindel laughed as well. Although it was likely said in jest, still he said, "That might be best."
Much sooner than he would wish, it was time for the company to depart. Sunlight was beginning to peek through the thick canopy above them, so Glorfindel signaled to Galadir, and they were off.

"Partings are never easy," said his lord solemnly beside him as they watched the procession of Elves leaving their gates. When they were but dots in the distance, Elrond turned to him. "You should have kissed him. It would be perfectly acceptable, given that he is your husband, and really, you were already there. Why did you not? Was his horse too high?"

Glorfindel bowed without a word and left Elrond there at the steps, but he could still hear his lord laughing even as he turned the corner down the entrance hall.

While Erestor was away, Glorfindel had taken to staring at the distant mountains each time he passed a window, or even when he was resting during patrols. At times, he would catch himself wondering what Erestor was doing in the Golden Wood, whether he took his meals the same time as they did in Imladris, or whether his thoughts at all strayed to the husband he left in the northern vale.

This was how Elrond found him one day, sitting beside one of the larger windows in the southern wing, and once again Glorfindel found himself back in his lord's office, drinking blessed wine instead of tea.

"A gift from Celeborn," said Elrond. "As a thank you for sending Erestor and the scribes." With no further preamble than that, he asked, "Do you miss him?"

When Glorfindel just sat there, frowning at his glass, the lord of the valley shook his head and stood up. "Wait here," he said.

Glorfindel watched as Elrond opened one of his desk drawers and took out a roll of parchment. This he gave to Glorfindel as he once again took his seat.

It was a letter from Erestor, addressed to Elrond. It began with a report of his stay in Lothlórien, pleasantries from the Lady Galadriel, and a few more words typically exchanged between friends, nothing too personal that Elrond would not wish to share.

Then Glorfindel felt his face heat at what he read next. Apparently, Elrond's teasing was not exclusive to his captain of the guard. Glorfindel should have known; Elrond and Erestor were friends for longer, and they had a closeness between them akin to that of brothers. Here in his hands was proof of this, for written also in the letter was thus:

'I thank you also for the immensely detailed account of Lord Glorfindel's activities while I am away. I only hope he did not catch you watching him so closely if you could afford to give me a thorough description of the manner of his dress or the people he speaks with. Your silliness aside, I am gratified to hear that he seems to be adjusting well. He has always seemed to favor music, so I am unsurprised that he has taken to the Hall of Fire. The Hall truly proved to be a good idea in the end, did it not? I am glad we agreed on its construction.'

Glorfindel continued to read through the letter even as Erestor began to talk about his business again in the Golden Wood. He was very thorough, much of the details going over Glorfindel's head, but he devoured the words nonetheless, as they were the closest he had been to hearing Erestor's voice for nearly a year, albeit now that voice was only in his own head. Erestor writes exactly as he speaks, and the similarities made Glorfindel smile.

The parchment crinkled where he held it when, at the bottom of the letter, he saw his name again. It
said: 'If in the unlikely event that Glorfindel indeed asks of me, and as you so stubbornly insist that I provide a reply for him, then tell him I am well, if a little homesick. I look forward to coming home. The mellyrn are indeed lovely here in the Golden Wood, and I am sure he will like them, for they are the closest we have now, they say, to the gardens in Valinor and to lovely Laurelin, which he has seen, and Glingal from fair Gondolin. However, right now I find that my heart is drawn home still to Imladris, in the cooler breeze of the valley and the ever-present rush of the Bruinen. Sincerely, Erestor.'

Glorfindel read this last part one more time, and perhaps a second and a third time, for they were words meant for him where long there had been drought, before he handed the letter back to Elrond.

"Thank you," he said, even if he doubted that it sufficiently conveyed the depths of his gratitude. The ache in his heart had eased a little, though longing sat there still.

Elrond smiled at him. "You are welcome, my friend. You should write to him, you know."

"I would not know what to say."

"Think about it."

At this, Glorfindel sighed. "I do appreciate it, Elrond. I think, though, that it would be strange if I suddenly write to him." He looked up at his lord. "And you really should not tease him so."

Elrond raised an eyebrow at that. "Why ever not?" he asked.

Glorfindel's voice was resigned as he said, "Erestor and I, we are not like that. Our marriage is civil at best. We were barely married before... well, before the fall."

"Yes, so you have said." Elrond's eyes were keen. "And yet, I get the impression that you wish it were not so."

Glorfindel wondered if he should divulge so much, to his own lord even. But ever since his return, only Elrond ever spoke of this aspect of Glorfindel's life. For one, no one else knew about him and Erestor. Erestor did not seem to speak much about personal things, judging by what Glorfindel heard from others in Imladris ever since his return, and Glorfindel found that their situation was not the kind of thing one could share in casual company. Besides, it was not a story that was his alone to tell, and he would not know what to tell anyone even if he wished to, for he himself was not so sure.

"Two years was much too short a time, and even then, I was seldom home. My duties always kept me elsewhere. How we are now is actually not much different from how we were before. Only... Only, well, I suppose Erestor has changed a bit. Not in an unpleasant way, his traitorous mind added. He sighed.

Elrond looked thoughtful. "It is interesting to me that despite all these things, you seem to hold some regard for him that is out of place from the picture you just painted. Am I wrong?"

Glorfindel thought to deny it, but Elrond had always seemed to him as one who could see more than what other eyes see. "Nay," he said, deciding against hiding the truth. "You are not wrong, but that is the story that Erestor knows. I do not even know where I stand with him now."

"You could ask him," suggested Elrond.

Glorfindel looked at him as one doubtful. "Truly? I would not even know where to begin. 'Erestor, you have been a pleasant housemate in Gondolin and a respected colleague here in Imladris, but tell me: what of love?'"
"Ah, so it does involve love." Elrond said it as if he was only waiting for it to come up, and that Glorfindel had just confirmed what he had long suspected.

Glorfindel threw up his hands. "It was an arranged marriage!" he exclaimed. "He was Ecthelion's cousin, young and had not even seen a world beyond Gondolin's walls. But it was a good match, which Ecthelion was happy about. We rather liked the idea of our Houses so bound." He hesitated before adding, "I was also pleased with the match. Erestor might have been young, but he was intelligent, and his reputation exceeded that of many Elves his senior. The truth is, I knew of him longer than he knew of me, as I had known of the match before he did. He married a stranger."

Elrond patiently waited until Glorfindel was done before he said, "Love often grows from arranged marriages. Erestor did not refuse the bond, so he must have at least found your match to be agreeable as well." Thoughtfully, the lord of the valley added, "I also noticed that much of what you are saying are worries based on assumptions on Erestor's end. Is that the only problem then? If you were to find out that he is accepting of your marriage still, would you do anything?"

Glorfindel shook his head sadly. "How can I think this? He no longer even wears my ring."

Without meaning to, it was one of the first things he checked upon his return. He inwardly rejoiced at discovering that his beautiful husband had survived the fall and that they were to live together again in this life. His joy was short-lived, however, at finding Erestor's fingers bare save for the ring of his office, and it remained so in the years that followed. Glorfindel never mentioned it; it had stung, but he was quick to tell himself that it was only to be expected. What was two years in a bond to the millennia that Erestor must have lived? Rings were small things often lost in the passing of years. Anyway, his own ring likely had been lost in those cliffs, so perhaps it was for the best that its mate was also gone.

Elrond's next question, however, unknowingly tested his resolve on the matter. "But he had a bonding ring. Has he stopped wearing it?"

Glorfindel looked up at this. "What do you mean? I have seen no such ring. I assumed he had taken it off after my death."

Elrond shook his head. "Nay, my friend. He has had it for as long as I have known him. He wore it through our service with the High King. Perhaps, Glorfindel, he also does not know where he stands with you, but far as I know, he has been faithful to you."

Glorfindel barely heard the whole of Elrond's speech, so loudly did his heart now beat to his ears. "Elrond, please," he pleaded, unable to keep the tremor in his voice, for Elrond's words brought with them such promise. Helplessly, he felt himself thaw and weaken, for long had he resigned himself to passing Erestor in the halls as if they were mere acquaintances ever since their conversation on that winter solstice feast. "Do not give me false hope. I cannot bear it."

Elrond's voice had completely lost its teasing quality, and he only looked upon Glorfindel fondly, and perhaps with a bit of pity. "I speak only the truth, my friend. I do not know why it is that you seem to fear him, but the two of you truly must talk. I should have known that you have not. How ever did you manage that, after all these years?"

Glorfindel laughed despite himself. "I do not know," he said. "I never know where to begin. He is intimidating, no?" Elrond laughed at this, for indeed Erestor had built quite a reputation even among them, but even that only made Glorfindel smile fondly. "He is always so quiet, I never was able to read what was on his mind. When he looks at me, words fail me. I never truly learned how to speak with him, even in Gondolin. It was how I ended up giving him his own wing, far from where I
resided, instead of asking him first if he was willing to join me in mine, as I would have wanted. It was also how, I believe, we ended up this way, with him believing that this marriage was one of convenience, when the truth is that..."

He stopped himself there, the sting of an old familiar pain blooming once again in his chest. He regretted it all so: how he had thought he had all the time in Arda to get to know the one Elf who caught his eye, only to be so abruptly pulled into Mandos' Halls without even saying goodbye, much less telling him just how deeply ran his regard. Had he known he had so little time left, he would have spoken to him more instead of watching him from the arches of his window, from his balcony, from across the dining hall. He would have asked him about the books he liked, his favorite songs, the things he could not stand, or perhaps even what fruits he favored, so Glorfindel could ensure that the kitchens always kept them.

He regretted how, upon his return, he found this Elf again, nigh unrecognizable in his high counselor's robes, his life that crossed three ages reflected by the deep wisdom in his eyes, all traces of youth gone. And yet, he was still so heartbreakingly beautiful that he took Glorfindel's breath away.

As he did the first time. As he always had whenever Glorfindel looked at him.

Ecthelion had laughed at him - laughed at him for days - until he realized that Glorfindel was serious in his intended suit. Ecthelion then jumped at the idea and arranged it all himself. Everyone thought it had been a good match and so never questioned the intention behind all of it. Only he and Ecthelion knew that it was Glorfindel himself who asked for it all, already half in love as he was with the mysterious Elf he kept seeing in the libraries of Gondolin, and later, one he kept hearing about in the courts of the king.

He knew not how long he sat there, quiet and staring into the distance, but when he came to, Elrond was still sitting there looking at him. When their eyes met, the lord of the valley smiled. "Well?" he asked.

Glorfindel sighed, too tired to deny it. "Aye, I love him," he confessed finally, voice low, as if afraid of who else might hear. He had kept it so long that it now felt like it was too personal a secret. "I always have, even before. It was my idea, all of it, for long have I watched him even before our betrothal. I thought to convince him of the merits of such a union, but everything ended before I could make much progress."

Elrond raised an eyebrow at that, for that had indeed been a revelation. "Oh, Glorfindel," he said, heaving a great sigh. "I was not certain of the details on how you felt about him all those many years ago, but the way you look at him now is telling. You are quite obvious, my friend."

"Do you think he knows?"

At this, however, Elrond only laughed. "Maybe not that obvious, then. When it comes to you, Erestor can be just as blind. They could be dancing to songs about this in Bree and still Erestor would not know. Not unless you tell him."

At this Glorfindel was silent again. And again, Elrond sighed.

"You two. Two of the greatest minds in Arda and one would not know it, so foolish are you with matters of the heart." Elrond leaned over to place a warm hand on Glorfindel's shoulder. "Glorfindel, you are safer with Erestor than you could ever know. If you wish to be his spouse, then be his spouse. In fact, you already are his spouse, just a very poor one."
Glorfindel ran a hand down face, wishing to shut it all out. It was difficult to believe all of what Elrond said, especially in light of the way Erestor had always been with him - helpful and polite, but also somehow distant still, curt in his responses. Despite these, dare he hope? Could he trust all that Elrond claimed about Erestor?

"What do you suggest I do, then?"

"I do not know, Glorfindel. What do you do with a spouse of three ages whom you suddenly wish to bed?"

Glorfindel's mouth dropped open at that. "That... That is not at all--!"

Elrond held up a hand, laughing. "Peace, my friend. I jest." He waited for Glorfindel to settle. "It is just too much at times, this hole you have both buried yourselves in."

"It is not so funny from this end, I assure you."

"No, I imagine not," conceded Elrond. "Well, I do not suppose Erestor would take kindly to being accosted and ravaged against his office door." He ignored Glorfindel's scandalized and wholly undignified squawk. "No? Then perhaps you could start with small things."

Glorfindel, whose head was starting to hurt at all the surprises Elrond kept throwing into the conversation, eyed him warily. "What do you mean?"

"Little things you would do with a long-time spouse, but perhaps begin with things safe enough to do with a close friend. I notice you do not even smile as often as you should to one another; you ought to fill in those gaps. You know his schedule but do not approach. Perhaps next time you could offer your assistance or your company. Stop stalking him--"

"I do not stalk him!"

"--step out of the shadows and be around him. Talk to him. Invite him for a walk, for tea, and see what things he will allow. He just might surprise you. For now, though," Elrond smiled. "Write to him."
Dear Erestor,

I know that my writing to you would come as a surprise, but please bear with me for a moment. Elrond showed me your letter. It was the first time for me to find out that I am apparently not alone in being a victim of his teasing. I just thought you ought to know that he has done so, in case it happens again in the future and I read something I am not meant to - not that I am saying that I mean to read future letters if he ever gives them to me, of course. I apologize, by the way.

All the same, I am glad to hear that you have settled well there. I read a little about your progress, but since construction of such structures are not my specialty, I am afraid I did not understand many of the details. It all looked impressive, though. I hope there would be an opportunity for you to explain it all to me someday. I am also curious where you learned about them.

Yours,
Glorfindel

--

My Lord Glorfindel,

I admit that your letter did come as a surprise, but it was not an unwelcome one.

I should have known Elrond would show you that letter. He had been hinting at it, but sometimes it is difficult to discern whether he is serious about something or not. I do apologize for the tone of it. Elrond's letters can be full of nonsense sometimes, I could not have responded more appropriately if I wished to.

The construction indeed is going well. We are still in the early stages, but the project is feasible. Lord Celeborn is pleased, and I admit to looking forward to seeing it done as well, for it is not something that we can do in Imladris. Such a thing needs the strength of the Anduin to justify the cost of making it. If you are truly interested, then it would be my pleasure to tell you more upon my return.

As for my education in such matters, as with many things, I learned it when I was in Lindon. To be precise, for about a decade, I apprenticed with a master in Eregion on general construction and architecture. Eregion was the capital of many disciplines at the time, but they are most known for the works of their hand. The application, though, I practiced in Lindon.

You would have liked Lindon in its earlier days, I think. Its courts were run not unlike how the Lord Turgon ran Gondolin, but the fields there are more vast and the air smelled of pine and of the sea.

Sincerely,
Erestor

--

Dear Erestor,

We can do without titles now, can we not? I would much prefer it if you were to call me by my name. We are of equal rank now and I am a lord no longer. I say this with relief, for in this life I find I do not miss the responsibilities that come with the title. Instead, I am more interested in knowing more of the valley and the world around it, and the joy to be had when one has absolutely nothing better to
do than to sleep on the branches of old beeches in the upper hills.

I hear a lot about Lindon, as I understand that many here in Imladris once dwelt there. I have read a little about it as well. I do not know your role in that fair city, or how many you have had for I realize now that they would be plenty, but I would be pleased if you could tell me about them. Not necessarily in letters, of course, as I imagine the scroll for that story would surpass the length of the Bruinen. But if I have not been at all transparent just yet, I was hoping if I could get to know you in this life, as I had not been able to in the past. I regret the way things had ended for us. I do not believe I have told you this yet, but it was good to see you again. I was glad to have something familiar to me when the world has so changed.

Yours,
Glorfindel

--

Dear Glorfindel,

I am glad to have been a source of comfort for you, if that is the case. I can only imagine stepping into a strange world and how disorienting that could be. Please, if you require anything still, whether it be to know what has occurred between this age and the one you remember, or something else, you must let me know. It was remiss of me to entrust you only to a guide and not provide such assistance myself. For this, I apologize.

As for my life in Lindon, mostly, I was part of the High King's council. A good part of my role there is a little similar to what I do for Elrond and Imladris now, although perhaps the manner was a little more formal. Granted, many places would appear more formal compared to Imladris, and that, I believe, was intentional on Elrond's part. I do not know if you already know the story, but Imladris began as a stronghold in the Second Age. It was established shortly after Eregion fell and was long under siege during its first years. That is why, despite what it is now, you might have noticed that Imladris has several strategic means by which it can defend itself. Long is its history in the Second Age, with ties very close to Lindon. Perhaps, this is something else I can tell you about upon my return. You are right, and I realize now as I write this that it is indeed a long story, one that I think is better heard than read.

You say you would like to know about me. I am afraid that there is too little to tell or too much, depending on what you mean. Perhaps we could exchange questions? It is a sentiment I also share, that I would like to know you as well, in a way I was not able to long ago. I pray that this time, we would have a much better chance at doing so.

I could begin with something easy: how are you, and how has life been so far in Imladris?

Sincerely,
Erestor

As the leaves changed colors with the passing of time, more letters were exchanged, tucked between official correspondences Elrond seemed only too happy to sift through to find the ones addressed to Glorfindel. A few times, Glorfindel actually received official missives from Erestor in his role as administrator - reports of activities of the Galadhrim, intelligence from their scouts, and other such things that would be useful for Glorfindel's role as captain of the guard. It amused Glorfindel that Erestor even separated these letters from the rest of their correspondences.
As for their personal letters, in them Glorfindel was able to learn more about Erestor and what he had done between Gondolin and Imladris. The exchange of letters spanned years longer than what they had together in Gondolin, and never before had more words been said between them. For this, Glorfindel was glad, and he thanked Elrond for insisting upon it when he did. With each passing year the letters grew longer, less formal. They would sometimes graze upon serious things, such as the events that led to the Last Alliance and the war that ended the last age. From these, Glorfindel learned that Erestor, though he did not say it in so many words, still deeply grieved the loss of the High King, whom he served for more than three millennia.

Sometimes, too, they would talk about lighter things and exchange silly stories that happened in Imladris or Lothlorien. Glorfindel found Erestor's dry and occasionally scathing and irreverent humor surprisingly entertaining, if a little scandalizing. Glorfindel was able to learn a fair bit about Lindir, Saelbeth the counselor most senior next to Erestor, even poor Galadir and other Elves with whom Glorfindel regularly interacted with in Imladris, as well as a few notable ones among the Galadhrim. The thing was, Erestor had a tone of voice that made everything seem formal, so on the day that Glorfindel realized that what he was actually reading was a veiled form of gossip, he could not help but laugh. Erestor apparently had a knack for picking out secrets and funny stories wherever he went. He read well between the lines and made good use of his quiet ways to pass by undetected. He even had choice words about Elrond, Galadriel, and sometimes even solemn Lord Celeborn, Cirdan of the Havens, and Thranduil of the Wood Elves, whom Glorfindel had not yet met.

Glorfindel recognized, of course, that Erestor said these words in jest, or at least said them with much fondness, if with exasperation of the same degree, having worked with these rulers and gained their friendship at some point or another. Truly, long gone was his quiet, sometimes shy mate. Or, perhaps, he had always been like this and had much to say, only Glorfindel never had the chance to hear them.

Erestor, who had now seen much more of Middle-Earth than Glorfindel ever had, had a way about him now that made him seem comfortable and one with this world that sometimes still felt new to Glorfindel. He knew not whether Erestor sensed this, too, and meant to rectify it, for whatever topics they touched upon, Erestor would give a brief background and even share a few stories, and his tone was always proud and fond.

These only endeared him even more to Glorfindel, for he appreciated such efforts and learned much from them. As time passed he thought of Erestor more frequently until he was no longer ever far from his mind, and thought often that whatever differences he found from the Erestor he knew in Gondolin and the one who was in this world now, Glorfindel loved him still, for he found in Imladris' chief counselor the same brilliant Elf he married long ago. And with each passing year, his inability to see that precious face even from afar, as was his wont, began to take its toll. Elrond had begun his teasing anew, for he knew fully well just how frequently his two advisors now wrote to one another. Lindir though, who knew these not, read much in Glorfindel's occasional quiet moods all the same, and like a true friend, strove to make him feel worse by writing songs about his current state:

"Oh, cruel fate, merciless!
Minding not my dark distress,
Distant sings my withered heart,
Enduring not this time apart.
How it sings: 'Erestor, oh Erestor!
When will I find you at my door?
Return to me, oh love of mine,
Lest I fade now as I pine!"
The songs were all horrible and juvenile, which made hitting the minstrel with his scabard all the more satisfying.
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

I apologize that it took me a while to update compared to the earlier chapters, but work has been demanding of late. Good news, though: two chapters! Hurray! It was supposed to be just one, but it went longer than I planned, so it had to be split into two parts.

Speaking of plans, my notes are also a bit more all over the place from this point onward, so please bear with me. I will still try to update as often as I can, hopefully once or twice a week.

The company from Lórien arrived a little before sunset. The families of those who were part of the journey stood near the gates, bright faces fixed at the pathway for the first sign of their loved ones' horses. A few members of the guard, led by Glorfindel, stood a little apart from them, there to welcome the returning Elves and assist them with the unloading. Stablehands were also at the ready to mind the horses so their riders could rest.

The arrival of the long missed travelers was, as expected, a joyous and noisy affair. Excited squeals and calls were heard aplenty, and there was much hugging and talking. Besides the return of these Elves, news of Lothlorien was also something residents of Imladris were excited about, adding to the crowd, for close were the two realms and many residents have friends and kin residing on the other side of the Misty Mountains. True enough, there were even faces in Imladris now that were not there when the company left, garbed in Lorien silver and gold, and these Elves in particular were most warmly welcomed by those who expected their coming.

A little to the side, some distance apart from the rest, was a reunion more subdued. Glorfindel watched as Erestor smiled fondly at seeing his companions reunite with family and friends, before his eyes met Glorfindel's as the captain approached. Their meeting was certainly less enthusiastic than the others around them, for Glorfindel even stopped two steps away from Erestor's horse. At that moment, though, he did not complain, so glad was he to just see that face again.

"Welcome back, Erestor," he said. His voice might have come out warmer than how one official would speak to another, but that could not be helped. Anyway, so distracted were the others around them that nobody paid them any mind.

Erestor seemed to regard him curiously for a moment, but he did eventually smile. "Thank you. It is indeed good to be back," he said, and he punctuated this with a great sigh. He looked weary from the journey, Glorfindel noted. The hood of his dark green riding cloak was bunched up on his shoulders, and he must have pulled it down recently as a few strands of his hair strayed from the rest and swayed now with the brisk autumn breeze. All the same, Glorfindel could not help but stare at him and remark, at least silently to himself, how startlingly green Erestor's eyes could apparently look in the right light, wrapped as he was in that cloak. It was not often that they saw him as anything less than perfectly neat, with nary a crease on his robes or a strand of hair out of place. How he was now, a little rugged and with his cheeks still pink from the cold on the road - it was also a good look on him.

As Erestor made to dismount, somehow it felt natural for Glorfindel to step closer and lay a hand on his horse to keep it still, and to provide a ready hand should the counselor require assistance. He did
not, for he came down from his mare quite expertly, although he did offer Glorfindel a nod and a 
smile in acknowledgement of the gesture.

"Thank you, too, by the way, for keeping me entertained while I was away," Erestor said when they 
stood face to face. "At the very least, the arrival of your letters provided a good excuse to get away 
from the Lady of the Wood. She always seemed to wish to speak about one inane thing or another."

Glorfindel laughed. "I am glad they helped keep you out of trouble," he said. "And it is good indeed 
that you have returned, for many of us felt your long absence. I believe that the other counselors feel 
they have waited over long, and have prepared a list of things they will go over with you the moment 
you are with them again."

Erestor winced at that. "Ai, please, no. It has been much too long a journey for that to be the first 
thing I am to do. I would not put such a thing past them, however."

Unfortunately for Erestor, as if summoned by their mere mention of it, a voice came from the 
direction of the main house.

"Master Erestor!"

Both turned and true enough, it was Saelbeth, the senior counselor who led the others in Erestor's 
absence. He was a good fellow, Erestor had shared in his letters, if a little quick to worry and the 
most attached to their work. Although he cared not for positions of power, he was reliable and 
organized, making him a good temporary chief when such a need arose. His dark robes billowed 
around him as he strode toward them.

"My lord, it is such a relief you are here now, safe and sound!" exclaimed Saelbeth upon reaching 
them. Instead of the customary laying of one hand, he placed both hands on Erestor's shoulders, who 
seemed to take it all in stride. This must be Saelbeth's way, thought Glorfindel.

"How was the Golden Wood?" asked Saelbeth. "We have been awaiting for news of your arrival for 
days. Do you have time today to pass by our offices?"

Erestor met Glorfindel's eyes for a moment, and in that look Glorfindel knew he gave his warning 
just in time. Dark eyes shifted back to the other counselor.

"It is good to see you as well, Master Saelbeth. Lothlorien is as beautiful as always." He smiled at 
Saelbeth when the other pulled away. "I should report to Lord Elrond first, but I also have matters I 
must discuss with Lord Glorfindel here. It is a favor for the Lord Celeborn that cannot wait, I am 
afraid. Tomorrow, perhaps?"

"Oh, of course, my lord," said the counselor. "I understand completely if there are more pressing 
matters to address. I will tell the others then. Do you need assistance?"

Saelbeth gestured to the cart where the company's belongings were kept still, but Erestor shook his 
head. "I am well and have everything that I need. Thank you for the offer, my friend, and for 
welcoming me."

Saelbeth smiled and nodded. "I am ever at your service, my lord. Let me know immediately if you 
need anything. But if you are certain you are all right, then I shall leave you to it so that you could 
settle down. Will we see you at dinner?"

"Yes, most likely. I look forward to it."

Saelbeth smiled, laid a hand on Erestor's shoulder, in the usual way this time, then bade them both
"I know there is no favor for the Lord of the Wood," said Glorfindel when Saelbeth was a good distance away.

"Of course not," said the chief counselor. He turned to Glorfindel with an amused look in his eyes. "That is good, you see? You know me better already."

Glorfindel laughed at this. "Poor Saelbeth."

"He would have kept me with matters about work had I not given him an excuse he could accept. He means well, but such things are ever on his mind. I, for one, would like to rest."

"Go on and have it, then," said Glorfindel. "We can take care of things here, and I will see to it that your horse is cared for."

Erestor turned to him fully then, his face taking on a worried cast. "I would protest better on another day, but--"

Glorfindel held up a hand, giving Erestor a reassuring smile. "Do not apologize. You are weary from the journey and that is to be expected. It is why we are here. Go."

Giving Glorfindel one last grateful smile, the counselor walked down the path toward the main house. Glorfindel watched him for a moment, comforting himself with the familiar sight of the chief counselor back in Imladris. He then turned to the others, turning over Erestor's mare to one of the stablehands, before he began to command and help the guards put some order in the proceedings despite the excitement that still went on around them.

Whatever they were able to begin with their letters, they seemed to be able to continue somehow in Imladris. Glorfindel was initially worried that they would not and they would return to that uncomfortable silence they had between them. Fortunately, Erestor proved true to the objective of the letters, and welcomed conversations between them whenever there was an opportunity.

Elrond had helped, somehow, in his own insufferable way. Shortly after Erestor's return, the lord of the valley had taken to inviting them both for tea or drinks, depending on which time of the day he managed to accost them. It was, in Glorfindel's opinion, their lord's thinly veiled attempt to encourage further interactions between them, which was embarrassing knowing what Elrond now knew. Fortunately, Erestor did not seem to mind. After finding one another in front of Elrond's doorstep that first time, Erestor comforted Glorfindel's surprise and embarrassment with a warm smile and a simple shrug, before proceeding to knock on Elrond's door.

Such meetings became regular occurrences, until the time came when they were more comfortable meeting without Elrond's aid or presence. Soon, it was no longer a peculiar sight to see the captain and the chief counselor in conversation at different points in the day.

They began somewhere safe for them both: work. They found midway back through their letters that there was a good area where they could work together. Erestor, it turned out, had an extensive military background, for the Elves ever waged wars with the enemy and even among themselves in the First Age, and the end of the Second Age was rife with unrest. One form of battle would catch up to one at some point or another, especially for one who worked as closely with rulers as Erestor. Erestor did not provide much details, but Glorfindel knew enough of wars to read between the lines. Erestor knew too much, and his wisdom and insights when it came to some of the things Glorfindel
raised spoke of first-hand experience. It was a difficult revelation to be read out of parchment, moreso as he knew back in Gondolin, just as it showed even now, that Erestor's preference had always been, as it seemed it would always be, in more scholarly pursuits. It must have been difficult for him to shift his concentration to more pressing roles while the wars were on-going. At the very least, it helped Glorfindel respect him even more, and it gave them much to talk about.

Soon enough, they ventured to other things - Glorfindel's preference for music, his friendships with the Elves in Imladris, his experience leading the guards. Erestor, on his part, shared much of what went on among the scholars and the counselors, his many stories about Elrond, and made good on a few other things he promised to tell Glorfindel that were much too long to write about in his letters.

Despite all of these, Glorfindel, from time to time, would be reminded that between them still lingered a few uncertainties. By some unspoken agreement, they continued to keep the nature of their relationship quiet. Anyway, after so much time had passed, it would be difficult to bring it up now and correct people's assumptions. They also never referred to each other as spouses, and seemed to content themselves with the use of their names or, if they were in the presence of other people, their titles. No touches were exchanged, not even such that were common among friends, and whenever it happened by accident, both would be quick to move away - with Erestor, at first, being the faster of the two to do so, to Glorfindel's disappointment and dismay. Whether he noticed Glorfindel's reaction to this or not, somehow he seemed to relent, and in time he became less quick to pull away, but perhaps became even more careful not to instigate such moments to begin with.

There were also times, few and far in between, when Glorfindel thought he saw Erestor looking at him in a strange way, as if one faced with a puzzle he could not solve, or even, at times, as how one would look at a stranger whom he hesitated to trust. Once, Glorfindel called him on it and asked what he was thinking, but Erestor only shook his head and remained quiet. Glorfindel let him be, for he had learned long ago that there were still many things that Erestor did not tell him.

All the same, many have said that Erestor seemed to favor him above everyone else. Those who have known Erestor from past ages and under prior kings spoke of his mostly reclusive ways, which they had earlier dismissed as simply a matter of preference, but the knowledge of which now made them remark on his apparent warmth toward Glorfindel. All these were said with good cheer - albeit a few not without some teasing and suggestive smiles to the captain - for few Elves would begrudge another whatever meaningful friendship they could find in the long lives they lived, no matter how confusing or surprising such friendships might be.

And so it was that things remained like this for many years. Sometimes, perhaps most days, Glorfindel could even say he was content.
Chapter 8

Few secrets stayed secret in Imladris - or, as Glorfindel was beginning to believe, in any Elven realm in the Third Age.

"My Lord Glorfindel! Come, you must meet my daughter."

...was how it all began.

Glorfindel stopped in his tracks as he saw their newly arrived visitor approach. The Lady of the Golden Wood was resplendent as always, but this time, behind her was also a lovely maiden with shining silver hair, clad in white and with a ready smile on her face.

"My dear," said Galadriel to her companion as she pulled Glorfindel to stand closer to them. "This is Glorfindel. I told you about him. Glorfindel, this is Celebrian, my daughter."

Lady Celebrian had a beautiful and open face, quick to smile, and her voice was light and filled with song. "Well met, Lord Glorfindel," she said with a light curtsy. "Indeed, I have heard much about you from my mother. You must have made quite an impression during her last visit."

Glorfindel smiled uneasily at that, remembering how that last visit went. Likely, Galadriel must have found it all entertaining; he did notice she smiled brightly at him those few days after their first meeting, even though they had little need for interaction at the time.

"Thank you, my lady, although I am not certain if I deserve such praises," he said honestly.

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Galadriel. "Our introduction was unique, to be sure, but am I not already forgiven for that, dear Glorfindel?" At Glorfindel's smile, if possible, she brightened further and turned back to her daughter. "Elrond is fortunate to have him, truly. Never have the guards of Imladris been more attentive and courteous to guests, nor have their forms been better. You must come visit us soon, Glorfindel. Our Galadhrim could learn much from you."

Lady Celebrian smiled at her mother's words and looked up at Glorfindel, still very much impressed. "Only to be expected from a lord of old," she said. "It must come easily for you now, my lord, for Imladris is much smaller than Gondolin, is it not?"

"Nay, my lady," said Glorfindel. "Imladris has its own challenges that were new to me when I came. It is good, however, for in Gondolin it is a whole House that I led, while here I am able to concentrate better on the guards. If it seems that I am doing well by them, it is likely because I have more time for them."

Celebrian's laughter was light, like the pleasant chiming of bells. "Modest, too," she said. "You are as nice as I hear, and no doubt as accomplished as they say as well. It comes as no surprise, for you are Master Erestor's husband, and I cannot imagine him settling for anyone less."

Glorfindel froze. They were, of course, in the middle of the dining hall, just as a number of Elves from Elrond's household were entering. Glorfindel felt their gazes on his back, even turned as he was from the entryway.

In the span of one breath, and seemingly out of nowhere, a hand slipped smoothly in Glorfindel's and squeezed. He felt the warm press of a body against his arm as a deep and dearly familiar voice spoke.

"That is quite a compliment, my lady, and I thank you," said Erestor beside him. "It is good to see
"Master Erestor, greetings! Oh, it was long as always, but otherwise uneventful," came Celebrian's easy answer, blissfully ignorant of the effect of her earlier words. "The weather was fair, for which I am grateful. It is ever so unpleasant when it rains on the road, don't you think so?"

Erestor smiled and agreed. He did not follow up after and merely stayed quiet, which allowed the lady to turn to Glorfindel again.

"Truly, I am glad that we have finally met. Everyone speaks so well of you, Lord Glorfindel. Please," she turned from Glorfindel to Erestor, "will you not both sit with me at dinner? Mother will surely monopolize Elrond as always. It would be nice to sit with a friend, and another whom I hope would also be a good friend in time." At this, she turned her warm smile at Glorfindel.

"It would be our pleasure," said Erestor. Celebrian's smile brightened at that.

"It must be so nice to be reunited again," she said with a happy sigh. "You both look wonderful together, too - a very handsome couple indeed. I was thrilled when Mother told me, for it is such a sweet story. Tragic, oh do not get me wrong, but it all worked out in the end, yes? You are together again now. I truly am very happy for both of you."

Celebrian likely would have engaged them longer had it not been for the arrival of Lord Celeborn, who joined his wife and daughter, at which point Erestor politely excused them in the guise of wishing to speak with Glorfindel alone. Celebrian was only too happy to oblige and cheerfully pulled her parents aside, allowing Erestor to pull Glorfindel to the opposite direction. He let go of Glorfindel's hand, but instead of pulling away, his hand crept up Glorfindel's arm and rested at the crook of it as if it had always done so for centuries. Glorfindel, who had initially been confused but had also learned to follow Erestor's lead when it came to such things, placed his other hand on top of Erestor's. It felt good to finally be able to do so.

"Thank you for the rescue," he whispered to his companion. He looked back to where the Lady Celebrian and her parents had gone. From where they stood, it would only look as if he and Erestor were in a private conversation, which he supposed was the idea. "You know, what with what happened last time with the Lady Galadriel and all."

"Things have not really gone much better this time. Worse, even, I would say," said Erestor in the same low voice. He sighed, but did smile up at Glorfindel. "The damage was done when I arrived, but it would have been cruel to leave you to weather the storm alone."

Touched by the thought, and filled still with the nerves brought about by that previous encounter, Glorfindel was hit by the urge to kiss this surprisingly kind and honorable Elf. He caught himself just in time so that only relief showed on his face. "Again, thank you. I was completely unprepared for that meeting."

Erestor laughed. "It would have been worse had you let Galadriel know that it is still not well known here. Sometimes I wonder if she knows just how much havoc she wreaks whenever she comes."

"It was the daughter this time, though," reasoned Glorfindel.

"Aye, but I do not doubt the mother had a hand in it." They stopped for a moment a little to the side of the hall where they could watch the other Elves arrive and settle. The hall was only half filled, so Glorfindel surmised that they had a while more to wait. Although no heads were turned to them, he knew they were being watched. It made his head ache just thinking about what will come after this.
"I suppose you ought to know," said Erestor, filling the silence. "Elrond is courting Celebrian - I believe I mentioned this before. They have known each other for quite a while, but it was only after the war that he made up his mind and expressed a desire to settle down. There is no lack of love there, but ever had other concerns filled his time and attention. This time, I believe, a bonding is not too far away, hence this visit. I am glad that he has a chance now to seek happiness."

"What is she like? From what I saw there, you have also known each other for a while."

"I met her a few years before the war, about the same time as Elrond. She and her mother came to what was then a young Imladris, for Celeborn had fled with us here to escape Eregion when it fell. I knew that she and Elrond exchanged letters after that. She comes and goes, though, so it was not until recently that we were able to know each other well as friends. Worry not; things are fairly straightforward with her. She takes after her father, I am relieved to say. Can you imagine having someone like Galadriel in Imladris?"

Glorfindel bit his lip to keep from laughing. "I think it would be lovely," he said.

Erestor gave him a pointed look, which was so effectively eloquent in its expression of his opinion that it forced the laughter out of Glorfindel anyway. A few nearby Elves turned their heads toward them, but upon meeting Erestor's level gaze, they immediately looked away.

"You are very good at that," observed Glorfindel, amused as he watched the last Elves squirm in their seats.

"I doubt it would spare us the trouble Celebrian's announcement caused there in the entryway. Nice positioning, by the way. I believe only the ones seated in front of the room had not been able to hear your conversation. Perhaps next time you ought to consider them, too."

Glorfindel cringed at the comment. "Do not even joke about that. I am sorry. I was not expecting them to meet me there the way they did."

Erestor shook his head and sighed. "It was not your fault. Such things tend to happen around the Lady of the Wood. It would be best to just stay out of the way or to go along with it should you ever be caught."

Elrond arrived shortly after that, as did most of the other guests and attendees of the banquet. The lord of the valley then invited all to come and sit for the feast. Heeding the call, Glorfindel and Erestor moved together to join them at the main table, walking toward Celebrian, whose easy, relaxed smile brightened upon seeing them approach.
Chapter 9

It was a livid chief minstrel who accosted Glorfindel the next day.

"Married! Married, Glorfindel? There is no way you just missed telling us this detail."

"Good morning to you, too, Master Minstrel," said Glorfindel as he met Lindir in the middle of the hallway. "Lovely day for it, all this yelling."

Lindir, however, chose to ignore his disapproving tone. "How could you have kept this from us? Do you know how much is at stake here? This puts an end to at least a third of the on-going wagers around you two. What am I even going to do with the pots for those?"

Glorfindel rolled his eyes at his friend's histrionics. "Yes, because ever have I been sympathetic to your shameless cause. It serves you right for betting on other people's business."

Lindir sniffed at this. "You old Elves. We are at the dawn of the Third Age, you know. We won a great war and the enemy sleeps; we deserve to enjoy life in this time of peace. Gossip and merriment should abound!"

"Indeed. If you have the energy for such things, then you also have the energy to return the pot money for your obsolete wagers, one by one. I hear the Greenwood is lovely this time of the year."

The chief minstrel sneered at Glorfindel. "You are funny, really. Ugh, I hate this! It is not only the wagers, you understand. For something like this to slip from under my nose - my very nose, Glorfindel! - it is embarrassing! I can already imagine what that insufferable Haldir is going to say. If he wins the remaining wagers, I can never live it down."

"Haldir? Haldir of the Golden Wood, that Haldir?"

"Do you know other annoying marchwardens named Haldir? Of course, that Haldir."

"How is he even..." Glorfindel stopped himself, shaking his head. "No, I do not even want to know. I should have known you would pull in even the most respectable Elves in your silly games."

"Haldir, respectable? What weed have you been smoking, my friend?" Lindir completely ignored Glorfindel withering glare. "Oh, but I should have known. That rumor! You know, the one about Erestor having a bondmate in Aman. I suppose that was technically true at the time. That began because he had this ring when he was at the High King's court. Everyone thought it was a bonding ring. I do not remember seeing it of late, which is probably why I did not think of it immediately."

Glorfindel had never seen this ring, but that was twice now that it was mentioned to him.

"That is strange, is it not? And we have not guessed it at all." Lindir was now looking at him thoughtfully. "Come to think of it, you do not act the part. I mean, you play the lovesick part quite adequately, following him the way you do--"

"Hey."

"--but that is a far cry from being the long-time couple you are supposed to be. The rumors are true, are they not? You did not deny it, and I have spoken with many who swear they heard it from the honorable Lady Celebrian themselves."
Glorfindel sighed. "That is a long story that I do not even wish to get into today, my friend."

Surprisingly, Lindir stayed quiet and did not protest at that, as Glorfindel would have expected. He continued to stare at Glorfindel thoughtfully, which was such a foreign expression on his face that the captain was beginning to feel unnerved.

The minstrel did grin eventually though, his face returning to its usual playful look. "Well, your secret is out, I'm afraid. Beware, Captain. Whatever your reasons for keeping your relationship quiet, do not underestimate how big this kind of news is here in Imladris. We have long known the chief counselor, and you yourself are still a bit of a celebrity. Do not deny it. If I don't see another Elf swooning when you pass until the end of this age, it would still be too soon. But that's both of you off the board." The grin widened. "Oh, you will see. This will be fun."

True enough, once word had spread that the captain and chief counselor were, in fact, bonded mates, it was as if the inhabitants of Imladris saw them in a new light. Many were of the idea that they should have known, or that it had all been obvious from the very beginning, and were quick to remedy their mistake by treating the two officials as if they were newlyweds.

"Here," said Erestor as he stood in front of Glorfindel's desk at the barracks, after just having placed a small basket of pastries on the surface - Glorfindel had moved the cloth aside to take a peek. "From the baker, who came by earlier to seek permission to travel to the Havens to visit family. I was given explicit instructions that these were to be shared with my..." he trailed off, but did wave his hand at Glorfindel's general direction. "She sends her regards," was all he said in the end.

"That was very kind of her," said Glorfindel, torn between sympathy for his mate - who did not look at all comfortable standing there now that his hands were empty - and joy at the simple fact that he was in Glorfindel's office without invitation at all. "Please, Erestor, sit. Let me get you some tea."

Erestor pulled the chair in front of the desk and sat down. He sighed and leaned on the armrest, one hand on his temple as if staving off a headache. "I thought I may as well pick up those documents I asked you to sign. Do you have them?"

"I do, just give me a moment. Here." Glorfindel placed a cup of tea on the desk in front of Erestor. "It's fresh. I made it just before you arrived. Stay a while, you look like you need some rest."

Erestor did not speak, but he did take the offered cup, deeply breathing in the scent of the tea before taking a sip. He sighed and closed his eyes, the tension easing from his shoulders somewhat. Glorfindel, who had sat himself on one side of the desk, could not help but watch him.

"Glorfindel!"

He looked up at the door to see Galadir, who was about to enter with his usual energy but had stopped abruptly at seeing Erestor there. "Chief Counselor Erestor! This is a pleasant surprise. We do not see you often here. Or, well, I suppose it is not surprising for you to be here, come to think of it. Perhaps I just do not catch you."

"What do you want, Galadir?" asked Glorfindel so Erestor need not speak.

Imladris' deputy captain turned his attention back to Glorfindel, but did not lose his smile. "I do beg your pardon, my friend. I would not have barged in had I known you had company. We were just speaking about the new rosters out in the training field and we wondered if you are done with them. All right if we have a look now?"
Glorfindel reached out to take a scroll from the shelf beside his desk. He handed this to Galadir.

"My thanks, Captain." His eyes then strayed to the basket on the desk. "Fresh pastries, I see. Sweet. That's very thoughtful, actually. I wish my Naurwen would send me those from time to time."

It looked as if he would make another attempt at engaging Erestor in a conversation, so Glorfindel waved a hand out at him. "Go away now, Galadir. We are on a break."

"Oh? Oh! Of course, of course!" To Glorfindel's horror, his second actually winked at Erestor before nodding at Glorfindel. "I shall leave you two to it, then. Captain, Counselor." He nodded each to both of them and left, locking the door behind himself as he went, before Glorfindel could even stop him.

"Charming, that one," said Erestor, cup still touching his lips.

Glorfindel sighed and ran a hand down his own face, which felt a bit warm. "He is a good soldier," he said in the fool's defense.

Erestor smiled. "Indeed. Has a mouth on him, though. He regaled us with his stories of life on the road during the trip to the Golden Wood."

Glorfindel winced. "I am sorry."

"Do not be. The scribes were entertained, at least. So were the architects and the builders, come to think of it. I have worked with him in the past, so I know he is a capable guard. Has a good aim with a bow and arrow." Erestor shrugged. "So long as I am not the one who must respond to him, we will be fine."

Glorfindel could not help but laugh despite his embarrassment. "I thought as much. It is why I sent him away."

"I did notice that," said Erestor with a smile. "Thank you."

"Speaking of Elves who love to talk, how are you coping with... you know."

"You mean from being congratulated at every turn, as if I had my wedding yesterday instead of thousands of years ago?"

Glorfindel frowned in sympathy. "Ah. Yes, that."

"Galadriel," Erestor said with a shake of his head. "I blame her for everything." He then heaved a heavy sigh, and looked as if one deep in thought. "I am all right, I suppose. It is a bit strange, maybe. I do not think I passed anyone who did not mention it. They all seemed quite delighted by the news."

"Huh," huffed Glorfindel. "Really. About half of them were pretty annoyed with me."

Erestor looked up at Glorfindel, hand on his lips, hiding a grin. "Those wagers, I take it?"

"You know about them?" Glorfindel asked, surprised.

"Who does not know about them? I just do not know how it is that Imladris became the center for such things, but I know of good, respectable Elves from as far as Mithlond and Eryn Galen who have their gold in those coffers."

"My presence did not help any, I think. I have had my fair share of questions when I arrived, much of it due apparently to our interactions. They did not understand it, and read of it what they will."
Glorfindel did not bother mentioning that some of those guessed not too far from the truth, for reasons he also could not deny. He indeed might have watched Erestor too often.

"It is all right. Better that whatever wagers are done about me concern only you now instead others. There was even a time when, simultaneously even, they..." Erestor seemed to cringe at the memory. "Let us just say that sometimes these things make life seem more colorful than it has any right to be. Anyway, being bonded is more stable and certain than courtships tend to be, and such things make for unexciting wagers. I wish I thought of it sooner."

Glorfindel could not help but grin at Erestor, one eyebrow raised. "You would have declared us to be spared from ridiculous wagers?"

"'Tis a noble reason - peace. Is it not what we all fight for?"

Glorfindel could not help but shake his head, but a smile was still on his lips. "You play far too much with words, Counselor. Do you employ the same techniques when you negotiate with the Greenwood?"

"Please." The chief counselor waved a hand dismissively. "Thranduil's ambassadors cannot even see beyond their horse's rear end. I employ no technique save the use of simple Sindarin, in short sentences lest the mix of words confuse them."

Glorfindel's laughter was loud and open. "You are impossible," he said after a while, although he said this with an almost admiring tone. He was never one to say such things despite the revelation that he found them extremely funny.

Erestor just smiled modestly and gave one of those slight shrugs of his, just an easy lift of one shoulder. He always seemed so effortlessly graceful to Glorfindel, a joy to watch, and he was reminded again how much he wished they could have more times just like this.

After a while though, Erestor's face took a more serious cast, and he almost seemed regretful when he said, "Forgive me; I am keeping you. I suppose you need to get back to work."

"You could stay," Glorfindel said quickly, just as Erestor moved to stand. Erestor looked at him then, almost with a look of surprise, and Glorfindel smiled in a way he hoped was reassuring. "I mean it. Your manner is of one exhausted. Long day, I take it?" Erestor gave him a tired nod. "I have a full pot of tea still and would, in fact, appreciate the company."

Erestor regarded Glorfindel thoughtfully, and had that look about him again, the one that made Glorfindel feel as if Erestor was trying to read his mind and puzzle him out. It was unnerving just as it was embarrassing, for although his intentions were truly for Erestor's sake, it was also true that there always existed in him a desire not just for any kind of company, but Erestor's in particular. It was a given in all things that he did, and he wondered how much of it showed to the Elf before him.

Fortunately, it did not seem as if it was a day for Erestor and deep contemplation. The chief counselor did look exhausted, with whatever it was that kept him busy nowadays. He slowly sank back to his seat, doing so with a great sigh. "Too many have come to me today for one concern or another. I suppose I could use a moment's respite, and this is a good place as any to hide." He gestured at Glorfindel's desk and the work he interrupted when he arrived. "Please, do not mind me. I will only take you up on the offer of tea and be on my way."

"You need not hurry, really." Pleased that he had what he wanted, it was all Glorfindel could do to keep a besotted smile from his face, which he tried to hide by standing and moving back to the chair behind his desk. He doubted he could work well given that Erestor was sitting across from him and
being a general source of distraction, but he did make a good attempt.

They were quiet for a while, with only the faint sounds of rustling parchment, the scratch of Glorfindel's quill, and the chink of Erestor's tea cup against its saucer filling the room. Glorfindel took a piece of pastry from the basket Erestor brought before subtly pushing the said basket toward the other. The gesture earned Glorfindel a smile, and Erestor did reach in to take a piece for himself. For the most part, though, the counselor just drank his tea and looked out the window, perfectly comfortable in his silence, so that despite his initial nerves, Glorfindel was lulled also into his peace and he was indeed able to work for a while.

It was Erestor who eventually broke their silence. "Do you need help?" he asked.

Glorfindel looked up from his work. "I thought you were resting."

Erestor smiled and shrugged. "I can only be idle for so long. Give me something to check or rewrite."

"I do have a request for supplies I must complete soon." Glorfindel shuffled through some of the parchments stacked on the side of his desk, pulling out a few. "Galadriel took care of the inventory and consolidated a list of things that we need still or should be replaced. I was supposed to review his numbers before giving a good copy to Elrond."

Erestor held out his hand. "Give it to me then. Elrond gets me to go through such requests anyway, so it should save us all a step."

When Glorfindel handed Elrond the request he and Erestor worked on - well, mostly Erestor worked on with a few inputs from Glorfindel - a dark eyebrow rose at seeing the chief counselor's signature already affixed at the bottom of the parchment. Not to mention, it was also a clean copy written in the said chief counselor's penmanship.

"You two are getting along well, I take it?" Elrond asked with that usual teasing glint in his eyes.

There was probably a small smile on Glorfindel's face. "It just so happened that he was there and insisted on something to do. It might be a one-off thing."

"Curious, what you two do in private. Though, I am not complaining. This saves me the trouble of talking to both of you. It is a good idea, come to think of it. Could you go through future requests with him first?"

"Aye, if you wish."

Elrond laughed at Glorfindel's formality. "Please, do not keep yourself from celebrating on my behalf. I know how excited this makes you."

A sigh. "Shut up, my lord."
They say things came slowly for Elves, so that many things can pass through the years unchanged. However, this was not to say that they would never seek change, or that they did not know what it was like to want for better things and grow bitter with impatience.

Glorfindel knew that things were changing when more and more did some odd days come when he would watch his husband with a gaze a little different from before. More often nowadays, with their attempts at establishing a working relationship they could both live with, not to mention pushed together as they were by the expectations of those around them, was Glorfindel able to spend more time with Erestor and admire his profile in the firelight, or watch how the dappled shadows of the leaves outside his office window danced across that striking face. He would catch himself staring at Erestor when the other was deep in thought, watching those eyes, with their fascinating play between brown and green depending on the light, even as they did their own staring, out the windows or off into the distance. He watched the way Erestor would bite his bottom lip partly between his teeth as he frowned at a parchment on his desk, and Glorfindel could not help but think of another instance when the other might do the same thing, for infinitely more pleasurable reasons.

Such things, when he caught himself thinking them, would be quickly, guiltily pushed to the back of his mind, dangerous as they were given the delicate balance he had already achieved with his spouse. He watched other couples around him and wondered at what it must be like to have such things freely, there for the taking if they so wished it, that they could even afford to take such things for granted. So casually did they hold hands, and sometimes they even kissed with their eyes open still, without thought that for others, such things would already be considered luxuries, achieved only in dreams and fantasies.

It was therefore not the best of timings when Lindir - who, for someone so crass and irreverent on most days, sometimes also showed bouts of insight that surprised Glorfindel - dragged him one evening to the Hall of Fire for a drink.

"So," began the minstrel after two rounds and a lull in the conversation. "What is he like in bed?"

It was a testament to their strangely enduring friendship that Glorfindel no longer choked on his drink at the question.

"Is he as quiet as he is outside of your rooms," continued Lindir when Glorfindel did not immediately respond, "or is there a beast that he unleashes behind your heavy doors? How does he want to be kissed? What does he do that melts the bones in your knees?"

Glorfindel looked at Lindir disapprovingly. "That is highly inappropriate. Is that what we are actually going to talk about?"

"No, really. I am curious." Lindir leaned across the table, meeting Glorfindel's eyes with a look so intent for one supposedly inebriated, it was unsettling. "I mean, if anybody is curious about such a thing, you are the person to ask, are you not?"

Glorfindel looked down at his drink, watching the fire dancing on the surface. "You would ask someone how their spouses are in bed? Really, Lindir?"
"I have done worse things," said the minstrel flippantly. "That is not why I am asking you this, though. Tell me: even if you wanted to, can you even answer the question at all?"

Glorfindel looked up at that. Lindir had a strangely serious look on his face, not unlike that time when he accosted Glorfindel in the hallway when he first found out about Glorfindel and Erestor. He did not get the full story then, but Glorfindel should have known that the other was not bound to let that go.

"Glorfindel," said Lindir when his companion did not speak. "You and Erestor are not fully married, are you?"

The captain frowned. "What is that supposed to mean?"

"I mean, there are two parts to a marriage. There is the ceremony, where you make your vows in front of witnesses - this takes care of the public front. Then, there is the consummation, which joins your faer, and cements your vows. It is only then that two people are truly bound."

"What brought this on?" asked Glorfindel even as he looked away.

"I was curious ever since I found out about the two of you. Some things kind of made sense - the way you look at him, the way he had always acted as if he was unavailable. At the same time, however, some things still did not fit. I told you before that you two do not act the part, and you are always careful with him, and sometimes even he with you, almost as if you have no reading at all of what the other is thinking or feeling. You do not see his fae the way a mate should be able to, do you?"

When Glorfindel remained quiet, Lindir sighed and continued to speak.

"I read something interesting the other day," he said, topping up Glorfindel's glass. "It was about the practices of Elves in the First Age, the time of princes and kings. You do not see many arranged marriages nowadays, but it was the norm then, was it not, among the nobles and kin of the kings? You were pretty high up - I mean, we have books about you, for the Valar's sake - and Erestor... well, who knows where Erestor came from, but my guess is that he was also a noble, the brother or close kin of a prince or someone of your rank, if he ended up betrothed to you.

"Now, whatever differences we have in our practices, one cannot change the nature of Elves, one of which is that is that we cannot force bonds. The first years of an arranged marriage were therefore typically spent in courtship, or whatever you people call it, and you waited for love to grow, as it often does anyway. When it does, the marriage is consummated, and it seals the marriage. They said that such things often took three, five, ten years or so, depending on how well acquainted the parties were."

Lindir leaned forward again. "My friend, how many years did you have together before your city fell?"

Glorfindel did not quite meet the other's eyes. "Two years."

"Did you know one another before you were wed?"

"We knew of one another, but we were not personally acquainted."

"Morgoth's balls," cursed the minstrel, eyes widening. "Are you telling me I am right? And until now you two are not... Why ever not?"

Glorfindel sighed. "I am yet to be certain if it is what he wants still. He seems content with the way
"What? You are waiting for him? Glorfindel, you are a fool if you trust Erestor's face." At Glorfindel's glare, Lindir held up a hand. "No, listen. Do you know what Erestor is best at? Concealing. It is why he is a good politician. He will look happy with whatever you eventually give him, never mind what he actually thinks. Of course he will look content with you."

"And you know this how?"

"Glorfindel, I have known him for an entire age. Besides, it does not take a genius. What kind of fool would be happy with the relationship you two have? You look miserable, especially of late, and why not? It is an unconsummated marriage - of four thousand years! If I have ever heard of anything as ridiculous, I--" Lindir shook his head. "You two have been carrying on the way you have all this time, playing at a marriage that is apparently so fragile either of you could break it when ever one so wished. If he at all returns your regard - which I believe he does, since he tolerates your presence even if you are a bit dense - then he must also feel anxious and discontent, same as you. Maybe you ought to, you know, do something by now."

Glorfindel was silent for a long time before he asked, voice low, "What if you are wrong?"

"I am not wrong," declared Lindir. "But even if I were, then do you not think that you have tortured yourself long enough? Long have you floundered when it comes to him. At the very least, you will know where you stand." Lindir then took his own glass, touching it to Glorfindel's. "I mean, this is just my unsolicited advice, of course."

"Terribly unsolicited, yes."

Lindir grinned at Glorfindel's resigned tone. "Friends, you know? I hear they can be such trolls. Now," here he raised his glass, as one would in a toast, "may the frown disappear from your face so the rest of us can enjoy the rest of our summer. Cheers!"

Glorfindel was more distracted than usual the following day, to say the least. He could not take the idea of approaching Erestor and broaching the subject to him out of his mind, even if he still did not know how to even do so. He thought about it so much, in fact, that he kept seeing the two of them in his mind's eye, together in ways that would give Glorfindel the answer to Lindir's first question, when he brought up the topic of Erestor in last night's conversation.

He was therefore not in the best of states to work. Unfortunately, they were nearing the day of Elrond and Celebrian's wedding - Erestor had been right about it when Celebrian had last visited - and everyone in Imladris were taking additional loads on top of their usual duties in preparation for the said event.

Erestor had called for him to go over a particular request, something about Glorfindel's men and the work that still needed to be done. Glorfindel was not certain on the details.

"What is it?"

Glorfindel blinked and met Erestor's eyes. "What is what?"

"You were staring. Were you even listening?"

"Yes," was his first instinct to say. He relented quickly though, knowing the other would just catch him on it. "All right, not competely. I had something on my mind."
Erestor frowned and looked concerned. "Shall we do this another time?"

"No, it is fine. I am sorry." Glorfindel looked down at the parchment he was holding. "Can we run through this again? What am I looking at?"

"These are the guards that the household staff have pulled to help out in the preparations for the wedding. Since we are also tightening our security, I thought you ought to know, as I do not want that area to be compromised because your men are overworked. Could we come up with a roster or rotation scheme, perhaps, one we could all work with?"

Glorfindel forced himself to concentrate even as Erestor leaned across the table to point at the lists on the parchment, indicating which of Glorfindel's men were pulled at particular areas. Glorfindel could feel his warmth from when their hands almost touched, and this close, the familiar scent of him filled his senses - deep, heady traces of the woods reminiscent of cedar trees, and lighter tones of spring that sometimes changed whenever Glorfindel would catch them. It intrigued him, tempted him; he nearly trembled at such proximity.

A knock then came at Erestor's door, momentarily distracting the counselor. He looked up at the intruder, and as he did so a lock of black hair fell down his shoulder and brushed against the back of Glorfindel's hand. Glorfindel recognized the voice of one of Erestor's apprentices, though he understood not the words exchanged, so intent was he on that accidental contact. His hand turned, subtly so the other would not notice, and his lips parted, taking in a slow breath as he reveled at the feel of those soft strands against his fingers.

They were gone almost as quickly as they came. Erestor moved away and strode toward the door, likely to take care of whatever it was that the apprentice came to ask for, leaving Glorfindel for a moment to catch his breath and calm his fast beating heart.

"Shall we continue?" Erestor asked upon his return. Glorfindel was not sure if he was disappointed or relieved when Erestor took the seat across from his instead of looming above him as he had earlier done. "How many men do you need to secure the eastern pass?"

There was little contact between them after that, so that they were able to agree on something by the end of their meeting. All the same, it had been a long afternoon for Glorfindel, and his evening, spent staring at the wall that divided his room from Erestor's, had been even longer.

Chapter End Notes

Sindarin words used:

Fae (s); faer (p) - soul/spirit
Chapter 11

"I think I am going to be ill."

Glorfindel chuckled at his lord and charge's obvious discomfort. It was the day of Elrond and Celebrían's wedding and Imladris was filled to its brim with Elves from all corners of Middle-Earth. The past few days had been spent welcoming the household of Cirdan and Thranduil, not to mention the drove of Elves from the Golden Wood that never seemed to stop coming. This, along with the preparations that were already underway, made for a very busy valley indeed, which spared nobody in its demands.

But finally today, Glorfindel sat beside Elrond in his rooms, on the last stretch of preparations and waiting. Elrond was clad in his matrimonial white, with details and textures in mithril, his hair done in formal braids. On his face, however, he wore the lines of anxiety, for they were still waiting for Lindir, the master of events that day, and his signal that they were ready to begin. And it was taking a while.

"You are such a child."

Glorfindel's eyes immediately went to the door, where Erestor had just entered. Glorfindel could no longer help but stare at him, more openly even these days, following him with his eyes whenever he was in the same room, although recently Glorfindel had not had the chance speak with him at length. Out of everyone, it seemed Erestor had been the busiest of them all and the most difficult to catch, for he stood as Elrond's second in all things, and Elrond, truth be told, had helped little as the day of the wedding drew near.

Erestor himself was clad in formal robes in the dark blues and gold of Elrond's house, and his hair was done in braids a little simpler than Elrond's, pinned at the back of his head with a gold clip in a modest design. He wore a circlet around his head, which matched Glorfindel's, for that day they would stand beside Elrond as his family and witnesses, as Celeborn and Galadriel would stand for their daughter.

It had been a decidedly awkward affair, getting to decide who to stand by Elrond's side. As a descendant of Turgon, Galadriel's cousin, Galadriel would have been Elrond's closest kin. This, however, would have looked strange, and the exchange of gifts awkward, obligating the Lord and Lady of the Wood to bestow a gift to their own daughter. The responsibility fell then either to Glorfindel or Erestor. Glorfindel, being the eldest son from a lower house in the line of Finwë, would have been Elrond's next closest kin - "closest" being the operative term, because even then he was quite far off. Erestor was farther if bloodlines were to be followed, but in deeds he could be better acknowledged, for he was there with Elrond's parents at the Havens in the Mouths of Sirion, and was Elrond's friend, advisor and trusted colleague for nigh on three ages.

It was Celebrían who pointed out the aptness of the two lords being wed themselves, which saved them all the trouble of having to choose. It was also a happy situation all around, she said, for it gave Elrond two people to stand with him instead of one.

Elrond scowled at his chief counselor as he approached. "Easy for you to say. You old nobles are lucky with your neat plans and arranged marriages. You do not know what it is like to marry for love and arrange for yourself everything that goes with it." He caught Glorfindel's eye in the looking
glass, and smirked. "Oh, wait."

Glorfindel gave Elrond a warning look before his eyes quickly flitted to where Erestor stopped at the foot of the bed, checking the contents of a chest laid on top of it. Fortunately, he did not seem to have heard the last part of Elrond's speech.

"Technically," said Erestor as he walked toward them with a mithril circlet in his hands, "you did not arrange anything. I did. All you did was ask for her hand, and you then proceeded to be a right mess and implored for the help of anyone who would assist you."

"Given that this 'anyone' turned out to be you only serves to prove what we have long established, which is that you cannot resist me." Elrond then turned to Glorfindel, holding up a hand that looked like it was meant to be placating, even as Erestor adjusted the circlet around his head. "I mean this in the friendliest, most non-romantic sense, of course, Glorfindel. We are practically brothers, Erestor and I." He chuckled. "Or father and son, as the case may be."

"You are no son of mine, a fact for which I thank the Valar every day," Erestor said in a clipped tone. "By Elbereth, it is as if your less than desirable qualities grow worse with your nerves. You have run us all mad this whole week and show no signs of stopping."

"Indeed? Glorfindel." Elrond turned again to his captain. "What state were you in on the days leading up to your wedding?"

Glorfindel caught Erestor's eyes then, but he did not think to lie, so said truthfully to Elrond, "Much like the one you are in now, my friend. I slept not a wink, and the seneschal of my house nearly ran out on me."

Elrond seemed much pleased by this answer. "Interesting. Did you know this, Erestor? Do you not find that interesting, considering that your own match was arranged?"

Erestor sighed. "Elrond, stop. Glorfindel, do not indulge him." He looked briefly at Glorfindel before turning back to their lord. "All weddings bring with them the nerves you are feeling now, so stop baiting your friends. Calm yourself, but do not do so by passing your anxiety on others."

Elrond sighed as well, deeply and unsteadily. "Ai, Erestor, I need something to distract me, and if you will not have me speak with Glorfindel, then the responsibility falls on you." He smiled at his chief counselor. "Why don't you tell me about your own wedding? We have not spoken of such things in the long years of our acquaintance. Was it much like this one?"

Erestor looked at Elrond suspiciously, as if to check if the other was making fun again. Seeing Elrond's pallor and expectant face, however, he moved to sit on one of the chairs across from where his two companions sat. Glorfindel thought that his gaze flitted over to him for a moment, but it passed quickly, and Erestor fixed his eyes back to Elrond.

"We had it early in the summer," said Erestor. "I remember the winds still brought with them the pleasant coolness of spring, but the sun was bright and the day had been long. The ceremony was held at the front gardens of the House of the Golden Flower, on the pathway leading to the main house. There were many flowers, most of them white and golden yellow. It had been a good time for flowers, and the air was ever filled with their fragrance wherever you walked. Whose idea was the day for the ceremony, Glorfindel?"

Glorfindel, surprised at being pulled in the telling of the story, sat up straighter and said, "Mine."

Erestor smiled at the captain. "It was a good choice," he told him, earning himself a smile in return.
"There were many things that day that I thought were well thought out. I had never entered the house before then, so setting it against the front doors, held open and adorned with white fabric and fresh vines, was a welcoming gesture that I appreciated. The blue carpet that led inside the doors was the color of my House. Was that coincidental?" The last question he addressed again to Glorfindel.

Again, Glorfindel smiled, Erestor's words stirring the memories in his own mind. He remembered those doors, the carpet, the archway under which they were wed, and the multitude of guests that was almost the whole of Gondolin. "No," he said to Erestor, "it was picked for its color."

"It was a beautiful House as it was, but there were even more good things that can be said about it on that day. The minstrels sang a pleasant song, their voices almost in harmony with the wind, never rising above it, never overwhelming. It helped much in easing my nerves at the time, seeing all those things." Erestor drifted away briefly, but then chuckled. "Truth be told, I was afraid that it would be like those other weddings I attended, all extravagance and show, and was so relieved that it was not.

"Do you remember Lord Rog's wedding?" he asked Glorfindel. "He had these things hanging from the trees and the ceilings that you had to part with your hands in order to walk, and everywhere it was reds and golds and silvers. Ever present was the sound of bells and drums; it was such a loud affair. Then, in the evening, there was this grand show, and such dances and colors... It was dizzying."

"The House of the Hammer had always been like that - flashy," said Glorfindel, which made Erestor laugh, undoubtedly remembering along with him the many ways Rog and his House had surprised them all with their bold style. "So, those things did not appeal to you?"

"It was just strange, seeing them in a wedding. One would think such things should be more subdued, given the occasion. Then again, it is Rog of whom we speak, and one can never call him subdued." Erestor sighed, leaning back in his seat. "I infinitely preferred what we had. I do not know if it was because it had been my turn then - my own wedding, that is, when I never gave much thought to such things before - but it felt more personal in a way, and I was pleased by it in ways I did not expect to be."

Glorfindel only considered his next words for a moment. Bolstered either by the happy memories of their old city and their old life, or perhaps also by the nerves and the desire to tell Erestor all that was in his mind, which were now almost always below the surface every time he was in the other's presence, he said, "I am glad you liked them, and even moreso that you noticed those details, for they were all for you."

Erestor stilled at the comment. Elrond raised an eyebrow, although the beginnings of a smile grew on his lips. Glorfindel saw these things only briefly though, as his eyes had fallen to the floor, else he became too nervous to continue.

"I asked many things from Ecthelion, as well as anyone who cared to answer, about details that could be used for the wedding," he said. "I asked if there was any particular flower that you favored, any song you would appreciate to be sung." He gave a short laugh, remembering that time when all floundered to give him an answer, when they could not do so adequately. He caught Elrond's eye. "It was a difficult thing to plan, for it turned out that Erestor had no favorite flower, no favorite song. It became obvious that one can develop a general idea of what Erestor might like, but individual elements could not be named in the way that I asked for them, for he was not particular about such things. I therefore had to come up with a list of things that, when put together, would be something that he would appreciate.

"I did have help, mostly from the ladies of my House. I thought about everything that I knew about Erestor and worked with them to bring these ideas to life, for I must admit that they were better than I
when it comes to such things. A few things were thrown in that I also personally liked. I thought indeed that Erestor might prefer a relatively subdued affair, more relaxed than extravagant, but elegant overall. It was also what I wanted, so I was glad of it. I never really did find out what he thought about it all, though - until now, at least."

Never missing an opportunity to tease, Elrond quipped, "And now we know that Erestor liked everything that you did. It seems you knew him quite well, even then."

"I knew him enough, apparently," smiled Glorfindel, suppressing the urge to shake his head at his lord's thinly veiled hints. He glanced at Erestor, who had suddenly grown quiet. "Although it would have been nice at the time to know that he truly liked them, and saw even those small details I thought he would miss."

Erestor cleared his throat, and Glorfindel could swear his cheeks looked a bit pink when he spoke. "I believe I thanked you at the time."

Glorfindel laughed. "In so few words!"

At that, Erestor finally seemed to relax a bit again, and he huffed out a breath and rolled his eyes. "Did you think it was easy to initiate conversations with you? That day was only our second meeting, the first time being the betrothal where we exchanged silver rings. Furthermore, you were the head of one of the greater Houses in the city and a favorite of the king."

"I think this is the saddest part of the story thus far," said Elrond. "Poor Glorfindel, saddled with an intimidated husband who cannot even speak to him."

Erestor shook his head and looked at Glorfindel. "I honestly thought there were better matches for you."

"Ah," said Elrond. "I take it back; that was the saddest. You are quite good at this, my friend."

Glorfindel looked at Elrond bemusedly before turning to Erestor, although his smile was perhaps a bit smaller than before. "I did not know you thought that."

"I did, but Ecthelion had been much too happy about it all. He truly was quite fond of you, and was overjoyed at the prospect of joining our Houses. In the end, I did not have the heart to refuse him."

"I am glad you did not refuse the betrothal, Erestor," Glorfindel declared solemnly. "I had hoped you would not, and I remember feeling so anxious that I kept asking Ecthelion about you at the time when we were waiting for your answer."

Erestor looked at Glorfindel strangely again, but seemed to try to shake himself off it. "Anyway, as I said, the wedding itself was lovely, but there were other things at the time that tested my resolve. For instance," he turned to Elrond, back to his storytelling, "he had the king standing beside him throughout it all."

At Elrond's curious look, Glorfindel explained. "I followed Lord Fingolfin's host alone; my parents never left Valinor. I had no kin in Gondolin, so my Lord King Turgon kindly agreed to stand with me."

"Who officiated, then?"

"Well, he did, and in his stead at the time of the ceremony stood Tuor and Idril, his daughter. But in everything else, it was he who stood where my father would have been, had he been in attendance."
"The gift-giving must have been enjoyable for you," joked Elrond to Erestor.

"Indeed," sighed Erestor. "I understood that no one else could have stood with Glorfindel, for everyone else would have been younger and of lower rank, and anyway, ever had he been a favorite of the king, his most constant of captains. You must also understand, however, that I was then newly part of the king's court, at a rank when I must speak with at least two superiors before I could even reach the king. For him to stand in front of me in so casual a manner was unnerving and strange.

"I wish I knew then what I know now - that kings can be like Thranduil, stubborn and fickle and an infinite source of headaches, and would-be kings such as Elrond can be like a child even in his own wedding, needing silly stories in order to behave!"

Glorfindel was about to laugh just as Elrond and Erestor was about to begin their squabbling anew, but a knock on the door stopped them all. At Elrond's bidding, the door opened to reveal Lindir's grinning face. "We are ready, my lord," he said to Elrond.

"Ai, so it begins!" exclaimed Elrond with a great deep breath. "Thank you, Lindir. We shall be out shortly." Once the door was again closed, he turned to his two friends, gracing them with a nervous smile. "All right. Do you not have any words for me, some token of comfort and wisdom? I ask, for in all my years on this earth, I find I am, for the first time in a long time, at a loss and almost afraid of what is to come."

The two counselors stood across Elrond, for the moment adjusting to the change in their lord's mood. Glorfindel met Erestor's eyes then, and he smiled at the look the other gave to him. In the later days of their acquaintance in Imladris, Erestor would, from time to time, look at Glorfindel like this, as if he was looking to him for an answer when he himself was unsure. More and more did he grow comfortable seeking for Glorfindel's opinion and advice, about work and even now, it seemed, when things took on a more personal nature. Ridiculous as it might sound, Glorfindel recognized in him more of the old Erestor he knew in Gondolin, the one who would turn to him to see if they were of one mind, before doing anything of import. That Erestor had always recognized what they were to each other, and to see that old familiar habit again at that moment was all the encouragement Glorfindel needed to speak.

"Many believe that things unfold in this world by the will of the Valar," he began, turning to face Elrond again, "so that things shall happen regardless of how much we wish it to be otherwise. I, however, do not believe this. Ever had the Valar been baffled by our choices, and there are a great many things that are beyond their control. I believe that when the music was written in the beginning, the One sparked only the beginnings of a melody and gave to us the ability to continue it, so that every note thereafter would come alive by nature of its own design. As do the Valar have their own will, so do we that came after them - Kementári gave voice to the birds, but she did not write the songs that they sing; the Naugrim are Aulë's children, but never had he moved their hands for them, and so what wonders they create are their own.

"So do things come to pass in Arda that unfolded because someone who walks it had willed it so - because it is a living world, and not because such events were written long ago. And so I believe that most meetings between lovers are serendipitous, chance encounters that are the result of a series of our own decisions as well as many, many accidents. Many things could have happened differently. You could have met Celebrían at a later time, when another suitor had won her heart, for we know she had many. Erestor could have been matched with someone else even as my offer came, or, as it seems almost could have happened, he could have refused the betrothal had he been any less kind, less likely to put value in the happiness of a loved one.

"Ever has the music of the world been a mystery and its unfolding just as difficult to comprehend."
Sometimes, however, it brings to us such joy that we find we do not wish to question, only to take with a grateful heart what it seems to offer, and hold such gifts precious ever after. Short may have been my life with Erestor in Gondolin, but I am overjoyed at having found him again in this life. Never have I underestimated the fact that he lived for nigh on four thousand years without me, moving from one end of this ever-changing world to the other, but upon the day I came to take my place again in Middle-Earth, he was there. In this new life he had become to me a precious friend, and now I cannot imagine how life would have been had things unfolded otherwise, and I landed in a world where I am to be alone once again. I find I do not wish to think of such a possibility, for important to me he has become, and whatever else happens to the two of us, I will always choose to stand by him as his husband, for as long as he would have me.

"Therefore, my friend, I bid you calm your heart, for this should be a day of joy and relief. Celebrían ended up yours when there were infinite ways in which she could not have been. Be happy, Elrond, for this day you will remember as the day you were counted as the luckiest one, blessed with the most precious gift this strangely unfolding world can ever give to you - your mate and other half, who ever after shall become to you an important part of who you are."

Elrond had already begun to smile even as Glorfindel spoke, and when the captain was done, the Half-Elf was smiling warm and widely before finally pulling Glorfindel to an embrace.

"Thank you, Glorfindel," he said as he pulled away and released his captain. "You are right, of course, and this is a joyous day. I find I am indeed relieved, although my heart still insists on its infernal fast beating. But long indeed has the wait been and many times have I been parted from her, but always did my dear Celebrían choose to wait and remain faithful. Our first meeting was, in fact, filled with great sorrow, for at the time Celeborn and I had been mourning the fall of a great city in Eregion. Celebrían had merely come to give comfort to her father. Such comfort, fortunately, she extended as well to an old soul such as mine.

"It would be strange to say that I am grateful for that day, for we have seen much horrors that even now haunt me still. But what I can say is that the world indeed unfolds in mysterious ways, for amidst the chaos and darkness came this inexplicable light, brought into the room by one who otherwise seemed a stranger. She was, for a very long time, the only spot of beauty and comfort during the struggles of that time."

Elrond then turned then to Erestor, whose shoulders he grabbed tightly as he said more brightly, "Come, my friend! I wish to be wed. Take me to her who promised herself to me, and let us be done with this day, for I wish for nothing more than to finally call her my wife."

The three of them stepped out of Elrond's room and made their way together toward the gardens, where the wedding was to be done. Elrond had already stepped out into the grass when Glorfindel felt a hand upon his arm, making him stop in his tracks just before the open doorway.

"Glorfindel," Erestor said, bidding Glorfindel to face him. When he did so, however, the chief counselor turned his own eyes away, even as he spoke. "Celebrían - sweet Celebrían, who knows not our story - once said that she was glad to have two wedded couples to stand beside them on their wedding day. She said she is encouraged by it, for it must promise a loving and fruitful union to have two long-standing pairs giving them their blessing. I cannot begin to describe what life Elrond and I had shared, for it seems now to be a great long story filled with loss and sadness, but it is because of all this that I wish to give him and Celebrían all that can be given to them on this most precious of days. Therefore, if steadfast pillars are part of what Celebrían wishes, I was loathe to stand with them when I was so unsure with you. It is only the lack of other options for Elrond that still had me agreeing."
"Listening to you earlier, however, gives me hope that we just might, after all, be able to fulfill our lady's wish." Erestor met Glorfindel's eyes briefly before his gaze lowered again as he said, "There is something I wish to give to you."

Glorfindel watched as the other pulled something from under the neckline of his formal robes, and then stood stunned as he saw what hung from a thin chain around Erestor's neck. They stood wordlessly in front of one another as Erestor proceeded to unlock the chain, and let fall two gold rings on the palm of his hand.

"I was not sure if this is something you would wish to be returned to you, or even when would be a good opportunity for me to do so, but... It's just that I have always had them. Here."

Erestor lifted his hand, letting Glorfindel inspect the rings. To his surprise, he recognized old patterns that were not part of their initial design, signs that they had been worn and had seen ages pass. He realized what they were - their original rings, somehow miraculously finding their way back to him.

"How...?"

"How I retrieved yours, I think, is a story for another time, for now we must make haste." The dark-haired counselor plucked one of the rings between his fingers and looked up at Glorfindel. "May I?"

Glorfindel stood as still as a statue for a moment, so great was his shock, but as Erestor's face took a worried cast, he was quick to shake himself off his daze. "Yes!" he said suddenly when Erestor's hand began to waver. "Sorry. Yes, please."

He held up his right hand, which trembled a little, though he supposed it could not be helped. His heart played its frantic drumming in his ears as he watched Erestor slide the gold ring on his forefinger, the metal still warm from where it rested against the other's skin, finding its place again after thousands of years.

Erestor then moved to place the other ring on his own finger, but Glorfindel stopped him, holding out his hand. "I think it's only proper that I... I mean, may I do for you the same favor? It would please me greatly."

Erestor looked up at him for only a moment before giving a stilted nod.

It felt to Glorfindel almost as if he did not breathe as he slid the ring around his husband's finger. His husband, he thought, finally truly, certainly, for there on his finger once again was the acknowledgement of the title, and his having kept them after all this time a hint to something Glorfindel had done his best not to entertain ever since his return, so badly did he want it, and so uncertain had he been of where he stood with Erestor.

"We should go."

Glorfindel mourned the loss as Erestor stepped away from him and turned toward the garden. He turned back to Glorfindel, however, when the hold on his hand did not relent and was, in fact, pulling him back.

"Erestor," said Glorfindel in a quiet voice, almost a whisper, as he held Erestor's hand tenderly in both of his. "After all of this - the wedding and all it demands from us - could we talk? This... Knowing that you had these with you fill me with such questions, the answers to which my heart cannot bear to assume. There are also many things I wish to say to you - things that I should have said to you upon my return, and, perhaps, even long before that."

Erestor just stared up at him for a moment, his eyes moving as if he was taking in everything that was
on Glorfindel's face. Then, slowly, he smiled, and it was warmer than any he had ever given to
Glorfindel, and whatever hope and joy Glorfindel had hoped to quell in the face of still a few more
doubts, his resolve failed utterly in the face of that smile. He felt himself tremble in his desire to pull
Erestor away from where the crowds were, to know his mind and heart once and for all, and to know
if Glorfindel himself did indeed have the chance of finding true happiness in this life.

"Of course. I believe there are also things that I must say." He squeezed Glorfindel's hand before he
pulled away again, releasing himself from the one that held him. "Let us put such things aside for
now, however, and let Elrond and Celebrían have their day."

Chapter End Notes

Much of the details about Gondolin and Elven marriage customs are meant to be
compliant with The Book of Lost Tales (from what I remember of it anyway, as I no
longer have a copy) and Morgoth's Ring (On the Laws and Customs of the Eldar) -
stretched, of course, as necessary for the story. Glorfindel's philosophy was formed
based solely from what theology is written in The Silmarillion. If you find anything that
I missed or was wrong about, please let me know. :)
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Elrond and Celebrían were wed in the afternoon near the end of summer, under an arch of golden mallorn blooms in a sea of silver leaves, as beautiful as if they were at their peak in autumn. Celebrían was resplendent in her flowing white gown, and it was said that never was such a smile seen on Elrond's face as there was then when he was facing Celebrían on their wedding day.

"I swear myself to you, Celebrían of the Golden Wood, in front of all whom we love. Long has been my wait, but the journey's end is beautiful and my heart is now at peace. You relieve my spirit with this joining. On these shores and 'til the next, nothing shall please me more than if you would call me yours forevermore."

The same smile was reflected on Celebrían's blooming face, and her eyes were aglow with joyful tears. "I accept you, Elrond Eärendilion, and swear myself to you, in front of all whom we love. May you find joy with me from this day forth, and ever shall I strive to be your harbor in an uncertain Sea. Your happiness shall be my happiness, from these shores to the next, 'til Arda's end, and wherever else we shall be led."

Glorfindel then stepped beside Círdan of the Havens, who officiated the union, and he laid his hand on top of the joined ones of Elrond and Celebrían. He spoke, "In Eärendil's name, brave prince and to me ever young: Manwë Súlimo, king of the skies, stand witness to the union of Elrond and Celebrían and bless them, as we who love them bless them here in Middle-Earth. May their union be fruitful and bring them much joy."

From the other side of Círdan, Galadriel also laid her hand on them, and said in her deep, melodic voice, "Varda Elentári, queen of the stars, stand witness to the union of Elrond and my daughter Celebrían. Bless them as we who love them bless them here in Middle-Earth. May they find peace in one another and stand strong where others may falter."

Finally, it was Círdan who spoke. "We call to witness on this day the One, the Beginning, Father and Mother to all: Eru Ilúvatar, we join Elrond and Celebrían in thy name, in the strongest and most steadfast of ties, to be sundered by none save by thy will alone. Let them be one here in Middle-Earth, as in Aman, 'til Arda's end."

He then turned his kind eyes to Celebrían, and then to Elrond, his old friend. "With Eru and the Valar as witnesses, it gives me much joy to proclaim: you are wed, Elrond and Celebrían of Imladris. Exchange your silver rings with your marriage bands of gold, and kiss one another as wedded spouses."

Glorfindel and Galadriel moved down from the dais at the exchange of rings, each taking their place beside their respective spouses. Glorfindel exchanged a brief glance with Erestor, who gifted him with a solemn but approving nod, before he turned back again to the newlyweds.

It seemed as if all who witnessed the exchange of rings held their collective breaths. Later, it was said that it was as if Celebrían's coming marked the real beginning of the Third Age in Imladris, for it was only then that they felt the veil of their mourning fully lifted for the first time, ever present from the war and the death of the High King from the last age, which weighed most heavily upon the shoulders of none other than their lord himself. Elrond's happiness was a balm that soothed where few even knew they had wounds, that the rings have not yet fully slid on their lord's and lady's
fingers before the minstrels began their song of love and joy, joined shortly after by all who were present.

The singing drew tearful laughter from Elrond and Celebrían alike, and wasting no time, once the rings were in place, Elrond drew Celebrían to him and gave her her first kiss as her husband, which met with much cheer and applause. No eyes remained dry, and even Glorfindel felt the heat of tears in his own. He blinked them back and looked at Erestor beside him, for he knew few others who loved their lord more than Erestor did, however much the two argued. True enough, Erestor's head was bowed and a hand was upon his eyes. When Glorfindel slid an arm around his shoulders and drew him to his chest, Erestor went with him, and he hid his face there for a time even as the rejoicing continued on around them.

"Thank you, my friend," Elrond later told Glorfindel. They stood to the side, a rare moment of peace for Elrond, as Celebrían had earlier pulled Erestor for Valar knew what. The two lords watched from across the lawn as it seemed that Celebrían was in the middle of telling a rather lively story to Erestor, who listened to her attentively, clearly indulgent.

"She looks happy," remarked Glorfindel.

"Yes, and entirely too attached to my chief counselor for some reason. I never really understood that."

Glorfindel laughed at his lord's confusion. "Erestor is the closest to family that you have. I can understand that, the desire to know those who are loved by and who love in return the one whom you most hold dear. You may as well get used to it; there will be a lasting friendship there, I guarantee you, especially if our lady is determined."

"That is what I am afraid of," said Elrond in mock lamentation. "In a few years, Erestor will steal my wife's loyalty to me, you will see, and then we will have problems. I do not need two people to my left and to my right, at the ready to outnumber me."

"We could make Celebrían officially an advisor, if that would make it easier to bear," laughed Glorfindel.

"Ah, well." Elrond shook his head before turning fully to Glorfindel. "Speaking of my chief counselor and familial ties, however..." Elrond nodded at Glorfindel's hand.

Glorfindel knew he blushed, and he did not need to look down to know what Elrond meant. "You did not tell me he had mine as well."

"That is because I did not know." Elrond bent down a little to examine the ring on his friend's finger. "I do feel rather silly comparing wedding rings," which made Glorfindel laugh, "but then again it is my wedding day. That does not look new." He eyed Glorfindel pointedly.

"It is my old one, yes," said Glorfindel. "Later I will ask him how it is that he has it, when I knew it fell with me."

Elrond sighed even as he stared at Glorfindel. "And yet you doubt him still. What other proof do you need?"

"It is not that I doubt him out of spite. It is only that..." Glorfindel sighed as well as his eyes followed his husband of millennia move in the crowd. He could walk with a multitude and Glorfindel knew he would still be able to single him out easily. "I would hear the words from him. Long have I watched
him, taking nothing, and receiving not one sign of affection save polite smiles and approving nods; to hope for more and be wrong now would undo me finally, I know."

"I do not know what words you still need to be heard. Dare I say - for again, it is my day, and I suppose you will not begrudge me to speak about matters of the heart on this one day - that perhaps you sought to guard yourself for much too long? It may be true that it all began a bit one-sided, but he accepted you, no doubt mourned you, remained faithful to you, and now returns your ring. If his smiles seem small and polite, it could be because he is exceedingly polite. He smiles rarely, however, and that he does to you in the first place should already be a cause of wonder."

Elrond shook his head, though he did smile. "All the same, I am glad that it seems that you two have made progress. Frustratingly slowly, but it is progress. I pray that it continues, for I shall pity you if you could have what joy these things called marriage can apparently bring, but you begrudge it upon yourself needlessly. It verges on stupidity now, really."

Glorfindel sighed. "No need to be cruel about it, my lord. Not to mention, smugness is unbecoming, especially as you have only been married for but a day."

"Elrond!"

They turned just in time to see Celebrían approach, a bright smile on her blushing face. She took both of her husband's hands. "Let us move now to the grand hall. It is time for the dance," she said with thinly veiled excitement. She then turned to Glorfindel. "I am very much looking forward to yours, my lord. You know what they say about the Falas..."

Glorfindel gave the lady a fond, but bemused smile. "It is old wives' tale, my lady, is it not?"

"Certainly not!" said Celebrían, clearly affronted. "It is true. I have seen my parents dance it, and I tend to agree. The Falas reveals love that is shared, and I am excited to dance it now with my husband, and that we shall dance it along with you and Erestor, and Mother and Father, for it is different for every couple."

"Ignore Glorfindel, my darling," said Elrond, laying a hand on his wife's shoulder. "He is an old prude who likely has not danced it properly. Or with Erestor. Consider it a gift, Glorfindel," this Elrond said as he looked up at his captain, "that my wife requested you dance our wedding dance with us. Perhaps it will not only resolve this disagreement between you and my lady, but perhaps also prove to you what I have been insisting upon earlier." He smiled and raised an eyebrow at Glorfindel. "We are about to begin. You should go find your husband."

In his long life, Glorfindel heard many couples swear by the *Melda Falas*, an old dance the origin of which no one could anymore trace. Most passionate of claims were held by the Teleri and the Noldor, although once or twice he also heard it claimed by the Sindar. The Teleri claim it for its name and its reference to the pull of the Sea; the Noldor appreciate the simplicity of its make, its finding the essence of its subject, so near to their own philosophies; while the Sindar attribute its effects to some mystical power of the land.

Truth be told, Glorfindel did not really understand such claims, except perhaps those of the Teleri. Poetry he understood, and reference of a lover to the shores that called to them all made sense to him. Everything else, however, he had not experienced. He had danced the *Falas* with others before, had even danced it with Erestor once on their wedding day, but overall he judged the dance to be too slow, involved too little in terms of skill and movement compared to the more complex dances he usually preferred. It also fell short of the promises mothers told their daughters about love and its
mysteries, for even when he danced it with Erestor, it was nothing but a series of steps in time with
the music.

All of this was why he felt completely caught off his guard as he experienced now the difference
between dancing the *Falas* in the past - with partners with whom he was barely acquainted or even
with a mate by virtue of an arranged marriage - and dancing it now with Erestor, whom he had come
to know more intimately. Where in the past Erestor had not been able to meet Glorfindel's gaze at all,
his eyes were only averted for a moment now, before eventually finding Glorfindel's - and holding.

They went through the initial steps with a curious air about them, just studying one another's face it
seemed, for the dance afforded them such things. Glorfindel always marvelled at how he could never
seem to grow tired of just looking at Erestor, from his sharp, noble features to the smooth fall of dark
hair over his shoulders, so soft it begged for his touch. He wondered if there was something about
the music that lulled him to think more about such things again now.

The music slowed and faded; they reached the first pause. These things, features of the dance that he
once thought awkward and pointless, he experienced now again as if it was something new. A single
note hung in the air about them as Erestor held a hand between them, and when the tips of their
fingers met, he met Glorfindel's eyes again. They stood so close that Erestor's breath was on his lips,
and it was different.

He must have looked back at Erestor in wonder, but the counselor was silent as the music swept
them up again in movement and wide turns. Out of the corner of his eyes he could see that Celebrían
had begun laughing, which was not such an uncommon sight, as long-time couples often flirted
while dancing the *Falas*. The attention Glorfindel could pay them though was taken completely as
Erestor took a step closer and he filled Glorfindel's arms, warm and real as surely as if they were
locked in an embrace. The only time in all their years in Imladris that they stood this close was back
when Glorfindel had just arrived and he pulled Erestor into a slow dance, but even that he could not
compare to this. The urge to let his arms snake tighter around Erestor's waist was much too strong to
resist, but it seemed as if Erestor did not mind this time, for in return his hands crept up Glorfindel's
arms and on his shoulders beneath his hair.

And then he understood, like the sudden light of the Havens after sailing for days beyond count
across a dark Sea: Erestor was returning his gaze instead of avoiding them, was welcoming him forth
where before he would retreat. Whatever mist had been cast about them seemed to have lifted in this
moment so for the first time Glorfindel could see, and while he could not have said how he knew, he
felt absolutely certain that Erestor's heart was the same as his own. A *dance that reveals love that is
shared*, Celebrían had said, and the realization nearly brought Glorfindel to complete stillness.

He knew not how long they danced. Never were their gazes broken save for when they turned, and
ever were their hands linked for as long as they could manage it. And as the dance approached its
end and the movements of the three pairs slowed with the music, neither Glorfindel nor Erestor saw
the tender way that Celeborn held Galadriel close and kissed her forehead, or the way that Elrond
brushed a thumb against Celebrían's cheek and kissed her lips. Glorfindel could not have looked
away from his spouse, for in that wondrous moment as they stood near one another face to face, he
watched as Erestor's eyes slowly closed, watched his lips part to take in deep, shaky breaths, and
Glorfindel thought he would weep as he felt fingers slowly curling against his nape, burying into his
hair. His own hand trembled as he lifted them to touch Erestor's cheek, and he closed his own eyes
as he let his forehead touch his mate's - for never had it been clearer than now that that was what he
was - and he willed his heart to calm even amidst the tempest that now shook his very soul.

"Erestor," he whispered, reverently, like a prayer. "Erestor. I cannot stay here. Will you come with
me?"
Erestor opened his eyes and looked back at him. He only held his gaze for a moment before breathing out a deep sigh, sweet and heady this close, brushing against Glorfindel's lips. He nodded once, shakily.

Glorfindel only spared a moment to take a deep breath of his own before he quickly led Erestor by the hand away from the floor and against the flow of Elves coming in to dance. He led them across the hall in an area with the most empty tables, and here he parted the dark curtains that gave privacy to one of the balconies, pulling Erestor out with him.

The balcony was comfortably large, a few paces from one end to the next, and again, a few paces from the balustrade across and back to the hall. It was dimly lit by nothing but the light that escaped the curtains behind them, so that the stars were brightly visible against the evening sky. Tilion was nowhere to be seen, affording them even more discretion.

He knew not what he thought to do once they were alone, though he knew what he desired. But here where the cold breeze of the night helped to ease the heat in his cheeks, Glorfindel began to think more clearly again, and he hesitated, unsure of how to proceed.

He needed not worry though, for it seemed that only a brief moment passed before Erestor himself was reaching for him himself, leaning in, and in the span of one breath - a gasp from Glorfindel - warm lips touched his in the sweetest of kisses. Glorfindel only paused for but a moment, but soon his arms were moving of their own accord until his hands were on Erestor's cheeks, his touch light and reverent and with not still a little disbelief. For a moment their kiss was just that, an unmoving press of lips, but oh, how completely did it undo him. His heart was pounding in his chest and he felt the tremors from the tips of his fingers down to his legs and toes.

And then, a most beautiful thing - Erestor moaned in his arms, a deep, sweet sound that barely rose above the music from the halls, but it was the first time he had heard it, at least outside of dreams. The reality was infinitely better than he ever imagined, and it made Glorfindel's hold tighten around his spouse, pulling him closer. His hands slid down to Erestor's neck, keeping him still, even as Glorfindel parted his lips and coaxed his partner's to open as well with a sweep of his tongue.

The first touch of tongues sent fire coursing through Glorfindel's veins, and his mind emptied of all things save to find ways in which he could get more. He kissed Erestor with newly found passion, and did not notice them moving until he had Erestor pressed against a narrow slab of wall at the corner of the balcony, between the curtained entrance and where the balustrade met the outside walls of the main house. Erestor's arms tightened around his shoulders and neck even as their kiss deepened, heads tilting naturally so they could taste more, delve deeper. Glorfindel's groan had the hint of a growl when he felt his bottom lip caught and pulled between sharp teeth. He buried his hand in Erestor's hair and pulled, reveling in the exhale that escaped that sweet mouth when he did, even as he dove in again to lick, suck, and taste what he spent years and years and years desiring.

He knew not how long they stood there, exchanging kisses that ended and began anew more than what his dulled faculties could still care to count. Glorfindel could have stood there with Erestor indefinitely, he knew, but it was when he caught himself with his hand reaching for the fastenings on Erestor's robes that he forced himself to keep still. His breaths were harsh to his own ears.

"Forgive me," he said, even as his hand slid up to rest against Erestor's neck and he claimed another kiss. "I do not know what has come over me and it is hard to stop."

"Do not apologize. You were not alone, and I reached for you first." As if just realizing what he had just said, what he had done, Erestor pulled away and shut his eyes, and his head fell back against the wall behind him, a hand coming up to his mouth. "Valar, I reached for you first," he said again.
Erestor looked completely disturbed as this seemed to sink in with him as well, which was so absurd, it drew a laugh out of Glorfindel. In his own nervous state, seeing Erestor like this, looking as if he was fighting down his own panic, was a comfort. He did, however, feel pity for the Elf before him, so he reached out again to touch a cheek that felt warmer now than it did before. "Erestor," he said, encouraging the other to meet his eyes. "I pulled you here. I believe I was moments away from doing what you just did, though I admit that I spent those last moments hesitating. I am glad you were braver."

Erestor breathed out a harsh sigh, looking away. It seemed as if what fog of madness descended over Glorfindel's mind still had not lifted, for even this he found absolutely endearing. His hand upon Erestor's face moved, thumb brushing lightly against a pointed chin, just a brief caress, before he was leaning in again for a kiss.

This kiss was a little less frantic, slower in comparison to what they earlier shared, but the effect on Glorfindel was the same. Soon enough, he was sighing himself, and he pulled back with his head down, clearing his throat.

"Perhaps you ought to go first," he said to Erestor.

Erestor raised an eyebrow at the suggestion. "I truly am curious about your opinion of me if you think I am not in a similar state as you are. I am not... we both need to calm ourselves."

Glorfindel knew that there was a blush on his own cheek, knew what Erestor meant, and he thanked the darkness for letting him hide his embarrassment. Still, "That is actually a relief to know," he said, letting out a laugh.

That coaxed a smile from Erestor, who then pushed up from the wall behind him and walked past Glorfindel. He leaned against the balustrade and looked out for a moment before looking back, and he signaled to Glorfindel with a slight tilt of his head - an invitation to join him.

"We will not be missed for a while yet," said Erestor as Glorfindel approached and stood beside him, leaning against his own section of the balustrade. The night air was cool on his face, bringing calm where heat earlier suffused him.

Despite the beauty of the valley around them, the stars like diamonds twinkling against the vast dome of the night sky, Glorfindel's eyes were on his husband before him. None could rival this view, he thought, not the stars of Elbereth, not the swaying branches of the trees around them, nor the waterfalls between cracks in the surrounding hills. He revelled at this feeling of being able to stare openly, for it seemed that Erestor did not mind, though they were close enough for him to know that Glorfindel was looking.

"Eärendil," said Erestor suddenly, pointing up. Glorfindel followed his gaze, looked up at a bright point in the sky. It felt almost as if the star was watching them in turn. "Elrond never really knew him. He remembers a haze of light, a bright-haired ellon, the sound of water. He cannot remember a face. He was taken when he was young. Do you know the story?"

Glorfindel shook his head, but recognized the diversion for what it was. He accepted the offer of the story, for he always enjoyed it when Erestor shared such things with him. It was not quite the story yet that he most wanted to hear, but perhaps some distance to the matter between the two of them would be wise for the time being. "Tell me," he said.

They spent a few moments like that, with Erestor telling Glorfindel how he and Elrond met. He told him about Elrond's birth in Arvernien, and told him of their parting when the sons of Feänor came. In all that time Glorfindel listened attentively, save for when Erestor hesitated at the story of the third
kinslaying and seemed unable to continue with the details. Glorfindel kissed him then to comfort him, for it seemed as if Erestor had not meant to stumble into that story.

The gesture seemed to have been appreciated, and Erestor squeezed his hand before he continued about how he and Elrond met again in Lindon. He spoke of how surprised he was to see Elrond alive, how he learned later on that Elrond had been adopted by the second of Feänor's sons, but that he disappeared, after which Elros, Elrond's brother, chose the path of Men. Erestor then spoke of Elrond's friendship with the High King, and spoke again of their lord's grief about the other's passing.

"I was glad that we did become friends in Lindon," said Erestor, "for it gave him someone to turn to when Ereinion died. He mourns quietly, but he mourns long and deeply. He barely spoke when we came home from the war. Sometimes I worry for him, losing family the way he seems to. It is why I wish him and Celebrían well, and hope that they have many children despite him marrying late in life. What do you think is a good number for them?"

Glorfindel smiled at Erestor, marvelling for a moment at the kindness and love for their lord so honestly displayed and shared with him. He thought about Erestor's question for a moment, before saying, "Three is good."

"Three," said Erestor carefully, as if testing the idea in his head. He returned the smile. "All right. I will pray for three."

They stood quietly for a while, just looking out at the valley. Despite the events of the evening, Glorfindel felt at peace where he expected he would not, especially after everything that had just occurred.

"I take it you will not be returning your ring to me after the wedding," Erestor suddenly said beside him.

Surprised at the statement, Glorfindel asked, "Why in the world would you think I will return it?"

"Just... management of expectations," said Erestor with a sigh. "I thought it was possible still that... at least maybe until... that is to say, I had not been certain until about a few moments ago. Before that, I have not allowed myself to hope too far just yet."

It was so similar to the same doubts nursed by Glorfindel himself that he could not help but laugh again. He longed, from the deepest recesses of his heart, to ask everything from Erestor, but knew somehow that it was not yet time, and they will be missed by those beyond the balcony curtains soon enough. So instead, he just said, "We are a right pair, the two of us."

"It is beginning to look like that, yes." Erestor smiled even as he said this, though his attention was caught by the change in music from the hall behind them. "We should return," he said, turning to Glorfindel. "Are you ready?"

Glorfindel could not help but sigh. "I would rather have stayed here, but you are right. It would not do for us to be--"

"Damn it!"

They both turned in surprise as the curtains were suddenly swept aside, revealing a frustrated looking Lindir.

Glorfindel frowned at him, not even surprised that it was this particular Elf disrupting them. "Hello, friend Lindir. What might be your problem this time?"
"For the love of Nienna, Glorfindel," lamented the minstrel. It was only for a moment though, as he then turned a little more serious as he looked at Erestor. "Lord Elrond is inquiring as to your whereabouts. Here I am, a true friend, trying to be discrete in my search in case you two do not wish to be found," this Lindir said with great emphasis, eyeing Glorfindel again, "only to find that I need not worry. Here you are, after all, just talking, like a pair of children decades still from majority."

"Curious, as judging by your tone, this seems to surprise and displease you. Why, what else did you expect we would be doing, Master Lindir?" asked Erestor, and he said it with such a perfectly confused and innocent face that Glorfindel had to bite back a grin. Lindir once said that Erestor was a master at concealing, and there it was.

Lindir eyed Erestor with a look that was far from amused. "Nothing. I am not even surprised anymore, Lord Erestor," he huffed in disgust. "Come now, please. Our lord mentioned something about a speech."

Chapter End Notes

* Melda Falas is "Beloved Shore" in Quenya. :)
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

I am so sorry for the delay in updates! RL became so hectic and this chapter did not cooperate at all. I rewrote it several times before I was finally satisfied with it. Hopefully it makes up for the long wait. :)

As the night came to a close, inevitably, they found themselves in the hallway where their rooms were. Glorfindel was weak with nerves, for never was the moment they shared in the balcony far from his mind even after they rejoined the festivities and spent the last hours of the evenings in the company of their friends. He had longed for Erestor for far too long, and here and now when they were to part for the night, Glorfindel found that he could not bear to let him go.

One source of comfort to him though was that he could feel Erestor nervous beside him as well. He had been silent ever since they parted from the others for the evening. Glorfindel thought he saw him stealing glances his way as though there was something Erestor wanted to say, but whatever it was, it did not reach Glorfindel, as Erestor seemed to hesitate to speak each time. And so they spent that walk back to their shared wing in the main house in silence, contemplative and still a bit tense, so new did everything seem.

Upon reaching their doors, they paused only a moment before Erestor cleared his throat. "I suppose the night ends here," he said, his voice low and careful. He stared at his own door before turning to meet Glorfindel's eyes. "Thank you, Glorfindel. It was an interesting day, certainly. But, well... good night."

And just like that, Glorfindel's mind was decided. Erestor barely stepped one foot away from him before the counselor was pulled back by the hand, turned and captured in a strong embrace. Glorfindel met surprised green eyes as he held Erestor close, watched those lips part as breaths grew heavy. He understood perfectly, for he himself was nervous and his chest felt tight, but his mind was filled with thoughts of Erestor and how he could not, would not, end the night parted from him again.

Their kiss was a natural touching of lips, still shy and slow in coming but ultimately inevitable, drawn as they both seemed to one another. Glorfindel breathed deeply as he pulled Erestor closer to himself, breathing in comforting cedar and those other subtle, heady nuances of Erestor's scent that were more and more becoming familiar to him. He deepened their kiss, unbearably sweet to him and maddeningly slow, but perfect in a way he could not describe nor express save in the way his fingers curled and burrowed into the folds of Erestor's robe.

In the next moment, he had backed Erestor to the wood of his own door, away from the counselor's rooms that separated him from Glorfindel for far too many years. Glorfindel kissed him as he had been wanting to again ever since they followed Lindir and parted the curtains to rejoin their lord and lady. He was barely conscious of turning the lock and pulling them both into the darkness of his room.

Time passed exchanging kisses unbearably slow and deep, but at the sound of the door closing behind them, Erestor suddenly pulled away. Glorfindel caught his husband's worried look as it was only then that the counselor seemed to realize where they were. He stared at the closed door, and
Glorfindel thought he felt Erestor tense at the sight.

He took that precious face between his hands and turned him gently to face him again. "Do not fear," he whispered as he closed his eyes and pressed their brows together. "Nothing need happen that you do not wish. Forgive me for pulling you here without asking; I only want to be with you."

A moment passed, and then long fingers were touching the back of his hands, feather-light and careful, tracing knuckles to where Glorfindel's fingers were buried underneath dark hair. Here Erestor held him and made their fingertips brush, and this Glorfindel felt keenly as it sent tingles down his arms.

"Glorfindel," whispered Erestor, his eyes closing. It was almost a sigh, and never had Glorfindel's name sounded sweeter to him. "It is not that I do not want to. I... It is just that..."

"Oh, Erestor. I understand." Glorfindel touched his lips to the crown of his husband's head, a light, lingering touch. "There is much still to settle, I know. I wish to know you, too." He kissed him again, this time between his eyes, then on the tip of a slender, high nose. "We will take care of those things, and we need not go further until everything is known and has been said between us."

Erestor sighed as if in relief, his breath warm against Glorfindel's lips. The lines between his brows did not completely ease, but at least he met Glorfindel's eyes as he said, "Yes. Thank you. That is what I want, too. But..." He cast a brief look at the room before looking at Glorfindel again in question.

Glorfindel sighed. He pulled Erestor so the counselor's arms were around Glorfindel's waist, chin resting on his shoulder as they embraced. "Will you not stay the night, Erestor?" he asked in a voice almost needy and forlorn. "Will you not stay the night, Erestor?" he asked in a voice almost needy and forlorn. "Rest with me; I so wish for your company. Ever have I wanted it, but each time the day ends and I am left yearning for more. Lately, too, I have spent far too many hours at night just staring at that blasted wall between our rooms."

He felt the deep rumble of Erestor's laughter against his chest and as a whiff of air against his ear. "You silly thing," said Erestor, and his arms tightened around Glorfindel.

Glorfindel could not help but smile. He pressed his cheek against Erestor's hair and sighed again. "Please, Erestor."

This time, it was Erestor who pulled back to kiss him between his brows, drawing a smile from the captain. But his heart jumped as Erestor then took his hand and walked them toward the bed, hardly believing that the other would acquiesce.

Wordlessly, they shed their heavy outer robes and placed their circlets on the bedside table. Glorfindel sat back on his side of the bed and watched Erestor walk to the other side, pulling his hair free of their braids as he went, his thin inner robe billowing slightly with his movement, its sleeves falling to his elbows and revealing perfect pale skin. Glorfindel watched, his heart in his throat, as Erestor bent down to pull back the covers, his dark hair falling down his shoulders in loose waves.

"You are so beautiful," sighed Glorfindel as he watched Erestor climb to bed. "I do not know if you ever noticed how much I watch you. I always do, every chance I get. You move with such grace, I cannot take my eyes off you."

Erestor had stilled when Glorfindel spoke and now stared at him in shock. He then shook his head, though seated as he was with his back to Glorfindel's moonlit window, it was not easy to make out his face. "Easy there, Glorfindel," said Erestor in a shaky voice, which he sought to hide with an embarrassed laugh. "Everything is yet new. Do not compliment me so, for I am far too old to be
This drew a loud laugh from Glorfindel. Such joy and freedom did he feel in that moment, finally having said one of the things that had always been in his mind ever since he knew Erestor, and even seeing Erestor's reaction to it, which was more than he had ever hope to have. He pulled his husband close and kissed him, before arranging them so they were lying together, with Erestor's head upon Glorfindel chest, and their arms around each other.

"Peace such as this I have never known," said Glorfindel, sighing deeply as his arm wrapped tighter around the precious body beside him. He felt more than saw Erestor smile, who, in turn, snuggled closer to Glorfindel.

He did not expect he could sleep so quickly with Erestor finally, finally resting in his embrace. For a while he just laid there, fingers playing with the strands of black hair that fell neatly down Erestor's back, touching them in a way he had always wanted to, but never thought he could. But soon enough, his exhaustion from the day's festivities seemed to catch up with him, and far too easily did the sound of Erestor's breathing lull him to peaceful reverie.

They awoke at early light at the sound of knocking, which was steadily growing louder with each rap on the wood of Glorfindel's door. It took a moment for Glorfindel's vision to clear and for him to find his bearings, but when he did, he saw that Erestor had already sat up, just a little more awake than him, although barely. He was sleepily rubbing off the veil of sleep that had not yet completely lifted from his eyes, and his hair fell freely around his fair face. This was a vision completely new to Glorfindel and he stared happily at it, for it was more beautiful than anything he imagined.

His basking was cut short, however, as another round of knocking began.

"Counselor Erestor!" came a familiar muffled voice. It was Saelbeth. "Are you there, my lord?"

Their eyes immediately met then, both surprised by the call, especially that it was made on this door. Erestor immediately rose and donned his outer robes before crossing the expanse of the room to answer the door. Glorfindel watched him go; he then rubbed the last of sleep from his own face and reached for his robes.

"What is it?" he heard Erestor ask when the door opened to reveal a nervous looking Saelbeth.

"Your pardon, my lord, as no one was answering at your door," said the other counselor. "It is King Thranduil. A runner came bearing news: there is trouble in the Green Wood and his party must leave. He insisted on not bothering Lord Elrond about it for they need no aid from us, but he did send his regrets at having to leave so soon. I thought it needed to be reported to you, at least."

"Where are they now?"

"Preparing to leave, my lord. They will be in the courtyard in perhaps half an hour. Do we arrange for an escort?"

"Yes. Glorfindel," called Erestor, but Glorfindel was already beside him, out of his formal robes of the evening prior and already in his usual tunic and leggings.

"I will take care of it," said Glorfindel, nodding at Saelbeth before turning to Erestor again. "I'll also see about those reinforcements. The good king might still be convinced that they could need aid after all. Just follow when you are ready."
Erestor nodded. "Good. Thank you, that is also what I thought. I will be out in a moment."

Thus they were swept once again by their duties in the valley. With Elrond understandably spending his days with his new wife, his usual responsibilities naturally fell to Erestor, and sure enough, the chief counselor was pulled from one place to another as he now juggled his own work as well as Elrond's.

As the days passed and their schedule still did not relent, Glorfindel eventually resigned himself to simply waiting for things to settle before they could spend time together. After all, no one in the valley knew how the situation between the two lords was no different from Elrond's, and that they could also use some time with one another now that things seemed to have looked up for them. This was not to be, however - at least not any time soon. Glorfindel could only sigh in his frustration as they could barely even find an hour in a day to share meals together before someone was barging in again to disturb their peace.

His one comfort throughout it all though was that Erestor continued to spend his nights with him, much like he did on the night of the wedding. After the shy fumbling of the second night, in which Glorfindel asked, with less grace than he would wish, if they could spend the night like they did before, things seemed to fall easier between them. It was as if this request confirmed once and for all that they were pursuing now a path they left off when Gondolin fell. Erestor, bless him, at least did not need much convincing, and was thankfully kind enough not to prolong Glorfindel's misery during that fumbling speech. They were chaste still, however, and only ever slept those nights, as both wanted to keep their agreement to understand things between them first before moving any further. All the same, it quickly became the time of day Glorfindel most looked forward to, for nights were the most peaceful time for them. And though these nights did not last long enough for any serious conversations to last between them, they were a significant improvement to how things were in the past, especially since one of Glorfindel's great regrets in Gondolin had been that they did not share rooms, or really much of anything.

Finally, in a little after a week's time, Erestor declared his work stable enough to spare a day free. Glorfindel was quick to pass his work to Galadir with little preamble, and in no time at all, he and Erestor had agreed to ride out and go somewhere they would not be disturbed. Peace, after all, did not seem to be an option for them in Imladris at that moment.

"There is a grove of beeches that I used to frequent when Imladris was still being built," said Erestor when they have both mounted and Glorfindel asked where they were going. "I have not returned in so many years. I wonder how it looks like now."

"Anywhere is better than here," declared the captain in exasperation. "Come, we should leave quickly before anyone sees you out."

Erestor laughed. "I am not hiding!"

"Why not? Maybe you should from time to time. If I had any less sense of duty to this valley than I do, I would hide you myself to give us more time for things equally important."

Erestor shook his head and laughed again, but he did turn his horse toward the gates and finally led them out.

Erestor led them through about an hour's ride, tracing a narrow arm of the Bruinen deep in the woods. Soon, they reached an area where the trees that grew were indeed solely beeches. The undergrowth was surprisingly but pleasantly thin, and the calming sounds of birdsongs and flowing water were all around them.
They took what provisions they brought and let their horses wander to drink and graze, while they searched for a good place to settle. They eventually decided on an old beech with a comfortable crook in its roots, standing near the clear waters. Glorfindel sighed deeply as he leaned his head back against the tree’s wide trunk. The morning air was cool still around them, and up above them fleeted birds in bright colors.

"Peace at last?" Erestor asked beside him. Glorfindel needed not look at him to know that a smile played upon those lips.

"Yes. It had been an extremely long week," replied Glorfindel tiredly. A thought then came to him, and he looked at Erestor and smiled. "It had its moments, though. Reporting to you, for one."

Erestor, in turn, promptly winced. "It is temporary, of course," he said quickly and uneasily. "Only until Elrond rejoins us. And I thank you not to make it even more difficult, my lord. It is bad enough I have to sit while you stand across from me. Did you really need to stand at attention?"

"Come now, it was only that first time. It was how I did things with Elrond."

On the first day of Erestor sitting in Elrond’s stead, Glorfindel had had to relay to him the report of that week’s patrol. He had not been able to help his smile - more like a grin or even an outright laugh, really, if he had not been able to stifle it - as images of Erestor in Gondolin suddenly came unbidden at that moment. How the tides can turn indeed, reporting now to his husband who used to be so much younger, and who so long ago was only quick to abide by whatever Glorfindel said or asked. Unique indeed was their situation, for despite their history, the circumstances of their reunion saw them both now on equal ground - this time even with roles reversed.

Erestor's exasperated glare at the time, too, had been oddly, but immensely, entertaining.

Erestor sighed beside him. "Enough of that now, please. I left those responsibilities in Imladris. It is best that we keep them there." He looked uneasily at Glorfindel. "It did not bother you too much, I hope. Did it?"

Glorfindel smiled fondly at him. "Oh, Erestor. Of course not. Those things do not matter to me, and you earned your position in the valley. Besides, maybe I prefer working with you than with Elrond."

A dark eyebrow rose skeptically at that. "Most people would disagree with you."

"I always found you more efficient than most." Glorfindel grinned. "Or maybe I just prefer looking at you than with Elrond."

Erestor looked like he was fighting off both a smile and a blush, still not used to such candid conversations. The smile he was able to keep at bay; the blush, not so much.

Glorfindel reached out for Erestor's hand, realizing how much time they had already lost. Long had they delayed things between them that they had grown so used to uncertainty and silence, and seemed not to know how to handle things when they were well and good. Times like this, for one. He mourned this, and so it was with a more subdued tone, hesitating only slightly, that he said, "I love you, Erestor. I wish to begin this day with this, for I do not wish for you to have any reason to doubt me anymore."

Erestor's hand seemed to flinch in his hold at this declaration, and it was a while before he could find any words to say. "Truth be told," Erestor slowly said, as if finding the words only as he went, "the last few years have been most confusing to me. I wanted terribly to ask, but I could not seem to find the courage to approach you about... about things." He looked up at Glorfindel, his eyes oddly
pained. "Tell me one more thing: for how long?"

Glorfindel's eyes were steady as he met that gaze. "Always. On the day we married. Maybe ever since I saw you."

Whatever playfulness touched their earlier interactions disappeared completely. Erestor looked as if he had been shocked to stillness, and his eyes were wide even as he broke contact and stared into the water. When next he blinked, his eyes seemed to glisten briefly in the sunlight that streamed between the gaps in the leaves.

"Lately, I began to wonder," he said. "I did not know what to think of you at first when you returned, so I took the safe route and gave you space. If you wanted a new life, free of the ties you had in your old one, you could have it. I did not want you to feel as if you had to ask it of me, or worse, for me to expect that you would, only to realize that you did not." Erestor sighed, and Glorfindel thought he recognized embarrassment there, a subtle hint of it in that face now carefully guarded again. "But then you approached me on your own, and you were kind as you had always been. It was uncanny how so much of you remained the same. I do not know why I expected you to be different, but then, this sort of thing has never happened before, has it?"

Glorfindel smiled at him, hoping to ease his discomfort.

"You even wrote to me." Here, Erestor smiled a little, amused but a bit embarrassed still. "That was surprising. But also... maybe a little encouraging."

Glorfindel raised an eyebrow at that. "Encouraging?"

Erestor was silent for a time, deep in thought. When he looked at Glorfindel, there was hesitation and worry again. "This is all I can say for now, for yet again my courage fails me. You said you mean to ease my doubts. Perhaps, to do this, you could address the questions I have? What else is it that I do not know?"

Glorfindel looked down to where Erestor's hand was still in his, for this time it was he who floundered at how to begin. "I first saw you in the House of the King," he said, meaning to start his part of the story. "I had just come from an audience with him and there was something that I wanted to check, so I passed by the libraries. You were there." He sighed as he took himself back to that moment, clear still in his mind, for it was a cherished memory. "I was already seated at one of the tables when you passed by. You went to speak with the librarian at the time, whose desk was across the room from me, but I was not near enough to hear what you were discussing. I do remember staring though, which was not something I tended to do, although perhaps a good while had already passed before I realized what I was doing."

At the look of surprise that was once again on Erestor's face, Glorfindel could not help but laugh, a bit shyly and self-consciously.

"I thought you looked... interesting." He laughed again, embarrassed at his choice of words. "You were... ai, Erestor, I have not the words. What come to mind either seem inadequate or embarrassing to say, but I will tell you that I never knew myself to be one who noticed others around me the way I noticed you then."

Erestor, who seemed to have relaxed somehow as he listened to Glorfindel's tale, now said, "Inadequate or embarrassing, you say. I am even more curious now."

"You looked... neat? Just really well put together. Sharp and a little intimidating - I remember you were in full formal wear, with a circlet upon your head and rings on your fingers - though you could
not have been any older than the city itself. I sensed that, but at the same time, it was interesting to me that you carried yourself as one who had the wisdom of millennia. It was fascinating to see."

"You found me fascinating."

"And fair, in case you were waiting for that," Glorfindel could not help but jest.

Erestor gave him a withering look, which made Glorfindel grin.

"Well," Glorfindel shrugged, and he looked again where their hands were joined, finding that a thing of wonder still. Slowly, experimentally, he ran a thumb against the skin of Erestor's hand, lightly touching the ring there that matched his own. "That is true for me at the time, at least. I kept you at the corner of my eye until you left."

He barely kept himself from visibly reacting when Erestor's hand turned, touching their fingertips together, reciprocating Glorfindel's curious touch. It sent a thrill through him, so careful but absolutely indulgent did it feel for them to be doing this. They embraced at night, yes, and kissed occasionally, but this still felt like a different territory, and discovering it now the way they did brought with it its own kind of excitement.

He almost missed it when next Erestor spoke, "I remember that day. You were at one of the middle tables, close to the doors. I wondered what you were doing there."

"You knew me?"

Erestor looked at him as if he just said the most ridiculous thing he had ever heard. "Everyone knew you, Glorfindel."

Glorfindel looked at him strangely, but he let the comment pass. "I saw you maybe once or twice more after that, and it was always the same, until a time came when I realized that I looked for you every time I was at the House of the King." He chuckled. "This is also how I found out your name. I overheard a few Elves say it when you passed by, and I learned then that you were among the councilors and that you were part of Ecthelion's House. I also heard many good things, and it seemed you were admired for your mind and knowledge of lore, especially for one so young. Another time, I heard that you had an eye and a good memory for maps. These were all interesting to me, and I rejoiced at your accomplishments and the recognition others gave you - silly, I know, for we were not even acquainted then. It also seemed as if the more I learned about you, the more interested I became.

"I did not know then what I was doing, but I searched for you constantly and strained my ears for anything about you. Then a day came when I heard that your mother had received a few offers for your marriage. You were at that age, they said, when such things became a concern, although it was also said that you were indifferent to the whole matter and would likely accept whoever was the best match."

"You heard a lot of things," observed Erestor, a small smile on his face.

"I was frequently at the king's court. People talk, and I was waiting for them to do so." Again, Glorfindel shrugged, as if to say that it could not be helped. "Before that time I was content to keep my silence and watch you from afar, for long have I been alone in my life, and I was used to it. Maybe I would have approached you and courted you at some point, but the truth was that it might not have been for a few years yet, content as I was to learn about you the way that I had. It was all quite new to me." At Erestor's look, Glorfindel smiled and shook his head. "I told you - before you, I noticed no other. It was just not my way. But the matter about the offers worried me, and I feared
that your House was already on its way to deciding with whom it should be. I knew then that I could not stand by and...

Glorfindel trailed off, suddenly embarrassed again. It was not the best way to begin anything romantic with anyone, he knew, and he worried that Erestor might now think so as well. Fortunately, Erestor just smiled at him, tilted his head as if to acknowledge that he understood, and Glorfindel breathed a sigh of relief.

"As you might have already surmised, I approached Ecthelion directly and asked if it was true that such arrangements were being made, and if so, I told him that I intend to be considered myself. Ai, he was terrible about it, and teased me incessantly once he recovered from his shock. He said something like, 'I have heard rumors that someone has finally caught your eye, but I never would have expected it would be my cousin. Are you not a bit old for him?'"

"What a horrible thing to say," said Erestor, though he laughed for the first time since Glorfindel began his story.

Glorfindel laughed with him and shrugged. "Well, he can be horrible if he wants to be. The important thing was that he eventually helped me with the whole thing. From what you told Elrond, it seemed Ecthelion played a more active role in your decision than I expected, so really, I ought to just be grateful to him."

Erestor smiled again. "I did not know it mattered so much to you. I thought you just finally decided to marry and I was one of the available prospects at the time."

Glorfindel crinkled his nose at that. "That is quite a cold view of things. I assure you that it is not like that at all." He sighed, and pulled at Erestor's hand. "Well, that is how it began for me. Could you continue from here now? What did you think of it, when the matter was brought up to you?"

Here, Erestor turned subdued again. Instead of pulling away, however, he moved so that they were sitting closely side by side. "I was indifferent to marriage," he said. "I knew the circumstances of my birth, of course, and knew that strategic unions can benefit my House. Had I been given a true choice, however, I probably would not have married, and would have chosen instead to lead a solitary life of scholarship."

Glorfindel, who already had an idea of how Erestor had been at the beginning of their union, sighed sadly all the same as he finally heard it said by Erestor himself. Erestor seemed to see his reaction, for he shook his head and sighed. He then leaned his head upon Glorfindel's shoulder, and was quiet for such a long time that Glorfindel thought that he was not going to say anything more. He did not press him, however, and merely rested his own head against Erestor's, drawing comfort from this.

He was surprised, therefore, when Erestor squeezed his hand and spoke again. "Let me tell you now, my lord, of how I fell in love."
"Are you tired?"

Erestor felt the jump in his blood at the voice that spoke behind him, though outwardly he did his best to remain still.

"My lord?" he asked, turning his head enough to look at the one who spoke. Glorfindel stepped beside him with his back straight and his hands behind himself, the white ribbons that matched Erestor's still braided in his hair.

"The ceremony had been long, I know, and one would think the whole of Gondolin was invited," he said. He smiled then at Erestor, a smile small but kind, and also even strangely apologetic. "I am sorry. I tried to get them to keep it simple, but I am afraid it still turned out a bit lavish."

"Everything is beautiful, really," said Erestor, his eyes lowering to the ground. He found he could not maintain eye contact with the tall Elf-lord. "Many have long waited for this day. I do not think it can be helped that things are as grand as this."

"Have they," said Glorfindel thoughtfully as he began to watch the dancing crowd. "What an odd thing to wait for. I suppose it is true that people no longer have much to talk about now that the gates are closed."

Erestor thought that it was not only that. Not everyone was the head of a prominent house, nor were they one whom all considered to be a highly eligible bachelor. Every mother within the Encircling Mountains had dreamt of Glorfindel as a son-in-law at one point or another, but the old lord had always seemed uninterested in such matters, so much so that people have begun to expect that he would continue on this way, unbonded and childless. It was a curious thing, this sudden decision to marry, and Erestor knew that he was not the only who was taken by surprise.

He had not realized that he had not spoken and was then only staring at Glorfindel until the golden-haired lord turned his head and caught his eyes again, and smiled. Erestor felt his face heat with embarrassment and this time, it was he who quickly turned to the crowd.

"I believe we can excuse ourselves after a while," he heard Glorfindel speak, before he himself could think of anything to say. "Is that all right with you?"

He supposed that meant that they would be leaving together. Erestor was nervous, though out loud, he said, "Aye, my lord."

"You know," there was some lightness there in Glorfindel's voice, "you may call me by my name."

Erestor bowed his head, unable still to look at him. "Is that not inappropriate?" he asked.

"How so? What do spouses call one another?"

To which Erestor truthfully said, "My mother addresses my father by his title."

"Even in private?"
"I would not know, my lord," said Erestor. "Perhaps they behave differently when others are not there as witness."

Glorfindel did not speak for a while, and for a moment they just stood there, watching the crowd. "You are also a lord now," he eventually said. "Your title is the same as mine."

"It is a title I gain by virtue of being your spouse. You are still my superior." It was strange, this insistence on the issue. One would think addressing Glorfindel by his rightful title was the polite and appropriate thing to do, but for some reason, the golden-haired lord seemed displeased by this. It did not really show on his face, but Erestor had spent enough time at court to take note of things people did not say out loud. And so, he said, "if you would prefer it otherwise, however, I shall do my best to address you as you wish."

"It is not only what I wish that should matter, and I would not want to make you uncomfortable," said Glorfindel with a resigned tilt of his head. "Indeed, I would prefer it, but I will not insist. Just... I would have you know that you may do so, if you were so inclined."

It was not a habit of his, for Erestor had always been surrounded by people whose status was higher than his. Even at home, being the son of a lord, the cousin of the chief of their House, and even at the King’s court, working with the high councilors - Erestor had few chances to be so informal.

In the end, he called Glorfindel by his title more often than he used his name. It was difficult, after all, addressing one like Glorfindel as an equal, even if he had treated Erestor no less than this in the time they were together.

"Love?" Glorfindel asked, his eyes on the grass. "This story... involves love, then?"

He felt Erestor turn to look up at him. "Did you think it was completely devoid of it?"

Glorfindel did not speak for a while, for so many thoughts were suddenly racing through his mind. "We started with so little that to hope for such a thing would have been laughable - or even pitiable," he said. "I aimed first for you to feel comfortable with me, so that I may have your trust. I remember it being gravely important to me then, to be in your good graces."

"We started with little, aye, as mere strangers to one another," said Erestor. "I never knew that you thought such things. Although, perhaps it is good that I did not, for I likely would not have known what to do. I think I held myself poorly those first few days."

"This wing is yours."

Glorfindel had given Erestor a quick tour of the House, barely adequate for such a large structure, but then, it had been a long day. Erestor also thought it curious that Glorfindel would even do such a thing, for he expected to be shown around by a member of the household, not by the lord of the House himself.

"A wing?" he caught himself saying in surprise, for what Glorfindel said only then began to sink in. He looked around and thought that none save Ecthelion had as much back at the Fountain. "There are so many rooms here."

"Aye. Your rooms, a study you may use as an office, a library, a few spare rooms for your family, for whenever you wish for them to come," listed Glorfindel. "You may do whatever you wish with
these rooms. Turn them into whatever you need."

Glorfindel opened the door to a nearby room and stepped aside so Erestor could peek in. Erestor's eyes widened as he saw a wide room with walls lined from floor to ceiling with shelves filled with books. He turned to a shelf close by and saw the volumes that filled it - the closest set was a complete collection on the Elven realms in Beleriand.

"That was the work of a few admirable scholars in Nargothrond," said Glorfindel when he saw what Erestor was looking at. "I acquired them back when we had dealings with them still. They are quite detailed, even entertaining in a few places."

"You have read them all, my lord?"

Glorfindel smiled. "No, not completely. A few volumes here and there, when I found the time. The same goes for most of the books here."

Erestor looked around. A few here and there, he said, but even that was impressive given how big the room was.

"This was arranged and intended to be your study," said Glorfindel. "You may fix it as you wish, just approach anyone in the House, or tell me, whichever you prefer. The desk is new, but it is of good make, so I hope it is adequate for your needs. We were told what books you might need, but let me know if you need to acquire other things."

The more he was shown, the more awed Erestor felt. This room was larger than even what he had at the court of the King, which was a room he had to share with two other councilors. From what he had seen of the books, they were also more than sufficient for his needs, for there were even volumes there that Erestor only heard about but had never seen.

"I... have heard good things about you," Glorfindel spoke again behind him. When Erestor turned, the old lord was perusing one of the shelves. "So I was hoping you would help with the running of the House. To be honest, it would be a relief to finally have someone I can trust to work beside me. I believe the population has tripled since our coming, and it is no longer an easy feat, overseeing everything on top of reporting to the king."

Aah, so that was it. Erestor thought he could understand that, if that was indeed the purpose of their marriage, or even just part of it. A life alone must have its challenges for one like Glorfindel, and Erestor could perhaps now understand why he had been chosen. Viewed from this light, he was admittedly in a better position compared to other prospects, and his experiences would be helpful to him and Glorfindel if he were to help with the running of the House.

"Certainly, my lord. It would be an honor to work beside you, and I have been curious about the House of the Golden Flower," said Erestor. "It is the fastest growing House in the entire city, after all, is it not?"

"Yes, it is," said Glorfindel with a rueful smile. "It can be a pain at times."

Erestor could not help but smile at the complaint. "Does it not mean that people are happy, though? We only beget children in happy times, after all."

Glorfindel shrugged at this, but Erestor could see that his smile turned more relaxed. "I suppose it can mean that."

They were quiet for some time, just standing there. Erestor did not know what else to say, so he kept quiet, and just waited for Glorfindel. Glorfindel eventually seemed to sense this, for he turned to him
and gestured to the door.

"Come. You must be exhausted. Let me show you to your rooms."

Erestor followed him down the hallways, his thoughts turning to other things. He ducked his head again, embarrassed all of a sudden, but he could not help but wonder if things were truly this way. Ecthelion was unwed, and the king lost his wife early on in the Ice; Erestor was not one to gossip, so he truly had no idea how the lords of the Houses lived with their spouses. But the House of the Golden Flower seemed to be one of the more opulent Houses, and perhaps it was not so strange for such families to live so far apart.

He sighed quietly behind Glorfindel. There were still so much he did not know, and it was a feeling he had not felt since he was an apprentice at the court of the king. He watched his new husband's broad back as he walked ahead of Erestor. He did not seem to be the hasty type, which he supposed was fortunate. He felt his face grow hot at the thought of them being spouses - the thought was yet to fully sink in - and he concluded that yes, it was definitely fortunate that Glorfindel did not seem as though he would rush things.

"I truly did, though, didn't I? Rush things in the beginning, I mean." The morning breeze was pleasant there in the woods, and Glorfindel watched the way their hair swayed, tips touching beneath the shade of the trees. "It was how you ended up thinking it was a simple arranged marriage, after all. That had been difficult to remedy, but it was not as if I could just say that I have been following you for years. By that point, it likely would have made you more wary of me."

"I remember spending so much time trying to understand my role," said Erestor, "and for a while, the only thing that made sense was that perhaps you wanted a companion and helper."

"Had I known we would have such little time, I would not have tarried so much, and there were things I would have done differently. We truly went about things so slowly, didn't we?"

"Did we?"

Erestor asked it distractedly, and Glorfindel noted how Erestor fiddled with the edge of his sleeves. His hold on Glorfindel's hand had also loosened.

"What is it?" Glorfindel asked. "What are you thinking?"

"I... did not think it was all that slow," Erestor said. "Certainly, we spent an age apart, and the time we spent in recent years was stretched by our own uncertainties and the change in circumstance. But those days in Gondolin... I do not think it went slowly, not for me."

"I was timid, I admit that. Our union came to me as a surprise, even if Ecthelion kept saying that the match was good and beneficial for both Houses. Perhaps I am just prone to be loyal, that it would not take much for me to devote myself to someone. I thought that you were... not difficult to admire."

The transition to life at the House of the Golden Flower came surprisingly smoothly for Erestor. He was introduced to the household, all of whom were kind and helpful, and the main caretaker, who was also entrusted with whatever Erestor needed, was a warm sort of Elf, a trusted friend of Glorfindel's from even before Gondolin. Erestor spent much of those first few days learning all that he could about the House, listening to the people's stories, familiarizing himself with its daily activities. After a while, Glorfindel began to turn over some of his tasks to Erestor, mostly those
things that concerned the day to day running of the House.

In the evenings, they usually would share a meal together and spend some time in the study before they retired for the night. It did not happen every night, only when their schedules allowed it, for Glorfindel was usually out, called for some matter or another, and Erestor still kept his place at court, and those days, the city was busy and tense with the changing moods of the king. Still, in the days that they were both free, Erestor somehow found himself often in Glorfindel's company.

Glorfindel, Erestor found, was a quiet companion. He seemed content to spend a free evening just reading for hours on end, so that somehow Erestor understood how it was that the old lord took so long to marry. There was a peace to him that Erestor found pleasantly calming, and it was evident that he needed not the company of others to wile away the time.

That was not to say that he kept to himself, nor that he ignored Erestor. On the contrary, Glorfindel during the day seemed outgoing enough, and in the evenings, he was quite attentive of Erestor. He would often look up from his books and ask Erestor how he was, and sometimes he would engage him in conversation even though Erestor still found it difficult to say much at length. Glorfindel, thankfully, seemed fine maintaining much of the conversation, and Erestor found he liked to listen to him, for he had seen much and had interesting stories of a world outside Gondolin.

It was also in those evenings, when they were quiet, that Erestor was able to observe his new lord. He was not much for gossip, nor was he ever interested in talks of romance and personal preferences - why would he, when he fully expected his marriage to be arranged? - but he knew of people who could spend hours - days - just saying things about Glorfindel. He could almost hear the excited voices of his louder female cousins ringing still in his ears when they first heard of Erestor's engagement.

Looking back, although Erestor used to wonder why Glorfindel did not choose his more obvious admirers, now that he knew him better, Erestor could no longer imagine Glorfindel in such taxing company. Although he seemed to get along well with nearly everyone, and despite his prominence in the military, Glorfindel seemed more reserved in private, more inclined to quieter hobbies. If this was the case, it no longer seemed strange for him to prefer the company of a quiet scholar, even without his need for help with the House. It must be tiring for him, too, after all, when people fawn over him - which they sometimes did, not that Erestor could blame them. He supposed he could see that what they said about Lord Glorfindel was true, especially now that he began to be more conscious of such things. After all, Glorfindel was sought after not merely because of his status; he truly was the fairest among the lords, and with such unique coloring, ever did he stand out in a crowd.

Erestor had always thought such things, but before their marriage, he only thought them in a way that was academic. As a councilor, one heard many things, and of course, the chiefs of the Houses were ever visible. Those days, though, with just the two of them in private, it was difficult to remain disconnected from such observations. Glorfindel in the dim light of the evenings seemed different from the lord whom the rest of Gondolin admired during the day, and it was a revelation that intrigued Erestor, for ever was he drawn to unexpected things.

In the end, perhaps Erestor watched a bit too much. Perhaps he was still young after all, easily swayed by kindness and admirable traits, or by trust bestowed by a respected other. Whatever it was, there soon came those days when Glorfindel would look at Erestor, and while Erestor averted his eyes still - as he could not help but do from the very beginning - perhaps in those moments, he did so for a reason a bit different from before.
"Do not look that way," Erestor said with an embarrassed smile, and it was only then that Glorfindel realized that he must have had a look of shock on his face. "You charmed everybody else."

Glorfindel huffed out a surprised laugh. "You were charmed? Are you not above such things?"

"Valar, no!" Erestor exclaimed with a laugh of his own. "That is, clearly, I was not. Certainly it has never happened before, nor did it ever happen again after you. But you were different. You were my husband, and though I say that I never truly understood what the purpose of the marriage was, a union was a union, and of course I thought about those things. I wish I could say that I was only planning ahead, for such was my way, but really, I am not even sure that that was all of it.

"You were a good lord, I saw that. You were kind to those around you, and you ran your House admirably. I also thought we agreed on many things and got along well enough, and you listened to me when it came to work, and even other times when I would speak. I had not expected it, as I was inferior to you in so many ways; I expected you would command me and I would have little say in the running of things."

"You worked well," said Glorfindel. "I did not lie when I said I heard good things about you, so I had it in my mind to truly entrust those responsibilities to you. I even admired how you worked, and was quite pleased to have you on my side. You made things easier for me."

"That is good to know," said Erestor, smiling now. "I tried my best to please." At Glorfindel's bemused smile, Erestor shrugged. "Of course, I did. You were who you were, you cannot forget that. It was difficult, keeping up with you. But then, it was not so bad. Life at the Golden Flower was good. People were kind to me, and accepted me as their lord fairly easily."

"They ought to have, since I asked them to. I told them it was important to me that you felt that our House would be your House, too."

"You tell that to me now, and it starts to make sense after two ages." Erestor shook his head in amusement. "Thank you. They were good people, and they loved you. I saw that, too. That must be why they were good to me then. They always followed where you led."

"And do you remember..." Even after all that he had already said, here Erestor still seemed to hesitate. "No, nevermind."

Which, of course, only made Glorfindel curious. "What is it?"

He caught Erestor's sidelong glance, so he smiled the best he could even though the other immediately looked away again. Erestor sighed, but seemed to stifle a smile. "There was this one time," he began slowly, "an afternoon sometime near the end of spring. We have not seen each other for a few days, as I was called often at court and council ended late in the evenings, and you were also out often in the field and would leave early each morning. But I was early coming home that day, and I found that it was a rare free day for you, too. You invited me for a walk and we sat side by side under a tree on a small hill..."

"How have you been, Erestor?" asked Glorfindel once they had settled. Erestor looked up at the question.

"I am well, my lord," he said politely.

"That is good to hear. Are you not having trouble with concerns of the House? I know council has been giving you trouble, I shall not even ask about it."
Erestor sighed at this. "Council is tiring of late, so much so that duties around the House have become a welcome distraction."

"What an unfortunate turn of events," Glorfindel said with a rueful smile. "Although I certainly would not be against it if you were to choose to quit council and concern yourself only with the House."

Erestor smiled and lowered his head. "I do not know how the head adviser would take that, but that is not such a bad idea, actually."

Glorfindel's gaze seemed to soften somehow...

"I remember this," cut in Glorfindel. "I was happy when you said that, even if it looked like you said it in jest."

Erestor laughed. "Such revelations," he said with a shake of his head. "And how easily did you find happiness over such a small thing."

"I was in love," Glorfindel retorted simply, which made Erestor clear his throat.

"As I was saying, my lord," Erestor quickly said. Glorfindel delighted at the blush that bloomed on the counselor's cheeks.

"It is your decision," said Glorfindel. "They will certainly lose a good member of court, but should you ever wish it, I am fairly sure the king would let me ask for you."

"I shall keep that in mind," said Erestor in reply.

They sat quietly for a while. Erestor thought it was becoming easy, moments like that. Days together were rare for them, but still, Glorfindel seemed to have become a familiar part of Erestor's world, so that even in Arien's light, he was more comfortable now than he had been before. It was a pleasant change.

Glorfindel suddenly spoke. "We were wed around this time of year," he said, his voice cutting through Erestor's thoughts. "Do you remember?"

Erestor looked at him, but did not speak, for the statement caught him by surprise. He looked around them, and indeed the trees were in full bloom, and the winds were pleasant. Thoughts of a garden full of flowers flashed through his mind, and he realized that it had indeed been a year already since that day.

"I have something for you," said Glorfindel, who was extracting something from within his tunic. He was soon showing Erestor a small pouch, which he then handed to him.

For a moment, Erestor just stared at it.

"The gift is inside the pouch, Erestor," teased Glorfindel.

"My lord, I have nothing." Erestor clutched the pouch and held it to his chest. "I did not know that such things were celebrated, else I would have acquired something for you as well."

"Peace, Erestor. I expected nothing. If I may?" Glorfindel smiled and reached slowly for Erestor's
hand, and he took back the pouch and opened it himself. "They are not celebrated, worry not. I believe the first gift is expected on the third year. It is only that I saw this and immediately thought of you, and I realized I may have been remiss in these kinds of things. You should have received something from me sooner."

Glorfindel lifted a gold hairclip. Upon closer inspection, Erestor saw that it was shaped like a dragonfly, but in a clean, simple design that he immediately liked. Gems of a pale forest green - a type of beryl? - thought Erestor - dotted the places where its eyes would be, while the same smaller cut gems lined the thin tail.

"It is... dragonfly?" asked Erestor curiously.

"I thought it suits you, in a way - sharp-looking, but also colorful and beautiful. I love watching them as a child. I hoped you would like it. Do you not?"

Erestor smiled. He truly liked it.

"I also like that it is the color of our House," said Glorfindel.

"I also thought that the green was the color of your eyes in the evening," Glorfindel interjected again. "It was why I bought it in the first place, although of course that much I could not say."

"You..." Erestor took a deep breath. It was clear he had not been expecting it, and Glorfindel marvelled at his ignorance and naïveté. Surely there must be a limit to humility. Was Erestor still not used to the idea of his husband as an old admirer?

Evidently not. Taking pity on Erestor, Glorfindel said, "Sorry. Please continue."

"This is beautiful." Erestor could not help but say, reverently touching the clip with his fingertips. "The gesture is also more thoughtfulness than I spared in the matter. I am so sorry."

"Please," said Glorfindel, placing the clip in Erestor's hand and closing his fingers around it. "It is a silly trinket, and I did not give it to you so you would feel bad. These things are not normally commemorated, especially given the nature of our bonding. But I would like to thank you for being such good company in the past year, and I hope to someday see that you are happy here."

"I was overwhelmed, to say the least," said Erestor. "And knowing not what to say, I ended up keeping quiet. I thought you sensed my discomfort, for you suddenly began to talk about other things, things outside of us.

"You told me about what you had been doing in the fields, how the warriors were doing. You told me of the worries of the King, and of the talks among the lords. You did not dwell on dark things, however, and proceeded to tell me which lord was courting whom, and then how Penlod was so frustrated by the demands of his Houses because he suddenly had an interest in playwriting, and how Rog found himself once again in trouble with Salgant because of his temper and, to quote Rog, Salgant's 'unfortunate, natural ineptitude'.

"I remember laughing at these last stories despite myself, and by the time you were recounting the insults thrown between Rog and Salgant, I was laughing so much and felt horrified by it at the same}
time, for it was terrible to be laughing at such respected lords. But you kept at it, and even began to share embarrassing stories about Ecthelion when he had too much wine, and somehow you had me telling my cousin's secrets, too, of how he was with us at home.

"I do not know if that day meant for you what it did to me. That was the day when I truly began to think that things were well and promising between us. I already thought of you as my lord, whom I thought was always so kind to me, but then I also began to believe that we could, in time, indeed be as spouses are supposed to be. You were... striking and beautiful to me that afternoon, and for the first time I was conscious of it, for I remember thinking you had a pleasant sort of smile, the kind to which one cannot help but smile back. It must be why I laughed so easily."

Glorfindel felt his chest tighten as he listened to these last few words. For Erestor to have had such thoughts within a year of the wedding - such a precious thing, yet he had been oblivious to it, so careful was he to not hope for too much with Erestor. Erestor was so young, so difficult to read, that all Glorfindel remembered seeing that time was how bothered his younger spouse had been by the distance in their status, which Glorfindel sought to bridge even as he resigned himself to years of waiting.

"We really... could have used more time, more days like that day," Erestor continued to say. "I would have... wanted to see where it would have led us. Things were good, even if I found it difficult sometimes to speak to you still, and there were still days when I was more conscious of who you were. But I think... in time, I would have become used to it. There were even days when I thought it preferable if we... could have showed a bit more affection to one another. I never knew how to do so, though, and even had I known, I would not have dared."

In the dappled light, Glorfindel could not help but think that Erestor truly was beautiful, with eyes lowered and still with that faint flush, as beautiful as he had been so many centuries ago in Gondolin. Of course he wanted him as far back as those days, and he would have wanted to hold his hands the moment they were wed. What an odd situation they found themselves in, and he could not help but sigh now, leaning his head against Erestor's, his heart filling again with regret.

He listened as Erestor continued to speak, noting how his voice began to take a more subdued quality. "Of course, things could not be so. We were busy again after that day, for despite that brief respite, the city was ever restless. Then there came talks in court of Maeglin defying the king, for he already missed a few council meetings. We could not have known it at the time, but I later surmised that it must have been around that time that he was captured, as histories later recount it. Maeglin did return eventually after some time, and many councilors breathed a sigh of relief, jumping at the hope that all was well. We wanted no trouble, after all, for many of the older and wiser ones were growing inexplicably restless, though they tried their best to hide it.

"Those days in that last year, I looked forward to nothing but coming home, for it seemed as though what worries I felt outside of our House's walls remained there for as long as you were home. I was at peace whenever you were around. But soon even that was taken from me, for there was a moment in our second spring, when even as the flowers in the garden bloomed, a shadow descended upon my heart and brought with it a dread I could not place. Every night thereafter, I remember praying that you would come home soon, for I was uneasy whenever you were out, even though I knew you could not be far, for the gates were closed."

Glorfindel remembered those days. He had not known Erestor felt that way at the time, but he knew at least of the unrest felt by others around them. He was constantly in the company of Tuor and Ecthelion in those days, for Tuor relayed to them Idril's doubts, and how they must work to keep the city safe.
For a long time, Erestor did not speak. He merely looked up where birds fleeted from one branch to another in the canopy above them.

"Long after Gondolin, for many years, I despised the changing of the seasons," he said after some time. Glorfindel looked at him and felt suddenly alarmed, as for a moment he caught Erestor's eyes beginning to water. The counselor blinked it back quickly though, so that it passed as though it never happened. "I particulary mourned the end of spring. This time of year was the most difficult, for although my happiest memories of my dear lord happened on these days, it was also during the Gates of Summer that I lost him in the end."

Chapter End Notes

(1) The gem I imagined for Erestor's clip is like a pale, forest green alexandrite. Coincidentally, though it was not on my mind when I first wrote the idea, the green alexandrite would probably be the same type of beryl Glorfindel will drop for Aragorn and the Hobbits later on. So it later becomes his signature Elf-stone? ♥

(2) Because Erestor was speaking of the seasons around the end, it seemed more natural for him to allude to forthcoming events in the language I was using to narrate, which happens to be English. "Gates of Summer" though is the translated version of "Tarnin Austa".

(3) It has been months (OMG months I am so sorry!) since this was last updated, so my memory might not be as good. I will read through the entire thing again in the following days to make sure I did not contradict myself anywhere. In the meantime, if you find any mistakes, I am so sorry! *deep bow*
"Erestor!"

Erestor was quick to find him. In the rising panic and the booming sound of drums, his eyes had only been strained for that familiar shock of golden hair. It served them well this time around, for even though Glorfindel had once or twice lamented his inability to get lost in the crowd, this time that trait helped Erestor find him amidst the fray.

"My lord!" he called out, relieved but guarded still. "Where have you been? You disappeared so suddenly."

Glorfindel ran to him and was quick to grab for his shoulders. "Erestor, thank the Valar," exclaimed the old lord. "Go; please go. Pull as many of our House as you can, but do not tarry for anyone. The House of the Wing is not far. Find the Lady Idril." The hands on him tightened. "Erestor, do you understand?"

"Come with us, my lord."

But Glorfindel only shook his head. "My position is at the market, so there I must go. But you, I bid you find Lady Idril and stay away from the main gates."

"The market? But that is so out in the open. Whatever is coming will meet you right there!" Heart racing with the noise outside the walls, Erestor found his hands reaching for his lord's. The resolve that Glorfindel met him with was worrying, and it set Erestor's lips into a thin line. "Then, I shall go with you. Let me fight."

"Nay!" It was Glorfindel's turn to cry. "I take only the warriors; the rest I wish to go. Lead our people out - that is your duty. Take a sword with you, but use it only in defense. Do not argue, Erestor, we have not the time!"

All around them people have begun to scream, but whatever they saw outside of their windows Erestor yet knew not. All the same, darkest dread filled his heart and it made his eyes stray back to Glorfindel. Upon his fair head bled the light of a red sun setting, and somehow that unnamed shadow that Erestor sometimes saw when looking upon his lord was cast upon the other's face, dimming his inner light. It made Erestor hold on to him tighter, though he knew not yet what it all meant.

"Please," he pleaded, his voice inexplicably but surely breaking. "Please. My duty is with you."

"Erestor. I beg you. I beg you keep safe, else for me it shall be for naught. If you are truly loyal to me, then listen to me and do as I say. Lead the people out while I go. Promise me you will obey."

There came a loud crash outside and a long, screeching sound that Erestor had not lived long
enough yet to know how to describe. Instinctively, it made him step back. At the same time, he found himself wrapped in strong arms, and when he looked up he saw Glorfindel looking over his own shoulder and toward the sound of wailing outside. Erestor could see there was a line now marring the skin between Glorfindel's brows.

With more urgency, the old lord turned back to him. "Erestor," he said sternly. "Now, swear to me that you will avoid putting yourself in harm's way. Do not make me command you; I do not want to."

But I will if I must, came unspoken, but Erestor understood it all the same. He shut his eyes and bowed, shaking his head, for it was already in his mind to let Glorfindel go, but that he would follow when he found the opportunity to do so. Yet he had never disobeyed his lord, and he doubted if he could sustain such deception when faced now with that wise and steady gaze.

In the distance, he heard someone call Glorfindel's name. Glorfindel yelled back in acknowledgement, but he did not leave, and instead turned back to Erestor.

"I cannot leave until I know you will be safe." Somehow those fingers loosen, were more gentle though they did not let go, seeping warmth into Erestor. "We do not have much time. Erestor, please. I will only be distracted knowing that you are also out there where you should not be. This is a siege, young one, and by the sounds of things and from what I sense, this is no battle to defend the city so it stands. More important are those within it. Therefore, you must go; you must escape. Do you understand?" Another crash, but Glorfindel did not even flinch, nor did he break eye contact. "No matter what happens," he continued to say, "you will do all that is in your power to endure and survive. No matter what happens. Swear this to me."

The golden lord was so earnest and so steadfast in this, that even amidst the chaos he shone to Erestor like a tall pillar of light. For all that he had feared being married to such an old and powerful Elf could be, Erestor never thought that the other would make him obedient to him like this - not through coercion, but by what strangely seemed like protectiveness and affection. He made it seem as though his strength would depend on Erestor keeping himself safe, and Erestor found himself powerless to argue.

His hands clutched at the cloth on his lord's wrists. His head bowed and the words bitten through his teeth, in the end, he found himself saying, "My lord, I swear."

They were quiet for sometime, and Glorfindel had no doubt that they were thinking of the same thing. The scene continued in Glorfindel's mind like something distant, greyed out and cooled to him by the peace and grace of Mandos. Yet he wondered if, in Erestor's case, the passing of the years somehow did for him the same thing, or did he still feel pain in the memory of losing... whatever Glorfindel was to him then. His lord, his husband by name - Glorfindel was not even sure anymore.

Their last meeting had no goodbyes. In the excitement of the oncoming battle and the desperation to get as many of their people out, at the time, he spared little thought to whatever sense of foreboding they said came with one's impending death.

"I did not even see you again after that," said Erestor solemnly beside him. "So early did you warn us, and so stubbornly did people of our House insist on pushing me forward though I wished to stay and wait for you. Your orders, they said, that we stop for nothing, even for you, for if fate would have it that we all meet again, then it shall be outside the vale and where it is safe. And so we were ahead in line, only some ways behind Lady Idril's host. News of your battle took so long to reach us that by the time we arrived, it had already ended."
Glorfindel watched Erestor closely. "Did you...?" He faltered, not knowing how to ask.

Erestor seemed to understand though, for he shook his head. "I do not know which would have been more cruel: that I arrived late as I did that I did not even catch a last glimpse of you standing tall and bright upon those cliffs, or to have arrived in time only to see you fall." His eyes then fell to the ring on his finger. "After your battle, the Eagles came and drove off the last of the Orcs. They then took you and brought you up back to us, but you were no longer there, your fae having gone already to Mandos' Halls. My caretakers to whom you entrusted me, they would not even let me go near your body. They did, however, give me your ring--"

"Erestor."

"--and they told me to keep it, to just return it to you when we meet again in Aman."

The calm rushing of the water before them belied the shadow that now descended upon Glorfindel. He realized he never truly thought about what his falling would have been like for Erestor. Erestor said it in so little words now, but in his mind's eye Glorfindel could somehow imagine his young spouse running to the back of the line, trusted members of their House in tow. Glorfindel could perfectly imagine his household, perhaps even his seneschal - a loyal Elf and a most trusted friend, who cared for Glorfindel like a brother and so also eventually cared for Erestor - pulling Erestor back and pushing him to the others to protect him. Erestor would not have stood a chance, not with those Elves who were loyal to Glorfindel. And yet, Glorfindel could also perfectly see his precious, stubborn Erestor trying anyway, out of his own version of loyalty to his lord.

"Oh, Erestor," he said, heart breaking at the scene in his mind. "Forgive me. You were so young." How that must have been like for the other, he could not bear to imagine for long. It made him take Erestor's hand again. "Did you mourn me?"

To his surprise, Erestor snatched his hand away this time. He also turned away from Glorfindel, but his profile in the sunlight was tense and the line of his mouth was pressed thin.

"Do you think me so heartless that I would not mourn my own lord and husband, who told me to go and leave him behind?" he said. "Even people not related to you shed tears for you that day, so what more the naïve young scribe whom you took to your House and inexplicably been kind to and called your spouse? I never even learned to properly understand you yet, but I--" Eyes a steady glare on the grass, material of his robes clutched in those pale hands, Erestor faltered. "Sometimes your opinion of me..."

"I did not mean--"

"Of course I mourned you," continued the counselor, insistently. "Before you, I never even knew what it meant. I knew and lost no one before you that I could mourn, and so your fall was a revelation - eye-opening, and I would even say..."

Erestor wavered, and he stopped himself and just shook his head. "I mourned you, my lord, long and deeply."

"I am sorry." Glorfindel reached out for him again. "Erestor, I am so sorry."

It was a while before Erestor spoke again. He still did not meet Glorfindel's eyes, and Glorfindel did not insist upon it, now somehow realizing that all this time there might be this that he had missed. He knew Erestor led a life... a full, longer life, than what he had when Glorfindel knew him. But that Glorfindel could have had a bigger part in that life was not something he had even considered. In all the years that he knew Erestor in Imladris, he occasionally struggled to reconcile the young Elf he
"You saved a city," he eventually heard Erestor saying, "and in doing so went down in history as one of our most renowned heroes this side of Arda. Many who dwell in this Middle-Earth owe you their lives. Even Elrond owes you his life, for without you he would not even have been born."

"I truly intended to return to you," said Glorfindel. Erestor still would not look at him, and he was growing anxious as to how to comfort the other. "I never thought we would have so little time. Even that time, I was looking for you--"

"Do not tell me this!" Erestor suddenly turned to him, but there was a shadow in his eyes that was far from what Glorfindel wanted. "Do not tell me you asked for me. I was not there!"

"Nay, that is not what I meant." Glorfindel gathered those hands to him again, and he kept the hold though Erestor's hands closed into fists within Glorfindel's own. "That is a good thing that you were far away. You were safe. That is good and it was what I wanted, so I do not mean that I was disappointed then to not have seen you before my end. I only meant that I thought it was over, and so I already began to look for you in the hopes that we could be reunited." He squeezed the hands in his, and did his best to implore with his eyes for Erestor to settle and calm down. "Erestor, believe me. I did not mean to die."

In the deceptive peace of the woods, Erestor's voice was low and quiet when he said, "No one means to die."

After that afternoon, Glorfindel's thoughts would often stray to that conversation. By the time Erestor was done, it did not look like he had the will to tell anything more, and so they lapsed into silence for quite some time. Glorfindel then invited Erestor to partake in the food they brought, to which the other thankfully seemed open to. Both of them, however, kept the conversation to lighter things. They eventually returned back to the valley each deeper in thought than when they left it. They also returned more subdued, so that even though Glorfindel assisted Erestor with his horse when they brought them back to the stables, they did so without speaking to one another.

That evening, after supper, Erestor told him, "I would like to stay in my rooms tonight."

Glorfindel watched him. "Why?"

"I have things in my mind that are best nursed in solitude."

It was so like him. In the years of their budding friendship, it was not as if Glorfindel had not experienced Erestor growing quiet in his company. Erestor, as Glorfindel learned even as far back as old Gondolin, was a deep thinker, and he would sometimes look out windows or up at blue or evening skies and just stay that way for a long time. Glorfindel, pathetic and lovesick as he knew he was, also just watched him in those times. Never mind that they were already wed; in those early years, Erestor was not yet fully his.

It was a painful reminder that even now, in this, little seemed to have changed.

Lindir, of course, was quick to find him the next day. Glorfindel looked up from his seat just as the
minstrel took the one across from his.

"So, how was your romantic picnic in the woods? The babbling of a brook, the music of birdsong, horses calmly grazing on the side... aah, to be young and carefree."

"We are hardly young nor carefree," Glorfindel said in greeting.

"Perhaps you better be - well, carefree anyway, seeing as we cannot do anything about how ancient you both are." He happily tapped Glorfindel with the back of his hand across the table, grinning. "It can do you both good, you being you and with Erestor having that stick eternally up his--"

"Lindir," Glorfindel cuts in with a tired, warning tone.

"Aah, but there it is. What is your problem now anyway? You look like someone took your favorite sword instead of one who came back from frolicking in the grass."

"We did not--" Here Glorfindel stopped himself, realizing that he was going down that ridiculous road many conversations with Lindir went. Instead, he merely sighed, and confided to his friend, "I think he is upset with me."

Lindir's eyebrows rose at this. He leaned back to peer up at Glorfindel, as though staring at his miserable face would make things more believable. The minstrel did not look too perturbed, though. "Is he, now?" he said still in that same sing-song voice of his. "Well, well... barely back together and already fighting like an old couple, I see. I apologize for all the times I called you slow--"

"Lindir."

"Couples fight all the time, really. I am sure this is nothing to be worried about."

"But I do not want to fight!" cried Glorfindel, frustrated. "While I do admit I may have coveted what other couples have, this is the last thing of theirs that I would want for us."

"If it makes you feel better, it does not take much to offend the chief counselor." Lindir shrugged at this. "In fact, as I have been telling you for the longest time, that you even managed to dodge his anger this long is quite a feat in itself. Perhaps this means he is now more comfortable with you?"

Glorfindel sighed again. "I do not think so."

"Dare I ask what happened?"

"We just have... a few things we are settling. We may have unearthed something difficult."

"Aah. In our long lives, one would likely unearth quite a few of those. And with Erestor, well..."

Lindir made a vague gesture, although he did look more thoughtful than he did earlier. Not for the first time did Glorfindel wonder about Lindir's friendship with Erestor, for the two of them did show some trace of familiarity in their interactions. He wondered if there was something the minstrel knew.

"Let's just say he has always been interesting, that friend of ours," Lindir said eventually. "A lot of history there. He is not the most forthcoming, I would admit, which I imagine is not an easy thing to get used to, not for you. But give it time. He always comes out better the next day, and all couples have to make up sometime."

Rains in Imladris used to be a pleasant affair. It did rain often in the valley, for ever did the place
seem to welcome Ulmo's blessing in whatever form. It was said, too, that their new Lady Celebrían had an affinity for it, and so Glorfindel would not put it past the powers surrounding the valley to let it rain often to please its lady.

They did, however, on some days and if one were in a particular mood, work to dampen spirits further. Glorfindel's movements had been slow when he walked down the halls toward the chief counselor's office, just as they were now that they were about to conclude their meeting - work-related, as such things had become a regular occurrence now.

They had not spoken about the past again ever since their return, and two days had already passed since then. Erestor was still subdued and Glorfindel did not push him, but he would not deny the disappointment that welled in him when it seemed that the other would continue to keep to himself. Things already seemed to become promising a few days prior, after all.

"My lord?"

Glorfindel looked back at the call. His back now to the window from which he was looking out, he could still hear the soft pitter-patter of rainfall against green leaves.

"Why do you do that?" he suddenly found himself asking. Like him, Erestor looked just as taken aback.

"Do what?"

"That..." Nothing to it now, Glorfindel just pushed on, gesturing toward Erestor. "You call me again by my title when you could perfectly call me by my name, as I have asked you to many times before."

Erestor straightened where he stood behind his desk, keeping a level gaze at Glorfindel. "I did not know it bothered you."

"It does." With a sigh, Glorfindel leaned back against the window sill, arms folding to his chest. "You should call me Glorfindel more often."

"I do call you Glorfindel."

"Not often."

It was Erestor who mirrored a sigh this time. "How often do you wish it then?"

"Call me by it always."

The chief counselor winced as though he found discomfort in the idea. "This is odd. I did not expect it to make such a difference."

"It makes a lot of difference."

They were quiet again, with Glorfindel just standing there and Erestor behind his desk, eyes on the stack of parchment before him. Glorfindel supposed, if he chose to be generous, this was still an improvement; years ago, they did not even have this, uncertain as they were on where they stood. They were civil, acted the part of colleagues despite regarding the other as something more. But they were supposed to be past that now, so Glorfindel could not understand why they were like this again, like two people on either side of a chess board waiting for the other to move.

Shadows flickered in the candlelight when Glorfindel moved, taking steps to stand before the other
behind that desk.

"What are you doing?"

The question and the hint of nerves in that normally calm voice hurt Glorfindel more than he cared to admit. "Am I not allowed?" he asked in as steady a voice as he could manage. They were barely a breath from one another. "We have already done it before. You said it was all right."

There must have been something on his face that conveyed his confusion and his pain, for Erestor relented, stood his ground. Glorfindel supposed they at least had this. Erestor had always been quick to appease, easily reading Glorfindel at least far better than Glorfindel could read him. Glorfindel used to think it came naturally to Erestor, long trained in diplomacy as he was, but he also wanted to wonder how much of it was because Glorfindel held... some position of favor, of a fashion, with Erestor.

Still, although he did not step away, Erestor still would not meet Glorfindel's eyes. "It is not that..."

When nothing else seemed forthcoming, Glorfindel sighed, feeling suddenly tired. Slowly, carefully, he lifted a hand to lightly touch the hair that fell to the side of Erestor's face, touched a cheek when that head bowed even lower. Undeterred, Glorfindel bent down so that they were somewhat face to face, waited a moment, and when Erestor did not move, he brought their faces closer.

All their kisses left him breathless and wanting, as though what they shared in the moment barely made up for all the years that were lost to them. To Glorfindel's relief, Erestor did kiss back, albeit softly and carefully. Despite this, however, this time around the kiss also brought with it a slightly different sort of longing, a bit more bitter and confusing in that Erestor seemed even further away from him than before. Not for the first time did Glorfindel envy what other spouses had, the closeness that allowed them to know the other's thoughts and hearts, let them speak though great distances kept them apart. Others had this while here Glorfindel stood, not even a hair's width from his own spouse, but Erestor's mind, as always, was closed to him.

The moment ended soon enough with them just standing there. There used to be a time when Glorfindel thought that Erestor's silence was the same as it had been all those years ago. Now, though, with the permission to look longer, he can see that there was more to such moments this time.

"What do you think about, when you look like that?" he asked in a whisper.

"Like what?" Those eyes were still lowered, hidden from Glorfindel in the low light.

"Like you are far away."

Erestor did not answer immediately, and when he did, he was still ever cryptic. "My thoughts are far away."

Glorfindel could not help but touch him again, to get whatever semblance of contact he could have. "Where is this place, then, that calls to you so that you leave us?"

"Memories," Erestor said, and there he pulled away.

Glorfindel watched him go in sad, frustrated silence. Erestor walked to the window sill and sat there. For a while, he just looked up and out, as though something about the rain falling from the canopies fascinated him.

"Come," he said, after some time. "Sit, and I shall tell you another story."
Aaaah apologies for the rating change, as I just adjusted it to reflect the rating to date. I have been itching to for a while now. I will turn it up again if the story ends up needing it after all. This... the story just keeps changing on its own. *dramatic slide down wall*
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

It's the rainy season again where I am, and I actually wrote this chapter at a hole-in-a-wall, outdoor-sitting restaurant with just a roof over the tables and the rain pouring outside. I couldn't go home for a while, but it's funny how these things work out.

There were many things that Glorfindel was able to notice in Erestor in the passing years. Apart from his role as Elrond's chief counselor and primary deputy when the Lord of the Valley was absent, Erestor was also a loremaster, a teacher, even a scribe still when he fancied it. It was hardly an obligation anymore in those later days, more a pastime than anything else, but Erestor apparently still had a thing for stories and histories.

Glorfindel sat across Erestor on the window sill. He could have sat on the chair he earlier occupied, but he loathed the distance between them given what progress they seemed to have had. Whatever was filling Erestor's mind now, Glorfindel would wait until it unfolded - through these stories Erestor was keen to tell him, it seemed. But he would be mad if he had to wait for it the way he used to, so far from Erestor, and without acknowledgement of what they were to each other.

Erestor seemed somewhat conscious of this. As he watched Glorfindel settle on the cushioned seat, there on his solemn face was something yet again unreadable to Glorfindel. There, too, however, was a slight upturn to his lips, as though he could not stop it though it seemed like he tried, and that was at least something Glorfindel was holding on to.

"The journey and eventually finding the Havens at Arvernien took us years," Erestor began when he saw Glorfindel settled. "As you can expect, many of us knew little of the world outside of Gondolin, and of those who saw more had stayed too long within the Encircling Mountains to feel any sort of safety outside of them. They spoke, too, of the great army north that fell the Union where only some years ago many of our warriors marched, but from which so few of you returned.

"The soldiers among us led us southwards following the Great River, for they feared still the enemy that resided in the northern territories. It was a sad, uncertain road, marked by long days of toil and even longer nights of unknown sounds and the threat of footfalls that we could not place. For so many of us, what beauty the lands outside Gondolin held was shadowed by the fear of being so out in the open and seeing it after so terrifying an introduction, forced out of our beloved but doomed city.

"We had hoped to find a place to settle sooner than we did. Twice we decided to settle somewhere near the river, but we could spend only some time in one place before Orcs and fell creatures would find us - scouts of the enemy, they used to say - so that we were forced to keep moving.

"I do not think any of us counted how long it was before we found the Havens. I do not think anyone even felt safe enough until years later, when people began to settle, bear children again. There is even a funny story there. You know what they say about the Pull?"

Glorfindel tilted his head at the question. "You mean when one recognizes a mate?" he asked. It was an old story, one that seemed to split most Elves, for not all believed the saying that one would
recognize a true mate at first meeting. Glorfindel could not even say he had proof of it, for although Erestor did catch his attention the first time... well, the circumstances of their marriage had been an odd one. A series of mad moments on Glorfindel's part would even be one way to describe it.

Erestor only nodded though, oblivious to Glorfindel's thoughts. "Right. It seemed that young Eärendil felt it the moment he beheld Elwing. He proposed to her when both of them were age 12, I believe."

This, at least, drew a laugh from Glorfindel. His last memory of Eärendil was that of a small boy, barely past his knee. "What an amusing sight that must have been. What did Tuor say?"

"I have not seen Tuor laugh so heartily in years." The memory seemed to make Erestor smile and the look on his face was fond. He shrugged. "They waited a few years, but just barely. Only two years past Eärendil's 20th summer, he married Elwing."

Glorfindel's eyebrows rose at this news. "So soon?"

To which Erestor only smiled again and said, "Seven years later, they had Elrond and Elros."

Glorfindel counted the years, how old Eärendil would have been then, and just had to shake his head. "By the Valar," he breathed in awe and still some amusement. "At least they waited another seven years. There is that, at least?"

"Again, barely," said Erestor with a chuckle, quiet and short. Always he would draw back to that same solemn mood and he would turn outside, as though letting the rains remind him of whatever it was that plagued his mind during such times.

"Those were happy years," he went on to say, "finally, and after what seemed like so long. Finally, after Gondolin and the journey to Arvernien, we were hearing the laughter of children again. In our reckoning, twenty years?" Glorfindel saw him close his eyes briefly, shake his head. "That is barely time to settle and convince one's self that it was a time of peace enough to welcome love and thoughts of building a family. But I believe that the people of Gondolin would grasp at any sign that things for us were finally turning for the better, that what peace we knew in Tumladen could be had again. It was a good dream, too, and we had it, for how ever short a time it was."

By then, Glorfindel had been watching him for some time, just listening to the slow, quiet narration of a story that was but a few years after Glorfindel's death. It felt surreal somehow, how foreign and distant such details felt. He saw Arvernien only as Erestor described it, but all the same it seemed to him beautiful and sacred, a sanctuary after years of marching. He could only imagine what the Havens had been like, what it meant to the survivors of Gondolin, weary from loss and the long years on the road. Yet it was a picture also tinged with bittersweetness the way Gondolin felt to Glorfindel in those days in Imladris, for he knew the ending to this story, or at least had some idea of it.

He suddenly dreaded what was to come. Erestor already told him some of it, but not with this level of detail. It seemed as though there would be more in the telling this time around, more that Glorfindel had to know. For a moment, he wondered if he had the strength to hear it.

Erestor, however, looked as though he would go on. Gaze out the window again, unmoving as a statue and nearly as cold, he said, "The sons of Fëanor came like a storm in the night."

The refugees from Doriath were quick to fight. Having seen those fell faces and having gone through
the sacking of their kingdom by those same people once too many times, they were the first to sound the alarm and alert the others to the horrors that were to come. And so the people of the Havens were quick to take arms - but then, perhaps that was also why things quickly went downhill. In later years they would come to call the third kinslaying "the worst one of all".

For refugees of Gondolin, that night was not like the nights camping in the wilderness, where they would sometimes come awake at an especially loud woflcry or the urgent whispers of the night watch as they tracked footsteps they could not place. It was not like the time when they passed the Fens of Sirion and had to hide, for a company of Orcs were also there passing. The Havens, in those later years, was becoming like home. They had farms there that already saw several harvest seasons, so to see them trampled and burned in the chaos was nothing short of tragic.

It felt horribly, heartbreakingly, like Gondolin again.

Erestor's father was one of those who took arms - and one of those who fell. He had been, as far as Erestor could tell, trying to protect his wife, but by the time they were in Erestor's field of view, his mother was already dead on the ground, and one of two Elves with matching hair of flames had his sword through Erestor's father's chest.

The shock of it all, perhaps, had been what saved Erestor's life. In the face of such act of murder he had failed to scream, and in the few heartbeats it took for his world to cave and the noise around him to fade as though somebody stuffed his ears with cotton, the two Elves had fled, leaving bodies in their wake. The time it took for Erestor to run to his father could have lasted only but a moment, or it could have taken hours. By the time he woke from his stupor, it was to his shoulders being violently shaken, and to his father's eyes thankfully closed.

"Lord Erestor!"

Erestor was slow to look up, and when he did his vision was blurred by the tears that welled in his eyes. It therefore took him a while to recognize the Elf before him.

"Aglarion."

"Come away, my lord." Their old steward of the House of the Golden Flower extended a hand to him. With his vision becoming clearer, Erestor could see that the Elf had a sword on him on one hand. There was soot on his face as though he came from fire and smoke, and if the smell around them was any clue, it seemed that fire was also not that far. "It is not safe here. We must go now."

The series of events that occurred afterward - the chaos, the running, the call of voices announcing that the kinslayers were near - all were a fast-moving blur, for Erestor's mind was still in the fear and the grief in his father's eyes and his mother's beautiful hair splayed about her on the ground. He stumbled many times each time a wave of memory overwhelmed him on his feet, but Aglarion's hand was a steady support and a sure guide.

The steward led them until they were nearly at the city gates. But whatever the kinslayers wanted, it appeared they were loath to let it slip, for one of them, the dark-haired one, stood at the entrance to the city, eyes hooded with shadow, but vigilant.

Aglarion held Erestor out of the other's view, but in turn Erestor also saw little of what was going on beyond the wall that was shielding them from the fray. For a moment it seemed the old steward was weighing his options, his wise eyes darting about them. They stopped, however, on Erestor - that was, on his hand, where he still wore the ring of their fallen House, and his golden wedding band.

The steward took Erestor's hand and held it tightly. "I owe much to Lord Glorfindel and I have
never forgotten him," he said, his tone hard but sincere. "So much so that I consider my duty to him bound by my own life, not his. I see now, my lord, and remember that his last order had been to keep you safe.

"Do you see that break in the gates, the one where the pillar fell?" Aglarion pointed somewhere to the right of the gates, some paces away from the son of Fëanor. "When the time is right, my lord, I bid you to run through and never look back, not until you see the fenlands where the reeds grow tall and could hide you."

"What?" At first those words did not register to Erestor, but when they did and he discerned what the other intended, his eyes widened, and he moved to reach for the steward's arm. "No, wait, I cannot--"

"My lord, I have but one sword and none that I can give you. I know these people, and theirs is a family that will not fall by ordinary hands, be it Elf or dark creatures as accursed as they are alike. If it were up to me, I would fight them alone if it could save a city, just as my late and noble lord had done." The steward smiled sadly, and tightened his hold on the younger Elf's hand. "Alas, tonight it seems I can save only you. But then, you are you, and you were precious to Lord Glorfindel. He would ask the Valar that you live, and this I also pray. May what mercy is left within them be with you on this wretched night."

After that, Aglarion fled, his sword unsheathed and he was out in the open in mere moments. Erestor moved to call him, intending to go out and pull him back behind that wall. But already the son of Fëanor had seen him and had drawn his own sword. It was Aglarion who attacked first, and by then it was too late to call him back.

There was something to be said about what befell people during such times. Somehow Erestor recognized the steward's signal and he somehow had the strength to run, exactly as instructed, and perfectly so that their fell guard was none the wiser. He ran as fast as he could until he could see the marshes on the mouth of the Great River, where indeed the reeds grew taller than any Elf seen in Arvernien. It truly was a time of madness, for Erestor even surmised that the reeds were taller than any of Fëanor's sons, who towered over everyone, as grave and terrifying as any misshapen Orc.

His thoughts fled back to Aglarion, to his words and pledge of loyalty to a lord and house long fallen, but such things Erestor had also never forgotten. As the air around him grew quiet, as the adrenaline fell, suddenly Erestor noticed how badly he was trembling, how soiled by tears his face had become, and how he was sobbing and wheezing through the breaths that made clouds of white in that chill night.

He did not know how far he tried to go, but he remembered he was clutching the rough leaves all around him when his knees buckled and failed him, and he retched his sorrow upon the reeds.

When Erestor was done, Glorfindel could barely see from the tears that fell down his cheeks like the rains sliding down the window glass. He was not even able to contain his sniffle, though he averted his gaze a moment so that this time, it was he who looked out the window even as he felt Erestor watching him.

"I never knew," was all he could think of saying.

"There was no way for you to know," said Erestor with a voice that was eerily calm. "But now you do."
They were quiet for some time. Never had Glorfindel's heart felt heavy at a story's telling. Midway, he somehow knew what his foolish, fiercely loyal steward was capable of doing, but to hear it said and confirmed as the events unfolded was no less heartbreaking.

"He was a good Elf."

Erestor nodded, but did not say anything.

"I took him in," Glorfindel continued, for suddenly he felt as though he should talk about him. "When his father fell in Alqualondë, I found him about to take his father's sword. I stopped him and told him to come with me. He was only a child then."

"I know," said Erestor. "He told me, back in Gondolin. He was kindest to me, I suppose you could say, but then I thought it was because he was your steward and your most trusted. I worked with him often, too, back when you asked me to take care of things for the House. Still, I never would have thought that I could win such loyalty, even if it was through you."

Glorfindel's gaze lowered at this. Aglarion was but a boy when Glorfindel took him in, but he was good and obedient, with a good head on his shoulders. He was an adequate fighter, good for watches and short skirmishes, but he was not someone Glorfindel would bring to war. It was why, as the years passed, he became steward of the House when Glorfindel was away, for he was better there and seemed happier when all around him was at peace. Glorfindel needed not hear the rest of the story to know that the other did not make it out of those gates. Glorfindel would wager, too, that well did Aglarion know it even as he asked Erestor to escape.

He never really told anyone save for Ecthelion, but somehow he also felt as though his House read him well enough for them to know that his marriage was no mere political match. It was not as if he hid it, but neither was he the picture of openness and cheer, not in those days. But he did ask them to be kind to his would-be mate, and he did tell them silly things maybe, like Erestor's favorites and what his background was like, things that on hindsight probably clued them to their lord's infatuation with his much younger spouse. It all sounded so silly and petty now, those days in Gondolin, in light of this kind of ending.

His had been a good House. Erestor had told him this several times already, and Glorfindel also knew it, for he himself would still have given his life for them with or without his mate there. He never expected any of them to do the same for him, however, or even the same to him by extension, taking care of the newcomer to them and welcoming him openly by virtue of him being Glorfindel's chosen.

"I am sorry." Tears came unbidden again so that he had to bow down and shut his eyes, pinch the bridge of his nose in an attempt to quell them. "I know it was a long time ago. Still I... I do not think I can listen to any more today."

Erestor did not immediately speak, and for a while it was just the pitter-patter of rain that kept them company in that office. When Glorfindel felt himself well enough to look, he found Erestor watching him with what he could at least recognize as sadness.

"I understand."

With the rains came visitors to the valley. Glorfindel later learned that it was those group of Elves he kept hearing about, the one led by Gildor Inglorion, wandering from city to city. They were expected more or less around that time, and if Lindir was to be trusted, the minstrel had guessed that their
journey was made more urgent by the rains.

"It is not nice traveling in the rain," Lindir had said earlier with a laugh when the rider came bringing news of the company's coming. "Not good for the instruments, and the sounds drown out the singing, too."

Truth be told, it was one of those rare times when Glorfindel was not in the mood for singing and music. The days were gray and gloomy, and ever present in his mind was Erestor's story of Arvernien. The story alone was a horror Glorfindel could only imagine based on what he remembered of Alqualondë. To this day, with all the wars and the losses he ever experienced in his life, not even the bloodbath that was the Battle of Unnumbered Tears could compare to Alqualondë, where for the first time Elves raised swords against fellow Elves. It was unfathomable how one could ever do so, but Glorfindel was there when once blue waters turned red with blood. Even now it was not a story he had the heart to tell; he would much rather even tell of the story with the Balrog than to speak of Alqualondë. For him to learn that Arvernien was not just the second, but the third of such kinslaying, and the worst one yet - it was unthinkable.

He could not help his feeling of dread, too, for he now sensed that there was more to these stories than Erestor merely sharing his history. What purpose did such stories serve, so that Erestor would keep Glorfindel still at a distance - willing to be called spouses, willing to show them wearing rings, but unwilling yet to have more beyond these things - Glorfindel did not yet know.

He watched the other now through one of the windows in the western wing, which had a good view of the entrance to the Homely House. From that distance Glorfindel could see his husband standing with Elrond as they welcomed their guests, covered yet in riding cloaks as they stepped out of the rain. One did have his hood down and he stood at the front of the company - Gildor, Glorfindel would guess, for he had the light golden hair of Finrod's house.

Gildor greeted Elrond and Erestor in a familiar way, with the customary hand on the shoulder. But then he turned to Erestor again and pulled him to an embrace, one that at least spoke of long years of friendship. For a moment, watching them that way, Glorfindel remembered that night many years ago when the Elves at the Hall of Fire told him that Gildor and Erestor had history. He checked himself, wondered if he watched them too intently or for too long, or if they stayed in that embrace for too long, but then Gildor pulled away and did the same to Elrond. Glorfindel breathed easier.

As though sensing him, when his companions were distracted, Erestor's head lifted up to face the window where Glorfindel stood. Glorfindel stilled at that steady gaze, for even at that distance Erestor's eyes had the same effect on him as if he were sitting across from him in council. Erestor did, after all, have that weighted sort of silence about him, one where you knew that his mind was working in ways invisible to those around him, even to his own spouse.

Glorfindel stood and met that gaze, watching Erestor in turn. It was only for a moment, but then he treasured any time or attention Erestor paid to him, especially in those days when missing him felt more palpable, ridiculous as it may be given that they lived in the same house in the same valley. But then, ever did loving Erestor feel ridiculous, and Glorfindel was not so proud that he would deny it.

Soon enough, Erestor's attention was called back to his companions. It seemed that Elrond was saying something to him, and so he turned to his lord, and did not look as if he would be let go any time soon.

Glorfindel stepped back from the window and left them to it.

Chapter End Notes
This chapter was a bit difficult to write given my love for Maedhros and Maglor. I somehow dodged writing about Maedhros, but Maglor was heartbreaking, especially how it was said that he was torn about the things they felt they had to do. Maglor had a gentle heart, but he also did what he did - it's a challenge reconciling such things.
Chapter 17

Imladris, Glorfindel discovered, truly was a welcoming place. The valley loved visitors and it welcomed Gildor and his company with much joy and song. The halls bustled with people meeting, the gardens filled with Elves playing games or sitting on the grass once it dried, having seen more days with sunshine.

With Gildor's company were a few guards who brought tidings of the roads they passed along the way, and so Glorfindel had spent some time with them to gather what information could be used for the valley. Orc tracks had been sighted as near as Moria and Hollin where old Eregion stood, and while the numbers were few still, Glorfindel took note of them, for they knew not when things would shift again in that time of peace.

This kept him busy for some time, but he did not mind, for he was in a subdued sort of mood still. He mostly kept with the guard, but he knew he ought to report such things to Elrond and Erestor soon. He told himself he was still completing things on his end before he could do so and that anyway, there was no hurry. That Erestor might be avoiding him in recent days - for Glorfindel had not seen him, nor had the counselor returned yet to Glorfindel's rooms - was not something he wanted to confirm, much less even think about. So he kept himself busy.

Lindir caught him one evening however, and immediately pulled him outside where there was a bonfire lit and around which Elves were sitting and making merry.

"Work, work, work!" Lindir complained as he wrapped an arm around Glorfindel's shoulder and handed him a cup containing sweet mead. The scent of it was already on the minstrel, who must have partaken of it early on in the evening. "Those things will not kill you if you leave them for one night, will they?"

"I am in charge of the security of the valley, you know," Glorfindel thought to tell him, though he knew it would just fall on deaf ears. "Negligence on my part actually could kill us all."

Lindir's face scrunched up, unimpressed. "Aiya. Your stick in the mud of a husband is rubbing off on you, and unfortunately not even in the good way." Glorfindel's eyebrow rose at the rather crude jibe, but the minstrel remained (or acted) oblivious. "Come. Have you even greeted our visitors at all? For shame, Captain."

They approached the fire where there were a few seats yet available. The nearest Elf who seemed to have heard them turned to look back, and his face brightened when he saw them coming.

"Ah, Lindir," said the fair-haired Elf. "We wondered where you might have run off to. Who is your friend?"

The question came, though Glorfindel did note how Gildor glanced up at the gold of Glorfindel's hair.

"'Evening, Gildor!" greeted Lindir as he proceeded to push Glorfindel down on the seat next to their guest. "Gildor, meet Glorfindel. Glorfindel, Gildor."

"Glorfindel of Gondolin!" exclaimed Gildor, whose face brightened at what must have been confirmation of his guess. It also seemed that the mead had already been passed around to quite a
few of the crowd on that fine evening. "News of your return has reached even our travels on the road! So it is true? The famed hero of the Hidden City returned to Middle-Earth - forgive me, but this is just amazing."

Glorfindel cleared his throat and schooled his features so that he could smile. "Well met, Gildor of Nargothrond," he greeted the other in kind. "It is good to meet you here, for we have both lived through harsh times. 'Tis a shame to be introduced to one another so late, but those days were not suitable for much socializing, were they?"

"Oh, aye. Nargothrond and Gondolin - both fair and called the 'long-standing' cities in the old days, but compared to later kingdoms, they do not seem so much anymore, do they?" Gildor laughed pleasantly and lifted his cup to toast their lost cities. "Certainly our centuries seem far too short now compared to what Lindon has."

"What about Lindon?" asked Lindir, who now dropped himself with less than his usual grace beside Glorfindel. "Don't you dare reminisce about the old days and make me feel out of place; I just introduced you both. Lindon is a fine topic, however, for I know it well. I was born in Lindon, you know."

It was a pleasant enough conversation that followed. Lindir had long been the one to introduce Glorfindel to good friends, and it seemed that Gildor was another one who proved to be good company. He regaled them with their stories on the road, told them of news in Lothlórien, and even piqued their interest with what was going on in Eryn Galen. Gildor was friendlier with the Wood-elves than... well, Erestor, who thus far was Glorfindel's main source of information on the Woodland Realm. Glorfindel figured a second eye in that regard could not hurt.

Of course, inevitably it seemed in those days, the conversation did turn to more personal things. Lindir had wandered off closer to the center of the group and was already mid-song among several of the minstrels. Glorfindel recognized Anoriel and the others, and even Galadir was sitting there with Naurwen, his wife.

"I believe I owe you an apology, my friend," Gildor said beside him.

Glorfindel, who was then distracted by the singing Elves and was finally feeling himself relax, turned at Gildor's serious tone. When he looked at the other, the other Elf was still smiling, although perhaps it was a more wistful expression than it earlier was.

"For what do you apologize?" asked Glorfindel.

"Erestor."

It was then of course that Glorfindel remembered the stories, one about this Elf's history with Imladris' chief counselor. Gildor looked distinctly uncomfortable though he still smiled pleasantly and pushed on.

"You might already know this, and I assure you he and I are merely good friends now, but there was a time when I... ah, approached him, thinking he was available. I did not know!" He was quick to wave his hand at Glorfindel in defense, though Glorfindel really had not even said anything yet. "I did not sense it in him, so I did not think he was bonded. I am sorry. He did eventually put me in my place, so you need not worry."

Glorfindel was not quite certain how to react to the unexpected apology nor the topic in question, and so he merely cleared his throat. "Yes, I know about it."
"Ah, so you do know. Well then, I pray that my company this evening and this very conversation would prevent any duels in the morning, yes?" The Elf-lord grinned and shook his head. "I truly apologize, for I did not mean to overstep. When he said he was already taken by another... well, what does one have against a golden ring, eh? Of course he wore his in a peculiar way, although looking back perhaps it was not so strange given how you fell. Yours must have been quite a story. He said it was a love that saw too little time, but that he did not think he would ever meet another like his mate again, and so my attentions were better turned elsewhere."

Glorfindel thought back on another night many years ago when he learned of Erestor catching the attention of others, told to Glorfindel even by the same Elves they were with that very evening. He never asked anyone any more about it, nor did he ever have the courage to tell Erestor that he knew, for that might lead him to admit that it did make him jealous all the same, despite that the stories all told Erestor discouraged such attentions. But ever had he been curious what Erestor told those others, for it was said that he effectively rid himself of unwanted overtures.

"I see," was all he could think of saying, in the end.

"It took a while to get him to say it, of course," Gildor freely went on to say. "He has always been reserved, even with friends. He never even told me who his spouse was! Imagine my shock upon coming here and hearing that it was none other than Glorfindel of Gondolin himself! Aiya, that is a spouse to be proud of indeed, but he is such a private Elf." The Elf-lord shook his head, exasperated but fond. "But I could see then that he held much affection for his spouse, or at least was loyal to him. I had to prod him about it, though. What you had, it was a political marriage, was it not?"

Schooling his features against all that Gildor revealed, Glorfindel only managed a brief, "Aye."

The other Elf nodded again, none the wiser. "I thought so. Most marriages were in our time and among our ranks. I am glad yours was amenable to you, so that you would keep it to this day. 'Tis not everyday we get second chances in Middle-Earth."

Glorfindel sat quietly, subdued, enough so that Gildor could continue. "Listen: we have a performance tomorrow evening - a concert, if you will, for my dear cousin, Celebrían. I could not make it to the wedding, so I suppose it would be like a late wedding gift."

"I have heard of such an event happening," said Glorfindel. "I did not know you would also perform."

"It will be a night for love songs. The minstrels are excited." Gildor grinned his easy grin and clapped a hand on Glorfindel's shoulder. "I imagine it is a good way to spend an evening with a lover, too. You and Erestor should come."

The Hall of Fire was full the following evening, for Elves did consider concerts to be quite the treat, especially when they learned that it would be one for their lord and their new lady.

It was a group of Imladris' minstrels, Gildor's company, and even a few of the Lórien Elves that remained from after the wedding that sat together on the platform at the center of the hall. It was a rare congregation indeed, and many of the Elves who came to watch and listen opted to sit on the floor at the center of the room, cleared for the occasion. A few even seemed to have brought blankets with them or pillows for more comfort. Elrond and Celebrían sat in their own corner of pillows and blankets near the platform, likely led there as the minstrels' guests of honor.

Many Elves still sat along the steps close to the pillars, and it was there that Glorfindel spotted
Erestor. The chief counselor was seated to one side a little apart from the main crowd so that it did not even look as though he had company. Glorfindel wondered if Erestor was waiting for him, for he did tell the other about Gildor’s invitation. He supposed it was only natural, for although it might not be too strange for them to not come together, to not sit together was a different matter.

He therefore went to sit beside Erestor with this in mind. Erestor had been watching the stage and so did not immediately notice him. The counselor did look back when he sensed the shuffling behind him, and there on his face was recognition and yet another one of those expressions that Glorfindel could not well read.

"Good evening-- Glorfindel."

Glorfindel caught the pause, and was admittedly torn between sighing at the more immediate "my lord" that the other was likely supposed to use, or to just count the small victory that Erestor at least listened well enough to make the effort to change his form of address. Glorfindel supposed that there was time yet to wean Erestor out of that habit, especially as he seemed to do so every time he sought to distance himself from Glorfindel.

"Good evening, Erestor," he instead calmly greeted the other in turn.

Seated as they were there in the outskirts, the crowd was thinner where they were. Glorfindel was even at the end of that row, so that it was only Erestor to his left and no one else to his right. Erestor was turned away from Glorfindel, for he had returned his attention to the musicians in front.

"Good evening, all!"

It was Lindir who stood now at the center, beaming at their audience.

"Blessed are we indeed to see such a rare treat as this. As always, we welcome our friends from Lothlórien, but tonight as well we have with us the company of Lord Gildor and his brood of restless bards--"

There seemed to be good friendship indeed between Lindir and the musicians Gildor brought, for his jab was met with broad grins from the others.

"--who have come from all of Middle-Earth from Mithlond and even as far as the Woodland Realm, to settle for a time here in beautiful and restful Imladris. Together we hope to extend our celebration of Lord Elrond and Lady Celebrian’s union, for indeed the new age is promising to give us a long time of peace. It is therefore a perfect time for love, be it new or picked up again where it had been left frozen in the frost of the old wars. And so we bid you to sit back and listen, and hope the music lets you celebrate love in whatever form it comes to you on this fine evening."

A hush fell in the room as Lindir once again took his seat. Tonight it seemed he would play his flute, one Glorfindel recognized from back when he first met the minstrel, and one he grew to understand was Lindir’s favorite.

As Gildor had promised, it was a night for love songs. The minstrels opened with a mellow and seemingly familiar tune to all, aptly the song that was written about the meeting of Beren and Lúthien.

"The leaves were long, the grass was green,
The hemlock-umbels tall and fair,
And in the glade a light was seen
Of stars in shadow shimmering."
The evening continued on this way, where gradually Elves around them began to sigh happily and settle in their seats with smiles on their faces as the Elves on the dais continued to play one song after another. There were songs on first meetings, on finding love, on love's comforts and its triumphs. There were songs sung for spouses, but so did the minstrels bring them to things that were more nostalgic, so that they also celebrated love in the sweetness of its youth, when lovers frolicked and danced together on the grass and under summer rains.

It was during one such love song that Glorfindel caught Erestor looking elsewhere. He followed the other's gaze to two younger Elves sitting together on the other side of the Hall. One was enraptured by the minstrels still, but the other, seeming to have tired of listening for the time being, was braiding the other's hair. When the young one reached the end of the braid, he seemed to search around for something he could use, but finding none, he ended up pulling at the braid to catch the other's attention. When the other turned to look, however, the young Elf had the tip of the braid up and waiting, so that it brushed the other's nose at the right moment. The other Elf scowled and there ensued a brief tussle between the two. Their actions, however, were affectionate, and they were smiling throughout.

"New lovers, I think," Erestor suddenly said beside Glorfindel, in a low voice so that no other could hear. "Fitting for the kind of evening this is. Trust Gildor and Lindir to come up with something to gather lovers around; it has always been their thing."

Glorfindel looked at the two on the stage, and supposed he could see that. Lindir had ever been nosy when it came to Glorfindel's own love life, whatever sorry state it was, and it was easy enough to imagine Gildor to very well be the same. An Elf deterred from pursuing love by being presented with another love story had to be some kind of romantic, or at least a poet.

"Gildor said that this was a present for Celebrían. She at least looks happy." Glorfindel gaze shifted to where their lord and lady sat, where indeed Celebrían sat holding hands with her new husband, bright face turned to the minstrels.

"Well, of course she is," said Erestor. "Celebrían is a romantic."

'As many in the room appears to be,' thought Glorfindel, eyes wandering to the stage and then a little to the audience. Imladris was truly a marvel of a place. Inevitably, of course, his attention turned again to the Elf beside him.

"What about you?" he asked Erestor. "Do you enjoy these songs as well? I remember there had been evenings when we spent the time listening to the minstrels, which you seemed to enjoy well enough, although never had those times been like this when a whole concert is dedicated for songs on love. Do you like them?"

"Love songs have their own charm," said Erestor and nothing further, and shortly after when silence fell between them, he turned back again to the minstrels. His eyes never landed too long on Glorfindel, so that Glorfindel was once again just looking at him. Seated so closely now though still not touching, blue eyes fell to his hands clasped together in front of him. The captain felt them now distinctly light and empty, as it ever had been ever since Erestor moved away from him again.

Over in front, it seemed the minstrels have reached the end of their planned songs, and were asking the crowd for their preferences.

"Sing a song for us in need of love!"

Glorfindel peered at those Elves who made the request, and noted that there were even some amongst the crowd who were smiling and nodding their heads.
"Not all are happy with their yoke and there are hearts that are simply weary," said one of the Elves in front. "Cruel can love be when it is absent or unrequited. Do you then have songs to comfort such hearts?"

"Aah, so we turn to that part of the night," said Gildor, who headed the singing. "As of course it must. If our Lord and Lady permit it, we have quite a few here that we could share - more of them even, if you know the nature of minstrels. Ever had we been drawn to the bittersweetness of such romances."

"Certainly," said Celebrían readily, when Elrond merely smiled and gestured for her to speak on their behalf. "I love all kinds of love songs."

"Our gratitude, my lady," said Lindir this time. "I wager there are many here who could use such songs, after all."

It could have been Glorfindel's imagination, but it seemed Lindir immediately caught his eyes in the crowd. The minstrel then winked, and as though to be rid of any doubt for whom he meant it, he also turned slightly to Erestor and sent the counselor a grin and a wave.

Glorfindel sat confused and suddenly nervous, and had to shake his head at the Elves around them who curiously followed Lindir's gaze and found them upon the captain and chief counselor. What they could be thinking, Glorfindel did not know, for all of Imladris save a very select few seemed to believe that theirs was a long and secure union, steadfast in its surviving the past ages. He knew it from the way they would smile at him in those days, in the way they talked to him about Erestor and relayed messages to him for Glorfindel to tell as though it was only to be expected. He also knew it from the way the happily bound would joke with him about married life as though he was a kindred spirit.

If only they knew.

His eyes lowered on the floor before drifting once again to the Elf seated beside him. Not for the first time did Glorfindel wonder at how it could be possible to feel as though so much has already happened and yet also so little at the same time. Progress with Erestor was either slow-going or an exhausting back and forth, where even love was claimed but then left cold and neglected. After so much time he still did not even know why.

"I crave your mouth, your voice, your hair. Silent and starving, I prowl through the streets. Bread does not nourish me, dawn disrupts me, all day I hunt for the liquid measure of your steps."

Glorfindel could not help but sigh, for there indeed the minstrels began songs of the kind of love he could very well understand. Beside him, Erestor looked as though he had stiffened in his seat, although for what reason Glorfindel was once again drawing a blank. He was growing to sorely dislike that feeling.

The next set of songs was not any better. Every stretched line that told of pining and longing, every mentioned strand of hair upon a beloved's head, every word, all spoke to him as though the minstrels opened his heart and laid it bare from inside out for all to see. They spoke of winds that touched skin more often than a would-be lover could, of stars shared by worn hearts that lived apart. The tightness in his chest suddenly felt tenfold heavier, for Erestor was beside him as he had ever been, and as he had remained in so many years, his but not fully his. Glorfindel never thought himself to be greedy, but there must be truths in the tragedies that told of shadows that grew in one's heart out of love spurned.
As the first notes of yet another song was played, carefully he turned once again to his spouse beside him. Erestor was turned away from him, but his profile was golden and beautiful in the firelight.

"Three paces down the shore, low sounds the lute,
The better that my longing you may know;
I'm not asking you to come,
But—can't you go?"

"Erestor?"

The counselor turned - not immediately, Glorfindel could tell, but he did so soon enough and he supposed such things had to count for something. He looked at Glorfindel, who caught the... oddly troubled look on that otherwise fair face, before Erestor quickly smoothened his expression out into its usual neutrality.

"Yes?" he whispered so as not to bother the others, and Glorfindel must be mad to find fleeting happiness in little things like that, when Erestor would direct something at him that was just between the two of them. His voice was even low and sweet-sounding as he went on to say, "What is it?"

"These words, 'I love you,' and the whole is said—
The greatness of it throbs from Sun to Sun;
I'm not asking you to walk,
But—can't you run?"

Before he lost his courage or for his senses to catch up to him and stop him, he unclasped his fingers from their tight hold and finally reached out to do what he had been keeping himself from doing all evening.

In the dim light of the Halls, behind the backs of the Elves seated in front of them on those steps and even the Elf that was seated to Erestor's other side, Glorfindel slipped his hand into Erestor's. He pulled it closer to himself, entwined their fingers together and even folded it so that it was completely covered, warmed by Glorfindel's hold.

Erestor, of course, stiffened at the touch. "What are you doing?"

"Why do you always ask that? Do you not like it when I do this?" Glorfindel tightened his hold even when Erestor made an initial attempt to pull his hand away. "No? Have you perhaps changed your mind?"

That, at least, helped to make Erestor relent. He stilled and just stared at Glorfindel, his now dark eyes confused and troubled once again, but at least he was not struggling. Glorfindel often wondered what the other sometimes saw on Glorfindel's face every time he cared to look, if even half of how pathetic he felt ever made it through what others have told him was an otherwise calm and wise face. Perhaps if they looked at him long enough, if they saw him when he was this close to Erestor, they might change their opinion and tell him he instead looked the child he felt himself to be, standing beside someone who even started out so much younger than he was.

"Glorfindel, someone might see." Erestor's words had to be half-hearted at best, and Glorfindel wondered why the other kept saying such things if he did not mean them, especially if all they ever did was hurt Glorfindel all the more.

"We are wed, so even if they see, it is only to be expected." Stubbornly, he kept that hand to himself, even tightened the hold though it felt as though his hands were shaking with nerves. "As it is, I do not think we even show it enough that we are married. Were I the one watching us, that to me would
be the more curious thing."

What would Erestor do, he wondered, if Glorfindel were to kiss his hand in that crowded hall? If Glorfindel were to lean in and attempt to kiss his lips, would he move his head aside and refuse him, as it seemed to be his more natural instinct?

He decided not to try, for already he felt stretched enough as it was, and any more refusal from Erestor could only be more heartbreaking than what he could manage to hide in such a public place.

He did, however, even as Erestor sighed and turned away to watch the minstrels again, decide that enough was enough. Tonight, he would ask Erestor to return to his rooms again, for long indeed were the nights when the space beside him on his bed was cold and empty. He would ask Erestor about the stories he seemed so keen on telling Glorfindel, although to what end the other still did not know. But Glorfindel would seek to understand, once and for all, even if it meant he had to beg the conclusion out of Erestor.

"Three paces in the moonlight’s glow I stand,
And here within the twilight beats my heart.
I’m not asking you to finish,
But—to start."

Chapter End Notes

*jumps her muse and throttles her* OH MY GOD WHY ARE YOU SO ELUSIVE

Poems used for the songs in this chapter:
- The Song of Beren and Lúthuen (J.R.R. Tolkien)
- Love Sonnet XI (Pablo Neruda)
- Serenade (Djuna Barnes)
Chapter 18

"Glorfindel, wait!"

He supposed that backed into a corner, people would be prone to doing things they otherwise would not consider.

Certainly it was not Glorfindel's way to push Erestor. He had always been careful, respectful of his space, and he never demanded anything of him. He never really thought that he was in any position to do so, formal titles and contracts notwithstanding, but surely... surely, after everything that he had already learned and heard, it was all right to ask for a little more now?

Erestor's hand was still clutched tightly in Glorfindel's. He never did let him go, so that even when the concert was done and people began to rise from their seats, they were two of the first ones to leave the hall. Erestor had tried to protest, but Glorfindel nevertheless pulled him towards the direction of their rooms. The counselor did not have much opportunity to insist, for already a few people had been looking at them, probably wondering if something was amiss. Erestor was nothing if not the picture of propriety, and so he eventually relented, and allowed himself to be led at least until they were alone again.

"I wish for us to talk," Glorfindel told him. They were just two turns away from their rooms, and in those quiet halls Glorfindel could feel his earlier gall waning. Being alone with Erestor tended to have that effect, but he pushed against it this time, tightening his hold on the other's hand as though drawing strength from it. He turned to Erestor and implored to him, "Please."

The request seemed to take Erestor aback, for his mouth visibly shut and he was quiet all the way to Glorfindel's door. He only hesitated a moment when Glorfindel bade him to enter, but enter he did eventually, to Glorfindel's relief.

"Here," offered the captain. He gestured toward the open balcony, thinking that perhaps Erestor might not be as comfortable talking in the bedroom. After all, he did seem to avoid it in recent days, but this at least Glorfindel could provide.

They were at the height of harvest season, which was usually a pleasant time for Elves. Back in the early years when he and Erestor were spending time together, more as friends than anything else, it was also around this time of year that they would end the day a little bit later. The longer days afforded them such opportunities, more reasons to linger for longer conversations during walks or shared meal times, and Glorfindel looked forward to having those again. Perhaps someday it could even be better, for they would not have to do so in such neutral grounds. Someday Glorfindel hoped it would be here, in his private quarters, or even better, in one they shared.

One can hope, he thought to himself, though mentally sighing. How far such things still seemed.

Erestor, who at least had given up on any attempts to escape, sighed resignedly and leaned over the stone rail. It occured to Glorfindel that he never really had Erestor here before, and it was yet another one of those uneasy thoughts out of the uncountable ones he had had with this particular Elf.

"I wish you would not look so ill at ease," he said to him as he made to stand beside the other. The Moon was only half-lit above them, but it at least afforded them some light. Stars were scattered above them and somehow that was a comfort, a remembrance of a time only recently when he and Erestor stood at another balcony and things had been more pleasant. He hoped that the same could still be said about this night even as he turned back to Erestor. "Will you tell me the rest of your
story?"

Erestor frowned as he looked up at Glorfindel. The question was clear on his face.

"Tell me," said Glorfindel again, attempting to explain. "What is it that I am waiting for? Why does it feel as if what I thought was simply the story so that I may get to know you better now seems to be something I ought to dread?" It was he who sighed this time, for his heart grew heavy with the admission. "What is your story, Erestor of Gondolin, that you draw back still from my touch even if here and there I am given - even by you yourself - these small signs and stray hopes for love? Do you not think such things cruel, especially if in the end you leave me after all?"

He did not mean it the way it came out. He meant something along the lines of the way Erestor left him on his own, to think of things on his own, with only but a little to make sense of them. Even then, he did not think much of it, perhaps would have thought it merely an exaggeration of the ill feelings he had been carrying of late, had Erestor not turned to him as though one caught.

Dark eyes widened and seemed to shimmer in the moonlight, but what admiration Glorfindel otherwise could have felt in that moment was shadowed by the chill that passed through him at the sight. Another thought, one more troubling, occured to him.

"What?" he asked, brows scrunching as he met that gaze. "Why do you look at me like that?"

But then it seemed as if another realm of possibility that he never thought to entertain opened to him. After all, whatever was keeping Erestor from him continued to pull at the other even despite the revelation of recent days. It made him turn away from Glorfindel and had him keeping his distance. What thoughts were brewing in that fathomless mind, Glorfindel only continued to wonder. Where were they leading Erestor?

_Please let it not be so_, was Glorfindel's heartfelt plea, even if out loud, all he said was, "Erestor?"

Erestor, for his part, appeared to take on a more solemn expression. He turned away from Glorfindel and merely looked down at his own hands, folded in seeming calm, resting upon the stone rail.

"Erestor of Gondolin..." he said quietly as though only to himself. He huffed out a breath; it was not quite a laugh. "So much of my youth return to me ever since your return. I have told you some of the events that followed shortly after Gondolin; perhaps, if I say so now, you can understand why I do not like to think of such times anymore."

"Forgive me," Glorfindel was quick to say, heart promptly clenching with sympathy and guilt. "You relived those stories for me. Indeed, I can understand, for horror and grief do not make the best memories--"

"Nay, it is not only that." For a moment Erestor seemed to find difficulty in continuing past that initial denial. He was quiet for a long time and appeared more uncomfortable with each moment that passed. It was a strange sight, the often unflappable chief counselor nearly folding in on himself. His arms folded against the rails, his shoulders hunching as he looked out into the vast mountain view, though it did not look as though that was what he was seeing. "Grief, fear, horror... yes, I had all of those. But apart from such things, worst out of them all...

"Do you know where I was, my lord, in those years after Arvernien?" Erestor's voice had lost all inflection, seeming to dull in the retelling. "I ran. I was ever running until the end of that age. Do you know what I was doing when the Great War came, when the host of the Valar arrived and the call for a final stand against the darkness was made? I hid, still, along with the rest of the cowards, until in my fear I was even driven to seek refuge in the deep woods of Taur-im-Duinath. Do you know
where that was, my lord?"

Glorfindel shook his head, and so Erestor went on to say: "It was a forest so dark even Orcs went around it, but the roots of the trees went deep in the ground so that they could hold it even as the earth trembled from the fighting that was happening up north. Some say that those who found themselves east of the Great River and south of the Long Wall were lucky, for they were able to avoid much of that war, suffering it only near the end." Here Erestor laughed, but humorlessly. "Lucky, perhaps, but also, it was a place where the weak ones fled, those cowards who did not wish to fight. It was a place one would never find you, Glorfindel."

Glorfindel frowned at this last remark. "What do you mean?"

"To be known to have stayed in that region does little for one's pride. There was no valor there, only shadows and droughts as much as floods, famine, and inexplicable deaths. You would not even know from which you ran away, from whom you could seek for aid, but you do not leave knowing the evil that waits out of the shadows and beyond the tree line. So many died there all the same, attempts to run from death aside, but of course many of us there also did survive. Fewer casualties but still easily in the hundreds maybe, but that was nothing to the numbers lost in the war."

"Hardly anyone talks about the end of that age," said Erestor. "No one wants to tell. You either suffered a great loss in the fighting, or you lost all face avoiding the war. It is perhaps fortunate that not many ask, but do not believe that when word gets out that you were one of those who fled, you would not suffer the consequences."

"Have you suffered from such judgments, Erestor?" Glorfindel carefully asked. "Has anyone treated you badly because of this?"

"If they have, it was only to be expected." Erestor's voice was firm in its conviction. "I was wrong to have fled, then faced the new age reaping the rewards for which others have fought and died. But at the time I did not know anymore where to go. They even said that the call to Valinor came at the end of the fighting, but we were too far from the ships, and even if we decided to answer, what face did we, who did nothing, have to give to those who earned their place there?"

The silence stretched between them. Glorfindel's mind was frantic trying to imagine the picture Erestor painted, as he did with every story, and he mourned once again the fate his mate had found himself in. He found himself at a loss for what to say, but it seemed that Erestor read his silence a different way.

"It must be disappointing," he said, hands now clasped tightly in front of him. "Forgive me. I know, too, that I have been irresponsible with you. The truth is... that upon your return, I knew I should have let you go."

Glorfindel, whose head was still full of the things Erestor had described, started at this. "What?"

Erestor shook his head. "Now so much time has passed that I do not anymore know how to confess that in all that time before Elrond's wedding, I had been considering how we should go about breaking the bond." Erestor seemed to sense Glorfindel's protest, and so pushed on to explain, cutting him off. "It is what I thought to be the right thing to do! You must understand, my lord, that all I knew has always been what I have seen of myself, living for as long as I have. This is why I know: I am no mate for you. Beautiful had you been in fair Gondolin, and had the Fall not happened when it did, I know it would have been a good life with you. You were beautiful and easy to love, and even events that came after only proved how much better you were, and how poorly I filled the role of being your equal."
On any other day, perhaps during another sort of conversation, Glorfindel would have been glad to hear about what Erestor thought of him. But now they only weighed heavily upon him, for Erestor placed them apart, as though on two opposite sides. "But then why?" he asked, heart worn by the shock and not a little bit confused. "You never said anything, and even now things do not seem as you say. I thought..." Now he could not even bring himself to say it, all the good things that he thought. "I... thought differently."

At this, Erestor gave a stilted nod. "With so many things I had ended up regretting, you would think I should have learned my ways from all the mistakes I have already committed. But in the end perhaps I am the same. Faced with difficult decisions, I tarry, and in that time you, who held a different side of the story, sought for a different continuation. And how tempting you were, and how beautiful had that night been when we--" Erestor stopped again, took a breath. "Memories of our own wedding and of Gondolin so fresh after so long... everything you said that day had been a revelation. And in those days I thought... we were getting along rather well and you were... pleasant, to have around." Another pause, another sigh. "Nevertheless, I should have kept my resolve, weak though as it were. I should not have considered what things could be like. I should not have given the ring back the way I did, for I have pictured that scene going quite differently. I should not have... kissed you, nor should I let things go as far as they--"

"Don't." Finally it seemed that Glorfindel's mind had caught up with the proceedings, frozen as it was by all the things Erestor was saying. "Don't you dare tell me you regret all these things. I have desired for the simplest of things from you all these years." Glorfindel's chest felt tight and he, too, held on to the rails in place of clutching desperately at Erestor, for already he could sense his hands shaking. "So do not tell me now that you take them all back."

"You say that still, after everything that I have already said?" Erestor asked, incredulous. "Are you listening, Glorfindel? I am not the mate for you; I cannot be. You say you love the Elf of those days, but my lord, did you know him all that well at all?" As Glorfindel stood dumbfounded, cruelly Erestor continued, stepping back as he listed, "Did you know that he would run without you, so that in your last moments the one who should have been there was nowhere to be found? Did you know that he could leave friends behind, or that you were not the only one to die for him? You, Aglarion, you were not the only ones I lost. There were many others, all in the span of those now seemingly insignificant number of years. Shall I describe them all to you? I have lost friends to madness, to feral wargs, even to unknown things that lurk in the darkness. Shall I describe to you the confusing helplessness of not even knowing whether someone you know is dead, or needed rescuing, but you do not know if you can linger, and so you listen to others who tell you to count it as a loss and move on for a better chance of surviving? Would you like to know how long I ran from the sword, and how badly I failed at fighting when it all mattered?"

And then like the tides' ebb and flow, the passion seemed to recede from Erestor again as quickly as it came. "You claim to love someone I have spent an entire age forgetting and for whose failures I continue to atone," he said more softly again. "Why do you not save yourself the trouble, my lord, and free yourself from me in a way that I cannot? Certainly there must be others who could make you happy, even younger ones who could at least share joy more purely with you than I could."

Glorfindel stood and watched him, this Elf he truly barely knew. He was torn in the middle of a tempest of emotions, his mind busy protesting against it all. But the suggestion of there being any other was ridiculous and impossible. He protested, too, the dim view of one so precious to him, and his heart still went to him, who stood tall despite it all, but who also seemed to be slowly crumbling if one were to look more closely.

"Erestor." Unable to be so distant from the other when he was so clearly shaken, Glorfindel reached out, slowly and carefully, so as not to startle. He touched Erestor by the arms, grip tightening just
marginally enough to steady him. "Erestor, listen to me. How many years was it even between what you witnessed in Arvernien and the war that soon came?"

"Nay, do not. Do not make excuses for me--"

"How young were you, so spoiled in Gondolin, only to see it fall, your husband die, for you to find refuge only to endure carnage worse than even the sacking of Gondolin had been? I, too, was a witness to a kinslaying, and even at my age then it was no easy sight to behold. I remember trembling even as I sought to stay the swords of my comrades, for how could such things even be done, Elves raising blades against Elves? Even when I was told that I had done the right thing, it mattered not that it was not by my actions that such horrors were committed. I know of Elves older than you were who marched through the Grinding Ice with the memory of the blood of their kin, and so heavily did Alqualondë weigh on them that it was easy enough for them to find their doom in that wasteland. You are not alone in knowing that horror, and there is nothing to be ashamed of about pulling yourself through the years after it. That you were still too shaken to fight in the war... Erestor, how could I, much less anyone, ever fault you for something like that?"

"Surely had you been there, as did you do the right thing in Alqualondë, so would you have done the same in a world that needed you. You would have fought, heartaches and trauma be damned, for you are strong and honorable and good, so much more than I had been."

"We cannot say what I would have done for certain, for I was not there," said Glorfindel. "But even if that were true, that is still an unfair judgment for you. You are no warrior, while I have long been one, and a lord at that. Such things are expected of me; I am not as free to choose my fate as you might believe."

Glorfindel could see that Erestor was not convinced. He was always so hard on himself, thought Glorfindel, which was an observation he had had of Erestor for as long as he knew him in Imladris. It was always in the context of work, but now Glorfindel could see that such things also ran more deeply than simple, everyday things.

And so he continued to say: "Although it may be true that one could have gone beyond circumstances and risen above them, it is still no reason to belittle a survivor, nor the things that you have done as recompense afterward. Were you not there at the rebuilding? Did you not eventually grow out of your youth, learned your lesson from your experiences? You learned your crafts in Lindon, helped build Eregion and even Imladris, and even now your old lords call you to continue in their building of a better, more peaceful world. Do these count for nothing?"

"Of course I know these things," said Erestor, pulling away. He missed the look of worry Glorfindel gave to him, for already he had turned away again. "I am no foolish youth anymore, and I know I would say the same things you are saying had I been faced with someone with my circumstances. But what the mind knows the spirit does not always understand, for still I cannot help but wonder what could have been. Had I learned the sword earlier, perhaps I could have spared another, could have lost fewer friends--"

"You also could have died."

Erestor did not immediately speak, but when he did, it was softly spoken. "There are worse things."

Before Glorfindel could say anything, however, Erestor appeared to pull himself together. He seemed to shake himself, look hard into the distance, before meeting Glorfindel's eyes again. "Forgive me. These thoughts are so old but seem surprisingly fresh again now, even worn and aged as I now am. They are childish thoughts, and that I even tell them to you at all is shameful."
"Nay, do not say that," protested Glorfindel again. "Clearly they bother you still, whatever your mind makes you say. But Erestor, whatever it is that haunts you, please, never be ashamed with me."

Once again, he reached out for him, and was grateful at first that the other was not pushing him away. Erestor did not move altogether, however, and Glorfindel recognized somehow that same tactic, the one that ended with Erestor leaving him to face whatever battlefield he had in his mind, alone and out of Glorfindel's reach.

"Erestor, stop this." This time he shook him a little, and did it again until Erestor's eyes were clear and looking back at him. "Come back to me, and cease all these things about not being my equal. Do not forget that I have known you now for much longer than Gondolin afforded me. While it is true that I might have occasionally looked for my young spouse in you, so have I also seen how much you have changed. Helpless to the other's pull, Glorfindel lifted a hand to brush a stray hair away from that pale and troubled face, tucking it gently behind a pointed ear. Truly, all traces of youth was gone from that too familiar face, but he was still so beautiful to Glorfindel despite it all. "I now see there is even more, much more to you that I must know. For as long as I have admired you, I have failed to ask about your weaknesses, your shortcomings and your perhaps less desirable traits. These are things that spouses must discover and accept in one another, if only so they would know when they should be around especially for the other. Is it not so?" Glorfindel ventured a smile in the hopes of coaxing the same from the other. "In this I hope you would do the same for me, too."

"You return by the will and favor of the Valar," said Erestor, head bowed. "Do not tell me, my lord, that you are not extraordinary."

"Please," begged Glorfindel. "Words like that are no favor to me, nor the title you still insist on seeing me with. I do not look at you any differently after everything you have told me. If anything, I love you all the more, for if there is anything I regret the most about my fall, it is that I now understand how bad it was that I left you on your own. I have claimed you for myself, foolishly and selfishly, but was also cruel enough to leave you when you needed me most." Carefully he took Erestor's hands, cupped them within his and pressed them together, completely covering them with his own. They felt cool and clammy to his touch, and he wondered once again what it must be like for Erestor, reliving through everything he did that night. "For all of these, I deeply apologize." He felt Erestor protesting, but he expected this and so he stood firmly, kept him quiet and in place. "For whatever good it would do you now, know that had I been alive at the time, I, too, would have preferred that you stayed away from the fighting. I would have taken from you the burden of the war, for is that not what a mate should do? We become the things the other lacks, and spare each other the guilt of not being what we believe we ought to be."

Glorfindel waited with bated breath, which seemed to wither once again in him as Erestor still did not return his gaze. Eventually, the counselor also pulled his hands away again, leaving Glorfindel's own hands feeling empty without him.

"When I first heard of songs of you in Ossiriand," said Erestor. "I could not bring myself to claim it. I could not say, 'he was my husband' nor could I feel any sense of personal pride. Only... like a child I kept your ring, for lack of other things to cling to, for in all that chaos, it was the only thing from my old life that was left to me. One of the rare good memories I could still recall.

"I think... I think it must have all happened rather quickly, so that I have pushed back those things for lack of any means to face them. It was just easier, forgetting everything. To be honest, I had considered a few times if I should just let those rings go as well. Perhaps I should let what was left of the seven rivers just take everything that I owned, all those memories that felt like shackles, away to where the Sea had taken the rest of Beleriand."
Erestor stood distantly from Glorfindel still, and Glorfindel supposed it was difficult to let go of beliefs held for centuries. He saw now, perhaps more clearly where he once was blind, how complicated Erestor's feelings for him must have been upon his return. Somehow his distance and silence those first few years and even now seemed differently colored, by more than shock and faded memories, and it pained Glorfindel to think about it.

But once again he reminded himself that so many things had happened in the centuries that he was gone. Erestor knew loss, knew regret, but perhaps also he eventually found his victories, found a way to grow and leave behind a past that he hoped had gone differently but could never redo. And so as did one need to let go of some regrets and leave them behind in order to grow, so was it perhaps best for Erestor as well to forget a life filled with so much horror and guilt. But Glorfindel was irrevocably part of that life - was he then supposed to step aside?

"Then, do you still wish to?" he asked, which made Erestor at least turn to him again. "If it is not a time you wish to remember, do you think..." Glorfindel swallowed the lump in his throat, but believing his next words to be necessary, he summoned what courage he could find so he could continue speaking. "Do you think you would benefit from severing what link you have to it? Your marriage to me and the rings you carried, especially with me here now, they bring you back, don't they, to those days? Would you rather be rid of them, and let them go along with the past that they bring?

"I am not ending things, do not misunderstand." This Glorfindel quickly said, for Erestor began to look at him with wide eyes. "Not completely. It is just that perhaps there is merit in getting to know one another once again as new people in a new world. I am Glorfindel of Gondolin no longer, and you are no longer the same person I married. How can you be, when so many things can happen in a decade, much less all the time that you lived? Many of my worries and what burdens I used to carry I left in Mandos' Halls, and if I could but give you that same peace, I would. But I have not the power to do so, and this is the best I have to offer: to sever the remaining tie you have to whatever you wish to leave behind. Again--" It was difficult to say why this point Glorfindel needed insisting, but something in him clamored for him to do so, and so he said again, "Do not misunderstand. We sever the tie only for a time, but I intend fully to gain you back once again. I will court you, here as you are in Imladris, and I will know you as best as you would allow. Perhaps this time it shall even be a union of love and one more believably to you as equals, instead of one with hidden agendas and colored by dubious political purposes. A love story set in beautiful and peaceful Imladris, I imagine, would be vastly different to one that unfolds so near the Fall of Gondolin."

It felt to Glorfindel that he waited for Erestor's response for a long time. The other, it seemed, was stunned to silence. He stared for a long time and Glorfindel let him, for there was little he would deny Erestor.

"Do you mean that?" the counselor eventually asked.

"I do."

Something changed in Erestor's expression. "Then why do you look the way you do?"

It took a while for Glorfindel to realize it, but belatedly he noticed the stinging in his eyes. It and the weight in his chest worsened when his attention was called to them, so that it seemed the tears came faster so that one, then another soon after it, fell down his cheeks. Stunned and embarrassed by the sudden well of emotion, Glorfindel sought to wipe them quickly away.

"Forgive me," he said with a self-conscious laugh even as his fingers came out wet every time he wiped them on his face. "This... you, being married to you, has been my constant and my familiar thing ever since my return. I still remember, too, how much of a relief it had been to finally have it -
to have secured you to me - in Gondolin. I suppose it is not so easy letting it go."

It even filled him with so much dread, so much so that it was becoming difficult to breathe, for even as he offered it he feared that Erestor actually would accept. Logically, nothing ought to change, for they would still be who they were and nothing would change of their interactions - only that they would not be married, which was surprisingly a big difference.

He heard more than saw Erestor sighing. "You are too good, my lord," he heard him say. "One would think that after everything that happened - even with you meeting your end precisely because you are too much of a martyr - you would learn your lesson. Why do you offer this when it does not seem to be something you want?"

"I do not want to force upon you something that so haunts you," explained Glorfindel. "How can it be fair that something that gives me so much happiness gives you pain? Now that I know better, then maybe I do not want it after all."

"'Maybe', he says..." said Erestor with another exasperated sigh and a shake of his dark head. "It is not the marriage that bothers me. I am even very fond of you and still did hope to return your ring to you should we ever meet again, whatever our relationship with one another would be. I would have let the bond go if you had asked, but that at least I wanted to return to you." Here, at last, Erestor gave a quirk of his lips, a small smile, which he seemed to offer in comfort. "Besides, you cannot tell me you were completely happy. We are married by title, at best. I have done none of my obligations to you as a spouse, nor am I anyone of great value. It would hardly be a loss."

But obviously it was, so strongly was Glorfindel mourning it and so vehemently was his whole being opposing it. "I never thought to question my regard for you. You do not seem to see it, but I see in you so many things to love - you are beautiful and I even love watching you while you work. You are intelligent and fit best where you are now, in thriving realms in peace time and beside benevolent lords who benefit from your loyalty and counsel." He flushed at Erestor's attention for a wholly different reason now. He still felt embarrassed by his own reaction, but still he wanted to tell Erestor everything. "How can you not see what I see? You are wonderful and I want you, now more than I ever had. I am sorry for everything that happened to you, but I will never stop being glad that you were here when I returned. I cannot imagine what it would have been like had you not been here."

The cool hands that came to touch his face, wiping his cheeks, were both a shock and a comfort. "There is little wisdom in denying one's past; one only has so long to run from it before it catches up to them. There is also good in regret, for in it we know better than to repeat the wrongs we have done." Erestor's voice was deep and soothing. "I know all of these, but perhaps with the shock of your return, I was not able to easily remove myself from it, and was overwhelmed by regrets I merely buried but never faced. Forgive me; yet again, I had been weak when I could have been wiser. But I would like to think that I am not so young as to need some ceremonial severing just to let go of something that exists now only in my mind. I can do so on my own, if you would but give me time. At least, I hope so."

Glorfindel looked up from where he had his head bowed and face hidden, for at those words his heart skipped a beat, this time with fervent hope. When he looked at Erestor's face, there was a bemused expression there. "You really are getting the worse end of an already bad bargain here," quipped the counselor. "Never had this been an equal match, and see, even now I get Middle-Earth's strongest, even purest warrior, while you get... well, this. I am nobody."

"I do not know what you are talking about," said Glorfindel breathlessly, uncertain whether he could take to mean what he thought Erestor meant with such words. "I have never known anyone I wanted more than you. You are wonderful and this has not changed."
"That you would even cry over this..."

"You have long had the ability to make me cry."
Tears even fell again as he said this. Glorfindel could not even remember the last time he cried, but it must be true what they said about floodgates opening, and this had stretched on for much too long. "I love you. All this time, I have loved you, and while I am willing to know and listen more, I am also tired and at my wit's end. Please, Erestor, please--"

"Enough." Finally, finally, Erestor stepped forward and took Glorfindel in an embrace, and for the first time since the start of their conversation, perhaps even that entire evening, Glorfindel felt like he could breathe again. Erestor held him tightly and it was easier, every inhale thereafter, filled even with the warm scent of him that still felt precious and new. "I am sorry. It is enough, Glorfindel."

Erestor's arms wrapping around him and the fingers the other buried in his hair were everything, all that Glorfindel felt he needed in that moment. "I have wanted you for such a long time," he heard himself say even as he pressed his face against Erestor's shoulder. His own arms wrapped tightly around the other in turn, and his words were muffled when they came out. "Please tell me the wait is over. Please. Do I get you now?"

Erestor did not speak, but neither did he pull away. Deeply and over and over, Glorfindel breathed him in again and it was somehow good this time, though they stood still in the quiet. This time his fingers, too, burrowed in Erestor's hair, clutched at the material of the robes on the counselor's back, mind finally finding peace through it all, at being allowed, and at being held in return. Perhaps, Glorfindel thought, this time it would be all right.

Above them hung the Moon high and brightly, and about them was a pleasant breeze. If it was possible to be somewhere unmoving until Arda's end, this would be that moment for Glorfindel.
Chapter 19

There was a fluttering in Glorfindel's chest as he awoke the following morning. It was a careful, giddy sort of happiness, but warm beneath the blankets and with the addition of soft heartbeats in his ear, he felt the feeling grow bolder, only too eager to trust and hope for good things to come.

In the too few days that he and Erestor shared a bed, Glorfindel would often wake with the weight of a dark head resting against his arm. Glorfindel, after all, was always first to pull Erestor to himself whenever they retired to bed in the evening, with Erestor merely allowing it first with some embarrassment, and then later with indulgent, little smiles.

It was therefore Glorfindel who would hold Erestor, and that was the position they would often wake to and for which Glorfindel had absolutely no complaints. But that morning found him resting against Erestor's chest for a change. He had needed that comfort from the night before, and he had pulled Erestor and stuck close to him until the heartache and the worries quieted in the wake of those arms wrapping around him. It seemed they somehow fell asleep that way. The joy that came with such a simple change was a sweet revelation, for of course it meant that Erestor allowed it, had given Glorfindel that kindness.

Memories of the night before came back to Glorfindel: Erestor's confessions, Glorfindel's offer to release Erestor from their marriage, Erestor's refusal and the reassurance that he was still willing to stay with Glorfindel. In another life, one in which Erestor had taken Glorfindel's offer, Glorfindel wondered what it would be like to wake that day to an empty room, one without Erestor, and with that thing that connected them - however insignificantly - extinguished completely. He did not have the heart to imagine it for long, and even as he did so his fingers clutch at the robes around Erestor.

Erestor asleep was a comforting sight. He was a calm sleeper, and even in the days when Glorfindel used to have mornings like this one, he would use the early hours of his waking just watching his spouse sleep. He found comfort in the slowness of Erestor's breathing, the soft haze of sleep over his eyes, the occasional warm weight of his arm on Glorfindel on particularly good mornings. Shifting his head so it rested beside Erestor's on the pillow, Glorfindel watched him, as he was wont, and even though this was far from the first time he had ever done so, he still felt that same warmth filling him. He could not have stopped his hand from rising and brushing that dark head of hair, the smooth strands sliding decadently through his fingers.

Erestor's eyes, green as deep, old woods, began to flutter and they were quick to find Glorfindel. Glorfindel, who had been waiting, met it with a calm he did not feel, at least not without the excitement and the nerves he still felt when it came to this Elf.

"Good morning," he quietly greeted.

He could see the way sleep's haze faded to give way to the chief counselor's usual sharp gaze. Glorfindel could almost see the thoughts beginning to swirl in that great mind as it awoke along with the rest of him.

"Good morning," Erestor greeted back, as carefully it seemed in turn. The shared moment broke as Erestor then turned away, caught by a yawn. He softened and stretched through it, pulling at the covers while Glorfindel just watched him, heart in his throat as his chest swelled with fondness for this Elf. Erestor's hair slipped smoothly between his fingers and the faint perfume in them filled Glorfindel's nose.

It was all just too much. "Please, Erestor." Glorfindel was suddenly saying. "May I kiss you?"
The words left him before he could reflect on them. Erestor seemed to still at them, too, but Glorfindel was relieved to see that the other did not look as though he was against the idea. Erestor nodded, albeit a little slowly.

“You need not ask,” he said, and so was Glorfindel looking forward to it that he did not even allow himself to doubt the truth of those words. He hoped instead that Erestor would but guide them if Glorfindel ever crossed a line.

He did wonder when they would ever get the hang of it. The way the mattress dipped, the intimate sound of shuffling cloth as their clothes and the covers brushed against each other, their stilted breaths - they all betrayed the awkward way they still found each other, especially now when the kiss was expected. But for all that it might lack as far as lovers or even sweethearts’ exchange of affections went, a kiss with Erestor was still that - his soft lips against Glorfindel’s, his breath tickling the sensitive edge of Glorfindel’s upper lip, the tips of his fingers just grazing the back of Glorfindel's hand. Glorfindel’s fingers found themselves buried in Erestor’s hair in no time, nostrils flaring as he breathed in deep and pressed their lips closer, crushing them as much as his nerves would allow.

Erestor's lips were soft under Glorfindel's. They went with his lead, mirroring the movements, and it was all Glorfindel could do not to bite, so sweet was it when Erestor returned their kiss. He felt it, too, the stirrings of desire, not anymore alien these days. It crawled up in him wrapped as they were in the warmth of their makeshift cocoon, the air growing hot and seductive as kisses melted one after another. Erestor’s fingers had wrapped loosely around Glorfindel’s wrists, and the unconscious brushing of fingertips against the thin, sensitive skin above his pulse was not at all helping.

Glorfindel willed himself to pull away before the urge to push Erestor down and do more threatened to overwhelm him. That heat coiling at the pit of his gut was growing dangerous, too, but he doubted that such things were appropriate given the wounds they opened just the night before.

Sunlight met him, reflected in Erestor’s eyes, as his own opened slowly when they emerged from that kiss. They regarded one another, at first carefully. Glorfindel could see the way Erestor scanned his face, and he did his best to remain still under that scrutiny, ever willing to be subject to whatever it was that would reassure the other. His efforts were rewarded with fingers sifting through his hair, and he closed his eyes again, helpless and flushing at that careful affection.

“We should get up in a while.”

It was at least a consolation that Erestor’s tone was regretful even as he said the words, as though he, too, loathed to leave this moment. Glorfindel therefore found the courage to move closer to him, to rise the short way needed to bury his face in Erestor's hair on a spot below his ear, to breathe in deeply as his arms wrapped around the other.

"You could say something," said Glorfindel, his words at first muffled by that thick fall of hair. "Send notice to Galadir that you have need of me and that he can take care of the guards for today."

Erestor laughed at this, and the deep sound reverberated through Glorfindel’s chest, pressed together as they were.

"That is too short a notice, Captain, and there is no way that something that vague would be accepted as a legitimate excuse. Knowing your deputy, by mid-morning the whole valley will have heard of how the chief counselor abused his power to—" Erestor cleared his throat "—keep his husband in bed."

It was good they were not facing one another, for who knew what kind of face Glorfindel even made at the suggestion. True, such a thing was almost guaranteed to happen were Erestor to do as
Glorfindel had suggested, but that did not make it less easy not to groan in embarrassment - and perhaps some other things - at the very idea.

"Valar, if only..." Glorfindel grumbled against Erestor’s clothed shoulder.

“What was that?”

It was not always easy, lying with Erestor like this. He was a warm, living body in Glorfindel’s arms, beautiful even among Elves, the one Glorfindel yearned for all those years in Gondolin. He had always been drawn to Erestor, and now, with the memory of his kisses still fresh in Glorfindel’s mind, Glorfindel itched to pull Erestor even closer, to feel more skin instead of the layer of clothes that Erestor wrapped around himself.

"Erestor, I--"

But the long years stretched between them, and Erestor’s personal history only added to the distance. How does one even ask another to bridge the space left behind by all these things? It was even only the evening prior that they unearthed what was keeping Erestor back. Glorfindel could only send thanks to the Valar that that encounter did not leave him without a husband in the end at all. The possibility of it left him cold, the distractions of earlier this morning momentarily forgotten. His arms tightened instead around Erestor.

"Nothing," he mumbled against a clothed shoulder. “It is just that… I do not wish to leave.”

They stayed still for a time, so that Glorfindel had to wonder if Erestor caught the shift in his mood when he thought about last night. But there were fingers in Glorfindel’s hair, lazily brushing them near his ear. It was a peaceful thing and it calmed his heart, and even eventually, just a few moments in, he could feel himself growing sleepy again.

Alas, it was not to be. The movements stopped and he felt a light tap on his shoulder.

"Go," said Erestor. His voice sounded more awake. “I shall see you when you are done. We cannot skip work today, for we begin celebrating the harvest, and we shall have few days for work enough as it is. You know how rowdy things can be this time of the year; we are not likely to get much done for the next couple of days."

Glorfindel had nearly forgotten the season given the recent rains, but sure enough, they were indeed at that time of year. The harvest festival was well-loved in Imladris when the valley would celebrate its time of plenty. The valley did get rowdy indeed, as Erestor said, and Glorfindel could not help but groan again, this time because he did not look forward to all the problems he and the guard would have to fix what with people drunk and making merry for days on end.

He felt Erestor chuckle above him. "Perhaps we could check the fields later, see what ruckus the valley has come up with this time,” he said. “If we can manage to finish our days earlier, then it might be nice to take some time to relax.”

Glorfindel rolled his head up to find Erestor looking down at him. There was a calm expression on his face, and just like that, Glorfindel felt his own mind easing. He returned that look with a smile, this time thinking that perhaps the day would not be so bad. “That sounds good. Shall I come to your office?”

"Let us see who finishes his day first, and then he can go and pick up the other.”

Their day thus planned, the two reluctantly rose to prepare for the day ahead. As they were in Glorfindel’s room, Erestor picked at the robes he wore and brushed fingers through his hair so he
could be presentable enough to walk down the halls. Sometimes Glorfindel wondered if anybody ever saw Erestor whenever he had to walk back to his own rooms in the mornings. Most married Elves would of course share rooms, but it was not unheard of for high officials, especially ones who were married for many years, to have their own separate quarters.

He rose as Erestor did and walked with him to the door. There was little else to be said so they remained quiet. But just as they neared the threshold, Erestor turned and briefly met Glorfindel’s eyes.

Glorfindel suddenly found his arms full, Erestor having stepped within them and Glorfindel’s own hands naturally finding purchase on the slender curve of his waist. Erestor leaned over and kissed him softly, just like that and with no preamble. Glorfindel of course kissed back, once the shock of it passed, for it was not everyday that Erestor initiated a kiss, and soft though this might be, he felt his fingers trembling all the same.

Erestor pulled away far too quickly. Glorfindel opened his eyes to find sharp green waiting for him.

“Thank you, Glorfindel.”

And then he left, opening the door and closing it behind him. Glorfindel remained standing there, the blood yet to flow back to his limbs, so weak did the unexpected kiss leave him. His lips tingled at the memory, too, so that his hand slowly lifted to rub at it, though it only served to make Glorfindel miss it even more.

Imladris never let anyone stay quiet for long. The harvest festival was a particularly boisterous affair, just all noise and colors as Elves and all their guests come to rejoice and give thanks to yet another year of plenty. All around them were the gold and green things of summer moving on to autumn, colorful decor hung up in trees, walls, columns and everywhere else that could take them. Music was all around them, and not far from it were the sounds of laughter and silly stories.

Erestor walking around such surroundings was always a heart-warming sight. For their walk, the chief counselor wore light robes the color of wheat fields, his circlet simple, and the only rings he wore were his ring of office as Elrond’s chief counselor and his gold marriage band.

Glorfindel stared at that golden ring longer and far more often than he cared to admit to anyone.

"Captain! Chief Counselor!"

They turned to see Anoriel running towards them, the lady minstrel looking winded as she stopped in front of them both. She paused to catch her breath before her usual cheer returned.

"Good! I found you," she said, albeit still a little breathless. She straightened quickly enough and gestured all around them. “Lucky the rains finally stopped, eh? We had to work through nights just to get everything ready given the days we lost to the rains, but we pulled it off anyhow, didn’t we?”

“Indeed you have,” said Erestor, gifting her with a smile. “You have done well, my lady.”

“Thank you, thank you.” Anoriel received the praise with cheerful grace and even did a little curtsy for Erestor. That was done quickly though, for she next grabbed both their arms and with a grin began pulling them to where she had come from. “Now, to my errand! Come, my lords, for I was sent to look for you.”

There was not much chance to refuse, for the lady had surprising strength on her when she put her
mind to it. Glorfindel exchanged a glance with Erestor, for they were not expecting to be accosted in
the middle of what was supposed to be a casual stroll around the grounds. Erestor shrugged, looking
just as clueless as Glorfindel.

They were led to a great crabapple tree, around which gathered a crowd of Elves. The tree was one
with branches that stretched out all around it. It was only when they came closer that they saw the
apples that hung from strings tied around the branches, below which were different pairs of Elves.
Galadir was there with Naurwen, his wife, and even Elrond and Celebrían were present. Their new
Lady, bright and like sparkling silver under all the gold of harvest, let go of her husband's hand to
wave enthusiastically upon seeing them.

"There you both are!" she greeted. She promptly went forward to pull them to the apple beside hers
and Elrond's. "We saved you a spot right here."

Glorfindel exchanged another look with Erestor, because that really told them nothing.

"All right, good work, Anoriel!" It was Lindir this time who spoke, standing on a makeshift platform
in the middle of that crowd. He raised his voice above the chatter all around him, his own bright grin
aimed at the newcomers. "Good of you to join us, Captain and Chief Counselor. You have eluded us
in previous seasons, but that evil ends today!"

A round of applause followed this announcement, which was met only with confusion from the two
high officers.

"What on earth is Lindir talking about now?" Glorfindel asked beside Erestor, whose brows were
scrunched together as he looked up at Lindir.

"I do not know, but I have a bad feeling about this."

"Now with all couples in, I would like to go over the rules of the game again." Lindir went on as he
faced the crowd. "Each couple has an apple between them. Without the use of their hands, they must
work together to finish off their apple before any of the other couples are done with theirs. The first
one to complete this task will of course be declared our winner!"

"What prize are we even playing for?" yelled Glorfindel over the crowd.

"Bragging rights, of course!" Celebrían happily answered him, as though this prize was enough to
play. This was followed by laughter from the other couples.

"Indeed, my lady, and what a most coveted prize that is, to be sure!" Lindir laughed along before
turning his grin at Glorfindel, who was shaking his head. The chief minstrel leaned over to him and
stage-whispered, "There is also a bottle of Dorwinion up for grabs for all you raging alcoholics." He
winked at Erestor, who promptly looked affronted.

"I beg your pardon--"

Lindir ignored him. "Couples hold hands now!"

Before either of them could protest further, there were game ushers coming towards them and
pushing them to stand closer face to face, with their fresh red apple hanging between them. Wide
eyes just caught each other right before their hands were forced together, and Glorfindel just knew he
flushed throughout when their ushers would not let them go. There was a faint flush on Erestor's
cheeks, too, but his eyes were sparkling with mirth as he watched the two ushers on either side of
Glorfindel, while he and the other participants were only assigned one or none at all.
"Remember: no touching of the apples, to all of you participants. I am looking at you, Glorfindel."

Glorfindel scowled at Lindir. "Why me?" came his protests, but the others were laughing around him. Erestor laughed, too, and suddenly Glorfindel found he was not so upset after all.

Lindir did another last moment check to see if all was ready. "All right, then?" Another short round of checks, and then: "Go!"

The game began in earnest, that is at least for the couples around Glorfindel and Erestor. The two of course hesitated, though all around them couples began attacking their apples with gusto. Many of the couples seemed to struggle with how to begin, missing their mark and having their fruits swaying this way and that to the great entertainment of their audience. Galadir and Naurwen, however, seemed to have a good strategy going for them, both Elves already alternating bites and appearing to be off to a good start. Glorfindel was mildly impressed.

"Erestor, what is this!" Lindir shouted over to them. His voice went up a dramatic pitch. "I never thought I would see our dear and capable chief counselor losing a fight, and so easily!"

Glorfindel would have rolled his eyes at the blatant and transparent attempt to rile Erestor, if not for the fact that Erestor did it first. That was not to say that the tactic did not work, for Erestor did look at their apple as though it was some troublesome thing. He then seemed to sigh before telling Glorfindel, "Here, you bite first."

"Pardon?"

But Erestor had already leaned over the apple and placed his cheek against where it hung. He then signaled to a shocked Glorfindel, even tugging on their joint hands for good measure. Glorfindel, hesitating at first, leaned closer and tried to take a bite. The fruit slipped away between them, causing him to bump his nose against Erestor's cheek.

"Apologies!" he said immediately, but Erestor only laughed.

"What are you doing being all formal in the middle of all of this ruckus?" Erestor shook his head. His eyes followed the swaying of their apple. "Nevermind all that."

He seemed to have gotten the hang of the game before Glorfindel, for it was the string he chased and bit between his teeth, steadying the fruit. He then pulled down with his hands, forcing a shocked Glorfindel to bend lower, and as though that was not surprise enough, the apple was shoved on his face and pressed on his nose and lips as Erestor quickly took a bite.

"Come, your turn." He signaled for Glorfindel to move as though the other was not too busy flushing at the intimacy of the game. No wonder it was all real couples in here, for otherwise the goal of the game could fast turn awkward. Erestor, who seemed to hold less inhibitions than Glorfindel, only clicked his tongue at his partner's delay. He went for a second bite, urging Glorfindel to do the same with another tug on his hands.

They did eventually get better it, Glorfindel successfully taking his first bite and getting into the game as well, to the great amusement of the crowd near them. They were not singled out though, for all couples were giving equal entertainment, peals of laughter rising here and there at different points in the game.

The crowd around them shouted and cheered for their favorites. Soon it seemed there were two couples vying for the prize: Elrond and Celebíran getting loud cheers, rivaled by those for Galadir and Naurwen. But the other couples were not too far off, and even Glorfindel and Erestor had
eventually caught pace with the others.

It was Celebrían's distressed cry that signaled the end of the game, with Naurwen cheering and her husband wearing a smug grin as he presented their finished apple to the crowd of spectators. Glorfindel could not help but laugh at the way Celebrían seemed to contest the results, although of course it was all in jest and she later embraced Naurwen in congratulations.

"We have our winner!" Lindir declared with much cheering, Galadir and Naurwen bowing graciously in the middle of it all, their prized bottle held by a happy-looking Galadir.

The crowd then began to disperse, during which Lindir turned to Erestor and threw out, “Thanks for the entertainment, Counselor. Too bad about losing.”

“Please,” said Erestor with mock disdain. “We could have won that had we been here not clueless and of our own free will.”

To this, the chief minstrel merely grinned. “Well, that is what you get for being caught unawares, isn’t it? Next time, you ought to be more proactive.”

Erestor huffed and pulled Glorfindel away from the tree. Lindir let them go with a cheery wave.

"That was fun," said Glorfindel as they walked away from the noisy crowd. His face still felt warm from the exertion and the afternoon sunlight still overhead. He pulled Erestor closer by his hand and Erestor let him, even finally returning his smile when they were far enough from the crowd.

"Aye, it was, but do not tell Lindir that." The game seemed to have eased whatever tension Erestor still carried when they left for the fields earlier. This time, he even linked their joint hands so their fingers rested and curled together more comfortably, and just like that, Glorfindel was once again distracted.

The couple games likely continued elsewhere; they seemed to silently agree that they would henceforth be on the lookout for them so that they could avoid them entirely. In later years, perhaps they would join in again when things were more comfortable between them, not to mention less likely to cause embarrassment in front of an audience. As it was, they were walking in public like lovers for the first time, and Imladris, none the wiser, just took it all in stride. They were regarded as any old couple, as though walking together hand in hand was but an everyday sort of thing.

Oh, if they knew.

Still, Glorfindel for his part had never felt happier. Erestor that day was quick to smile, relaxed here in their comfortable home in the valley, and Glorfindel had front row seats for it all. He was so different now, and more and more these days, Glorfindel could barely recognize his young spouse back in Gondolin. It truly was a very long time ago, so much longer by Erestor’s reckoning. Glorfindel himself perhaps changed little, as Erestor even used to say, a remnant of an old world that otherwise would have remained in books and old memories.

"Chief Counselor!"

It was a lady behind a stall that called to them this time. She was someone Erestor recognized, and he approached her, Glorfindel in tow.

"Look!" she said, inviting the counselor closer. "We have that green ink you favor, fresh from the south of Gondor. Here, I have set aside a bottle just for you."

“That is very kind, thank you,” said Erestor, receiving the ink bottle she handed to him.
The stall was filled with interesting things, many of which looked like they would be right at home on Erestor's desk. There were quills of different sizes, with shapes and patterns Glorfindel had never seen before, parchment of different colors, weights, knives for letters, and even a stack of books to one side.

“Let me buy that for you,” said Glorfindel, inspired by the handsome wares. “Is there anything else here that you like?”

Erestor's eyes widened at the question. “You do not have to, Glorfindel.”

But the lady at the stall only clicked her tongue at him. “Nonsense! What use is a husband if not to buy you nice things?” Before either of them could say anything to that, she took an item from the side, and pushed it at Glorfindel. “Here, my lord.”

At first, Glorfindel did not know what it was. It looked like a sack at first, albeit one with a nicely sewn pattern. He then realized it was perhaps a small pillow of some sort, whatever was inside it wrapped in a sturdy sort of woven fabric.

The lady continued on about it. “This is new, brought in once again by merchants from the south. My sister, you see, she travels sometimes with Master Gildor when he goes, and she thought this was quite the find. It contains seeds and some dried herbs, peppermint and the like. You can sleep with it, or if you sit all day you can put it between your chair and your lower back, or maybe around your neck if you’ve a good chair for it. It helps to ease some of the ache one might feel after long days. It smells quite lovely, too, you see?”

She brought the pillow up to their noses and indeed, the soothing scent of mint and even a hint of lavender rose up to them. Glorfindel noted the way Erestor’s eyebrow rose at this, and smiled. Erestor liked it, he could tell, and everyone in Imladris and even beyond it knew how hard the chief counselor worked.

“We shall take it,” Glorfindel declared.

He felt Erestor’s hand tighten in his, but he appeased that with just a tiny pat before he reached for the coin pouch he kept inside his tunic. Erestor was silent as Glorfindel exchanged his coins for the lady’s pillow and bottle of ink, but he took the items all the same when Glorfindel handed him the parcel.

“Thank you for these,” he said to Glorfindel when they had stepped away from the stall. His voice sounded rough at the words, and he even cleared his throat before speaking again. “You really did not have to. They were both expensive.”

“Not really,” said Glorfindel, smiling at the lady who was grinning at them from behind her stall. “You buy that ink yourself, do you not?’’

“Yes, but even I know it is an indulgence.”

Glorfindel shrugged. “Then, just use it well. The pillow also seemed like something you ought to have. You could definitely use something like that what with how long you work most days. You deserve it, and I wish to give it to you.”

Really, Erestor's smile was all Glorfindel had been working for, and the other gave it to him now - small, shy, and perhaps a little embarrassed. He refused when Glorfindel offered to carry the items for him, instead carrying them himself carefully, tucked close to his chest.
The harvest festival stretched on for several days. It had always been one of Imladris' more festive occasions, for the farmers pulled as many hands they could get during harvest season, so that in the end more than half the valley were ready to celebrate a good year's worth of hard work.

Whenever they could, Glorfindel and Erestor would walk around the stalls, for new merchants came everyday so that each day saw some variety. Erestor especially liked the ones that sold different edible things, and sometimes there were those who set up a stall to sell things they made for leisure.

Glorfindel was on his way to Erestor's office one such afternoon. They were closing in on the latter days of the festival and the grounds were no longer as crowded as it had been on the first days. Still, they took to their walks, which they both seemed to enjoy, so far be it for Glorfindel not to milk a good thing for all it was worth.

That day, however, he found no Erestor in the chief counselor's office. There instead was Lindir, carefully arranging a small but lavishly wrapped box on Erestor's desk.

"Do I want to ask why you are leaving gifts for my husband, Lindir, or is this the end of a beautiful friendship between us?"

Lindir looked up at the captain leaning with his arms folded under the doorway. If anything, the minstrel's smile just turned wicked as he went on to - this time pointedly - adjust the ribbon on the parcel. "Oh no, you caught me," he drawled, voice oozing with mock fright. "Here comes the husband. But! We must risk it all for love. Today is our anniversary, after all, Erestor and mine."

An eyebrow rose at this. "Digging yourself deeper in the hole there, my friend."

Lindir laughed so loud, it echoed around the stone walls. "Oh, calm your golden curls, Glorfindel, I can see your hackles rising from here. Aah, it's just hilarious." He made as though he was wiping tears from his eyes. "Alas! 'Tis not what you think. I call this day the anniversary of our friendship, for you see, on this day or thereabouts, some years ago, Erestor found me bleeding and resigned to fading in the fields of Dagorlad, and decided - all on his own, mind you - that I shall live still." Glorfindel's surprise must have shown on his face, for Lindir grinned, raising his eyebrows in a comical way that belied the gravity of his words. "Thought the two of you are the only ones with history, huh? It is good, I think, that this day comes at the height of all the festivities."

Understanding the moment, Glorfindel entered the room and sat down on the chair in front of the chief counselor's desk. "I do not know this story," he told Lindir, curious, and perhaps with his voice more solemn. "You were in the war?"

"Erestor was my commander," said Lindir with a nod.

"Commander?" repeated Glorfindel, sitting back in surprise.

"The High King called for a large host then, and there were few who did not answer his call."

Lindir sat at the edge of the desk as he recounted his story. "I had a brother - Laeros, my twin. My only family, for our mother died when she bore us, and our father only lived on long enough to see us through childhood. When he could no longer go on, he sailed after my mother."

"I did not know you have a brother," said Glorfindel. Lindir was one of the friendliest Elves in Imladris and it was not unusual to see him with company. Glorfindel realized, however, that so often did Lindir put the spotlight on others that he never really talked about himself.

"My brother was, for the longest time, all I had. He was no warrior, but he came with me when I decided to march to war." It was so rare, seeing Lindir without a smile. He had such a light to him
that it was even the first time that Glorfindel saw him so subdued. "He... did not make it. As you
could probably tell. In front of me, he... There was an Orc. It was after me, and Laeros, he defended
me."

Glorfindel's chest tightened. "Lindir... I am sorry, my friend."

The minstrel shrugged, but he played with the parcel on the desk, not meeting Glorfindel's eyes. "His
attacker did not stay idle and came after me after that. He would have had me, too - stabbed me
already on my shoulder, for one, and really at the time, I had not the will to fight. Erestor came from
behind it and finished what my brother could not.

"And, you know, looking back, it was a time of war and one does not really have the time to be off
saving people who have no will to live when you are in the middle of all of that. But Erestor would
have none of it and all but pulled me to his tent when the healers had their hands full with the others
who were more gravely wounded. Lectured me often, too:

"'He would have you live, you fool! Do not waste a sacrifice of love by dying at the next
opportunity!'" Lindir chuckled quietly at the retelling. "It was the most words I have heard from him,
you know. He has always been a quiet one, or at least he did not speak much to us at court. Not
many tried; I mean he looked so intimidating. He also always looked like he was mourning."

Glorfindel thought back on everything Erestor had shared to him. He thought he could understand
Erestor's care for Lindir, someone who was not a soldier caught in the middle of a war, saved by a
loved one.

"I stayed with him for some time after that. I thought he took a look at me before ordering me to help
out at the supplies tents instead of taking me back into the field. Then, after the war, so many sailed. I
thought I would have sailed, too, but I found I was sufficiently healed. I also knew my brother would
still be in Mandos' Halls for some more time yet. There was no reason to sail, and my heart has ever
been here.

"When the High King died, so few wished to stay in Lindon. Many joined Master Círdan, but I did
not wish anymore to live so close to the Sea. Besides, I heard many good things about Imladris, and
Erestor was there." Lindir shrugged and threw Glorfindel a grin. "I grew fond of my savior, what
can I say? Even if he seldom smiles, or even if he can say such harsh things in court, and really even
if he is just a plain bore sometimes since he lacks hobbies or areas of interest save for politics and
how to run a kingdom - I mean, he is an all right kind of guy."

Glorfindel huffed a quiet laugh and shook his head. "With all those things, yes, I can see how
difficult it is for you not to like him."

"He appreciates music, I guess - if you squint."

Glorfindel's laughter was louder this time. "Do not feel as if you are obliged to defend him on my
behalf. I like Erestor for my own reasons."

Mischief returned to Lindir's face. "Oh, I am sure. Care to share your reasons with me? You might
find I share them, too. I do admit he is quite handsome - pretty maybe, in some angles, and dare I talk
about that gorgeous silhouette--"

"Lindir..." Once again, Glorfindel shook his head. "So you do like him. How come you annoy him
so much?"

"How else can one get through to him? Before you came, I worried about his solitary ways. It is not
much of a life, you know? I never do anything to really make trouble for him, nothing that he cannot fix. Did you notice he likes to fix things? He is only ever around when there is work to do."

"Ah. That... I suppose it makes sense." Through the years, Glorfindel did see how Lindir seemed to keep Erestor busy, how much he teased him. He thought it was Erestor and Lindir’s particular brand of friendship. “Still strange."

"Your husband is strange,” said Lindir, raising his arms up in a full-bodied stretch as though he was not throwing slurs at friends. "I mean, no offense. Strange in the best ways."

"Thanks. I think."

"It's complicated, our relationship!” Lindir’s smile was bright from across the desk. “Maybe if you were out of the picture, we could write our own love story, he and I. Sounds nice, right? Love in a time of war, so much loss and tears, but there amidst it all is a bright light, pulling one afloat. I could follow him in peace time and work so that he notices me. It will be a sell-out."

Glorfindel frowned at the idea, which made Lindir bark out another laugh.

"Your face! Oh, just look at you, you precious sap. I just knew you would be the jealous type, old thing that you are. Wait 'til I tell everyone."

Did he really feel sympathy just a while ago for this foolish Elf? "Wait 'til I hit you in the face and then we shall see who is laughing, you annoying spawn of a--"

"If you must turn to violence and foul language, I insist that you do so outside and far from my office.” The voice came from the direction of the door, to which Glorfindel and Lindir turned. Erestor stood just past the doorway, a scroll in hand, the other resting on his waist as he eyed the two Elves in his office. "Is there a reason why two supposedly respectable members of Elrond’s household are loitering in my office?"

"Chief Counselor!” greeted Lindir. “Hello, hello. Looking dashing as usual, I see. Alas! You seem to have witnessed a side of your husband that he has been so carefully concealing from you. To the rest of us he is nothing but a brute and an animal, a right bully. Oh, for shame!"

Glorfindel turned back at him. "Lindir, for the love of--"

"All right, enough!" Erestor strode into the room and went for the desk with such purpose that Lindir sidled out of the way without further prompting. “I do not care what it is you two are squabbling about, but I will not be used as bait. Go away, both of you. I need to work."

He ignored the way Glorfindel's face fell and Lindir's unrepentant grinning. In fact, he ignored them altogether in favor of opening the scroll he held, looking for all intents and purposes as though he would just work, uninvited guests around or no.

He then seemed to notice Lindir's gift. He glanced at it and paused for a time, before bringing his attention back to his work.

Lindir looked at Glorfindel and shrugged. "It's like a strange courtship, really," he said in a stage-whisper. "He does not open it now but I know he will treasure it later. He keeps all my gifts. See, you do not see his love for you, but you feel it."

"Lindir, my friend." Glorfindel settled his arm around the minstrel's shoulder and began to walk them out of the room. "You really have a poor sense of self-preservation, don't you?" He let his hand squeeze - hard.
"Ouch! That hurts, you horrible boar!"

"Quiet, I said," came the warning voice behind them.

Glorfindel and Lindir ended up exiting the office with matching snickers, which only grew louder at the greatly exasperated sigh they heard behind them.

Glorfindel let Erestor stew for a bit before returning some hours later. It had already grown late so the sconces were lit in the hallways and Erestor had his own lamplight burning on his desk. Glorfindel smiled fondly at the sight. This time, he knocked and alerted the other of his presence, waited for Erestor’s dark head to lift up and nod in permission before he entered.

He approached the desk once again and took the seat in front like he did earlier, content to just watch Erestor for some time.

The counselor, however, stopped what he was doing and looked up at Glorfindel. "What is it?"

He truly was still a mystery. Or perhaps Glorfindel only felt it so, so curious was he of everything about this Elf he married. They married, after all, with Erestor only barely past a century and knowing nothing beyond the towering mountains of the Echoriath. Somehow, they knew each other again here in Imladris, but what were these years to the ones that Erestor shared with others? To Erestor, many of his years were full of loss and guilt, but beyond that, Glorfindel could see that he had around him people who loved him. Elrond, Lindir, even Elves like Gildor and the others here in Imladris, and even outside of it - they knew Erestor and liked him, respected him, not unlike Glorfindel’s House when they met Erestor long ago.

"You are a good person, you know," he told him, voice soft with affection. "To have loved you and to love you, I do not see this as anything to regret."

Dark eyebrows furrowed at the words. Glorfindel chuckled and shook his head at Erestor’s confusion, and only went on speaking.

"The life you lived without me had been so long. Even with the things you have told me, I feel like I have only scratched the surface. I have listened to your stories these past several days, though foolishly I now just remember that it is not only you who have seen your life. Many here speak well of you. Perhaps next time, you should come with me at the telling and listen to how fondly you are regarded."

To this Erestor was silent, though Glorfindel did not really expect him to have much to say. He even spared him from speaking, for he knew his last words might have made Erestor uncomfortable. He quickly changed the subject.

"What is your favorite color, Erestor?"

Erestor, who had averted his eyes from Glorfindel, looked up at him once again. The look of confusion had returned. "Pardon?"

"Many here must know you in ways I do not," explained Glorfindel. "I do not even know the most basic of things, and here I find you receive gifts from Elves who likely do so every year. Do you like the gifts Lindir gives you?"

"They are--" Erestor cleared his throat "--adequate. He gives useful gifts, although I have told him time and again that he really need not give me anything."

"Does he know your favorite color?"
Erestor sighed and his eyes lifted briefly to the ceiling, although Glorfindel thought he could recognize a faint flush on those cheeks despite the low light. “No, or at least I do not know. But I—” He sighed. “I like green things, I suppose?”

“Aah, hence the ink, then?” asked Glorfindel, referring to the rare bottle they bought a few days ago at the festival, and which now had its place on Erestor’s desk, just to the side of Glorfindel’s elbow. “Hence the ink, I guess you could say. I never really thought about it.”

“What of food?” asked Glorfindel next. “I know you like new things, but I notice here in the valley at least you like hearty things, stews and the like. And roasts, yes? What else?”

“Aye. When there has been a fresh hunt, or when we have plenty of game, those are good times of the year.”

“Aah. I will be sure to remember for next time we go out hunting, I will ask you if you have something especially to request.” Glorfindel found himself enjoying these revelations, so that his mind was now bursting with even more questions. “Then, how about your—”

“Wait, Glorfindel.”

Despite having cut Glorfindel off, Erestor was not quick to speak again. He looked troubled, but about what Glorfindel could not yet guess. The counselor once again cleared his throat. “You have not told me yours,” he said. At Glorfindel’s look of surprise, he went on to expound. “Your favorite color, I mean. And the things you like.”

Glorfindel’s smile, when it came, was bright, giddy, for was it not always a sweet thing when one’s beloved reciprocated interest? Erestor was seldom expressive, and so long did Glorfindel spend guessing the contents of his mind that affection from him still came as a surprise.

They spent the evening like that, walk forgotten, instead just exchanging questions and stories that were more trivial and personal than they had exchanged in the years that they had known one another. It even stretched on until late so that they surely missed the dinner bell, and it was not until Erestor’s lamp required refilling that they noticed the time.

“I have kept you. I am sorry,” he said to Glorfindel, who only huffed in amusement. “More like I have kept you, both from work and the evening meal.”

Erestor smiled a small smile. He pushed back his chair and stood, though he seemed to hesitate, and just looked at Glorfindel for some time. “I could have dinner arranged,” he said slowly, as though choosing his words. “We could have it in my rooms, if you like.”

Like so, he caught Glorfindel once again by surprise. Between the two of them, Glorfindel was the one more forward about approaching Erestor, and so was the one always quick to pull the other and invite him to his rooms. Even in the years when they were forging a careful sort of friendship, they always met in less personal places like the library, the courtyards, their respective offices. Of course Glorfindel had always been curious of Erestor’s private space, but he never intruded, never asked for something Erestor did not first offer. Any time spent with Erestor, after all, was precious and good; where they were mattered less than simply having him around.

To be invited this time… really, how silly were they, to be so old and to be together for so long but
still have first times they were yet to share? Only Erestor ever made Glorfindel feel this way, so old and so young, both in equal parts - nervous, foolish, stretched by the years and yet, every time, aching with the urge to take him in his arms and never let him leave.

“Please,” he answered, heart fluttering like that of a youth in the throes of his first love. “That sounds lovely.”

End Notes

I would love to hear from you!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!