The leaves crunched as they walked, staring down at the ground to be sure not to trip over a rock or step on something undesirable. Legolas led the way alone, the others following quite a distance behind. The two horses spanned the distance, allowing Gimli and Aragorn private time to talk with each other. It was almost unbelievable that the elf could not hear them, with his heightened senses, but they were careful to keep their conversation to the lowest whispers possible.

“But you got him last night,” growled Gimli out of the corner of his mouth.

“Ah,” said Aragorn. “But you had him this morning before we set off, down by the stream.”
“I didn’t!” said Gimli unconvincingly. He had meant for that incident to have remained unheard as well. But he supposed even a sleeping human could have heard their grunts and moans of pleasure from a good distance.

“You did,” said Aragorn calmly. “Which means, it is again my turn.”

Gimli’s mouth hung open. “You had him to yourself all last night. You shared his bedroll all night long. That hardly equals a morning quickie in my opinion.”

Aragorn shrugged. “I cannot help it if dwarves come too quickly to enjoy their partners properly.”

“What?!” Gimli exploded, and nearly ran into the back of a horse as Legolas stopped abruptly in front of them at the sound. Swiftly, Aragorn helped pull him back before the horse had a chance to kick. Legolas looked back at his friends. Aragorn shrugged innocently and Gimli bit his tongue. “He insulted my mother,” he muttered loud enough for Legolas to hear.

Legolas did not look pleased. Nor did he look as though he believed Gimli in the least. “Mmm, I thought as much. What did I tell you about that, Aragorn?”

“My apologies,” Aragorn replied with a dramatic bow, hand flourish and all.

Legolas nodded, his smile resting only in his eyes rather than his face, which remained a normal, elvish calm. He turned his eyes back to the path in front of them and continued walking along the rocky terrain. The horses followed obediently, and the man and dwarf brought up the rear.

“Keep your voice down,” purred Aragorn with amusement. Once the dwarf was angry, it was much easier to win a battle of logic against him.

Gimli grumbled. He took his eyes off the path as it curved, looking up at the elf in front of them. Legolas walked tall, gracefully, almost glowing with gorgeousness. He wanted Legolas now, and wanted him quite badly. Wanted everything from those kissable lips to his delicate ass. The smooth, luscious skin. Those deep, kindly eyes. Those—

“Gimli?”

Gimli snapped out of thoughts of elf worshiping, made sure his face looked stern, and turned up to Aragorn. “Aye?”

“He is mine.”

Gimli’s hand clenched tightly around the handle of his axe, though he certainly did not intend to strike. He simply needed to relieve some tension. “Not anymore he is not.”

Aragorn sighed softly. “I knew we were going to have problems with this whole elf-sharing business.” Aragorn looked up as well, seeing past the horses to the top of the elf’s blonde head bouncing slightly as he walked. “But it is my turn,” he said, looking back down. “Besides… I saw him first.”

“That has absolutely nothing to do with it!” growled Gimli, who had to remind himself to be angry in a more quiet fashion. “You had him yesterday, so I get him today.”

“Ah, but you had him in the morning, so I get him at night.”

Gimli was quickly agreeing with Aragorn that elf-sharing, though it had seemed like the
best arrangement for all at first, was simply not going to work. If Legolas had his way, they would all be there together, naked and touching all at once. Gimli shivered at the thought of being with a naked Aragorn. As far as he was concerned, he did not wish to see the man dressing in the morning, let alone naked and thrusting into their mutual lover.

“It is growing dark!” said Legolas, stopping again and looking around. “There is a plateau just over there. Safest place to camp for the night, I should think. No one likely to climb up the side of the gorge and attack us so there is just the one side to watch out for.” He dropped the horses’ reins and moved so that he was able to see them both. “Shall we set up, then?”

Gimli nodded and started forward. Aragorn nodded as well, calling back, “Good idea. Shall I take the horses while you scout ahead?”

Gimli grumbled. The unnatural cheerfulness in Aragorn’s voice only meant that he was trying to get on the elf’s good side. Gimli knew Legolas was not so easily taken in by an obviously fake kind word normally, but when Aragorn was concerned, it was a different matter. “Yes, good idea,” Gimli quickly repeated. “And I will go ahead with you, Legolas. After all, who knows rocks and mountains better than a dwarf?” And before Aragorn could say a word, Legolas had nodded in agreement, given them both smiles, and started up to the spot with Gimli just behind him. It was Aragorn’s turn to grumble. He tugged at the reins and followed, though slowly as the horses had to pick their path carefully over and around the rocks.

It was good that they had decided to stop when they did, for night fell much quicker than any of the three had counted on. There was little wood to be found, so the fire was small. And there was no nearby stream or river so their water was limited. The absence of such things also meant little shelter from the cold and the wind. There were a few small boulders here and there, but on the whole the plateau was sparse and uncomforting. Aragorn and Gimli stuck close to the fire for warmth as, to their surprise, did Legolas.

The elf looked pale. Paler than was natural for an elf. And his eyes seemed to hide something more than usual. Neither Aragorn nor Gimli thought to concern themselves with this at first, simply feeling glad to have Legolas so close.

“We made good time today,” said Aragorn. “At this rate, it will only be a few more days until we are there.”

“I should be glad for a warm bed and a full belly again,” said Gimli with a grin and a pat to his round stomach.

It was Legolas’ turn to make some off-handed, terribly predictable comment, perhaps about the cold or all the walking or the food. But he stayed silent, looking down at the small crackling fire. He held his hands out, palms facing the fire, then rubbed them together to generate a little heat. But elves did not get cold so easily. He had been warm and fine after climbing out of avalanches or ready to move on after swimming across icy rivers. While he had kept them company by the fireside upon many occasions, usually with tales of adventure and heroism, he had never sat there before specifically for the warmth. And now he seemed both cold and silent.

Aragorn and Gimli exchanged looks. “Er…” Gimli tried to think of something to say, though his mind was racing to try and figure out what was going wrong with Legolas. “I could open a bottle of whiskey if anyone is interested? I brought an extra one along.”

“No thank you,” said Aragorn with a bit of a punch, as though to stress his words and press Legolas into answering as well.

But again, the elf remained silent, not seeming to have heard or cared about the whiskey
which Gimli didn’t really feel much like drinking in the first place. Legolas, who sat on a rock, folded his arms across his stomach and rested them in his lap, leaning forward a little. Yes, he looked cold. But he also looked uncomfortable and that was most assuredly something an elf as wise and traveled as Legolas should not feel at the end of the day if all was as it should be.

Aragorn and Gimli looked at each other again. Their faces wore a mixture of exasperation, worry, and concern. Each seemed to be pleading with the other to divulge what he was thinking might be wrong, but neither seemed to want to say anything just now in front of Legolas.

But for all the thoughts crossing through their mind, some on target, some completely off, both were startled into jumping a bit when Legolas sneezed. “ehhhKixt!” Wet. Sudden. Strong.

“Legolas?” asked Aragorn the moment the shock wore off.

Legolas shook his head to indicate he could not presently explain, the reason for which was another sneeze already on its way. His mouth open, eyes closed, arms still in his lap, he jerked further forward at the force. “ihhKEHtshh!ehhhKEHshh! Ketshhh!” He sniffed wetly a few times and shivered, arms tensing as they struggled to get even closer to his body for warmth. “I…” he trailed off and sniffed again, not really knowing what to say. Aragorn and Gimli were both staring at him, expecting answers. Expecting something. He sniffed again. “I… I could use a hanky?” he asked meekly.

Aragorn did not have one on him, but Gimli did. “Sure. Take mine.” The dwarf leaned around the fire to him, arm outstretched, handkerchief in hand.

Legolas nodded a thank you and blew his nose, feeling great relief, though both Aragorn and Gimli cringed a bit at the rather unpleasant sound. “Thanks Gimli,” said Legolas, giving him a nod.

Not to be outdone, Aragorn quickly pulled off his cloak and held it out around the fire in the other direction. “Here, take my cloak,” offered Aragorn. “You look cold.”

Legolas nodded at that gross understatement and took the cloak with another thank you, pulling it over his front and shivering beneath it as though such a thing might be hidden from their view.

“Are you…?” Gimli whispered, finally building up the courage to say what was on his mind. “Legolas, elves don’t get sick, do they?”

A much better smile appeared on Legolas’ face. “Well now, what do you-heh-thih… think-heh-Kehtchhh! hihKixttt!”

“I think you have the sniffles,” said Gimli, who had closed his eyes and winced while Legolas sneezed, freely again, despite now having the handkerchief.

“But elves hardly ever get sick!” exclaimed Aragorn, deciding to join in the conversation, though he had behaved similarly at Legolas’ rather showy way of sneezing. “And we just started out! You picked a poor time for this, Legolas.”

The elf rolled his eyes with a soft sigh. “And you always plan your head colds a month in advance, do you?” He sniffed wetly and blew his nose again. Both Aragorn and Gimli inched away so slowly it was barely noticeable. “Half a year’s notice for a stomach flu? A week’s for a little snih… sn…” he had been trying to say the word ‘sniffle’ but what he was trying to say was altogether irrelevant for his entire sentence was lost to its audience as soon as that ‘I am about to sneeze’ look crossed his face.
The elf tried to warn them, tried to explain, and tried to apologize all in one. But all he
managed to get out before it struck was a jumble of words that didn’t really convey his message as
well as his twitching nose, squinty eyes, and open mouth with lower lip quivering slightly. “I…
have to… ehhh… got to… heh-ehhh… I… sor… ihhKxtt! ehhkxtchhh! ehhhKtshhh! Ketchhhh!” Only then did he recover the
handkerchief and blow his nose again. Several times.

And Aragorn and Gimli winced again. Several times.

“You know…” tried Gimli, steeling a glance at Aragorn. “When dwarves sneeze they, er,
cover their noses.”

Legolas slouched forward, sniffing and rubbing his nose with the handkerchief. “My
apologies.” He shivered again. “I am not exactly used to this. And…” he sniffed and rubbed his
nose. “And I really do not feel so… so well… Kixsttt!” He had forgotten to raise the handkerchief
this time as well and after rubbing his nose dry and seeing their reactions, this fact occurred to him.
“Sorry. Handkerchief, right? I shall remember next time.” He looked pleadingly at them both, as
though desperately wishing them both to believe him.

Aragorn rose to his feet, faking a stretch. “I think I will go look for some more firewood,”
he said, gesturing to their measly little fire which desperately needed to be fed.

“I will come with,” added Gimli quickly, following the hurrying Aragorn down the slope
and trying his best not to trip over rocks as he did so.

“I knew he was being too silent today,” Aragorn hissed, walking so briskly to relieve his
annoyance that Gimli had to jog to keep up with him. “Of all the…”

“He cannot help… catching ill… Aragorn!” Gimli managed breathlessly. “And is… just a…
little snuffle—”

Aragorn knew this of course. He could empathize with his friend’s plight well. He simply
wished it had happened some other time in some other place. Any other time in any other place,
really. “If you are so keen to stick up for him, you can have him!” sighed Aragorn. Then
comprehension lit his face. “Yes… that is it.” Aragorn stopped so abruptly that Gimli smacked
into him and stumbled backward with a grunt. Aragorn folded his arms over his chest. “You
wanted him so badly earlier. Well, now he is yours.”

“What?!” Gimli exclaimed so loudly that they both instinctively looked back to be sure
Legolas had not heard. “Have you gone mad?” said Gimli with the same tone but much less of the
volume. “You argue that it is your turn all afternoon and now that he has a bit of a cold he is
suddenly my responsibility?”

Aragorn shrugged. “Well, this is your night, is it not? I had him last night.”

Aragorn shook his head, giving Gimli a smile. “If anyone deserves to have him now, it is
you. Go right ahead and take the elf for the night.”
“Fighting over me again?” Both Aragorn and Gimli whirled around to see Legolas there, two cloaks around his shoulders and a handkerchief clutched in his hand. He sniffed hard and put both arms around the others’ shoulders. “I thought you two agreed to share me?”

Gimli blushed, though it was not noticed in the darkness. And Aragorn forced a cough to cover his own reaction. “We… well, we only…” Gimli sputtered. He wished he knew how long Legolas had been standing there and how much he had heard.

“It is all right,” said Legolas, drawing them closer. “You can both look after me tonight.” Aragorn and Gimli exchanged looks. Then finally they both smiled with great reluctance.

“Fantastic solution,” said Aragorn.

“Problem solved,” said Gimli.

Legolas gave both a tight squeeze around the shoulders and pushed them to turn around and head back to the fire. They walked back, albeit a bit reluctantly, and Legolas let them go as he heavily sat down on the ground by the fire. He pulled the cloaks tighter around himself for warmth, moving bent legs beneath as much as possible. And he brought the handkerchief to his nose and mouth as he felt the urge to sneeze again. “ehhhlkshhh! ehhhkixttt!” He blew his nose and looked up at Gimli, grinning. “Did you see? I remembered.” His face was glowing from the dancing flames, and from his proud smile.

Gimli nodded and sat down beside him with a grunt of a sigh to be back off his feet. “Aye, Love, you did.” He swept Legolas’ blonde hair back over his shoulder and knelt halfway to mark the elf’s cheek with a gentle kiss.

“Sî, Nîn Melui,” he said softly. Aragorn pulled out Legolas’ bedroll and set it out over the ground in front of the fire. He held a kind hand out to Legolas who took it and allowed himself to be guided over to bed. “You can sleep between us tonight,” said Aragorn. Gimli nodded as though they had discussed it before. “You’ll be much warmer.”

Legolas nodded weakly, face falling to oncoming sneezes once again. He covered up, remembering without assistance, and buried his nose in the handkerchief. His eyes closed and his eyebrows moved inwards then raised. “ihhhEKxtt! ehhKshttt!” He paused, frozen in the spot the sneeze had thrown him forward into. Finally, he drew another sharp breath. “ehhh-KIHxttt!”

“And we will not be far if you need something. Anything,” added Gimli, crawling over to Legolas and pulling his hair back out of his face as he blew his nose.

He sniffled and set his head down on Aragorn’s pack, for the man had just placed it there for a pillow. Gimli tightened the blanket around Legolas tightly to keep the warmth inside with the elf. And Aragorn bent down to feel Legolas’ forehead for fever. Legolas gave another small smile. “If I’d known you two were so good at sharing, I would have tried this long ago.” He rubbed his nose and closed his eyes with the widest, most mischievous smile of the evening. Aragorn and Gimli exchanged another look.

Translations:

Sî, Nîn Melui- Here, My Lovely
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