Like Toy Soldiers

by Marta

Summary

"From the ruin of the Gladden Fields, where Isildur perished, three men only came ever back over the mountains after long wandering. One of these was Ohtar, the esquire of Isildur, who bore the shards of the sword of Elendil; and he brought them to Valandil, the heir of Isildur, who being but a child had remained here in Rivendell." ("The Council of Elrond," The Lord of the Rings)

Notes

Step by step, heart to heart,
Left right left, we all fall down
Like toy soldiers

Bit by bit, torn apart, we never win
But the battle wages on
For toy soldiers.

("Like Toy Soldiers" by Eminem)

See the end of the work for more notes

Ohtar had ridden hard, as hard and as fast as his horse could bear him, and trusted his friends to keep pace. His lord had bade him flee, even at the cost of being thought a coward, and so Ohtar had fled. Elendil was long dead and with the orcs teeming all around, Isildur seemed fated to die ere long. But Valandil, Isildur's heir, still lived in Rivendell and might yet grow into the kingship. If the Dúnedain survived so must Narsil, so Ohtar rode like the wind, hoping against hope that he might somehow escape the battle.
Somehow, by luck or by fate, he made it through the orcs' lines. And not just him: in the madness of that battle he had somehow found Celendil and Meneldir, his friends from childhood, and they had all escaped together. Once they had broken through and put some distance between them and the orcs, Ohtar knew he could go more slowly. That he should – the horses now faced a long journey, if their good fortune held, and he should spare their strength while he could. Yet he heard the battle-din on the wind, mocking him. Isildur had warned him that some might think him a coward, and Ohtar had been ready for others' ridicule, but what of his own heart? He had been sent away with a noble errand, but that had been a timely boon; Ohtar knew how close he had come to failing. The cries of the men he had left behind grated on him, and so he dug his calf into his horse's flank, hurrying her on.

Once they had broken free of the storm-cloud the orcs had brought with them, Ohtar saw the sun low in the sky. He cursed at that, for even he would not risk the horses against wild countryside after dark.

Celendil had looked over at him, questioning. "Is aught amiss?"

Ohtar craned his head toward the sun. "We have perhaps three hours of daylight left before we must make camp for the night," he said. "And what then? We are alone in the wilds, with little enough store of food and no clear idea of our path home. Do you remember how we came from Eriador, all those years ago?"

Celendil and Meneldir looked at each other uneasily. He saw in their eyes that they expected him to puzzle out answers to questions like these, a thought that unnerved him. In truth, he should have guessed it sooner. In his own mind, Ohtar was no more than a king's squire; he had never made a decision that affected anyone save himself since he had been a lad, and his purpose all his life had been to see to his lord's needs. But he saw that by unvoiced assent he was now their captain. It had been he who had kissed Isildur's ring. He who was charged with Narsil's care. Where could he turn, and where should he go?

"I know the Greenwood is north," Meneldir suggested helpfully. "The Old Forest Road is two, maybe three days that way."

Ohtar shook his head at that suggestion. "We would not get far. The orcs may yet keep watch, and they will expect Isildur to send someone that way, to seek after allies."

"Well, I can see the mountains even from here," Celendil said. "I was little more than a lad when we rode to Mordor, and I've not looked at the lords' maps as you have, Ohtar. But surely if we ride west in that way, we could then strike north or south until we found some pass."

Ohtar bit his lip, deep in thought. He had overheard Elrond's warning in Rivendell, for even then he had stood beside Isildur at the great councils. He knew that it was dangerous to try to pass the mountains by the wrong road, and he was not over-keen to stumble into a troll's den. Nor could they afford much delay in these lands; winter would soon be upon them, and if they could not be on the other side of the mountains within the next few weeks, they would need to at least find some shelter.

But Celendil's suggestion of or south struck him. He remembered the dwarves he had met during the war. They had seemed a good enough folk. Thoroughly devoted to their own ends, aye, but that at last could be relied on. Could he entice them, somehow? He doubted they would see a broken sword as a treasure to be grasped at, and that of all his gear was his most valuable treasure. He had brought no coin with him, and being but squires he and his fellows had no rich gear to offer in trade. Perhaps he might barter their horses or, failing that, appeal to their recent alliance and a promise of future reward? Dwarves knew mountains through and through, and if there was
a safe road back to Rivendell, he knew he could trust them to find it.

He had, in any event, few other choices.

"It's no use wandering aimlessly," he said. He was glad to hear some conviction in his voice, and so he continued on: "But Durin's folk are decent enough; they will help us. We'll strike south when we reach the mountains, and entreat them to guide us home."

*Entreat* sounded nobler than *beg*, and though Ohtar was prepared to do either, it struck him that he might have stumbled on a secret of governance: the power of words. With the inklings of a plan in his heart, he remembered how Isildur had carried himself before his men. Cocking his head confidently, he smiled at the others. "And the country is rich with game, so we shan't starve. As for now, the sun waits for no man." With a last glance to the battle behind them, Ohtar led the others west.

---

**End Notes**

The account of Ohtar's escape is another one of those implausible details of canon. As Christopher Tolkien notes, in *Unfinished Tales* JRRT has Ohtar escape with a companion who happens to be near at hand but in *The Lord of the Rings* Elrond reports that there were three survivors. Christopher explains that the third survivor was Estelmo, the squire of Isildur's oldest son Elendur, and that he "was one of the last to fall, but was stunned by a club, and not slain, and was found alive under Elendur's body."

Unlike Ohtar, Estelmo doesn't have any particular reason to go to Rivendell, other than perhaps a vague sense of loyalty to Isildur's sole surviving son, Valandil. How likely is it that a badly injured man would go all the way to Rivendell rather than to Gondor, Greenwood, Lórien, or any of the other settlements that he *wasn't* separated from by a huge mountain range? That he would have gone there immediately (so that Elrond would mention him as part of the same group as Ohtar)? The other option is that he happens upon Ohtar and his companion (here my Celendil), or that in defiance of Isildur's last order Ohtar doubles back on the battle and finds Estelmo there. Neither possibility seems very likely to me. Instead, I have opted for Tolkien's earlier idea that Ohtar initially escaped with two companions.

Also, Christopher Tolkien suggests that Ohtar is a title for soldiers who aren't knighted, but Elrond uses "Ohtar" as a personal name for a specific individual. I have continued that tradition. :-)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](https://example.com) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!