The Far Green Shore

by Quasar

Summary

Then Legolas built a grey ship in Ithilien, and sailed down Anduin and so over Sea; and with him, it is said, went Gimli the Dwarf.

Notes


"Look, Gimli! Do you see it?" Legolas balanced with one foot on the prow of the boat, easily adjusting to the roll and pitch of the Sea. "The Tower of Pearl, on the outermost of the Enchanted Isles!"

"Had I the eyes of an elf, as you know well I have not," came a grumble from the stern, "I still could see nothing through this flapping shroud in my way."

With a fond chuckle, Legolas headed aft and ducked nimbly under the swinging boom. "It's a sail, Gimli. The shrouds are the ropes!"

"Sails, shrouds -- might as well be a babe's swaddling-cloths for all the good they do me!" the dwarf complained.

"Why, this is poor thanks to give to the very sail which is speeding you to Valinor!"

"Speeding, you say? Have we not been on this floating flet of yours a full two weeks longer than you said it would take us? Much more of this contrary weather and we will run out of provisions."
"What, already? You packed enough gear for half a dozen, and you ate nothing at all for the first four days of the voyage! But no matter -- I still have some store of lembas in my own pack which I will share with you. I can go many days without food, if need be."

Gimli looked alarmed. "Do you think there will be a need?"

"Of course not," said Legolas, but as he spoke he turned away from his friend's gaze. "I've just told you the Enchanted Isles are in sight. With a fair wind we can reach Tol Eressëa in two days, or less."

"A fair wind, that's the key."

Gimli's mutter was low, but not low enough to escape the hearing of an elf. And it well matched the thoughts that had been troubling Legolas as well. They had been beating westward against the wind since they left the Bay of Belfalas behind them. Over time, the contrary winds had grown to a gale with driving rains and great ocean swells that sent their light ship swooping like an eagle after prey. This moment was the first break in the rain in five days, and still the wind was against them.

The sail began to flap in protest as another gust drove waves against the bow. Legolas reached to adjust the trim of the sail, but before he could touch it he sensed a subtle change in their heading and turned to frown suspiciously at Gimli's hand upon the tiller. The dwarf had claimed to know nothing whatsoever of sailing, but could even a child of Aulë fail to grasp a little of the workings of wind and sail, keel and rudder in a weeks-long voyage?

Gimli looked back in blank innocence. He must have shifted the tiller unthinkingly in response to the increased pressure from the wind. The altered heading had quieted the flapping of the sail, but it would delay their progress westward once more.

With a troubled frown that he took care to conceal from his companion, Legolas made what adjustments he could to bring the Golden Lady nearer the wind. It was not her best point of sailing, and in a stiff breeze she made almost as much leeway as headway. Even if the clouds had not closed in, Legolas knew that the Tower he had glimpsed so briefly must be slipping back below the horizon.

He laid one hand on a quivering stay and the other on the gunwale as the boat heeled over in the gale. This was his ship, for all that Gimli had had the naming of her -- every plank of her had been shaped and fitted by Legolas' own hands. Already she was strained beyond what he had ever guessed, but he knew she would not fail him. Even in the harshest weather they had yet encountered, not a single sail had split nor seam parted. She would bear them safe to the far shores, he was certain of it, and he murmured his faith to the wood and fabric that carried them across the waves.

"Come, Gimli," he said at last, breaking his communion with the vessel and moving aft. "Surely it is my turn at the tiller. You should take some rest."

Gimli eased his hand from the slender tiller without complaint, but he quickly brought his other hand across to massage it, cradled against his chest. He was wearing a leathern cap to block the chill wind from his head, and all that was visible between the bottom edge of the leather and the first bristles of his iron-grey beard were two bright eyes regarding Legolas solemnly. "You're quite sure about that dream, are you?"

Legolas tightened his lips in annoyance at the question, but somehow he found it difficult to meet that silent gaze as he answered. "I'm certain."
Gimli nodded once and started toward the prow of the little ship, then turned back a moment. "It's no such terrible thing, you know -- mortality. The King made a fine end, and the two hobbits were quite peaceful at the last!"

Now Legolas returned a stare of his own. "Indeed? Think you that Pippin would have gone so soon, had he not been hastened by grief and loneliness? And what of the Queen, Gimli? Did she not rue mortality at the end?"

"Not her own mortality, I think," Gimli murmured, abashed but trying not to show it.

"No. Only that of him whom she loved." Legolas' stare did not waver. "I've buried enough of my friends, Gimli. I would have you with me in the Undying Lands where we may forget our grief. I am certain of the dream. You will be welcomed there."

Gimli nodded once more, and this time when he headed forward he did not look back.

From his position in the stern, Legolas could not see Gimli in the small canvas shelter they had erected forward of the mast. The shelter was really for Gimli's benefit, for the cold and damp troubled his old joints. Legolas himself did not mind the wind and rain so much, except that they were barring him from the shores he had so long desired to see.

In latter years, as he had delayed sailing for love of his friends still abiding in Middle-Earth, Legolas had dreamt often of Eldamar. After the passing of King Elessar, his heart had still been torn by thoughts of his dear friend Gimli. He had steeld himself to linger in the Hither Lands another few decades, perhaps a century, and to make the voyage across the Sea in solitude, long after the rest of his kind had emptied the Havens or sought seclusion in the deepest woods.

But then he had had another dream, a new one, wherein the Lady Galadriel appeared to him and said she had obtained permission from the Valar themselves for Gimli to accompany him to the Far Shores. Overjoyed at this knowledge, Legolas had begun at once to build his fair ship. He had neglected even to ask Gimli if this was indeed his wish, and it had taken much argument and apology to soothe the dwarf's ruffled dignity and persuade him to come along.

Now Legolas, even as Gimli had done, began to wonder if his dream had been true indeed. What if Gimli was not welcome in the Undying Lands, after all? At best, that would mean they must retrace their path back to Middle-Earth -- supposing that they could survive more of this weather at all. And then the lonely wait for a beloved friend's decay and death would resume before Legolas would attempt the journey once more.

At worst, if Gimli's arrival at the western shores was indeed not to the liking of the Valar, they might face some punishment for their presumption, even as the Númenóreans had been punished by the loss of their lives and land. Legolas hoped that any such punishment would fall upon his head alone rather than Gimli's, who would never have thought to attempt such a journey without the urgings and assurances of his friend. But he knew it was more likely that they would both suffer the wrath of the Valar. Indeed, perhaps they were facing it now, in these unending storms and foul winds that hindered their progress.

For a moment, as he gazed over the surface of the waves with his thoughts turned more upon inward doubts than outer vision, Legolas imagined that the roiling black clouds off the bow were the great wave that would sweep them to the bottom of the Sea for their hubris. Then he blinked and forced himself to focus on present reality over nebulous fears.

"Here comes another squall, Gimli!" he called, even as the wind began to strengthen once more. "Make sure everything is well fastened down!"
"Ah, it needed only that to make my day complete," the dwarf grumbled from his place in the bow. Legolas could hear him shifting their gear about and hoped his friend was taking the opportunity for a bit of food before the weather struck. Then he recalled Gimli's illness in the first week of their voyage and thought perhaps he should be hoping the dwarf was putting the food away uneaten.

The storm was upon them in a few minutes, and it was the worst they had yet encountered. The Golden Lady heeled over until her starboard gunwale skimmed just above the water, while waves crashing on her port beam threw gouts of spray as high as her masthead.

All of Legolas' attention was bent upon his little ship, keeping her intact and afloat. In counterpoint to the howling of the wind, he sang encouragement to beam and boom, asking her to hold fast just a short while longer. He allowed their heading to veer northwest, and then further north, in response to the pressure of the wind.

Privately he acknowledged to himself that a point of decision had arrived. When this squall was past, he would turn the ship's prow back to the East whence they came. Permission of the Valar or no, clearly the wind did not wish them to reach their destination.

There came a moment when the Golden Lady tipped far over and her prow plunged into the next wave. A mighty gust tore at the sail and ripped free the banner Legolas had fixed to the masthead. Ithilien's gleaming moon and Aglarond's golden tresses curled in crystal went dancing away into the shadowy rain. A great wave broke over the ship's keel and washed the length of the deck. Legolas clung to the tiller, crying "Eärendil! Le nallon, men tiro a berio!"

In the next moment, the Golden Lady lifted her prow and rolled gallantly out from under the wave. She rocked sharply, like a dog shaking water from its back after emerging from a river.

The rain lashing Legolas' cheek suddenly eased, and the wind backed around until it was blowing from southeast by east. Legolas shook the salt spray from his eyes and looked up to behold the clouds parting in the west. The last afterlight of sunset gleamed there upon the horizon, and shining through the new-rent clouds came the light of Eärendil, the mariners' star. Joyfully Legolas put the tiller over until the little ship ran with the wind on her port beam, leaping and darting over the waves as lightly as an elf-maid crossing stones over a stream.

The wind still howled in the sail, but now it was pushing them ever closer to their goal. As the last of the twilight faded, Legolas adjusted the angle of the sail and saw, peering round it, that their little canvas shelter had survived. Gimli's leather-clad head was propped upon his pack as a pillow.

"This is it, Gimli!" Legolas cried. "We will reach Tol Eressëa by dawn's light if this wind holds!"

He could scarcely make out the low growl of the dwarf's reply, and he grinned to himself. No doubt Gimli's stomach had objected strenuously to the motion of the storm, but they would soon be on firm ground and ready for a hearty meal.

The wind continued unabated throughout the night, driving the Golden Lady westward as the clouds fled and the stars wheeled slowly overhead. Legolas sang joyful songs as they sped onward, though he kept his voice low so as not to disturb his friend's rest.

As Legolas had predicted, when first light came, a low smudge of land was visible upon the horizon before them. Legolas had scarcely marked when they passed through the line of the Enchanted Isles, but the wind had begun to moderate at that time and was now pressing them on as a strong but steady hand at their backs.
The beauty of that sunrise stole Legolas’ breath. Sky and Sea were transformed from the unrelenting, sullen grey of past weeks to a riot of impossibly vivid colors. Some of the hues Legolas had no names for. It seemed he had never seen them before, as if some dulling veil had been removed from his eyes. And rising out of this medley of rainbows was Tol Eressëa itself, Elvenhome of many tales, in shades of green so pure they made the heart ache to look upon them. Snowy-foamed waves were curling to meet a shore of pale crystal sand whose gleam reminded Legolas of his first sight of the Glittering Caves, multiplied a thousand-fold.

He sat speechless and gaping with his hand gone slack upon the tiller, but the Golden Lady needed no further guidance. She sped toward the gleaming shore as an arrow from a bow, and at the line of surf she gave one last joyous bound before sliding gracefully to rest upon the sand.

Legolas leapt lightly over the side, laughing as the salt foam caressed his boots, and ran up the shining strand. A gentle slope rose above the dunes, crowned with flowering trees that he did not recognize. He longed to learn their names and habits, their fruits and scents and the sounds they made in the wind of each season.

Turning only a little further, he saw the rocky headland jutting to the east and knew in his heart that the fabled city of Avallónë lay just beyond. But the rocks themselves drew his eye, shining with shades of pink and cream in the morning sun. They were as unfamiliar to Legolas as the trees, and almost as lovely. Gimli, he knew, would delight in their colours and shapes, the way they bore weight or answered to a hammer.

"Gimli, come look!" Legolas cried. "We have made it! You never saw such loveliness!" He glanced back toward the ship, laughing when he saw no movement there yet. "Come, slugabed! Did you sleep through all the best part of our journey?" He raised his voice, starting back toward the ship; but still there was no reply.

A chill touched his heart then, a dread such as he had not felt since the days of warfare and strife that heralded the end of an Age. Swiftly he recrossed the sands and leapt to the prow of the beached vessel, bending to look into the little tent leaning against the mast.

Gimli was not there.

In consternation, Legolas straightened and cast his eye about the sands, but no footprint showed there, no ripple stirred the water save the Sea’s own rhythmic breath. Gimli was gone.

Frantic, Legolas rushed into the tiny shelter. There sat Gimli’s pack, seeming much smaller than he remembered, and tied atop it was the leather cap he had taken for the crown of Gimli’s head, many hours past. Had the dwarf been gone so long, and Legolas heedless of his absence? Surely it could not be so!

He tore into the pack, finding meager store of clothes and food, but none of the mail or weapons the dwarf had insisted upon bringing along. When Legolas turned to search the rest of the small ship, he saw a scrap of paper lying on the deck. It had been in the top of the pack, and he had cast it aside in his haste to look within.

With numb fingers and frozen heart he unfolded the paper. The message upon it was short, written in Elvish script but in the Westron tongue.

Do not grieve overlong. We mortals must all find our end somewhere, and I ever feared the weakness of age more than a swift, clean passing. Live well in the green lands. Think of me, and tell your kin of the Children of Aulë. It has been my great honour to be your friend. G.

Stunned and desolate, Legolas stumbled down to the sand. There he knelt, and bowed his head,
and for a time he neither saw the light of the Sun nor heard the waves curling upon the shore, but wandered in the bleakness of sorrow and guilt.

It was near mid-day when he lifted his head to find the tide lapping at his knees. The rising water was beginning to lift the Golden Lady from her bed, and soon it would coax her out to Sea once more. Legolas spared no further thought for the vessel he had fashioned so lovingly, but stood and began to walk slowly along the strand. His eyes were fixed upon his dragging steps, and he heeded not the piping of the sea-birds that wheeled about him, nor the whisper of green leaves higher on the hill.

When he came to the arm of rock stretching out into the Sea he paused and laid his hand upon one tall shoulder of polished granite. He noted the facets of the rock and the rounder salt-worn edges as a dwarf would view them, as things of beauty waiting to be revealed through careful shaping. A single tear splashed down to draw a many-pointed star on the stone beside his hand, and then he mounted up, scaling the headland until he could see the bay beyond. He marked the city's gleaming spires without joy or hope. The promise of journey's end seemed hollow and shrunken as last winter's withered fruits.

At the top of the headland, he found a path that led into the trees, where it met a broad, smooth road. Uncaring, he followed this way toward whatever destination it might find.

He paid little heed to the passage of time while he walked, but he had not traveled far when a soft grunt drew him from his mournful reverie. A short way up the hill to one side of the road, a small figure was kneeling in a bed of flowers. Small as a child of elves or men, but too plump for either, and with a shock of white hair atop. The soles of two leathery feet faced Legolas, and he remembered Gimli insisting he knew the look of a hobbit's foot. Grief pierced him anew, and he stood still upon the path with bowed head, unable to speak.

As he stood thus, there came another grunt from the garden, laboured breath catching for a moment in surprise, and then an accent he had not heard in decades. "Hullo."

Legolas looked up and a smile tugged at his lips despite his sorrow. "Sam," he managed. "You look very well." He recalled that Sam was nearly of an age with Merry, but of course he had come to the Undying Lands at an age somewhat younger than Merry when Legolas had last seen him.

"Mister Legolas?" It seemed as if Sam doubted the evidence of his own eyes. "Why, Gandalf was right, then. He said you'd be along if we waited a bit. You look, er, that is -- I daresay you've had a long trip, have you?"

"Yes," Legolas whispered almost to himself. "Very long."

Sam paused in the act of reaching out his hand, and his grin faded. Then he glanced down at the dirt on his palms and grimaced. "Come in then! You look like you could do with a bit of tea. And I think we've some seed-cakes left, if you're hungry."

"Mister Frodo! Look who's showed up on our doorstep, just like Mister Gandalf said he would!"

Legolas was not moved by the prospect of tea or cakes -- indeed, he felt as if he would never again wish to take part in any sort of merriment -- but at the name of the Ringbearer his head came up. "Frodo?"

And there by the little round door was the hero himself, smiling and calling a greeting. He was still rather slender for a hobbit, but less so than he had been all those years ago when Legolas last saw
him by the borders of Fangorn Forest. No one would mistake Frodo for an elf-child now, though Sam could still make two of him. The lines on his face were more about the eyes and the mouth than on the brow, and his hair was only half faded to grey.

Legolas found his hand caught between two small warm ones, and he smiled in spite of himself. "Frodo. You look well. Happy. But . . . older?"

Frodo heard the question in his tone and nodded. "Time does catch up to us, even here, though much more slowly than it would back home." And indeed, he looked a good deal younger than Sam although Legolas knew he was the elder of the two. "Bilbo lasted a good few years, and he was in fine health until the end."

"The end . . ." So, the Undying Lands would not have lifted the burden of mortality from Gimli's shoulders even if he had completed the voyage. Legolas thought of the letter tucked in his jerkin: 'I ever feared the weakness of age.' Unaccountably he stumbled, the strength leached from his sinews. His friends caught him and guided him back a few steps to a low stone bench beside the door, where he sat with his head sagging into his hands.

When the darkness passed from his eyes and he looked up once more, he found Frodo regarding him with a knowing look.

"Mithrandir said you would not be coming alone. Where is Gimli?"

Legolas had not thought he would have the heart to speak, yet words came to his lips nonetheless. "We sailed together, but some force opposed us. For three weeks the wind was contrary and the weather foul. Yestereve we battled a terrible storm, and Gimli . . . was lost overboard." Here his voice faltered.

At length he continued in a low tone, "I did not at once discover his absence in the darkness. Yet even at that moment the clouds parted and the waves calmed and the wind hastened me to these shores. Gimli had suspected it, that he would not indeed be permitted to set foot in these lands."

Frodo stood very straight and cast a worried look at Sam. "That isn't right. Valinor itself is forbidden to us mortals, but here on Eressëa some exceptions are made." He considered at length, his maimed hand toying with some object that hung at his breast, under his shirt. "Right, then," he said at last. "Sam, take Legolas inside and get him some refreshment. I'll be back before nightfall."

"Right you are, Mister Frodo."

"But where are you going?" Legolas asked.

"I must send word to Olórin. He will want to know of your arrival, and what you've just told us." There was a light in Frodo's eyes, a determination that would remind anyone who saw it that this small person had marched into the Black Lands and brought an end to many years of darkness and terror.

"Olórin? But, who . . ." Legolas stared in bewilderment as Frodo caught up a walking stick from just inside the door and started off down the road with a quick wave and a jaunty step.

"Come on, Mister Legolas." Sam had his hand poised under the elf's elbow as if he were preparing to help some decrepit gaffer up an awkward slope. "Come inside and I'll make you comfortable."

Over the past century, Legolas had learnt to take some ease withindoors, but he could never quite relax underground in a space too small for him to stand upright. Yet when he stepped in, he found to his surprise that the parlour just beyond the entryway had been designed with Elvish guests in
mind. The ceiling was comfortably high, there were two tall windows standing open to admit a gentle breeze, and chairs of several sizes stood about the room. The hearth was dark at this hour and season, but he saw that it stood in an intimate nook well suited to telling stories or playing music or simply smoking one of the pipes that lay along the mantel.

While Sam was puttering about finding food and drink, Legolas sat quiet in the parlour, lost deep in thought. Through most of the centuries of his life, Legolas had had only brief dealings with folk of mortal races, until at the Council of Elrond he had been chosen as a member of the Fellowship. Then Legolas had begun to make mortal friends and learnt to share many of their concerns.

All of the mortals he had met that day were now gone, save only Sam and Frodo -- and it seemed they, too, would pass in time. Legolas had never known the sting of grief until the War of the Ring, and now he was learning that use made it no easier to bear. Rather, each new loss merely compounded the pain of the old.

He recalled a conversation he had overheard some years before, at the time of the passing of Faramir, Steward of Gondor. King Elessar had been consoling his Queen, who was nearly as unfamiliar with grief as Legolas.

"They are nearly all gone, now," Arwen had said. "The Dúnedain who knew you in the North, most of the veterans of the War . . . soon there will be none in the city who remember the days before the King. I have mourned friends before who passed, while I and my brothers, my father and mother, lived on -- but always I had them to turn to in my grief. Now, to linger while all about us perish . . . how can you bear it, my love?"

Elessar's pause was so long that Legolas, standing in the hall outside the room, wondered if the King would answer at all. "I find some comfort in knowing that my time will also come. Short-lived or long, all Men pass beyond this world. And some who walk here for the shortest time yet accomplish the greatest deeds. I watch my friends grow older and try to learn from those who do so with grace. And I look forward to meeting them in the Halls of Judgment when my own time comes to travel there."

Legolas thought of the frost in Elessar's hair, the fine lines around Arwen's eyes, the stiffness in Gimli's gait. And he bowed his head.

Now he wondered, do the Children of Aulë even come to the Halls of Mandos? They believed they would be reborn; he had heard Gimli speak of it -- as Durin was said to have come again, and folk said that Lúthien walked the earth once more in Arwen Undómiel. Would Gimli reappear in a future generation, to swing his axe in some long-distant battle? If ever he did, Legolas would never meet him or even hear of his existence, in these lands so far removed from Middle-Earth. And that distant shadow-Gimli would never struggle over Sindarin grammar, or learn to appreciate trees as anything but fuel for a fire.

Legolas realized his cheeks were wet, and also that Sam had been in the other room a suspiciously long time. He drew a deep breath and pulled himself straight just as Sam peeped round the corner of the doorway. At once the old hobbit came bustling in.

"Here you go, Mister Legolas. Some potato and cheese soup will fill up your corners for you, with a bit of bread to dip in it, made fresh this morning. And the ale we brew here is mighty fine, though we had to teach them high folk how it's done. And there's peach tarts for afters. You couldn't ask for better than that!"

Legolas could ask for a dwarf to sit by his side, enjoying the food with noisy gusto and making it seem the more delicious by his appreciation, but he didn't say so.
Before he reached the bottom of the bowl, visitors began to appear to welcome him to Eressëa. Lord Elrond was the first, and the mere sight of him warmed Legolas with old memories. He met Elrond's lady wife for the first time and perceived in her solemn gaze the same pain transmuted into wisdom that Frodo bore about him. Celeborn arrived next, and the twins Elladan and Elrohir, and many others -- some whom Legolas had known in the Eastern lands before or after the War, and some who had left the mortal shores long before he was born.

As the sun set, the gathering became a party; yet it was a very sober and restrained party by the standards Legolas had learned living among men and dwarves. There was no spilling of beer or dancing or raucous laughter, and Legolas was soothed by what he took to be respect for his grief. Then he heard light, cheerful song outside a window and glanced out to see joyous elves in a circle-dance around a large tree, while others hanging upside-down from the boughs tried to catch the dancers or pull their floating scarves away or drop flowers upon their hair. Legolas realised that this gathering was not subdued at all; it was simply that he had forgotten how to be an elf.

Among these shining immortal folk he suddenly felt young and ill-formed. Had Gimli felt thus, when he attended the small gatherings of elves in Ithilien? Legolas knew the sense of not-belonging well enough from the times he had visited Aglarond; yet there it had been a difference of physical form. He was too tall, too pale and slender, his voice un-dwarf-like. Here he began to feel as if he were somehow lacking in spirit: he was set apart by youth, by what an Ent would have called 'hastiness,' by his fondness for coarse things . . . and by his experience of grief.

That was it. How many of those fair folk swaying under the trees had ever known the loss of a friend? Violence held no sway here, and few mortals had ever walked these shores. Had any of these known Beren and Lúthien, or mourned their departure? Had they watched with puzzlement as Bilbo was placed in the earth, like a seed never to sprout?

Legolas did not belong here. He would never be one of the carefree folk, not so long as he remembered Elessar and Faramir and dear, beloved Gimli.

He turned to leave the hobbits' stifling parlour for the cooler air and friendly gloom of evening, but two steps beyond the doorway he stopped, transfixed by the sight of Galadriel approaching. She bore a light like dawn upon her face and raiment, and her golden hair flowed like sunlit waters. She seemed to have grown in beauty even beyond the Lady of Lothlórien of years past. Where once there had been something about her wistful and stark as a bloom of elanor amid the snow, now she radiated a serene joy that warmed all around her. From the corner of his eye Legolas saw the elves around the tree stop their dancing and turn to her as leaves toward the sun.

"Legolas," she said with a voice like the pealing of bells. "We are glad to have you with us once again."

"Lady Galadriel." He bowed deeply in respect for her beauty and strength, this ancient lady of the Noldor; yet he could not forget his sorrow even now. "Why did you send me a false dream?"

She tilted her head slightly. "If you dreamed that I called you to Eressëa, that was no falsehood."

"You told me Gimli was permitted, as well!"

"Indeed, I made such a petition, and Yavanna conveyed to me the judgment of Mandos himself."

Legolas trembled to hear such names of power -- the Valar themselves -- discussed as acquaintances who might be met around a turning of the road, or with the passing of another day. "But --"

"Olórin will learn why your journey was hampered." She turned as if a voice called her upon the
Sea breeze. "Come. Let us go to meet him."

Light and swift of foot as any laughing maid, Galadriel led him through the trees. The soil grew thin and gritty, the trees that clung to it slender and bowed, yet as serene in their flutterings as any majestic mallorn. It was not until his feet descended to the silver sand that Legolas recognized where they had come; the very beach he had arrived upon, where he had read Gimli's letter and felt his heart cleave.

"This place holds an ill memory," he said, halting, but Galadriel only repeated, "Come."

As they stepped near to the lapping waves, a light sprang out upon the water. Legolas thought at first that it must be the gleam of some bright star rising over the eastern brow of the Sea, or perhaps the Moon himself; but there was a shape to this glow, and after a moment his sharp eyes picked out the form of a ship limned in white. She glided toward them, growing larger in view, and Legolas recognized the sail and keel-lines of his own Golden Lady, bearing some brilliant light aboard her. More swiftly than wind or waves she approached, and leapt across the final distance to glide to a stop upon the sand.

The light came forward from the stern of the boat, borne in the staff and raiments of what appeared to be an old man, but was not. Legolas nearly gaped, as awe-stricken as any young hobbit meeting his first elf; for indeed, he felt himself overmatched in the same extreme. He was forcibly struck by what he had glimpsed dimly in the forests of Fangorn: the being before him was no man nor even an elf, but one of the Ainur whose names were whispered in prayer, a spirit more ancient than the stars above or the land below.

"Mithrandir . . ." he murmured uncertainly, for there was nothing grey about this person. He had thought Galadriel shone with the light of dawn, but now he perceived she merely carried an echo of sunlight about her. Gandalf the White blazed from within like a star come to shore, as if he might at any moment step into the sky and take his place beside Eäarendil and the others.

"Olórin," Galadriel said, curtseying deeply, and Legolas understood the name at last.

"Galadriel," said the being, and his light dimmed, and he was Mithrandir once more, friend and companion of many battles and journeys. Like a mortal -- albeit a young one -- he hopped from the boat's gunwale to the sand. "Legolas son of Thranduil, you have a grievance?" There was a twinkle in his eye that might have been amusement; it made Legolas straighten his back and firm his jaw.

"I have a grief, a great and terrible one," he corrected. "I received permission for Gimli son of Glóin to journey hither with me, but he was hindered in doing so, and perished because of it."

Mithrandir nodded. "There was dispute concerning that permission. I took it up with Ulmo, and with Aulë. Behold!" He flung out an arm, and where he pointed the rim of the Moon, replete with promise, slid over the lip of the world. It painted a path of amber across the waves, shading to gold as more of the fat orb hove into view.

The water danced and shimmered in this cool light, and as Legolas watched he saw the motion of the waves grow more frantic. They frothed and bubbled in one spot not far from shore, and then the water was cloven by some round object rising up from below. It bobbed and swayed and grew taller, elongating to throw a shadow along the Moon's beam. It began to take form, a blunt silhouette rising higher while the moonlight played softly upon the cascading water.

Legolas had never before distrusted his own ears, but now he found their report hard to credit; they were picking up a steady mutter of Dwarvish curses in a familiar voice. He gaped like any lackwit. "Gimli?" he asked, scarcely above a whisper.
The dark figure paused, waist-deep in the water, and shook his head violently, spray flung like golden jewels from the braids of his beard. He pulled off his helm in a gesture as familiar to Legolas as the sight of home, even if the water that poured forth was less comforting.

Legolas laughed, astonished but beginning to believe. Here, upon the border of the realm of the Ainur, among folk who conversed with gods, anything was possible. "Gimli!" he shouted, and dashed into the waves heedless of his garments.

Gimli paused in squeezing the water from his beard and peered toward the beach. "Legolas, is that you?"

They met mid-wave and Legolas' tall, slender form made the dwarf stagger, so great was the force of his joy. They embraced, and Legolas bent his head to kiss Gimli upon sea-streaming lips. In that moment he felt what Lúthien must have felt, and Idril, and Arwen. There would be no issue from this union, but his soul was bound more surely than any formal vows could have tied it.

Gimli broke their kiss to prattle of wonders beneath the waves that put the gems of Moria and Aglarond to shame. They stepped from the waves to thank their benefactors and greet their friends, and all the while Legolas' mind whirled with the knowledge: the son of Glóin and the son of Thranduil would never again be parted. Whether to the halls of Mandos or the sleep of Durin, they would pass beyond together.

He laughed aloud with the joy of mortality.

*Long was the way that fate them bore,*  
*O'er stony mountains cold and grey,*  
*Through halls of iron and darkling door*  
*And woods of nightshade morrowless.*  
*The Sundering Seas between them lay,*  
*And yet at last they met once more,*  
*And long ago they passed away*  
*In the forest singing sorrowless.*

. . . *And when that ship passed an end was come in Middle-earth of the Fellowship of the Ring.*

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