Memories of battle

by Ragnelle

Summary

"I have seen too many dark things. Do not ask me. I will not recall memories to darken the very light of day; do not ask me about the dark. Ask me about Light."

Battles comes in many forms, and the memories are not always dark. These are the memories of several characters, with Aragorn as the most prominent. Each vignette will have a different memory, told in first person. MEFAs first place 2009

Notes

Disclaimer: These vignettes are based on the characters and world created by J.R.R. Tolkien, all of which are the property of the Tolkien estate. The stories are made for entertainment and at no monetary gain.
Some memories are too dark to bring into the light, and I have seen too many dark things. Do not ask me. I will not recall memories to darken the very light of day; do not ask me about the dark. Ask me about Light.

Ask me about the light, and I will speak. Ask me about the light, and I will tell you of one day when the light was strong. I was young, barely twenty years of age, and had returned from a journey when Elrond called me, he who had been like a father to me.

That day all was changed.

That day, for the first time, I heard the name of my father. That day, for the first time, I saw the heirlooms of my house. That day, for the first time, I knew my inheritance.

That day, for the first time, I knew my own name.

And I was young. For a whole day pride filled me and I thought that the world could bring no more beauty. I thought the world was full and could give no more for I was young, and I was of noble birth; higher than any among Men. I did not think about the years ahead, on the responsibilities that lay before me, or the burdens my birthright brought. The world was full of light. Nothing could darken it. Nothing could make it shine more bright.

A man can be so wrong.

I walked underneath the trees at the hour when the sun set. What did I feel, you ask? I cannot tell. Even in that moment I could not have told; my heart and mind was too full to tell. This alone I know: I was glad, and I could not keep my gladness inside. It burst out in song.

Then I saw a sight that overthrew it all.

The memory of that vision has not faded with the years, for there she walked between the trees; Lúthien Tinúviel, most beautiful among all the Children. I do not know how long I stood there, dumb by the sight, speechless at this vision. But then I saw her walk away under the shadows of the trees, and suddenly I feared that if I lost sight of her now she would never again be seen. And so I called to her:

"Tinúviel, Tinúviel!"

And she halted. She spoke to me and she was no dream. She lived, she breathed; she was flesh and blood. Arwen Undómiel, Elrond daughter. My own name and lineage crumbled to nothing against her beauty, and even in my youthful pride I knew then that the light carries within its own darkness. Just like dark spots appear before the eye when we have been staring at the light, thus the world was dark when I turned my eyes from her.
No, do not ask me about the dark. Ask me about the light, and I will show you the light in my beloved's eyes.
Minas Tirith: A Gondorian Soldier

In the hours before dawn I dreamed. In my dream I saw the towers of Minas Tirith, and myself standing on the walls surrounding the city. I stood close to the gate, where I usually stand guard, and outside the Gate he waited; the Nazgûl. The Captain of Despair, servant of the Enemy.

I knew then that I had to face him. I had to go down and face him outside the Gate. Alone. And I was afraid. And I went.

I went out and I stood before him and I opened my mouth, and I laughed!

I laughed, and fear left me. I laughed, and my enemy had no power. I laughed, and while I laughed no one could harm me…

I woke from my dream when the bell rang. It was dark; the air heavy with smoke and the sun will not show her face ever again. Though the darkness I can hear him call for me, and I know that today he will come. Today I must face him. And my dream does not comfort me; my dreams have never been true.

I am afraid.
"Few other griefs amid the ill chances of this world have more bitterness and shame for a man's heart than to behold the love of a lady so fair and brave that cannot be returned. Sorrow and pity have followed me ever since I left her desperate in Dunharrow and rode to the Paths of the Dead; and no fear upon that way was so present as the fear for what might befall her."

Aragorn, The Houses of Healing, Return of the King

On the Paths of the Dead.

Need drives me, bitter need; to walk the Paths of the Dead. The dead call, but if I had any other choice, I would not have chosen this path. If I could but choose and follow my heart, then all my paths would bring me back to one place; to that place where among the trees I first saw the light in my beloved's eyes. But I can not.

The Dead has been called. The Dead follow.

How long must I walk in darkness? How long must I walk among the shadows we both forsook? The shadows of dead men follow and still; this is the path of hope. There is light beyond the Shadow. There must be, for now it is too late; we cannot turn back.

The Dead has been called and the Dead follow.

Pale wraiths, pale eyes; I do not fear them. But two eyes haunt me. Two eyes of burning ice. They follow me and I would rather be haunted by a host of shadows. The dead call for me but it is the call of the living I can not obey, that I fear. I can not melt the ice, I can not slake the thirst and I can not heal the hurt hidden behind the strength in those eyes.

The Dead has been called and the Dead follow.

The Dead call, their cry echoing in my head. "Rest!" they cry, and their longing I can fulfil. Beyond this Path the dying call: "Heal our wounds!" and to that task I can ply my skill. But the eyes ask what I can not give. They follow me though the shadow and I can not close my ears to their call, I can not escape their gaze and I can not answer their call or fill their emptiness. I can not return their love.

The Dead has been called and the Dead follow.

Proud eyes! You do not want my pity and you can not have my heart. If I could but choose, I would follow my heart. I would walk in the light of another's eyes among softer shadows. I would walk among the living trees, not this cold stone.

But I have called the Dead, and the Dead follow.

Shieldmaid, I am who I must be and I do what I must do, so that hope shall not die and the light not be quenched. Do not seek me! Do not seek the paths of the dead. Choose a brighter path, you that can choose.
Aragorn: Before Leaving

25. December 3018.

Aragorn sat with his head bowed to his knees; only Elrond knew fully what this hour meant to him. (FotR, The Ring Goes South)

Can they not hurry! What more is it that they can possibly need to talk about? Ah, son of Arathorn, you have waited for so long, have you not learned patience? Seventy years; what is a few minutes against that?

Everything it seems. I have no patience; we are ready, the farewells taken, all words spoken; let us leave!

Breathe Aragorn. There are others here, remember? Think of them – a distraction might work. Yes, think of one of the others; think of the old hobbit. He is standing outside in the snow. He should not stand here, getting cold. He should be inside, but he will not leave. Not before we do. They should hurry; they should know better than to keep old Bilbo outside - it is snowing. He will get a cold! Where is Gandalf?

Ach, this is no good. Where is that wizard? He has had two months to talk to Elrond, prepare and plan; what can they possibly need to talk about now? It is too late to make new plans now!

Patience. You are a grown man, not a boy going on his first trip. Be calm.

Yes, old man, you are no child. Even in the reckoning of your own people you are no longer young. If you were, you could have joined the younger hobbits, milling about. But pacing does not fit you, regardless of what Barliman calls you. And by now you know that is does not really help anyway. Think of something else!

But I can think of only one other thing. Arwen was not there. Am I relieved or not? I have waited for this day, I know what is expected of me; what I must accomplice. I know my people have waited, and my mother… my mother did not see this day, and this day is not even the end we have waited for. It merely marks the end of our waiting. Not the fulfillment of our hope, but the test of it.

All this I know, and still; it is my beloved's eyes that stand before me. The Evenstar; the fulfillment of my hope, and she is not here. I did not want her here, but now I no longer know what I want. Two months are so short a time, made shorter still by searching for tracks and new. It had to be done, and so there was no time. Now all words are spoken; now there is nothing more to say. Still, to see her, one last time… If we fail, I will not see her again.

No. We have said our farewells, and once is enough.

But Elrond…

None of us is saying anything, but we all feel it; the shadow between us. He is the only father I have known, and my happiness will case him grief. Our happiness. I am a Man, I do not know what "forever" is; my years are too short for understanding. Even so, he wants me to succeed.

Are they not ready yet? Can we not begin our journey?
Éomer: Pelennor Fields

Chapter Summary

Then suddenly he beheld his sister Éowyn as she lay, and he knew her. (RotK, The Battle of the Pelennor Fields)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*Death! Death take us all!*

O my sister, how did you come here? No, no! this cannot be. You are not here, you are safe. I would have you safe, not here; dead upon the battle-field!

Did I sing of joy at the battle's beginning? Did I welcome the day and eager yearn for slaughter? Not as I do now!

No more songs. No more joy. You lie dead and all joy is ended, how then can there be songs? Dark day and evil morning that you should die and I live. O, were you only a fell vision to cloud my sight and steal my mind! But my eyes do not lie, and now the night is coming. Death, death! Death take us all! And our enemies with us.

*Ride, ride to ruin and the world's ending!*

Chapter End Notes

Italics quoted for RotK, The Battle of the Pelennor Fields
"I fell when I saw the elven-light in your eyes. Lost with no desire ever to be found, if not by you."

Your words surprised me. I had grown accustomed to my beauty being praised, to moonstruck wooers whose eyes seemed stuck to my body's form, the swelling of my breasts. Then their eyes would hastily lift. Blushing, they would seek to hide their lapse with words about my shadow-hair, my well-shaped lips; the nose, the eyebrows' slender curve, the shape and colour of my eyes. All this their mouths would praise, and I heard the same repeated words until the world grew grey and dull. And so I would smile, and nod, and then dismiss them from my side.

Never had I heard of any light within my eyes.

I looked at you. There, dressed in white, I saw a mortal that resembled elven-kin. Your body grown to full measure, tall among the trees; strong hands, strong shoulders, legs long and lean. In your eyes the noon-sun shone, glittering as in a shallow pool.

I looked again.

Behind the glitter-light dark shadows lay, belying the surface's shallow gleam. Deep darkness born of heavy doom, of years of toil and danger, blood and pain and death. And in that shadow I was lost, I wandered wild. My own sorrows small and pale against the sorrows lain on mortal Men.

Then in the dark I looked once more.

Beyond the shadow's blinding sights, beyond the sorrow and the fear great joy shone fort; great courage and a mirth that broke all bonds and boundaries. A light unknown to all immortal kin.

I saw a Man.

A Man grown more in thirty years than I had ever in my thousands. And so I forsook both Shadow and its twilight twin to live in day as long as it would last, and pass beyond the world when nighttime fell.

Still I see your eyes, but nighttime fell far swifter than the twilight ever felt, and neither light nor shadows hold your eyes, except the surface-gleam of mirrored candlelight. Bitterly I learn that at our first meeting I was wrong; I never matched your age, I ever was the young. You were the older all these years. First at your death I know what you have known in all your life; Death will come. The final shadow that you conquered - fear - still hides the secret of the other side.

O Númenór's king. Not till now I understand the tale told of your people and their fall. As wicked fools I scorned them, but now I pity them at last. For if this is, as it is said, the gift of the One to Men, then it is bitter to receive.

"So it seems," his echoed words did ring. "But let us not be overthrown at this final test, who of old renounced both the Shadow and the Ring. In sorrow we must go, but not despair. Behold! we are not bound for ever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory."

When my time comes, beloved, when I can rest and close my eyes in that last sleep of death, when
I have grown to match your age and like you willingly give my life away, then will you come? Will you find me in the dark when I am lost?

With courage, mirth; with your great joy: Come! Meet me in the darkness. Bring me home.

Chapter End Notes

Written for Teitho challenge: "Growing up"

Beta: Lia

Two paragraphs near the end are closely paraphrased from The Return of the King, appendix A: The tale of Aragorn and Arwen

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