

I don't own JKR, nor would I ever think I am equal to Milord Tolkien. He was a pioneer, and all of us are but trying to build on a massive foundation he left us with his work.

Happy Super Bowl to my fellow Americans. Here is one of the three stories you all will be seeing here on fanfic this month. I will warn you however this one has not been Grammarlied very much or edited by anyone but myself. I didn't have time for it this weekend (Family Time comes first) and unfortunately the patron I sent it off to Thursday didn't get it back to me. Still, I hope you all enjoy this transition/problem solving chapter.

Chapter 20: Healing and Learning

The meal was pleasant, although Harry reflected that the amount of food that had been offered was barely enough for afternoon tea in his opinion. He wasn't surprised by this. Elves did not eat nearly as much as humans or dwarves, let alone hobbits, the bottomless pits they were. He had noticed this in Tauriel as they traveled together and was already resolved to eat more snacks as the day went on, or munch on Lembas once a day at least.

In terms of how they ate, elves ate slowly, savoring each bite as it came, and amusingly to Harry, elves never mixed things. You would not find an elf using bread to sop up a bit of sauce from a fish or chicken dish for example, or dip bread into stew. Tauriel had been a bit confounded by watching Harry do that while they were traveling. Instead, an elf would eat the bread on its own, regardless of if it was their special travel ration of Lembas or regular Elvish bread, then would finish the rest of the meal.

Although, their bread is pretty fantastic all on its own, Harry thought, as he took a nibble of his own piece of bread, having finished most of what he had been given already: a small steaming cup of soup, that was intensely flavorful despite its seeming simplicity, a cup of wine, with more on hand nearby, and two small flat meat cakes. *It's not made of wheat, not alone at any rate, they certainly don't have enough farmland for that to be a major segment of their diet. And I wonder what kind of seasoning they use on the bread and meat cakes? At first the taste is similar, but there's some other added spice to the meat that makes it almost like a pepper kind of flavor while the bread tastes of rosemary.*

Of course, Harry's observations had just been on the food. And as he watched Celeborn shake his head slowly from side to side as he questioned Tauriel about the Battle of the Lonely Mountain, Celeborn sat back, filing one certain observation away for now. *Celeborn truly doesn't like dwarves, does he?* It's subtle, but the way he frowned whenever any of the dwarves came up in Tauriel and my tale, the faint twitching of his fingers, showed his true feelings there. *Then again, should I be surprised? Like Galadriel, Celeborn is more than old enough to*

have been part of some of the darker moments between dwarves and elves, and who knows, he might even have been involved in some of them.

"The creation of the forts was an excellent move, and I approve of putting the elven host on both flanks. Attempting to weld the dwarfish and elvish contingents into a single whole, using mixed units, would've been impossible. Even elves of different kingdoms often had a hard time fighting together in the ancient wars against Morgoth, let alone in the wars against Sauron," Celeborn murmured, leaning back in his chair and gently tapping his fingers against the back of his other hand as he sat there. "And yet, the army should have performed better."

He looked over at his lady wife, and Galadriel looked back at him before shaking her head at an unasked question, thankfully answering verbally for the others at their table. That was Harry, Tauriel and Arwen. The table was set on a small private telain that served as a private balcony. Nearby, music could still be heard playing elsewhere, threatening to drag Harry's attention away. But thanks to his time in Rivendell, Harry was somewhat used to Elvish music.

"No. Sauron was in full flight by that point, although I do not doubt He had already set a portion of His will to set the weather in motion, to darken the skies. Sauron certainly summoned the birds to the battlefield. But that was set in motion before time. Saruman had pursued Sauron far afield of Dol Guldur by the time this Azog creature and his forces arrived at the Lonely Mountain, far to the south and east. It was not His will that was weakening our fellow elves. Further, husband, consider how well the dwarves and humans fought."

Celeborn grimaced very slightly. Like most elves Harry had met, it was quite clear he wasn't very effusive in his emotions, totally unlike Tauriel once you got to know her or even Legolas among friends. Which Harry reflected was something that had worked to help attract Harry to Tauriel as Celeborn answered. "True. If it had been the will of the dread enemy, all would have been afflicted."

"And, both Mithrandir and I were there. I can't say I would've been able to have done much against some kind of background feeling of that nature, but Mithrandir would certainly have noticed," Harry interjected mildly, wondering what Celeborn was getting at. "At least I assume speaking of something more subtle than the feelings of the Barrow wights?"

"Yes, you mentioned those in your most recent adventure." Galadriel smiled at Harry, a smile full of approval. "That was well done indeed, both your role in and young Estel's. It speaks well of the man he might become. It will be good for a Ranger to rise so high. But no, the feeling of the Great Enemy is far less visible than that. It affects living things far more subtly, empowering his creatures, and sapping the will, energy and courage of those they face. A dreadful feeling of exhaustion and fear slowly fills your thoughts, deadens limbs and clouds minds. But it is a technique would take a great deal of concentration to use over any range without a creature nearby to direct it through."

Celeborn spoke up then, his grimace deepening in memory. "That is what several of the Ringwraiths were used for in the last war. The elves were forced to face them again and again, keeping Sauron's influence at bay, and more than once the Ringwraiths still caused trouble. Especially among the human forces. Only Elendil and his direct family could drive them away with their will, although the other Númenóreans who had come to Middle Earth could at least withstand it to a degree."

"Hence your comment on his not being able to do it while on the run from Saruman," Harry nodded in understanding, reflecting internally that none of his listeners had been at all surprised by Estel's name or his heritage. Arwen had seemed surprised, but not all that interested, while it was obvious Galadriel had been brought into Elrond's confidence on this point.

"All of which means there must be some other reason why the Elvish host to not perform as well as it should have." Celeborn murmured, tapping his fingers slowly against the back of his hand again. This was evidently some kind of visual tick that he was working at a problem or concern perhaps.

"They were facing trolls. I dealt with the twenty or so that we faced in the center, but the majority of the trolls were forced to the sides by Azog early on in the battle. I know the dwarves turned their ballistae to help, but even so, it's no surprise to me that the trolls broke through the forts and closed as they did." He looked over at Tauriel. "Although I didn't face any of them in close. Tauriel?"

Tauriel still seemed to be a bit in awe of meeting lady Galadriel and Lord Celeborn in person. The feeling of lady Galadriel in person was far more powerful than in her sending, and Celeborn was the equivalent of a legend among the Moriquendi, the elves who had never crossed the sea to Valinor, be they Silvan of Sindar. But now she spoke up in defense of her countrymen. "We none of us expected to face trolls during the day, nor so large a force of them. Once they broke through the walls, we only had our shield wall against them, and it failed due to the terrain and the trolls reach."

"Trolls during the day is indeed a somewhat worrisome. And you say that Mithrandir was most interested in that as well, that he was able to scrape off some kind of paste or salve their skin had been covered with?" The last person sitting at the table asked.

Harry and Tauriel both turned to lady Arwen, and yet again, as Harry looked at her, he was amazed by her beauty. Her dark eyes and darker hair seemed to shine under the starlight above and the few silvery lights nearby that the elves of Caras Galadhon. Her face, far younger looking than Galadriel's was almost the definition of beauty, a small mouth made for smiling and expressiveness, high cheekbones, and black eyes currently narrowed in thought.

She truly is like night to lady Galadriel's day, Harry reflected. And yet, despite her beauty, I can't say I'm attracted to her.

That was strange to Harry. He had been attracted to beauties before, including several that he knew were well out of his league. Professor Sinistra was one such. An older, gorgeous black-skinned witch, she had been the subject of many a young student's fantasies. Fleur Delacour was a second. While her Veela allure had never mattered to Harry, she had been a gorgeous young woman regardless, and her accent had been tantalizing to say the least.

But looking at Arwen, Harry didn't feel any stirrings of arousal or anything similar. Instead, he looked at her as if she was a magnificent statue, or a painting perhaps? She was simply too good-looking to be attracted to, if that made sense. *Or perhaps too much beyond human beauty?*

Comparing Arwen to Tauriel, Harry felt he much preferred Tauriel's beauty. She was in his opinion just as beautiful, and far more approachable. The way her eyes lit up when she was telling a story, the memory of watching her move on the trail next to him, the way she bit her lip when she was excited or looked as if she was sniffing the air when on the hunt. All these things combined, attracted Harry to Tauriel far more than he was attracted to Arwen.

There was also the fact that Arwen and Tauriel were very different in terms of temperament, something Harry had been able to observe throughout the conversation to this point. Arwen listened intently to everything, but she hadn't commented on anything before this. She apparently was something of a healer, learning both from her grandmother Galadriel and from her father Elrond occasionally when she was in Rivendell, although Arwen had not spent nearly as much time there as she did in Lothlorien over the past two thousand years since her mother had traveled across the ocean. Arwen was not a fighter and had no wish to be one.

While Harry had no issues with that, Harry had something of a type. A girl who could look after herself and was willing to get her hands dirty fit that far better for Harry than Arwen and her softer touch, no matter how gorgeous she might be.

"I did. He took three or four jars worth of samples, I think?" Harry looked over to Tauriel again, and she nodded agreement. "Don't ask me what he did with them though. I have to wonder how much room he has under those robes of his, or if he somehow has his own version of my makeskin pouch."

Tauriel laughed at that, but the joke passed the others by.

"If we find what is in now, we might be able to discover counter agents to it," Arwen murmured, leaning back in her chair as her grandfather had a moment ago, her eyes turning far away.

Harry wondered idly how exactly that would matter in a fight, but reflected he probably could do something with that knowledge if he had to. Gandalf too. But without wizard aid, it probably wouldn't be much use. *Not unless we can somehow find whatever ingredients they use and stop the orcs and whoever else from getting those ingredients. Doubtful.*

"Regardless of trolls though, you are still looking as if you're displeased by something Celeborn," Harry said turning away from Arwen to gaze at her grandfather, not noticing Tauriel smiled slightly as he did so. The fact that once more, Harry showed no trouble with turning his eyes away from the raven-haired beauty gratified her deeply.

"I am. Even against trolls, a force of elves that large should have been able to do better. Even after our lines were broken during the last battle against Sauron, trained Elvish warriors could fight three or four on one against trolls. There are techniques and tactics that members of our shield wall learns. And if we have been properly supplied long spears and other weapons can make fighting them relatively easy."

Celeborn sighed faintly. "I was worried you mentioned how many losses the elves had taken, and beyond even the use of trolls during the day, I had feared some kind of new weapon, some spells magic or other. I still do, as I cannot see why the Elvish host took such losses."

Tauriel had told Harry that in all, the elves had lost four hundred dead and another hundred and forty crippled. Gandalf and their healers had done their best, but even Gandalf could not heal utterly crushed limbs or missing eyes.

"Recall, Celeborn, that it has been many centuries since the forces of Mirkwood went to war," Galadriel murmured. "They still lived on Amon Lac then, and were ruled by Thranduil's father, Oropher."

Celeborn's brows drew together for a second, then he nodded, sighing faintly. "Of course. I had neglected to consider the full ramifications of my distant kinsman's passing. Their losses in the War of the Last Alliance were far greater than our own, and they did not take part in the wars of the north as we did along with Elrond and the folk of Rivendell."

The elves had lost the majority of their fighting strength in the last war against Sauron. They and the humans, particularly the northern hosts under Elendil, had been decimated in the last battle at the foot of Mount Doom, when Sauron himself took the field. Never since had either race been able to field such a host, despite it having happened around two thousand five hundred years ago.

"And how isolationist the former King was, I doubt he even trained his host beyond the minimum, or even thought of doing so. There is only so far that training alone can account for," Celeborn shook his head slightly, but not in condemnation, rather self-recrimination. "In the past thousand years, we should've thought of that, and opened a dialogue with Taur-e-Ndaedelos. That we did not is on my shoulders just as it was on the shoulders of Thranduil."

"We **did** to try to make overtures my love," Galadriel gently touched her husband's shoulder. "It is not your fault nor mine if King Thranduil turned us away then, nor is it any burden on you to realize how poorly his troops would fare in open battle. Taur-e-Ndaedelos' Unseen Host was

the only measure of his folk's combat ability we had, and they acquitted themselves well, did they not?"

"They did," Celeborn agreed, while Tauriel smiled very faintly, the Elvish equivalent of preening at this praise. "Still, there is no reason why we could not ask the new king if he would wish to house some of our folk and have them train with his main army. It is to be hoped that such will never be needed again, but far too often life in Ennor falls well short of hopes."

Ennor was the Sindarin term for Middle Earth.

Galadriel nodded at that but Harry was confused. "Why do elves even bother having a regular army at all? If you can hide the location of your main dwellings as well as Rivendell and Lothlorien or somehow keep the enemy from finding it magically, you could turn a forest like Mirkwood into an entire battlefield. Hit-and-run attacks, even on a large scale, would be devastating."

"We here in Caras Galadhon do have a version of the Unseen Host to be certain, and you are correct Harry Potter. That portion of our military makes up the vast majority of it. Which is yet another strange sign of Thranduil's... foolishness," Celeborn answered, trying hard not to speak ill of the dead, but also not wishing to let him off the hook for something Celeborn saw as gross stupidity. Thranduil himself was a veteran of the War of the Last Alliance, after all. *He should have known better than to wholly hang up his blades as he did. And if he knew he could not combat the darkness in the south of Mirkwood alone, letting pride dictate his actions rather than sense was also foolish.*

Aloud he said, "Yet always in war there is a time when you must stand and fight. And in that, our shield walls, our group training and tactics have always served elvenkind far better than even the sharpest blades. But it is true that it is a way of warfare that needs both intense training and experience. If the forces of Mirkwood did not have the experience or the training in the harder tactics, then we see what occurred, the losses that the Elvish host sustained in this battle. A battle, I will tell you now, that would be quite small in terms of the scale of the wars against Sauron, let alone those against Morgoth. Many a time in that those wars, forces of several thousand elves were forced to face eleven or twelve times their number in orcs and goblins."

As Harry visibly tried to wrap his mind around battles on an even larger more violent scale as the Battle for the Lonely Mountain, Celeborn examined the young human closely. Although like his wife, Celeborn was no longer certain that human was the right term for what Harry was. He was still mainly human in thoughts and mannerisms though, and that was enough.

He was a smart fellow, very observant and quick on the uptake. At first, Celeborn had been concerned that Harry would set aside his interest in Tauriel in favor of pursuing Arwen to the cost of all three. Far too often it seemed humans were driven by their desires, be it for land, money, power or women. But while it was clear that Harry recognized how beautiful Celeborn's

granddaughter was, it was just as obvious that he preferred Tauriel. The little glances her way, the subtle touches of hand, how closely they sat at the table told Celeborn this.

Celeborn was happy to see it. Even setting aside the fact that despite possibly being as immortal as elves, Harry still thought and felt like a human, Celeborn did not think that Harry and Arwen would be a good match, but he knew that humans placed far too much emphasis on physical beauty and could be swayed by such. *And, although I am loath to admit it, there have been times in Elvish history when that was true of us as well. And rarely have such moments ended in less than tragedy. Still, there seems to be a true connection between Harry and young Tauriel. Indeed, that bond is almost like that between an elven man and woman, as my wife mentioned.*

"And speaking of training," Tauriel asked hesitantly. "I would request that I be allowed to train with your own rangers Lord Celeborn, lady Galadriel. Unless Harry wishes me to be by his side as you help his mind to heal, I would prefer to use my time constructively."

When Celeborn nodded at that, Harry spoke up quickly. "I would also request sword lessons once lady Galadriel is done with me. If I'm not being too presumptuous anyway, I presume you have some equivalent of a human master-at-arms somewhere around here. If he or she would prefer not to train with an outsider or human I can understand and accept their opinions though." *I would prank them during my stay viciously for it, but I can accept it.*

Celeborn chuckled at that, shaking his head. "I am my own as you put it master-of-arms, which I assume is some kind of human title for someone in charge of training. I will agree with that." He looked over at his wife quizzically. "How long exactly do you envision healing young Harry's mind to take?"

"Considering that I only have a vague idea of the problem beyond the emotional turmoil he has been dealing with since arriving on Middle Earth, I am afraid I cannot tell you, my husband," Galadriel answered, her tone making Celeborn bow his head in apology. Galadriel took it gracefully and continued. "I doubt it will take long enough for Harry's muscles to begin to atrophy but I too would prefer that Harry is able to look after himself better when he leaves us than how he came."

"And once your healing is finished Harry," Galadriel went on, turning to gaze at Harry, who felt mildly put upon by that comment. "You and I will have a discussion about magic, senses, and perhaps some new abilities that you might have come into now that Aulë and Arien have sung your life into the song of Middle Earth."

"So I won't be learning anything about the sword from you, then? You're not some kind of secret warrior Queen on an Age-long break from leading from the front or something?" Harry teased. Honestly he could barely see Galadriel strike down anyone in her anger, let alone fighting at the front with a sword or even a bow.

His joke fell flat, however. Galadriel shook her head, looking away for a moment. "I do not know how to wield a sword Harry, and only once in my life have I ever fought someone face-to-face, a spear in my hand. And it is a time of my life I do not look upon fondly."

"...The Kinslaying?" Tauriel guessed, while Arwen looked on, having heard this before, a pained expression on her face. Not at hearing it again, but rather what she was hearing in the first place.

"Yes. The Kinslaying at Alqualondë. When the Noldor used swords and other weapons long prepared as they fell upon the unsuspecting Teleri. I was not in the vanguard. Like my brothers, I came after with the host led by my uncle, Finrod. We arrived as the fighting and slaying was going on. It took us far too much time to realize who was in the wrong, and it was the only time I ever wielded a weapon, taking up a spear in defense of my mother's folk against those of my father. Of all of his acts before or since, it is the one act that I will **never** forgive Fëanor for. Not in spirit, and not if he came back to life again," Galadriel said, her eyes far away, her voice sharper and angrier than Harry had yet to hear from her.

For a moment the table fell silent as Arwen gripped her grandmother's hand lightly, squeezing it once before letting go, as the others left her for a few moments to her remembered grief and despair, turning the topic to Harry and Tauriel's journey to Caras Galadhon. The Kinslaying was one of the darkest moments in Elvish history, indeed it was the first major such.

The tale went that the Noldor had been swayed by Fëanor's words to leave Valinor behind, to pursue Morgoth for his murder of their king and the theft of the Silmarils and to raise new nations in the lands of Ennor they had left behind. But to get there, they fasted way to travel was by ship, which meant dealing with the Teleri of Alqualondë. But the Teleri although close to the Noldor, refused to help. They did not wish to disobey the Valar. When this became clear, Fëanor and his house tried to steal the ships. The Teleri fought back and the Noldor drew steal.

Never before this had elf fought elf. Indeed, never had elves fought at all. Weapons of any kind seemed useless to the Teleri and the Vanyar. But the Noldor had long been poisoned by Morgoth's whispered warnings, and many of them, Fëanor chief among them, had forged and hidden weapons away. The fell black blades of Fëanor's house drank deeply of elvish blood that day in Alqualondë, but the host under Fëanor, the ones most eager to leave or led directly by his house, did not have numbers enough to prevail against the bows and makeshift weapons of the Teleri.

The second host, of which Galadriel had been a part, had come upon a battle already occurring within the city, and had assumed that the Teleri had attacked their fellows on orders of the Valar. With their aide, the battle had quickly turned into a massacre. One that Galadriel at first attempted to quell. The Teleri were her mother's folk, and she had spent decades among them in the past. It was one time however that her voice had not been strong enough.

And when that did not work, she, along with a few others refused to take part in the battle. Instead, Galadriel worked with the Teleri protecting some directly with the spear that she had been given from her oldest brother's stores of such.

Looking at Galadriel's hard, cold eyes as she stared out into the night around them, Harry realized something that had eluded him for this. Or perhaps, he had known intellectually, but it hadn't really sunk in. The First Kinslaying was literally Ages in the past. Thousands upon thousands of years in the past, when Galadriel was still probably considered a somewhat young lady among her folk, the equivalent of her mid-twenties. And yet, Galadriel could still remember events all that way back as if she was there once more.

Elves could not forget, not as individuals, and not, Harry realized now, as disparate societies. They would always be looking backward rather than forward, and with the tragedies they had suffered, they could not simply move past them. Even dwarves were better at forgetting ancient wrongs, grievances and trials than elves, let alone humans.

Who would've ever thought that it is our ephemeral memories that let humans keep on growing as societies and individuals? Harry reflected, wincing a little at the irony of that statement hitting him, as it was his memories that Harry's nightmares were dominated by.

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After Harry had agreed to let Galadriel start her examination that night, he found himself laying out in a small sofa, one without a back. Indeed, it looked almost like something he had seen once an image of a Roman household except it was entirely made of wood and looked almost as if it was a series of branches magically wound together. His head was set on a soft pillow, his laces untied and his boots set aside. Harry stretched, sighing contentedly as he felt the softness of the lounge underneath him. "Even the best of sleeping bags still has to be set on the ground," he murmured in a mock-philosophical tone.

This caused Tauriel to snicker, a sound Harry had yet to hear from any other elf, giggles being the closest sound. "You could figure out a way to make the ground soft as loam underneath us, or simply travel with an actual mattress in your mokeskin pouch."

"Huh, good thought. So long as I wouldn't be alone on that mattress, it might be worth the effort," Harry teased back, causing Tauriel to flush and look at the two elven women with them. "Sorry, too much?"

"Perhaps in front of other ladies," Galadriel interjected smoothly, shaking her head, while Tauriel looked torn between annoyance at the ill-timed flirtation and blushing a bit at the fact she was not nearly as adverse to the idea as she should be this early in their courtship. Arwen looked mildly scandalized but also amused. "I would approve of the turn of phrase, but only when alone."

"Gotcha," Harry responded, sitting up and bowing from the waist towards Tauriel, then the others in apology, while Galadriel, looked down at him, a wry smile on her lips, holding a small carafe of water in one hand.

She had gone to retrieve it from the well personally, and spent several minutes holding her hand over it, doing something to the water. Not that Harry was going to comment on that just yet.

Now having removed his foot from his mouth, Harry began to joke once more. "You know, this reminds me of a play I once saw on my world about what therapy is supposed to be like. I have to tell you though, if you're going to ask me about my childhood, or show me images and ask me what I should think about them, this is going to get very boring and very grim quickly."

"Hush. I will not be trying to walk you through your emotions or thoughts yet, Harry Potter. You have already begun to heal and talk through your most horrible memories with Tauriel. And such things are but much better handled by loved ones."

Galadriel watched with some hidden delight as Harry and Tauriel both flushed a bit as she pointed this out. *Good, very good indeed. I was still somewhat concerned about how quickly the two of them seemed to be coming together, but their relationship is very clearly one that can last.* She glanced at her granddaughter, who was also watching on, her eyes showing a certain amount of confusion. *Hmm, come to think of it Arwen has not been around any newly bonded pairs, has she? Nor humans in general. Having Harry here could be good for her in the long term, as could making a new friend in Tauriel.*

She coughed gently to bring everyone's attention back to her, continuing smoothly. "No, I'm going to be examining your physical brain to start with. After that, perhaps we will need to talk about your emotions and the turmoil you are facing with them, your flashbacks and ill dreams in conjunction with your talks with Tauriel, how to compartmentalize your mind to keep the fell memories at bay. But first I want to make certain that there is no underlying physical damage to your mind. I know that contact with the Valar can harm the unwary mortal."

That thought horrified Harry, and he nodded rapidly. "What do you want me to do?"

"Drink this and lay there comfortably." Harry took the small glass from Galadriel as she poured a cup, setting aside the silver chalice to one side, watching as Harry drained the water slowly.

The magic she had imbued into it almost instantly began to take its toll, and Harry laid down quickly, his eyes swiftly closing. "Y, you might have to look into that spell, it's pretty power..." Before he could even finish the sentence, Harry was asleep.

Galadriel bent to her task while an interested Arwen looked on, and a worried Tauriel looked on. She held her hands out to either side of Harry's face, fingers spreading across his face and forehead, into his hair as she slowly felt out the brain within.

She had known as far back as their first meeting that Harry's mind had been damaged by his time in the Void. He had been hurt not just emotionally by what had occurred before that, something Harry had tried to hide or even ignore with humor. But his mental faculties had been hurt, his mind damaged by the sensory deprivation and nature of the war Harry had waged against the creature known as Tom Riddle, and then his close contact with the Valar.

She knew that Varda would have healed him of much of the damage that close contact had created, but there might still be lingering issues, as Harry was only the third actual mortal any of the Valar had, to Galadriel's knowledge, interacted directly with on a mental level beyond the halls of Mandos. Sending dreams and whispers was one thing. Pulling Harry's spirit to them on their distant height on Taniquetil.

What Galadriel hadn't planned for was the basic nature of Harry's brain changing. Galadriel was a past expert on healing both minds and bodies. She had literal Ages of experience healing both, and in particular after the War of the Last Alliance, Galadriel had gotten a lot of experience healing the minds of humans who had been in the presence of the Ringwraiths or taken some other mental damage, be it physical or spiritual. And not once had she seen a mind actually in the process of changing like this.

Such a thing should not have been possible, but as Galadriel used her magic to map out Harry's brain, that is, his physical brain was shifting, altering as the magic of Arda continued to flow through him. Pulling back, she shook her head lightly something that caused Tauriel to bite her lip in worry. "Oh, dear. The Valar are at work here, but they know not what they do..."

"L, Lady Galadriel?"/ "Beleg Naneth(Grandmother)?" Tauriel and Arwen asked as one.

"Shush. I will know more anon," Galadriel answered, once more pushing her mental presence into Harry's mind, waving off Tauriel's worry and Arwen's interest.

Within mere moments, Galadriel knew that her first instinctual reaction was correct. The Valar were integrating Harry into the world around him, but instead of simply letting the magic of Arda flow through him, as they would a born Maiar, they were using that magic to change him physically and mentally. Perhaps to them, treating Harry as if he was a cross between a elf and a Maiar, like Luthien the Fair, Galadriel's old, and long dead friend made some sense.

But it was also wrong. Such a statement should have been almost unthinkable, but here, Galadriel knew that the Valar were, with the best of intentions, messing Harry's mind up in a very large way.

The human brain and that of an elf were on the surface somewhat similar, but in practice they were very different, elvish minds changed but slowly, and had a far, **far** greater ability to take in memory, and moreover to keep memories fresh and usable than humans did. Their emotions were a little closer to humans, but even there, humans could feel emotions to a far greater

degree than most elves could. Elves could hold onto their emotions for longer, but humans could also get over their emotions more easily.

But Harry's mind was being slowly changed by the magic of Arda under the Valar's direction to deal, Galadriel presumed, with the fact Harry would live as long as an elf. Certain segments were being enlarged, their functions streamlined, memory in particular. His emotional section wasn't changing similarly, perhaps because of all the portions of the brain, the Valar could understand it the least.

Yet living that long did not mean that Harry's mind could handle these changes. Worse, it was evident to Galadriel almost immediately as she began to examine Harry's mind that while some of the damage from his time in the void had been healed naturally over time, other injuries to his mind had been somewhat sealed in by these changes.

All this meant that Harry's own memories were attacking him as he and Tauriel had seen on their journey. His memories, memories that his very human mind had suppressed, were, as Tauriel had seen becoming clearer, sharper as his physical brain changed under the impact of the magic of Arda pouring through him. But Harry could simply not deal with them. Indeed, Galadriel doubted even an elf would be able to deal with so many years of memories what amounted to sensory deprivation interspersed with moments of mental and physical torture.

"I had thought I would need to help Harry through some mental changes along with his continuing issues from leaving his past life behind. But not this much, nor so many **physical** changes. Thus I will need to both stop that process, heal the mental damages done to those portions of his mind, and then guide Harry through how to control his own mind and thoughts. Things that come easily to elves will be difficult for him I am afraid, but it is better than this... this mess of good intentions and lack of understanding," Galadriel grumbled, shaking her head as she pulled her hands away from Harry's face.

"How much of that will Harry be aware of, and will he be able to help you in that task? It is after all his own mind, lady Galadriel. While I have course trust you, and I do not doubt that Harry would, it is still worrisome to hear of anyone having such power over another," Tauriel worried at the problem.

Galadriel paused at that, then nodded. "Yes, you are correct there. I will need his permission, this goes well beyond simply repairing any physical damage he has sustained in the past."

Waving her hand over Harry's face, she murmured 'awake' in Quenya, dispelling the spell. He woke up quickly, blinking as he looked around him, then began to frown as he looked up at Galadriel. "I take it that I haven't been asleep for very long. And that this is not in fact a good thing.

"You would be very correct on that, I am afraid," Galadriel answered, before going into detail on what she had been finding as she probed his mind.

"Glorious, permanent PTSD, and concussion like syndromes occasionally permanently burned into my mind by well-meaning demigods," Harry grumbled looking around now with more suspicion. "Can I get a refund on this whole immortality lark? It seems to come with a lot of hidden pitfalls."

Once more Galadriel knew that Harry was using a tiny bit of humor to try and deflect his real concerns, and she shook her head. "Tell me, is using humor like that a learned response, or a societal more?"

"A little bit of both. I told you about my father and his Marauders, and own friends too. But I can admit there is also something called the British stiff upper lip that occasionally comes into play. But make no mistake, I fully understand how dangerous this is." Harry scowled, looking down at his one scarred hand worriedly. "Why exactly are the Valar trying to do this?"

"In the past, no human has achieved physical immortality, although several have achieved it in terms of memory," Galadriel smiled a bit at her own joke, although it went over Harry's head for a second until he figured out what she meant. "I believe the Valar assume that a human mind will simply not be able to survive the millennia, and perhaps they are correct there. Recall Harry, you are a singular existence in Arda in practically every manner that truly counts. Your arrival, your magic, your way of achieving immortality."

Galadriel shook her head thinking deeply. "I think they are making the mistake of comparing you to Tuor."

"Who?" Harry asked, confused. "I know of Beren and Elros, but not Tuor." Beren was the name of the human who had fallen in love with Luthien the Fair, and had gone on numerous adventures with her, leading to many tragedies but also reclaiming the Silmarils from Morgoth and, through their daughter, the birth of Eärendil the Mariner, who crossed the sea and whose arrival in Valinor convinced the Valar at last to go to war against the Dread Enemy. Elros was Elrond's brother, who became the king of the Edain, those men who would become the Númenóreans.

"Tuor Eladar," Arwen explained as her grandmother sighed faintly, almost becoming lost in memory again, and few of them good ones. "Tuor was the father of Eärendil, and a hero in his own right. Through him and his elven wife Idril, were the remnants of Gondolin saved when Maeglin the Dark betrayed the last free realm of the Noldor to Morgoth. Thereafter only scattered, hidden settlements survived, but it was only thanks to the heroism of Tuor, Idril and Glorfindel the Bold that any of the Gondolindrim survived."

"The more I hear about the history of this world, the more I want to learn more," Harry grumbled. "I had known of Eärendil, obviously, but somehow his father never came up in conversation. Ugh. Anyway, why..."

"I will willingly speak to you of the histories of this world at a later time, Harry. As for why I mention Tuor and how the Valar might be comparing the two of you, he and he alone is the only human without elven blood in him to ever be allowed to cross the sea to Valinor and live there anon with his wife, Idril. He traveled there physically with her across the ocean, and for his deeds, he was welcomed and changed to live among the Kindred."

"Wait, if that is a possibility then..."

"Beren was not offered a similar fate because he had already died once due to wounds taken on his fell journey to recover the Silmaril," Galadriel answered, somewhat amused by how Harry kept on getting distracted. "Luthien too died out of grief for him. Both were returned to life, but Mortal life, as it is beyond the Valar's powers to stop a human soul passing on from Arda entirely."

Galadriel shook her head slowly. "In that, your magic sets you aside Harry, making you more than human, just as much as your foreign origins. Eventually, they lived out their days together. Eärendil already had elven blood within him before choosing immortality to remain with his wife, so as I said, Tuor is the closest comparison."

"I see...so they are trying to change my mind to become like his?"

"Exactly so. But Tuor did not have years of sensory deprivation or battles against a wraith to deal with. Further, your mind is simply a bit different to even that of a normal Man of Middle Earth," Galadriel explained. "There are parts of it that I assume have to do with your magic, as they have no equivalent. So while the Valar might believe, and they could be correct, that your mind needs to change, they did not take into account those differences nor the damage you had sustained. We will need to halt the process and then repair the damage before guiding the change further."

Harry fell silent, sitting up and staring down at his hands for a moment, breathing in deeply several times. Tauriel came over to rest one hand on his shoulder and he looked up, smiling at her for a moment before looking back at Galadriel. "I am not happy with anyone messing with my brain like this, no matter how well-intentioned. I had thought that the physical side of things would be the smaller part of my healing here with you, Lady. This does not please me at all. Can the Valar reverse the changes they've made?"

"I... do not think so. As I said, Harry, there are aspects of your mind beyond the scope of Arda, and further, none of the Valar were involved in the creation of our minds. Our minds, our Fëa, come from Ilúvatar. The Valar do not quite know what they are doing here."

"And, and if the changes continue?"

"You spent untold years in the Void fighting the Riddle creature, Harry Potter. If we do not do something, those memories **will** subsume your nightmares to the point they eventually invade

your waking mind. Even your magically assisted constitution will fail Harry. But do not be concerned,” Galadriel soothed. “We caught it early enough and I believe that once I can halt the magic of Arda from flowing through you for a short time, we can still repair the damage done. However, due to the damage to your brain, and the nature of the ongoing process, Tauriel pointed out that I should get permission to continue to work on you before going on.”

Tauriel smiled gratefully over at Galadriel, which turned far more tremulous when he turned back to Galadriel. “I, thank you Lady Galadriel. There is a lot of this I don’t like, but I can understand the necessity. I knew coming here I needed help. Not taking the doctor’s advice would be foolish. Still, this is...”

“I will give you an oath to do no harm if you wish, Harry,” Galadriel said softly, understanding his concerns all too easily. “I will bind myself to do no further damage to your mind or change it in any way you would not approve of.”

Harry knew that from someone like Galadriel even mentioning doing so was paramount to taking the oath itself, and after a moment he reached up, squeezing Tauriel’s hand, which was still resting on his shoulder. “I thank you for that, Lady. And if you do help me in this manner, I will be deeply in your debt.”

Galadriel chuckled faintly, shaking her head. “You have spent too much time among dwarves, Harry,” she teased. “Let there be no talk of debt between us. Do you wish to take time before I begin to think on this further?”

Harry shook his head. “A time to mediate a bit, perhaps, to uh, gather my courage for this. Will I, that is will I be different afterwards?”

“I will do my best to ensure that no great changes occurs to your personality,” Galadriel assured him. “I think it is important you keep your... well, your base human nature, I suppose is the best way to say it. Your drive, your passions and your desire to get things done are what make you human.”

“Thank you,” Harry said again, nodding his head and wishing he could help in some fashion. But while he obviously would be involved in the process of dealing with his emotional trauma, the physical damage would be well beyond him. *You can’t just cast a Repairo spell on your bloody mind*, he thought trying to keep his spirits up. But the knowledge his own brain was basically eating itself had horrified him.

He fell silent, as Arwen asked Galadriel some questions about her past experiences with healing human minds, wondering where the influence of one such as Sauron ended and the mental trauma began. This was actually a relatively straight forward question for Galadriel, who answered easily, waiting for Harry to gather himself.

Eventually he was ready, and after kissing Tauriel's hand, he took another draught from Galadriel's well, leaned back, and was once more asleep within seconds.

"Tell me truly, Beleg Naneth, how difficult will this be for you? And for Harry?" Arwen asked, frowning as she looked between them.

"Tough for both of us, although... I believe I can keep Harry from feeling anything. I will have to keep him asleep through all of this, however. Once begun this process will not be one I can simply halt and take a break from. Still, separating his mental presence from his brain will be somewhat easy thanks to the spell I placed on the water."

Galadriel shook her head staring down at her hands then to Harry. "The rest? There is a reason why it was only the second generation of Númenóreans who seemed to truly be set apart from other men in terms of longevity, becoming closer to Elros than the Edain they descended from. A grown man's mind and brain are very different from a child's. It will be a long, delicate process. Subtlety and control are needed here."

Lady Galadriel fell silent, then after a second she raised her hand. On it a ring lay suddenly glowing with a clear white light, as if a star had fallen from the night into her hand. More light flashed from that ring than any of the lights around them, and a feeling of overwhelming magic flowed from it. This was a ring of power Tauriel could tell almost instantly, one of the Three Rings that had been created by Celebrimbor which Sauron had never touched.

Now Galadriel pulled it off her finger, setting it aside as Tauriel watched on in surprise. Even Arwen was somewhat bemused by that act. "Beleg Naneth, if the work will be so difficult then why..."

Seeing the younger elves' expression, Galadriel chuckled quietly. "Yes, it is a ring of power. The ring of Adamant, Narya, in fact. Yet, this is a task it would not help me with overmuch." Arwen nodded, but still looked confused, and Galadriel chuckled once more. "I also like to set Narya aside occasionally like this, as a test for myself. To know that I can stand back from the power, that it is simply a tool like any other."

Tauriel and Arwen both nodded at that, understanding the point, although both younger elves looked at one another, wondering if they could so easily discard such a 'tool'. Seeing that look Galadriel shook her head. "It is often harder to turn away from power than use it. I could indeed use that power to do great good. I have in the past. But one always needs to consider the cost of such things. And the implications for you and your folk in using them."

That caused Arwen to nod, while Tauriel still looked a bit conflicted, understanding her point, but not seeing as deeply as Arwen.

With the girls' confusion dealt with Galadriel turned back to Harry. For some reason, Galadriel found herself almost looking forward to this. Not to the necessity of such fiddly work, of course.

But the challenge of it? It had been a long time since Galadriel had needed to work on something so intricate. *The last time I did was on a much larger scale, re-creating Melian's Veil around my realm*, she thought, as she began to project her presence into Harry's physical brain and mind.

"Arwen, I trust you can look after his body's needs?"

"Blood replenishing herbs and lots of water correct?" Her granddaughter asked. "From my experience helping to heal blunt force trauma to the head, he might start bleeding from the nose as you start to work on the physical brain."

Tauriel, for some reason that eluded Galadriel at present had started at Galadriel's words, but Arwen hadn't reacted, so Galadriel nodded, ignoring it for now. "Exactly. I am also afraid that he might start thrashing about once we start working. I cannot be nearly as subtle as the Valar can be in this, being able to see only so far into a person. You may have to use your magics to keep him calm."

Arwen answered in the affirmative, and Galadriel left her body behind for a time.

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Harry found himself floating in a sea of gray, the shape of trees all around him, distorted by the fog. In the distance, a sound like seagulls on the wind accompanied by the crashing of waves. *"So is this a sending, or a lucid dream? It certainly isn't anywhere I've ever been. I've never heard a bird make that noise before, or waves crashing... As a British bloke I feel ashamed of myself for some inexplicable reason."*

"A bit of both Harry Potter." Galadriel's voice made him turn, and once more, he found himself stunned by the vision of the Lady of Lothlorien. Here, in the realm of the mind, her raiment of her physical form was gone, and in its place stood the magnificence that it always been there underneath. If Harry had not seen her like this before, he might well have been blinded. As it was, he had seen others of even greater power in a similar manner, and so could still deal with it relatively well. *"This realm is but a dreamscape, one with little connection to the reality, but it is within your mind."*

Nodding at that, Harry looked around. *"Judging from that I suppose this is where my, my mental presence will stay I suppose as you work?"* When Galadriel nodded, Harry chuckled dryly. *"So my mind gets to sit it out in the waiting room, while my brain's being operated on. It might get a touch boring, but it's certainly better than the alternative."*

Galadriel laughed at that. *"I do apologize for that, Harry, but mayhap you forget that you have all your knowledge and training to call upon. Perhaps you can figure out a project to work on, hmmm?"*

"Huh..." Harry thought for a moment, then as he gestured, a black-haired man with a long, billowing cloak, a sharp beaked nose and deep-set, coal black eyes appeared there.

"Potter! I will see you expelled for this!" The image roared, right before it was blasted into paste by a spell from Harry.

"..." Galadriel stared, and Harry, after a moment of euphoria, Harry subsided, looking very sheepish as her gaze bore into him. *"No."*

"Yeah, I suppose that isn't very, um, mentally sound as I had hoped." Harry answered with a grimace. *"I apologize, it was just the first thing I thought of."*

"I will put that down to your normal attempt to use humor to not talk about deeper issues," Galadriel answered, shaking her head. *"Think of something more constructive to do with your time here Harry, you will find it goes far faster than time on the outside world, regardless. But before that, I believe I have someone else I should introduce to."*

Galadriel had felt that presence almost the moment she had begun to probe Harry's mind, feeling the magic of the world of Arda pulsing through him, changing him. The presence of one of the beings most connected to that magic. The obvious one to discuss such things with Galadriel by the powers beyond the sea.

With a gesture, the fog around them receded, and from out beyond the trees a woman stepped. Well, she was a woman physically. But there, the similarities ended. She was a vision, a revelation of beauty and poise that made even Galadriel pale somewhat in comparison.

She was not as tall as Galadriel, coming up only to the Lady of Lothlorien's shoulder, but her hair was the blackest night, making even Arwen's hair seem bland in comparison, falling down her back and chest in loose ringlets. Her eyes were luminescent, literally glowing, her face so perfect that any artist in the world in this world or Harry's original would have wept, begged, and committed murder cheerfully for the opportunity to try and capture it in carving or painting.

Her lips were full, quirked into a somewhat sad smile, but one that was, despite it's obvious grief, also welcoming at the same time. And, although it somehow made Harry feel a little dirty to think of it, her body was much like that of the Maiar Arien , except, for the fact that it wasn't completely made out of fire as it was for his patron.

Harry knew a broad outline of Lady Galadriel's history and the history of the elves. He understood who he was seeing here, and after getting over his shock and pushing through the feeling her presence evoked, he bowed his head lightly to her. *"Maiar Melian. I would have thought Arien or Aulë would be the one to help in this, if the help of an Ainur was needed."*

Natalie smiled faintly at the use of the word Ainur rather than the more specific Maiar or Valar. Where precisely Arien placed in the power structure, such as it was, between the Maiar and the Valar was quite an ephemeral topic, although it was one that was completely beside the point at present. *"While Arien will perhaps be able to help Galadriel during the day as she works on your problem, it is nighttime Harry Potter, and her powers during the night are much diminished, both in application and sense."*

Harry nodded, understanding that to mean that Arien might only be vaguely aware of what was going on, and unable to do anything about it one way or the other. *"And Aulë?"* He grinned suddenly. *"Wait, let me guess. When it comes to issues of the mind, he's no help whatsoever. From my interactions with him, he seemed almost dwarfish in his bullheaded approach to anything outside of his own craft."*

Melian did not laugh, but her smile at least remained where it was, which Harry would count as a win. *"Something of the sort. In truth Harry Potter, while all of us can in some small fashion influence events or discern the minds and thoughts of others, we have never been able to outright control the minds and hearts of others, nor do any wish to do so. The need to control, to order and organize things as we feel they ought to be is a slippery slope for beings such as us. One Morgoth slid down even before Arda was made, and one Sauron and many of his other followers also fell into."*

For the first time since they met Harry saw Galadriel's twisted into a wrathful one, her face a rictus of hate and loathing. Not that this surprised him, knowing what he did about Sauron and his history with Galadriel's family.

Finrod was the eldest brother of Galadriel, who had been king of Nargothrond and head of the siblings, the sons and daughter of Finarfin who had left their father behind in order to follow their kin across the waves. Eventually crossed they had to cross the Helcaraxë instead of the ocean, but afterward, Finrod became a great king, leading his brethren and their house in creating a new realm. Of all the house of Finwë, he had been the tallest, fairest, and beloved by all, even being the first elf to reach out a hand to Man when they came into Beleriand, becoming the lord of the Houses of Man who would later be named the Edain.

But this did not mean he was immune to the disaster of Dagor Bragollach, when the forces of Morgoth routed the combined might of Elves, men, and dwarves. There he was saved by a human, the father of Beren. Eventually, Finrod would be pulled into Beren's quest for the Silmarils thanks to an Oath he had made to Beren's father. In this journey, Finrod eventually came face to face with Sauron while wearing the magical guise of an orc. Eventually he fought and slew a werewolf that came for Beren, slaying it with his hands and teeth. Yet in doing so, Finrod was mortally wounded, and he died in Tol-in-Gaurhoth, a fortress that he himself had built decades before under the name of Minas Tirith.

So Finrod fell, joining Galadriel's other two brothers, Agnor and Aegnar. Both of them had fallen in the Dagor Bragollach.

To say she loathed Sauron was an understatement. Indeed, her hatred of Sauron was perhaps only eclipsed by her remembered anger and hatred towards Fëanor. Thus she would ever be his foe, for all her lack of martial prowess.

Letting Galadriel have a moment to herself, Melian continued to address Harry. *"Regardless, we Ainur had no part in creating the minds of men or elves. Those came from Ilúvatar himself. Nor have any of us delved so deep into the healing of the physical brain as Elvish healers have. And most of them have only healed other elves. It is only the healers here in Middle Earth which have delved into the brains and minds of others. So I, as the representative to my masters, have to apologize. Until Galadriel began to push the magic of Arda back out of your being, we had no idea we were doing more harm than good."*

"I... I would have preferred you lot ask permission before messing with my brain, but I can at least understand why you felt it was needed. I also remember the pain I felt meeting with Manwë and the rest, and then their rummaging about in my brain. Not all of which was caused by the damage I'd taken in the caves under Goblin Town," Harry answered, shaking his head. *"So are you here to help Galadriel?"*

"Not directly, at least not at first." Melian looked over to Galadriel, her eyes brimming with affection and so much approval that Harry knew if he had been the recipient of that look, he would probably have begun to cry a bit. Happy tears, but still, tears. *"You are in good hands with Galadriel. No, I am here to help direct the magic of the world away from your brain for a time, and then only allow it in at Galadriel's word. Then it will become a joint project, the likes of which I have not taken part in since the creation of my and my husband's realm here in Middle Earth ages past."*

Her wan smile widened then to the point it could really be called a normal smile, shaking her head slightly. *"I am actually looking forward to it."*

Harry nodded and looked over at Galadriel himself when she spoke. *"For now Harry, why don't you start on some project or other. I wish to speak to my Pengolodha (teacher) for a moment."*

Nodding, Harry knelt down into a meditation pose, and the fog around them began to take shape under his directions. Soon an extremely large sandbox appeared in front of him, along with a full runic etching set and a random twig.

Cocking their heads thoughtfully, Galadriel and Melian spent a few seconds looking at what Harry was doing. But when they understood the purpose of the large box of sand, Galadriel and Melian turned to look at one another.

"It has been quite some time since the two of us could speak face to face like this. Sendings like our last discussion are just not the same," Galadriel said.

"You well understand why I personally have rarely contacted you even with a sending rather than this more substantive contact," Melian answered, even as she let the taller woman hug her gently.

"I do not blame you, it is not your fault or mine how this occurred. And of all of us you had reason to retreat, Pengolodha," Galadriel answered, her voice compassionate. "I would no doubt wish to leave the shores behind if my Celeborn passed on to the halls of Mandos. And I know something myself about the greater pain within you."

Melian was a Maiar who served Vana and songbirds were her particular treasure. She loved songs and the forests of Yavanna and had, in the dawn of the world, often traveled through them, singing to the birds or blessing the trees. When the march of the Eldar to the West began, Elwë, a king of the Teleri, came upon her and at their first meeting, both of them had been ensnared by the other. How long the two of them dwelt in solitude, not even any of the Valar could say, but it was long even as trees reckoned things, for many grew around them as they stood there, entranced with one another.

Long his people had searched for him, and when they came upon him they found him changed, yet still the king they knew. Together, Melian and Elwë created the first real realm of the Sindar elves on Middle Earth, those elves who had begun the journey to the West yet never reached the ocean. Melian wove around their realm a Veil which would hide it from all those who with fell intent while Elwë now named Thingol, gathered his folk under his banner, becoming King of all Sindar, the elves of the Teleri who stayed in Middle Earth.

It was through Melian that eventually the blood of the Maiar entered both elves and men alike from her daughter Luthien the Fair, and her marriage to Beren. But Thingol eventually died, slain in base treachery by the dwarves of Nogrod when they became enamored of the Silmaril he had been given by Beren, then fit into the necklace thereafter known as Nauglamir. And then later Luthien, who had been reborn as a human, had passed on forever along with her husband.

In an effort to move on from their shared grief at that, Galadriel's forced her voice to come out with a somewhat rueful tone. *"It is strange to think that I have lived longer than the ages you and Thingol were wed. That I have led my people for nearly as long as he was king."* She then went on more hesitantly, looking over to where Harry sat, then back to Melian. *"Has Thingol come back as yet? Do you dwell with him now beyond the Western ocean in peace?"*

Melian's shook her head, the bottomless grief within her now clear for anyone to see. *"No, he has yet to be reborn. A part of me feels it will be soon, but it is not yet."*

Now it was the Maiar's turn to be hesitant, as she looked at Galadriel. *"Galadriel, my Nolemo (student)... you have heard the call of the West. You know that you and the other elves of Middle Earth, you are declining, your Fëa overcoming your physical forms, and your Fëa themselves becoming weary of Middle Earth. While the Ban might still be in place for some, it*

*has never been in place for you, as it was never in place for your brothers. You could return to the blessed lands. You... at least then you would be with **your** daughter..."*

The Ban of the Noldor had been set in place when the Noldor under Fëanor had sworn his horrible oath to reclaim the Silmarils come what may on the names of the Valar. It had been then anointed in blood during the Kinslaying.

But Galadriel and her siblings had not taken that oath. Although moved by the words of Fëanor they, and their household, had wished more to journey beyond the blessed lands to carve out their own kingdoms. More than that ambition, they had been moved by love, wishing to stand with their cousins. And although Aegnor and Angrod had taken part in the Kinslaying, they had also been among the first to come back to themselves after, and to help end the violence. They continued on and then when betrayed anew by Fëanor, headed north, crossing the Helcaraxë with the main host of the Noldor.

And yet, despite the fact that she could return to Aman, where the Noldor were now ruled by her father, to bask in the might and majesty of the Valar, Galadriel shook her head firmly. *"No. I will not return to Aman. My reasoning for being here is still the same, regardless of the tragedy that befell Celebrain. I wished to rule my own lands, to explore and grow as an individual beyond merely being a princess of the Noldor. My willpower is undiminished even if my Fëa is weaker. And my husband is **here**, in these lands. Celeborn never evinced any interest in journeying thusly, and I will not leave him behind. Not if any choice is left to me.."*

Melian smiled her sad smile at that but nodded. *"Understandable. And in point of fact, it is probably a good thing. Although we Maiar and Valar have been slow to recognize it, young Harry's arrival has changed things dramatically, well beyond what even Manwë and Varda together could foresee. So perhaps it is a good thing that you remain here."*

Galadriel nodded at that. *"One cannot add a note to the Song without the Song itself changing in a fundamental manner."*

To that, Melian, known as the greatest singer of all Arda, simply nodded, and soon both of them turned to their work, disappearing from Harry's 'waiting room'. The fog returned, and the sounds of birds grew louder in the distance, as Melian began to push back against the magic of Arda, and Galadriel began her work.

OOOOOO

Despite only being a sending, Melian's presence could be felt by those who were most attuned to the world and the magic within. From where she was watching Harry and her grandmother, Arwen blinked in surprised shock, shaking her head. "I, I believe that the Valar, or at least a spirit from beyond the western ocean, has reached out to help my Beleg Naneth."

“What do you mean?” Tauriel asked in confusion, not able to sense anything. There was a faint tingle to her skin, perhaps, but that was all she could sense.

“It is something I can barely sense myself, but I think... I think a spirit is here that was not here before. And...” Arwen leaned over Harry, causing Tauriel to twitch just a bit as Arwen stared into Harry’s face. “I think that the spirit in question is helping Beleg Naneth push out the magic of Arda from within Harry Potter to let her work on his brain. It is a very odd sensation, one I cannot think of the words for... a lack of something that is always supposed to be there...”

“But it is not a bad thing?”

“No, indeed it might be a good thing.” Arwen turned away from the bed, nodding over Tauriel’s head. “Somehow, I do not think my grandmother’s worries about needing to watch over Harry’s physical form will become an issue.”

Arwen paused then, noticing a faint tinge of relief entering Tauriel’s eyes. She cocked her head thoughtfully, looking at the much younger elf, feeling a bit amused to think such a thing of someone else. While Tauriel was less than a fifth her own age, Arwen had long been the youngest elf in Lothlorien, and before that one of the youngest in Rivendell. “Is there something troubling you?”

Tauriel looked up at that, and frowned faintly, before deciding to just outright state it. “I have never been one to care overmuch about appearances or beauty beyond that of nature. But when I met you, I... I feared that your beauty would snare Harry. I have not seen any sign of it, yet I feared it. I apologize for that.”

“There is no need. I know I am attractive, as such things are measured by both Sindar and Noldor,” Arwen answered matter-of-factly. “I have had several single men seek to woo me, but I have never been interested in such. Particularly since many of them were a literal Age older than me.”

Tauriel laughed at that, and Arwen smiled. “You need not fear. Your bond with Harry is easy to see, and despite the time not matching up to it, I feel it might be to the level where it cannot be impacted by outside forces. Nor would I be interested in breaking up what is obviously a love match even if I had the power to do so.”

“Thank you,” Tauriel smiled in reply a great weight lifting from her shoulders as she sensed the sincerity in Arwen’s words. “I would like to get to know you better in the coming days, if you wish it as well.”

“I do. Having a friend younger than myself will be quite nice. All too often I am the youngest in the crowd. Perhaps had I known that there were even younger elves, and children too as you mentioned them, in Taur-e-Ndaedelos, I would have travelled there long since,” Arwen answered with a chuckle, shaking her head. “But since Beleg Naneth requested that I help in

writing up a treatise on poultice and other healing practices in Common to send to Erebor and the Beornings, I have some translations to do. Be well Tauriel, and remember, if you sense that Harry needs water the carafe over there is still full. The magic within will keep Harry asleep for as long as need be."

Tauriel nodded, and as Arwen walked off, watched as the black haired Elven woman easily insinuated herself into a song that had been going on in the background all along. Like many elvish settlements, music was simply a part of every day, lauded and listened to by any who wished to turn their mind hither. As she walked, Arwen's voice rose in an incredibly well-trained alto, coming to take over one of the main parts so smoothly and easily it would have struck any human as a planned move.

It was a sign of mastery of music and voice that Tauriel could only shake her head at. She had never aspired to be a singer, not since the moment she had seen a member of the Unseen Host draw and fire a bow, the singing of the bowstring a far greater, more alluring sound than most music could ever be. But even Tauriel could see that Arwen's voice was magnificent.

With a shake of her head, Tauriel moved to Harry's side opposite where Galadriel sat, laying her finger gently on Harry's lips. If they became parched in his sleep, she would know he would need more water and was close to waking up. *Although perhaps with the spirit that Arwen believes has come to Galadriel's aid even that won't be needed?* She glanced across Harry's body at Galadriel, shaking her head slightly. *Who would ever have thought I would be here, in Lothlorien, watching the Lady of the Woods healing my... my man like this? Life certainly has changed since I led that patrol to capture the 'trespassers'.*

Tauriel smiled widely now, rolling the term 'my man' around in her head, and finding she quite liked the sound of it. Indeed, as she sat there, the dreams she'd had of traveling the world before meeting Harry seemed all the closer, all the warmer, knowing she would do so with him beside her. *Come back to me Harry, hale and whole. We Both have a lot of exploration to do...*

She paused then, and in a very human gesture, raised a palm and slapped her face lightly. "And that sounded dirty even in my mind, Harry is corrupt... I'm going to stop now. Good grief." With that, Tauriel got comfortable in the chair, and closed her own eyes, more than willing to spend time in Elvish dreams as she waited for Harry to wake up healed once more.

As per normal with her dreams, Tauriel found herself in the woods of Mirkwood, a bow in hand, a quiver full of arrows at her hip. And at first, all seemed well. The dream was very obviously a mix of memory and imagination. The background was from her memory, and her quarry was a group of spiders, if ones that gleamed oily blackness. While that was not so unusual, the fact they spoke with Thranduil's voice for some reason might have struck most as odd. For Tauriel, however, that was typical fair, really.

However, after she slew the last one with an arrow, the feeling of the dream started to change slightly. There was a spell on the wind, a feeling in the air almost that told her that something had changed. No longer was Tauriel the hunter. She was now the hunted.

Tauriel couldn't quite tell why she thought that. Nothing in the woods around her had changed, and even in a dream, Tauriel knew it was still her dream, it had not become a joined dreamscape like the time Galadriel had reached out to her. But it was as if there was simply a presence in the air, a hint of some bigger predator out there.

Instantly, Tauriel broke off her own hunt, quickly moving through the woods as quietly as possible, taking to the trees occasionally and backtracking, leading whatever creature was out there trying to hunt her a merry chase. Then she changed direction randomly, racing away through the trees, emphasizing speed rather than silence. Yet not once through this movement did Tauriel lose that feeling.

Whatever was after her was intelligent, knew the woods as well as she did, and was just as quick. *But I am **not** normal prey. Very well, if this creature is smart enough to trail me so well, let us see if I can turn the tables on it a bit.*

With that, Tauriel began to deliberately move through the forest in such a manner that used her knowledge of it to her best advantage. After all, the forest was based on Mirkwood, not just her imagination. Soon Tauriel came to what she wanted, a small stream deep enough for her to wet her feet up to the ankle with a small series of rocks on the other side, overgrown with weeping willows on both sides. Tauriel entered the stream, pausing there and moving both up stream and down, leaping out onto the rocks at the end of each half-loop. Wiping the wetness away from the grass, she then moved onto the rocks.

She spent several moments then pulling her feet up on to the rock and removing any sign of her footsteps, before slowly and carefully moving through the fronds of the weeping willows, and then climbing up a nearby tree. So slowly did she move that not a single leaf was out of place or damaged in her passage. There, Tauriel hid herself amidst its boughs.

Any hunter would assume that Tauriel had taken to the stream, either going downstream or upstream as she had left tracks, and as Tauriel knew she was currently scentless- she always was in her dreams - it was only sight and sound that would give the game away.

Tauriel waited there, watching the fronds of the weeping willows, waiting for her quarry to either appear along the stream, or pushing through it.

She heard movement before she could see anything, the whinny of a horse of all things, a chuffing noise as it was pulled to a halt. *A horse moving so silently through these woods?* This was not a rhetorical question, as Tauriel had never met a horse that could move through the leaf-strewn forest of Mirkwood quietly. Even deer made more noise than this horse had been

up to this point. Further, there was no sound of rein or bangle, simply the horse. And the creaking of leather, perhaps.

For a moment, that was all she could hear, as the beast's master paused in place, no doubt looking around him thoughtfully. Then, the clouds above moved, allowing the light of the stars and moon to shine through, and Tauriel barely held back a gasp as she beheld who had been hunting her.

At the same moment, he had turned towards her, and his voice rose flavored by amusement. ***"You have good instincts young elf and reacted promptly and well to understanding that the nature of your hunted changed. But to avoid any further complications, perhaps you could come out of your hiding spot and deal with me face-to-face?"***

Tauriel obeyed without even about it, coming out from the woods to stare at the hunter, Oromë. One of the Valar, Oromë was known as one of the staunchest opponents of the greater darkness, a hunter of evil things who never relented, never gave up the hunt or his anger at their despoiling of Arda. Oromë had been the one to first find the elves in that long distant past, and to lead them to the shores although it also occasionally left them to hunt the creatures of Morgoth that even in those days still populated Middle Earth. *"Your pardon, Hunter, but I did not expect by opponent to be you tonight."*

"Nor should you have. And if a feeling of wrongness enters your dreams, it is never a bad thing to be cautious." Oromë said, chuckling very quietly, the kind of chuckle that could be lost on the wind, the brushes of leaf upon leaf. "I tend to try and keep my touch upon the people I interact with as silent as an arrow on the wind, so it is good that you noticed anything at all."

And yet, while his chuckle was quiet, and he had been incredibly silent in his movements, in raiment and the feel of him, Oromë was very definitely standing out at present. He wore what looked like a specially made set of full plate armor, gold-colored, but not shining as brightly if it was really gold, the armor ending at his shins and elbows. He wore a pair of black riding boots that came under the armor under his greaves, while his forearms were bare, his skin seemingly giving off a silver gleam. So bright was it, Tauriel could barely make out the grip of the long spear in his hand, thin, but with half its length the metal point, wickedly barbed. His helm too was of the same metal seeming to meld into the armor at the neck yet it moved from side to side easily. The helm was a full face helmet, leaving only his eyes uncovered, eyes that glowed a fell blue light, offsetting the silver his body gave off.

Behind him now as he stood on his own feet was his horse, Nahar, which looked almost ghostlike in comparison to its master. Then again, Oromë seemed to bend the dream around him, becoming the most real thing in that dreamscape. And on top of that, there was this feeling, a feeling of ready wrath, of violence barely constrained. It was like the Valar was a bowstring pulled taut, ready to be loosed, or a dagger poised to plunge into an unsuspecting animal in an instant.

"Still, I cannot believe that this is happenstance for a usual thing, your presence in my dreams," Tauriel intoned, shaking her head as she stared up at the far taller Valar. *"And, as proud of my own abilities as I am, never what I have believed that my abilities on the hunt would warrant the presence of yourself in my dreams for whatever reason."*

"It is not usual, and you are correct. As superlative as you are on the hunt, on tracking and striking unseen and as often as you have praised me for your skills, I would not normally be able to appear in front of you thusly."

With an abruptness that startled Tauriel, Oromë turned away, leading Nahar off and very obviously expecting her to follow. She did so, and within seconds, they were elsewhere in Tauriel's dream realm, the start of her hunt on the spiders. This part of the dream was the most like her memories, a memory of a specific battle against the spiders not even a day after she had returned with the rest of the Elven Army to Taur-e-Ndaedelos. She had gone on a solo hunt then, slaying several spiders from ambush, as they had encroached far too deeply into elven lands.

Oromë seemed to grunt in approval as he saw the two dead spiders where she had left them, pulling out one of her arrows she had left in the corpse.

"I could not retrieve them yet, as I was forced away by the other spiders quick reaction to my first ambush," Tauriel hastened to explain, somehow feeling as if she was being remonstrated with.

But Oromë simply shrugged his massive shoulders, and Tauriel noticed for the first time that all his metal armor moved almost like a second skin, not just the neck area. ***"I was not commenting. Do you know my philosophy?"***

"I do not believe it is called a philosophy per se honored Valar, although it is known that you hunt the dark creatures, orcs, goblins, trolls, and other nameless beasts from the Sleep of Yavanna." This was after Morgoth had shattered the two Lamps. It had not ended until Varda created the new stars to hang in the sky, which became the first things the new born Eldar, the Firstborn, saw.

"Yes. That is it. To always hunt the darker creatures out there, to defend those who cannot fight such on their own. I had never wished for us to retreat across the sea, I had never wished us to give over rulership of Middle Earth to humans, elves and dwarves. Not until the last creature of Morgoth was accounted for. And when he returned, when he proved to be unchanged, I was all for riding out instantly, slaying both him and the creature that he had found to aid his destruction of the two trees."

For a moment, Oromë's eyes dimmed with memory, his hand gripping the shaft of his spear so hard the wood creaked, and Tauriel wondered if he was seeing that scene again in his mind's eye: Seeing the destruction of the trees, their draining by the creature Ungoliant. The two of

them had come upon the Trees, Telperion and Laurelin, during a festival that had called most elves and spirits away. Destroying the trees, they had then been encased in an impenetrable darkness, heading to Formenos, where Fëanor, his father and sons had retreated. There, the first murder done in Aman occurred. Finwë stood before Morgoth, unafraid of his darkness unlike the few others there, and Morgoth slew him before stealing away the Silmarils.

Then the Valar shook himself and seemed to stare down at Tauriel with interest. ***"Even now I wish to hunt. To be about the world beyond the blessed lands, and slay the foul creatures left behind Cursed Morgoth. Then my wrath might lessen. But I am constrained by the words of the Lord Manwë. I cannot personally roam this world any longer. But I can influence and warn, just like others have done before me."***

"... And you have chosen me? Simply because of my proximity to Harry I suppose?" Tauriel asked, uncertain how she felt about that. On the one hand it would be something very silly to get angry about. But on the other, Tauriel would've preferred to be known for her own merits, especially by her patron deity.

"Your proximity and relationship with Harry is part of the reason. He has shaken all of the Valar to a certain degree, and though many are still very leery, some of us wish to be slightly more proactive than we have been in the past. But your closeness to Harry was the final factor for me choosing you to relay this information to. Otherwise, I might have reached out to Legolas, Oromë admitted. "But, he also has his duties as king, and he cannot go searching into the shadowed corners of the world for the creatures that are our rightful prey."

"But I can. And Harry and I have already made plans to travel the world and explore. Yet that still does not tell me why you are here. You should know me well enough to know that I would be doing that anyway," Tauriel declared, her earlier moment of pique disappearing.

Oromë snorted at that, shaking his head. ***"You are correct on both scores."*** He fell silent then, staring out into the shadows of the trees, probably seeing far more at night than even an elf like Tauriel could, for all that he didn't actually seem to have eyes rather than to bright green pinpricks of light where they should be.

"Things are stirring beyond," he said abruptly.

That abruptness took Tauriel back for a few seconds, but when the words actually registered, she paled. ***"I, Harry said that Lord Manwë and the others had examined him, examined his memories for any sign of the Great Enemy, and they had not seen any."***

"Nor had they. If we had, we would've sent instructions to Mithrandir and our other servants to remove him," Oromë answered bluntly. ***"If we had not seen fit to turn him into a gibbering vegetable, able to no longer serve his dread master, anyway. Even an unwilling pawn is still a pawn after all, and best removed."***

Tauriel blanched further at that, but Oromë went on. ***"No, it's not the Great Darkness that stirs, but something else. You have fought her children, and we were just talking about her most horrible act on this world. You know who I speak of."***

Tauriel stared at him, a shiver going through her body as she looks down at the dead spiders. *"I, I thought that it was known by the wise that Ungoliant had eaten herself long ago."*

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. It is almost impossible for me to tell if it is that creature herself, or some of her daughters and sons. We also indeed long thought she had disappeared from Arda," Oromë practically snarled, a voice full of wrath and injured pride. ***Something is still out there, hidden to even Manwë's sight. What it can be, what impact it will have, I cannot tell you. But it will perhaps be up to you and Harry to combat whatever it is. After all, it is his arrival here on Arda that caused this in the first place."***

Oromë was not being entirely truthful here. He wasn't lying, he was simply withholding information. Manwë and the others were still very leery about Morgoth returning, knowing that if he did somehow returned from his long exile, he would be terrible and powerful indeed for having spent so long in the Void. Who knew what strange powers or abilities he could have discovered there?

It was why Aulë was reinforcing the Door of Night. It was why Manwë and Varda were watching the Walls of the World so closely. And yet so far there had been no stirrings in the Void. That was part of the point of the Void really, it never changed. But none of them, not even Varda, in who the light of Ilúvatar himself could be most clearly seen, could discern anything there. No, the only movement in the shadows was here, in Middle Earth.

Further, all of the Ainur were disturbed to this day by a single fact: Even now, none of them had ever learned where Ungoliant came from. Not even Manwë, Varda, Ulmo and Mandos, the ones who knew the most of Arda and Ilúvatar himself, knew. She had not been a spirit, some Maiar twisted by Morgoth. Rather she had been twisted already, a separate darkness than his. From where she came from no one knew. Certainly she had not been here before the Song. But neither was she part of it. Much like Tom Bombadil was to the Firstborn, so Ungoliant was a mystery to the Ainur, if a far more villainous one.

Nor was Oromë actually telling the truth as to why he was appearing in front of Tauriel. Indeed, when the first stirrings of something fell moving in the darkness had been discovered, Oromë had thought to hunt it down himself regardless of where it was, ignoring the rule of Manwë that the Valar needed to let Middle Earth and its denizens to their own devices as much as possible. That rule after all was more of a guideline than an actual hard and fast law, given their sending Olórin and the others to Middle Earth.

"I see. I cannot say that it is something that this knowledge was chosen to fill me with joy. But neither is it a duty I would shirk away from even without your warning. Do you have any idea where we might find this quarry?"

"Some of them will be a beyond your reach. For others, Manwë and I can sense movement in the far north, something ageless stirring there, unconnected to Sauron and his machinations. But others will have joined forces with Sauron's darkness. Make no mistake, whatever else, He is still the great threat to Middle Earth. Do not miss the target for the shadows," Oromë warned.

"I see. But even Harry could not assault such as Sauron now that he has retreated into his fortress at Mount Doom. I trust you don't think that Harry and I alone will be enough to deal him?"

"No. Perhaps if more of Sauron's power was involved in his own physical form, but it is not." For a moment Oromë looked frustrated, shaking his head. ***"But that makes him all the stronger you see."***

Tauriel nodded at that. And Oromë went on. ***"To that end, as your prospective lover is being healed of both the damage dealt to him by the void, and me and my fellows' lack of knowledge of the human brain, you and I will be training in here. I will not teach you further on how to use bow and arrow. You are at the limits of what an elf could do with such anyway. And you will find an able teacher in combat in Celeborn. But I will teach you about hunting the spider-kin. They are far more dangerous than the lesser spiders you have dealt with in the past. I will also tell you about the other creatures of Morgoth just in case my thoughts on what is stirring out there is wrong. Including some creatures that, while they had not been seen for millennia, might still be out there somewhere."***

Tauriel frowned for a few moments more, then shrugged her shoulders, allowing a chuckle to escape her. *"That sounds like an excellent use of my time frankly. And given what Harry has said about his own life, and how trouble seems to find him so often and so easily, I can almost guarantee that he and I will run into numerous beasts and monsters long thought dead. Better to be armed with knowledge before doing so I think."*

"Good!" Oromë chuckled at that, and with that, they began.

OOOOOOO

Weeks then months passed as Tauriel remained mostly in elvish dream, learning about the various creatures of the Greater Enemy that might still be out there. This was a depressing number, not so much in total amount, but in variety. While there were only a total of a twenty to thirty monsters unaccounted for, Morgoth had been incredibly inventive in how many experimental beasts and monsters he attempted to create in his first rise. It was only after his return to Middle Earth that he narrowed it down, after the elves had come and defeated him in the battle of Dagor Aglareb. And the vast majority that still survived to the War of Wrath, when the Ainur finally crossed the sea and made war upon him, died then against the might of the Maiar and the hosts of Vanyar, Teleri and Noldor from beyond the sea.

Surprisingly, Tauriel didn't learn about as much in terms of history as she had thought she would from Oromë. For one, he was completely uninterested in history that didn't touch on his own portion of the wars against Morgoth. For another, none but Ulmo and Mandos (and Melian, admittedly) had truly concerned themselves overmuch with Middle Earth after the Noldor had defied Manwë and brought their doom upon themselves in following Fëanor.

Having loved the Firstborn with an almost childlike infatuation, the Ainur had been greatly disillusioned by this act. This, and worry their war against Morgoth would cause more damage than Morgoth on his own, stayed their hands. And while Mandos and Ulmo still continued to watch events in Beleriond periodically, that was a big difference from taking an active interest in what was going on there. So what was known of that time to the Ainur was second-hand for the most part.

The only one who had any direct knowledge of that time, Melian, did not speak of much. Every memory she held of Middle Earth was tinged by grief at her dead husband, who still rested within the halls of Mandos. And, worse, of Luthien, whose spirit had passed beyond Arda, never to be seen again.

But in the realm of hunting, both in terms of combat and silent stalking, Oromë was a master beyond any dream of competence Tauriel had ever dared to have.

And so Tauriel learned. She learned about trailing someone over a desert, an environment she had barely heard of before, let alone seen. She learned about tracking creatures over planes, up sheer mountain faces and over ice. Tauriel learned about weaknesses, where various monsters could be struck or stabbed, what weapons to use, blunt force or piercing. That had come as a surprise to Tauriel: that some creatures were more susceptible to taking internal damage from a hard strike as their chitin was too tough to pierce.

It was a fascinating time, and every few days she would wake up, and have a meal with Arwen.

For their part, Arwen and Lord Celeborn had been astonished that another one of the Ainur had reached out to Tauriel. One of them taking responsibility for a large majority of the problems Harry was facing with his brain made sense. But in this day and age, a direct sending from a Valar was something to be lauded.

In a way, it renewed the Galadhrim's connection to the Valar in a way that had not occurred in Ages. For several weeks after that revelation songs were sung to the Valar, starting and ending with Varda. The lady of the stars was the favorite of all elves regardless of race.

And of course, Celeborn took this warning seriously. Members of his own ranger core, the Everseeking, who had not been called up to serve with their more active fellows began training and practicing once more. Patrols out from Lothlorien now scoured the area around their realm, out to the edge of the comparatively small segment of forest that was Lorien, and

further out even to the foot of the mountains beyond, turning back only at the outskirts of a small lake the dwarves of Moria had called Mirrormere.

Celeborn also sent out several of his people as messengers to Legolas along with the notes Arwen had created to share with the dwarves as congratulations for resettling Erebor. If the goblins of the mountains somehow did start to push back out into their now empty hovels, it would be good for Mirkwood to have a better trained military. Further, messages were also sent to Rivendell. Normally that would be done mind-to-mind by Galadriel, but Celeborn could not perform that magic. Rather a band of five elves would head south to the Gap of Rohan and then up north from there to Rivendell. Such was the danger of Moria that the faster route of going straight north was deemed ill-advised.

In particular, Celeborn himself led an expedition to Dol Guldur. This was the only expedition that Tauriel joined, several weeks after her arrival.

Marching along in the back of the column, Tauriel had tried hard not to smile at the thrill of it. Surrounded by elves she had not worked with before, but being led by the Sindar legend that was Celeborn was utterly amazing. Ahead of her, she could see Celeborn now, moving across the land so swiftly the pace was pushing her hard, pausing only occasionally as they pushed through the trees, having crossed the river almost the moment they set out from Caras Galadhon and now pushing into Mirkwood, which had been called Greenwood the Great when the world was young.

They had made excellent time, unburdened by any heavy weapons. Full one hundred Elven warriors, with a force of ten ranging out around them as scouts, coming in occasionally to report, or lifting their voices in a series of bird calls to tell of terrain ahead of the main group.

Thankfully for Tauriel, the bird calls and hand gestures that Everseeking used were similar to the unseen host of Taur-e-Ndaedelos. They used fingers instead of whole hands, but the gestures themselves were the same.

So when one of the ranging scouts came back and wordlessly held up his hands his fingers in an X-shape, and brought them down to his mouth, she knew to be quiet. The entire host paused, crouching down, spreading out. As they did, they all pulled bows off their backs, fitting arrows to them and looking expectantly back the way the warrior had come.

The scout raced to Celeborn's side, whispering into his ear.

Celeborn slowly nodded, then held up a hand in a circle motion with a fist, raising his voice into the call of a hunting hawk, calling four times. Within moments, the elves had faded out into the woods around them, each of them finding individual hiding places in a wide semi-circle, blending into the wood as only trained elven warriors could.

What followed was perhaps not the most perfect example of what Harry had called hit-and-run attacks that could ever be. After all, when one side of a battle uses that tactic they were usually using it against a more numerous opponent. This time, it was the elves who had a major advantage in numbers. But it was easily one of the best prepared ambushes that Tauriel had ever been a part of.

The first time the group of eighteen goblin war riders knew of their presence was a hail of arrows coming at them from nearly every direction, a single arrow from each elf. The one lone warg which somehow still lived after taking two arrows to its flank tried to escape back the way it did, only to die to the arrows of two other scouts. They had been called back by Celeborn's earlier cry which had also told them from which direction to approach the ambush point.

Tauriel waited until Celeborn signaled the clear with a single shout of, "Done!" to move forward, being among the first to examine their victims. She retrieved her arrow, the fletching just slightly different than those of the Everseeking, plucking it out and then crouching down next to her victim, frowning thoughtfully as she turned the goblin over, nose wrinkling at the scent.

A moment later, one of Celeborn's officers was kneeling beside her. "Tell me, do these were the same markings and accoutrements as the group you and the human ran into during your trip down to our fair land?"

There was a tiny bit of disdain and censure in her fellow Sindar's voice, but Tauriel ignored it. Either it would go away as the older elf interacted with Harry, or once her love woke up he would prank the man into fleeing in fear. *Ah... how easy, and good it feels to think of Harry as my love.*

Shaking off that pleasant thought, she nodded holding up a patch of leather armor she had cut out all the goblins clothing. "They do. Look, you can see they are prepared for a long journey, given their packs, and this mark of an eye? It is the same one Harry and I saw on that group of warg riders. It is not one I have seen before, but I presume this means they came from Mordor?"

"Undoubtedly, although it is not a symbol I have seen before. When I fought under Gil-Galad Sauron used a clenched, mail fist," Celeborn frowning faintly. "I had thought that our campaign to point out the spiders within this segment of Mirkwood had been enough. But if they are still sending out patrols to Dol Guldur, it is evident that is not the case."

"So it is not just a normal patrol then. You think that they could be looking to repopulate the place?" Tauriel asked, shaking her head. "So quickly after Sauron was forced to retreat?"

Celeborn shook his head. "You assume, as did the Wise at the time, that his retreat was not planned, that it was made in haste. But Sauron was one of Morgoth's greatest commanders for reason, he planned ahead. I do not doubt that by the time he was forced to give over in Dol

Guldur that he had long since begun work in Mordor and brought together a host of orcs and goblins to protect his realm."

For a moment, Celeborn looked southeast, his arms crossed in a surprisingly human gesture as his face blank of all expression, thinking deeply. "If he has... then any chance of outright victory has slipped past us."

"Surely if the realms of elves and humans and even dwarves come together and..." Tauriel began, only to stop as Celeborn shook his head. It was not an abrupt or angry gesture, rather there was a profound sadness in the gesture.

"No. While I appreciate the thought, it is not possible. For one, there is no set communication between any of the Elven Lands and humans any longer. The humans go their way, and we go ours. Such it has been since the fall of Arnor. More, many of my folk would outright refuse to work alongside dwarves, as would I. And second..." Celeborn sighed a little, gesturing around them as the rest of the host began to move off. "While the warning from Oromë has served to galvanize me and my folk, it will not last. Our energy, our desire to care about what happens beyond our borders has lessened tremendously since the days of the Last Alliance."

He looked at the far younger elf with a bleak, hard gaze. "And do not mistake the Battle of the Lonely Mountain for the kind of campaign you would face if you tried to break into Mordor. If the Black Gate has been repaired, it would take an army of hundreds of thousands to break through, and the losses would be steep indeed. Losses that my folk could not sustain and would be unwilling to even attempt. I would be unwilling to even attempt it."

Tauriel frowned at that, and not for the first time wished that her fellow elves were a bit more like humans in how they regarded loss, challenges and the future. Not that she could blame Celeborn. Not for being so leery of the idea, and not with the idea of working with the dwarves. After all, she well understood that his uncle's realm of Doriath had been destroyed by the dwarves. And he has a point, I suppose. I doubt even humans would be willing to raise the army we would need to break into Mordor even now. "Then what can be done?" she asked aloud.

"We will aid the Dunedain. We will keep watch on Mordor and send in scouts. Never far through the mountains of Ered Lithui or Ephel Duath. But enough to make certain we know if Mordor has readied its forces for an offensive." Celeborn frowned at some secret worry then, before gesturing Tauriel to join the rest and they moved on.

Later on in her stay in Lothlorien Tauriel would come to understand more about the folk there, Noldor and Sindar alike. For one, she would learn that there were no Elven children around as there was in Taur-e-Ndaedelos. For another, the population was actually a little smaller than she had first thought as well. Although it was hard to estimate, she estimated the population of Lothlorien was barely larger than her home's.

Further, while the Everseeking was several times as large as the unseen host had been, the main army, those men trained to fight in stand-up battles, was only a thousand strong. Those thousand were all veterans, and the one time Tauriel watched a group of them train she came away astonished at their level of coordination and the small unit tactics they practiced. But still, there was only a thousand of them. And when attacking a fortress, most of those tactics and skills would be negated anyway.

For now however here in the woods of Mirkwood, she simply bowed to Celeborn's greater experience, and the group continued on their way.

The Everseeking kept going day and night, as elves could when unburdened, and soon, as dawn broke on the fifth day out from Caras Galadhon, came within sight of Dol Guldur. There, Celeborn waited, spreading out his troops in every direction searching for anything unusual or any movement, be it spider, orc or goblin. They found a surprisingly large amount of signs that a group of goblins had been here since the last expedition Celeborn had led up to the outskirts of the dread city.

"We never went in. With my wife still exhausted from her ordeal of driving Sauron out, it did not seem a good idea at the time. Now, I believe that was a mistake," Celeborn admitted grimly that evening as he called his officers and Tauriel together. The young elf was quite awed to be involved in this discussion, and as was the way of wisdom, she stayed silent throughout the meeting as the officers reported with their people had found. Signs of goblins, lots of them. Entirely without wargs and coming in from the west, from the direction of the Hithaeglin, or Misty Mountains in Common.

That could only mean one thing: the goblins of Moria still had sufficient numbers to send out these expeditions. The why of it was in question, however.

"We will discover that inside I believe," Celeborn murmured. "A journey I am not looking forward to."

His officers, several of whom were at least as old as he was if not as experienced or well known, all chuckled, while Tauriel stared out into the forest as dawn crept across the land, shivering. For the touch of dawn did little to dissipate the dread she felt here. A raw evil had sunk into the land here, spreading for leagues beyond Dol Guldur.

Dol Guldur was not the fortress's original name. Amon Lanc it had been at one point, the Naked Hill, for no trees grew upon it. In the past, it had been the site of the capital of the Silvan elves of Oropher, when Mirkwood had been known as Greenwood, and the taint of Sauron had yet to be felt in these lands.

The elves however had been driven out three times by Sauron. Not by war, but rather his influence on the lands. Twice as he warred against Gil-Galad in the first and second wars wars

of Sauron and the elves. Wars which only ended in victory for the elves when the men of Numenor came to their aide.

Of course, the second time, the Númenóreans had fallen into decadence and arrogance, led by the mad despot Ar-Pharazôn who in his arrogance decided to capture Sauron and bring him back to Numenor. Which eventually led to the destruction of Numenor by Ilúvatar. But that was an entirely different tale.

The third time that the area had been abandoned had been on the heels of the war of the Last Alliance. By that point, the elves of Greenwood did not have the numbers or will to resist when the darkness began to creep into their woods once more, and Thranduil, then king upon the death of his father had led his people permanently north, putting thousands of leagues between the former capital and their new home.

Now, as Tauriel and the rest of the small host moved up the hill to the distant fortress, Tauriel had to struggle to see anything that denoted her people had ever inhabited the area. Where before the Naked Hill had been green, green with grass and the gardens of the elves, now it was black and ruined. The very land had been changed, becoming more black with stones and debris from the hidden forges. Where before there had been no outer wall to the city, now one rose high above them.

In groups of fifteen the elves moved into the fortress, spreading out slowly, all of them now being affected by the feeling of wrongness in the air. Indeed, it was all Tauriel could do to concentrate on the real terrain around her, for fear of jumping at shadows. Only Celeborn seemed immune to it, and even he looked around very warily indeed. *Such is the weight of Sauron, that even now that he is gone, the very ground feels wrong and almost evil.*

Celeborn knew this, and quickly began to break his people up into groups. Several of them, who during times of peace worked as stonemasons or architects, he set to the task of pulling down the outer walls. "I realize my wife could probably do a much better job of this, but we will do what we can to make this fortress useless to the enemy."

He then rattled off a dozen names, and older elves in the main stepped forward, along with Tauriel. "While the rest are guarding the area against sudden surprises and seeing to the destruction of the outer area of the fortress, we will delve into its dark heart. I wish to know what the goblins were after."

Some of that they found quite quickly. On the first floor of the large tower overlooking the pits and the main mustering ground there were several rooms devoted to what looked like making poultices or experiments of some kind, a mix between the kind of things that wouldn't be out of place in Radegast's home or a brewery, coupled with a lot of glassware.

"Take samples of whatever is here. Arwen or my wife might be able to discern something of what has gone on here," Celeborn ordered. Leaving two men to that work, the rest of them

made their way deeper into the fortress as Celeborn talked quietly with the others about how they could go about destroying something like this. There was only so much they could do by knocking down buttresses or columns after all. Many of the larger segments, particularly the area where Gandalf had seen segments of the army coming together, they could bring down. But that would leave a veritable war and of passages side passages and tunnels.

The deeper they went the more nervous all of the elves, even Celeborn became. Being deep underground like this in an enclosed space, that was not pleasant for any elf. Even Tauriel, found uncomfortable, and she had explored Erebor alongside Harry and Dis.

But the search was fruitful, as they discovered what looks like large cages, which had been opened at some point in the past. Celeborn took one look at the chains within, and intoned grimly, "trolls. At least three of them, perhaps as many as five."

Tauriel and the other rangers moved around the area for a few moments, piecing together what it happened here. "Five. They were left behind for what reason I cannot say. And then, the goblins came in. They broke down the door. They didn't have the keys..." Tauriel said, gesturing to where the gate to the large cage had been taken off his hinges.

"The goblins then turned on one another and killing at least nine of their number... Feeding them to the trolls." One of the other rangers said distastefully, gesturing down to where several gnawed on body parts had been left scattered across the area.

"Thereafter, they prodded the trolls out of their cages, and presumably out of the fortress," another member of the Everseeking intoned.

"So the goblins and Moria will now have access to trolls." Celeborn shook his head slowly. "If the dread creature within Moria could not already create such, I doubt that having samples will allow it to. Rather five such will simply make Moria more defensible. Not that anyone in their right mind would ever dream of trying to reclaim it from the creature who conquered in the first place."

Tauriel looked at Celeborn in confusion but be it his general distaste for dwarves or a simple unease with the subject, he said no more. And soon enough, the group of explorers rejoined the rest of the host.

For several days the elves worked around the clock trying to destroy what they could of the fortress, but this proved to be far harder than any had hoped. They knocked down the outer gate and were able to fire several of the wooden supports for the tower, the inside of which became uninhabitable. Much of the wood within the underground segments was also set alight, but this did very little damage to the fortress in total.

As this became clear to everyone, Tauriel had a suggestion, and spoke up for the first time to Celeborn and his officers as they were debating whether or not they had done all they could. "If

we cannot destroy this place, could we not set traps and snares throughout? Make it so that if the forces of Sauron do try to come back, they will have to pay for the privilege."

While the others all looked a little askance at the idea of using traps trickery like that, it smacking too much of something the enemy would do, Celeborn simply nodded thoughtfully. "Good point. Traps and snares are just as good as ambushes after all."

That revelation seemed to appease his officers, and the forces got to work. By the time they left Dol Guldur two days later, there were several thousand traps strewn throughout its interior. Further, Celeborn decided to ask his wife to reach out to the eagles of the mountains. The beasts of Manwë could perhaps be asked to keep a watch on Dol Guldur which would endure far longer than any attempt by the elves to keep a watch on it. Eventually, even if they were only within sight of the place, an elf would need to leave, overwhelmed by the dark miasma of the territory. But an eagle could keep watch from afar.

With that, the expedition finished its mission, and headed back to Caras Galadhon without further incident. Where Tauriel's lessons began again.

OOOOOOO

When Harry next opened his eyes, he was surprised that the trees above were not as gold as he remembered the mallorn trees been when he had initially laid down. He mumbled that for a few seconds, then added, "That means something, but at the moment it's beyond me what."

"The seasons have changed from autumn into winter and then spring, Harry since I began my work upon your mind." Galadriel's tone was somewhat rueful, and Harry blinked as he turned his head slowly, as if his body was no longer used to moving, to look at where she sat in a chair beside the lounge he had laid out on. "I had not anticipated how difficult it would be to work on your mind, but it is finally finished. While I cannot say that your dreams will always be peaceful, your memories will no longer attack you, and your mind is entirely repaired once more. Your human perceptions, your human mind and way of looking at the world, have not been altered beyond incorporating new senses into them."

"New senses?" Harry said, trying to rise and failing the first time, getting it the second time. Human bodies were not meant to simply lie still for months on end, and everything creaked and groaned as he moved, standing up slowly and stretching in place.

"Indeed. You will not ever be able I think to sense the world around you as much as Mithrandir or myself, but you will be more susceptible to it than most elves. I will teach you how to use those new senses over the next few weeks I believe," Galadriel agreed, watching him closely to make certain that his body had not taken lasting injury having sat so still for so long. Thankfully it seemed as if he had not.

Thinking quickly, Harry knew of one way to test Galadriel's opinion on how his brain was healed once more. Remembering the pain of removing a memory to share it with Tauriel in his Pensieve, Harry raised a finger to the side of his head, closing his eyes briefly and then pulling the finger away. At the end of his finger a long silver wisp of memory wafted in an unseen breeze for a moment. Harry blinked, then smiled, and slowly put the memory back into his head. "While there's no easy way to see if I still retain all my memories, after all, how would I know if I was missing any, that didn't hurt at all. Which is a very good sign, lady Galadriel."

Galadriel looked intrigued at what he was doing, and when asked about it, Harry explained about the Pensieve. This caused Galadriel's eyes to light up in interest. "Such a thing would be an amazing creation, Harry Potter. Even I can see the military applications of it and the social one as well."

The self-deprecating moment made Harry rolled his eyes a bit. While she was no warrior, he was certain that lady Galadriel had been involved in the planning stages of at least a few smalltime campaigns over the centuries... or Ages, however you wanted to measure her life.

And now they came to it, Harry could see her point. With the Pensieve, a commanding officer could really see through the eyes of his subordinates, could get a better feel for the lay of the land than any officer before. Teaching other officers would also be much easier.

"If you want, I can work on creating a Pensieve for you and Celeborn." Harry went back to stretching for a moment grunting as he worked out his shoulders, neck and back in particular. His legs at least didn't seem as badly creaky as the rest of him, but they did feel really weak. *Hell everything feels weak. I think I lost a lot of muscle.* "But I would request a few days to get my body back into some measure of shape before starting on that or teaching you and Celeborn runes if you wish to learn them."

"I certainly do wish to, although I doubt Celeborn would be very interested." Galadriel smiled faintly. "My husband tends to leave magic and so forth to me."

"I wonder why?" Harry quipped, before jumping up and down a bit as Galadriel laughed at his joke. He felt good. His mind was clearer than it had been since the battle of the Lonely Mountain perhaps. You can also feel more of the world around him then he was used to, could feel the direction the wind was blowing from, could feel the wooden plank underneath his feet.

Turning to look across the lounge sofa, he smiled tenderly at seeing Tauriel there. Her eyes were closed, her hands clasped around her bow, the bow currently unstrung.

"She has been here every time I woke up briefly to take some Lembas from Arwen or Celeborn. I do not know what she is doing in her dream, but it is a sign of her devotion that she has sat so beside you, Harry," Galadriel murmured, watching as Harry reached out a gentle hand to run a finger down Tauriel's cheek. "Treasure her."

"Oh, you can better believe I will," Harry answered.

The tender gesture caused her to stir slightly, and Harry kept on gently stroking her cheek until she woke up, looking around and then up at Harry with a smile on her face that rapidly grew as she realized it was Harry who was standing in front of her, looking barely worse for wear except for the beard that had grown on his face. That was so startling that the first thing she did was to tug at it and say, "That thing must go Harry. While I like the dwarves well enough at this point, that does not mean that I wish to kiss someone trying emulate their gross facial hair."

Galadriel's laughter at that caused Tauriel to blush faintly, not having realized they weren't alone. "Yes well, I will get rid of my beard presently I suppose. But, and while your being here while I slept is touching as hell Tauriel, I have to question why. You never struck me as someone willing to sit still for that long."

"I am not," Tauriel answered dryly. "But as to what I have been doing... I have much to tell you Harry, and you lady Galadriel. Indeed, I believe Celeborn also has something to speak with you about."

Soon, the four of them, and Arwen, were once more seated around the table. Or rather, most of them were seated. Harry was moving around the area doing some exercises as Galadriel ordered to work out the kinks in his body. Many of them would have been recognizable by someone in Harry's past world who did yoga, others were more straightforward, push-ups, set-ups, shoulder exercises, arm twists and so forth.

While he was doing that, Celeborn and Tauriel explained what had been going on since Harry had been placed in his healing sleep and Galadriel had bent to her work. The news that Celeborn had once more lead an expedition to Dol Guldur, and this time into the dread fortress rather than to its outskirts, caused Galadriel to frown a bit. After several centuries of being the site of Sauron, the land there was certain to be fouled beyond belief. Thankfully, none of the elves had taken hurts along the route, for if they had and then entered that dread fortress it was undoubted that such wounds would have been affected in a fell manner.

She gazed down at her head where Nenya once more rested on her finger, and slowly shook her head. "I have expended quite a bit of my energy on healing Harry, and I was barely recovered from my earlier exertions against Sauron. Give me a at least a week I think, and then, I will tear the foundations of that fell fortress apart," she said grimly, a flash of fury appearing and then disappearing from her face. "I would never condone destruction for its own sake, but if there is even a slight chance that Sauron will try to reclaim that fortress, it makes far more sense to expend effort now rather than deal with it later."

Celeborn nodded, grateful that his wife was willing to be proactive on this. Few elves indeed would be willing to do so in this day and age, and unlike his folk, he could not order her to do so. But given their most recent victory against Sauron, it made much more sense. He was also somewhat entranced by his wife at the moment. Galadriel practically glowed, and it was not

simply the satisfaction of a job well done, of a master having performed some difficult task in her craft. Rather, it was as if the light of Aman, the light of those who had been in the presence of the Ainur, had been rekindled within her, when it had been slowly fading over the centuries since Melian had passed beyond the ocean to the West.

"I'll help," Harry said from where he was performing exercises. "I might not be able to do as much large-scale destruction as you can, but my spells lend themselves to violence far more than your magic does, milady."

Galadriel nodded in thanks to that, and then looked over to Tauriel. "The rest of the news however that the hunter left with Tauriel disturbs me slightly more. The idea that there are still monsters out there from the time of Yavanna's Rest is somewhat disturbing." *Almost as disturbing as the fact that the spirit within Moria is once more awake and active, if only in a small manner.*

She did not say that line aloud, however. She knew that doing so would probably act as a goad to someone like Harry, intrigue him enough to investigate. And that was the last thing she wanted. Even Galadriel did not know what manner of creature had overcome the dwarves in Moria. All she knew was that Durin's Bane was monstrously powerful and not Sauron. And fighting such creatures underground, without a trace of sunlight would badly reduce Harry's strength.

"Are you concerned with how close Moria is to your territory here?" Harry asked, showing Galadriel she had been quite correct in her assumption.

Thankfully, Celeborn shook his head. "No. Regardless of anything else, the goblins of the mountains have always been more susceptible to moving in daylight. They can do it obviously, but they are easily routed if faced with any kind of conflict during the day. Their organization is also nonexistent in comparison to the forces of Sauron that I faced during the war of the Last Alliance. No, whatever power is there would be very difficult to assault in his layer but will probably not ever reach out very far from it. If we can but scout along the foothills and send aid up to the... I believe you call them the Beornings?"

When Harry nodded, Galadriel and Celeborn both smiled faintly as if at some old memory, before Celeborn went on. "If we can send aid up to them, and keep the way between Mirkwood, Erebor and Rivendell open, that will be enough to curtail the strength of the mountain goblins. That, and perhaps destroying the fortress of Gundabad in the far North utterly."

Tauriel looked over at Harry speculatively. "Oromë did mention that at least some of what he felt was stirring was in the north..."

"Yeah. And Thorin also mentioned something about ice drakes. It is certainly an idea, although I think Gondor would be just as interesting" Harry answered, and Arwen shook her head in some

amusement as Tauriel and Harry exchanged smiles at the idea of traveling again, reflecting anew that Harry was definitely not her type. *Well she admitted mentally, beyond the power of those eyes of his. So expressive they are. I can definitely see why Tauriel is interested in such. But his attitude is far more combative than I would prefer.*

"An idea that is a few winters in the future," Celeborn said firmly. "I have seen enough of you, Tauriel, to know that you can look after yourself with that spear or with bow and arrow in hand. But I have yet to see you wield a sword. Nor have I yet to see Harry here do anything similar. It would be ill of us to allow my wife's investment your time to be so misplaced, Harry."

"In other words, he's interested in teaching someone else how to sword fight after several thousand years and is just as interested to invest his time in you before you go out gallivanting on these explorations of yours," Arwen translated, causing all of the elves there to chuckle quietly and Harry to laugh loudly.

The next day, Galadriel walked Harry through a series of mental exercises, and began to help him to organize his mind as many elves could do. From then on, Harry showed her some more of his own magic, including the Patronus spell. Galadriel was instantly fascinated by it, and within a few hours, had begun to learn about it as much as Harry had, and then, began to create her own.

"This spell alone Harry could be a magnificent tool in my hands, with Narya to lend me power. Even if Sauron comes against our veil, I could see him off with something like this. I might even be able to destroy some of his lesser wights entirely," Galadriel said enthusiastically, practically grinning in delight, an expression that Harry had never thought the poised, controlled Galadriel would ever show.

"You're talking about the Ringwraiths, the Nazgûl? Yes, I think that spell would have a very nasty effect on them. I think it would dissipate their corporeal forms at the very least. Maybe if you can trap them in one place, encircle them with the Patronus fog and then close with a fully corporeal Patronus, you could even destroy them. Although that would be very hard to do."

"Agreed, and I don't think I could do it far afield unfortunately. Still, when face to face with one? It is certainly possible," Galadriel answered, gesturing to one side to where a giant swan waddled around, twisting its long neck this way and that as it looked around, before slowly dissipating into particles of light. "I also think I could do more with the projection and shape of the spell... Something to think about in the future I think."

Harry shrugged his shoulders, and the discussion turned to Galadriel's method of magic. Several days later, she walked Harry through using his new senses to discern the nature of the world around him, to detect anything dark or influenced by Sauron or similar beings for the first time. Eventually she would teach him how to project his mind afar, although she warned Harry that such a technique took literally centuries to master. "You will first be able to push your senses out further, to see in a wider area around you, perhaps to the level of an elf on a clear day with

nothing to get in his or her line of sight. But after that it will take centuries for you to get to the next level, to where you can project your thoughts and mind further, to perhaps even create a mental connection as I did to you in the past."

She then shrugged, adding, "That is, unless you can find a Palantir. That is a device of the Númenóreans which allowed them to both see afar and speak to one another from hundreds of thousands of leagues apart. It allowed even the least of their commanders to do so easily. One such as you would be able to do far more."

Galadriel had compared Harry now to the ancient Númenóreans several times during their conversations in these days. To her, Harry was human certainly, but now human evolved, more even than the Númenor at their height. Not only would he be looking forward to a lifetime as long as that of an elf, but he retained all of his human aspects. *His mind is truly unique she reflected, incorporating the changes that the Valar believe necessary for humans to truly live as long as Harry could, to retain his magic, and his original personality.*

On top of those lessons, Harry began to teach Galadriel about his runes, what they could do, how to use them and, most importantly in his mind, how dangerous they could be if you made mistakes. Thankfully Galadriel took all of this in stride, and within a month of starting, she was up to etching her first runes. The discussions they had on this score were also quite interesting, although using runes like this were not something Galadriel had ever researched before. The closest she could think of that elves had ever done was in the creation of some of their weapons, and in the forge that Celebrimbor had devised in order to create the Rings of Power.

True to her word to Celeborn, however, Harry's days of exercising and training were quickly interrupted by an expedition to Dol Guldur. Surprising Harry somewhat, Galadriel made no special preparations for this, trusting in the fact that her husband had already scouted the terrain between Caras Galadhon and Sauron's former fortress to make certain that there were no dangers. She simply joined Celeborn and a force of a hundred of the Everseeking, Harry, and Tauriel for the journey.

Noticing Harry's bemused expression as they left the outskirts of Caras Galadhon, Galadriel chuckled. "Harry, it might not have occurred to you, but I am not defenseless. Indeed, if I wished I could make this journey on my own without issue. But as I would prefer to do my part to continue my folks' willingness to go beyond our own borders, a larger expedition is necessary."

After the group crossed the Anduin Galadriel showed this was indeed the case. She easily kept up with the others, although she in no way looked as if she could easily disappear into the wood lands like the Everseeking or Tauriel could. She still moved as silently as the other elves did, though.

The two of them talked extensively about what they would do when they arrived at the forbidding fortress, while Galadriel also occasionally told Tauriel about what it had been like

when the elves had inhabited it. She knew quite a bit about that time, as Oropher had respected Celeborn and Galadriel highly, often journeying to their lands both in Lindon and in Lothlorien when they moved themselves there.

Yet the reality of the fortress was far less grandiose and pleasant for Harry than Galadriel had described, and although Tauriel had warned him, he still wasn't prepared for the difference between the area Sauron's spirit had contaminated and the rest of Mirkwood. The impact of the feeling on Harry was almost as much as when he was dealing with the Barrow Wights, and his scarred hand began to throb abominably before they were even within sight of Dol Guldur. The closer they came, the worse the pain became.

Thankfully, Galadriel had known this might be the case, and had brought along a salve specifically for Harry to work into his scars. It helped with the throbbing, although not nearly as much with the pain, which was part spiritual in nature.

Regardless, the group entered the fortress quickly, whereupon the Everseeking and Tauriel moved ahead of the rest of them. They all remembered where they had laid out traps before, and now had to disable them. This took them the better part of the day and night, while Harry helped as best he could during the day, and retreating out of the area at night, with Tauriel and Galadriel, who knew nothing about traps, for company.

The next day, Tauriel and the others finished their work quickly. Then, Celeborn, Harry and one of the better architects among the Everseeking entered the underground segments of the fortress, having worked out a specific plan to destroy this place. The exterior of the fortress wasn't the problem. The interior, the warren of caves and galleries underneath, were. Even Galadriel would have trouble destroying that portion of the fortress. So Celeborn and Harry moved through the fortress with two of Celeborn's best architects, looking for weaknesses. They didn't find many that hadn't already been smashed, but this ended the moment Harry used a Bombarda on a portion of a ceiling.

The architect, who had yet to actually introduce himself, stared at the rubble, then said quietly, "I do believe we have gone about this a little too delicately."

Harry laughed loudly at that, while Celeborn simply shook his head. "Leave it to a human to discover a magic that is so easily destructive."

"Say that to Arien and her death ray," Harry snorted, and Celeborn chuckled, remembering Harry's tale about the Battle of the Lonely Mountain.

The three of them headed down to the lowest level first, and from there, with a prepared shield array to protect them, Harry used his spell to bring down three more roofs, Each time it went off without a hitch, bringing down large segments of the underground caves one after another, blocking them off with debris, although the fourth time, a larger than average section crashed down, nearly striking the trio with shrapnel if not for Harry's shield spell.

Staring at the blue energy wall in front of him, Celeborn raised a hand to touch it before thinking better of it. "I must say, these shield stones of yours are fascinating Harry. I don't suppose I could interest you in creating a few hundred of them could I?"

"It will be exceedingly boring work as time-consuming so that would be a no. I'm more than willing to make up a few as I did on this expedition simply because I still don't trust my reflexes just yet. But you're asking me to manufacture them in mass. That's not going to happen." Harry answered quickly, shaking his head. "I might be technically immortal now, but that for certain is not how I would prefer to spend my time."

"Understandable, if somewhat saddening," Celeborn chuckled once more, shaking his head. *Spending time around Harry is somewhat amusing. I can see why my wife likes him so much.* "And this is the kind of thing that My Lady wishes to learn?"

"Among other things. Although don't ask me how long it's going to take her. Given how quickly Galadriel was able to pick up some of my spells I've shown her, I hope she can learn quickly, but runes and regular magic are two different things..." Harry trailed off as they came to what looks like a room simply devoted to well nothing much. There was a weird out of place giant mound of mud dominating the room, and lots of muddy footprints on the grounds, so many it was as if dozens of orcs and goblins had come and gone from this room. But that was it. "What in..."

"This would be one of their spawning areas," Celeborn announced distastefully. "I know not why, but mud is somehow more conducive to 'birthing' creatures of the Greater Darkness. With the spirit of Sauron living here for so long, the very ground would give birth to the creatures he willed it too, a sign of the evil that the Great Enemy wrought into Arda itself. It is undoubtedly cleaner than the... other fashion in which orcs and goblins can repopulate themselves, but it is a sign of a far, far greater evil."

"I wouldn't call it greater, except perhaps in terms of scale. But I understand your opinion," Harry said grimly, remembering what he had been told about that topic before. He very deliberately pointed his finger at the roof, and intoned, "Bombarda!" He didn't have to see the spell allowed, but it certainly gave him more satisfaction. As did the site of several dozen tons of rock coming down from the ceiling, squishing the mud pile flat.

The group had begun at the lowest level, bringing down ceilings and occasionally smashing walls one after another. By the time they were finished, the whole area was grumbling a little. It didn't stop after the last spell, and all three men looked at one another as the final bit of ceiling began to crash down in front of them.

"Do you think we might have overdone it?" The chief architect asked dryly, as he turned and began to run back down the corridor.

Within seconds, Celeborn and Harry were beside him, the human pushing himself hard to keep up with the elves, but considering the fact that the destruction of the ceiling was now starting to follow them, with large cracks appearing directly above them and bits of stone falling behind,

he certainly had enough motivation. Harry could however admit to a bit of jealousy as Celeborn spoke in reply, his voice laconic rather than harried or breathless from the sudden sprint. "When it comes to Sauron, one can never be too certain, a fact that has undoubtedly come back to bite our collective rear far too many times in the past. Since we now have the ability to do at least this job properly, I would prefer to it well."

"Humans have a saying," Harry huffed, breathing in deeply after every word as he raced after the other two. *I wish I could put this down to still not being back to full health after so long not moving, but I wager that a lot of it is just because there they are elves and I'm not.* "There is no kill like overkill."

The disapproving glares he got for this bit of human witticism amused Harry greatly.

Soon, they were outside. There was a cracking boom from behind them, dust and bits of debris following after them as they came out of the interior of the fortress. The trio found that the other elves had all vacated the interior of the fortress's interior, and that a large segment of the tower had also been shattered while they were within the hill beneath.

The architect looked in that direction, nodding his head sagely even as the rest of the tower began to groan under its own weight. "I knew my calculations were right. It was the weight of that portion of the tower collapsing onto the ground that caused that miscalculation below."

Celeborn gently took the man by the shoulder, directing him to his other hand towards the nearest hole in the outer wall of the formerly formidable fortress. "Indeed. However, let us be off now, so that my wife might complete our work here. Given how goblins can work with stone almost as well as dwarves, even the destruction we have wrought could be undone with sufficient time and effort. It will take a special touch to make certain."

Galadriel met them at the base of the hill that had once been called Amon Lac, looking around sadly before looking in their direction. "Are you all finished then?"

Harry nodded, while Celeborn went on to explain what they had been up to within. When they were done, Galadriel asked Celeborn to make certain that everyone was well away from the hill. Harry stood with her, watching, ready to protect her from any debris or whatever from what she was going to be doing, and also equally fascinated to watch her work. Harry had yet to see Galadriel do any large-scale magic, and he wondered what her magic would look like in comparison to his or Gandalf's.

Once Celeborn returned and said that all of their people were accounted for in the forest behind them, Galadriel began. She held up her hand on which Narya gleamed, her hand raised like a claw facing upward.

From above, the wind began to blow, going from a barely felt breeze and then accelerating rapidly as the ring began to glow white, so white Harry feared it must have been actually

heating up. But Galadriel showed no sign of pain. Rather, her face was twisted into one of concentration.

Above Dol Guldur the wind picked up more and more, the speed of it rapidly growing to a point where it became a hurricane, and then continued to go even faster, to the point where the wind literally seemed to shriek in agony. From the bottom of the hill, Harry hastily used a sticking charm on his feet and those of his companions just in case, wondering idly what a shield spell would do to a wind based attack like this.

He need not have bothered. Galadriel's control was such that even this close to her target, the only effect to Harry, Galadriel and Celeborn was a very stiff breeze. And as Harry watched, Galadriel slowly twisted her hand until it was pushing downwards, and the tornado descended.

It encapsulated the entire top of the hill, and if the noise of the wind had been horrendous before, that was nothing compared to now. As Harry watched through the tumult of the wind, the outer wall began to be torn asunder, first large chunks pulling away here and there from the already destroyed segments, and then large bits of it being simply ground to dust. The stone resisted Galadriel's assault, but it still gave way. The already badly undermined tower collapsed utterly. Then there was a loud booming crash, heard even over the sounds of the wind, and segments of the wall began to collapse inward as the entire hill shuddered, so much Harry, Galadriel, Tauriel and Celeborn felt the ground shiver under them. Bits of the exterior of the hill well below the fortress fell inward, leaving small caves and holes barely large enough for a man's hand scattered everywhere, the results of the damage that Harry had already caused inside now taking its toll as everything crumbled inward.

Galadriel kept the spell going until the last segment of the outer wall had collapsed. And then, she released her clenched fist, flexing her fingers, as the light of the Ring of Adamant began to fade away slowly. In accordance with her will, the tornado slowly began to dissipate, first rising back into the sky, then slowing down until it finally disappeared entirely, leaving the bright blue sky above completely unmarred once more.

The damage to the fortress was total. Harry would be surprised if there was one stone on top of another up there and it was very obvious even from here that the damage to the underground segment of the fortress, the greater segment, had been just as complete.

I might have been able to do something on a similar scale with enough preparation and calling on Arien, but it would probably have wiped me out, Harry reflected. I remember reading about some destructive spells back in my old world, but even they would struggle with destroying something made of so much possibly magically reinforced stone.

Not that Harry was going to show his awe in front of Celeborn or Galadriel... although Galadriel could probably tell. Still, Harry had an image to maintain after all. "So you elves do know about there being no kill like overkill! What was with your earlier look, Celeborn?"

Celeborn laughed at that, while Galadriel smiled faintly, and laid her hand, the hand that was not still glowing like a miniature star, on Celeborn's arm as he held it out to her. "Truly, a good days work, I think. Now let us leave this place. The fortress is destroyed, but there is nothing I can do here to cleanse the ground of Sauron's taint. Not even your Patronus spell would not do that Harry Potter."

Harry frowned as the three of them turned to join the rest of the Elven force, many of whom bowed family towards Galadriel as she joined them. She simply smiled faintly at them all, and continued to walk beside Celeborn and Harry as the elves surrounded them and began to make their way away from the fortress. "That... I'm not saying this didn't need to be done, but if we can't clean the taint from the ground, doesn't that mean that eventually it will still spawn orcs or goblins?"

"No. Not unless orcs or goblins come here and make it their home again. It is their presence or that of a greater evil nearby which will start the process, which will call to the taint within the ground to begin to spawn more of them. No, with the fortress destroyed, there would be no reason for them to come back here," Celeborn answered.

Harry frowned at that, thinking militarily that there probably was. But then again, the reasons Harry could think of offhand could be better done in smaller more diverse packets of watchers and skirmishers. If Sauron was going to rebuild his forces in Mordor, he didn't really need an exterior outpost like this any longer.

Seeing her young friend still looking a little out of sorts, Galadriel interjected. "Further, even that would take years, decades even to start. Only if Sauron or one of his Ringwraith's came here could do that timeline be accelerated to the point where it could become dangerous. And if such a one does come, I will feel it even from Lothlorien." She smiled slightly at Harry. "And thanks to learning your Patronus spell, I could give such a one a very, **very** bad day. I could send my Patronus here from afar to drive them off at least. And if possible as I said before to you, I could even, with help and protection, come close and try to use the spell to destroy such a one."

Before, Galadriel had enough magical power to easily destroy a Ringwraith's physical body. Yet the spirit would simply return to its master, to reform again. But the Patronus gave her the means to destroy its spirit, to cleanse it utterly from Arda. That was a gift that Galadriel knew was at least the equal to her help with Harry's damaged brain if not more in the long run.

"That makes more sense," Harry said, before turning aside as Tauriel joined them. She took his hand, and the two of them moved off away from Galadriel and Celeborn, who smiled after the young couple, as they journey back to Lothlorien continued.

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Several days after their return from Dol Guldur, Harry also trained with Celeborn after he and Galadriel returned from destroying Dol Guldur. This began about a week and a half after Harry had woken up for the first time, when Arwen, who had volunteered to help with his physical exercises, had deemed him physically fit enough for more arduous exercises.

"You look pleased," Harry opined, looking across at Celeborn. The two of them stood in the middle of a training area on one of the telain. It was so wide that it could have done for a pickup game of football, Harry reflected. A small entranceway into one of the trees sat nearby, where Harry had been directed to take a training sword from, one among numerous others hanging within. At one side were a series of wooden dummies, crafted so that an operator could move segments of the dummy to attack or defend.

Celeborn's faint smile widened, and he gestured to Harry to stand across from him. "I am indeed, my young friend. Although I will keep my reasons for such to myself."

Be it because of her Fëa once more being renewed by contact with Melian, or because she was so enraptured by what she was learning or the work she had done on Harry had been so fulfilling, Galadriel had surprised Celeborn last night. Elven courtship and marriages were not like human marriages. Over time Elvish lusts and desires began to diminish. Their love for one another was far more constant, but it was more a love of the Fëa, the soul rather than of the body, the Hröa.

The night previous, Galadriel had decided to replay their youth a bit. That had almost alarmed Celeborn at first, but once he was infected with her interest, he had certainly enjoyed himself. Not that he would ever dream of sharing that with anyone else.

"For now, let me see what you have learned already of swordsmanship. You have mentioned several times that you took lessons from Thorin on the road. I want to know how much you will have to unlearn."

Scowling a bit at that shot at his dwarfish friend, Harry raised the practice sword taking a stance that Thorin had taught him. Then, when Celeborn indicated they should begin, he attacked quickly. A strike to the shoulder was deflected, a slash was dodged, and then Celeborn's sword was up flashing into his face. If not for his reaction time and speed Harry would have lost the bout right then. But he was able to duck under the next strike, going on the attack quickly.

However within two more passes Harry found his sword smashed out of his hand by a blow he barely saw coming, his leg kicked out from under him. A second later, the tip of Celeborn's blade tapped gently against his chest. "I see you have much to learn. Your footwork was so-so, but only so-so. Further, your entire style is based on that of a dwarf. You have far longer reach than them, you don't need to get in so close. Nor do you need to worry so much about protecting your head and shoulders. Rather you must protect your entire body. After the first strike, you are far too immobile. You will need to learn to move, to dodge and to shift from side

to side not just backwards and forwards. A blow dodged is far better than a blow defended," Celeborn observed critically.

"I have to know Celeborn," Harry grumbled as he pushed Celeborn's blade to one side and rolled to his feet, standing up warily lest Celeborn attack him as he did so just for a lesson on when not to let his guard down. "Is there something beyond general antipathy towards the dwarves in your stance towards them, or is there something personal there?"

"I was in Menegroth, when the dwarves killed my king. I survived their sack of our land, if barely. I have never forgotten, nor will I," Celeborn said, his eyes flashing his smile turning thin and dangerous. "I will retain an open mind if I must toward individuals, but as a race? The dwarves will never find a friend in me."

Scowling, Harry nodded at that, realizing that there was little he could do to change Celeborn's mind. He could argue that the dwarves of Erebor were not the tribe who had attacked Doriath but he didn't honestly know whether or not that was the case. The dwarves of Nogrod had after all been themselves attacked by Beren and his folk and had never been heard of again even among dwarves. This implied that they had either been wiped out, or scattered and joined the other clans. And what clan they had been originally he had no idea.

"Now, let us begin again," Celeborn ordered. And for the next few hours, Harry got used to the impression of being disarmed and put on his ass more than he was happy about.

Of course, despite all the time he spent training and teaching, Harry did spend time with Tauriel. While she was busy working out with Everseeking she still made time to come by and have every meal with Harry, or Harry sought her out occasionally when she was busy. And more than once, as spring turned into summer, summer into awesome, and autumn into winter, they had romantic moments.

One such moment took their relationship physically a little further than had previously been the case.

Tauriel and Harry had agreed to leave Caras Galadhon for a bit of alone time. They had brought with them some food that cooks of collaterals household had generously prepared for them and traveled further northwest along the Nimrodel river until they were practically at the edge of the territory the Galadhrim claimed.

There, they had a picnic, debating once more on whether or not they should head north right away, as in follow the Misty Mountains up words, or had to Erebor first, and then straight north from there. Or even if they should do that at all. While Harry was interested to see what a streak was like, and perhaps hunt down some of these beasts of Morgoth. He was equally interested in Gondor and Rohan, the two best known human nations that existed up on middle Earth. Fact that there were only two such still disturbed Harry a bit, that the remnants of Beleriand had not

evolved into a country again beyond the shire was strange. But nonetheless, Harry did want to see Rohan and Gondor.

"Think about it. If we head to Erebor, hopefully Thorin will have finished creating some armor for the two of us. Which would be a major boon I think," he finished dryly. "But if Oromë didn't indicate that the dangers in the north were any immediate threat, then meeting and interacting with the folk of Rohan and Gondor would be fascinating. We might even meet Gandalf moving among them again. It's their nations that are the closest to Mordor."

By this point, Harry knew that most of the strength to resist Mordor, if such a thing was needed, would come from humanity. For all their strength in magic the elves, lacked the will and numbers to fight a war on the scale that would take. Lothlorien was arguably the strongest of the four remaining realms of elves on Middle Earth, but it barely had five thousand Everseeking and a thousand frontline warriors.

And it was also losing strength over time. Since Harry had woken up eighty elves had made the decision to leave Lothlorien and make the journey to the Grey Havens ruled by Cirdan the shipwright. And the Teleri who made up the majority of that realm had never gone to war beyond their walls. Tauriel had also mentioned how even the mainly Silvan and Sindar elves of Taur-e-Ndaedelos fought the urge to journey to the West and indeed many had made that journey over the decades.

"Mordor will not be moving anytime soon. There is a great difference in the force needed to defend a realm of such size than to attack others," Tauriel demurred, having had that conversation with Celeborn a few times over the past few months. "Further, Sauron himself will need to gather his strength. I do not doubt that no matter how much planning he had made beforehand, being driven and then harried from Dol Guldur will have sapped him. No, it will be years before he can reach out from his realm to assail the west."

"Maybe, but we do know he arrived in Mordor at least," Harry argued. "If we had any way to slay what amounts to a demigod, I would argue that sneaking into Mordor to do just that would be a very good idea."

"And yet it would also be impossible. I do not doubt your powers or abilities Harry, but even you could not slay such as Sauron, not without causing enough noise and violence to bring his orcs and goblins down on top of us. Further you are making the assumption we could even get there in the first place. I do not," Tauriel shook her head wryly.

Sighing, Harry conceded the point with a nod and a pat on Tauriel's thigh, which was currently bare, given the way her small skirt had risen up. Tauriel tensed a bit at the touch, but not entirely from embarrassment and after a moment, she let Harry's hand remain where it was, instead continuing the debate. "So I think that at the present, the best we can do is twofold. First, go out into the wild places and put to use the learning I have had from Oromë to hunt down any fell beasts that Sauron could eventually call to his aid. And two, continue to teach

Lady Galadriel your runes, so that she in turn can teach Mithrandir and others, thus spreading their knowledge. How is that coming by the way?"

"Slowly. Her carving skills are excellent, but it takes her some time to really take in what I'm teaching her. Part of that is undoubtedly the fact she's the first person I'm teaching from the very start," Harry admitted with a sigh, flexing his fingers on her thigh even as he turned to look into the Nimrodel's waters at their feet.

That distracted Tauriel a bit, but she knew that was part of their game here, and she reciprocated the act placing a hand on Harry's legging and beginning to make circles with her fingers. "Oh? So you think the problem lies in you then?"

"Not reaaally?" Harry shivered a bit at her touch, and his fingers began to move on her thigh in turn, his head leaning sideways to rest on Tauriel's shoulder. "Back in my old world, my friends and I were all taking the same class, so knew most of the same material. Galadriel's essentially learning several new written languages, each of which with their own rules on sentence structure. Rules that, if not followed, result in either boom or poof rather than simply a sentence that makes no sense."

Tauriel chuckled at that. She had seen Harry show Galadriel both boom and poof occur several months back when Galadriel announced she felt ready to move on from using the sandbox Harry and a few elves had created. Boom meant a small scale explosion, enough to seriously injure anyone in proximity. Poof meant the destruction of the stone used as a backdrop to the runes as the magic overwhelmed it's physical structure with nowhere to go. "Hehehe, yes, I recall Lady Galadriel and Arwen's faces when they saw that. I think that is when Arwen lost interest in studying them for now, and I doubt Lady Galadriel has been that surprised in literal Ages."

The sound of Tauriel's laughter delighted Harry as it always did and he turned sideways to lay a gentle kiss on her neck. But despite feeling a sharp desire to let Harry's ministrations continue, Tauriel wanted to continue the conversation. So she raised her other hand from where it had just set down an empty wine glass to gently push Harry's head away from her neck. "So that leaves us with only hunting down monsters as a means to do harm to the forces of darkness."

Harry pulled back pouting a bit but also holding back a snicker at how Tauriel and many of the rest of the folk he'd met in this world could reel off lines like that without being embarrassed. *But then again, lines like that are way closer to the truth here in this world than they would normally be in my old one. Dementors and specific spells notwithstanding.*

Unaware of her love's thoughts, Tauriel went on. "I would rather travel north if we are going to Erebor in the first place. I have seen winters here and in the forest of Mirkwood, but I've not seen the lands of ice and snow. I suppose the question is, do we wish to be around other people, or strike out on our own for a time?"

“Hmm... okay, you’ve convinced me. Having more time on our own would be very nice,” Harry said, a look in his eyes that caused Tauriel’s smile to turn sultry almost, if such a thing could be said of an elf. “I will start to put some work into our tent and our other travelling gear then. There are a few things I want to try out that could be very useful even beyond having all of our gear in my pouch.”

“Not all,” Tauriel cautioned. “We should always have some equipment on hand, some food, emergency weapons and so forth. Even elves can be ambushed, Harry.”

Harry nodded, and the debate shifted to how they would go north. Here Harry won out, saying they should stop in at Erebor first before going on rather than going straight north. “Armor is going to be useful, after all. And I think staying near the Misty Mountains or any areas previously occupied by goblins or orcs is just asking for trouble.”

When Tauriel agreed, Harry decided that was enough serious discussion for now. “Good. Now, I’m talking for a bit.” With that, he leaned in kissing Tauriel hard on the lips, instantly deepening the kiss as Tauriel’s mouth opened in a gasp. Soon, their tongues were dueling, as Harry’s hands moved to slowly push Tauriel back down onto the ground. But soon Tauriel was taking part just as ardently, one leg ground around Harry’s waist, pulling him against her.

They spent the rest of the afternoon and evening making out. By the time they returned to Caras Galadhon their lips were slightly bruised, but both had smiles you would have to use magic to remove. This sight drew some stares from a few elves they passed, but most had the decency to not notice. And if Tauriel’s shirt had come undone and Harry’s entirely off, that was no one’s business but their own.

Another year passed by thusly, with Harry’s days filled with training and teaching, and occasionally pranking. Alas, most of the Galadhrim took the same route as those of Rivendell did, simply enduring rather than pranking in turn. Galadriel and Arwen though did not, and more than once Harry found his food tasting of compost or his skin turning different colors as they took to pranking him back in turn. Arwen also joined Galadriel in teaching Harry about her own brand of magic, which had much in common with Radagast’s area of expertise and learning from Harry in turn.

And then, as summer came around once more, Harry and Tauriel decided to leave. While Harry had a lot more to teach, Galadriel had finished learning all the runes and knew enough to get by, and even start to integrate a few into defending Lothlorien, while Arwen had learned enough to be taught by her grandmother in turn. With the use of the large sand tables Harry had helped build, she could also now teach others to a certain extent.

Arwen, Galadriel, and Celeborn bid them farewell at the outer edge of Caras Galadhon as morning passed into afternoon. Arwen spoke quietly to one side with Tauriel, having become good friends with the younger elf, despite the two of them having very different personalities as Galadriel, Celeborn and Harry spoke together. They did so in very different tones. Celeborn

was wryly sardonic, teasing Harry about wanting to leave just as their training was getting to a good point. Galadriel in contrast sounded worried about his leaving, ruffling his hair and reminding him to be careful out in the wider world and reminding him to look before he leaped and more homilies.

Is this what having a big sister is like? Harry thought, taking her words in good humor, while warning Celeborn he would look magnificent in neon pink. “And yes, Galadriel, Tauriel and I will watch over one another, never fear.”

“See that you do. I have come to care for you Harry, just as much as I do Mithrandir, and I do not have so many dear friends I can afford to lose any,” Galadriel admonished. “Indeed, I can trust Mithrandir to watch over himself far more I can you with your past record of strange adventures.”

In his time with the elves, more of Harry’s adventures in his past life had come out to Galadriel and even Tauriel. Many a night as Arwen rubbed salve into his still-scarred hand did Harry regale them and, indeed several dozen other elves of Lothlorien with his adventures in his past life. The tales of magic and mystery fascinated all the elves, although his description of human cities in his old world horrified them all.

“I can’t really argue with that, particularly since Tauriel and I will be searching out these beasts of maybe-Ungoliant,” Harry grumbled. While he understood the importance of Oromë’s intervention and treating with Tauriel, he didn’t think the beasts would really have that much of an impact immediately, much like he had been convinced that Sauron would be unable to act offensively. He would have preferred to get to know more Men of Middle Earth.

Still, if Tauriel wanted to hunt them down, he was more than willing to go with her as they explored the world together. “And it isn’t as if you have not gifted us tools to keep us safe.”

Indeed, the Galadhrim had loaded Tauriel and Harry down with gifts. Training swords for both, throwing spears, several quivers full of arrows, feathers for fletching more, and two daggers, one for each of them was but the start, although they were very different. Tauriel’s was a single-bladed long dagger that could be used around the camp as well as a weapon, as she already had a series of smaller daggers. While Harry’s was a simple punch dagger, it’s tip wickedly sharp, but the blade barely larger than his closed fist.

Food in the way of enough Lembas for both lovers to sustain themselves for months. A bottle made of wood that Galadriel and Arwen between them had crafted to treat any water placed within of whatever poisons it might contain was a gift many kings would be jealous of.

And on top of that, there were gifts for each of them in turn. Tauriel received a cloak which was enchanted similarly to the ones used by the Everseeking. It wasn’t as good as Harry’s, but it was perhaps the best that the elves could create in this Age. Harry in turn had been gifted a brooch made of silver and gold threaded around the emerald he had found in the Barrows. It

was enchanted in some manner that Galadriel was quite mysterious about, simply saying it would give strength when it was most needed.

“True, but not all the gifts in the world will matter if you still attempt to solve every problem like it is a wall you must slash apart,” Celeborn chortled, jibing at both Harry’s way of dealing with problems in the past and the way his sword style had looked before Celeborn began to correct it.

Galadriel smiled at her husband’s wit, resting her hands on Harry’s shoulders as he looked her in the eye. This was much easier than it had been when he arrived in Lothlorien, for the magic of Arda had not only just changed his brain in various ways, but his body too.

For all his body had been sore and creaked through disuse after he woke up, it had become... better in various ways over the year since. His hand-eye coordination was even better, becoming equal to that of an elf as he got used to it. He was also a bit taller for some reason, now topping Tauriel by two inches although still several inches short of Galadriel’s own height. He hadn’t had a lot of muscles at the start of training with Celeborn, being wiry rather than bulky. But over the past year, Celeborn had pushed him so hard physically he had added quite a bit of muscles to his shoulders, legs and core.

Galadriel noticed all this anew, and smiled faintly at the work her husband had put in on this young man who they had both come to love. “Be well, Harry. You and Tauriel both have too many people wishing to see you again to be lost in the wilderness, whatever you might face.”

“I won’t forget. After all, with Tauriel to look out for, I can’t be so quick to put myself in danger.”

A light slap to his back showed that Tauriel had finished her conversation with Arwen, the older, black-haired elf still flushing a bit at whatever had been said. “Who is going to look after who?”

Harry turned with a smile, grabbing her hand and pulling Tauriel into a hug despite her mild protest at being in front of Galadriel and Celeborn. Both older elves looked on, amusement dancing in their eyes while their faces tried to show disapproval. “We’ll see who has to save who, I can almost guarantee it. And with that, Lady, Lord, I think it is time we leave.”

After another round of well-wishes, Harry and Tauriel turned, heading out into the woods. For a time, Galadriel and Celeborn stood watching them, not looking at their granddaughter as she finally composed herself from whatever joke Tauriel had told the normally poised girl. Finally, they turned away, heading back towards Caras Galadhon. As they did, Galadriel shook her head slightly. “If they had only waited another few months, I would have gotten that young elf’s parents down here. Hopefully, they will stop into meet with the young king on the return journey at the very least. No parent deserves to hear about their daughter’s relationship secondhand after all.”

“I think they will Beleg Naneth,” Arwen announced. “Tauriel and I spoke about that, and while it is not her main priority, she does wish her parents to be there when she and Harry wed.” Arwen paused then, her voice becoming a mumble that Galadriel very carefully did not react to. “Where in their courtship that wedding might occur is up in the air however. I have never heard the term horny before, but now I don’t think I will ever forget it...”

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As the trio of Galadhrim reached the outskirts of Caras Galadhon, Harry and Tauriel had reached the shores of the river Anduin. Here they finally faced the real choice: crossover and then head back north and east to Erebor or follow the river south into the Fields of Celebrant and then into Rohan or elsewhere. But after a conversation interspersed with several kisses, Harry once more prevailed over Tauriel’s desire to see the forest of Fangorn and the horse of Rohan.

“I promise we will get there eventually, Tauriel,” Harry said, having actually been moved by Tauriel’s talk of deep valleys and hidden dells where no elf had walked since the breaking of the world. “But armor comes first. As does exploring the north.”

“I know Harry but allow me my Sindar foibles. Forests will always call out to me,” Tauriel replied with a breathy little laugh, still recovering from the most recent kiss. “But come, let us be on our way once more.”

Nodding, Harry helped to create a rope bridge with his magic, crossing the river. From there, Harry and Tauriel began to travel once more, racing across the land to the east and north. To Erebor they would go, and on from there.

End Chapter

Well folks, there we have it. Two semi-large time skips, combined into one chapter. It has now been the better part of 2 years since Harry and Tauriel left Erebor. This, I think, is how I will be dealing with time skips. I will set up what Harry is learning, or what he and Tauriel are doing, and then skip through to the end of it, interspersed with interesting moments. That, and travel times. I will intermingle travel times with explanations about what Harry is done to their travel equipment as well as romance. But this will let me speed up the passage of time significantly. I will also punctuate it I think, a time or two anyway, with excerpts from Bilbo and the Shire. After all, this is a very different Bilbo than the one who returned to the Shire in the books. His impact on Frodo will also have been different.

Anyway, I hope you enjoyed this, and I hope my fellow Americans among you all enjoy the Super Bowl!

