

## Chapter XIV

*No one is so accursed by fate, no one so utterly desolate,  
But some heart, though unknown, responds unto his own.*

As the riders came to a halt in the clearing before Olórin's house, the wind ruffled the leaves of the beeches and mallorns above them, allowing the bright noontime sunlight to glitter upon the company of Elves as a light shining upon a handful of brightly colored gems. Still standing at the rail of the porch, Frodo marveled at the beauty of the Fair Folk, many of whom, he suspected, had been born in the Bliss of Valinor, as Galadriel had been, as they carried about them the same ineffable light and grace. To the best of his knowledge, he had never seen Turgon, the king of Gondolin, nor any depiction of him, but he had no trouble discerning who he was as he dismounted his golden horse. Once High King of the Noldor in Middle-earth, the son of Fingolfin was tall and strong, dark-haired and keen-eyed, with a glance that missed little. Pride had been his doom during the First Age, his unwillingness to abandon Gondolin despite the warnings of Ulmo, but though his pride had brought about his end and the fall of Gondolin, it had also brought about the situation that had allowed Tuor and Idril to come together, wed, and bear a son, Eärendil, who would be the salvation of both kindreds in Middle-earth. Apparently, Turgon had repented of his folly and learned enough from it to win his release from Mandos — no doubt in great part for the sake of his wife Elenwë, who, like her husband, had not supported Fëanor or the Noldorin revolt, but had faithfully gone into exile with Turgon and his Noldor kin, and had died in the crossing of the Helcaraxë. Still, Turgon's personal pride had not completely vanished. His clothing was rich and his bearing one of great dignity, that of one born to command, and even as he left his mount in the care of one of his companions, he came to the foot of the porch stairs, his fair face wearing a wry smile that was neither proud nor humble.

When his deep gray eyes glanced upon Frodo and his smile broadened for a moment, the hobbit started, wondering if Turgon had ever before seen one of the little folk. But his glance moved on, taking in the awe-struck twins, who had the sense to bow graciously, then Aránayel, who followed the example of the children with some hesitance, and Ványalos, who was much more conscious of Eldar propriety than she, and finally to Olórin. Before his host could follow the example of the others, Turgon startled him by bowing deeply, more graciously than any guest would ordinarily greet their prospective host. Before Olórin could speak to protest, the Elf lord straightened again and faced him with a bright smile.

"So you are the Istar of whom I have heard so many tales from my kin and their folk in fair Tirion," he said, his voice deep and rich. "My greetings, Lord Olórin, to yourself and those of your house. I trust that my companions and I have not arrived at an inconvenient hour, wholly unannounced?"

"Not *wholly* unannounced," Olórin replied after shaking off his surprise to offer a polite response, "and your arrival could never be an inconvenience, Lord Turgon. Though we have never before met, I have long hoped that such an opportunity would arise, in a time and place where we could do so in peace and safety. You and your companions are welcome to my house — but might I ask, what brings you to Lórien?"

"Several things, errands for kin not least among them." His eyes returned to Frodo, again with a smile. "I bear tidings from Tirion for a number of Lórien's residents, sent with me as I was sent at Elenwë's behest. Elenwë wishes to spend the coming festival with her kin who live upon the slopes of Taniquetil, and a gift she wished to take to them was to have been brought to Tirion with my kinsman Glorfindel when he returned with the Master Baggins of my great-grandson's household. He returned without Elenwë's gift, and when I spoke to her of my desire to pay a brief visit to Lórien to attend neglected business of my own, she asked me to fetch her forgotten gift."

Recovered from his own feelings of awe and surprise, Frodo returned Turgon's smile. "Is that why you stopped here, to bring a letter from Bilbo?"

The tall Elf laughed kindly. "Among other reasons. Though most in my party have other destinations, there were others who traveled with us who will come later today, with more important business. For now, if we may pause here to refresh ourselves, we would be grateful."

No further request was needed. "Oh, certainly!" Frodo replied with sudden enthusiasm. "We'd been expecting guests, and were just about to prepare luncheon. I'm afraid it's going to be more Hobbitish than Elven, but if you don't mind...."

“Not at all,” he was assured. “I have seen your kinsman Bilbo quite frequently in my great-grandson’s house in Tirion, and while he seems perfectly happy to consume any meal so long as he is not troubled to prepare it, the tales he has told of your people’s love for the joys of plate and cup have both fascinated and amused me. I learned to fend for myself in the kitchen many years ago, and if you require assistance, I would be pleased to offer it...”

Frodo and Ványalos immediately declined his gracious offer; the twins’ eyes widened to hear it, having never imagined the legendary king of Gondolin at work, preparing his own meals. They were so surprised by this, they made not a single peep of protest when Aránayel volunteered them to help with the preparations. They followed their elders back into the kitchen while Aránayel returned to the central hall to clear away the things from their morning’s lessons. Turgon’s companions saw to the comfort of the horses before joining them. Olórin sensed that the Elven king was pleased by the turn of circumstances, wanting some time to speak with his host, and so the Istar led him to the more comfortable surroundings indoors. Before they entered the house, Turgon paused to speak briefly with one of his traveling companions, then followed Olórin to the central hall.

“The elder Master Baggins is full of many intriguing tales, not merely concerning his own folk,” the Elf said when he and Olórin settled down to talk while the others went about their tasks. “He has told me much of you, and I might have been inclined to doubt some of his tales, had they not been corroborated by Elrond and others of our folk who are lately come from Middle-earth. From what they have told me — Elrond and Glorfindel in particular — I have come to understand that the old *perian* does not exaggerate.”

Olórin’s smile was wry. “If you believe that of Bilbo’s tales, then I think perhaps you do not perceive how clever hobbits can be in spinning fanciful stories to entertain or impress others. Bilbo is particularly gifted, that way.”

Turgon chuckled. “That I have noticed, but some of what you might consider the most fanciful tales did not come from him. Indeed, they could not have, since the events they told occurred centuries before his birth. Glorfindel has told me much of your involvement in the struggles against the accursed king of Angmar who became Sauron’s right hand; Círdan has spoken of deeds you have undertaken in aiding the Shire folk, for he sees far and clear, and the halflings dwelt near to his own home; and I cannot begin to count the words of praise I have heard from Elrond and his wife and virtually every member of their household, my cousin Galadriel included. Should I believe that all of them exaggerate when they say that in the end, you became the chief director of the efforts against Sauron, and that it was by your plans and your faith in the Free Peoples that victory was ultimately achieved?”

“So long as they did not neglect to mention that my plans and direction would have come to naught but for the steadfast efforts of many others — Frodo and themselves not least among them — then I will not say that they exaggerate. But I did not set out with the intention of achieving that position, my lord. I did not want power over others, nor did I ever seek status to bring myself renown. Had the others of my order remained true to our purpose in Middle-earth, I would have been but one of a number trying to guide the peoples of Endor toward a goal that would benefit them all. Curumo — Saruman, as he came to be known — was the greatest of the Istari, and even now, I grieve that he allowed his desire for power and fame to corrupt him into becoming a shadow and a puppet of Sauron. I did not want his position in our ranks, and I would have refused it, had it not been deemed necessary by powers far greater than either of us.”

The Elf nodded, his long dark hair shining in a shaft of sunlight filtering down from the vented ceiling above. “I have been told these things as well — truthfully, I knew of them before I heard any tale of your deeds as the Grey Messenger. We have never met before this day, but I had heard of you long ago, before I followed Fëanor and the others to Middle-earth. Elenwë, as you know, is of the Vanyar, and in her youth, she lived upon the slopes of Taniquetil with her kin. When she was a child, she heard tales of one of Lord Manwë’s servants who, it was said, often walked unseen among the Eldar, giving guidance and inspiration unlooked-for. She thought this a most wondrous thing, that one of the Ainur would bring our people such good and yet do so in a way that asked for and allowed no payment for his gifts. It was only by chance that she discovered his name — how, I cannot tell you, for rebirth faded many of the memories of her youth — but I recall that she told me of him in that time long past, when we lived in fair Tirion under the light of the Two Trees. I know now that you are the person of whom she spoke, though I did not realize at once that you were also the Istar of whom many tales have been told by those who came over Sea in the darker days of this age just past. When I made that connection at last, I began to feel that I must meet you, face to face. The more I heard from those who returned with you, the more I came to know that it was more than idle curiosity that prompted this desire.”

Olórin’s eyes narrowed, darkening with puzzlement at the king’s words. The servant with whom Turgon had spoken before entering the house came to him just then, and brought with him a large, flat bundle, covered with a silver cloth. Turgon

accepted the thing with a word of thanks, and the servant politely withdrew. "I fear I am at a loss to understand why you would wish this," the Maia said when they were again alone, save for the distant presence of Aránayel on the opposite side of the hall, clearing away the things from the children's lessons. "I admit that I did visit Gondolin on occasion during the First Age as I visited the Eldar here in Aman before the terrible days of the Kinslaying, but I did not think that I had acted so obviously as to be noticed by you or your people. My task then was to help counteract the darkness of Morgoth's evil in the hearts of those he sought to destroy, and to guide those who would resist him onto paths of wisdom rather than reckless folly. You did not need my help, even if you would have taken it, for you already had the aid and support of Lord Ulmo."

Turgon sighed as he lightly ran his hands over the silky silver cloth covering the object on his lap. "True, though perhaps it would not have hurt for you to lend the benefit of your wisdom, which I am told is great, for I had grown too complacent in my power and pride and did not listen to Ulmo. Since I was allowed to return to bodily life — mostly for Elenwë's sake, I deem, for she was wholly innocent of any wrongdoing, and would have suffered had I not been allowed to return with her — I have thought long and deep over matters as I perceived them then, and as I now know they were indeed. My pride in the achievement of Gondolin robbed me of the strength and wisdom to let it go, but another, wiser power moved my daughter to prepare a secret escape from Tumladen, despite my confidence that it would remain safe and secure. Was that Lord Ulmo's doing, or your own?"

The Maia's pale cheeks colored slightly. "Mine, and Idril's. She saw the wisdom in Ulmo's warning that you would not, and when she felt a desire to do something that might yet bring hope should worse come to worst, she could not devise a means of achieving this without feeling that she would betray you. So I offered to her the vision of a secret passage to escape Gondolin, as you had devised a secret way that had been its only entrance. It was only a nudge to help her remember something she already knew, so that she could be prepared should disaster strike. When you would not heed Lord Ulmo, I fear I had more faith in Morgoth's tenacity and hatred of you and your people than I did in your ability to keep Gondolin from harm. I apologize if this offends you...."

But Turgon shook his head, refusing the offered regret. "Perhaps it would have at the time, but no more. You acted from prudent wisdom and I from reckless pride. Your actions ultimately saved many more than I could have, while mine bore naught but bitter fruit. And even if you did no more than you say, I am glad to meet the one who nudged my daughter's feet onto the proper path. Much good has come of it — the saving of all my people, and Middle-earth as well. Without my grandson's intercession, Morgoth would surely have been the victor, and we would not have this chance to sit and talk in peace. And," he added, laying the palms of both hands atop whatever lay beneath the silver cloth on his lap, "it is because of matters of peace that I have come, to return this." One hand then grasped the cloth and drew it aside as the other grasped the thing beneath, bringing it into view.

Olórin's eyes widened even as a soft gasp escaped him. "Glamdring?" he said, recognizing at once the sword he borne for the better part of a century. His eyes then shifted from the gleaming blade to the Elven king. "My lord, I asked Elrond if he would be so kind as to return it to you, because I knew he would likely see you before I had the pleasure, and it was he who confirmed that it is rightfully yours. I had the good fortune to find it, and Elrond was gracious enough to permit me the use of it, even though it is an heirloom of his house, but it is not mine, and I make no claim to it."

A wry smile danced across the Elf's fair face. "Yes, he told me that I could expect such a reaction. From all the tales I have heard of you, I had anticipated it as well. But, my Lord Olórin, those very tales — one in particular — are what convinced me that this was the path I should take."

Olórin's brow furrowed, puzzlement mixed with certainty. "And which tale is that?" he asked, expecting to hear an account of his confrontation with the Balrog.

Turgon's smile broadened as he settled the gleaming sword across his knees. "I have, of course, heard many concerning your defeat of a Balrog," he began, seemingly about to confirm the Maia's expectations, "and while that is a tremendous feat, it is not the first such tale of valor I have heard. The stories of the feats of Glorfindel and Ecthelion are much the same, and who can say which struggle held more hanging in the balance of the outcome? It was not the account of a battle that stirred my feelings in this matter; it was comments, quite casually offered, by my nephew, Ereinion."

"Gil-galad?" For several moments, Olórin could only blink, his mind reaching back to recall all the times he and the last High King of the Eldar had met. They had been few. Gil-galad had greeted the Ringbearers when they arrived in Aman and had been present during their meeting with the Valar, and he had attended the feast that followed in Valmar. Since then, Olórin could

recall seeing him only once in Elrond's house, when he had gone there to bring Bilbo letters from Frodo, and Gil-galad had been visiting his cousin. They had never had any long conversations, although Olórin hoped that someday they would have a chance to better know one another. "We are barely acquainted, my lord. What could he have said to have prompted this?"

"Little," Turgon confirmed, "but enough. I have come to realize that it was not merely a matter of good fortune or chance that led my nephew to a reign vastly longer than any other High King of our people in Middle-earth. He has, of course, argued that the defeat of Morgoth and the support of the Men of the West were largely responsible for it, but I am not alone in believing he is wrong. Any of us who ruled before him would have fared poorly, even without the curse of the Silmarils upon us. Pride would have led us to folly in our dealings with Sauron; of those of us who came into Exile, only my kinswoman Galadriel had both pride and yet wisdom enough to avoid the temptation to use her Ring to confront Sauron directly. Others of us would not have been so prudent, to our defeat and that of our people. Ereinion has eyes that see far, and a mind that thinks deeply, and a heart that is able to hold in it concern for the welfare of more than just his subjects, or even his own kind. He knew that it would be through cooperation with the other inhabitants of Middle-earth that Sauron would be defeated. That one of his allies did not share the depth of his wisdom and the courage of his convictions did not change the truth of his conclusion. One day, when he and I were both in Tirion and had spent some time discussing many things with Elrond, something was said that led Ereinion to mention his first meeting with you, upon the white shores of Aman. He said that though few words were spoken, he looked into your eyes and saw a spirit much like his own. Both of you had accepted a heavy burden of duty you did not desire, both of you had studied the situations with which you had to deal, and had concluded that cooperation with many others was the only path to success — but that care needed to be taken to discern friend from foe, lest your foes deceive you. You both were offered, and accepted, the power of a Great Ring to aid you in your tasks, and you used that power sparingly and wisely. In the end, you fulfilled your parts in the greater efforts, but it was reliance upon the acts of an ally that would determine whether those efforts met with success. His did not, for Isildur lacked the strength to destroy the Ring; he did not even try, and when Ereinion perished, he could do no more to try to guide matters to their necessary conclusion. You succeeded in reaching that conclusion at long last because the halfling in whom your trust was placed did not fail of it."

The Elf lord sighed, a sound full of sadness and regret. "Ereinion realized during your brief conversation upon the docks that it was more than the fact that you are a Maia and he an Elda that brought your similar efforts to different conclusions. He had been raised and bred in war, and lived in constant war; he had never known a time of true and lasting peace; always there was some threat to his people, large or small, against which he felt duty-bound to defend them. You came of a people he felt he could scarcely begin to imagine, of times that knew strife but also knew great peace and joy, of a sort he could not truly comprehend, but longed to know. He could only look upon a sword such as this as an instrument of combat, a means to defeat an enemy. He had never had an opportunity to learn to appreciate the art of the smith that fashioned from metal a thing of beauty, only the craft of the weapons-maker that gave him what was needed to combat those who would threaten his people. His efforts as a commander were directed toward achieving victory over an enemy, and only that, because he could not do more than hope that if he survived the seemingly endless struggles, he might someday have a chance to know a better world. Yours, he perceived in those brief moments of your meeting, had been aimed toward regaining and establishing a lasting peace such as the world had once known, not merely ensuring temporary safety. You were willing to give — and indeed *did* give — your life for that cause, and risked it again by going back into the fray of war when you might have remained here in a land of bliss."

Turgon paused, his gray gaze taking in the length of the shining blade in his hand before turning back to his host. "And I understood all that he meant. My own efforts as High King had been focused upon protecting and preserving Gondolin, my kingdom. In the Halls, I came to understand, admit, and regret that I had been less concerned with the inhabitants of my kingdom as *people*, and more concerned with them as my *subjects*, the existence of whom gave me a kingdom to rule, for a king must have others to command, direct, and protect or he is nothing. I wielded Glamdring for the glory and defense of what I had built, to preserve my pride and my power. You wielded it as a tool to protect those in need, whoever they were — Elda, Atani, Dwarf, Halfling, it mattered not who or what, only that you desired justice to be done, and the innocent to be defended. I fought beside my allies and knew them through selfish ties; your allies were any good people who wished to drive back the Shadow. I am certain we both knew Glamdring's potential as a weapon of war, but I fear only you saw its beauty and potential as an instrument of peace. In my house, it stands as a relic of a bloody past, a trophy and emblem of failure that came to be because I could not let go of my desire to keep what I had made with my own hands, just as Fëanor could not let go the jewels which his hands had wrought. In your house, Glamdring would know a better and more noble rest, for her power to bring about peace would shine forth, and not be hidden by memory only of the blood that has stained her edges. That is why I wish to return her to you, my Lord Olórin. Not as a reminder of the conquests you made and the foes you defeated with her, but as an instrument with which you helped to bring about cooperation and peace in Middle-earth that neither I nor my nephew nor any of our ancestors and kin were able to achieve."

Please accept her, I beg you. Here in your humble abode, she can be appreciated as a thing of beauty. In my house, she can only be a reminder of wrongful pride and wars of folly.”

For what seemed a very long while, Olórin studied the blade Turgon offered, not hearing the sounds of cheerful voices at work in the kitchen, nor noticing the intense scrutiny of Aránayel as she watched and listened from across the hall. The sword had been a useful tool, that he acknowledged, but he had also always appreciated its beauty, the skill of the hand that had designed and crafted it. He had not witnessed the forging of Glamdring, but Elrond had told him it had been made by Maeglin, the son of Turgon’s sister who though blessed with great gifts of mind and hand had not the wisdom to turn aside from his wicked desire for his cousin Idril, and had betrayed Gondolin to Morgoth to save his own life. That his betrayal had ultimately destroyed him was no comfort, for too many had paid the price of it — yet Glamdring and Orcrist and other weapons of surpassing excellence had come from the hand of Maeglin during the days before his heart grew fully poisoned by his lust for Idril, his anger with Tuor, and his yearning to depose Turgon and succeed him. He had made it when the defense of Gondolin and her people was true within his heart, and the purity of his intent had guided his hands well. There was a great deal of history wrapped around this ancient blade, some full of sorrow and folly, but much full of hope and courage and the dreams of creating a world free of war, in which she could rest and no longer be needed. Though he was not foolish enough to believe that any peace would last forever in Arda Marred, Olórin’s one hope for the outcome of his mission to Endor had been to see its people freed from the yoke of Sauron and his minions, to have a time without the strife of danger and war in which they might have a chance to choose to begin down a path of greater understanding and wisdom. He had not deluded himself into believing that it would be a path without pitfalls, but he knew that achieving a better and more lasting peace could not be done if that road was blocked and could not be taken. His efforts had been focused upon removing the blockage so the path could be seen, and subtly encouraging those who remained to begin down it, and teach their children to continue in that same direction.

Finally, he looked up, his dark blue eyes connecting with Turgon’s gray gaze; a flicker of understanding passed between them. “I will accept your gift, and all you have said, my lord, with one condition.”

Curiosity touched the Elda’s expression. “You have but to name it.”

“You have other obligations to attend soon, as you have mentioned — and as I am certain is true for your nephew, this being a season of festival for your people — but I would be honored if you and Ereinion would return to this house, at your convenience, so that we all might have a chance to become better acquainted. Although I was able to walk through your kingdom unseen or unnoticed, I could not make myself known to you, and my duties demanded much of me. During the Second Age, I was not permitted to return to Middle-earth, for I was needed elsewhere, and saw only glimpses of Ereinion’s life and the struggles of Endor’s peoples from afar. Elrond and Glorfindel and Círdan and Galadriel have told me much of him, and of you, but in truth I know very little of the man who first wielded this sword, and he whose hand first bore Narya. My duties now are very light, and at my discretion, so I can now have the luxury to do things I could not when the world was younger. I would like very much to know both of you better, unless you would prefer otherwise.”

Turgon’s face remained still for a moment, then broke into a broad smile, and he laughed. “Shall I also ask my brother and our father if they would care to join us? It sounds to me as if you have it in mind to become acquainted with all who served our people as High King in the days of Morgoth. Perhaps such curiosity is fitting for one who serves the king of all Arda. Alas, there are some of our kings who remain in Mandos’ keeping, and are unlikely to return to us soon.”

Olórin smiled in return, chuckling softly. “So I have been told. No, I will be content if you will agree to my request and naught more.”

Turgon spent but a moment considering this, then nodded. “I would like this as well, and I know the same is true for my nephew. We have spoken of it. In the early days after your return from Endor, we did not think it wise to intrude upon your life, for all of Aman heard of the terrible grief that had befallen you and we did not wish to risk interfering with more important matters upon which your very existence relied. So we have waited, and the tales we have heard in Tirion have done naught but whet our curiosity. So I accept your terms, my Lord Olórin, and gladly. It will please me to see Glamdring given a home where she can be properly honored, and the price you ask is a gift in disguise.”

Bowing his head with great deference, he lifted the sword with both hands as he rose, only to kneel and offer Glamdring to his host. Olórin accepted the gift graciously, feeling the familiar weight of the ancient blade in this hand that had never before touched it; he had surrendered the sword into Elrond’s keeping during the voyage from Middle-earth. An errant bit of light

flickering down from the vent at the peak of the vaulted ceiling glittered along the bright silver of its still-sharp edge, and he smiled at the rise of memories it brought, not all of which were grim. "I shall happily give her the home you desire, but let us hope that never again will either of us see her shine as a warning of enemies drawing near."

The Elf heartily agreed with him as he returned to his chair. An odd expression danced across his face. "A useful ability, but a rather distressing one at times. I had not been told that such a property had been discovered by the metal smiths when I commissioned Maeglin to fashion new arms for myself and my household, and I have often suspected that he was pleased to see the shock I felt the first time we carried these weapons into battle against Morgoth's minions. He claimed that he only wished for my arms to be the best he could possibly make, and that he had thought I knew of this discovery." He snorted. "Would that the blades he forged had shone thus in his own presence, wretched traitor! Yet I have forgiven him. He brought about his own end through his betrayal, and did I do better when I let my own pride and desire lead to the destruction of Gondolin?"

Olórin's smile softened as he lowered the sword. "Then, perhaps not, but you have done better since, for I do not think Lord Manwë would have agreed to your release from Mandos had you not found forgiveness in your heart, and the wisdom to understand your mistakes. Maeglin, I fear, may never win his freedom, for his heart seemed to me to be as hardened with bitterness as Fëanor's. It saddens me to think that two with such great talent and skill will be confined to the dark halls until the End, but they alone chose their paths and refuse to stray from them."

He lightly ran one finger along the flat of the blade, pausing when his touch encountered something unfamiliar. He peered at what he had felt, frowning ever so slightly. There was a new inscription on the blade, above the point of the original inscriptions that Elrond had once read to identify the sword. "This was not here before," he said as he tilted the blade so that the letters could better catch the light. When they did, he gasped softly, his glance snapping to Turgon. "This is in Valarin!"

"As I requested," Turgon confirmed. "A most unusual language, but I felt that it best suited what I wished to have written on the blade before surrendering it to you. Though I must confess, I can read not a word of what is written. I fear I have always been one who stopped my ears rather than listen to the language of the Ainur."

A gentle laugh was heard in response to that remark, Frodo emerging from the kitchen bearing a tray of goblets filled with drink for the guests. He had not been eavesdropping, precisely, since the conversation had been clearly audible in those parts of the house not behind closed doors. "I've had the same reaction to it, Lord Turgon," the hobbit said as he proffered the tray, offering him refreshment and careful to remember what he had heard about the Elves who had once been High Kings in Middle-earth preferring to leave those titles behind after their returns from Mandos. "I have been trying to at least grow more accustomed to the sound of it, so that I can avoid wincing when I hear it, but I suspect my progress in that attempt has been rather poor. What does it say, Olórin?" he asked the Maia.

One corner of the Istar's mouth twitched in a wry smile as he read the words, first in Quenya, then in Westron, to spare his guests' sensitive ears. "*Nóna sé ohta, colla na sérë, senda sé alcar. Born in war, borne to peace, at rest in glory.*" Olórin's gaze lingered for a moment on the inscription, then turned to Turgon, still bright with his smile. "Thank you, my lord, it is an apt description of Glamdring's history. I know not how glorious she will find this house, but you may rest assured that it will ever be one of peace."

That seemed to be contradicted a moment later when the others of Turgon's company entered, and either availed themselves of the refreshment Frodo offered, or headed into the kitchen to help bring out more beverages and the meal that Ványalos and the children had just finished preparing. Olórin withdrew from the happy chaos for a moment to reverently settle Glamdring on a shelf where the sword would be safe until he decided upon a more permanent home for the honored blade. He did not notice the way Aránayel watched him through intense and narrowed eyes; he might have when he turned back to face the rest of the hall, had not a delighted cry from the children drawn his attention elsewhere.

"Helyanwë!" they cried in joyful unison, all but dropping the things they'd been carrying in their eagerness to rush to greet their beloved caretaker, who was just then entering through the door at the front of the house. If not for the deftness of Ványalos and one of Turgon's companions, the tray and bowl would have missed the table toward which they were fairly thrown.

"You *did* come!" Lére added, unabashedly exuberant as he pelted toward the entrance to be the first to give her a happy hug.

The silver-haired Maia laughed no less joyfully than the twins. "Did I not say that I would do so as soon as I could?"

“Yes, but we were afraid that might be a *very* long time!” Melui explained as she joined her brother in offering the welcoming embrace. “Why didn’t you tell us you were coming today?”

Helyanwë smiled as she returned their hug. “Because I did not know it would be today, until we arrived. We made better time than we anticipated.”

“We?” Aránayel echoed, her face still and her voice even, but her eyes bright with a green fire that was not the warmth of pleasure.

Helyanwë graciously ignored Aránayel’s barely hidden contempt. “Yes, myself and one who was finally convinced of the need to make this journey for the right reasons.” She turned toward the door, which was still open behind her, speaking to someone who remained in the shadows of the outer porch. “Come,” she said gently. “It is time to let go of the past and greet both the present and the future.”

Even as she said the words, Olórin’s heart missed a beat, knowing somehow who it was that waited beyond the door, but unable to believe it until he had the proof of his eyes. As a tall and slender figure stepped onto the threshold and into the fuller light, he felt his face break into a smile as surprised and delighted as the twins’. “Lindarinë!” he said, the name both a greeting and a blessing. He had not seen his old friend since the day the Istar’s ship had set sail from Alqualondë to take him to Middle-earth in the guise of an old man, and even then, he had seen him only from afar, as the Elf had been trying to hide himself from the pain of living, hard at work mending the sails of a ship that had been caught in a storm in the Shadowy Seas while ferrying new arrivals from Endor. His face seemed more pale than it had been before his death in the Kinslaying, as if even a brief stay in the darkness of those silent Halls had drained the blood from his spirit. And since his return from Mandos, his dark hair had become streaked with silver, perhaps reflecting an aging of his spirit, as the dimming of his once bright gray eyes reflected the dullness in his empty heart.

Now, hearing his name spoken, Lindarinë looked toward his host, and there was suddenly a glimmer in his eyes that was not joy nor laughter, but a strange and unfamiliar sorrow. “Olórin,” he answered softly, as if to speak any louder would cause his once musical voice to break. For what seemed a moment that had no end, the Elf looked upon the friend he had avoided for so many years, afraid to see in him a painful reminder of happier times that seemed forever beyond his ability to regain, even briefly. The sadness in his eyes blurred, as night’s mist is stirred by the first winds of dawn — and then suddenly, as if he had found a resolve he feared losing if he hesitated, he crossed the distance between them in a few long strides to embrace the Maia, who gladly returned the gesture of affection.

“*Avatyara ni!*” he all but whispered, his voice hoarse and full of the sorrow in his eyes, which overbrimmed as he dissolved into tears.

*To be continued...*