

Twice Blessed

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Chapter XV

A moment's insight is sometimes worth a life's experience.

"I had not intended to come here," Lindarinë said some time later, after Olórin and Helyanwë had led him to the privacy of the currently empty verandah at the back of the cottage. Others, Ványalos and the twins in particular, had reacted with concern when the Elf had greeted his host with such unexpected tears, but they had not interfered. Olórin had suggested that his old friend might wish a place of greater privacy where he could take a few moments to compose himself, and Helyanwë had firmly supported the suggestion. The Istar noted with some interest the solicitous manner with which Helyanwë insisted on ensuring the sea-elf's comfort before excusing herself to reassure the others and fetch refreshment for her traveling companion. The verandah was peaceful, warm with the midday sun filtered through wind-stirred leaves; soft fragrances of blooming flowers, lush grasses, and freshly-turned earth were a pleasant presence on the breeze, as were the gentle sounds of the nearby stream and the rustling branches overhead. Elf and Maia sat together, taking what pleasure they could from their surroundings; Lindarinë was clearly reticent, but Olórin had learned enough of patience to refrain from pressing him, glad though he was to see his old friend. Long minutes passed before Lindarinë was finally able to bring himself to speak, and as he did so, he only glanced at his host from time to time, seemingly reluctant to meet his sharp but compassionate gaze.

"I think that you know as well as anyone my mood of these past years, since my release from Mandos," the Elf said, sparing Olórin one of those few glances. "What was the purpose of returning to life, if it was to be an empty life? I blamed many, you know. The Valar, for not warning me that I would come back and find myself without kin. Fëanor and his sons for caring more about benighted jewels than they did about the lives of others who had done them no wrong. The Noldor in general, for following him and causing so much pain and grief both here in Aman and also on the Hither Shores. Even you and Ványalos and all of my friends who still lived, for showing me compassion and caring rather than joining me in anger against those who had harmed me and so many of my kin. I did not think Lord Manwë and Lord Námo would have allowed me to leave the Halls had I not conquered such feelings, but I realized the error of that assumption shortly after I was allowed to return to Eldamar. I could not understand why they had permitted this. I would rather have remained in the silence of the dark halls than return to life when all I could feel was pain and bitterness."

"The ways of the Valar are often difficult to comprehend," Olórin answered gently. "Lord Námo in particular acts upon the prompting of things he knows of which not even Lord Manwë is aware. Yet if they agreed that the time had come for you to be brought back into the realm of the living, they did so because they believed it was not only warranted, but that this was written to be your fate. You did no wrong when Fëanor and his followers spilled blood in Alqualondë. I know you, Lindarinë, and I know that you could not have so much as lifted a hand to hurt another, even if it meant that your own life would be forfeit. Unless you have thoroughly hidden some darker truth of the matter, you died in innocence, treacherously slain by a blow struck from behind while you were attempting to guide others to safety. The deaths of so many who shared your fate has long brought deep sorrow to all the Valar, and when they could, I know they wished to repair the great damage that was done to the families of the Teleri who were so betrayed. They certainly must have known that your kin would not be with you if you returned to life, but they must

have believed that your strong friendships with others would support you in the days to come. I am sure they did not intend for you to suffer.”

“The Halls are not a place of healing for all who enter,” another voice agreed, that of Turgon as he emerged from the house, bearing a tray with the refreshment Helyanwë had prepared for Lindarinë. As he set it on the low table near the sea-elf’s seat, the former king favored the newest guest with a grave but compassionate expression. “I myself did not truly understand this until long after I had been allowed to leave. I know many others who have gone to Mandos and returned, and for each, it seems the experience is different. The time we spend there, if time it can be called, gives us a chance to reflect upon the life from which we had been sundered, and to gain wisdom, if we may, from reflecting upon all that we have done in a place where there is naught to distract us. I had much to reflect upon, as did most all the others I know who have returned. Elenwë had less to contemplate, for like you, she never raised hand nor word against another. Her stay would also have been brief, had she not wished to wait for me to return to Aman, in whatever manner was to be my fate. Yet even she was not as innocent as you; she made the choice to follow me into exile, as I followed my kin out of loyalty to them, though I would not swear Fëanor’s abominable oath. You did nothing, and so there was naught for you to ponder as you waited.”

Lindarinë snorted softly; his tone was mild rather than harsh when he spoke. “Was there not? I do not think the bitterness in my heart was caused by nothing.”

“Perhaps not,” Olórin said, able to sense that there would not be friction between the two of the type so typical between the returned Noldorin Exiles and the Teleri of Aman who had suffered in the Kinslaying. He was relieved by it. “But for some, the answers to the pains of life do not lie in Lord Námo’s halls. If he and Lord Manwë agreed that the time had come for you to be released, it was likely because they both saw that your healing would be found here in the world of the living, not in the grim isolation among the dead. I have tried to help you find such a cure, as have so many others who knew and loved you before that tragic day. It has long grieved me that you would not allow me to give you what aid I could, as you yourself once aided me in finding the path I needed to return to life and joy.”

A small, bemused frown creased the Maia’s fair face. “And yet, when you arrived just now, you asked me to forgive you. For what? I pray that you are not about to tell me that you have utterly despaired of life...”

To his relief, Lindarinë shook his head, the silver in his dark braids glinting like mithril in the leaf-dappled sun. He looked up at Turgon for a moment, and gestured for the Noldo to join them, since he seemed reluctant to leave. “No,” he said with a sigh as Turgon found a seat on a nearby bench. “But not because I found life worth living, I am ashamed to admit. Unbearable though many days have seemed since my release, none were so black that I wished to return to the dark halls. Had I felt closer to the kin I lost in Mandos, I might have chosen to go back, once I realized that they would not be here to greet me. I have heard others, such as Turgon, speak of the choices they were offered before they left Mandos. I cannot recall having been given such options, and I fear that is much of the reason I rejected the counsel and comfort you and Ványalos and others of my friends offered to me after my release. It felt to me as if I had been cast out as a thing unwanted, not granted release, and it has taken long for me to understand that I was indeed given a choice. I could not remember it, for I chose swiftly and with the certainty that what I wished to find when I was returned to life would be waiting for me when I came forth. I have regretted my haste, far too often. But,” he added, taking another deep breath and releasing it slowly, “though I have lived too much of this new life I was given with my eyes and ears closed to all around me, my eyes, at least, have again been opened.”

His gray-green eyes flicked once more toward Turgon, who answered with a crooked smile. “You know that we did not ask you to travel with us, intending such a thing to happen,” the Noldo said, his chiding gentle. “If you must blame someone for this, turn to Elenwë, for it was her suggestion that we ask you to join us on our journey when she found that you and Helyanwë were passing through Tirion at the same time we were about to depart.”

"I blame no one," said Lindarinë, "least of all your lady wife, who has never treated me with aught but kindness. Helyanwë also wished us to travel together, though it was your lady who was responsible for leading me to this revelation, for which I am grateful."

Olórin listened to their exchange with interest. "Do my ears deceive me, or does it sound as if you are better acquainted with one another than I would have guessed?"

"They do not deceive you," Turgon was first to confirm. "I have never quite understood it, being that she is of the Vanyar, but for some reason, Elenwë enjoys the sea. Before the port of Tirion was built, we often visited Alqualondë so that she might indulge her strange fondness for the deep waters and the shores. For some even more peculiar reason, she has enjoyed Lindarinë's company ever since she first met him while walking along the quay, watching the mariners at work mending nets and sails. She has surpassing skill with needle and thread, and she has said that only among the sail-makers of the Teleri has she seen a male capable of handling a needle with deftness equal to that of even a clumsy woman. I could scarcely refute her claim, since I have no skill at all with such things, but it pleased me that she was able to find friends among the Teleri who would not hold my Noldorin blood against me — or who would come to forgive me my unfortunate heritage for the sake of my fair wife."

"She is a great treasure," Lindarinë said most graciously. "She has been one of very few who were able to stir me from my ceaseless misery, simply by knowing how to distract my thoughts with familiar everyday matters. And through her, I began to understand that I could not hold all the Noldor to blame for what was driven by the madness of a few. You drew no blade against my people; indeed, none of those who wantonly slew my kin have been released from the Halls, or lived to return when the Ban was lifted. It was not Noldorin blood that caused tragedy so long ago; it was individuals armed with sword and pride and anger who committed the crime. We of the Teleri were not the only ones who suffered; those such as Lady Elenwë died as well, for no greater crime than showing loyalty to those whom they loved. And even the greatest of crimes can be forgiven, when a just price has been paid."

Olórin's eyes widened with gentle surprise. "Wisely spoken, old friend. I hope others of the Teleri have also gained such wisdom with the passing years."

Lindarinë cleared his throat before tendering a reply. "Others more than I, I am sure," he admitted. "Although I have known Lord Turgon and Lady Elenwë for some time, I was not so eager to extend my forgiveness to others of the Exiles returned. My lord Olwë has not been especially forgiving, and his bitterness has been shared by many, myself included. It has only been since your ship came to us this past autumn that I have heard another Telerin voice from the ancient times speak eloquently on behalf of the Noldor, and their suffering. I had heard of the one called Círdan from those who have come West from the Havens of Lindon, but though I had seen the great beauty and craft of the ships he built and sent into the West, I had not believed that any Elf who had refused the Great Journey could truly be wise."

The Maia smiled, rather impishly. "Then you certainly did not know Círdan, who he was and from whence he came. The age you see upon him is the weight of many thousands of years of living, and surviving in a world where evil saps the strength of even the strongest. All he has experienced has given him great wisdom, though he has never flaunted it. It was his own choice to remain in Middle-earth when Ulmo asked it of him. For more than three long ages, he has endured far more than Olwë or Elwë — and yet his heart is more easily moved to pity and forgiveness. He has known sorrow because of the deeds of some of the Noldor, but never has he held all their people accountable for the acts of a few. Was it he who finally persuaded you to come here with Helyanwë?"

But Lindarinë shook his head. "Not precisely. I had heard him speak of some of the things you have mentioned, not attempting to lecture those of us who have never left Aman, but simply telling tales of what befell the Teleri of his acquaintance who did not come West. I do understand that I had made presumptions that were not true.

When he heard of my young cousins and their predicament, he did not chastize me for being hesitant to come to their aid, even though he had known them and their parents far better than I, when they dwelt together at the Havens in the East. He told me, in fact, that though he had fostered the children of others in Middle-earth, he had always been uneasy at the outset, fearing that he had lived alone too long to be suitable as a guardian. Although things turned out well, he felt that his success was more the result of blessings from above than any particular skill on his own part. And even though his foster son Ereinion had been released from Mandos before he arrived here, he had never truly forgiven himself for failing to defend him adequately during the wars with Sauron. After listening to his honesty, I felt I should at least attempt to be certain that I would make the proper choice. Helyanwë had pointed out, quite rightly, that I should make the effort to meet with my young cousins again at some neutral place, where I could at least feel that I was surrounded by friends who would have no reason to pressure me to become their guardian simply because of the traditions and customs of my people. I left Alqualondë with what I felt were good intentions, but I began to have misgivings shortly after we passed through Tirion and met with Turgon's company. It seemed too convenient to me that so many people were saying that I should be free to make my own choice, uncoerced, yet were taking such great pains to arrange for this supposedly neutral meeting. I soon decided that when we had passed through the Calacirya, I would tell Helyanwë that I wished to return home. The errand she and others had devised to lend additional persuasion to bring me here was a trivial matter that could have been accomplished by anyone; my presence was not required, and I had begun to resent the feelings that I was being manipulated for the purposes of others."

Olórin sighed, the sound full of sympathy. "I am well acquainted with such feelings," he said, thinking back upon the forced company of Aránayel. "Yet you are here. What changed your heart?"

Lindarinë looked away for a time, as if debating whether or not he wished to respond; then he turned his face back to the Maia, his eyes full of self-recrimination. "Our brief stop outside Valmar. It is apparently the Lady Elenwë's custom to visit Ezellohar at times of festival."

"It is," Turgon confirmed. "She greatly mourned the loss of the Trees, and after our return from Mandos, she made it a tradition to go to the place where once they stood, at the times of year when we offer thanks to Eru Ilúvatar for the beauties and bounties of this world He made for us. She gives thanks for such things every day, of course, but she is moved to make greater gestures of respect during times of festival, to remember what has gone before, both in joy and in sadness. I have never objected to her wishes in this matter, for I feel moved in very similar ways. Yet this was not the first time Lindarinë had come with us on such a journey."

When Olórin's curious glance turned to the sea-elf, he explained. "Twice or thrice before, Lady Elenwë convinced me to join them in their memorial. I have long suspected that she hoped to draw me into the more pleasant aspects of the festivals, but she never succeeded. The last time I accompanied them was several years ago, before my young kin arrived. When Lady Elenwë asked if I would join her in this memorial, I agreed more out of appreciation for her past kindness to me than because of any desire to see the place where the events that had brought ruin to my life had begun. I..." He hesitated, glancing down at his hands. He spoke more softly. "I did not know that Ezellohar is no longer the same."

Olórin did not understand what he meant until the Elf looked up again, his gaze steady, but his eyes bright with unshed tears. "Until then, I had not seen the body you surrendered, the one in which you had been sent in disguise to Middle-earth. Yet I had heard many tales of your mission there, and how you went only because Lord Manwë insisted you go. You were afraid, and still you went, and suffered greatly for it."

"As was my duty, Lindarinë," the Istar reminded him. "There were many more who lived in Middle-earth who had even greater reason than I to fear Sauron. It was their world and their lives that he threatened, and I would have been abandoning my purpose here in Eä to refuse to help them, no matter how frightened I was."

“I know. And I also know that you almost paid a terrible price in following the command of your lord and in the final fulfillment of your duty. But even if you had gone full willing from the start, and there had been no dreadful repercussions from Lord Manwë’s command, it would not have changed the fact that you faced enemies and great dangers and bitter betrayals, the worst of which came from your own kind. You would not have needed to go on such a mission if Sauron had not betrayed all your people by joining with Morgoth, then attempted to take his place as the Dark Lord after he was defeated. You would not have been forced to carry on your mission alone if the four others who had been sent with you had stayed true to your appointed tasks, and had not fallen into folly, either of misguided purpose or selfish greed. And you would not have ever known death if not for the wickedness of yet another fallen Maia. You did no wrong to any of them, and yet they all turned against you, abandoning you in your time of need, or bringing you direct harm to further their own ends. Is this so different a fate from the one I suffered in Alqualondë, those many centuries ago?”

It was not difficult for Olórin to follow his reasoning; the fair head shook. “No, it is not so different. I knew that I had gone to Middle-earth to face enemies, but I did not expect to face enemies who had begun as my allies. We were not intended to contest Sauron directly, but to help the people whose world it was to defeat the evil that sought to destroy them. I certainly did not anticipate what would become of my fellow Istari, Curumo’s betrayal least of all. And though I had suspicions that the evil in Moria might be one of Morgoth’s servants who had escaped his defeat, I had long thought it might be a dragon or some other fell creature he had bred, for those who knew the truth had chosen to conceal it, no doubt prompted by a terrible fear. It would have been easier for us to face Glaurung himself. But what choice did I have? The Balrog was there, and I was duty and honor bound to protect those I had been sent to help. My life was of little consequence beside their need, and the need for hope to survive long enough to win Sauron’s defeat.”

Lindarinë’s nod was heavy with regret. “I have heard the tales of what befell you during your long labors on the Hither Shore, and I have found that at heart, none are exaggerated. Whether it was out of duty or honor or love, you took up a heavy burden — and I had not truly understood how heavy it was until I saw the empty *hröa* that had been yours, preserved there between the Trees on Ezellohar. I have never seen a Man with my own eyes, nor the ways in which time and the cares of the world weigh upon their flesh. The death of the body is not the same for an Elf as it is for a mortal, nor is the aging. I was surprised by Círdan’s appearance when I first met him, yet even as ancient and weary as he seemed before the healing of Aman gave him back some measure of what he had lost, it was not the same as what I saw when I looked upon that empty shell upon the green hill. You were asked to do impossible deeds with so little, at terrible risk to yourself, to your very soul, but when you accepted the burden, you did not set it aside, despite the difficulties you surely must have faced in that form you were required to wear. When I saw it, I felt shame so great, I knew I could not return home as I had planned.”

“Shame?” Olórin echoed. “Why? You did not send me in that guise, nor did you create the evil that made it necessary for me to go....”

“No. But in the years before your departure, after I had been released from Mandos, you reached out the hand of friendship to me time and again, offering the light to help me find a way out of my inner darkness, and I shunned it. All the things I had expected to find when I returned from the Halls of Waiting were here indeed — not embodied in my kin, but in my friends who would have done or given anything for me, if I had but accepted the love they offered. I have wallowed in self-pity for two ages of the world, and my misery was ultimately of my own making. I could not let go of my anger and my pride long enough to remember that you offered your help not for glory or gain or even vengeance, but simply because you cared for my well-being and wanted to see me happy again — as I had once wanted for you, when you first came to Lórien. That is why I asked for your forgiveness a short time ago. You tried to give me what I clearly needed, and I did not trust in our friendship enough to accept that gift. Such pride is inexcusable — as inexcusable as my stubborn refusal to succor my young cousins, who have no other living kin. Helyanwë wanted me to come here to meet with them again because she felt that in a neutral place, with friends about who would not

try to sway my decision, I might come to know them better — more honestly, at least. I must confess that I agreed mostly because I have grown fond of her and did not wish to utterly disappoint her. I never planned to do more than play out the charade, until we went to Valmar, and my eyes were opened. I could see then how others, like you, had made many sacrifices, for others, and for me, and that I had been incredibly selfish in turning my back on my cousins. I cannot promise that I will make a good guardian for them, not after the life I have lived since that dreadful day in Alqualondë, but I understand that I should try, at the very least.”

Turgon spoke up, his tone both gentle and sympathetic. “You should not be too hard on yourself, my friend. I know how difficult it can be to carry on when you feel as if you have lost your entire world. If my daughter and our people had not needed me to lead them across the treacherous ice, I would have returned to Valinor after Elenwë died during the crossing of the Helcaraxë. There have been many times when I have looked back on my decision to follow Fëanor, and even now, I cannot say why I chose to do it. I have always felt that his desire to reclaim the Silmarils was wrong, and that his Oath was sheer madness, and why I pressed on even after the journey had cost me my beloved wife...”

He shook his head. “In hindsight, it would have been wiser to lead those who followed me back to their homes in Valinor, but also in hindsight, had I done so, I might well have sealed the doom of the Noldor, and Middle-earth, forever, condemning them to life under the hand of Morgoth with no hope of ever finding pardon and aid from the Valar. For there would have been no Eärendil to come hither and plead for both his parent kindreds had my daughter Idril never wed Tuor of the Edain. It is far too easy to blame ourselves for things we cannot change, and it always more difficult to move forward than to look back. But we cannot do the one if we spend too much time indulging in the other.”

“Truly spoken,” Olórin commended. “The choices I myself made were never easy, Lindarinë, but I have tried to not allow myself to be overly burdened by the past. Perhaps to you, it seems that I had only to make the decision to board a ship and sail from Aman to Endor, but it was never so. When first I went, I had to choose to give up much of what I am in order to abide by the will of Valar, and when I returned after my death in Moria, it began not as a voyage from Mandos or these blessed shores, but from the Timeless Halls and the presence of Eru Ilúvatar.”

His voice fell as he remembered, more clearly than ever, the moment when that choice had been laid before him, and the bitter stab of pain he had felt in knowing the inevitable decision, far worse than any misgivings he had experienced in conceding to Manwë’s command that he go as one of the Istari. There was no comfort in knowing that he could not have done otherwise; the intense feeling of loss was greater than any he had ever known, before or since. Even the memory of that ache took his breath away, and he needed a moment to collect himself to continue. “It was the most difficult decision I had ever made — indeed, I suspect I will never be asked to make a choice more painful. To give the aid I knew was still sorely needed in Middle-earth, I was required to choose to leave behind the place all the Ainur of Eä long to be, and of my own free will be again trapped and hindered by mortal flesh, to fight enemies of my own kind not to help my own people, but to help peoples who would never truly understand and appreciate all I had done and all I had given up for their sake. I do not believe anyone truly comprehends how terrible a choice this was, and that if I had never been pressed to take up a task I did not want, I would not have been faced with that awful decision.”

Even as he said the words, a light of new understanding began to dawn in Olórin’s thought, a gleam of a connection to other troubling matters, but he did not have time to ponder his own affairs, as Lindarinë spoke once again. “I doubt it not,” the Elf said quietly. “And that is why seeing the *hröa* that had been imposed upon you touched me so deeply. I did not know the specifics of all you had done and had been required to do, but I knew enough to feel ashamed by my own reluctance to help my young kin. I have never had children under my care, but I remember sufficient of my own childhood to know that it is not necessarily a burden — indeed, that it can have many joys, certainly far more than you were assured of when you went to Middle-earth, and when you tried to help me recover

from the despair that clung to me after my return from Mandos. And that is why I asked your forgiveness. You have always been my friend, and have had my happiness and my best interests at heart even when I treated you as if you were my enemy. I denied you and your good intentions out of bitter self-pity, thinking only of myself and how I had been so terribly wronged, no other could possibly understand my pain. But you did understand — you have always understood.”

“Not as clearly as I do now,” the Maia admitted.

Lindarinë shrugged. “Perhaps, but that is not the issue. Your kindness and caring toward me has always been sincere, and motivated by the love of a friend, not the love of self. I was so deeply mired in my own pity, I did not want to remember this. For that, I am sorely ashamed, and it is for that which I ask your forgiveness. My eyes were opened upon Ezellohar, and though I cannot bring back the years I lost to the darkness of my spirit any more than the Valar were able to bring back the light of the poisoned Trees, I can at least hope to salvage what I can of our friendship that might have been.”

The brightness of Olórin’s answering smile was like the parting of clouds on a gloomy day, bringing the rays of the sun into a world too long bereft of light. “Our friendship is no less now than it was in the years before the sun and moon,” he said, his own elation bright in his voice. “The clouds of past misfortunes may have brought sadness between us, but never have you done or said anything to make me love you any the less. And there is no doubt in my heart that even those sorrows and troubles will but strengthen our friendship, for we both have known death, and rebirth, and are now wiser for it.”

Lindarinë began to refute that claim, but when the Istar rose to embrace him, a gesture of both forgiveness and joy, he had not the heart to gainsay him. Turgon, who had anticipated this reconciliation, looked on with a silent smile for a time, then sighed, a sound of contentment rather than frustration. “Elenwë will be pleased to hear of this,” he said, “if I may speak of it to her, Lindarinë. She has prayed that you would let go of the bitterness of the past, for she could see the unhappiness it brought you, and she has also wished that your heart would change toward your young cousins. She and I have had only one child, and she has told me that her greatest regret in dying during the crossing of the Helcaraxë was the knowledge that she might forever be separated from Idril, and never have a chance to see her wed, or begin a family of her own. There are few orphans in this land, but she would take in every one of them, if she could. Had you continued to refuse to become the guardian of these twins, Elenwë would have offered to take them into our home, but she knows as well as I that it is far better for them to be with kin.”

The sea-elf took a deep breath, having been only marginally successful in holding back tears of his confused emotions. “She may yet have that chance, if I prove to be an unsuitable guardian, but I will try my best, I promise.”

“You will do well, I think,” Olórin assured him. “You know that you will have whatever help I can offer, and I am certain many others will lend the same support. Círdan may speak of his doubts over such matters, but he was an excellent foster father to many youngsters in need of such aid. I dare say he may also prove to be a fount of valuable advice when it comes to raising children alone, without the help and influence of a spouse.”

To the Maia’s surprise, Lindarinë suddenly flushed and looked away; his puzzlement was answered by a new voice. “Mayhap that will be advice less needed than it seems,” Helyanwë said as she stepped out onto the verandah to join them. She moved to stand beside Lindarinë; when she laid her hand upon his shoulder, he covered it with one of his own in a gesture of clear affection.

Olórin blinked as his thoughts suddenly put together the scattered pieces of a puzzle he had not even realized existed. A moment later, he grinned and laughed, kindly. “Ah, so it was not only your experience in Valmar that persuaded you to this course,” he said to the sea-elf. “Even before I went to the house of Nienna to meet the twins, it

seemed to me that Helyanwë spoke of you with greater warmth than was her wont, but I mistakenly presumed that was because of her feelings toward your young cousins."

"We have been acquainted far longer," Lindarinë admitted. "Helyanwë was appointed to aid me during the days I spent in the house of Lady Nienna, after my release from Mandos. She bore the brunt of my grief and anger, which you saw only after it had had some years to temper, when you returned from your tasks in Middle-earth at the end of the First Age. She has often encouraged me to renew the friendship of those I had known in Lórien, and in all the years since my release, she has returned to counsel me when I began to despair of life. I know that at first, it was naught but a part of her duty, but it has become more."

"It is no surprise that we did not meet together, all three, until now," Helyanwë added. "The times in which I counseled Lindarinë were often after his hope for life could not be stirred by his friends who loved him, and you have had many other duties that have taken you far from these shores. The affection that has grown between us began long before the arrival of his young cousins."

Olórin's glance turned to the silver-haired Maia. "Does Lady Nienna know of this — wait, do not answer," he said quickly, gesturing to curtail her reply. "Of course she does. She does nothing without full knowledge of her purpose, and she would not have sent you to counsel Lindarinë time and again if she did not know of your feelings, and approved of them. No doubt she counted upon them as a means to succor the young twins. And I shall not ask for any details of your relationship, save to wish you happiness."

Helyanwë smiled. "Thank you, Olórin, I had no doubt that you would be pleased. We have Lord Turgon to thank as well, for he recognized what we had been attempting so hard to hide from each other, and persuaded us to end such foolishness. There are some things in life too precious to waste, even a moment. That we are immortal does not change that wisdom." She inclined her head toward the erstwhile king in thanks.

"Indeed," Turgon agreed, also smiling broadly. "I regret every moment of the years I was parted from Elenwë, and though we were reunited, I cannot help but feel that had she been at my side during the years of Exile, things might have gone quite differently, for the better."

"And I did not agree to come only because Helyanwë asked and I did not wish to disappoint her," Lindarinë said, only a mild note of defensiveness in his voice. "As I have told you, there were other matters to persuade me, one that involved your halfling companion."

The Istar's eyes widened. "Frodo? You have not mentioned him before. What business could you have with him?"

A long-missed smile crept across Lindarinë's fair face while Helyanwë's smile evolved into a silvery laugh. "All in good time, old friend. Our business with Frodo was, I must admit, a bit of a ruse to persuade Lindarinë to at least begin the journey to Lórien, but Master Baggins was full willing to participate, and the ruse was not without a greater leavening of truth. We will come to that, but first, I believe there are other matters of greater import to be settled. The others await."

To be continued....