

Clash of Wills

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Chapter One

Ananyse shifted to her side, the sharp stones beneath her poking through her cloak as she tried to find a somewhat comfortable position on the granite rock she lay across. The wind rustled the leaves of the birch tree above her as she slid over a couple more feet. The snoring lumps of her men across from the glowing coals of the banked fire flickered against the darker backdrop of the forest edge a hundred yards behind them. This close to a more comfortable bed, and yet she dared not lead them into even a few feet of the forest.

Their way through this land of rock and more rock at the foot of the mountains was dangerous enough with the bands of patrolling Orcs from the Mines of Moria to their west and from Mordor to the southeast, but the rumors of the elves within the Golden Wood and their protection of their borders she knew were not exaggerated. There was more chance of being shot on site first, and questions asked later that she dared not take any chance there.

She sighed as the rocks beneath her seemed to dig in further and finally sat up, rubbing her hip as she leaned over her knees. The fire barely gave out much light, banked as it was and shielded from view by the overhang of rock. The lone tree she sat beneath brushed its branches on the overhang and enclosed the area fairly well for them to be hidden enough to get some quick rest.

She pulled her heavy braid of copper hair to hang over her shoulder and adjusted the band that held it tightly braided. Its silkiness was always a problem and she usually pulled it as tight as possible, or else seemed to have a mind of its own. But her hair was her one concession as otherwise from a distance, she looked like one of her men. The tunic and leggings were loose enough that they did not reveal her thin figure, not that there was much there to begin with, and with her cloak and helmet, most could not tell she was female even at close range. Until they saw the braid, and then her dark eyes. Try as she might she could not change the long lashes that framed the dark brown of her eyes, and the high arching brows that spoke of her Elvish heritage. The hair was pulled tightly back over the tips of her ears, then braided, falling to her waist when free, but hanging to the middle of her back while braided. Giving the band a final twist she rubbed her hands to warm them as she stared into the glowing coals.

Was it only a year ago that she'd left home? It seemed like a lifetime. Home, she laughed to herself, was it really that? Grimacing she reached into her belt pouch pulling out a small piece of dried fruit and began to slowly chew. They had followed the Old Forest Road through the forests of Rhovanion, fighting

several patrols of Orcs there, the darkness creeping ever further toward her lands. Her home in the Erid Mithrin, the Grey Mountains, had been harsh. It was a land that was not forgiving, but she now was the Oracle of Mithrin, now that her mother was dead. Dead, and why was she here, on the borders of Lothlorien, Moria and the light knows what sorts of dangers, on a quest to find answers.

She scratched the back of her head, the last couple weeks of travel had not given them any time to stop long, and too far from the Anduin to take a least a quick dip. Light! She'd lay down in even a few inches of water if it meant she could be clean again. But the last bath, she had to laugh at that, the last bath had been the fall into the stream as they had passed through Rhovanion, the forests of Mirkwood were dark, but not as dark as her visions. Her latest vision completely overtook her, and if it hadn't been for Delvan, she'd be lying there still. She laid her forehead on her knees as she rubbed her arms. The wind seemed to swirl about the small cavern, and the coals of the fire burned a bit brighter with the gust of air.

Dead, just over a year ago. Still she could hardly believe it, her mother, gone into the shadow. She betrayed you, betrayed your people. How could she do it? Because she didn't consider them her people, Ananyse grimaced. They only tolerated her mother over the years, first because of her marriage to King Thodren, and then because of her visions. They had protected the Mithrin for over two hundred years, long enough for her daughter to grow up, and begin to see visions of her own. But Ananyse's visions were different. They always had been, so dark, so despairing. She grew afraid to touch anyone, so many deaths she saw. Only the barest touch would send her reeling, and of late, unconscious. What did it all mean? She looked up as the sky began to lighten slightly, and stood, stretching the tight muscles. Walking over to where the sentry stood she knelt beside him as he sat looking toward the wood.

"You've been thinking of your mother again." Delvan whispered, turning his head toward her with a frown.

Ananyse grinned, her teeth a white flash in the darkness, "You know me too well I'm afraid, Delvan."

"You have to let it go, it was not your fault, Deyanan did what she had to do, she wanted more power. You know this. She wanted revenge, Ananyse. For all the supposed wrongs we did to her, after all these years. Why didn't she just leave after Thodren's death? She could have gone back to her people, she was fully Elven."

Ananyse frowned, "She couldn't bear the thought that she might be disgraced, living with a mortal and bearing him a child. I don't understand why she felt that way; Elrond himself is half Noldor, half human, yet he leads the Rivendell Elves as always." She shook her head. "I think she was taken by the shadow long ago, I just couldn't see it. It was only realizing her "visions" were not really anything but pure fiction anymore made me suspicious." Ananyse stood, "It's time to get moving, with luck we'll be out of these lands by nightfall and mayhap even get close to the river to camp by." She grinned at the sour look Delvan gave her.

"I fear we will not leave the Golden wood behind just yet, The river Anduin splits as it heads south along the eastern borders of Lothlorien and is where I thought we'd make camp before nightfall." He looked over to the wood again, the trees starting to become more distinct as the light brightened in the sky overhead. "I fear we may catch their attention, skirting their borders as we are, but who knows. If they were watching us now, we'd not know it."

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The splash of water against her boots was welcome as they crossed a narrow span of tumbled rocks, the water flowing strongly here but not too deep. They spread out as they reached the bank, and ran quickly along the rivers edge. Ananyse looked at it longingly as they ran, the river to the left side and the Golden wood to their right. A shiver ran up her spine as the men behind her loped easily along. She glanced at the wood, but only the trees looked back. She'd felt an uneasiness all day, since leaving the rocky ledge this morning. Glancing back at the trees there was only one reason why. She raised a hand and they stopped, gathering about her as she whistled a piercing note in the air. In moments Delvan ran up to them, breathing hard.

"An Orc patrol a couple leagues back, didn't seem to be on our trail, maybe just using the same path, although I'm surprised they'd get this close to the wood." He looked behind him. "I suggest we keep on till nightfall and hopefully we can find a place away from the trail."

Ananyse nodded and Delvan turned back. A couple leagues more they slowed, the trail veered off to the left crossing the river again. They left the trail to follow the riverbank further south until finally stopping at a small grove of trees on the rivers edge. The Golden wood sat back away from the river here as it branched off into a smaller stream that flowed into the forest. Slipping her quiver and sword from her back she sat down, stretching the tired muscles in her legs. A few moments and Delvan reached them, squatting down beside her.

"The Orcs turned off a few leagues back. But I don't trust them."

"Double the guard tonight, but we all need a rest. No fires. I've felt uneasy all day today, I have a feeling we've had more company than the Orcs behind us."

Haldir stood in the cleft of the branches of the tree, watching the group of men make camp near the edge of the river. The Elves had tracked them for days now, waiting to see if they would turn into the Wood, but they only skirted the forest. The Orc patrol stayed a few miles behind them, unaware of a quarry just ahead. They could thank the wind for that, blowing continuously from the north these last few days, but their luck would more likely change soon, he felt the wind shifting slightly. He could leave them to their fate, but something about the men in the group didn't seem right. With a slight motion another elf lowered himself quickly to the ground, creeping silently to the edge of the forest. Even here, where the trees thinned, the elves melted into the trees. Settling himself into the branches of the tree, he adjusted the bow on his back, and leaned against the trunk of the tree. The other elves settled in for the night, two heading north to watch the Orc patrol. The light deepened to its purple twilight as the Evening star rose, the sky clear. Haldir's vision did not dim in the darkness and he made out the shapes of the men as they settled down easily. Rumil had moved close to the group, his shadow blurring the trunk of the tree he knelt behind. The men talked softly, and as he watched, the smaller one that led them, rose to walk along the bank of the river. Haldir leaned forward, as he watched, another one broke from the group, following. Whistling almost soundlessly, Rumil turned, and with a wave disappeared into the trees behind them.

Ananyse knelt along the bank, and pulled the helmet from her head, reaching down to splash water on her face. Delvan sat down next to her.

"I have double guards set, and will relieve them in a few hours." She smiled and sat back, "I'll be glad to leave this land behind. Once we reach Gondor, we shall be able to relax for once. You think the Orcs have gone? We have been lucky with the wind at our backs, were it to change they would catch our scent and be on us."

Standing up she pulled the quiver from her back, and removed her scabbard. She pulled out the sword slightly, checking the edge, then slid it back into place. Nodding to Delvan she walked back to the edge of clearing, and pulled her cloak tight about her as she laid down, laying the quiver and scabbard next to her. She checked the knives she carried in her boots, then laid down, staring at the stars above her. The wind shifted slightly and she turned her head to stare

at the trees that stood only a few feet away. The shadows danced as the breezes whispered through the branches. She looked back up at the sky, then glanced quickly out of the corner of her eyes and yes, the shadows did not lie. Not only did she have her own guard this night, but an Elvish one as well. What did they want? They had not crossed into their territory except for this night. If they thought she was a threat, they'd be dead now. No, something had caught their interest, and she smiled. In the morning, she'd give them a reason. Laughing to herself she closed her eyes and slept.

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Rumil knelt next to the tree and pulled an arrow from his quiver, running his fingers through the fletching, smoothing them. The woman had lain down again, near the others, the one she had called Delvan still sat by the river. He shook his head. Haldir would be most interested to know the leader of this band was a woman. He smiled as he watched her shift to get more comfortable. Why they were headed to Gondor, he did not know, but her weapons and the dress of her men told him she was of the Mithrin. Only one was known for the flaming copper hair that this one had. Galadriel, the lady of the wood might like to know her kin was traveling but a few miles from her. But that was for Haldir to decide. He settled down to wait for the morning.

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Ananyse sat up as the wind picked up, blowing bits of sand in her face waking her. The moon was setting and the air was crisp with a bite of a cold damp breeze from the south. The wind had changed, but hopefully the Orc Patrol was far enough away to not notice them. At any rate, morning would break soon and if she wanted to take advantage of the river, the time was now. She rose silently, striding back along the bank, out of sight of the men behind her. Delvan stirred as she passed him, rising quickly as she slipped by him.

"You not thinking what I think you are." He whispered as he reached her, grabbing her arm.

"Yes I am, it's been almost a month, and I can't stand it anymore."

He growled low in his throat, "And if you are right about the elves?"

"Then they'll get a nice show, won't they."

She smiled as she stopped. Delvan groaned.

"Ananyse, this is madness, it's too damn cold, for one thing..." he stopped as she turned toward him, one long eyebrow raised in question as she dropped her quiver and scabbard on the bank. Seeing she was not going to give in he turned stiffly about, "I'll be back here, call if you need me."

Ananyse grinned as he walked back, then turned toward the riverbank as a shiver ran up her spine. Behind her the trees rustled in the wind, and she turned her head quickly as a quiet bird call sounded on the wind. Quickly she pulled off her outer tunic, then sat down to pull off the soft boots, tucking their knives back inside as she slid them off.

Rumil groaned silently as he looked back toward the forest. Had Haldir heard his call? The woman was undressing quickly, and watching her do so was making him extremely uneasy. What was he to do? He sighed in relief as he felt Haldir touch his arm, and turned away quickly, as Haldir looked toward the river bank, his brows raised suddenly in surprise. Turning back to Rumil, he frowned as Rumil smiled and spun, running silently back into the forest.

The sky was turning a bright pink as he turned back toward the river. A Mithrin, as he had thought, or should he say The Mithrin. The Oracle of their sect was well known for her visions. He had heard rumors that she had left her city. Galadriel, the lady of the wood, would be interested to know she was so close, but as yet she had not approached the Golden Wood. The woman stood on the bank, now, and Haldir's eyes narrowed as her shirt slid down her back, as she struggled with the ties that bound it tightly to her wrists. Her back was smooth in the dim light, but even so, Haldir could see the scars that crisscrossed it. Turning his head he waited until he heard the splash from her entering the water, and then strode quickly to the edge of the bank. He sat down on a rock, knowing he was in full sight once she broke back through the water, and he turned his back to her, glancing back from the corner of his eye as she came up for air. He heard her gasp, but whether from his presence or the cold of the water he was not sure. She stood in the water, her arms creating small waves about her shoulders, the light of the coming dawn reflecting in the surface before her.

"So I do have an Elven escort, how nice of you to drop by." Ananyse grinned, gritting her teeth to stop them from chattering. The elf turned his head slightly, and the early morning light wreathed his head in gold as it came up behind him. He had a strong profile and the long silvery blond hair was pulled back at the sides into a small braid. A long sword rose from his side as he shifted slightly,

"You take many chances, my lady, bathing in a cold stream with an Orc Patrol only few leagues distant."

Ananyse dipped herself further down into the water, swirling it about her. She knew the elves had excellent vision, but she hoped in the dim light that they couldn't see through the water. She really didn't want to have to put on a show, but she would not call for Delvan.

"And who do I have to thank for my guard this night. You've been following us."

Haldir glanced again out of the corner of his eye, turning his head slightly he could see the bank behind her, he scanned it quickly, as the wind had changed in the night and now blew from the south. It did not bode well. "I am Haldir."

"Haldir? I have the March warden of Lothlorien to guard my bath?" Ananyse laughed, then sank back under the water.

Haldir stared at the water in consternation, then shifted quickly as she rose thru the water again, plastering her hair to her head and revealing the slim pointed ears, and the high arching brows. She stood once again with the water lapping about her shoulders.

"I should think the Oracle of the Mithrin might know better than to endanger her men."

Ananyse slapped the water, snorting, "Endanger? What with my guards and yours, I should think we were quite secure."

Haldir turned to face her fully, and she sank rapidly back into the water. The light glinted off his blond hair as he looked down at her sternly. "And do you think we would raise a hand to save you if the Orcs attacked?"

Ananyse gritted her teeth harder as she shivered, "Then why are you here, other than to annoy me."

Haldir turned away again, but not before she saw the slight quirk of his lips. "I suggest you remove from the water, your lips are turning blue. The wind has changed and comes from the south, taking your scent directly to the Orc patrol on the other side of the river. I fear you may not have much time."

Ananyse sighed and then waded out from the water, staring at the elf as he turned away. She grabbed her tunic, wiping the water off the knife she'd held, then sliding it over her damp shoulders. Her fingers shook, she had stayed in the water much longer than she planned. Sliding her breeches up and knotting them quickly she gathered the over tunic and was sliding it over her shoulders when he turned around. She slid the knife into her boots and rose quickly, just as he stepped near her. Reaching up to his neck he unfastened the clip that held his cloak and with a quick movement had it thrown around her shoulders. He turned suddenly as she heard Delvan shout behind her. With a quick nod, Haldir turned and as she watched strode into the forest, in moments lost to sight, even without the cloak she now wore about her shoulders. Fingering the light weave she stared as Delvan gripped her arm.

"Was that an Elf I saw, or do my eyes deceive me?"

Ananyse smiled, as Delvan stared at the cloak. "Yes, Delvan, that was an Elf. The March Warden Haldir himself."

"Haldir? Of Lothlorien? I have heard much of him, why did you not call?"

Ananyse shrugged her shoulders, slipping the scabbard and quiver back over her shoulders. "I was in no danger, Delvan. Rather, he was quite courteous. I think they were curious as to who we were, and why we are here on their borders. I did not give him any answers," she said as she took her bow and helmet from Delvan. "Come, we head for Minis Tirith and The Great Library there."

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Haldir watched the men as they broke camp, and turned as his scouts ran to him.

"The Orcs have gone back into Moria."

Haldir turned back, watching the river. The men had gathered together and he could see her speaking to them. Quickly they began to disperse, lining in single file as she stood and turned to face where he stood. He stepped back deeper into the shadows of the forest, certain she could not see them, but she had unerringly looked directly in his direction. She wore his cloak still, a long sword and scabbard hanging down her back. Gripping her helmet she walked toward the trees, and behind him the elves drew their bows. He motioned to them and stood as she continued to walk toward the wood, stopping only a few

feet from entering the forest itself, waving her men to wait. Turning back she continued the few steps into the forest then stopped, hands on her hips as she looked about. Haldir smiled as he saw the elf perched directly above her look in his direction in question, his bow held ready. Shaking his head he stepped out of the shadow, his brothers stepping behind him.

She raised her eyes to him, tall for a human, she still had to look up at him, and he could see her jaw clench as he looked down at her. "Your cloak, my Lord Haldir?" she said reaching up to remove the quiver.

He shook his head and reached out to stop her, but she stepped back quickly before he could touch her. The sounds of leather and wood creaked loudly as the elves shifted position imperceptibly, and she bowed her head to him briefly.

"I thank you for the loan of your cloak then, someday I will return it to you." She studied the elves behind him for a moment, "I go on to Minis Tirith, to the great library. I may not be able to pass this way again for sometime, and I would appreciate it if you would send greetings to the lady Galadriel. I would come to speak with her, but other things must be done before I can."

Haldir nodded, "I will do so. Perhaps the answers you seek at Minus Tirith could yet be answered by the lady of the wood."

Ananyse looked away for a moment, "There are many things I have yet to seek, My Lord Haldir. Galadriel would answer many, but there are some she may not yet understand. I am led to the White City, and so my fate I must follow. May the light be with you and yours." She bowed once more and turned, looking up into the tree above her. Rumil and Orophin stepped up from behind Haldir.

"She sees much." Orophin murmured in Elvish. Rumil laughed softly, "Nay, I think perhaps it is Haldir who saw too much," as Haldir turned toward them, scowling. "I saw nothing, Rumil, that I have not seen before." Rumil grinned as Haldir brushed by him, winking at Orophin.

"I am not the one who ran at any point," Haldir spoke a moment later and Orophin laughed at Rumil's expression of disgust, slapping him on the back as they slipped into the forest.

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Ananyse shifted the large scroll from in front of her, the dust floating in the thick smoky air. The candles lit the parchment in front of her, but she still had to squint to read the faded lettering. Her Elven gift from her mother had not been their keen eyesight, but her visions. She had not had one of late, and she began to worry. They had come on so strong before her mother's death. A warning she now knew.

Her mother had betrayed them, seeking power over others she had bargained with the lord of the shadow, and had stood on the crest of the hill, waiting in glee as the Orcs swarmed over the city, only to find her own head one of their trophies.

Ananyse shook her head sadly. She had tried to warn the elders, but they had not believed her, her own mother calling her false! She clenched her teeth in anger and grief. She couldn't let her emotions >control her. She took several deep breaths, fighting the tide of emotion that threatened to engulf her, forcing it back down to where it huddled in the pit of her stomach.

here were the parchments? She only wanted to trace her lineage, but could not find the one she wanted that was written in the common tongue. Of her father's line she knew much, but her mother had refused to tell her of her own. She had never spoken of where she was from, and even her father would not tell. So she could not enter the Golden Wood of Lady Galadriel until she knew for sure whether her history lie. She hoped it was not of the Mirkwood Elves as she had heard since the death of her mother, their leader Thranduil's s opinion of her was not good. It seemed he had much misgivings on a half breed elf. She pulled out another dusty parchment and sighed as it crumbled slightly in her hands. Leaning closer to the candle she paused as she caught the sight of her mother's name. Excitement crept over her as she read, the long list of names leaping out at her. The parchment trembled as her fingers shook, and she carefully laid it on the table. With a deep sigh she pushed the emotions back, her face becoming impassive. So many new questions raced through her mind.

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Galadriel glided to where Celeborn stood, looking down over the City of Caras Galadon. "She did not come?" he said as she touched his hand, glancing at her. Galadriel stood silent for a moment, then shook her head. "She may come as yet."

Galadriel slowly smiled, her eyes full of sadness. "My mirror shows me many things, and Deyanan's betrayal of the people of Mithrin was a sad day for us." Celeborn sighed as well.

"It was a dark day the moment Deyanan's eyes met those of Thodren. All of her life she wished for something more, how could we have known? She was never happy here, here in the heart of Elevation, the most beautiful city, and even she could not foresee what the future would bring to her."

"Nay, Celeborn," Galadriel whispered as she turned away, "I think perhaps she did foresee that her life with Thodren would bring much in the way of power. She used her Elven vision, her foresight, to help win him over, but bitterness overcame her when he died. She was never fully accepted by the Mithrin."

"We tried to call her back," Celeborn reached out resting his hand on Galadriel's shoulder, "But she would not come."

Galadriel closed her eyes in sorrow, "And now even her daughter avoids me, what have I done that would bring on this grief." Her shoulder's shook as Celeborn gathered her into his arms.

"No, my love, 'tis not your actions that keep away the daughter of Deyanan. But I think more that she does not know of us, of our kinship. Haldir spoke of her and her wariness to him, I do not think she thought she could come to you, and would be welcome."

"Celeborn, you must try to reach her, speak to her in your mind, she must come back to us." Galadriel cried.

"I will try, my love, but what Elvish traits she has inherited I do not know. Her human blood may be too strong, the emotions interfering with my thoughts."

Galadriel frowned, "Her heart is human, in the mirror I could see, she struggles with the strength of her emotions always, but if she does not let them free, they will destroy her. I feel it strongly, Celeborn. As such, her looks with her fathers hair, sets her apart from all other elves. I fear even here she may feel apart." She turned back toward the city. "I can only hope she will come, and we can speak our hearts to her."

Celeborn nodded, taking her hand, they walked slowly down the steps. "I will have the scouts look for her, we will know if she comes near, and bring her by force, if I must."

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Ananyse yawned, her jaw cracking, as she rubbed the sleep from her eyes, weariness seeping through her bones as she pushed herself up from the ground. So tired, of late. Did the men see it? They were loyal to her, Delvan and his kin. His father's father had become her guardian when she was just a child. Unloved by her mother and outcast by the human children, she often was alone. His children had carried on as she lived, and now Delvan stood by her side, his sons ready to take his place when he was gone.

She smiled, and picked up a small stone. Tossing it none too gently, it landed squarely on Delvan's nose as he snored, he sat up abruptly, coughing, and turned toward her scowling.

"Ow, what was that for?" he snorted as he rose, scowling again as she laughed. Pulling the lanky gray hair from his face, he scanned the trees around them. "We travel nearer to Lothlorien," he said as he pulled her to her feet, frowning as she winced slightly. "Do you still insist we must go there? These elves make me uncomfortable, their reputation as fighters are renowned, even to us. This Haldir has quite a reputation of his own. I fear for your safety there, Ananyse. The closer we come to the Anduin, the closer we are also to Mordor. So far we have been lucky, only twice have we encountered the Orc patrols. You fight well, but if we are outnumbered, your life would surely be a great gift to the Lord Sauron. I would rather we keep to the mountain passes and head back to the Grey Mountains. Our city shall be rebuilt, and we can go home."

"Nay, Delvan. You can go home, but my life there is done. I cannot go back. And I do not know where to go forward. I am lost. I have been dreaming much again, I fear the darkness is coming once again. Be on your guard, as I have felt a great uneasiness come upon me this night."

"Then we must hurry, Lothlorien stands another day's march yet." He reached down to gather his weapons when Ananyse froze.

He turned slowly to stare at her, and as her eyes widened in horror he grasped her arms. She fell limp for a moment, struggling to control her breathing as she shook. She stepped back quickly, reaching trembling hands quickly for her bow.

"We are under attack!" she shouted just as the roar of the Orc patrol broke through the trees. He tossed her quiver to her and turned pulling his sword from its sheath, and ran as her arrow plunged into the Orc before him.

He gripped the weapon in both hands, thanking the Elvish traits Ananyse had inherited, and her own skill with the bow. He was good with his swords, but she had surpassed even their best bowmen, and with her knives, he grunted as his sword shuddered against the shield of another Orc, he laughed to himself, with all her knives, she was very deadly. He glanced out of the corner of his eye and could see she still held her ground, the arrows coming from her bow a blur as she fired repeatedly.

A roar behind him made him turn rapidly, swinging the sword around him, he blocked the blow of a huge creature, its black face engulfed by the helmet it wore. Its huge arm swept him aside as it approached, and Delvan groaned as he hit the ground hard, rolling quickly up behind the Orc as it stalked toward Ananyse. She turned toward him, firing an arrow, and the Orc screeched in anger as the arrow buried itself into its arm. Yanking it out easily the Orc swung his huge blade toward her, but she ducked quickly, spinning around him, as the motion of his blade spun him back toward Delvan. Another arrow lurched him forward toward Delvan and he swung his blade to his right, slicing a deep gash in the Orc's sword hand. Its eyes glowed red madly and it roared, the sound sending chills down Delvan's spine as he leaped back away from the Orc's thrust.

Another arrow from Ananyse as she circled beside Delvan knocked the Orc back a few steps. It broke the arrow that now lodged in its thigh, and came toward them with a speed that surprised him. He leaped forward toward the Orc as it hurled itself toward them, only to find Ananyse slim form between them. She twisted quickly and the Orc's sword sailed harmlessly over her head, but only inches from Delvan's nose as he leaned quickly back away from its path.

The Orc howled its rage and with a motion that was quicker than thought, backhanded Ananyse throwing her several feet into the copse of trees. Delvan glanced toward where she lay, and swung his sword, slicing the ties on the Orc's chest armor. They circled one another and Delvan spun under the Orc's arms as he lunged forward. Their swords clashed with a ring of steel, and Delvan struggled with the Orc as their swords locked momentarily, its deep set red eyes glaring at him in hate. Using its size the Orc shoved Delvan away, swinging his sword and Delvan gasped as the blade bit into his side. Only a small wound, but Delvan sank momentarily onto one knee as he struggled to regain his breath. He looked up in horror as the Orc swung his blade toward him, and Ananyse leaped before him. The blade caught her fully along one side, and he cringed as he heard it snap, and Ananyse fell, with a loud gasp. He was not yet on his feet when she rolled toward the Orc, her left hand twisting to bring the knife strapped to her wrist into her hand and she plunged it quickly into the

Orc's stomach. Grasping her side, she rose to one knee as the Orc roared in pain, and her right hand with its knife flew, slashing at the beast's throat. It staggered back, clutching its throat, the hate emanating from its eyes as it smashed its fist along side of her head. She landed heavily and rolled again, pulling a knife from her boot as Delvan circled behind the Orc, blood running freely from a gash in her head. The knife flew from her hand just as Delvan thrust his sword into the Orc's back and the knife buried itself into the Orc's forehead. Its eyes went dark as it fell heavily to the ground and Ananyse collapsed slowly to the ground. Delvan ran toward her, limping heavily.

"Ananyse, light." He cried as he reached her. Blood ran in small rivulets from the wound in her head, but it was her side that he reached for, the tunic soaked with too much blood. She lay in a daze and he could see her struggling to fight off the pain. Her eyes were bleary as she struggled to sit up, fighting his efforts to keep her still.

"We must go, Delvan. We cannot stay here, you must take me to Lothlorien," she coughed and a small trickle of blood ran from the corner of her mouth. He grasped her waist as she struggled to stand, his men gathering around them. Bracing her with his arm he pulled her along as they straggled in a weary line.

Ananyse dropped wearily to her knees into the shallow water as they tried to cross the narrow band of water here, her blood spreading out in a watered streak as the river's current washed it down river. Delvan's grip pulled her back onto her feet and they staggered onto the bank. The trees loomed overhead as the band entered the shadows of the forest. The men weaved slowly past them into the darkness as Ananyse stopped to catch her breath, the pain in her side engulfing her. She gasped, struggling to gain more air, and leaned over onto her knees as Delvan held her up.

"Come on, Ananyse. By the Gods, these elves better be close by, or I'm afraid you'll not make it much further." He pulled her upright, wrapping his arm around her waist.

Ananyse gasped as the pain swept thru her, and reached up to pull her helmet off with shaking hands. Delvan stopped abruptly as the men in front halted. Heated words trickled into Ananyse's head as she shook off the blackness that was threatening to engulf her. "Take me to the front," she gasped as Delvan pulled, half-carried her toward the front of the column. Delvan's son Eoin stood nose to nose with an elf, his bloodstained hands gripping his sword, but not drawing it. The others stood warily as Delvan pushed his way forward, reaching Eoin as Ananyse finally pulled off her helmet throwing it to the

ground. Staggering slightly when Delvan released her to draw his sword, she pushed past him, halting him as her hand left a bloody imprint on the already filthy sleeve. Looking up through the haze of pain, she straightened slowly as she looked up at the elf.

"I come to seek Galadriel," she coughed, the blood trickling again from her lip, bending slightly as she clutched her side.

Haldir stared at her in amazement, not believing she was even standing, as the woman gasped for breath.

"I shall bring you to Galadriel, but your men must go no further." He said as he stepped forward. The sound of her hand hitting his face was like the crack of a whip as with a blur she swung at him in fury, her eyes blazing through the haze of pain. Haldir looked at her for a second in astonishment, touching the bloody imprint her hand had left behind on his cheek. He looked at the blood on his fingertips, and looked down at her, outraged, when he saw her eyes widen in horror, and she fell forward into his arms. He lowered her quickly to the ground and began to pull away the tunic when Delvan's hand clenched his shoulder. Kneeling over her, Delvan gripped the elf's tunic, pulling him inches from his face.

"If she dies, I kill you." Delvan snarled as he looked into the impassive eyes of the elf.

"She will not die." Haldir said as he pushed him away. He reached into his belt pulling out a small pouch and leaned back over Ananyse. He pulled away part of the tunic, and frowned, motioning to the elves behind him. They quickly disappeared. He lowered his head as he knelt beside her, a soft murmur of Elvish coming from his lips as he whispered into her ear. Delvan leaned forward, their eyes meeting again, his full of fury, Haldir's impassive.

"What are you saying? I want to know what you do, you will not cast a spell over her."

Haldir smiled sardonically, as he sprinkled a small powder into the wound as much he could.

"He only speaks words of healing," Rumil spoke from behind Haldir as he handed him some green leaves. "Haldir is well versed in those arts," he said as Haldir gently laid the leaves over the wound and ripping off a strip of cloth from her tunic hem, bound them around her as best he could. "The powder slows

the blood, and the leaves are only to cover the wound." Haldir lifted Ananyse into his arms as Delvan stood also. She curled into a ball of pain as she moaned, and her arm gripped his shoulder as she laid her head on his chest. Her eyes misted with tears that would not fall as she stared up at him, not really seeing him as he strode quickly through the forest. Delvan only a step behind, the men following warily.

Chapter Two

Galadriel stood waiting as Haldir strode quickly into her *Talan*, carrying the girl. Her eyes widened in surprise as he looked toward her, seeing the bloody imprint on his cheek. His eyes narrowed, and he turned away, laying the girl gently onto the bed.

Galadriel glided beside him as he pulled the covering of leaves off, the powder and blood had congealed in the leaves, and he frowned slightly as he pulled them off. Together they began to ease the pieces of tunic out of the wound as the sound of arguing arose behind him. Her men had been held back once they had reached Caras Galadhon, with only Haldir hurrying on with Ananyse. Celeborn had come forward to speak with her men, and seemed now to be in argument with one as they climbed the steps to the home of Galadriel. Celeborn stopped just outside the entrance, barring the way, as Delvan meant to enter. “you must wait here. Galadriel will do all she can, and in Haldir you have already been given her greatest chance of survival.” Celeborn stood before the door. “She will come when she is able, so rest the moment, we will tend your wounds. Be assured Ananyse will come to no harm here.”

Delvan ground his teeth, trying to see beyond the tall elf in front of him. He started as he felt someone grasp his arm, and looked back at his son Eoin. “Father, be still, they will do what they can.” He looked back toward the tall elf, who looked at him haughtily, if not kindly.

“I am Celeborn,” he murmured as he brought his arm around Delvan’s shoulders, pulling him away from the doorway. “We have longed for the day that Ananyse would come to us, for she is of our blood, and we have missed our chance of knowing her.”

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Haldir looked at Galadriel as she pulled away the last of the tunic. She probed the wound carefully and Ananyse moaned in pain, writhing in the bed. She shook her head, “there is a piece of the metal still lodged within the wound, Haldir. It is wedged between her ribs. You will need to hold down her shoulders as I take it out. We will need your strength I fear she is quite strong. She motioned for another to hold the girls feet as Haldir turned gripping her shoulders. He bent over her, his hair brushing her shoulders and his hands pressed her firmly to the bed.

“Ananyse, you must listen to me,” he whispered looking into her eyes as she struggled, “there is a piece of the blade still lodged inside, we must remove it, and it will cause you great pain.”

Ananyse stared up at him as he grasped her shoulders, and he watched as she slowly blinked, her eyes clearing for a moment. “Do you really care?” she gasped as Galadriel probed deeper, sucking in a deep breath between her teeth and biting her lip. She writhed in his hands, closing her eyes and throwing back her head. But she did not scream as Galadriel probed deeper and deeper, her breath coming in gasps. Haldir closed his eyes for a moment, then looked back down at her. Her eyes watered and as he watched she clenched her jaw, blinking rapidly. Breathing heavily through her nose she coughed suddenly as Galadriel sighed. Blood trickled from the corner of her mouth as she lay back, and Haldir whispered softly in sindarin into her ear. “Yes I do.” Galadriel stared at him for a moment as she dropped the small piece of metal blade into his hand. He stood back as several elven women began to pull the bloody clothes from her and turned to leave when Galadriel spoke.

“Haldir,” she said as he turned back toward her. She tossed a small towel toward him, and he touched his cheek. She smiled as he scowled and turned, wiping the blood from his face as he strode through the door. Celeborn turned as he stepped out, Ananyse’s men standing quickly.

Delvan pushed past Celeborn, and stopped in front of Haldir, stopping him with a hand on his shoulder. The Elf turned toward him slowly, his eyes glinting in anger and Delvan withdrew his hand.

“You have touched me once too many, if you do so again, I will kill you.” Haldir snarled softly as he turned to face Delvan. He looked down at him from his taller height, and his expression was cold as Delvan stepped back. Celeborn stepped between them, frowning at Haldir as he laid a hand on each.

“Leave your angers behind,” he said slowly as he looked at each in turn. “The men are welcome here, Haldir, they are only concerned with the girl.” Celeborn looked over toward Delvan. “Galadriel says the girl rests now, and will be well. She will need time to heal.”

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Delvan sighed as he watched the flow of the river in front of him. It seemed like months since they had brought Ananyse here to Lothlorien, but was in fact, only two days. He had not been able to see her once Haldir had carried her

here. He clenched his jaw in frustration. He was not one to sit idly, and this waiting was driving him to distraction. If he didn't do something soon he didn't know what might happen. Probably end up killing some elf, a quick image of Haldir made him smile, but he shook his head. No, not that one. He was not stupid, the elf definitely would be an interesting combatant though, if he ever got the chance. Not with bows, but with a sword, Delvan just might surprise the haughty elf. He smiled again and swore as someone coughed behind him. He turned to find the object of his thoughts standing before him, expression cold as usual. Delvan stood, facing him as Haldir inclined his head slightly.

"I know it is difficult waiting, and Celeborn thought you might be interested in something to help you pass the time." Haldir's brows rose in question as Delvan folded his arms, wary.

"And what would that be?" He asked, frowning. Probably singing and poetry reading or some such.

"A contest of skills?" Haldir smiled as Delvan jerked his head up, "Your people are known for their skills, you have a reputation as fierce fighters."

Delvan smiled, "I was just thinking the same thing, March Warden, and just what do you propose?"

Haldir bowed, gesturing back to the city. "Let us go to our training court, and we can discuss it."

Delvan followed Haldir back into the city, wondering if the elves had read his mind. Oh well, this would help pass the time. He grinned at Haldir's back, and maybe teach the haughty elf a lesson. Haldir turned to give him a condescending look and Delvan swallowed uneasily.

The training court was a large open space at the base of one of the large Mallyrn trees. Its huge branches spread over the court, closing in the space, and torches were lit, in the dim light around the court. Some elves were wrestling in the center, but stopped quickly as Haldir approached, bowing to him and walking to the side. Celeborn nodded as they crossed the court to him.

"Welcome, My Lord Delvan" he said, waving his arm toward the court, "You see something here not many humans have seen. I can count them on one hand. But you are a special guest and is our thought perhaps you would like to test your skills here? I do not want to offend you or your men, it is your choice to make." He turned and looked at the elves surrounding the court, raising his

voice slightly. "It will be a fair test, and all who win or lose, will do so in the most courteous manner. We are not here to prove superiority." He turned to Delvan. "My Lord?"

Delvan grinned, "I am no lord, My Lord Celeborn, but I am sure my men would like the opportunity."

At Haldir's nod, a gateway was opened and Delvan's men were led to him. In moments the men were told, and their grins revealed their anticipation. Eoin clasped his hand to Delvan's shoulder. "I fear none of us would fair well against you in any competition, except mayhap in the use of the sword, and I for one would request my father to fight, for he is the best swordsman."

Delvan grinned at Eoin, but turned to Haldir. "Nay, I have always heard of the prowess of the Elven bowman, and have never had a chance to see. I would propose you show us some of your skills in that regard." Haldir looked at Delvan for a moment, then turned as his brother's Rumil and Orophin walked up to him. They whispered to Haldir for a moment and he shook his head, frowning. They grinned as several more elves joined the conversation. Haldir frowned as they folded their arms in unison, and sighed. He turned to Celeborn who also smiled. Turning back to Delvan he scowled.

"My brothers Rumil and Orophin," he said as he roughly clasped each of their shoulders, as they continued to smile. "My brothers and friends have suggested that I am the one who should do this, although others here could do as well."

Rumil laughed, "Nay, Master Delvan, do not let him fool you, of all our warriors here today, and everyday, only Haldir is labeled Master. If anyone can show you the best of our abilities in the bow it is he."

They turned as several targets were led out onto the field, elves still stood behind them, and Delvan was surprised when they did not move position. The targets stood a good distance from Delvan and he squinted to see the rings that were painted on the target. The center black and only a few small inches in diameter. The elves lined up in a row, six abreast, all aimed at one target. Haldir stood behind them, and took the bow handed to him by another.

The first six raised their weapons, and pulled back, the arrows resting only a second as they all released in unison, the loud twang of the bowstrings reverberating in the air. The sound of the arrows hitting the target was only seconds later and Delvan and his men looked on in astonishment at the arrows as each hit in a perfect ring around the edge of the black center of the target.

The elves raised their bows once again as Haldir looked down the row, and as he watched, the arrows were released again, in unison, the sounds of wood splitting as the second set of arrows ripped through the spaces left by the first set, creating a thick circle of wood and fletching; and a very tiny space in the center. Haldir walked to the center of the row, pulling back his bow, stretching the string tight, his fingers holding it loosely and easily against his cheek. Delvan watched as his eyes narrowed and he released the arrow, it flew in a blur and the sound of it hitting the target was loud in the still air. Delvan looked to the target and his jaw dropped as he saw Haldir's arrow sitting squarely in the midst of the others.

Haldir set his bow down, and motioned for the second target. The six elven bowman stood abreast once more and raised their bows. They pulled back and released the arrows once again, but this time they lined up on the target one above the other. Quickly several elves grabbed the target and turned it sideways so they were looking at the arrows, one behind the other in a row. Another elf brought a new target and set it behind the sideways target as Haldir raised his bow once more. The wood groaned as Haldir pulled the string taut, applying a little more pressure on the string, pulling it back to his cheek again. Delvan watched in amazement as he released the string and the arrow broke through each of the six others to embed itself into the back target.

Eoin scratched his head for a moment, "Light, no wonder you elves have such a reputation, I can understand now why Ananyse didn't want to enter the wood." He turned to Delvan. "But I think we may have more of an equal chance were it to come to swords."

Celeborn smiled, crossing between Delvan and Haldir, who stood to one side now, his hand resting on the long hilt of the sword he always carried. Delvan had watched him stand thus, fingers wrapped loosely around it as if it were a part of him. "I think that this would be an excellent opportunity. What say you Haldir?"

Haldir's eyes narrowed and Delvan wondered if Celeborn's request was done purposely, as if he figured Haldir would not dare refuse him. Haldir nodded sharply as Delvan stepped forward. The two entered the center of the court, and the crowd grew quiet as they waited in anticipation. The elf was taller, and leaner, but Delvan had more muscle. Both were quick, but the elf quicker. Delvan knew it would take all his skill to gain any advantage against the elf.

He narrowed his eyes as they circled slowly, each assessing the other. He gripped the hilt of his sword and drew it slowly, the metal blade sliding out of

the scabbard with a loud screech. Haldir drew his sword and it withdrew in a soft deadly whisper, gleaming in the dim light of the torches. Delvan relaxed his fingers slightly, holding the sword loosely as they continued to circle, Haldir's expression become blank and impassive. Their eyes met and Delvan howled as he thrust first, leaping toward Haldir, their blades coming together in a resounding crash.

Delvan's arms strained as they fought each other's blade, sliding apart with a screech of metal. Haldir's eyes narrowed slightly and Delvan's sword parried his as Haldir swung his blade in a blur of an arc, the blades meeting and continuing the arc, coming apart at last and Delvan ducked as Haldir thrust his blade forward, passing over his head. Delvan growled low in his throat, the elf's speed was shocking, he was going to have to use his weight if he was going to gain advantage. He threw his weight out behind his next thrust and succeeded in pushing his way past Haldir's defensive stance and they once more came face to face, blades locked together once again.

Haldir snarled and turned quickly, and Delvan had to leap back, rolling onto his back to avoid the next swing. Quickly he was up and swung the blade toward Haldir's knees, and the elf leaped out of the way easily, bring his sword down to catch Delvan in the arm, but only cutting the fabric of his sleeve.

Delvan breathed through his nose, trying to draw in air as he fingered the cut in his sleeve. That could have been a lot worse, and Haldir smiled as Delvan scowled at him. Delvan parried again as Haldir brought up the sword in a path straight for his chest, and they hit shoulder to shoulder, Delvan using his weight to force Haldir back in a stagger. The elves eyes glinted in anger and Delvan knew he'd made a point. These elves were not used to brute force, preferring to work from a distance, but Delvan and his kind were tough and fought with everything they had. He grinned at Haldir and charged him once again, and their blades screeched as they clashed over and over.

Haldir staggered back again as the man shoved his sword toward his shoulder, and he turned just in time to miss the blow. It was getting more difficult to breathe, but he'd not show any weakness to the human. The man was good, and the elves behind him were murmuring in appreciation, the humans all grinning in satisfaction. He ducked quickly as another thrust sailed over his head and he sliced out with his sword as the man leaped back, another rip appearing in his breeches. The elves cheered at this, and the man stood up, breathing heavily as Haldir circled him.

The man's eyes narrowed and Haldir tensed as he sprang toward him, but was unprepared when the man turned at the last second and growling, slammed his hilt into Haldir's jaw, throwing his head back. Haldir landed heavily on his back and sprang back to his feet, rubbing his jaw as they circled. He was breathing heavier now, if not as loud as the human. The man was using his weight and strength, and although Haldir was probably stronger in terms of wiriness, and agility, brute force tended to wear one out quickly. He leaped toward Delvan and swung, their blades connecting, and Haldir slid his to the base of Delvan's hilt and forced the blades into an arc, flinging Delvan's sword into the air.

Delvan swore under his breath as the blade flew out of his hand and kicked out with his leg, knocking Haldir off his feet, and he clutched the front of Haldir's tunic as they rolled on the tiles of the court. Haldir slammed his hilt across Delvan's nose and rolled away as Delvan snorted, blood running from his nose. They both rose slowly and Delvan scrubbed his sleeve across his nose, glancing at the blood there.

Bits of grass and sticks clung Haldir's hair and he crouched slightly as he sprang toward Delvan, who ducked again, spinning aside. This time Haldir turned the opposite direction and slammed his hilt into Delvan's shoulder, knocking him off his feet. With a whistle the blade split the air and Haldir spun the sword in his hand and with a blur of motion had the sword pointed at Delvan's throat, not quite touching him as they both gasped for breath. Delvan stared at him for a moment then suddenly began to laugh, raising both hands in defeat. Haldir stood up slowly, then reached out a hand to Delvan, hauling him to his feet. The crowd of elves and men roared in approval as Celeborn walked out to them.

"Well done," Delvan grinned as Haldir eyed him warily. Delvan turned to his men raising his arms and they cheered, then he turned to Haldir and before Haldir could step back, roughly grasped his shoulders, pulling Haldir towards him with both hands. Shaking him slightly, he laughed again

"I have not had that much fun in a long time, Haldir, or any better an opponent." Haldir's lips twitched in a small smile as Delvan slapped him on the back, rolling his eyes.

Celeborn shook Delvan's hand, smiling and the crowd gathered around them all talking and laughing at once. Celeborn began to speak, then stopped suddenly as he looked up toward the tree's branches. A walkway there, that Delvan had not noticed was filled with more elves, but it was the sight of Galadriel

hurrying away up the steps into the city that caused him to stop. He turned toward Delvan. "She is awake."

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Ananyse sat on the edge of the bed, and jerked the rest of the long nightgown that was tangled in the bedclothes out from under her legs. Standing up, she twisted the gown to hang correctly, wrinkling her nose in disgust as it fell to the floor to puddle somewhat at her feet. Not quite tall enough, but she hated nightgowns anyways. She looked up as Galadriel glided through the door, her face wreathed in a smile. Ananyse sat back on the bed, tossing the long strands of her unbound hair back, as they fluttered around her face. They must have washed it while she slept, as it hung in a silky shimmer to her waist. She probed her side, but only a small tenderness remained.

"It is good to see you awake. We were concerned at first as you were very ill. A few more hours and I don't think we could have saved you. You are very lucky." Galadriel smiled as she stood just inside the door. "I hope you are comfortable, I will have some food brought up right away as I'm sure you are hungry."

Ananyse smiled uneasily, "I would be more comfortable in my own clothes."

Galadriel smiled slowly, "Your clothes are being repaired, although I'm afraid your tunic and shirt were destroyed, we will give you something to replace them."

"I have more in my pack, thank you." Ananyse said as she moved toward the window. Looking through it she could see down over the tree trunks into the city below. The tree's were circled with stairs and platforms as far as she could see, creating hundreds of levels within the branches of the trees. Tiny lights glittered in the dimness and the air was filled with a haunting melody she could not understand.

"I have heard Caras Galadron was beautiful, but I could never have imagined this." Ananyse whispered as Galadriel joined her at the window. She turned to brush her fingers along the intricate vines of the tree that created the walls of the room. Eyes wide she turned in a circle staring about her at the walls, then stopped as she faced Galadriel again, coming back to the window she looked down.

“Look, Delvan comes, he has been very anxious for you. It has not been easy for him.” Galadriel pointed down the steps as he leaped up them. Behind him came another tall elf, and standing on the landing behind them, she saw Haldir. She tensed as he looked up and their eyes met and he turned away, striding back down the steps. She grinned as Delvan burst through the doorway, stopping abruptly as he looked at her in astonishment.

“Light, “ he breathed as he stared at her. Then he grinned and hugged her, twirling her about. Setting her down, he laughed as she adjusted the nightgown with a rue smile, then grabbed her arms again, “If you ever leap in front of me again, girl, I’ll kill you!” he growled as Ananyse laughed, hugging him.

Galadriel stepped back, taking Celeborn’s arm as they watched them. “ She looks well,” Celeborn whispered as Galadriel smiled sadly.

“We shall see, her physical form has been healed, but I fear for her emotional one yet. We must have the time to heal that as well.”

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Galadriel sat on the root of the tree, as Ananyse wandered about the small copse of trees. She wore an elven dress of lightweight silk, a heavier woven tunic over that, but every few steps she would trip over the hem, and Galadriel tried not to laugh, hiding behind her hand, as the girl grumbled under her breath.

“How can you stand to walk in these, My lady, it has been over two days and still you have not brought me my clothes or my weapons.” She turned to stare at Galadriel.

“ I was hoping you would give up that request once you had something more suitable to wear, but I see that I am wrong in my assumptions.” Galadriel laughed, “I can see that you probably never have worn the clothes that would truly suit you.”

“I wear what suits me, My Lady, although you may disagree. I have never had any use for beautiful dresses, and never had any to wear. My mother wore them, but I was more comfortable dressed as the friends I had. It was easier for them to forget what and who I was.”

Galadriel frowned, “I am sorry we did not know more about you, we were not allowed to approach you. Deyanan swore at your birth that she would never let

us near you, and kept that oath. You do not even understand our language, I cannot understand her bitterness.”

Ananyse touched Galadriel’s hand as she bowed her head. “Do not despair, Galadriel, I am alive and have lived through that period. It is over now.” She sighed. “ I am so torn, I do not know where I should go.”

Galadriel wrapped her arm around Ananyse’s shoulder, pulling her down next to her. “I see many things, Ananyse. I have watched you grow up, unable to help you. Unable to reach you, but I could see things. I saw your mother’s bitterness, and I saw her betrayal.”

Ananyse stood up, trembling. “I see things too, terrible things, I don’t know what to make of my visions. They come from all directions,. I never know when.” She covered her face with her hands, shaking. “All I see is death anymore, Galadriel, death and despair. Everything is dark and bleak and black. There is a shadow consuming us and I don’t know what to do.” She cried as Galadriel wrapped her arms around her again. Suddenly Ananyse pushed her away, “I am afraid to touch anyone anymore.”

Galadriel smiled sadly, “Do not fear to touch me, we are of the same kin, Ananyse. You will not see visions of me or any other of your kin.” Ananyse turned away, shaking, her head and fled up the stairs as Galadriel’s smile turned to a frown. “But you have seen someone’s death, someone here.” She said slowly as she stared Ananyse’s fleeing form.

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Haldir stood at the base of the stairs, looking up at the top of the trees to the Talan where Ananyse slept. The moonlight lit the shadows of the trees with a blue light, and overhead the stars winked through the rustling branches of the trees. The air was warm as it always was, and he leaned against the tree trunk hidden in the shadows. Hearing footsteps he turned his head to see Delvan walking slowly up the stairs, head down deep in thought. Haldir stood silent until he came abreast then spoke softly “Your thoughts are heavy this night?”

Delvan whirled, his hand reaching for his sword. Seeing Haldir step from the shadows he sighed in relief. “Light, I never know from where you come, I fear if I were not a guest here, I would have been long dead.”

The corner of Haldir's mouth twitched as he put his hand on Delvan's shoulder. "I thought you might like to have this." He said as he pulled out the small piece of metal blade that they had taken from Ananyse.

Delvan took it and held it up to the light, staring at it. "Light," he breathed, "you dug this out of her?" Haldir nodded, and Delvan's shoulder twitched. He turned back to Haldir, handing him back the metal piece. "No, you keep it, you saved her life, and so I am in your debt."

Haldir looked at the metal for a moment before placing it back into his tunic. "You care much for her."

Delvan looked at him from the corner of his eye and sighed. "Not like you think, she is like my sister, our family has been her guardian, protectors since she was born, many many years ago. My sons will carry on when I am gone." Haldir nodded in understanding, he could appreciate their loyalty to her. He turned to leave when Delvan grasped his arm, "If she is hurt in any way," he paused for a second, "I will come for the one who harms her." Haldir stared at him coldly.

"You have nothing to fear from me." He said as he turned and walked down the steps. Delvan watched him go, "Don't I?"

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Delvan frowned, arms folded as he stood in front of Celeborn and Galadriel. "I do not understand, why can she not go. She is healed, and we have the rest of our clan ready to meet us as soon as I send word. We go wherever Ananyse feels we must."

Galadriel looked down at Delvan from the steps where she stood. "She has healed her physical wounds, Delvan. But she has emotional ones that will destroy her if she does not learn to release them."

Delvan snorted, "Emotions? Ananyse has always had control of her emotions, must be one of your traits. She is fine, other than her bloody visions."

Galadriel frowned, "Those visions are partly from the emotions she buries, but that is not your concern, she must stay here, but I cannot force her to do so. She is my kin, and would have her stay of her own free will. Do you not care for her so, that you would purposely endanger her soul? You must convince her to stay. Your men grow weary of idleness, and I know you must be also. Go to

meet your men, and return here. You will be welcomed when you return, and in that time we may be able to heal Ananyse. But you must not allow her to leave with you, convince her she must stay.”

Delvan sighed, closing his eyes briefly. “Alright, I will try to convince her to stay here. She is head strong and has a mind of her own. I’ll gather the men and once we meet the others we will return for her.” He looked narrowly at the two elves. “She belongs to us. I will be back for her.” He turned and strode angrily down the steps as Galadriel and Celeborn watched.

“I fear it will not be an easy choice for any of us.” Celeborn whispered softly, as they turned to walk back up the steps.

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Ananyse stood with her hands on her hips, facing Delvan as he shoved his clothes into his pack. “You cannot go without me, I am fine.”

Delvan sighed, “No, you need to rest a bit more, besides, we only go to meet up with the rest of the clan, Ananyse. It will not take long and we will be back here.”

“Delvan, I am the leader of these men, I will go.” She shouted, as Delvan turned toward her.

“No, you are not. Not now. You have been injured and no one,” he growled as he gripped her shoulders “No one wants to have to worry about you right now.”

Ananyse mouth hung open in consternation, “Worry about me? Since when have you ever had to worry about me?”

Delvan eyes narrowed, “Well, let me see now, one when you fell into the river, two when you collapsed during another vision, do I need to go on? They are coming more and more frequent, what if you have one while we are under attack? I don’t want to deal with that right now, so as of now I am the leader, by agreement of all the men.” He snarled as she stepped back, in shock. Clamping her lips shut in a snap, she straightened, her arms clenched by her side.

“Fine, go without me. I don’t need you anyways. Maybe I’ll just stay here, so don’t worry about coming back.” She pushed past to start down the stairs, when

she stopped., ripping the hem of her dress that was caught on the edge of the wood, she looked back, then whirled to run down the stairs, holding the dress above her knees.

Delvan sat on the top step, watching her go, finally hanging his head in his hands.

Chapter Three

"Haldir," Galadriel said as she glided up behind him. "I need to speak with you." Haldir turned toward her. Resting a hand on his arm she walked with him through the trees, leading him to her small bower. Gliding down the steps she turned as he reached the bottom, staring at the small mirrored pool. "I see many things in my mirror, as you know." Haldir nodded, as she stopped near the mirror. Looking back at him she frowned.

"I cannot let you return just yet to the borders, you must send Rumil and Orophin out on their own. I know it is your watch tomorrow, but I will need you here." Haldir began to disagree, but stopped at the look Galadriel gave him. "You have a connection with Ananyse, whether she will admit it or not. I have seen you look at her. I had thought once she was here she would be more comfortable, but she is not. She is in great danger, Haldir."

Galadriel turned around towards the mirror. "A great darkness is descending upon Middle Earth, Haldir. We have spoken of this before. Mordor grows in strength and Sauron is gathering his armies to him. Our time is coming to a close here." She turned her head toward him. "We have a choice, to stay or not. But does she? Ananyse is half elven, and I cannot say whether the Valar will allow her to come to the Grey Havens or no, but she has some part to play in this future here, I have seen something of it, but not all. But she will not live to play that part if I can not heal her spirit. It grows dark, and despairing, and she will suffer greatly if we cannot force her to release her emotions. I need you, Haldir, to help me."

Haldir stood, "I do not know what I can do, My lady."

Galadriel smiled, walking up to him, she put her hand on his sleeve.

"Don't you? Of anyone here, you make her feel more emotions than anyone, whether it is anger or anything else, it is at least some emotion." She smiled as his eyes narrowed, "You also pride yourself on keeping your emotions buried deep. Maybe you will learn something from her as well." She touched his cheek, and he flinched slightly. "You will stay near her, and I will speak with her to let her know I requested this."

Ananyse sat on the bed, wrapped in only the thin sheet. Haldir sat outside the flet, refusing to come any closer as she taunted him.

"I swear I will run about the city in nothing if you don't bring me back my clothes, and my weapons. I am not an elf and I want my things."

Haldir groaned, shaking his head. "I will speak with Galadriel." He heard the rustle of the sheet and gritted his teeth.

"Well, I am not waiting, I have waited long enough. I hate those dresses." He heard her steps nearer the door and rose, turning as she gripped the sheet to take it off. He caught the sheet as she turned rapidly away and wrapped it back around her, closing his eyes as he did so, but somehow managing not to touch her. Pulling the ends together, he pulled her toward him, "I will speak with Galadriel, but you must be patient." He growled, anger glinting in his eyes. 'I have been forced to keep you safe, but I can not protect you if you run about the city like a, like a "

"Strumpet?" she said as she stared at him. He released her, and stepped back, scornfully.

"I did not say that. I would not insult you so. I will see what I can do." He bowed to her and turned quickly, but stopped at the doorway. "You will stay here. Otherwise I will return with your clothes, but your weapons I will keep."

Ananyse opened her mouth to protest, but snapped it shut at the look he gave her. Striding off down thru the city she could hear him muttering to himself, and grinned.

A few moments later she heard the sound of running feet and stood, as two young elven women hurried into the room. They bowed to her and laid a small pile of clothing on the bed.

"Galadriel said we must help you change, she fears you are going to drive our March Warden insane." They giggled, "Here, it is not all what you brought, but we have tried to replace what you had."

She sorted through the clothing, seeing her breeches, but a new shirt and tunic, in the grey silk that the Galadrim wore. Tossing off the sheet she began to dress, the women helping with the unfamiliar shirt and tunic. She had put on the belt when Haldir strode through the door, carrying her sword, and a bundle, which she hoped had her knives, and also her pack. He eyed her carefully as she took the sword from him, and laid it on the bed. Holding out her hand, he gave her the pack. Frowning, she took it, looked at it for a moment, then grinned suddenly.

"Oh, I almost forgot." She opened the pack and sorted through it, finally pulling out an elven cloak. "I told you I would return it." She said as she handed it back to him. He fingered the wool, then thrust it back to her. "No you keep it, you may have need of it."

She stood staring at him for a moment, then reached for the bundle he still held. He did not release it, but flipped the bundle over, opening it. She frowned as he held up one of her knives, one brow raised as he looked at her. She grabbed the bundle from him hugging it to her.

"They are mine, given to me by my father. It is all I have left of him."

"Do you need so many?" he asked as she turned toward the bed, rolling the bundle back up.

She turned to frown at him, when Rumil ran into the room. Haldir turned quickly as he motioned to him, and they left the room, as Ananyse hurried to the door. Rumil whispered, gesturing with quick motions as he spoke, and Haldir frowned. Ananyse frowned when Haldir glanced in her direction, and Rumil did as well, still arguing fiercely.

"It's my men, isn't it?" she said as they both turned toward her. "I am leaving then."

She turned but stopped at Haldir's hand on her arm. She shuddered at the shock of electricity that swept through her but he did not even blink. His eyes narrowed, and he pulled her about, "the lady of the wood will decide when you are able to leave." His eyes glinted and Ananyse swallowed, at this moment, she thought he would do whatever it took to make her obey Galadriel's wishes.

"I will not leave my men any longer. What has happened."

Rumil shrugged as Haldir pulled her into her room. "I will not discuss it, but I must leave."

"Haldir, I am going with you, I will not be left behind this time." She shouted as he let her go, rubbing the arm where he had gripped it. He scowled but turned as Galadriel swept through the door.

"The men are just within the wood, Haldir, but they are trapped. The Orcs have them cornered and Rumil says only the small band of Galadrim keep them from slaughtering them all. You must hurry." She turned toward Ananyse.

"I do not wish you to go," but she turned toward Haldir. "But if she wishes it, I will not stop her, but only to the borders, Haldir." She turned back to Ananyse, "I am sorry, but I cannot allow you leave Lothlorien as of yet."

Ananyse smiled grimly, gathering her bundle, hurrying to catch up to Haldir. He looked at her angrily. "I cannot watch you, you must keep up."

Ananyse scowled, but kept to their pace easily as they ran through the forest. As she ran she unrolled the bundle and replaced the knives that she kept in her boots. They had hurried through the forest down paths she would have never noticed for several hours until finally coming to a small stream. As Haldir and Rumil whispered, Ananyse rolled out the last of her knives strapping two to her wrists and tucking the final one inside her tunic. The Elves glanced back at her as she strode up beside them.

"The Orcs are on the other side of the river, the men are trapped in a small cave that sits a little above the Orcs, in the hillside." Haldir said as he scanned the woods in front of them. They crouched down behind the line of trees as he drew a map in the soft soil. "We can attack them from behind, but Orophin says he doesn't think they have many arrows left. We will try to reach them but it will be difficult as there is no other access to this cave and the Orcs are spread out in front."

Ananyse nodded, pulling her bow from her back. "I will try to reach them, We have our ways of communicating, and I will let them know we are here." Haldir stood and she strapped another quiver of arrows onto her back. He looked at her for a moment as Rumil and the others slid silently into the forest. "Don't worry about me, Haldir." She grinned as she hurried toward the stream.

The water was cold as she crossed it, but slowly she made her way thru the bank of trees until she could see the Orcs as they hid behind a large set of boulders, protected from the trees behind them and the elves there. None seemed to worry about the men above them. Dimly she could see the men as they hovered near the entrance to the cave. Why did the Orcs not attack? What were they waiting for? She could not see any of the other elves, even though she knew they were only steps away from her. Pulling up her bow, she pulled it back, squinting in the mottled sunlight as she aimed.

It seemed like the forest was suddenly quiet as she waited for the signal to fire, and the sounds of arrows being released broke the stillness amid the roars of the Orcs as they leaped for cover. She squinted at the Orcs, then lowered her bow as she slid it back behind her. Leaping from behind the trees she ran into the

brush, leaping past the smaller boulders as she ran into the Orc patrol. They looked at her in astonishment, even while they leaped toward her as she twisted among them.

Elven arrows flew around her in greater number and she knew that Haldir was going to throttle her if she got herself out of this one. Leaping away from an Orc as he staggered back, an arrow embedded in his chest, she hacked her way through the sea of filthy black bodies towering over her. Only the confusion of the arrows flying at them from all directions, kept the Orcs from slicing her in two, as she finally reached the hillside. Delvan and Eoin had scrambled down from the cave and with a oath grabbed her arms tossing her above them into the front of the cave. Moments later a shower of arrows showered down on the Orcs from the cave side as well, and then the Elves were there, arrows shot at close range, even more deadly than from afar.

Ananyse sat against the wall of the cave for a moment to catch her breath, trying not to remember the murderous look Delvan had given her. Breathing deeply, she stood up, and scrambled out of the cave, sliding down the mossy bank, brandishing her sword. She froze as she heard a deathly roar from behind her and turned so quickly that her braid swung out from behind. The Uruk behind her reached out in that instant and grasped the end of the braid, yanking her head back, and Ananyse was thrown backwards. Using the momentum of her fall, she twisted, and pulling the knife from her wrist cut the end of the braid free, cutting through the braid easily, and she rolled over quickly as she hit the ground, her hair uncoiling to hang like a heavy curtain across her face. Brushing it back away from her face she gasped as the Uruk swung his heavy sword toward her only to find the stroke blocked by Haldir.

They struggled for a moment and the Uruk howled in pain and frustration as he was hit with several arrows, staggering back. Haldir sheathed his sword quickly and in only the barest moment of time had his bow in hand and another arrow launched. The Uruk twisted as the arrow hit him at such close range forcing him sideways.

Haldir turned to Ananyse at that moment, and with a furious look, yanked her to her feet by her tunic, and threw her back behind him. She staggered and was caught by the shoulders as he shouted in Elvish, turning back and aiming his bow, launching yet another arrow into the Orc. She gasped as she was lifted quickly up into the tree behind her, and Orophin motioned to her to climb, his eyes glinting like ice.

She climbed quickly and found a flet had been built into the tree high above the fighting and Orophin pushed her onto it, giving her a scowl and then disappeared back down the tree. Ananyse trembled as she scrambled over to the edge. Below her she could see the elves move from tree to tree, using them as shields as they grimly cut down the Orcs around them.

She could see the basis for their reputation as she watched Haldir fight, his brothers only feet from him. His cloak barely moved as he pulled the arrows from his quiver, and calmly aimed at each of his targets. The elves were grim even as the Orcs fought back, and only the shouts of her men and the dying Orcs pierced the air as they fought below. She rolled on her back, placing her shaking hands over her eyes and the sounds of the arrows whistling then striking their target continued. Finally she heard no more. Sucking in a shaky breath she rolled back over and looked down. Haldir stood below her as Delvan and several Elves walked up to him.

"Take half of our band and find the remaining Orcs and kill them. Do not leave any alive," he snarled. "Follow them into the Mountains if you must."

Turning toward Delvan as he shouldered his bow, he looked up at the tree top as Ananyse sat back quickly. She could hear him speaking quietly to Delvan and hugged her knees. For once maybe she had gone too far, she could have been killed easily, and worse yet, may have cost the lives of some of her men, and elves. She trembled as she remembered the icy glare Haldir had given her, as well as Orophin, and even Delvan. She pushed the heavy weight of hair from her face as she heard the branches rustle slightly behind her. Turning slightly she looked back to the center of the Flet to see Haldir climb easily into the flet from the hole in the center. His face was grim as he stood up and held out a hand to Ananyse.

"We must go on, we will make camp a few miles from here, but it is not an easy walk as the way is very rocky and hilly here. Come."

Ananyse stood up without his help, and brushed past him to climb down the tree. He grasped her arm as she slipped by him, halting her. His face was hard as he looked down at her, his eyes glinting with fury.

"You will never do that again, and be so foolish. I expected more of you, you are of the Mithrin and they are not fools."

Ananyse pulled away from him, clenching her teeth and climbed down, trying not to glance back at the elf who followed her so closely. Her reception once

she got to the base of the tree, dropping from the lowest branches, was not any better. Delvan scowled at her as she turned away, and they gathered their weapons as Haldir strode off along the bank of the river. They had reached a small clearing beside the stream when Haldir motioned for them to halt. Immediately several Elves melted back into the trees, and several others began to gather wood for a fire. Haldir turned back her.

"We will make camp here. There are no Flets built in the trees here, as I would prefer to be off the ground, but your men would not be comfortable there, so we will make camp here." He strode away, and Ananyse sat on a small rock overlooking the stream.

She pulled her cloak around her as the wind picked up, feeling the spray from the water as it bubbled over the rocks in front of her. She turned as Delvan touched her shoulder, handing her some food, but she did not speak as she turned back, chewing the bread he had given her. Delvan squatted beside her for a moment, and she could sense he was trying to decide how to speak to her, but she gave him no opening as she ignored him, staring at the river. Finally he sighed and straightened, walking back toward the men behind her. She finished the bread, and turned back toward the fire that now was burning merrily in front of her. Pulling out her whetstone she pulled one of the knives from her boot and began to sharpen the knife in short angry strokes.

Delvan sat a few feet away from Ananyse, watching her sharpen her knife angrily. He sighed as Eoin sat down next to him.

"The storm is going to break soon, I fear." Eoin murmured as he chewed on his bread, watching her. Delvan nodded in agreement as several of the elves returned speaking with Haldir. He nodded and they walked back toward the fire. Squatting down beside Delvan and Eoin, they held their hands to the fire. Haldir sat down opposite them, staring at Ananyse as he did.

The elf Delvan heard was called Rumil, turned toward them. "The tension is like thick rope tonight. Soon it will fray, no?" He said slowly, speaking in elvish again to his brother who nodded. "The woman carries many knives."

Eoin grinned at the elf, "I would approach with much caution if I were interested. I think it's about time those two got on with what's bothering them. Unless your brother likes his company a little more manly."

Rumil grinned then laughed quietly, translating Eoin's words to Orophin, who winked. "Nay, as much as some of our friends would wish it, our brother has never gone down that path."

Eoin snorted with laughter, eyeing Haldir as he stood up, "Maybe he just doesn't see that she is interested in him." He grinned as Haldir turned toward him scowling. He began to speak when Rumil stood up quickly,

"Haldir!" he said as he pointed at Ananyse. Haldir turned and leaped toward Ananyse as she sat frozen in place, her knife dropping from her limp hand, a look of anguished horror on her face as slowly her eyes rolled up, and she fell forward.

Haldir caught her as he leaped across the fire, the smell of her hair burning slightly filling the air. He laid her down as she stirred with a moan, her eyes glassy and unseeing. The blood drained from her face, leaving it white as the Elves, when she began to gasp. Her eyes closed as Delvan, Eoin and the Elves surrounded her, and she began to tremble violently.

She shuddered, her eyes flying open, and they were bright with unshed tears. Realizing where she was, she struggled violently from Haldir's grasp. Scrambling to her feet, she backed away, still seeing something from her vision, and she stumbled as she staggered away from them, crying out. They rose as she faced them again, struggling to control the emotions the vision had wrought, and Haldir stepped toward her.

"Do not touch me" she cried as he reached out. She backed away from him further and then turned and fled into the trees as they watched. Haldir frowned and with a glance at his brothers, strode after her. Eoin growled under his breath and made to follow but stopped as Delvan grasped his arm.

"No, I think we must stay out of this one, Eoin." He sat back down, pulling Eoin with him. "I think we had better sit quietly for awhile, or we may end up dead." He nodded toward Rumil and Orophin who had come to attention and were slipping through the trees after Haldir, bows drawn. Around them the other elves had stepped into view, and were leaning not so casually on their bows, their attention focused directly on Delvan and the men.

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Haldir followed Ananyse easily through the trees as she fled, he could hear her weeping as she stumbled through the trees. He drew closer to her as she

turned suddenly, and stopped, her chest heaving with the heavy breaths she took, her eyes wide with pain. She took a deep shuddering breath as he stepped closer, holding her hand out to stop him.

"Don't come near me," she gasped.

"You can go no further, Ananyse."

"Who are you to tell me where I may go!" she cried out as she backed up a step, anger flooding her pale face with spots of color.

"I am the March Warden of Lothlorien and if the Lady Galadriel says you are not to leave, then you will not leave." He said firmly as he stepped closer.

"Galadriel," she hissed as he watched in interest the range of emotions that played across her face, as she struggled to control them. "Galadriel! How dare she, how dare she think she can choose what I am to remember or no!"

Haldir circled around her as she turned to face him.

"Nay, it was not Galadriel that made you forget what you saw, Ananyse."

She stared at him in horror, then fury sparkled in her eyes as she swung to hit him again. He caught her wrist and pulled her toward him, his own eyes full of fury. "You will not hit me again. Once only will I allow it." He snarled as she struggled to free her wrist.

"Let me go, I hate all of you." She cried out as she struggled with the iron grip he had on her wrist. He could feel the straps that had held her knife to her wrist, and reached out as she twisted her other hand, grabbing that wrist as well, forcing her arm back away from him as she tried to swing the knife. She hissed in pain as he forced her to drop the knife, and he kicked it away from them into the moss of the forest floor. He twisted her hard against him, knocking her knees out from under her, and they fell to the forest floor with a grunt as he twisted landing first with a grunt as she fell on top. Rolling over quickly he pinned her down, throwing his leg over hers and grasping both wrists above her head in one hand. He reached down and jerked out the knives she carried in her boots, throwing all four into the bushes. He sensed a movement behind them, and knew his brothers had slipped away, knowing they had stayed near until they were sure he would not come to any harm. He turned back to Ananyse as she struggled underneath him, her eyes narrowed in frustration.

"How dare you," she hissed, as he leaned over her. He looked at her for a moment,

"Where is the other one."

Her eyes widened then narrowed quickly as she clenched her teeth. "What do you mean."

His eyes narrowed as he stared at her, "You have one more knife, and I will have it now. Where do you keep it."

"You can go to the Shadow," she snarled as he sighed, gripping her wrists tighter in his hand, he reached out and slid his hand into her tunic as she gasped in outrage. She saw his eyes flicker for a moment as he pulled out the dagger, tossing it behind him.

"You must not fight it anymore." He said as he held her pinned beneath him.

"Fight, how can I not fight it. You have no idea of what it is like. And you had no right to remove those memories from me."

"You talk in riddles, you are angry I made you forget the vision you saw when you came to me injured? Your mind could not deal with both, and it gave you some peace for awhile, yet you fight those same emotions." He said as she shook her head in denial.

"You still had no right," she cried out as tears began to slip down her cheeks.

Haldir, stared at her for a moment, reaching out to touch the wetness. "Do you shed tears in anger, or is it that you weep for me?"

Her eyes flew open, and she stared at him in surprise as the tears continued to slip down her face. "You have no idea what I see." She whispered. He shook his head.

"You see death, and despair, a great darkness threatening the world. I have seen it as well, Ananyse."

She turned her head away as her lips trembled. She shuddered as he traced the line of tears over her cheek, and they flowed even heavier as she began to shake. He whispered something she could not understand and rolled pulling her into his arms as he sat up leaning against the tree beside them. She hid her face

in his shoulder as she shook with force of her weeping, and he stroked the strands of her hair as she wept, watching them slide through his fingertips. Cupping her cheek he forced her to look at him as he bent down, brushing his lips lightly across hers. Ananyse trembled as a warmth began to spread through her. Haldir slid his hand to the back of her neck and pressed her back against the moss as he traced the lines of her face.

"I put the spell upon you to help you heal, I am sorry if you are angry."

Ananyse sat up, her hair sliding over her shoulder hiding her face from him, "You only make it more difficult to bear."

He sat up as well, pulling her hair back to see her expression. "Why? Because it concerned me? I am not afraid to die, Ananyse, you do not know our ways."

Ananyse looked at him, her eyes full of pain. He set his fingers on her lips as she began to speak. Brushing her lips again he pushed her back, leaning over her, his long blond hair curling over his shoulders to settle on her tunic as he kissed her again. Ananyse sighed as she slid her fingers through the strands as she pulled him closer.

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"You will not tell me of your vision this night?" Haldir asked as he pulled his tunic back on, belting the buckle of his sword belt. Ananyse sat facing the trees away from him as she braided her hair. He watched her shoulders twitch as a shudder went through her. She turned to face him, her eyes full of sadness.

"The men of Rohan are going to be trapped at their fortress of Helm's Deep. Galadriel has been aware and is sending a messenger to you, he will be here soon. You are called to council, they will send you and your elves to Helm's Deep." She closed her eyes for a moment, as he knelt next to her. "And you will not come back."

He pulled her to stand next to him as Rumil broke through the trees.

"A messenger from Galadriel, we are called back to Caras Galadron." He said as he looked curiously between the two of them.

Haldir turned to Ananyse as she bent to pick up her knives. Grasping her wrists, he twisted them from her grip as she glared at him. He grinned as he slid

them through his belt. "Your knives are mine until I decide to return them, I will not have you lose your temper and try to use them on someone else." Ananyse stared at him as he turned back to Rumil.

"Ready everyone to leave, we go this night."

Delvan stood up as Rumil walked back through the trees, speaking quickly with Orophin. Haldir followed, and Delvan's eyes narrowed as he waited for Ananyse. She stepped out a moment later and he frowned as she stopped for a moment to watch Haldir as he spoke to his brothers, then turned back toward them. She crossed over the fire, bending to pick up her knife, then knelt next to Delvan as he sat, sliding the knife into her boot. "where are your other knives?" he asked as he noticed the other sheaths were empty. She lifted her sleeve revealing it's empty sheath, and grimaced.

"Haldir has them, I'm afraid I threatened him with them and he has confiscated them"

"If he has hurt you in any way?" Delvan began as she shook her head.

"No, he did not hurt me, I made my choices, Delvan." She said, sighing, and he groaned.

She stood up as Haldir turned to them.

"Come, we return to Caras Galadhon, and you must come back as well."

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Galadriel and Celeborn were waiting at the gates of the city when they arrived. Haldir bowed to them as they gathered around him, speaking quickly in elvish.

"I wish you knew how to speak their language," Delvan growled as they stood back waiting. "It puts us at a distinct disadvantage when they can talk around us and we know nothing of what they say. Friends or no, we wouldn't know until it was too late if they change their minds."

"Be at ease, Delvan." Ananyse said "The elves go to council on one thing, do they renew their ancient allegiance with men and send their own to fight, or do they ignore our fate and take their grey ships back to the havens. I see only that some will go."

Delvan looked at her slowly, realization dawning. "Including Haldir?"

Ananyse looked at him sadly. "Including Haldir." Delvan's hand braced her shoulder as Haldir approached.

"You are requested to attend the council meeting, Ananyse and you Delvan as her second. Your visions may be of some use, if you speak of them."

Ananyse nodded as they followed Haldir up into the city. The council chamber sat high in the largest Mallyrn tree, directly below Galadriel's Talan. They walked up the last of the steps into the chamber, the light drifting thru the tree branches above making the air a bit hazy in their shadows. Haldir stopped a few paces from Galadriel as she sat down next to Celeborn. A few moments later Ananyse turned to see Elrond, from the Rivendell Elves step into the chamber, his dark hair and complexion a startling contrast to Galadriel's and Celeborn's silvery blondness. He kissed Galadriel, speaking softly to Celeborn then sat next to them as another elf entered the chamber. Ananyse frowned as Thranduil, of the Mirkwood Elves strode into the chamber, head held high as he greeted Galadriel. He too was blond, but not the silver tones of the Lothlorien Elves, and his expression was haughty as he turned to stare at Ananyse.

"Why do you allow her to attend this council, Galadriel, she is not of the high elves." Thranduil said stiffly as he stood staring at her.

Galadriel rose, motioning Elrond back into his seat as she glided to Thranduil, leading him to a seat. "I ask her to attend, as she is of my kin, as you know, Thranduil. I would like to hear of her visions regarding this matter."

Thranduil snorted, his eyes narrowed as he sneered. "Visions? She is a farce as was her mother, we cannot trust anything she says."

Galadriel frowned as she turned to face Thranduil, glancing back at Haldir as he stiffened.

"You will not speak of her thus, Thranduil. Your bitterness when Deyanan chose another has poisoned your mind all these years."

Ananyse stood up, staring in surprise at Thranduil, "You do not trust my visions? And if they concern your son, who fate stands upon your decision here?"

Thranduil looked at her sharply, " What do you know of my son, Legolas? I have not heard from him for many months."

Galadriel laid her hand on Thranduil's shoulder. "He is of the fellowship, Thranduil. I sent messengers to you, did you not receive them?" she turned back to her seat and sat down.

"Enough of this, Ananynse, you will speak of your vision."

Ananynse stared at Haldir for a moment, then looked to Thranduil.

"I saw that the Rohirron fall back to their stronghold of Helm's Deep. They are few and many are wounded. Of the ones to fight, many are old or young children." She closed her eyes as she forced the scenes of her visions into words.

"I see them fighting, it is dark and there are thousands of the enemy outside the walls. Their cause is hopeless. I see the despair in Legolas's eyes as he looks over the walls. Aragorn, son of Arathorn is there, he also looks wounded, but is able to fight. Only ," she faltered for a moment, only I see a column of elves arriving and it is because they do so that I see the fight will become a victory, if that is what you could call it, for many lives will be lost." She sat down abruptly, as Haldir turned toward her, waving him back.

Elrond frowned, looking back to Galadriel. "it is many ages since we have allied ourselves with men."

Galadriel looked at him and then Thranduil. "Can we stand aside and leave them to their fate, for if they fail, this world will fall into the shadow, and we may find our paths to the west blocked as well Do we dare leave this to the men of this world?"

Elrond sat for a moment, his brow furrowed in thought. "Even if the men of Rohan win this fight, it is only the beginning of the end, whether the shadow will rule or not, our time here is at an end. This age is finished. Do we send out our people, most to certain death, when they may still have a chance to live, if only to sail to the west?"

Haldir shook his head "There will be those of us who wish to fight, My Lord Elrond, your sons have spoken of it to me before."

Elrond sighed, having had this conversation too many times before. "I do not understand your attachment to the lives of men, they have only brought us misfortune. We cannot change what has happened before, and how do we know that men will be strong enough to win this fight, now."

Galadriel smiled, "You must trust in those men you know, Elrond. You have raised Elessar, you know what he is capable of. I know in my heart he is true, the blood of Isildur runs heavy in his heart, but he will prevail, I feel this. I feel we must send what aide we can."

Thranduil stood up, "I cannot. My own borders are fraught with skirmishes even as we speak, and I will not send my elves to fight, when they are needed in the Mirkwood."

Galadriel nodded . "It is as you say, then you must do what you will, Thranduil. I will send Haldir, if he chooses to go, as he is the Captain of the Galadrim, to lead those of us who will fight, to lead them to Helm's Deep."

Haldir glanced back at Ananyse who had stiffened, "I will lead them, My Lady. For I must do what I can to help Aragorn, who is a friend, as well as Legolas of the Mirkwood. Perhaps, I can prevail so that they may continue their paths of the fellowship."

Elrond stood also, as Galadriel and Celeborn rose. "So be it then, as I have sent on the fellowship, so shall I send what elves may wish to go with you, Haldir." Thranduil frowned and strode out of the room, as Elrond stopped in front of Ananyse.

"Your path is not an easy one, as you well know, but you are welcome in Rivendell, ere you pass through or near her valleys. Not long will we stay there, but until the end of this age. Your mother I knew not well, she leaned more to Thranduil's likeness than I. But of your struggles with your blood I know well. Take comfort in the kin you have, they will help you if but let them."

Ananyse smiled sadly as he left her, then hurried from the chamber as Haldir turned, Delvan striding behind her. She ran down the steps, leaving him behind as she fled. Reaching the bottom of the first flight she turned to look back up the stairs. Delvan was striding down them, frowning, but behind him she could see Haldir as he stopped at the top of the rise. Fighting to control the anguish that was threatening to overcome her she turned, but found her way blocked by Rumil and Orophin. They both smiled, and grasped her arms as she began to

step back. Rumil smiled at Delvan as he reached them, eyes narrowing as his hand went to his sword.

"Do not interfere, time is short and things must be said that one would try to avoid. We will not harm her." Rumil said as they pulled her along with them. She struggled but they gripped her arms tightly, pulling her along as elves around them looked on in amusement. They finally pulled into a small talon and released her as she folded her arms, staring at them in frustration.

"Where have you led me?" Ananyse as they stepped back to the door.

"To my home," Haldir said as he brushed between them, and Ananyse stepped back. He murmured to his brothers in elvish and they turned and left, glancing at Ananyse as they did so. She looked around the chamber, avoiding Haldir as she walked around the room. It was very neat and only small touches, his sword and bow leaning against the wall, a small set of books lying on the table near the bed, revealed Haldir's personality. Picking up one of the books she looked at it, but it was written in elvish and she could not read it. She really was going to have to learn it soon.

"You are avoiding me," Haldir said as he walked up behind her, pulling the tie off her braid. She spun around, grabbing at the uncoiling hair, and frowned as he smiled down at her. Taking a deep breath she stepped back to find her way blocked by the bed. He stepped closer and Ananyse had to lean back to look at him. He gripped her arm as she pushed him away. "Why?" he frowned

She tried to push past him, away from the bed behind her, but he didn't move. Instead, he pushed her back and she fell back, as he knelt on the bed, arms braced on either side of her. "Are you now afraid to speak what is in your mind?" he said as he settled beside her, pulling the long strands of her hair across the coverlet.

Ananyse closed her eyes, his nearness sending waves of warmth through her, but knowing he would soon be lost caused her breath to quicken in anguish as he whispered to her in elvish. Taking another deep breath to settle the quailing of her stomach, she opened her eyes to see him staring at her. "I will not speak any more of it," she said as she turned her head away.

"So you will leave me with this vision of you, refusing to meet my eyes, afraid to be strong?" he said as he pulled on a strand a little harder, causing her to turn her head. She looked up at him as her eyes misted, but she sighed, reaching up

to pull him toward her. She kissed him, as he leaned over her, his weight pushing her into the bed.

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Ananyse sighed as she closed her eyes, the feel of Haldir's warmth seeping into her as he lay beside her. He traced the line of her hip as she turned on her side, sending tremors along her skin. She sat up, pulling her tunic on over her head as he lay back. She brushed the hair out of her eyes as she walked over to the window, looking out over the trees below. She heard him move in the bed and she turned back to see him smile, as his eyes traveled over her.

"I think I would like to see you dressed thus all day." He grinned as she looked down at her bare legs. "But I do not think I would appreciate others looking as well."

She turned back to the window as she heard him get up, and when she turned back he had pulled on a new silver tunic and black breeches.

"You might want to dress, as my brothers will be here soon with my mail."

She hurried to the bed donning the remainder of her clothes and had just belted her sword to her back when the two returned, carrying golden hued mail and a velvet red cloak. They proceeded to apply to pieces of mail to Haldir as he spoke to them quietly in elvish. And soon he was fully dressed. Rumil turned toward her, the velvet cloak in his hand, and pausing for a moment, reached out, offering it to Ananyse. She took it, feeling the weight of the velvet, its smoothness and her hands shook as she placed it around Haldir's shoulders. He rested his hands on her shoulders briefly as she watched him turn toward the door, but as he reached it he stopped, turning back to her.

"Are you coming?" Ananyse closed her eyes for a moment, then reached out, placing her hand on his arm as they turned to leave.

They reached the base of the Mallyrn trees and Haldir stopped in front of Galadriel and Celeborn as they watched the elves gather, forming their lines of companies. The Rivendell and Lothlorien elves blending into one whole cohesive unit, their battle mail, and cloaks pulled from ancient use, to once more march to war.

They stood waiting, impassive as Haldir turned to Galadriel. She reached up to place her hands on his shoulders, kissing each cheek in turn. And Celeborn grasped his shoulder firmly, looking into each others eyes for a moment.

Ananyse stood back, a few steps behind, feeling humbled at the magnificence of the elves. Their beauty and gracefulness was amplified by the trappings of war, and the low lament that was beginning electrified the air. Haldir knelt in front of Galadriel and then stood, turning toward the procession but then he stopped for a moment, looking back at Galadriel.

Turning abruptly he strode back to where Ananyse stood, lost in thought, and wrapped his hands on either side of her face, kissed her slowly. Ananyse rose on her toes as he kissed her, finally gasping for breath when he released her.

He smiled. "I will come back." Then he turned and walked to the front of the elves and they began to march, his red cloak a beacon in the dimness of the wood, and she stood there until she could see him no more.

Galadriel stepped up to the flet, listening for any indication of someone inside, but she heard nothing. Stepping into the darkness of the Talan, she looked around, finally seeing Ananyse asleep on the bed, curled around a volume of elvish poetry she had been trying to decipher. It had been four days since the elves had left for Helm's Deep and no word had yet come. Galadriel sat on the edge of the bed, and stroked the hair that lay on the coverlet. Ananyse had not bound it at all since Haldir had left, and had taken to wearing an elvish gown, simple in design, that suited her slimness. Her men had left to give aide to Gondor, as Ananyse had felt they would be needed there, and she had stayed at Lothlorien, and had spent most of her time closeted in Haldir's Talan.

"Ananyse, you must wake." Galadriel spoke softly, touching her brow, which was furrowed now in sadness as she woke, raising a pale face to Galadriel as she sat up. "You cannot hide here forever, you must face life once again."

"I cannot bear it, Galadriel." She said as she hung her head, her hair falling to shield her face.

"You hide, but yet I think you do not look at your vision as close as you might think." Galadriel said softly as Ananyse looked up sharply.

"What do you mean, Galadriel? I saw him fall, I saw the sword that cut thru him, I saw him fall," she wept as Galadriel wrapped her arms around her.

"You saw him fall, perhaps deathly injured, but you did not see him buried? Did they cut off his head? Nay, you but saw his reaction, in great pain, but we do not know that he is dead." She said as Ananyse sat back.

"I know what I saw and felt, I have never been wrong before." She whispered, not bearing to find even a small amount of hope if there was none to be had.

Galadriel smiled. "Come with me, and we shall see what the magic of Galadriel has to say." She pulled Ananyse to her feet and together they went through Caras Galadron, Ananyse of the copper hair, and Galadriel, beautiful in her silvery golden hair. The elves as they passed through murmured of their likeness, yet their differences were just as striking.

They reached Galadriel's small bower at the base of a large Mallyrn tree, and Ananyse hesitated as she stepped upon the grass before Galadriel's mirror. A large urn Galadriel grasped and filled from the small stream that flowed into

the pool beside the mirror's bowl, and she poured the water into the bowl, carefully, as she spoke in elvish. She turned to Ananyse.

“Shall you look into my mirror, or shall we look together, for what you see, I will see as well, and we can bear the thought together.”

Ananyse grasped her hand and they turned together and as one looked into the bowl. For a moment all Ananyse could see was their reflection in the water, and as she met Galadriel's eyes in the reflection it slowly began to change.

Instantly they were transported into the noise and smoky mistiness of Helm's Deep. Loud the shouts and clangs of weapons and men, screams of anguish and terror bombarded Ananyse as she grasped the edge of the bowl. Their vision swirled and they were swept into the heat of the battle, the towering walls of the Deep gray in the rain as it poured down over masses of Orcs and men as they fought. The sounds of arrows as they were launched and the clash of steel upon steel echoed in the night as their vision circled the fighting, racing over the ramparts to suddenly stop, as Haldir filled their vision. The rain had plastered his hair back away from his face, and he fought, his sword cleaving many an enemy who fell shrieking to their deaths below.

The vision swirled, changing direction to follow the line of the rampart where suddenly it was hurled into many pieces, a great breach blown into the wall. Galadriel and Ananyse both gasped as the vision raced along the breach, watching as the Orcs swarmed through the wall. Then they were hurled among the racing lines of elves as the archers ran to block the incoming force of the enemy and then they were back, as Haldir staggered up from the wall, dazed from the blast.

He turned and blocked the blow of an Orc, shoving him back over the rampart wall when he stopped and turned listening as Aragorn shouted from below. Calling his men to retreat, Haldir turned as another Orc swept toward him, spinning as he blocked the thrust again, but turned only to find another behind him, and Ananyse cried out as the Orc thrust his blade into Haldir's side.

“I cannot watch anymore, it is as I saw.” She cried as Galadriel gripped her arm, forcing her to stay near the bowl. She shook her head as Galadriel pulled her back to the bowl.

“No you must watch,” she cried as they looked back into the bowl.

Ananyse shook as she looked again and they saw Haldir stagger back, only to see an Orc behind him, and the blow as he was stricken from behind. They watched him fall slowly, the light fading from his eyes and cried out as Aragorn struggled to reach him, then laying him gently on the rampart as Aragorn whirled back into battle, his voice crying out for vengeance.

Ananyse legs trembled as she closed her eyes but Galadriel's insistent voice forced her to continue to look. The vision swirled once more and now as they looked, daylight broke through the bleakness of the night and shouts of wonder and joy carried through the air as they saw that Gandalf had arrived with the Rohirron and the day was won.

Then the air blurred and once again they were on the ramparts, steps away from where Haldir lay, his velvet cloak soaked with blood, his face pale against the grey of the stone fortress wall. The men of Helms deep were seen as they worked their way down the rampart, throwing the Orc bodies over the wall, carrying the dead to be buried. Among them several elves also went, their bodies filthy in the morning light, their faces haggard. And there they saw Rumil as he slowly lowered his brother Orophin against the wall, Orophin wounded but alive, their faces grey with sorrow.

Rumil stood and slowly made his way along the rampart and as they watched stopped suddenly as he spied Haldir and with a cry, flew to his side. Gently lifting him, Rumil pushed back the sodden hair, red with blood and listened to his chest for signs of life. Ananyse gripped the bowl as Rumil lay with his head on Haldir's chest, his shoulders shaking. Then he lifted his head and they saw that he was laughing. And with a shout, called over men to help him lift Haldir gently and they bore him away.

Ananyse and Galadriel both let go of the bowl, and sank to the ground. Ananyse weeping with overwhelming emotion.

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Aragorn strode quickly into the cavern where they had placed the wounded, searching for the wounded elves, Legolas only a step behind, and a muttering Gimli another step back. Reaching the area where the wounded lay, he stopped, turning around in frustration as he searched and finally sighed as Legolas bounded from behind him toward the far corner of the cavern. He sank with a thankful sigh beside Rumil as they sat beside the still unconscious Haldir. His wound was bandaged and his face was grey as he hovered near death.

“I have done what I can, Aragorn.” Rumil whispered as he stroked the blond hair from Haldir’s forehead. “But my healing skills are not enough I think to free him from the shadow’s grip. You are of Elrond’s people, perhaps you are able to help him where I cannot.” Rumil bowed his head in defeat, but Aragorn grasped his shoulder.

“Nay, my good friend, your skills have kept him on this side of the living, I will do what I can, but we will need to get him back to Lothlorien, for it will be his love for the Golden Wood that may heal him the best.”

Rumil looked up as Orophin, who was lying beside Haldir on his side spoke, and Aragorn looked at them in surprise.

“Nay, it will not be the Golden Wood that will pull Haldir back, but a copper haired half elf that holds his heart.”/p>

Legolas touched Haldir’s skin as he leaned over him. “He is cool, so no fever burns his brow. Lucky that the stroke of the ax that tried to slay him was not dipped in poison, as is their wont.”

Aragorn reached out, and laid his hand gently on Haldir’s brow as well, and spoke slowly as Gimli sat nearby on a rock.

“That elf’s got enough backbone to withstand a dwarven ax, no Orc weapon going to lay that one low for long.” He fingered his beard as the others looked toward him, and harrumphed under his breath.

Aragorn and Legolas grinned as Aragorn turned back, whispering to Haldir, calling his name softly. For a few moments it seemed as if there was no effect, then Haldir took a deep breath and opened his eyes narrowly, pain hazing them slightly as they watched anxiously. Lifting a trembling hand, Rumil caught it as it dropped back to his side wearily.

“Brother, it gladdens my eyes to see yours, though full of pain, but open and on the living side of the world.”

Haldir stared around him in confusion for a moment. “The battle is won,” he rasped as he raised a hand to his head.

“We have won this day, my friend,” Aragorn said as he gripped the hand “but alas tis only the first battle of many more. But your chance for battle’s glory is done this day.”

“So you would cheat me of my chance at future glory and all the allotted injuries that may go with it, friend Aragorn?” Haldir laughed weakly as he groaned.

Aragorn grinned, but Legolas spoke first, “Nay, your glory this day dawns bright and clear, with your sweeping procession of Elves, we won the day. Only because of you, have the men of Rohan outlasted the night, until with the aide of Gandalf, and the courage of Aragorn and King Theoden, have we carried our victory.”

“So be it, that I should be able to again see the light of day, although on whose feet I shall walk yet I do not know, for I cannot at the moment feel my own.”

Aragorn frowned, as he laid Haldir’s hand on his chest. “Your injury was severe, Haldir. It will take long to heal fully, but the feeling to your legs should return soon. The muscles are swollen and torn, and will take time to renew themselves. It is best to get you to Lothlorien as soon as we can. Only there, with Galadriel to heal you, and the powers of the Golden Wood shall you recover.”

Haldir sighed as his eyes closed in weariness. Aragorn stood as Orophin stretched out beside Haldir, watching over him, his own injuries keeping him still.

Rumil rose and walked with Legolas and Gimli as they followed Aragorn to the entrance to the cave.

“I would take him to Lothlorien myself,” Aragorn said as he turned, “but I fear our path is set to the road ahead. You must take him back, Rumil, with Orophin and the remaining elves. We will continue on as we are set, Legolas, Gimli and I, but our thoughts and hearts will travel with you to the Golden Wood.”

Rumil nodded, clasping Legolas with his arms, then Aragorn. Turning toward Gimli he grinned as the dwarf stepped back. ‘I fear my brother’s words may have hardened your heart toward him and us, but we have come to respect the fair words of Gimli, son of Gloin. Farewell, master dwarf, may you cleave as many Orc skulls as you did this night, and the world should surely be safe for elves to walk once more.’ Rumil stepped back, glancing back to where Haldir lay. “Our flight to the Golden Wood will be slow and yet we must race against time if we are to get Haldir to safety. If we find a way, we will send word of our travels, and the welfare of my brother Haldir.”

Aragorn gripped Rumil's hand, "it is all you can do, Rumil. I pray to the Valar that you have a safe journey."

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Rumil stopped, staring at the line of trees that hovered in the distance, breathing a sigh of relief and joy at the sight. Turning he ran lightly down the rocky hill, to where the elves had stopped to rest. Haldir lay on a litter, his face grey as Rumil knelt near him.

"Haldir, soon you will feel the coolness of the Golden Wood, it is only steps away." Standing quickly, they lifted the litter and hurried toward the forest. Reaching the coolness within, the elves seemed to revive somewhat and they pressed on through their exhaustion, coming finally to the stream Nimrodel, where they stopped to rest once again. Orophin lowered himself to sit next to Haldir, as he stirred.

"Haldir, my brother, the call of the Nimrodel wakes you."

Haldir stirred groggily, pain flashing across his face as he looked up at the canopy of trees above him. The tinkling of the stream beside him made him smile painfully as he turned his head. "The fair Nimrodel," he sighed, "place me in her waters, so that I might be refreshed, and cleansed of the filth of the battle." They lifted him gently from the litter, and laid him in the shallow waters as they formed a small pool, and he sighed again, as the water seeped thru his clothes. For a moment it seemed he was renewed as his eyes opened, but then they closed once more, and the grayness of illness filled his face once more. They pulled him from the waters, covering him with his cloak, and bore him once again toward Caras Galadron.

Galadriel stood at the gates of the city, news of Haldir's coming borne to her as soon as they had stepped into the wood. Night was falling and the lights of the city twinkled in welcome as the elves bore him to the gate. She touched his brow with love, and turned to follow them into the city. Ananyse stood rooted behind her, pale in her fear as she looked upon Haldir's still form.

"All is not lost yet, come, as he helped you in your time of need, so should you help him." They hurried after the litter as it was taken into the city.

They took him to his Talan and laid him gently on the bed, on his chest so that Galadriel could look on his wounds. Rumil and Orophin helped her remove his

clothes as Ananyse stood back, not sure of what to do. They covered him to his hips, and Galadriel turned as Rumil and Orophin looked toward her.

“Come, you must speak to him. Call his name, call him back from the world of the dead.” Ananyse’s eyes widened as their eyes met, and she heard Galadriel speak in her mind. “You must leave him in the dark no longer, you know of what I speak.”

Ananyse knelt next to Haldir, touching lightly the sides of his face as it was turned toward her, his arm hanging over the edge of the bed. Grasping his hand tightly she began to call his name softly as Galadriel and his brothers spoke rapidly together in elvish, their words fading into the background as Ananyse focused on Haldir.

“Haldir,” she whispered, “Come back, you must come back. Haldir, please.” She rested her forehead against his arm, feeling it cool and lifeless. Sighing she stroked her fingers along his cheek. “Haldir,” she whispered again. “I must tell you what I could not before.” She looked up at him, his eyelids closed and grey, and she kissed them.

“Haldir, I saw two things in my vision before you made me forget them. Two things I saw.” She whispered, clenching his fingers tightly. “I spoke truly when I saw you fall, but first I saw something else. But I was afraid, I could not tell you, even later. I did not believe in my own vision, though I should have. Haldir,” she whispered more urgently as the elves hovered around him, Haldir, you must come back to me, for I saw a child,” she whispered as Rumil and Orophin both turned to her startled, “I saw a child, in human years of nine or ten, but he was tall, so tall, and he looked so much like you I was frightened.”

She leaned her forehead against his arm again, “But his eyes were brown, like mine, and there I stood behind him, and I knew” she paused looking up at his brothers as they paused, “I knew that I was his mother. Haldir,” she cried softly, “You must come back, only you can teach him the way of the elves, for I cannot.” She lowered her head as she wept, and curled up next to the bed, as they covered him. She pulled his arm around her, and sat there next to the bed, as Rumil and Orophin sat nearby. Galadriel left them and slowly the night passed.

Ananyse had fallen asleep, her head leaning on Haldir’s arm as she hugged it to her, she woke as the muscles flexed as he tightened it around her. She turned to look into his face to find him awake, pale, but awake, and his eyes glinting as he looked at her. He raised his eyes to look toward his brothers who sat

grinning in relief, and smiled rolling over with a groan, pulling Ananyse with him. She sprawled across his chest, her hair sliding over her shoulder to pool on his shoulder and he turned his face into it for a moment. “It is a good way to wake with the smell of Lothlorien in your hair, but I fear I do not know this woman who lays across my chest, for the only copper haired half elf I know is a warrior of strong will and this one is weeping foolish tears all over me.”

Ananyse looked up through her tears with a frown, and then hit him squarely in his shoulder as he groaned, wincing. His brothers laughed and he reached out to them as they pulled him up to sit against the bed pillows. Ananyse curled up against his shoulder as his arm wrapped around her, and hid her face into his chest, trying to control her tears. She felt him caress her hair as his brothers spoke to him in elvish. He sighed, and they gripped his hand for a moment before they left the Talan. Curling a strand of her hair around his fingers, he gently forced her to look up at him.

“I was so very tired, that even the healing waters of the Nimrodel could not bring me out of my darkest dreams. I hovered there, not able to choose what path I must take when I heard your voice, calling to me. I knew not then if I could come, for still the weight of the darkness held me tightly. But then I heard you speak again, and your voice carried into my mind, and in my heart.”

He reached out a trembling hand to run his fingers over her cheek as she had done to him. “I felt your touch and then heard you say that which I never thought to hear. It has been many years since there was any children borne to elves in this world. How is so that you could bear mine?” he whispered as if he was afraid to speak of it.

Ananyse sat back as the blood rushed to her face, “I didn’t think I had to explain how that works, Haldir,” she said as he grinned. She smiled at him as Galadriel swept through the door with Celeborn behind her.

“Haldir,” Galadriel murmured in joy as she sat on the bed, as Ananyse stepped back. “You have come back from the brink of death, and it gladdens our hearts to see you awake.” Haldir smiled as she hugged him, and gripped Celeborn’s hand as he leaned over him.

“It was the smell of Lothlorien that woke me, but I fear that a stranger sat next to my bed for I recognized her not.” He grinned as Ananyse rolled her eyes, and Galadriel turned to smile at her.

“I am still the person I was, but I will choose which side that I will show.” Ananyse said as she sat on the end of the bed, adjusting the folds of her dress. “Perhaps you prefer me the way I was?” she asked as Haldir groaned.

Galadriel laughed, the sound tinkling in the morning brightness as she smiled, “I think the warrior still lives Haldir, best you be wary for you’ll never know when she shall come forth.” She turned to Celeborn. “The day has dawned in hope from the depths of despair, a flicker of light in the oncoming darkness. Would that the world may be saved, as yet ours will become as mist. But a new light has blossomed and we may yet have time to breathe life into it, that it may become a beacon to others in this world, a breath of hope renewed. Though the will of the Valar, a new child comes to the elven world, and he may yet lead those of us who cannot leave this world, to a new beginning.”