

**A BOY, A GIRL,  
AND A DOG:  
THE LEITHIAN  
SCRIPT**

-1-

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ACT I

AN APPOINTMENT IN MENEGROTH:  
THE THRONE-ROOM SCENE  
OF THE LAY OF LEITHIAN

retold in the vernacular  
as a dramatic script  
(with apologies to Messrs.  
Tolkien & Shakespeare)

*This is dedicated  
with the utmost affection and respect  
to the authors of The Comedy of Errors  
and Farmer Giles of Ham,  
and with infinite gratitude.*

# MEETING THE PARENTS



WHO IS THIS PUNK, AND WHAT HAS HE  
DONE WITH OUR DAUGHTER?

**Dramatis Personae & Cast, in order of appearance**

[this is how I'd cast them - you're free to supply your own actors, of course.]

**The Human Bard Gower (appearing courtesy of The Rose Playhouse)**

Derek Jacobi (appearing courtesy Henry V)

**Luthien aka Tinuviel, Princess of Doriath**

Claudia Black (appearing courtesy Farscape)

**Elu Thingol, King of Doriath**

Jeremy Irons (appearing courtesy Brideshead Revisited)

**Melian the Maia, Queen of Doriath**

Emma Thompson (appearing courtesy Sense & Sensibility)

**Beren Barahirion, Human Warrior**

Christian Bale (appearing courtesy Treasure Island,  
Little Women)

**Mablung, Captain of Doriath**

Ronald Colman (appearing courtesy The Prisoner of Zenda)

**Beleg Cuthalion, Elven Ranger**

David Niven (appearing courtesy The Prisoner of Zenda)

**Daeron the Bard, Elven Flautist**

Lani John Tupu (appearing courtesy Farscape)

**Citizenry of Doriath (nonspeaking parts)**

as themselves (appearing courtesy of Mandos)

## SCENE I

**Gower:**

Now  
envision wide upon this meager screen,  
the lofty arches of deep Doriath,  
where Elu Thingol, gray King of Elves  
and Melian the Wise his wife  
whose birth precedes the eldest stars,  
hold high court before their host.

--Let thy mind  
make of our panel white and keystrokes black  
Shining caverns, enlumed all with bright  
lamps of white gems all fashioned fair  
upheld by dragons carved and gilt,  
and water flowing o'er the stone  
like to a grotto fashioned of the gods  
where birds do sing beneath no sun--  
Here,  
into the shade of the holy trees  
Luthien Tinuviel doth lead her love,  
Beren the wanderer from out the woods,  
before her mother musing and infuriate sire  
before the assemblage of her friends and kin  
and doubtful Daeron that betray'd of love . . .

**Luthien:**

Mom, Dad -- this is my fiance, Beren.

**Thingol:**

Well, well, well. So you're the fellow who's been  
camping in my woods this past year. How did you  
get past the security system?

**Beren:**

Um?

[distracted by the spears/crowd/nightingales/jewels/  
waterfall/trees/Melian]

How . . . ? I, er, just, erm, kept walking, and  
then I was here.

**Thingol:** [thinking]

--Yeah, right.

[aloud]

So, --Beren, is it? --what do you do for a living?

**Beren:**

Orcs. Um. I, uh, I hunt them. Sir.

[winces]

**Thingol:**

Really. And do you foresee a long-term career in this . . . admirable venture of yours?

**Beren:** [desperate flippancy]

Well, I expect I'll be doing it the rest of my life.

**Thingol:** [not amused]

And this should impress me why?

**Beren:**

Well, my dad was a good friend of the King of Nargothrond, saved his life at the Siege of Angband, and they say I take after Da -- I might be useful to have around, is all I'm saying.

**Thingol:** [biting sarcasm]

In case you hadn't noticed, this isn't Nargothrond -- or do I look like Finrod Felagund to you?

**Beren:**

I, I don't know, sir; I've never met King Finrod--

**Thingol:** [forced patience]

--That was a rhetorical question, boy. I'm saying I don't care who your friends-and-relations are, I want to know what you have to offer my daughter. I didn't raise Luthien to be a beggar or a gangster's moll -- I expect her to take over the administration of Doriath after me. We have lots of people who can kill Orcs, and with eons more experience than you've got, so I don't really see a place for your talents in our organization.

**Beren:**

Well, my parents ran a realm too, not as big as this, but nevertheless--

**Thingol:** [losing it]

Silence! Impertinent puppy! Can you give me one good reason why I shouldn't throw you into the labyrinth and delete the key? Do you really expect me to believe that you've just been taking music lessons from my daughter in the forest? I should chop you into pieces

and chop the pieces into pieces! -- unfortunately,  
you'd miss most of it--

**Beren:** [nervously]

Um, I know this isn't the best time to remind you,  
but Tinuviel did say you'd promised me a safe  
conduct . . .

[pause]

**Thingol:** [lethally]

Who's Tinuviel?

**Beren:**

. . .

**Luthien:** [exasperated]

It's my nickname, Daddy. Like yours is Thingol.  
Because of my singing. And you did promise. In front  
of witnesses.

**Thingol:** [raising voice]

--but as I was about to say, I stupidly promised  
her that I wouldn't kill or maim you (I can't think  
why, all she does is look at me and I give her what-  
ever she asks for) but that doesn't mean I can't  
find other ways to keep you from getting at her, you  
empty-handed vagabond--

**Melian:** [mindspeech]

Ahem. Elu.

**Thingol:** [mindspeech]

--Yes, dear?

**Melian:** [mindspeech]

The good news is -- that he isn't a brainwashed slave  
sent here by our Enemy to assassinate you, kidnap  
Luthien or corrupt Doriath.

**Thingol:** [mindspeech]

Hmph. What's the bad?

**Melian:** [mindspeech]

That he isn't a brainwashed slave sent here by our  
Enemy to assassinate you, kidnap Luthien or corrupt  
Doriath.

**Thingol:**

!?. . . !?



**Melian:** [mindspeech]

He's just a boy who's fallen in love with a stranger  
he met in the woods.

[longish pause]

**Thingol:** [mindspeech]

--It was different for us...

**Melian:** [mindspeech, sighing]

It's always different...

[Simultaneous w/previous exchange: Enter the two chief  
warriors of Doriath.]

**Beleg:**

All right, all right, what's all the fuss?

**Mablung:**

Daeron, old boy! Fill us in!

[Daeron gives a guilty start and almost drops his flute]

**Daeron:**

Erm. Hullo, chaps. It's that Man you were all out  
looking for. He just turned up. --How did he get  
past you?

**Beleg:**

How indeed? We figured he'd jumped the gate and made  
a run for it. Done a bunk, as it were.

**Mablung:**

Right. When was the last time anyone got past us,  
Strongbow?

**Beleg:** [thinking]

Mm, seventy-four years ago. That wolf light-cavalry  
unit down the cliffs on the other side. Didn't get  
far, though.

**Mablung:**

You sure it's been that long?

**Beleg:**

Sure I'm sure.

**Mablung:**

I don't remember all of that -- I think you've got  
an extra decade in there.

**Beleg:**

No, that was the winter before the winter that the borders got four cubits of snow and five of those things with six legs and two heads.

**Mablung:**

Anybody know what those things are? What are they called, anyway? Daeron?

[Daeron gives a guilty start]

You're the bard around here -- don't you know?

**Beleg:**

What's wrong with "those things with six legs and two heads?" or better yet, "those dead things with six legs and two heads"--?

[Melian gives them a Look, and they quiet down. The conversation regarding a suitable dowry is just concluding.]

**Beren:**

So, if I brought back all three of them, and you had three daughters, would you let me marry all of them? --Just curious, sounds like a real bargain on elf-princesses--

**Luthien:** [stage whisper]

Beren! Shush! I don't know how long it would take me to get you out of the labyrinth -- it might take a hundred years!

[Beren hushes up.]

## SCENE II

**Gower:**

Now  
let us turn aside from counsels of the great  
and cast our thoughts upon the parting of the twain  
whose love enduring should downcast  
the powers of earth and e'en the gods . . .

[The hall before the main gates. Beren is pacing and ranting in nervous aftershock; Luthien holds his hand, anchoring him, compass-like]

**Beren:**

I had it all planned out. I was going to say, "I've been engaged in a systematic program of destabilization targeted at the most vulnerable areas of Morgoth's regime, combined with a low-impact lifestyle which honors traditional Sindarin folkways and combines high efficiency with respect for Arda." That would have sounded halfway intelligent. And I completely lost it. I must have been hyperventilating: I thought there was this -- glowing light around your mother.

**Luthien:**

You could see that? Most people don't notice.

**Beren:**

Y--your mom glows. --Why?

**Luthien:**

It's only when she's using her Power. She doesn't try to show off or act like she's different from Eldar, really.

**Beren:** [confused]

You're an Elf -- but she isn't?

**Luthien:** [surprised]

She's Maiar. Doesn't everyone know that?

**Beren:**

! . . . !

[shaking his head]

I thought it was bad enough learning your father's the king -- now I find out your mother's a goddess--!

[starting to hyperventilate]

**Luthien:**

It's okay. I think she likes you. The fact that you got past her Maze without going mad means you're Good. --I pointed that out to my father.

**Beren:**

I'm afraid it didn't convince him.

**Luthien:**

He really isn't like this. Well, he is sort of paranoid -- but he does have reasons for that. Given that people keep ambushing and betraying and trying

to destroy us -- and those are our relatives, not the Dark Lord's minions.

**Beren:** [starting to rant again]  
He doesn't think I have a chance -- but I can do it. I made it through the borders; I can sneak into Angband. Frontal assault didn't work because it's too obvious. Well, and the Dragon and the Balrogs and the being outnumbered part of it, too. --Maybe I'll go disguised as a slave. They'll never expect anyone trying to get in, not out . . .

**Luthien:**  
Beren, you don't have to prove anything to me. Let's just go. We can take care of ourselves -- we don't need civilization.

**Beren:**  
No. Your dad's right. I can't do that to you. Argh! Now I understand my parents' dilemma. Poor Ma . . .

**Luthien:**  
I should go with you.

**Beren:**  
No! If anything happened to you I'd kill myself. You -- you can't imagine what it's like out there. The -- the spider-things and the things with the eyes . . .

**Luthien:**  
But it's okay for you to go.

[pause]

**Beren:** [quietly]  
It's got to be easier the second time. And I've been doing it for years.

**Luthien:**  
Why don't you go ask Finrod Felagund for assistance? He likes humans, and he owes your family. At least he'd give you supplies and maps.

**Beren:**  
Good idea. I should have thought of that. --Are you going to be all right? Are your parents going to make your life hell while I'm gone?

**Luthien:**

What are they going to do? Lock me up in my room?  
I'm not a child of ninety.

**Beren:**

I wish we had some way to contact each other. Even  
a pair of those matching knives like in stories.  
--You don't have anything like that here, do you?

**Luthien:**

No, that's magic, not reality. --I should go with  
you. You need someone to look after you--

**Beren:**

--Tinuviel, I'm coming back. No matter what happens,  
I'm coming back to you.

**Luthien:**

I'm counting on it. I'll be waiting for you, Beren.  
Forever.

**Gower:**

And here we draw the curtain dark  
across our scene of parting and desire;  
Of all that follows after, legend and song  
    alike recount,  
to keep in mortal mem'ry what the gods remember  
    still--  
how Luthien the elven-maid, and Huan hound of heaven,  
with Beren for love brought down the walls of hell  
and freed the First-light from dark Morgoth's claws  
and wove into the workings of the worldis Doom  
a brightling strand that shineth yet, despite  
(or through) the feeblest efforts of the bards.  
    Thus  
asking your gracious pardon for this flight of fancy,  
having proffered in hopes of gentle diversion,  
we end this our humble file. Adieu!

## EPILOGUE

[Outside the opening of the Caverns leading to the  
Palace. To either side lean the Captain and Bowman  
of Doriath; they are playing a game similar to "Rock-  
Scissors-Paper" but with edged aerial objects.]

**Beleg:** [between throws, leadingly]

Oh, oh, wait -- I know what they are.

**Mablung:**

What?

**Beleg:**

In a word? --Fell.

**Mablung:**

Heh.

[Beren enters through the gates, slowly, looking backwards, oblivious to the knives being tossed to and fro.]

**Beleg:**

Careful there--

[In a flash Beren transforms from distracted lover to superwarrior, spinning round and drawing sword and dagger at once to ward against all comers. Seeing the Doriath Rangers he remains in guard position while he speaks.]

**Beren:**

What are you doing here?

**Beleg:** [reasonably]

Waiting.

**Beren:**

For what?

**Beleg:**

Just waiting.

**Beren:** [lowers blades but does not put them up]

You're here to see that I leave the grounds promptly and without any trouble, right?

**Beleg:** [shrugs]

Something like that, yes.

**Beren:**

Something exactly like that, I'll bet.

**Beleg:**

Clever lad. You'll go far, I shouldn't doubt.

**Beren:**

Don't.

**Mablung:** [sotto voce]

But will you come back again, I wonder?

**Beren:**

Nothing -- and no one -- is going to stop me. --I don't expect you to believe me.

**Mablung:**

So you're really off to infiltrate Morgoth's bunker? Defy the Lord of Paranoids himself, succeed where even Feanor (not to mention the Great of Arda) went down in flames?

**Beren:** [defensive]

Yup.

**Mablung:** [guessing wildly]

And you're what, all of fifty summers?

**Beren:** [still more defensive]

Twenty-five. I think. --Wish me luck, why don't you?

**Mablung:** [seriously]

Oh, we do. We do indeed.

**Beren:** [disbelieving]

Hmph.

[He turns and starts to walk off.]

**Beleg:**

Ah, not to be overly critical, but Angband's that way, not the way you're going.

**Mablung:**

--Unless he's thinking of swinging by Nargothrond first.

**Beren:**

Clever fellow. Any final words of advice or farewell?

**Beleg:**

Hm . . . "Be careful"--?

**Mablung:**

"Good luck"--?

**Beleg:**

--Yourself?

**Beren:**

Tell them that I won't come back empty-handed, and that they will see me again.

**Mablung:**

Beren.

[They lock stares. Pause.]

--The light of Elbereth go with you.

**Beren:** [serious]

Thank you . . . Sir. --Look after her for me.

**Mablung:**

We always do.

**Beleg:** [sotto voce]

We try, at any rate.

[Beren looks round, pulls himself together, and vanishes into the forest.]

**Beleg:**

Did you see how he did that?

**Mablung:**

You neither, eh? --Twenty-five.

[shakes head]

**Beleg:**

Think we'll see him again?

**Mablung:** [shrugs]

I'm no seer.

**Beleg:**

Same here. Definitely. Herself, as well.

**Mablung:**

You saw that too, eh? What do you think will come of it all?

**Beleg:**

Oh, death, destruction, woe and lamentation.

**Mablung:**

The usual, then. --This place is starting to get to me again. Up for a warg-hunt, Strongbow old chap?

**Beleg:**

Silly question. Whenever not?



[They leave, strolling leisurely. Luthien appears in the doorway.]

**Luthien:** [softly]

Beren, you've made me see time as a mortal woman does. It's been an hour already! How will I survive a day -- a week -- a year? Come back soon, my love, and safe, or I promise you I'll follow you to the ends of Middle-earth -- or the stars.

[fade to black]

## ACT II

### THE SOJOURN IN NARGOTHROND FROM THE LAY OF LEITHIAN

retold in the vernacular  
as a dramatic script  
(with apologies to  
Messrs. Tolkien & Shakespeare)

*This is dedicated  
with grateful acknowledgment  
to that greatest of ancient authors,  
Anonymous,  
for demonstrating medieval snarkage  
in the play Everyman.  
(Thanks also to NovusSibyl  
for an invaluable casting suggestion.)*

# HOUSEGUESTS FROM HELL

"Shouldn't  
you lot be  
going now?"

-Don't let the  
door hit you on  
the way out, mind-

...LOSERS...

"BEOR!"

...WEIRD, HOW  
THIS FATE  
BUSINESS  
WORKS...

-JUST WALK  
AWAY, MY LORD-



OR -

SO, WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU TWO DO  
AROUND HERE, ANYWAY?

**Dramatis Personae & Cast, in order of appearance**

[this is how I'd cast them - you're free to supply your own actors, of course.]

**The Human Bard Gower (appearing courtesy of The Rose Playhouse)**

Derek Jacobi (appearing courtesy Henry V)

**Beren Barahirion, Human Warrior**

Christian Bale (appearing courtesy Treasure Island)

**Nargothrond Border Patrol Captain**

Hugh Jackman (appearing courtesy Kate & Leopold)

**Steward of Finrod's Household**

Alan Rickman (appearing courtesy Sense and Sensibility)

**Curufin, Son of Feanor**

James Marsters in sly, caustic and vicious mode  
(courtesy Mutant Enemy)

**Celegorm, Son of Feanor**

James Marsters in suave, charming, and gentlemanly mode  
(courtesy Mutant Enemy)

**Huan of Valinor**

Special guest appearance as Himself

**Finduilas, Princess of Nargothrond, daughter of Orodreth**

Gelsey Kirkland (appearing courtesy the Baryshnikov  
Nutcracker telecast)

**Orodreth, Prince of Nargothrond**

Hugh Grant (appearing courtesy Sense and Sensibility)

**Finrod Felagund, King of Nargothrond**

Kenneth Branagh (appearing courtesy Henry V)

**Celebrimbor, Son of Curufin**

Alexis Denisof (appearing courtesy Mutant Enemy)

**Gwindor, a Lord of Nargothrond**

Ioan Gruffudd (appearing courtesy A&E's Hornblower series)

**Assorted Nargothronders of both Houses: Rangers, Citizens,  
and Knights**

(Caranthir, Son of Feanor, only appears in conversation; but you may imagine Douglas Fairbanks Jr., courtesy The Prisoner of Zenda, in that role.)

## SCENE I

**Gower:**

From Doriath's enchanted gloom  
let now your unfetter'd fancy roam  
to where the silver waters merge  
of Sirion, and the marshy verge  
of Twilight, and beyond  
across the rugged rainswept hills  
to Narog, and to Nargothrond:  
Hither wary Beren draws,  
with blood-won token ever shown  
to the sight, as yet unseen,  
of those who guard, in green  
of forest from enemy -- alone  
he comes into their hands; yet finds  
a gentler grasp and more courteous minds  
than welcomed him in Thingol's halls . . .

[Outside the Gates of Nargothrond. Enter Beren, escorted  
by the Rangers, but unbound.]

**Captain:**

Forgive me, sir, but you must leave your weapons with  
us. It isn't permitted to go armed into the presence  
of the King.

**Beren:**

Of course. Hold on a minute--

[He hands over his bow, quiver, longsword, shortsword and  
dagger]

**Captain:** [relieved]

Thank you for being so understanding about this. Now  
if you'll just come this way--

**Beren:**

Not done yet.

[taking assorted dirks from vambraces, leggings, belts  
and backpack.]

**Captain:** [staring at the mounting pile]

Oh . . . Is there more?

**Beren:** [working poniards out of cloak hem and hand-guards]  
Yup.

**Captain:**

Is -- is that everything?

**Beren:** [muffled, struggling out of his armor]

No, there are still the backups, but you'll have to wait a bit.

[takes another several pounds of metal from undertunic, sleeves, waistband]

That should do it.

**Captain:**

Your trustfulness -- astonishes one.

**Beren:** [shrugs]

I'm here to ask for help. Weapons not going to be very useful for getting that, right? And I seriously doubt there are going to be any Orcs around here to worry about.

**Captain:** [affronted]

Certainly not!

**Beren:**

Exactly. But I have to say I'm a bit surprised at your trust, myself.

**Captain:**

? . . . ?

**Beren:**

Well, you don't know that I am who I say that I am. I could be a minion of Morgoth waving Barahir's ring about and claiming to be his heir. It -- is not -- an impossible scenario.

**Captain:**

Ah. Well. I do suppose it's -- remotely possible, but--

[He is saved from the increasing awkwardness by the entrance of the Steward.]

**Steward:**

I'm sorry, but the King is still tied up in meetings and he's left strict orders not to be disturbed. If you wouldn't mind waiting until he is free, you can make yourself comfortable in the antechambers, and someone will fetch you when the council's over.

**Beren:** [overcome]  
[nods]

**Steward:**  
Is there a problem, milord?

**Beren:** [hoarsely]  
--No. Not a problem. I . . . I wasn't expecting such a civil reception.

**Steward:**  
We may be at war, but that is scarcely an excuse for neglecting basic courtesy.

**Captain:** [drily]  
--Especially when it's been going on for almost half-a-millennium now. It's not as if anything's changed lately.

**Beren:**  
Believe me, I'm not complaining, sirs.

**Steward:**  
Then, milord, if you'll be so good as to follow us?  
  
[aside, to the Captain of the Border Patrol]  
  
--Are you sure?

**Captain:** [shrugging]  
So he says.

**Steward:**  
But--

**Captain:**  
I know. --I know. But mortals don't come back, or so he says -- and he should know.

## SCENE II

**Gower:**  
Now for the mean, whilst under distant shade  
sadly in duteous piety doth pine the maid  
Luthien, waiting for her love (or tidings of),  
the son of Barahir finds ease, and welcome,  
if not from all in Nargothrond, at least from some--

[The Steward ushers Beren into the royal apartments.]

**Steward:**

Please make yourself comfortable, milord. I only ask -- and please take no offenses, 'tis but for form's sake -- that you remain here and not wander before the King summons you.

**Beren:**

Not at all. I don't imagine I'd want to trip your security system.

**Steward:**

Precisely. What would you care for, while you wait? A change of garments? There's probably time for a hot bath, if you wish -- these councils often go far beyond what's planned.

**Beren:**

Er, food, actually.

**Steward:** [blinks]

Of course. What sort pleases you best? Manchets? Subtleties? Viands spiced and minced--

**Beren:**

-- Hot is fine.

**Steward:**

Just -- hot?

**Beren:**

If it's not too much trouble.

**Steward:**

No, I'm sure the chefs can manage -- hot.

[The Steward leaves, shaking his head. Beren wanders about, looking at the artworks and Really Cool Stuff around the chamber, being careful not to touch anything. Brief fade-out and in to indicate time-lapse.]

[Room Service enters with a steaming tray and lays out a complete place setting before leaving. Beren looks at the table, looks at the chairs, looks at the state of his clothes. Makes a cursory attempt to brush off the assorted rust, mud, blood, and grass stains, shrugs, and sets the tray down on the floor instead. Sits down cross-legged and starts uncovering dishes.]

[Enter Curufin, alone, looking around for someone else.]



**Curufin:** [noticing Beren]

--Well, well, well, what have we here? Something the dogs dragged in? Looks like a wolf's-head to me.

[Celegorm enters]

**Celegorm:** [flinging himself down casually into a chair]

I agree, brother. A thief at best, or possibly a revolutionary. Someone with little respect for law and order, I dare say.

**Beren:** [blandly polite]

Yeah, that's what they say. Or so I'm told.

**Curufin:** [sinking gracefully into another chair]

You're mortal, aren't you?

**Beren:**

Mortal enough, to my enemies.

**Curufin:**

I make the jokes around here. --Mortal.

**Beren:**

Go right ahead.

[He picks out part of the meal and starts eating. Curufin and Celegorm stare. Celegorm grins evilly and whistles. Sound of clicking on floor outside. Huan enters.]

**Celegorm:**

You'd better run -- he hates wolves, and wolf's-heads, outlaw.

[Beren does not move. Huan approaches and snuffles him; Beren gives him some of the meat from his tray.]

**Beren:**

--Aren't you a good boy? Want some more?

**Huan:**

[wags tail]

**Beren:** [scratching Huan's ears]

Dogs are great. Big dogs especially. --You don't really think I'd be in here without permission, do you? I'm waiting for your King.

**Celegorm:**

Huan! Get over here.

[Huan reluctantly leaves Beren and flops down next to Celegorm with a sigh]

Not our King. Not all of us here owe allegiance to the children of Indis. What are you, an emissary from the Kingdom of Beggars? Our hosts had better look to the number of spoons they have left when he leaves.

**Curufin:**

I've heard there are primitive tribes in some of these ancient forests.

**Beren:** [between mouthfuls]

That one was pretty funny. Not first-rate, but mildly amusing nonetheless.

[the Sons of Feanor talk as though he has not spoken]

**Celegorm:**

Yes, don't they rub mud in their hair? And they're supposed to be short, too.

**Curufin:**

But they paint their faces, and I don't see any paint on his face. Of course, it's hard to tell with all that dirt...

**Beren:**

You know, I heard Elves were supposed to be incredibly eloquent, and wise, and perceptive on top of that.

**Celegorm:**

If you're not a barbarian, why are you sitting on the floor eating with your fingers instead of a knife?

**Beren:**

Ah, because--

**Curufin:** [talking over him]

This is called "furniture." That--

[pointing]

--is a "table." One sits at it to eat, not next it. On these things called "chairs." They're really quite the rage now in civilized society.

**Beren:**

Chairs . . . You know, I think I remember those.

We used to have some when I was a kid. --They burn really well when you can't go out to cut wood because there's a horde of Orcs in the way.

**Curufin:**

Insolent mortal, do you have any idea whom you're addressing?

**Beren:**

No, but I expect you're going to tell me.

**Curufin:**

I am Curufin, formerly of Valinor, and this is my estimable brother, Celegorm.

**Beren:**

--Oh.

[aside]

Damn!

**Curufin:** [smugly]

Ah, you've heard of us, I see?

**Beren:**

Everyone's heard of the Sons of Feanor.

**Celegorm:** [preening]

Look at that -- we're renowned even among mortals, brother.

**Curufin** [suspicious]

What exactly do you mean, everyone's heard of us?

**Beren:**

Let's just leave it at renowned, okay?

[aside]

--and leave out the "psychotic obsessed losers" part . . .

[He waves a small piece of meat sneakily behind his back.  
Huan gets up and starts to come over to him.]

**Celegorm:** [sternly]

Huan! Down!

**Huan:**

[whines]

**Celegorm:**

Whose dog are you, anyway?

**Beren:**

I'm no man's dog -- or Dark Lord's. --Sir.

**Celegorm:**

I was not speaking to you.

**Beren:**

Good.

**Curufin:**

You've quite the opinion of yourself, haven't you?

**Beren:**

I know my limitations.

[The Sons of Feanor scowl, trying to work out if this is supposed to be an insult. Beren tosses the meat to Huan, who catches it.]

**Huan:**

[tail thumps]

**Celegorm:** [angrily]

Stop feeding my dog!

**Beren:**

Maybe you should take better care of him.

[throws another piece to Huan]

Then he wouldn't be so hungry. --Would you, boy?

**Huan:**

[loud tail thumps]

**Curufin:**

So, I assume all this . . . artistic slovenliness  
. . . is just an affectation?

**Beren:** [swallowing]

Come again?

**Curufin:**

Well, you're turning up your nose at the finest venison there. It isn't as if the hounds didn't already get their share at the kill.

**Beren:**

I don't eat meat any more.

**Celegorm:** [flabbergasted]

Why ever not?

**Beren:**

I only hunt Orcs these days, and other things that fall into the general category of fell. And before you go there, no, I don't eat Orcs. Or wargs, or spiders.

**Curufin:**

You didn't answer the question.

**Beren:**

Orcs kill anything that moves -- and eat them, too, unless under strict orders to bring back prisoners alive. For one, it's a way of maintaining a difference between myself and what I hunt, when -- as you've so kindly pointed out -- in terms of civilization I haven't much footing left. For another, I can't help but identify with anything hunted by Orcs. It seems wrong, somehow. Treacherous, even -- I couldn't begin to tell how often I've been warned of a patrol's approach by bird-cries or fleeing deer.

**Curufin:**

So now you're equating us with Orcs, no less.

**Beren:**

I never said that.

**Curufin:**

But you implied it. By implication, as it were. Implying that those of us who do hunt, and eat what we bring down, are no better than Orcs, and no different.

**Beren:** [slightly exasperated]

No. It's a personal choice. I don't impose it on anyone else. I don't expect anyone else to have my reasons for it.

**Celegorm:** [horrified]

So what do you eat? Berries and, er, roots? You're not a farmer, are you?

**Beren:**

Well, before things got too bad, people used to leave

stuff out for me, not obviously, but the occasional "forgotten" loaf or cloak or or boots or wheel of cheese or leftover . . . leftovers. Not much, but it helped make ends meet.

**Curufin:**

I hate to destroy your idealistic illusions, but bread is made from eggs, you know. And eggs are animals. You do know that, don't you?

**Beren:**

That depends on the bread. Seriously, though -- not all eggs hatch, even in the wild. So far as the intent goes, I'm not trying to destroy a bird, just to sustain my own life, though I might end up doing so by accident. A small difference, maybe, but a real one. I think.

**Celegorm:**

Well, going by that logic, it isn't just Orcs that eat whatever they can catch. Pretty much any animal will hunt and take prey, even beasts that are mostly herbivorous, like mice. I don't see your objection, myself.

**Beren:**

True. But I'm not an animal, either.

[Celegorm is fairly certain this is an insult directed at him, but is distracted from responding by Huan's willingly being lured away again.]

**Celegorm:**

No!!! Bad dog!!! Down, Huan!!!

**Curufin:**

I can't believe we're arguing moral philosophy with a mortal barbarian.

[suddenly suspicious again]

Orodreth? Is that you, playing some kind of bizarre joke?

[He attempts to dispel illusion; since it is not an illusion, Beren's appearance does not change.]

**Celegorm:**

You spoke in the past tense. What do you do for mealtimes now?

**Beren:** [becoming more enthusiastic as he goes on]  
Well, there's turnips, there's parsnips, there's feral edibles of all kinds around the old homesteads. A lot of the land used to be under cultivation. Cattails, you can prepare them all kinds of ways if you know what you're about -- a lot of different kinds of edible marsh grasses, in fact. Then there's pine-nuts in the forest in autumn, hazelnuts, -- berries, yes; wild-sunflower and thistles, the roots and heads can be steamed and they're really quite good; and there are always mushrooms. --If you know what you're about, again, and don't poison yourself. Even in winter you can find wood-ears and boil them--

**Curufin:** [fascinated in spite of himself]  
Wood-ears?

**Beren:**  
Those fungus that grow on trees and stick out like ears.

**Curufin:** [remembering to sneer]  
Impressive. Quite a lot of work, for an abstract principle.

**Beren:**  
I don't say it's easy. But I figure if the Sindarin clans can do it, then I can manage it too.

**Celegorm:**  
Oh, so now you're putting yourself on the same level as the Kindred, are you?

**Beren:**  
You guys really do have issues, don't you? What is your problem? You look like you have it pretty good here: you're cousins of the King, right? You don't have to worry about somebody deciding that that reward sounds a whole lot better than 'Thanks, gotta run, you didn't see me,' or finding your cave full of Orcs waiting to ambush you. Back off -- it's not like I'm here to threaten you, after all.

**Curufin:** [suspiciously]  
What exactly are you here for? And who are you anyway? You look sort of familiar, but I can't place you.

**Beren:**

I really think that in prudence as well as courtesy the King should hear my business first. --Sir.

[Before things can escalate, Finduilas enters with a parchment in hand.]

**Finduilas:**

Oh, there you are! Can I have your autograph, milord?

**Beren:**

? . . . ?

**Curufin:**

--What are you about, cousin?

**Finduilas:**

Isn't it wonderful? This is the mortal who saved my uncle at the Dagor Bragollach!

**Beren:**

No, er, that -- that wasn't me, that was my father.

**Finduilas:**

Oh. Oh.

[frowns]

Well, I'd still like your autograph. Can I see the famous ring? Do you know, everyone's speculating on why you've come. We're all madly curious. You must tell us! Oh, if you'd please sign it at the edge, then I can draw your picture in the rest. --Huan, go away, you'll smudge it!

[Beren is overwhelmed; the Sons of Feanor exchange Significant Glances]

**Curufin:**

Finduilas, darling, don't humiliate the poor fellow.

[Finduilas gives him a confused look]

You can't expect everyone to have had your advantages of upbringing. I doubt very much he's even literate.

**Finduilas:**

Oh, I'm -- I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to--

**Beren:** [gently]

It's all right. I do know my tengwar. And I'll be



happy to give you my name, though I'm not sure why you'd want it.

[He takes the pen from her]

**Finduilas:** [very hesitant]

Um, it -- it goes the other way round, milord.

**Beren:**

On the other hand, it has been a long time.

[He changes the pen over and spells out the runes of his name, very carefully.]

There. Does that look right?

**Finduilas:**

If your name is Beren, yes.

**Beren:** [grins]

Whew. Shouldn't have boasted before I did it, eh?

[Finduilas dares to smile. He doesn't sneer at her. She is encouraged.]

**Finduilas:**

Is it true that you're here to organize a new Siege of Angband? They're saying you're the one that Morgoth was hunting all last year -- no, the year before -- and that he fears you more than anyone else in the world!

**Beren:**

Well, I -- I wouldn't say that, necessarily--

[An Elven-lord enters, to be enthusiastically greeted by Huan]

**Gwindor:**

Down, boy! --Did you find him, Faelivrin?

**Curufin:** [grins]

Faelivrin.

[She blushes as she points out Beren.]

That's so cute.

**Finduilas:**

Oh, stop it. --Gwin, can you believe it? You were right last winter, when you wouldn't believe the

reports he'd been killed.

**Gwindor:** [stammering]

My lord -- it's -- such an honor. I never -- the stories, the songs, the way you always managed to get out of every trap

**Beren:** [almost as much at a loss for words]

You're both . . . very kind . . . I think -- I think you make too much--

**Gwindor:** [enthusiastic]

--What's it like, being a legend?

**Beren:**

. . .

**Gwindor:** [oblivious]

A champion of the oppressed -- the Man most hated by the Dark Lord himself!

**Beren:**

Mostly -- tiring.

**Gwindor:**

I would love to be like you! To think of it -- wreaking vengeance on our Enemy, obeying no rules, beholden to none, fearing nothing, alone against impossible odds, hunted by implacable foes, with a price on your head worth a king's ransom--

**Curufin:**

I said he was an outlaw--

**Beren:**

--Actually, I never saw myself as an outlaw. I kind of thought of it that I was the Law, in Dorthonion. They were transgressors. I punished them. They outnumbered me. That didn't make Morgoth rightful lord of Beleriand.

**Gwindor:**

I really liked the way you would use an Orc-chief's own battle-axe to hew him and just leave it there. That was such an insult! -- did you mean it to symbolize that their evil deeds would turn against them and destroy them, just as their own weapons had?

**Beren:**

Um, no -- that was because axes are really heavy and I didn't need one. The less extra weight to slow me down the better. I could always count on another axe with the next one.

**Gwindor:**

Ah, practicality. So -- what was the most exciting part of your career?

**Beren:** [after a long pause for thought]  
The sky.

**Gwindor:**

The sky--?

**Beren:**

Yeah, when I was waiting in ambush most of the night, or stuck in a swamp waiting for night, the way the branches and reeds would frame the sky was . . . it's hard to explain, but . . . it would keep changing, and every change would be perfect, and so slow . . . and then all of the sudden a bird would fly across, or a shooting star would --

[gestures vividly]

and then it would be still again, calm like deep water, but still moving slowly all the time, the way a lake moves all the time in different ways under the surface.

[long pause]

**Gwindor:** [not sure what to make of this at all]  
Oh. That -- almost sounds Sindarin, really.

[The Sons of Feanor exchange glances.]

**Finduilas:** [with a defiant look towards them]  
I think it sounds beautiful.

[confidentially to Gwindor, emboldened]

You know, darling, since he wasn't dead after everyone said he must be, then perhaps Gelmir's still alive, and if it's true that Lord Beren's going to help lead a strike force against Angband, maybe he could rescue him . . . ?

**Gwindor:** [controlled but clearly exasperated]  
Faelivrin -- you weren't there. You don't understand.  
My brother could not possibly have survived. --I don't  
want to talk about it any more.

[Finduilas looks hurt]

**Beren:** [serious]  
People do come back from the unlikeliest chances. But  
I did hear the Dagor Bragollach was like no other  
battle on earth.

**Curufin:** [wearily]  
Little cousin, reconcile yourself to facts, and do not  
attempt to raise your sweetheart's hopes with well-  
meant foolishness. He's bones and dust on the Thirsty  
Plain, and none of us will ever see him again this  
side of the Western Sea.

[smooth shift to sympathy, at Gwindor's glare]

--I do apologize, my lord.

**Beren:** [low voice]  
He's in good company. A lot of my family's out there,  
too.

[Gwindor gives him a grateful look.]

**Celegorm:** [mock outrage]  
You do think well of yourself, don't you?

**Beren:**  
That wasn't what I -- Never mind.

**Curufin:**  
Besides, what if he did somehow survive? That would  
mean he was a slave in Angband, and would you really  
wish that on anyone you loved? Even if he did somehow  
escape, he'd be no more than one of those brainwashed  
wretches that tried to assassinate your father and  
uncle in past days. He wouldn't be allowed to enter  
the domain, let alone return to live here. --I'm  
dreadfully sorry, children, but it is the truth, and  
one must not live on delusions.

**Finduilas:**  
Oh, you're hateful! I wish you'd never come here.

[To Beren]

--Not you.

[She storms out.]

**Gwindor:** [with a stiff and formal nod]  
My lords.

[to Beren, with a deeper bow]

My lord.

[stalks out after Finduilas]

**Celegorm:** [leans back in his chair, grinning broadly]  
Young love . . . Sickenin', ain't it?

**Beren:**  
Oh -- I wouldn't say so.

[Enter, almost immediately upon his words. the Steward,  
along with the Ranger captain, several more Border  
Guards, and a number of other warriors of Nargothrond.]

**Steward:**  
Sir, it will be just a few more moments. I do  
apologize, on behalf of King Finrod, as I'm sure  
he would himself, were he here.

**Beren:**  
That's -- that's fine. I thought for a moment you'd  
decided I was here on false pretenses and were coming  
to arrest me.

**Steward:**  
Oh no, I'm so sorry. It's only that everyone wanted  
to see you -- all the lot from the Plains, for old  
time's sake.

**Beren:**  
Oh.

[rises and bows]

Gentles, I -- I am honored . . .

**Warrior:**  
The honor is entirely ours.

**Ranger:**  
Your father used to talk about you.

**Guard:**

It seems like we've known you forever.

**Beren:**

I -- I wish I could offer you something, instead of coming as a beggar. But I can't even share refreshments, because I'm afraid what I didn't finish, Huan has.

[Mysteriously on the other side of the room now, Huan grins and thumps his tail.]

**Captain:**

Well, you two didn't finish the wine, did you? That's all the refreshment one needs! Rinse out those bowls, men, we don't need cups.

[aside, to the Steward, as the rest crowd around to shake Beren's hand]

--Remember when all we had was our helmets?

**Steward:**

I'd almost succeeded in forgetting that. What it was like not to remember what sleeping in a bed was like, or what hot food tasted like, or -- holy stars -- hot water!

**Captain:**

Oh come, you know those were the days!

**Steward:**

Days of hell, you mean.

**Captain:**

Perhaps so. Perhaps so. But brightest the stars on the darkest nights. --You'll surely drink a toast to the Edain?

**Steward:**

Of course!

**Celegorm:** [annoyed]

This party seems to be happening without us, brother.

**Curufin:** [quietly]

Let the little people enjoy themselves.

[Beren is beginning to hyperventilate, barely staying this side of fight-or-flight]

**Captain:** [noticing]

Are you all right, milord?

**Beren:**

Sorry. I haven't been around this many people in weeks. I haven't been around this many people who weren't trying to kill me in years.

**Captain:**

Everyone! Move back! Give Lord Beren some breathing space! More manners, less enthusiasm, and we'll all have a more enjoyable time.

**Beren:** [quietly]

Thanks.

[The King's entourage enters, bodyguards, petitioners, clerks, and Orodreth all trailing along behind Finrod. Beren resolutely shoulders through the mob.]

**Orodreth:**

Grinding Ice, but I thought that session would never end! Why couldn't you just let it go till next season, Finrod?

**Finrod:** [weary frustration]

--And then next season it will be the season after, and then the season after that. I've gone that route before. I don't care what inspiration struck him, if he's going to drop everything and start working on plans for a giant orrery instead of the arbalest, then I first of all want to know about it and next I want to know who's lined up to replace him! Some things are more impor--

[stops dead]

Beor . . . ?

[his voice trails off]

**Beren:** [holding out the ring]

Sir. Your Majesty. My father once was of service to you, and -- this ring I have -- as proof -- though I know it isn't conclusive --

[he falters under the King's stare and falls silent]

**Finrod:** [ignoring the ring altogether]

You're Barahir's boy.

[He grips Beren's shoulders.]

-- You look just like him. My home -- is yours. What do you need?

### SCENE III

**Gower:**

To such a kingly welcome as, though well-deserved,  
lost Dorthonion's lord hath scarcely dared whereof  
to hope,  
Beren now is come, and here in royal rooms,  
and served  
by Finrod Felagund himself, he finds him rest, and  
dares to open  
(as only to one other e're before) the hard-defended  
chamber  
of his inmost thought.

--Hearing his mind, the Lord of Caves  
wondering greatly, considers all his words, spoken  
and unspoken,  
deeming him here a sign of fortune, or doom, nor that  
he raves  
when of his mad and main-wrought quest he tells--  
how broken  
never will his given vow and pledged love ere be,  
while Sun  
and Moon cross 'twixt heaven's stars and the Endless  
Sea.

[Finrod's apartments. Beren, somewhat less disheveled,  
reclines before the fireplace watching the flames. Finrod  
is seated across from him on the floor. A carafe is  
between them; each holds a wineglass. As the camera moves  
it is revealed that Huan, asleep, is serving as backrest  
for Beren.]

**Finrod:**

--More?

**Beren:**

Sure.

[Finrod pours. Beren holds up & admires before the light.  
When he speaks his words are slower than usual, but not  
slurred: exhaustion, not drink, has overtaken him.]



Thanks. --This is amazing stuff. I'd expect I'd be unconscious by now . . . I can't remember when I last had wine; it's got to be six or seven years, I guess. It's the strangest thing: I can barely move, I couldn't fight now to -- hah -- save my life, and -- you know, it doesn't bother me at all. My mind is perfectly clear. I think -- I think this must be what safety feels like. If I ever knew it before, I must have forgotten a long time ago . . . Where was I?

**Finrod:**

You were explaining why you remained behind when the last contingent of refugees departed.

**Beren:**

Oh, right. --You sure this isn't boring you?

[Finrod shakes his head]

Okay. --So then Da says, to him, "What did I tell you?" and Old Man Galthrín says, "You said Orcs, me lord -- you said nothin' about any Trolls!" -- I guess it isn't that funny. But it was at the point where there was practically nothing left for us to defend, and yet the less there was, the less we were willing to give it up. The land itself . . . was getting strange . . . along the edges, and farms just . . . disappeared, from time to time. Not burned, just gone, like old ruins. But the survivors wouldn't give up, and we couldn't abandon them. Finally -- and this had been going on for a long time, it didn't just come out of nowhere -- Ma said that Dorthonion was dying alive, that the only way to survive was to cut out what hadn't been too touched by blight and transplant it somewhere new. And Da said, "But the roots aren't dead yet, Em." And she just looked at him, and -- I knew.

**Finrod:**

Did you really think you could save anything by staying?

**Beren:**

Da was no fool. He wished me to go with her because he thought I'd be safer that way, but he told me that she'd be safer if I was there to look after her. Ma wanted me to stay with him because she figured we'd both be safer looking after each other, and she

didn't really think they were going to make it. We drew lots; I got Da's arrow.

**Finrod:**

What did you want?

**Beren:**

Dorthonion healed. --Not one of the options, though. That was, hm, two years after the Dagor Bragollach? Three? Dunno.

**Finrod:** [winces]

I'm sorry. Do you know if they made it through?

**Beren:** [shaking his head]

I've heard rumors now and then. Nothing reliable. I think -- I think -- I'm pretty sure she's dead, regardless. I -- she only left because of the younger children. Once she'd seen them safe in Brethil -- assuming there's anywhere safe in Middle-earth -- I think she would have come back. Or tried to. That was the plan, though she didn't tell Da that. Seven years, though . . . she was one hell of a fighter. I don't think they took her alive.

**Finrod:**

That sounds . . . plausible. I heard much of Emeldir from your father during the War. He used to say I'd be better served by her, because then I'd have wits too, as well as a wielded sword at my command.

**Beren:**

That sounds like Da.

[chuckles]

--When we still had the fort, one of the things I hated worst--? Repacking the hedge. Worse than mudding up the walls in winter. Doesn't matter how much you wrap your hands, you still end up looking like you lost a fight with a wildcat. Couple times I tried to pull rank on some of the younger kids: hey, I'm the chief's nephew, you're just a couple of thanes, you go shove thorns into the barrier, I'll stand guard on the tower. Besides, I'm a better aim. --Actually got away with it. Twice, I think.

**Finrod:**

Did they report you to her?

**Beren:**

No -- she found them at it and pried the truth out of them. Then she called me out.

**Finrod:**

Called you -- out? As in a duel?

**Beren:** [nods]

She said if I was remanding her directives and changing the order of battle, then that obviously meant I thought I ought to be in charge of the fort. And in that case she was going to answer the challenge, because she had accepted the charge from the Lords of Dorthonion and she wasn't yielding it to Man nor Orc.

**Finrod:**

What did you say?

**Beren:**

After "Ma, wait--" and various assorted exclamations of pain? Let's see -- "I'm sorry, Hathaldir; I'm sorry, Dagnir; everyone, I'm sorry for failing to give you the respect owed by your ruling House." Then I was allowed to stitch myself up. I thought she broke my collar-bone, but I could use my arm after a week, so it wasn't that bad.

**Finrod:**

Weren't you -- angry, with her?

**Beren:**

Oh, yeah. I was furious. After I stopped shaking I went down to yell at her --

**Finrod:** [incredulous]

--After you'd just just lost a sword-fight with her?

**Beren:**

Why do you think that's funny? Something else would have come up and we wouldn't have gotten it out of the way. And there she was, doing my work, with her hands all torn up from the hawthorn branches. So I just started helping her as best I could. And after a bit I asked her why she didn't just make me do it, instead of busting my shoulder in front of everybody. And she said, "You can't make people do anything, kid. The best you can do is show them how to want it." So then I said, "But when you tell people what

to do, they do it." And she says, "That's because they want to." And I said something stupid, and she came right back with, "Well, if they want to not have their heads broken more than they want not to do their jobs, then they're still wanting it, right?"

[sighs]

So then I asked why she didn't make someone else want to do this for her, and she just gives me this Look. And then she said, "You never, ever, ask someone to do what you're not willing to accept yourself." And I was too dumb to stop, and I said, "But aren't you too important to do this?" And she points over at the gatepost next to us, and she says, "Your grandfather pulled that lodgepole out of the forest when the last one was hit by lightning, because it was tall, but not too broad, straight, sound but not too heavy, and of a bore with the last one. That's what it is to be chosen leader. Occasional lightning and all. Or Orcs, as the case may be."

[Huan stirs and whines sleepily, setting his head down with a grumble]

And then about a fortnight after my Da comes home, and my uncle's not with him.

**Finrod:**

Did you ever think of going after her?

**Beren:**

I didn't know where to start. And there were still people who wouldn't -- or couldn't, by then -- leave. I thought -- I thought she'd try to find her way back, I left runes and checked all our haunts on my rounds, but . . .

**Finrod:**

Why did you leave?

**Beren:**

It wasn't a conscious decision at that point. I hadn't slept in days, they were everywhere beating the woods for me, all my permanent camps were staked out, the only thing I could do was keep moving . . . why do the deer move when there's famine and the hounds are after them? Aside from natural disinclination -- which some people would disallow as a valid motive --

I suppose -- in so far as I was capable of any kind of rational judgment -- that I realized that being run to earth, cut down and butchered by Orcs wasn't going to serve anyone's purpose but Morgoth's. I think -- I don't think I was completely sane. Not as men mean it. There was a clarity to it, but not meaning. I was, the world was, they were. I was where they were not. -- Far past the point where any sense of duty or hope remains.

**Finrod:** [very softly]

That point you reach when you're so tired that you just want to lie down and stop-- but the body drags on like a hound on a leash until flesh fails and falls, and then the spirit burns to madness until somehow one cannot bear its pangs and staggers on again.

**Beren:** [suddenly alert]

You . . . do understand . . . ?

**Finrod:**

We have no songs that celebrate it. We endured. That's all. You must have heard -- the legends. The Grinding Ice, the Crossing -- words, for something beyond words.

**Beren:**

'Beyond words' . . . where there are no words for it, there is only -- itself.

**Finrod:** [lost]

Think of the worst night of the harshest winter you've ever known: to me that would, I judge, be as a brisk morning for you. The Sun is always present, even when we cannot see her, and the world is always warmed. But in the Night Without Stars we had nothing -- only endless, crushing, devouring cold, until all that is left is loathing for one's self, for very life itself . . . when the only light is that of other souls . . .

[Silently Beren props himself forward and fills the King's glass once more. Finrod drinks it off in one go.]

**Finrod:**

I'm sorry. This is gloomy hospitality.

**Beren:**

More wine?

**Finrod:**

Please.

[Beren refills both glasses and slides back against Huan.  
More brightly:]

Is it true that the price on your head was equal to  
that that's been set for my cousin Fingon?

[Beren shrugs]

**Beren:**

That's what they said. Since nobody ever collected  
on it, it's hard to say if that was just talk, or if  
they would have actually paid out.

**Finrod:**

That's rather a signal honor, to be counted the equal  
of a Noldorin King.

**Beren:** [manic grin]

I should have thought of that in Doriath. That might  
have impressed His Nibs a bit more than -- 'Um, hey,  
my relatives were heroes.'

**Finrod:** [troubled]

He wants you dead, you realize that.

**Beren:**

Oh yeah. -- He said as much. In some detail, too.

[shakes head]

Not that I really blame him -- I mean, look at it  
from their point of view: the King's daughter of  
Doriath shows up one fine evening with this  
inarticulate loser in ripped camouflage and says,  
"Guess what! I've found my soulmate, Dad!" I knew  
it was a bad idea. And then I tried talking and I  
should have just kept my mouth shut. It was pretty  
funny, actually, at least if you weren't us.

**Finrod:**

You're too harsh on yourself.

**Beren:**

Oh, you weren't there. It was bad. -- It was worse, actually.

**Finrod:**

But surely your lineage, your legend, your House's service with my own, all would count for something, even with Elu. I've been a friend of his for ages -- he's paranoid, but with perfectly good reasons, and he's not blind.

**Beren:** [shakes head]

Like I said, it was doomed from the beginning. And really, his reaction was entirely justified, and more than he knew. Yeah, lords of Dorthonion and all -- but that was a long time ago. I'm not the same person I was.

[points]

See that arch up there? I could get up there, and no one would be able to see me until it was too late, because I could cover the doorway without offering a target. And if I could, someone else could do it. Even though I know I'm safe here, I'm aware of that. Not like I could do anything about it just now, but I can't help noticing. But it isn't just that. I couldn't talk for months, even after I got to Doriath. I was not . . . entirely sane. I -- don't think she told them that. In fact I'm sure of that. So, hoo boy, it could have been worse. --Cheerful thought, huh?

**Finrod:** [seriously]

You'll have to reconcile with him after this is all over, you know. You can't take Luthien back to Dorthonion, and even if you both come here to live, it isn't as though you can legitimately cut off all contact with her family, even if Luthien's angry enough to do so. And then there are political connections, too. I have to think of them, Beren.

**Beren:** [deadpan]

Well, you've already convinced me of the need to apologize and be nice to your two noble kinsman, so we can enlist them into going along with the program until we get to Thingol's with the jewel, and since the other half of that plan hinges on you talking him into being gracious enough to then make

a gift of it, thereby keeping the Sons of Feanor happy, and not homicidal, (and incidentally at the same time delivering the most staggering insult possible to them which we won't tell them about, and making up for a couple few centuries of general oneryness and rude behavior to Thingol on their part) -- yeah, sure. I can probably manage not to mortally offend Tinuviel's father next time. So long as you do the talking, I'll do the keeping-quiet.

**Finrod:** [more serious and admonishing]  
And you will do this, will you not? All of it?

**Beren:** [still deadpan]  
You don't think I'd be crazy enough to jeopardize my whole life because the Sons of Feanor are a pair of arrogant bastards who for some unknown reason took an instant disliking to me?

[pause]

**Finrod:** [awkwardly]  
I have -- hm -- noticed a certain -- er, how can I put this tactfully? -- intransigence in your people, over the years.

**Beren:** [grins]  
--Stubborn as rocks, that's us. Goes with the territory, I guess.

**Finrod:** [fascinated]  
Really? Do you think that's it? Something to do with geography?

**Beren:** [confused]  
I don't -- I don't know. Maybe. I was just using a figure of speech.

**Finrod:** [musing]  
--Haleth was like that. Wonderful child, but one had to be careful not to agree with her too closely, or she'd take it all wrong.

**Beren:**  
I'm not that bad. I don't think. --Hey! You knew Haleth? As in the Haleth? Lady Haleth of Brethil?



**Finrod:**

Yes, she was having a run-in with Elwe, as it happens. Or Elu, as he calls himself now. Life's funny like that.

**Beren:**

It makes a little more sense if he's like the rest of the crew, but I never understood why she wouldn't take up Lord Caranthir's offer of shelter.

**Finrod:** [drily]

Obviously you've never met Caranthir.

**Beren:**

? . . . ?

**Finrod:**

--Let me put it this way: I don't cross him. --Ever. No, that wasn't the incident I was referring to. Why? Because Haleth was an intelligent and perceptive young woman and was not fooled by Caranthir's charming ways and words. Ever wonder why they showed up a week late, after the lord of the land was killed, and the heir, when they were practically in his backyard? Caranthir knew them for efficient fighters, and wanted them grateful, and leaderless. And he has not, so far as I can tell, the slightest compunction about using mortal Men as a screen for his more -- valued, shall we say -- troops. --I don't know that for a fact, of course. That's just my reading of the events. And the way he spits when he hears her name. No, I was referring to the -- tenor, of her exchanges with Elu over that unused property of his. It was a rather, er, heated crossfire to be caught in. A little tact might have made a great difference.

**Beren:** [recognizing the hint]

There was . . . not really . . . it was too late for tact by then. --Doomed from the beginning, I'm afraid. Everything I said made it worse.

**Finrod:**

Well.

[sighs]

I can probably patch things up. It still might even be wiser for us to go back and talk to Elu and to Melian -- you did say she was more favorably disposed

towards your suit? -- and try to put this nonsense out of the way.

**Beren:**

Tinuviel said that. I -- couldn't tell. Maybe. She didn't look like she wanted me eviscerated, but I wouldn't say she looked happy. But it doesn't matter. I can't go back without it. I'm sorry. I can't.

**Finrod:**

I'll not press you again on that, then.

[blandly]

Are you sure you're not related to the Haladin?

**Beren:** [grins wryly]

Not as far as I know. --I still can't believe you knew her. Wow. She lived almost as long ago as Beor. That's--

**Finrod:** [worried look]

Beren -- I knew Beor.

[pause]

**Beren:**

I know. --I know.

**Finrod:**

But do you understand, Beren? Luthien, whom you charmingly persist in calling, not inappropriately, Tinuviel, but which I cannot imagine endeared you further to Elu, had already seen Ages before your ancestor was ever born. You think me ancient beyond belief -- yet she is even older, though you see no difference in our years. Can you begin to comprehend how strange it is to us, to think of one of us finding her match in a mortal Man, whose entire life is over and forgotten even, in the passing of one of our measures of time?

[Beren looks at him in distress; Huan grumbles softly in his sleep.]

Even though, since our Return, time has fled faster even for us, the urgencies of war making us care for the coming of winter and the haste of summer, for messages and meetings and councils marked by the passing of days, and hours even, and not weeks --

still it is not for us as it is for you, and cannot ever be so. How can you begin to measure the compass of her thought, who saw the first Sunrise of the world, when you have not lived a single twelve-twelvemonths' span?

[Finrod's expression is sympathetic but urgent, attempting to convey his fears. Beren turns away abruptly and stares fiercely into the flames.]

**Beren:** [low but clear]

I heard a story . . . long ago, when I was a boy, but it was there everyday somehow, always behind the surface . . . about one who came out of darkness, to where we lay dull and almost speechless, and gave us words, and thoughts, and the knowledge of ourselves, and song.

[Finrod bows his head and is silent.]

--So Tinuvriel came to me, when I was lost and alone and almost without name, and I can no more hold nor measure her than I could measure the stars of the Burning Brier, or take the Sickle in my hand, but without her I am blind and deaf and dumb, and I could no more live without her light than theirs!

[stops himself]

Forgive me -- I spoke without thinking. Again.

**Finrod:** [very quietly]

Forgive -- that you have learned so well? --No, Beren, I will not question you in this again, nor insult you, nor her through you. I thought I had seen all things, known all that mortal or Elven mind might do, and here is a new song that I've never heard before -- but that does not make it an ill one. More wine? Or shall I take your glass?

**Beren:**

Thanks.

[frowning]

It seems strange -- wrong, somehow. You shouldn't be waiting on me. --Sir. Sire. I'm sorry. I do know the right way to behave.

**Finrod:**

--Please. I should hope that if I am a good enough host to put you at your ease, that I would not then be offended by your informality! And this is hardly burdensome service, my friend.

**Beren:** [with a wry smile]

--Friend.

**Finrod:**

--If I may presume so much.

**Beren:** [softly]

I'd hoped to meet with courtesy. No more than that. With duty, and civility at best -- at least a formal welcome, the bare necessities, a guide along the beginning of my road. I dared presume no more -- I'm not my father, nor my uncle, I've done nothing for you or yours. I never thought -- to find -- a home.

**Finrod:**

Nothing? Beren, you, alone, have done more in your short lifetime than many Elves have accomplished in a hundred years. Your efforts against Morgoth, tying up so many of his forces, for so long, spreading such fear among them and setting such example for the enslaved and oppressed -- not for your people alone, though you might not have realized that fact, but for every creature friendly to the Light!

[Beren cannot quite believe this is not mockery. Finrod's expression convinces him otherwise.]

**Beren:**

I should give you back your ring, Sire.

**Finrod:**

Keep it for your children. The debt I owe your family is beyond measure.

**Beren:** [raises eyebrows]

--Optimist.

**Finrod:** [earnestly]

With you here to inspire, to lend your ability and legend to the cause, what will we not be able to achieve? We are stultifying here, Barahirion, to a degree you might not believe, seeing our rigorous defenses -- but that's all we've done since the last

engagement ended. Small battles, little skirmishes, no one dares to do more. Not us, not Morgoth. But little by little, he accomplishes by sheer inertia, and we are defeated without a blow, because others fall to him.

[becoming more agitated]

Oh, we plan -- we prepare -- but what have we actually done? I can't even get a weapons development program to fulfillment, not even after Dagor Bragollach -- you'd think that people would see the need, see that he surely won't be resting on the successes of his biomechanoids and chemical weapons. I shudder to think of what he must be coming up with while we waffle over the symbolism and cosmology of warhead shapes, and squander the resources set aside on designing the world's largest planetarium!

**Beren:**

Er . . .

**Finrod:** [in full rant]

Oh, I know all the arguments -- that a perfect design, in perfection of harmony with the heavens, cannot but ensure victory; that the disregard of celestial balances is what doomed us before, that tiny inefficiencies in the cosmic pattern create massive chaos down the line. Grinding Ice! do I ever know them. And know a smokescreen when I see one, too. We lost too many, last time. It isn't the people who were there who cannot bear to think of renewing the attack: it's the ones left behind. We survivors would go back in an instant, and not stand around waiting for him to come out, if we had the means.

[He grips Beren's shoulder]

We will be rekindled with your presence, and renew the battle, and my people will see what they have been blind to all these years in ease and hiding, and together we will accomplish such deeds for the Light as Arda will never forget. --But that's for later: you're exhausted. We'll speak more when you've rested. --Good night, Huan. Rest well, my friend.

**Beren:** [thumping Huan's neck]

Won't Celegorm be upset if he discovers his dog is here?

**Finrod:**

Undoubtedly, if he notices. Huan roams most of the time as he pleases. He's older than I am, and quite capable of deciding what he should do without my say-so.

**Beren:**

But he still belongs to Celegorm . . . ?

**Finrod:**

So Celegorm thinks. Huan's his own dog, so far as I can tell, and does pretty much as he thinks best. --In that he is not unlike a certain Man named Balan I once knew, and his descendants. Remind me to tell you about the time your many-times-great-grandfather forcibly convinced me that accelerated healing is not always an adequate substitute for cautery and stitches.

**Beren:**

What happened?

**Finrod:** [raising an eyebrow]

A skirmish, an Orc-scimitar, a long journey still to take, and no time for foolishness like rest or medical attention. I was not entirely sane at the time, either. Are you sure you'll be comfortable? Just on the tile like that?

**Beren:**

Oh, yeah. --It's flat. And dry. --And there's no down to fall, either. So long as Huan doesn't stand up, I'm good -- and probably even then. I don't know about not having my weapons to hand, though.

**Finrod:**

Would you be more comfortable with your gear? I can send for it --

**Beren:** [shrugs]

I don't want to make trouble.

**Finrod:** [mildly]

I am in charge here: it won't be a difficulty. --It would be a strange thing indeed if I could not trust the son of Barahir of the house of Beor in my presence armed, or on my doorstep! I'll fetch your weapons for you.

**Beren:**

No, please -- it's not worth the trouble. I'll be fine.

[smiles]

That'd make your two noble kinsmen shake their heads, I bet. I can just imagine what they'd say.

**Finrod:**

That I give such trust to mortal men, or to your preference for sleeping under arms?

**Beren:**

Both. Either.

**Finrod:**

They've forgotten what it was to live in the field -- not that they ever truly did without the comforts of home when they could, you'll hear some -- interesting -- stories if you listen closely around here -- but they're also annoyed that you don't seem to be sufficiently impressed by the Eldar.

**Beren:**

I--

[bites his lip in frustration]

Sir, I'm sorry, I mean no insult to Nargothrond, or to your folk. It -- it's beyond words here, for one. For another -- I've grown up all my life hearing of the greatness of Felagund's court, and now I'm here, and I'm amazed. And for last -- I've hiked here from Doriath. I'm starved as much for shelter and kindness as a stray hound for his meat. More than that -- way beyond my ability to take in right now.

**Finrod:**

Do you think I don't know all that? Don't let it trouble you. I at least remember what it is to sleep in a swamp, in one's armor, grateful for a few inches of water to hide in under a burning sky, and kind hands holding one out of it as one's wounds are bandaged. Nargothrond is not insulted by your presence, Beor.

**Beren:** [with a worried look]

I'm -- I'm not . . .

**Finrod:**

I know you are yourself alone, (however confused you might have left some today.) I meant it in the general, not the specific sense.

**Beren:**

But -- I've given you you no vow of fealty, sire.

**Finrod:**

Ah, the word is still confused in the translation. Funny how such things persist.

**Beren:**

I'm afraid I don't understand . . . ?

**Finrod:**

You translate it "vassal", and I am not entirely sure how mortals understand the word. As we use it, it is more, and less, and other, than a contract of law, or a bargain of power. It means . . . "one in whom one has complete reliance," -- one who can be entrusted with a great work and more, needing no supervision. The words are but recognition of what is. Vows will not hold one to duty in the end. And it means, as well, the other half: that the trust is mutual, that the duty is given but for duty, and that faith will be kept in turn.

[he looks away, then meets Beren's eyes]

Ultimately -- it means, when all else fails, that one may send a vassal to his death, but never without good reason. Never from pride, or willful ignorance, or carelessness. Never a duty given without regard for the servant's honor. -- Lest in turn the liege turn traitor, and the bond be broken. But you know this already, son of Barahir and Emeldir, brother's son of Bregolas, lord of Dorthonion, -- whether you name it or not.

[long pause]

**Beren:**

I hope I will earn this trust, then.

**Finrod:**

You will never fail me, my friend.

**Beren:**

Is that your -- your Foresight, sir?



**Finrod:**

No. That's merely judgment. Now take your rest:  
I must excuse myself for preparation of our plans --  
which means, unfortunately, as many meetings as it  
does maps!

#### SCENE IV

**Gower:**

In hope most high of endlessly-awaited strife,  
long mused, longtime abetted, longer dreamed of  
yet,

King Felagund renews his ancient works, recalls  
to life

long-stilled ambitions, to o'erthrow and set  
in one fell stroke great Morgoth's pivot-hold,  
back from its strangling press in sortie bold.  
Like a master-painter he works over his design,  
now adding here a stroke, now there a line,  
now at a sudden inspiration swift-casting off  
and in one grand wide-sweeping unguessed move,  
turns inside out or back to front what was,  
building in space, in time, in Fate unshaped,  
to cause

the End long-purposed far beyond the Seas.

Meanwhile Beren the traveller, rested of travails,  
finding himself a stranger in uncharted realm,  
though air,

essays his own adventures, where for guide hath  
only tales;

(but never was there journey yet he feared to dare,  
in the Dark Wood, nor yet the Mountains of Despair.)

[A solar (or what would be a solar were it not underground) -- that is to say, a large, pleasant, brightly lit dining chamber/living room/meeting space off the main assembly hall, where some are taking breakfast, some playing quiet music some chatting; but there is a nervous undercurrent that manifests in cheerfulness.]

[Finrod's Steward enters. Beren, accompanying him, halts before continuing and checks "both ways" to be sure that all avenues of ambush are clear, then steps quickly through. This gets some Looks. He is washed and dressed in clothes clearly not his own, both for quality and fit, and appears less barbaric, though the results of getting

pine pitch in one's hair are not disguisable. More at odds with the tailoring is the fact that he has limited his accouterments to some dozen sidearms, belted openly over his garments. The overall effect is rather unique.]

**Steward:**

I'm so sorry we could not fit you better -- anything short enough was too narrow across the shoulders, and the alterations were rather hasty.

**Beren:**

Please -- you don't need to keep apologizing, sir.

**Steward:**

You gave us quite a turn, not being there.

**Beren:**

Sorry. I woke up and found I couldn't sleep where I was any more.

**Steward:**

On the floor?

**Beren:**

Under a roof. The arch was more -- familiar.

**Steward:**

Ah. I -- see.

**Beren:** [smiling]

You don't. --From above, it's like a tree. The ceiling is too high for a house, but too low for the sky. My caves were never chosen for their spaciousness.

**Steward:**

--Indeed.

[moving on]

There is a variety of foodstuffs available which will satisfy your dietary requirements, but I fear they are not labeled nor in any way distinguished in their arrangement at the buffet--

**Beren:**

Again, I'd rather you didn't worry so much about my needs. I certainly don't.

**Steward:**

Are you sure? I can ask the chefs to make up a list--

**Beren:** [innocently]

Or -- I could come forage around in the kitchens,  
if that would be easier.

**Steward:**

Stars, no!

[drily]

You're remarkably cheerful, milord.

**Beren:** [smiling broadly]

Well, I've been awake for one-twelfth of the day  
already, and nobody's tried to kill me yet.

**Steward:**

That is, I concur, an excellent reason to be pleased  
with life.

[He shows the way to the 'groaning board' which holds  
is an array of foodstuffs so varied and plentiful  
that Beren cannot even be surprised at it, any more  
than one is surprised at the number of colored leaves  
in autumn. He fills a golden plate with fruit and  
pastries and cheeses -- and also fills his sleeves  
and sash with several kinds of flatbreads. The Steward  
is too polite to say anything, but he does notice.]

**Steward:** [shaking his head]

It seems that we have run out of glasses already --  
I will have to speak to the staff. I'll fetch yours:  
what would you prefer, Lord Beren? We have spring  
water, well water, rainwater of different hours'  
vintage; there is also juice, in the modern fashion,  
both corrantine and grape, and this harvest's damson,  
which I personally recommend. There, is as well,  
watered wine, in any combination of wines or waters,  
in the old Valinorean mode, if you'd rather the  
traditional instead.

**Beren:**

Whatever you have is fine.

**Steward:**

All together--?

**Beren:**

No -- I meant -- whatever was most convenient. You decide.

**Steward**

You really don't care at all, milord?

**Beren:** [encouraging]

That's right.

**Steward:**

I do understand, young sir -- but I wish that I did not. May it please you, choose whichever seat you would: we do not stand on ceremony in the Hall of Hours, and everyone is free to take what place the soul desires. I'll return with your beverage shortly. I trust I may presume upon your forbearance to delay long enough to chastise the kitcheners for their duties' neglect.

**Beren:** [graciously]

You may.

[The Steward bows and leaves him with a somewhat ironic-rueful expression. Beren tries to sit at the table, but cannot get comfortable in the chair: after several attempts to reposition it to where he is able to relax, he shakes his head. Laughing at himself, he picks up his plate, circling the room until he finds a convenient alcove and perches there. He does not seem to be aware of the stares which follow him.]

[Someone has forgotten a goblet on the ledge, which is made of crystal and has for decoration a fully-sculpted version of the emblem on his ring, the two gold serpents winding up the stem and the gold wreath encircling the lip of the glass, but all the texture is completely covered in the clear shell blown around the ornamentation. Beren picks it up and examines it, astonished by the fineness of detail and its fragility. The Captain approaches and leans over with a most conspiratorial manner.]

**Captain:** [manic whisper]

--It's called "glass." One drinks from it. We make it out of sand.

[Beren gives him an alarmed look; he maintains the earnest expression for a long moment, then dissolves

into snickers, cuffing Beren on the arm.]

Did he really say that? About furniture?

[Beren nods, the laughter becoming contagious]

They've been going around repeating it as though they think it makes them sound clever. --What a pair of gits!

**Beren:** [looks around, then whispers confidentially:]  
Don't tell anyone, but I've forgotten how to use the stuff. I couldn't find a way to make the table-chair thing work.

**Captain:**  
What, those things? They're designed that way, so you won't sit there and clutter up the area all day.  
-- No, I don't know. That's just my theory. One of Celebrimbor's early projects -- gorgeous as water, but as comfortable as a pile of rocks.

**Beren:**  
Less, I thought.

**Captain:**  
You didn't think people were sitting on hassocks and rugs and column footings over there to be artistic and create an elegant tableau, did you? --Though around here one never knows . . .

**Steward:**  
There you are, milord. I thought you'd vanished again.

**Beren:** [soberly]  
No openwork vaulting in here.

**Steward:** [deadpan]  
I am certain some could be arranged, but probably not before lunchtime, I'm afraid. --Is that an empty glass beside you? Let me take that back and show them. Here is yours, milord. I brought the damson juice; I trust that it meets with your approval.

**Beren:** [tasting]  
It does. It's excellent. Thank you.

[sets the goblet aside and takes out his eating-knife.]

If you will forgive me, sirs -- I'll eat in your presence, for as Da always said, if people will drop by at mealtime they'd best not expect me to stop for them -- but I would no less than my folks that you stay, and join me if you'd like, for my mother's table never lacked another place.

[He offers choice of what's on his plate: they are visibly moved.]

**Captain:**

No, I've ended my fast hours ago. But I thank you, Lord Beren.

[The Steward only shakes his head. Beren begins to cut the little Lady-apples into halves but halts when an imposingly-regal individual approaches them, and his two companions at once come to attention.]

**Captain:** [salutes]

Your Highness.

**Steward:**

My lord Barahirion, may I make known to you our good King's brother and coordinator of the realm's defenses--

**Beren:** [putting aside his meal]

--Prince Orodreth--

**Orodreth:**

Please -- do not rise. I've no wish to impose upon you after the rigors of your journey! I only wished to say, at outset -- how much -- without delay, that is -- that I admire your many valiant efforts in the field and have always hoped and prayed for your continued success -- that is, when of course report more than insubstantial rumor has arrived, since the course of reliable news from out of the North has naturally dwindled in past years -- Not that I am blaming you in the least, my lord Beren, far to the contrary -- Rather I wanted to express my sorrow for your grievous losses -- and to express my gratitude for your own good works, on behalf of all our peoples. -- I also -- as a father -- would like to thank you for your kind indulgence to my daughter's fancies -- though, in truth, were it not for the exigencies of my job I'd have likely been asking for your autograph the other day as well! Her fiancée

hasn't stopped talking about you these last two days either -- prepare yourself for much curiosity, my lord. Nargothrond wishes to thank our hereditary champion -- not least impressive for the fact of your mortality--

**Beren:** [as Orodreth appears to be waiting for something, uncertainly]  
--You're welcome?

**Orodreth:** [a touch relieved]  
You do me honor, Lord of Dorthonion. I trust I'll see you presently in council?

**Beren:**  
You know more than I do, I'm afraid, Your Highness.

**Orodreth:**  
Ah. I did not mean to put you on the spot. milord.  
Now if you'll forgive me, I've got to run--

[Apparently by accident, the Steward half turns to bow in reply and simultaneously tread on the Ranger Captain's boot as Orodreth takes off.]

**Beren:** [staring after Orodreth]  
Was that supposed to make sense? Or am I still asleep? Which I gather from his words lasted rather more than one night, and I'm not surprised at all. That's gotta have been good for another three years.

**Captain:** [lowered voice]  
He lost his nerve. Left our final position of defense to Morgoth's top commander after a battle significant in its utter absence, and fled back to Nargothrond with the gates wide open. The only thing he didn't do was wait to give Sauron the grand tour of the place.

**Steward:**  
You haven't talked to the people who came back from there. It was something beyond reason, something which sent everyone there into the same funk as the Night of Darkness. I doubt that anyone could have held out longer than the Prince did.

**Captain:**  
Do you think the King would have neglected to at least tear the place down before he left? Not left it standing there for our Enemy to use, and give him for

free the best terrain in the region! -- All right,  
I'll stop.

[to Beren]

But that's what's behind his apology, lad. After Tol  
Sirion fell, the Enemy's troops were pretty much able  
to plough through us wherever they wanted, having a  
fine base of operations to work out from, and we were  
no longer able to control them in Beleriand at all.

**Beren:**

Oh. --Ohhh . . .

[frowning as he begins to understand, and put many things  
together. Perhaps he would ask more, or say something,  
but Celebrimbor son of Curufin approaches, wearing a  
somewhat distracted expression. (The actual source of his  
apparent rudeness is as much inventorly preoccupation as  
awareness of his own exalted heritage, but this would not  
be obvious at once to a bystander.)]

**Celebrimbor:**

Has any of you lot seen my glass? I think I forgot  
it over here . . .

[The Steward hands it to him with a Look.]

I know, I know, I'm sorry -- I was writing in my  
tablets and I've only got two hands --

[checks]

I say, is that the famous Ring?

[He seizes Beren's wrist and yanks his hand up for a  
better look, apple and all,

leaving Beren staring in astonishment at the eating-  
knife in his right.]

**Beren:**

Ah -- excuse me?

[The grandson of Feanor looks at him with mild surprise  
as though not anticipating him capable of speech. As the  
expectant pause extends and the other Elves look at him  
with disapproval, Celebrimbor blushes in realization of  
his error and clears his throat, releasing Beren's arm  
and bowing formally.]



**Celebrimbor:**

I was wondering -- might I examine it more closely, please? I've a technical interest in the metal arts.

[Wordlessly Beren removes the Ring and passes it to him.]

**Celebrimbor:**

Amazing, how such a trinket can summon kings to do one's bidding...

[When done he returns it and is about to leave, but notices the Looks he is getting from the Steward and the Captain.]

Thank you, er, Barahirion.

[moves away to the far side of the solar and his friends.]

**Beren:** [amazed]

It's like I didn't even exist.

**Steward:**

Don't let it trouble you, milord.

**Captain:**

They're all like that -- Shiplords. Unless you can do something for them.

**Steward:**

Actually, Lord Celebrimbor is not the worst.

**Captain:**

It would be very difficult to be worse than his father.

**Steward:**

His uncle is always civil, at least to me.

**Captain:**

That's because you're the one in charge of organizing hunts. Don't flatter yourself: Celegorm is not a nice fellow. My men served as beaters for him once. Do not ever get between him and the game. It's always accidental, he always apologizes for nearly running you over -- and then he does it again.

**Beren:**

That was Curufin's son? I wouldn't have guessed.

**Captain:**

You had something he wanted.

**Beren:**

There aren't any more of them around here, are there?  
I've promised to be civil to them, and I'd like to be  
prepared . . .

**Steward:**

No, that's the lot of them. But they have a sizable  
retinue here.

**Captain:**

In other words, don't assume that anyone you meet is  
not a partisan of theirs.

[grim chuckle]

Heh. I wonder if the Master-Smith realizes how close  
he came to having his arm stabbed just now?

**Beren:**

Oh no, I wouldn't have struck: there weren't any  
threat indications from him.

But it was kind of a dumb thing for him to do. --Are  
they all that biased against us?

**Steward:**

Well, there's Caranthir, but . . .

**Beren:**

--So I've heard.

**Steward:**

Maedhros isn't nearly as bad as the rest, and Maglor  
is fairly decent too.

**Captain:**

They've still got attitude problems taller than  
Taniquetil.

**Steward:**

There's no call for blasphemy. And we'd have no  
cavalry without them.

**Captain:**

True. I am very grateful for the cavalry. I don't  
think they care much one way or the other about  
mortals, though.

[leadingly]

Oh, and don't forget Amrod-and-Amras . . .

**Steward:** [drily]

That, certainly, would be impossible.

**Beren:**

I'm afraid I don't remember my kin speaking anything of them--?

**Captain:**

They probably wouldn't. Hardly anyone ever sees . . . them. -- That is rather the point, isn't it?

[the Steward grimaces. Beren looks from one to the other of them.]

Oh, go on, tell him. We don't need to worry about impressing The Beoring, of all mortals!

**Steward:** [sighing]

The story -- and recollect at all times that this is no more than a story -- is that Amrod was forgotten aboard the stolen ships when Feanor decided to burn them. You know of all that miserable affair from your history, I presume? Or whilst certainly not not all, at least the general outline?

[Beren nods.]

Moreover, your cousins were born at a birth, as I recollect--

[Beren nods again]

--and I never had the slightest trouble telling them apart, milord. Now the first we knew of that ship business happened when King Finrod began scouting out the reaches of Angband to aid in the strategies of the siege, and sent to ask permission of the lords of the North to traverse their lands with surveyors.

I was received civilly enough, and gave my speech before Lord Amrod, who listened and asked questions and then said he'd have to consult with his brother, who was out hunting, and would undoubtedly want to speak with me himself on the morrow when he got back. So they put me up at the lodge and the next morning I asked if I could see Lord Amrod again, because

there were a few points I had perhaps not laid out as well as I might and wished to clarify.

"No," their steward replied, "he's Amras today." I was sure I must have misunderstood and spent breakfast wondering what I had misheard him say, when I was summoned again to the lords' hall, and there was -- so far as I could tell -- the same individual with whom I'd spoken previously. Yet his manner, his dress, his bearing, his voice even, were all different. They introduced me to him as Lord Amras, and he insisted that I tell him all my message as I had told his brother. I trust I do not flatter myself when I say that I maintained my composure throughout, but I must confess that I was not prepared for the explanation which I received after from my counterpart in the lords' household, under some considerable pressure.

**Captain:**

And which you said you weren't sure you believed, either.

**Steward:**

Do you want to tell the story? --All right, then. Apparently, and this is only hearsay, but it fits the evidence, and subsequent reports -- when Amras died on board the ship, his soul was unwilling to return to the punishment that awaits us who rebelled, and his brother was unwilling to let him drift alone and houseless on this Shore. So, being twin and so much the same in flesh and spirit, Amrod gave way to his slain sibling and yielded his body to the other's will. But Amras, no less without precedent, and grateful for the gift, cedes back control in fair measure and with perfect accord, and so they both walk -- or ride to hunt, more like -- in Middle-earth.

[Beren is speechless]

Now, either this is simply a bizarre joke, which the youngest sons of Feanor and their household enjoy perpetrating on their more distant relations, and they both live but choose not to appear together before outsiders; or it is the case that the youngest son was killed, and his surviving twin went mad and now plays his part, which would explain why I could

not tell any difference in 'their' presences; or --  
it is true as I was told.

**Captain:** [snickers]

Or -- it's true -- and they're both mad. Equally  
plausible, eh?

**Steward:**

Don't laugh: it isn't funny, it's horrible and tragic.

**Captain:**

It's horrible and funny, Edrahil. It adds that last  
little missing touch of the surreal to the whole  
grisly mess.

[starts laughing again]

"He's Amras today" --sweet Cuivinen!

**Beren:** [appalled]

Can that happen?

[The Steward raises his eyebrows and shrugs.]

**Steward:**

Dark and powerful spirits have been known to seize  
the careless and unwary Seeker, or exchange recently  
slain dwellings with a living. But that's uncommon, at  
least among our people, and involuntary. I've never  
heard of such a willful sharing of one home between  
two Eldar souls -- yet I can't think why it should be  
impossible.

**Beren:**

I think -- I think that's the scariest thing I've  
ever heard.

**Captain:**

I keep telling myself, every time it comes up, that  
it's really rather moving to think of such devotion  
and unselfishness and brotherly love. So far it hasn't  
worked very well.

**Beren:** [still rather shaken]

That beats every ghost story I know. If my cousins  
had heard about that when we were kids, I would never  
have slept a night for the nightmares. . . . But you  
know, what would be worse, is if you thought it was  
normal.

**Captain:** [blandly]  
Well, actually --

[The Steward rolls his eyes resignedly; they are broken in upon by the arrival of several of "the lot from the Plains"]

**Captain:**  
Oh, sound the retreat, here comes the horde!

[He gestures them down]

Serried rank, there. Don't crowd our guest.

[Suddenly tongue-tied, they look at Beren in embarrassment. Seated in the arched alcove, flanked by an Elven-lord and an Elven-warrior, with petitioners kneeling before him, he looks rather like a primitive image of Orome, though he would never guess it himself.]

**Ranger:** [awkwardly]  
My lord Barahirion--

[gasps, enthusiastic]

--Do you have "Dark Battle" there?

**Beren:** [setting his hand on the hilt of his sword, surprised]  
Yes -- How do you know ...?

**Captain:**  
Legend, lad, legend -- get used to it.

**Ranger:**  
Might we see the blade?

**Beren:** [uncertain, looking to the Captain]  
I've peace-bonded it -- Sir?

**Captain:**  
I'll stand warrant.

[grins at the younger Ranger]

You're less likely to do accidental damage than some people I could mention here.

[Beren unlashes the hilt from the scabbard and offers it correctly, hiltwise, to the Elven-warrior first, who hefts it, nods, and passes it on to his subordinate.]

**Ranger:** [awed]  
'Dark Battle' --!

**Beren:** [plaintively]  
It's just a sword. The balance is good and the span suits my height. There's no aura to it that I can tell, no runes woven into it.

**Steward:**  
It is Dwarf-work, though. It came from here, like your armor. Beor's eldest son chose that blade; the hauberk was a gift to your great-grandfather Boromir when the grant of Ladros was made. Prince Aegnor said at the time that he'd gladly give even more to anyone willing to take that damp, drizzling wasteland off his hands, and that anyone who was going to defend it needed mail that wouldn't rust.

[Beren shakes his head, amused at his own surprise]

**Guard:**  
Excuse me, my lord, but -- why is your scabbard covered in wolf-skin?

**Beren:**  
Hides the smell of the metal. Until it's too late. I had a cape to match for winter, but that didn't survive the journey, used it for bug-bait . . .

[shakes his head, trying to forget about that part]

**Soldier:**  
My favorite story's the time when you challenged that Orc-captain to single combat.

[Beren looks blank]

The one they called "The Butcher"? Gorgol, it was?

**Beren:**  
Um, no -- I shot him from behind. A lot.

**Soldier:**  
But there's a song--

**Beren:**  
I didn't make it.

[pause]

I wouldn't be at all surprised if everything that any of us did was also ascribed to me. That happened to Da when he was alive. And everything that the hidden resistance efforts did as well, they said was me. -- Which was their right. I was responsible, after all, being their Lord, for what was done in my will, even if not with my explicit orders, and the blame mine to take for it.

**Guard:**

But you did burn down that supply depot, did you not? That command center at Drun?

**Beren:** [shrugs]

Fire arrows work great for that.

**Captain:**

Shot from where? There's no cover around Drun, unless the landscape's changed considerably in the last twelve-score years.

[Beren gives him a reproachful look. Innocently:]

I'm just saying--

**Ranger:**

--Did you really wound the Lord of Wolves?

**Beren:**

Oh. That. --Maybe.

[makes a face. To their expectant looks:]

When they sent in the wolfpacks initially there was a command group riding in the middle and this one guy in black armour who was taller than anyone I've ever seen, yourselves included. Black with spikes, of course. But I don't know if it was him or one of his minions -- if I was him I'd use a minion, and shift into a warg like they say he does. I just don't know: scary-looking-black-iron versus recurved, reinforced, yew/horn laminate and a straight-down shot not usually much of a contest, but I barely winged him. I swear the air rippled when I loosed and it was like shooting into water. So maybe it was Sauron after all.

**Soldier:**

The air moved?



**Beren:** [shrugs]

I wouldn't believe me either. But I don't usually miss, not when I've got a wide angle and an elevated blind to work from.

**Soldier:**

No, he could do that. I'm just amazed you weren't obliterated after.

**Beren:**

I was in a stand of oaks.

**Guard:** [to the Ranger, whispering]

--Did that make sense?

[the Ranger shrugs. Aloud:]

My lords, I do not wish to signal any disrespect to the Edain, but I fail to see how that could protect one against the Lord of Abominations?

**Beren:**

I -- think the land protected me. The trees--

[they are more confused]

**Steward:**

--The land?

**Beren:**

It never betrayed me the way it betrayed others.

**Soldier:**

How could the land betray one?

**Beren:**

It ate people. Farms. Beasts. Cattle strangled in vines in the open field. Hillsides disintegrated under a man's heel and pitched him down in the midst of his foes where the track had been solid an hour earlier, and no rain.

**Steward:**

But would you not say that was the work of the Enemy?

**Beren:** [thoughtfully, shaking his head]

I think the land went mad. I think we drove it crazy, fighting over it, holding it so hard and with such hate and fury on both sides, till it savaged all of

us like a wounded hound unable to tell the difference between friend and foe.

**Soldier:**

And why not you?

**Beren:**

I can't explain. Perhaps -- no, I don't know. I tried not to take without making thanks, not to damage as I went. I never resented it. That's -- that's why I'm alive, though. I was the only one who could skirt through the Nightshade without being affected by it. It was depressing, but it only made me sad, not insane. There were trees that I knew I didn't dare touch, and others that would tolerate me, but I didn't abuse their hospitality, so to speak. And then there were some in Dorthonion that welcomed me, that I knew I could sink pegs into to aid my climbs and that I'd sleep in without fear of any harm -- times when I swear the leaves turned to screen me from Orc-sight, when the roots folded fast about me against the wolfpacks and I never feared being trapped in the earth or thought to move to hide myself better. Oaks were particularly good to me. And beechgroves were always safe.

**Ranger:**

But -- you're a mortal, milord.

**Beren:**

So I've been told. But the woods and hills have never threatened me.

**Soldier:**

Is that how you were able to carry off so many legendary exploits?

**Beren:** [clearly still uncomfortable with that "legend" bit] Part. After my father died I only cared to do as much harm as I might to our ancient Enemy. I did things that've been called impossible because no one thought they'd be attempted, and didn't guard against me. Then they guarded against what I had done, --not what I did next. And since they'd manage to make sure that I had nothing else to do, no other responsibilities to look after, no one else to worry about, I could put a lot of work into the planning, give the execution free rein. It wasn't like there was anything they could do to me, except catch me. And against that

it's a good idea to have as many psychotic mutants and demon wolves as angry with you as possible, because then they're not going to stop and say "we should really take this guy back home for questioning, we'll get double the reward then"--

[shakes head]

There was a legend running wildfire given the name "Beren," but there was no one left to call me by that name . . .

[aside]

. . . or to answer.

[Silently the Royal Guard who is present holder of Dagmor slides forward and lays the sword down in front of him on the ledge; Beren gently traces his fingers down the flat of the blade.]

**Ranger:**

But were you not assisted in your revenge?

**Beren:** [confused]

By who?

**Ranger:**

By the men of his shield-band, your companions in all fortunes? --Dairuin? --Gildor? --Arthad?

[With each name Beren slowly takes a knife from his bandoleers and places it on the stone ledge in front of him next to the sword.]

**Guard:** [unable to stop asking, but knowing what's coming]  
--Urthel?

[click -- a knife]

--Radhruin?

[click -- a fifth]

--Ragnir?

[click -- the sixth]

**Soldier:**

Gorlim?

**Beren:** [voice eerily calm]

I have nothing of his. He -- died elsewhere, and I -- never found his body.

[checks]

No -- I'm wrong. I take that back.

[takes up the little eating-knife]

He told me this was Elvish work, and lucky, when he gave it me at Sun-Return the first year I was old enough to hold blade. Since the cut I immediately gave myself didn't get infected, the luck seems good. . . . I think there's a rule that you have to cut yourself with your first knife, and hide it from your parents . . .

**Captain:** [softly]

It has the rune for keenness in it -- a clean cut rarely festers.

**Ranger:**

Your cousin Baragund?

**Beren:** [sets down two daggers side by side at once]

With his brother my cousin Belegund, dead one beside the other, halfway back to the camp. If the Orc-arrows hadn't been poisoned they might have lived at least enough to warn the others, but the patrol kn-- thought to take out the sentinels first.

[sets down another blade]

Dagnir, almost of an age with me;

[and one more]

Hathaldir, who should have gone with the children and the wives, but wouldn't.

[He then unbuckles the leather straps that held the sheaths about his forearms.]

That's Ironjaw,

[lays down another band]

that's Bellsong,

[followed by a third]

and Star. My father's hounds, and mine.

[A long silence]

**Steward:**

You are the last? Of all Dorthonion's warriors? All your father's household at once, save you? All who were at the Dagor Bragollach with us, and their sons, but for you alone?

**Beren:** [incredulous]

Did you not understand? I thought it was made clear--

**Steward:** [equally distressed]

No. And yes. --And no. It is still difficult for us to comprehend the brevity of human life, but we accept it -- but ten years is small even in mortal reckoning, and the shield-guard of Dorthonion of younger years for the most part, and is beyond my ability to believe that Belegund your kinsman, who carried me out of Serech on his shoulders, and shared the last of his water with me in that furnace -- is gone from Arda as last year's leaves.

**Beren:** [hoarsely]

But in wartime a day is long, and "sunset may be a dirge where the morning was a dance."

**Soldier:** [low voice]

My lord -- we have not known full war these several years, and save the Dagor Bragollach and the times immediately following, not since long before then.

**Beren:** [comprehension arriving in full]

That is why your Prince apologized to me. --Not to me, to Dorthonion. Our realm died -- holding your borders against the North.

[Silence; no one dares to speak]

Well. I'm glad -- I saw what we saved.

**Captain:**

My lord, forgive --

**Beren:** [interrupting]

--Let it go! --My friends. We never sent to you for aid. We never asked for help. It was our duty, as we saw it, and our will, and the song's done and over with.

[he is breathing hard and his fists are clenched on his knees, and they wait tensely; then he shakes it off and begins wrapping the collars around his arms and replacing the weapons with perfectly steady hands.]

**Beren:** [pleasantly]

I'll be pleased to dwell here, when I've done what I came for.

**Steward:**

Will you, my lord?

**Beren:**

Yes. So long as you allow freedom of the woods to -- my House. I know I can't live underground all the time.

**Steward:**

I speak with complete confidence of the King's will when I assure you that you -- and yours -- will ever be free of Nargothrond.

[it's clear from this that Beren's mission is no secret to him at least]

**Ranger:**

When the nomads come through High Faroth again, it would be interesting to hear what they have to say about that notion of the land sensing the doings of Men, sir.

**Guard:**

You're right, it really does sound akin to something the Turned Ones would say.

**Ranger:** [officiously]

You shouldn't say "the Turned," that's quite rude. Laiquendi is permissible, but Lindar is better -- that's what they name themselves, "the Singers."

[the Ranger Captain smiles slightly at a well-learned lesson]

**Beren:**

Er -- who are the nomads, and where is High Faroth?

**Steward:**

The Green Kindred -- some of our people who never followed the Call, even so far as these lands. They build nothing, make no permanent shelters, kill no

living thing for food or sport -- will not even cut live wood -- and their only arts music and woven adornment. They're very strange.

[Beren carefully says nothing. Realizing]

Forgive me -- that was not what I meant to say --

[breaks off]

**Captain:**

They're the reason you were born in the North, lad. Your folk came with axes and ploughs and the Singers begged our lord to send you elsewhere, or they'd not be answerable for what happened after. --I don't think they'd have a problem with you, though. They won't stay in the area during Autumn, during hunting season but other times they come through what we call the Hills of the Hunters, that range of high country above the rivers -- you might have seen them, though the rains were pretty dense lately, I don't know how well--

**Beren:** [enthusiastic]

I saw those -- they reminded me of home, of the uplands by Aeluin. Beautiful country. I'd like to explore it someday.

**Captain:**

We'll have to take you on patrol up there, when this . . . business of yours, is over. Introduce you to the tribes and the Eldest Voices.

**Beren:**

I would be much grateful, sir.

[the shadow is gone between them]

**Steward:** [sighs]

Well. I should return to my work.

**Captain:**

Making sure Himself doesn't forget to eat?

[The Steward nods. His eyes are haunted and his confidence is vanished.]

**Beren:**

Sir. . . My lord Edrahil. . . ?

[the Steward looks at him gravely]

Would it please you to keep this?

[He offers, again correctly point-inward, Belegund's knife]

My sword-brother, heart-brother, my kinsman is honored in your remembrance of him. If it would mean anything to you . . .

[The Steward takes the knife and bows deeply. He fastens the sheath to his belt before replying.]

**Steward:**

You do me honor, Lord of Dorthonion. I'll see you at the King's table, after times.

[He leaves them]

**Beren:** [quietly]

I'm sorry to trouble you all. That wasn't what I came here for.

**Captain:**

We know. -- You're taking this remarkably calmly.

**Beren:**

I've had five winters, and more, to accustom myself to the fact of our doom. None of this is really new, even -- I just never thought about it all at once like this. Some of it I've already faced through, and the rest of it -- will come back with nightfall and I'll meet it then. Now -- is meanwhile.

**Soldier:**

I remember that being the way of your people, my lord.

[softly]

It seems very strange to us.

[long pause -- not hostile but filled with mutual regret and incomprehension -- broken by the entrance of Lord Gwindor, sans the Princess, but with a couple of other citizens of Nargothrond as Beren once again tries to finish breakfast.]



**Gwindor:**

Gentles -- my lord Beren--

**Captain:**

-- Where's your better half, lad? And what about your practice, eh? We missed you at the pells.

**Gwindor:**

They've kept us busy running to the archives and subarchives all night. Fael--

[blushes and goes on self-consciously]

-- Finduilas is still there, but she wanted me to make sure that Lord Beren was being properly looked after.

**Captain:**

Well of course he is! --I imagine your friends were just a little curious themselves -- not to mention jealous?

**Gwindor:**

That too, sir.

**Lady:**

How amazing! I've never seen a mortal before.

[she turns his chin to better see his face; again Beren is amused rather than offended by Elven foibles, fortunately.]

He looks almost like a person, doesn't he?

**Lord:** [oblivious to the Looks they are getting from the veterans]

Indeed he does, my dear. --What news do you bring from Doriath, sir?

**Beren:**

? . . . ?

**Captain:** [coldly]

Someone's been talking rather a bit more than they ought. Now I know it wasn't me, and I'm fairly certain it wasn't Edrahil, and I'm reasonably sure that His Majesty isn't the one either.

[narrows his eyes at Gwindor, who somehow manages to look both hangdog and stiff-necked at once.]

Pah, what am I saying? This is Nargothrond. If a whale sneezes in Brithombar Harbor, everyone knows about it in the Caves by nightfall -- even if it didn't happen. As the King well knows.

**Beren:** [awkwardly]

Excuse me, but my business is now the King's, and for him to make public when he feels the time is right. I'm sorry -- no offense meant.

**Gwindor:** [sudden realization]

You must have had to cross Dungortheb! Is it as dreadful as rumors have it? Can you tell us about your adventures there?

**Beren:**

No.

[relents slightly]

To tell you about it I would have to remember it, and I will never, ever visit that country again.

**Lady:** [surprised]

Do mortals also know the Living Memory? I thought not -- or so I'd been led to understand.

**Beren:**

I don't know about other mortals. I only know that I am never going there again.

[awkward silence]

**Gwindor:** [desperately changing subject]

So -- my lord, how do you find Nargothrond?

**Beren:** [relieved]

Beyond all description. The reports don't do it justice. I've only seen a tiny bit of it, of course.

**Lord:**

Is it finer than Thingol's place? I've never been there.

**Beren:** [tactfully]

Ah . . . it's a lot more . . . detailed, than Menegroth.

**Lord:**

But do you find it better?

**Beren:**

Well. I -- That's hard to say, I -- didn't see very much of Menegroth at all.

**Lord:**

But, given what little you've seen of Nargothrond, compared to the little you saw of Doriath, which would you say is the superior construction?

**Beren:** [trapped]

. . .

**Lady:**

Darling, don't be tiresome. You can't expect him to be able to explain such things -- they're not in the mortal understanding.

[Beren raises his eyebrows; the Rangers look affronted on his behalf.]

**Beren:** [more patient than sarcastic]

I did grow up speaking Elvish at home--

**Lord:** [aside to his companions]

Well, after a fashion--!

**Beren:** [ignores this]

--it's as much or more my native speech as Taliska. I don't answer because I don't want you to think me ungrateful, is all. I -- and this is purely a matter of my own preferences, not anything to do with which is finer overall, or whether I am even fit to make those kind of judgments -- I have to say, that I liked what I saw of Menegroth better. It's like the forest becomes stone as you go down into it, not like you're going into a cave really. There are all kinds of animals carved into a kind of illusion of life, and then there are ones I've never seen and don't recognize. I think maybe they're from Aman, but I never got the chance to ask. So I found Menegroth preferable, for that reason.

**Lord:**

But how could you in any way find the wild woods superior to a work of art like our glorious citadel?

[before Beren can correct him]

I know, I know, "preferable." What's out there that's not in here? Explain what's so amazing about the wilderness.

**Beren:** [unthreatened, accepting challenge]  
All right.

[thinks for a moment]

I saw this thing once: pine needles after the winter like a red pelt around the roots, patched with sun and snow in spots of white. --All of the sudden they leapt up and danced away before my eyes.

**Captain:** [to self]  
Hah. That's good. --That's very good.

**Lord:**  
Did a strong breeze come up and blow them away?

**Beren:**  
Nope.

**Lady:**  
I think it's a metaphor.

**Beren:** [encouraging]  
Could be.

**Lady:**  
One tree, considered as a paradigm for the passing of the seasons, elided to a metaphorical instant?

**Beren:**  
Mm . . . 'fraid not.

**Gwindor:**  
"Red pelt" -- is it a fox under the trees?

**Beren:** [regretfully]  
No, not quite.

**Ranger:**  
It's a spring fawn called by its mother, correct?

[Beren nods; the court folk frown, smile, discuss amongst themselves]

**Beren:**  
And then one time I saw something else: a brown leaf on a dry branch uncurled itself and spun away on the

wind, becoming red and gold as it went to join the last year's leaves.

**Lady:**

Oh, it's a time paradox, I'm sure -- about mortality, am I correct?

**Lord:**

No, I think it's like the last one. Some kind of natural phenomenon again.

**Lady:**

Forgive me for rejecting your supposition, but it must be a mortal version of that saying about blossoms never returning to their branches.

**Lord:** [shaking his head]

I think it's a kind of butterfly. I've seen them whilst out hunting in the forest -- they resemble a dead leaf, and then they unfurl their wings and reveal such manner of bright colors inside. You must have noticed them, surely.

**Lady:**

But butterflies don't uncurl. --You did say "uncurl," not "unfurl," did you not?

[Beren nods again]

**Lady:**

So which is it? An insect? Or an image of the forward rush of Time that cannot be turned back in its stream?

**Beren:** [kindly]

You're both right. The "brown leaf" is the shell of the creature whose past generations are all dead in the winter, and when spring comes it splits and unrolls itself all wet, and when it dries out, it flies down to the forest floor looking for food in the new flowers. I don't know what your name for them is, but we call them gledewings, because the hidden side of them looks like a hot coal. But we also say it's a sign of the gods -- the Hidden Fire that moves all Ea, and the Butterfly that Elbereth put into the stars to remind us that Life is ever stronger than Death.

**Lord:** [astonished]

Indeed! -- wherever did you learn all that?

**Beren:**

In the woods behind my house. --And from my parents.

**Gwindor:** [sharply]

I'm not sure why you're so surprised. All his family's been as quick-witted as fell-handed.

**Lady:**

We only came here after the Dagor Bragollach. It merely seems as though it's been longer, Gwin.

**Beren:** [who has gone off in a bit of a reverie]

And then this other time, not in the woods but on the heath, there was a sudden rainstorm that blew over, and on the granite outcrop where I was lying, the dip in the stone filled with water about as deep as a hide's thickness, and I saw in it the sky blue as a field of flax-flowers in the days before the harvest, and sun and moon both in the sky together and the Heavenly Arch, all at once.

[silence]

**Lord:**

I can't even begin to guess.

**Lady:**

Don't you think it's a parable of the deceptiveness of surface appearances?

**Lord:**

No. What does it mean, Lord Beren?

**Beren:**

Huh? -- Oh, no, that's just something that happened. I thought it was really great. It kind of made up for the rest of the day.

**Lady:**

Getting rained on?

**Beren:**

Getting shot. I was in too close and I think they cracked a rib. One of those "Things To Remind Yourself: Mithril Stops Arrowheads, It Doesn't Stop Momentum."

**Lady:** [to her consort]

I still think there's some deeper meaning in that last one.

**Lord:** [to Beren]

It really should be a riddle -- it isn't appropriate to stop at two, you know.

**Beren:**

I'm sorry. I just thought of those now, and somehow the third one never made it to the dinner table.

[to the subsequent odd looks]

It's a saying--? Which I guess you don't use. I'm afraid I don't know what it means, either.

[catches the Captain's sleeve and draws him down to whisper:]

Sir, I understand you're set to guard me. Would you please disarm me, or else send all these folk away, because I swear I'll savage the next person interrupts my meal--

**Captain:**

Everyone! Be off. Get back to work, get to your posts, find some work to do or keep the gossip-weave lengthening. Milord is not a spectacle to gawk at.

[Chagrined, the Ranger and the other veterans leap to attention and hurry away.]

**Lord:**

I say, can he talk to us like that?

**Gwindor:** [dry voice -- embarrassed by his friends]

Well, it certainly seems that way. My lord -- I'll see you at Council presently.

[He drags his companions away]

**Beren:**

Thanks. --Sorry.

[He sets to in hopes of clearing his plate without other incident]

**Captain:**

I was remiss.

**Beren:** [between mouthfuls]

You can talk, I can listen. Am I so much weirder than my ancestors?

**Captain:**

Well, let's see. Old 'Fetters' sent his top commander and an army of wolves into North Beleriand because the Orc-bands wouldn't go after you any more, and no one, friend or foe, would even try to claim the king's ransom on your head. So many stories are told about you that they can't all be true -- only the more improbable ones, apparently. And you wonder why people want to come and have a look at you? Oh, and you're a veritable child in our reckoning, to top it all.

[pause]

**Beren:** [rapidly folding cheese strips into some of the flatbread]

I must be rather disappointing, then.

**Captain:**

You're not mortal enough. Not to them, who have only rumor and theory of mortal ways to guide their fancies, and not to us, who have known your people long and in many weathers -- you're too much like one of the Green Kindred for comfort, and yet there's no mistaking you for anything but a Man.

[debates, then continues:]

Then there's the fact that you scarcely need a guard -- were you not so polite, I've no doubt you'd hold your own against the throng. Nothing seems to daunt you -- though after your experiences, not so surprising.

**Beren:** [swallowing]

Oh, I daunt, all right.

**Captain:**

Well, you don't show it. It's as if you've inherited all the stubbornness of all your ancestors, and then some -- and all their courtesy. It's disconcerting.

**Beren:** [frowns]

"Intransigence."



**Captain:**

? . . . ?

**Beren:** [scraping up the last crumbs from his plate]  
What the King said.

**Captain:** [wryly]

He would. He does love the words. --Do you want more?

**Beren:** [making sure that his extra bread is secure]

No, I've got provisions. Is there a fountain around, sir?

**Captain:**

There's one by the chronometer.

**Beren:** [looks blank]

Ah.

[apologetically]

--I'm afraid that's a word I don't know. "Time--"?

**Captain:**

"Measurer." Another of Celebrimbor's Workings. Come on, I'll show you.

[Beren drops down from the alcove and walks beside the Ranger Captain, not quite as though he owns the place, but certainly as quietly as the Elf.]

**Captain:** [noticing]

Hm. You wanted to be heard, then, when we took you.

**Beren:**

I wanted not to be shot. I think there's a difference, though I couldn't say what.

**Captain:**

We'll have to find a Sage and ask.

[A small group of people are seated near the fountain, Celebrimbor among them, discussing something that the son of Curufin is demonstrating by means of an elaborate diagram in the air. Ignoring the Nargothronders, who drop the discussion and stare at him, Beren plunges his hands into the spill and drinks that way.]

**Celebrimbor:** [piqued at being interrupted]

Er -- there is a cup there, Barahirion.

**Beren:** [innocently]

A what?

[keeps the straight face for a second, then grins]

**Celebrimbor:**

Do you mock me, sir?

**Beren:**

No, my lord -- only myself.

**Celebrimbor:** [annoyed]

Where is the purpose in that?

[Beren shrugs; Celebrimbor snorts and turns away in dismissal]

**Captain:** [undertone]

There's another way you differ from your forefathers -- I've not seen that subtle and eccentric humor in the Beorings ere now. You must have it of your mother's kin?

**Beren:**

No -- the sarcasm and the having-to-have-the-last-word comes from the Hador side. You probably just never noticed when Da and Uncle Brego were doing it, because they never stopped. I'm not as good as they were; I always give it away.

[long pause]

**Captain:**

I think -- I think that perhaps there has been more gentle humor at our expense across the ages than ever we knew.

**Beren:** [blandly]

Why, sir, who would dare to make jest of the Elves?

[gets a Look]

See, I wouldn't have done that if you were one of us, on account of not wanting my head shoved in the water. Unless it was summer and not raining.

**Captain:** [bemused]

Mortal customs . . . how strange, to take delight in being thought less of -- but I can think of some who'd be improved by it--

[a small chime sounds]

That's the summoning -- you should see this, as you slept through the last five.

[steers Beren towards a large and complex artifact of crystal and metals and lights which is in subtle motion -- think Myst & sequels, only more so. A crowd has already gathered around it in expectation.]

**Beren:**

What is it?

**Captain:**

It shows the heavens small, in all their moving, and six times a day it calls the sixth, so that anyone on this level can hear it. You'll find nothing like it elsewhere in the world.

**Beren:** [a little more loudly than he meant to]  
But what use is it?

[gets uncomprehending stares from bystanders]

Don't you always know where the sun is, and the stars, as we do not?

**Captain:**

Well, yes -- but one loses track indoors. And it's helpful for arranging meetings, or keeping them to sane durations. It also shows the turnings of the year, and the Great Years, and many other motions of the sky.

**Beren:**

I still can't see what we would do with such a thing.

**Celebrimbor:** [who has come over to see the mortal be impressed]

But isn't it a necessity in agriculture, to know when the proper times for, oh, planting and, and harvesting are? Or when to breed the animals and to feed them?

**Beren:** [raising his hands helplessly]

Yes, but -- the world just changes -- outside at least. It comes as it comes. You don't need a -- a -- sculpture for it.

**Celebrimbor:**

What about for the War? Setting up ambushes for the enemy at the right time, or in the field, to coordinate your troops so that you could all strike in unison?

**Beren:**

I'm not qualified to say -- I never took the field that way, except in practices. It wouldn't have been very helpful for my work -- too large, for one thing.

**Celebrimbor:** [sighing]

It doesn't have to be that large or that ornate. I mean in principle it could be a useful thing.

**Captain:**

No, actually, not all that useful. Not without being able to see what the rest of the field is doing, both ours and theirs. I can see a lot of disasters happening if you assumed that everyone was going to move at once -- and then they didn't.

**Beren:**

Would that be possible? I thought scrying was kind of almost useless for practical purposes. But if you could see -- or especially talk -- then you could actually avoid patrols -- coordinate groups -- warn--

[breaks off]

**Captain:** [covering smoothly]

My lord, what ever became of that project of your grandfather's? Wasn't he working on a device that would allow one to both see and hear, and be seen and be heard, across great distances?

**Celebrimbor:** [bitter]

No one was interested. They'd rather ride halfway across the country, never mind that it would take days, or sail to the islands, and speak face to face. They thought it was pointless and he lost interest. Now, of course, -- but it's too late. I don't know what became of his notes, and I was only peripherally involved in the Workings. There were some prototypes, but I've not seen them here. I think they were forgotten--

[The Measurer achieves its zenith and the full carillon rings out, interrupting them. Constellations appear, the

Moon and Sun rise and sail past, flowers open, animals and birds come out and make their circuits, ships cross before them, towers rise and fly banners, horsemen ride over their bridges, and finally the stars come out once more before it all folds away again to its quiescent state, and the satisfied crowd moves off.]

I'm still not quite happy with that last, but I've not thought of anything better to end it with.

**Beren:** [laughs out loud with delight]  
So that's its use -- it's just beautiful. Like a fountain. --Or a reflection. --Or a star.

[The inventor's expression goes from affront to confusion]

**Celebrimbor:**  
I assure you, it's more work than that--

**Captain:** [aside]  
--More work than the stars?

**Celebrimbor:** [snide]  
--but even a fountain is useful -- as I think you'd admit?

**Beren:** [oblivious to the tone]  
Nah, you don't need a fountain -- you could just have the water pour out into a bucket. It doesn't need a frame like a hall-door and a throne for the water with different levels so it sounds like a real falls almost. Your -- chronometer -- could you make it be something different each time? Or -- hey, what about this? Couldn't you make it show stories, like a tapestry? Only solid, but moving--

**Celebrimbor:** [sharply, almost savagely]  
--Do you think yourself our equal in art, for having mastered the brute skills of battle and slaughter beyond the usual mortal aptitude for such things?

[pause]

**Beren:** [unthreatening, as if to a very angry dog]  
No, my lord. I wouldn't begin to understand what you've done here, in another year, or ten. I only meant to say what I would make -- if I had any skill at all for the making of things -- which I have not.

Save traps and ambushes. I cannot make anything of beauty -- only dream of it.

**Celebrimbor:** [mollified, a touch embarrassed]

It isn't anything much. I've got a knack for it . . .  
I'm sure you could learn some skills, if you put your mind to it.

[dismisses him from consideration again, goes back to his seminar]

**Captain:** [exasperated]

I'm sorry. You can scarcely think us very Wise--

[Beren shrugs it off]

Would it please you to tour the rest of Nargothrond, or as much of it as we'll have time for?

**Beren:**

Might we go to the kennels, sir? I'd most like to see your hounds.

**Captain:**

Of course. I confess that the city often overwhelms me also, and all of us who range the woods by preference. The dogs may be importunate, but they'll ask you no impolite questions, at least!

[checks]

Your pardon, milord -- I spoke too soon. The King summons us to council.

**Beren:**

I heard nothing.

**Captain:**

I would be very troubled if you had. Please -- come this way.

## SCENE V

**Gower:**

Little knowing of the ways of the older world wherein kings contend with craft and cunning, (hailing from a simpler land, a simpler folk of speech plainer, of ways hardier, making no purpose of the twisted paths of curled

intrigue, nor seeing need for suchlike works)  
Dorthonion's young scion ventures forth  
onto a field of battle where hidden lurks  
such attack as ne'er might he foreguess.  
--His skills at secret warfare are all plain:  
the ways of stealth, of hiding, of leading 'stray  
the clamoring foe, the hungry beast, with main  
force to smite, or with speed to flee;  
treason knows he indeed, too well -- still  
e'en there the patterns plain and black  
of heart tormented and body wracked  
ask no unanswerable questions of the soul.  
How indeed shall he prepare, defend, when fire  
out of the ancient Ages past spills wide,  
when words wake fear, and greed calls forth desire--?

[At the entrance to the throne room -- via one of the  
smaller side doors, not the wide and fancy main entranc-  
es, that leads in behind a colonnade -- the Captain is  
about to usher Beren in when he stops suddenly.]

**Captain:**

What's wrong?

**Beren:** [quickly lashing the peace-strings around his sword-  
hilt]

I forgot to safe my blade again. --Do you need to  
check the knots?

**Captain:**

--Why?

**Beren:** [shrugs]

"A stranger, armed, in the King's presence" . . . ?

**Captain:** [dryly]

Seeing that it was he who ordered your weapons be  
returned you, I rather think it's all right. But  
if your scruples insist . . .

[he gives the hilt an experimental tug]

Safety's on just fine. Come on--

[gesturing Beren through. They pass through the colonnade  
and out across the apse-like area of the upper hall,  
Beren trailing along behind, staring up at the carvings  
and the vaulted ceilings and the way that natural

formations have been employed as some of the columns.  
The Captain pauses to wait for him, amused.]

**Beren:** [awed]

How long did it take to make all of this?

**Captain:**

Well, so far it's taken about two and a half Great Years. That of course includes work on the rest of the place, you understand, not just this hall.

**Beren:**

And your Great Years -- one of them's what, a hundred-forty-four years?

**Captain:**

That's right, twelve-twelvemonths. But it isn't done yet. Never will be, I expect. He keeps tinkering with it -- like that bit over there, that's new, I don't think it's been there a score yet. Between that and all the other projects he's got going, I'm betting it'll be at least another Yen. --Maybe longer. Of course, if it was ever done he'd have to start a new one, you know.

[Beren frowns, trying to fit this into his worldview. They reach the central axis of the throne room, coming in right along the dais to where a large table has been put lengthwise across in front of the throne itself and about which around sixteen chairs are set.

#### **Arrangement of council:**

Inner side of the table, facing into the hall:

The King is seated at the middle, presiding over a group of counselors, which includes his brother Orodreth (to his right), the Steward (on his left, assisting), Finduilas (on her father's right), Gwindor (to her right), Guilin his father (at table's end), the Commander of Nargothrond's Cavalry (to the Steward's right) with the Soldier from the Fens as his aide (right) and an empty chair on the end.

#### **Outer side:**

To the left of the empty place on the opposite side is Curufin, beside Curufin the Master of the Defensive Illusions, then his Aide (to the left across from the Steward), another empty place, and three high-ranking Counselors, at least one of whom should be cast as female, befitting a Kingdom headed by Galadriel's wisest



brother. The table is on the lowest and widest tier of the dais, as in the schematic below (assume the dais is slightly curved, despite the ASCII.) There is also an Honor Guard present, two stationed by the throne, two behind the King's chair (they are among the Guards present at the Relief of Serech, as is one of the two beside the throne.)

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**Finrod:** [rising in courtesy]

My lords -- my lord! Have you enjoyed your rest,  
and found welcome in my citadel?

**Beren:**

Indeed yes, I've at last seen something truly Elven  
in my stay here, sir -- that Measurer that sings and  
shines.

**Finrod:** [genuinely pleased]

It's wonderful, isn't it? --And have you found  
Nargothrond pleasant, to see it waking?

[there is a touch of Elvish -- or artistic -- vanity when  
he asks:]

It's never as fair as Menegroth, but it is beautiful,  
is it not?

**Beren:** [solemnly]

Yeah. It's a nice big place you've got here.

[The King, appreciating the joke, grins; the Counselors look rather taken aback.]

**Finrod:** [all business again]

How well do you ride, Barahirion? Have you much skill with horses? It may affect our schedule.

**Beren:**

Well. None with horses -- but a lot with mountain ponies.

**Guilin:** [dismay]

--Ponies.

**Beren:**

Don't laugh, my lord: it's harder than it sounds. They're carnivorous, and prefer the flesh of people. Men or Elves, makes no difference, I was told.

**First Counselor:** [skeptically]

Carnivorous?

[Finrod covers a smile with his hand.]

**First Guard:** [whispering]

I remember those little hellspawn. We should have sent them to fight the wolves.

**Second Guard:** [whispering]

I thought they were wolves.

**Finrod:**

Still, you'll want some training both to accustom yourself to the height and pacing of the Valinorean breed, and to staying in line with the rest of the "alquantar." If I recall correctly, your way was to run like a pack of hounds and over whatever or whoever's before you. Effective, very inspirational to keep up one's best speed, but not really a good idea with lances. A fortnight should do it, I think.

**Beren:** [jaw drops]

Sire -- I don't -- I really don't think I could learn to ride with your swan-flight in two years, let alone two weeks -- forgive me, but I've never used a long-spear from horseback, we always would ride and

dismount to fight -- and I've not ridden in seven, eight years--

**Finrod:** [dismissing his panic]

Oh no -- you just need to be able to stay aboard and not crash into anyone on the turns. You're not going to take part in charges. It's merely a matter of coordination, you already know the basics, and you've got perfect balance. You'll do fine.

**Beren:** [resigned]  
All right.

[aside]

I'm going to die. --Or wish that I had, at least.

[aloud]

Do I get to ask why?

**Finrod:** [deadpan]  
Certainly not.

[pause]

I'm going to tell you in a minute, so why bother?

[Confused looks from most of the others who aren't used to mortal-style humor.]

My friends, my good counselors, those among you who have not yet made the acquaintance of The Beoring -- may I present to you the son of our people's great friend and far renowned in his own right, Beren Barahirion, House Beor, rightful Lord of Dorthonion, whose cause is well-known to all present here.

[Beren bows to the Council, deeply embarrassed by the introduction]

Beren, sit down, if you please -- when my good kinsman returns from his summons I'll conduct a full overview of the plan we've devised, less the more technical aspects that won't mean anything to you. In the meantime if you'd care to examine the maps, you may get a better feel for what we'll be talking about. Oh, and if anyone here has questions regarding the data we've been using, now's the time to ask, as

our Chief of Intelligence is here now as well and his scouts have supplied most of it.

[Beren gives the Captain a startled look; the Captain innocently gives him his best I'm-just-a-simple-Ranger expression. A little nervously Beren goes to the empty place at the end of the table, where the chair is already pulled out.]

**Curufin:** [dryly]

Don't push it, Beoring.

[sees Beren's confusion and sighs]

I've been given to understand that your rustic background and long removal from anything slightly resembling civilization account for your uncouth behavior and am willing to make admissions -- but my brother is not quite as patient as myself.

**Beren:**

? . . . ?

**Curufin:** [exasperated]

That's his place. Anchor seat, next to me, focal point -- ring any bells?

**Beren:**

Oh. Oh, I'm very sorry, I wasn't trying to be rude--

[goes to empty chair at center, across from Finrod; the Captain pulls it out before he can struggle with it and squeezes his shoulder before going over to talk shop with his counterparts. The maps on the table are not merely parchment, but are "active" with scalar projections and live indicators, like the topograph projections in Myst only much prettier. Fascinated, Beren keeps running his finger through the intangible array; when the Army Commander and his Aide get up to join the discussion on the other side of the table about seasonal cover along the watershed, he notices Curufin staring at him.]

**Beren:** [wry]

I think this is what you call a "map," right?

**Curufin:** [a trifle drawn despite himself, almost genuinely playful]

That it is. --Ever seen one before?

**Beren:**

Not like this, I haven't.

**Curufin:**

Not quite so blasé; about us Firstborn and our accomplishments now, hey?

**Beren:** [doing his darnedest to earn the trust put in him]  
Your son's amazingly skillful, my lord. That --  
chronometer of his is truly the finest work of craft  
I've seen. You must be very proud of him.

**Curufin:** [grimacing, and totally sincere for once]  
He doesn't apply himself. He could do so much more if  
only he would concentrate on his own projects and not  
try to run all these other mentoring programs at the  
same time. But he's got no focus and people take  
advantage of him for it.

**Beren:**

Well, it's good of him to take the time to teach,  
though.

**Curufin:**

At the expense of perfecting his own art?

**Beren:**

I thought that's usually how crafts work, whether  
handcraft or lorecraft.

**Curufin:**

Among your folk, perhaps, where there's such a short  
time limit to accomplish both the practice and the  
transference. Among us it's a sign of mental, even  
moral instability, not to carry a thing to completion.

**Beren:** [nods]

I can see how that would work.

[frowning]

Would it be impertinent to ask you a question, my  
lord?

**Curufin:**

Well, that rather would depend on the question, I  
should think.

**Beren:**

I've noticed you wear an unsheathed long-knife, unlike anyone else here. Is there a reason for it?

**Curufin:**

Yes. Angcris would cut right through anything I tried to keep the blade in.

**Beren:**

Even mithril? It's truly that sharp?

**Curufin:**

It is. --I think your kind would call it "magic."

**Beren:**

But isn't that really dangerous? Couldn't you rig some kind of, oh, framework around to at least have a barrier so people wouldn't hit it by accident, so you wouldn't cut yourself? Like a fire-cage only smaller? I mean, we do have that tradition of the Vow of the Unsheathed Sword (though that's more one of those things in songs and tales really) but it just seems awfully risky to me.

**Curufin:**

I think you're assuming that the same conditions obtain to the Kindred as to Mortals, with regards to kinesthesia -- perception of motion -- and physical awareness. We are conscious of ourselves, and all earthly things, in a way I doubt you can begin to imagine. Neither I nor anyone else is going to brush against it in absence of mind.

**Beren:**

So what happens if you trip? It still seems dangerous to me.

**Curufin:**

Eldar don't trip. Or do anything by accident -- my lord.

**Beren:**

That must be nice.

[He is completely sincere, but Curufin gives him a suspicious look anyway]

And I suspect it's a lot more intimidating that way, too.

**Curufin:** [guarded approval]

You're not as dumb as you look, boy.

**Beren:** [grins]

That's a good thing, I guess?

[Once again Curufin has to resist the impulse to join in, not mock, but succeeds admirably nonetheless. The King, however, notes Beren's restraint and good will with approval, though Beren doesn't notice.]

**Curufin:**

Quite. --So, do you think this mad plan has a chance of succeeding, or are you just going along with it for lack of better ideas?

**Beren:**

Well, I -- don't know what the plan is yet, so I can't say whether it's mad or not, my lord.

**Curufin:**

Trust me, it's a mad plan. I've spent the better part of the last half-millennium involved in this, as I assume you know, and they don't come any crazier than this. If it couldn't be accomplished with thousands upon thousands of troops and virtually unlimited support, I seriously doubt that anything less has a prayer of succeeding.

**Beren:**

It's all about doing the unexpected. If they think you might do something, then your enemies will guard against it. If you've done it before, they'll put twice as many guards around to make sure you don't do it again. If you go around the other way, they stand there scratching their heads wondering what hit them, and then they put guards over there. I've seen it countless times. Seems silly, but no one can be everywhere, and if you can't imagine something, you can't imagine someone else doing it either.

**Curufin:**

Well. You're quite the strategist, aren't you?

**Beren:** [sighs]

Unfortunately.

[Celegorm enters and goes straight to his brother's side]

**Celegorm:** [aside to Curufin]

--All of the Hindmost, or Sindar. None of our people are on duty.

**Curufin:** [low voice]

Interesting. Most interesting.

**Finrod:**

Is something wrong, cousin?

**Celegorm:**

No, no, everything's fine, old chap. Carry on.

[takes the place at the end of the table]

**Finrod:**

Thank you. If everyone would please be seated . . . ?

[The knots of individual discussion break up and the council members take their original places; the Captain returns to Beren's side of the table and takes up station behind his chair. (This makes Beren a bit twitchy because although he knows it's an honor, he's not used to having or allowing anyone behind him.)]

To sum up very quickly for you, the plan is to set out from here and move northward (again, very quickly,) with the lightest accoutrements possible and in three flights, each slightly staggered from the other, each advanced by half-a-day before the next. When we arrive here, we'll kite across the valley of the Sirion to ford here, angling back upwards there, and vectoring past Tol Sirion altogether to hit Serech higher up here, where the flats are covered with shallow water but it's not soft enough to bog us down, splash through to the edge of the plain and form one Great Wing to rush straight across -- and over -- whatever's before us to Eithel Sirion. I'm sure you and my cousin will have a great deal to talk about before we regroup for the infiltration part. We'll ride straight through each night and rest by day as we must, and take care not to get tangled up in any engagements but leave them in our dust. Or mud, depending--

**Beren:** [interrupting]

--Is that possible?

[blushes]



--Sorry. --Your Majesty.

**Finrod:** [unfazed]  
I think so.

**Beren:**  
I mean, what about the horses? We can go all day, but they can't, can they? Not without us changing mounts, right?

**Finrod:**  
The Valinorean horse is not like that native to Middle-earth.

**Someone:** [not loud enough to reveal which of the Council but definitely Noldor]  
Either.

[The Captain shoots a got-your-number Look down that end of the table.]

**Beren:**  
And when we get there?

**Finrod:**  
You'll have a bit more to do than staying on then. We've some scaling devices to assist us and of course all will be stealthed, but we're still going to have to manage the climbing work ourselves along with despatching all sentries and resistance we encounter. The goal will be to encounter as little as possible -- it's a snatch-and-grab operation, not a havoc mission. And we have minimal data on the interior of Angband, except for some antiquated descriptions dating back to the last successful engagement with Morgoth, which are certainly inaccurate and misleading.

**Beren:** [frowning at the animated displays on the maps]  
So essentially we're sneaking into the Enemy's fortress via the mountains and trying to get as close to the target as we can without being noticed, figuring out a route as we go, and we don't know what the terrain looks like, only we know that it isn't like what it used to be?

**Finrod:**  
Essentially.

**Beren:**

Got it. How are we going to locate the jewel?

**Finrod:**

Well, "down" is said to be a good direction, as far as Morgoth is concerned, and Lords Celegorm and Curufin have attested that they can perceive within a farther distance-range than any other Elf the presence of the Silmarils, so we shouldn't have to spend too much time--

**Celegorm:** [interrupting]

Wait a minute, wait a minute, what do you mean, "Got it" --? He says "We're running blind into the midst of the greatest concentration of enemy forces to be found," and you say, "Got it" --?

**Beren:** [shrugs]

It's what I do, my lord.

**Celegorm:**

Oh, you're the outlaw! --I didn't recognize you, all cleaned up.

**Beren:** [solemnly]

Amazing stuff, that hot water, my lord.

[to the King]

--The only thing I'm not sure about is how you said everything will be stealthed and how we're going to be avoiding most of the trouble along the way. I know what I would mean by it, but I was getting the feeling that it meant something different.

**Finrod:**

Those are the technical aspects which are not going to require you to do anything at all. Each flight will have a full complement of Illusionists and Seers to forestall observation and anticipate enemy contact--

**Beren:**

Got it.

**Finrod:** [to his Commander]

A question, Lord Commander?

**Cavalry Commander:**

Yes. One. Does he have to come with us?

**Finrod:**

Yes. No sense in leaving any unnecessary legal loopholes. I enjoy an argument as much as Elu does, but priorities have to stay in proper order. Don't worry, it'll work out.

**Celegorm:**

Cousin Finrod, could we go over those technical aspects in rather more detail? I confess freely, I'm a simple soul, and I prefer plain hunting and plain dealing, as well as plain fighting -- this talk of scribbling back and forth and stealth confuses me.

**Finrod:**

Certainly. Master of Illusions, would you be so good as to attend and correct me if I've ommitted any of the necessary elements in--

**Beren:** [breaking in]

Oh there was one other thing -- how are we coming home? Won't they be waiting for us?

**Curufin:**

Not more than usual, my lord, seeing as that we'll be returning by the way of our siblings' holdings in the East, and thence to Doriath.

**Beren:** [nodding]

Got it.

[Finrod, carefully expressionless, sets to an intense technical discussion with the Mage and Celegorm over diagrams]

**Aide:** [to Beren, curious, not trying to be rude]

Is this how it goes at mortal councils? Interruptions and absence of formality and all?

[Across the table Finduilas gives Beren a sympathetic grimace]

**Beren:**

Um, yeah, except there was usually more table-pounding.

**Guilin:**

Table-pounding?

**Beren:**

Yeah.

**Gwindor:**

--I'm sure it's figurative, Father.

**Beren:**

No, it was loud, mostly. After my aunt died things got a little quieter 'cause Ma wouldn't put up with beer in the tablecloth or on the floor, but it was literal all right.

**Curufin:** [innocently]

Care to give us a demonstration, eh?

**Beren:**

Oh, no, I think I'll pass -- I see your drinking-ware is mostly glass, and I hear that's fragile stuff.

**Curufin:**

Pity. --These cultural survivals from antiquity are always so fascinating.

**Beren:**

All right, how about when we get back? Only we need ox-horn vessels full of beer so we can do it properly.

**Defense Aide:**

Beer? That's that foul drink you people make out of bread, isn't it?

**Beren:**

Er, not really. It has grain and yeast and water for ingredients, but -- different recipe.

**First Counselor:** [grimly]

I remember King Finrod tried making some once.

[Bleak expressions of remembrance on those attending to the discussion]

**Beren:** [interested]

Was it any good?

**Orodreth:**

If by good you mean, "palatable", the answer is a most definite no, my Lord Barahirion. If by good you mean "similar to the original pattern", then I cannot say, as I was never able to force down enough on our visits to Brethil to make any sort of accurate observations as to its flavor.

**Beren:**

Oh, Brethil. The Haladin might be valiant warriors, but they make wretched beer -- it's mead, actually. For real ale you have to start with mountain stream water and sweet grain from Ladros.

**Orodreth:**

I have on occasion imbibed both, and -- I fear I could distinguish no difference whatsoever, milord.

**Cavalry Commander:** [impatiently]

Gentles, is this in any way, shape, form or nebulous parallel relevant to the discussion at hand or the matter thereof?

**Beren:** [deadpan]

I thought you folks wanted to see how mortals do this council thing. That's probably enough. --So what do you want me to do? Am I actually going to be riding in the angle? Which rank? Front or back?

**Cavalry Commander:** [mincing no words]

That depends on how horrible you are. I'm saying at the outset, primaries or heart, because I want you where you'll bring down the fewest when you fall off.

**Beren:**

Oh, good. Fewer to step on me, right?

**Cavalry Commander:** [nods]

That too. We'll see how you do. --And what the King says.

[bitterly]

Ponies!

**Celegorm:** [calling from background]

Well, what's your final verdict, brother? Advise me with your shrewd counsel -- should we go along with this, or is it suicidal madness?

**Curufin:** [thoughtfully]

Everyone here knows I think it's insane. Just for the record. But -- I am reminded by the Heir of Dorthonion that the unexpected may well succeed, and that daring is usually more than adequate to carry the day against an unprepared -- or overprepared -- adversary. And cousin Finrod's plan is certainly as daring as it is well-prepared.

**Finrod:**

Thank you, cousin.

**Beren:**

If it's any consolation, my lord, the ground is very steep where I grew up, and the terrain quite rugged. I'm used to difficult conditions.

**Cavalry Commander:**

Scant. I'm not happy at all about letting a mind-deaf mortal near my horses, you should know. I'd far rather have you ride pillion as per when we take the archers to the front, but you're too coarse-boned for that with the distance we have to to cover. If you're rough with them in practice I will find ways to make you regret it, though.

**Beren:**

I used to be passable. Long time back I could even do the shooting-from-the-saddle thing and get maybe one wolf in three.

**Cavalry Commander:**

Really.

**Beren:**

Really. All right, maybe it was closer to one in four. It was kind of a showing-off thing, more than anything else.

**Cavalry Commander:**

Forgive me if I appear skeptical, but that would require use of both hands, would it not? What about your reins?

**Beren:**

What about 'em? I knotted the leathers so we wouldn't trip on them.

**Cavalry Commander:** [clearly unconvinced]

Indeed.

[His ADC tries to get his attention]

--Yes?

**Warrior:**

Sir -- Huan trusts him. And Barahir was always good to the little fiends -- even though I wanted to beat

them, because they Just. Don't. Listen. And they're wicked, even if they're not Evil.

**Cavalry Commander:** [eyeing Beren]  
Hmph.

**Warrior:**

Not all bad, though -- at least the "not listening" part -- a mind-linked rider terrified out of any pretense of rationality on an already-terrified steed is a very, very bad combination. And a mountless courier's precious little use in a redoubt scenario when the nearest help's Stars-know-where. Vicious half-wild mountain ponies having to be head-wrestled at all times, at least don't care if they've just lost their own rider, or whether their master is having Premonitions of Cosmic Doom, or pick up the images from all down the line of things past Elven, let alone equine, contemplation -- they just want to get away from the fires and maybe get a few good bites in along the way.

**Cavalry Commander:** [shrewdly]  
I've never heard you talk about the Battle from a personal standpoint.

**Warrior:**

Very sorry, sir. I thought I was being impersonally-abstract enough.

**Finrod:**

. . . So does that answer all your remaining questions, then? Have I left anything out that you can see?

**Curufin:** [looking at his brother, not at the King]  
I rather think so, myself -- and you?

**Celegorm:** [answering the other question as well -- We'll go for it]

Oh yes, absolutely.

[standing]

There's just one thing in all this that you're forgetting, kinsman.

[draws his sword and clangs it down on the table in front of them, declamatory:]

"Be he friend or foe or demon foul  
of Morgoth Bauglir, be he mortal dark  
that in after days on earth shall dwell,  
shall no law nor love nor league of Gods,  
no might nor mercy, nor moveless fate,  
defend him for ever from the fierce vengeance  
of the sons of Feanor, whoso seize or steal  
or finding keep the fair enchanted  
globes of crystal whoso glory dies not,  
the Silmarils. We have sworn forever!"

[Dead silence. All are as if in shock at the first overt invocation of the Oath in centuries which is now loosed again into the World. Only Finrod is completely calm and unaffected by it]

**Finrod:**

My lord my cousin, I thought we had settled this matter to honor's satisfaction for all concerned.

**Celegorm:**

How could we possibly have settled it, when it's not even begun? But we will settle it.

[The Sons of Feanor segue back and forth seamlessly between Good Cop/Bad Cop and Smart Chap/Simple Chap routines throughout the "debate" -- and shamelessly.]

**Curufin:**

Not that this insanity has a hope of success, of course -- but on the off chance that whatever whimsical force exists to unbalance the plans and careful calculations of thinking Elves is ruling this hour, we want to make our position perfectly clear. There can be no compromise on the matter of the Silmarils. Not even to temporize, not even temporarily. --If that's what you really intend. Cousin.

**Finduilas:**

I should think you'd want even one of them out of Morgoth's control, no matter who got it, just because of what he did to your father! And it's for a good cause. You should be ashamed of yourselves!

**Curufin:**

Be quiet, Sparkly, and let the grownups talk.

[to Gwindor, preemptively:]



Sit down, pup, and learn to control your temper if you don't want to go West early--

[to Guilin, before the rest of the Council has a chance to get offended]

I do apologize, good sir, but the role of impetuous youth at High Councils is to watch, listen, and learn in respectful silence from those older and wiser than they -- or so I've always believed, gentles.

**Second Counselor:** [evidently has resented the kids' presence at sessions]

It's good to hear somebody saying that, finally.

**Finduilas:**

Father!

**Orodreth:**

Your comments are offensive, Curufin--

**Curufin:** [interrupting, coldly:]

--But correct. The fact that you are offended by them is irrelevant.

**Celegorm:** [lazy smile]

After all, it isn't as though you can exactly throw us out now, is it?

[There is a silence, Finrod expressionless, the rest looking apprehensive but generally in agreement]

**Beren:**

Wait, wait -- why not? What exactly do you two do around here, anyway? Except help out the King's huntsmen, sort of, when you feel like it?

**Steward:** [urgent]

My lord, please.

**Captain:** [aside-but-loud-enough-to-be-heard-by-everyone]

--Good question, actually.

**Third Counselor:**

Your question, sir, is as rude as it is ridiculous. There are the sacred rules of hospitality, that are surely even known to mortals, which forbid the refusal of shelter to any guest -- and so much the more when guest is also of one blood and family.

**Beren:** [shakes head]

No, gentles, I'm sorry but I'm not seeing it at all -  
- when times got harder, we had a lot of people  
staying with us, and most of them were kin some ways  
or other, and they always were expected to do their  
own chores and contribute to the general running of  
things. Anyone who wouldn't abide by the house rules  
could just go build their own fort someplace else.  
Too much at stake to play dumb games over how the  
wood gets stacked or the blankets folded or the  
dinner cooked -- or--

[glances at Finrod]

--who stands what watch.

**Master of Illusions:**

You do not understand, Edain: after the Battle our  
losses were so great that without their forces joined  
to ours we would have been sorely pressed to defend  
our borders and to also maintain the city as it  
requires -- it's not as easy as you might imagine --  
and their assistance has proven indispensable.

**Beren:**

Oh -- you'd be surprised what turns out not to be  
indispensable after all, after you haven't got it any  
more.

**Celegorm:**

I think -- that anything this important -- ought  
not to be decided in secret. Shouldn't the folk  
of Nargothrond be allowed to at least know what  
arrangements their master is making for the dis-  
position of their future?

**Curufin:** [silk-smooth]

I think my elder brother is correct.

**Steward:**

I do not see, my lords, that there is any need  
to advance the schedule for the public hearing--

**Second Counselor:** [interrupting]

As a matter of fact that strikes me as an excellent  
idea. The more minds, the more vision and clarity  
brought to the matter, the more fresh air can only  
sweep through, would you not agree, Sire?

[All look at the King]

**Finrod:** [blandly]

Oh, by all means -- if we're going to have a coup,  
let us do it properly.

[He signals to the Guards to go open the main doors and bring anyone who cares to come in from the solar and corridors. As the hall fills he rises and goes to stand in the center of the lowest tier, but as though he's barely stopping himself from pacing; throughout the next part, as the battle for power builds in intensity, he becomes increasingly more fey and for longer intervals, like a high-voltage line with an intermittent short (which is a rather scary thing to witness, even when it's up in the transformers of a high-tension line)--if anyone else were operating under halfway normal conditions they would not be crossing him now.]

**Beren:** [whispering, to the Captain]

What's His Majesty up to?

[The Captain shakes his head -- he does not know either. When the assembly hall is is mostly full the King claps his hands loudly and addresses the populace at large:]

**Finrod:** [ploughing straight through and not allowing interruption]

All right, my people, pay attention! I'll be exceedingly surprised if anyone here hasn't some idea of what we've been working on these past hours, but listen up and you'll hear it plain, unencumbered by ornament -- or even much in the way of organization. If you don't already know, then know this: the Man who saved my life in the Dagor Bragollach is dead, but his son lives and comes to remind me of my debt to his House -- a debt we all owe to the House of Beor, who stood so long at the forefront of our borders against the North. He's here seeking aid for what sounds like a quest out of a bard's story, only it's the stark truth: to gain permission to wed the princess he loves, and who loves him in return, he has been set a task impossible to mortal Men.

[Beren grows increasingly embarrassed throughout]

No one here can have forgotten the story of how your King and commanders were saved in the darkest hour of the retreat from Ard-galen by mortal valor, when had

not Barahir of long inheritance of friendship come riding with his shield-guard and at great cost of their own blood broken the Orc-leaguer about us and delivered us from the Fen of Serech. Few here can have failed to hear of the legend of his only son, whose name is terror to the minions of the Dark and whose deeds are bitterest gall even to the Necromancer who has galled us so these several years.

[there is a lot of low-level discussion going on in the crowd during this, of approving tone]

But there are limits to what valor alone can accomplish, as alas we know! and without our help The Beoring will surely fail, for the condition assigned him is to bring back one Silmaril from Morgoth's stronghold. I grant you it's an incredibly difficult challenge, and not guaranteed of success, but I've devised a plan that makes it at least doable, with minimal likely risk of casualties and discovery, which would break Morgoth's teeth in insult and in his repute in the eyes of his captains, sowing the chaos which he so loves to sow among us his foes, -- and which satisfies honor of all parties, in all points -- or would, had not the former Lords of Aglon-and-Himlad suddenly and at very late hour discovered cause to balk.

**Celegorm:** [breaking in as the King pauses to assess the situation on several levels]

What our kinsman Finrod is leaving out is the following: the princess in question is no mortal, but one of our own -- no less than the daughter of Elu Thingol and Melian the Maia of Doriath, who instead of responding to such an insolent demand with the severity it should have incurred, chose this roundabout, more feelings-sparing way of saying -- not in a thousand years. Changes things a bit, doesn't it?

**Curufin:**

Moreover, your King attempts to trade upon our honesty and honor by pretending that he will arrange a merely formal bartering of jewel and girl and once the exchange is done the gem will be returned to our rightful custody. Frankly, since everyone knows that no one on this earth will ever give up a Silmaril voluntarily, I'm surprised that he's attempting to

enlist our support in an outrageous attempt to have us cheat ourselves, but then no doubt he thinks us all no more than fools and children by comparison to his legendary wisdom -- the wisdom that more than halved Nargothrond's fighting force in the execution of his long-thought strategy of the Siege!

**Captain:**

Oh, please--!

**Finrod:** [ignoring them]

--My cousins, on the other hand, who have been living here these ten-odd years as my guests, are now apparently trying to change their status from guests to hosts, and would like to convince you that they'll do a better job of it than I.

**Curufin:**

Our concern is solely for the people of Nargothrond.

**Captain:** [loudly]

Which people? Yours? -- or us?

**Curufin:** [patronizing]

Don't worry -- you'll still have a job.

**Captain:** [as if changing the subject]

You know, I remember hearing about a couple of field commanders who insisting on carrying a mosaic floor everywhere, to go in their field headquarters. Made themselves remarkably popular with their support staff and logistics people, not to mention the poor slobs who had to carry the thing.

**Beren:** [amazed]

Mosaic? That's stone, right? Little stones? How on earth . . .?

**Captain:**

On panels, and in boxes, with a lot of effort. --Did you bring it back from Ard-galen, milords? No? How many lives did it cost, of soldiers and horses too tired from hauling it to run when the fires came? That wasn't a small pavilion, as I recall. Was it worth the price to impress everyone with how organized and successful your House was? Didn't work, you know. You still had to move in here and sponge off of us. I'm sure they were really impressed with your care

for them. Going to look after Nargothrond the same way?

**Celegorm:**

I'm sure I've no idea why you think we're interested in taking charge here. We are the eldest heirs of Finwe, and we don't exactly need any other addition to our prestige.

**Curufin:**

However -- in the event of incompetence and lack of leadership, failures of judgment, absence of vision, even -- dare I say -- abandonment of wisdom, we would of course stand ready to ready to supply whatever assistance might be required, to the best of our ability.

**Celegorm:**

And I must say, we've seen Morgoth's mercy of leadership today, or any of the rest of it -- except the incompetence. We've heard a great deal about responsibility to mortals -- but what about responsibility to Nargothrond?

**Curufin:**

After all, it was only their duty after receiving the Grant of Ladros, was it not? not to mention your House's generosity in deeding them the northlands in the first place. It is not as though the mortals were the only ones to lose kin in the late battle against Morgoth.

[Finrod's expression goes from furious to murderous; Orodreth closes his eyes, pained; Guilin frowning nods in agreement; there is a lot of crowd consensus at this. Unable to listen any more, Beren jumps up and strides halfway across the dais, staring off into the darker apse. Unfortunately, it's hard not to hear.]

But that is ultimately of little concern to us. It's ancient history, so to speak. What concerns us -- concerns us all! -- is the Future. What becomes of Nargothrond -- of the Noldor -- of all the Kindreds, if Morgoth's ire is roused from the past decade's slumber and provoked in such an outrageous manner?

**Celegorm:**

In one word -- war.

**Curufin:** [gesturing offhand towards Beren]

Do you want your children to end up like him?  
Homeless, kinless, friendless beggars living without  
even the rustic community of our Dark-Elven kindred?  
Savages scarcely to be distinguished from the beasts  
of the forest where they dwell -- or worse yet,  
thralls slaving away in Angband as payment for the  
rash presumption of having chosen to defy the Lord  
of Fetters?

**Celegorm:**

And don't imagine that he won't retaliate -- there's  
no possible way old Fetters is going to take this  
one quietly. There will be hell to pay, quite  
literally, after the fact -- and for a long time  
thereafter. --This is assuming of course that the  
mad plan is even executable, that it won't simply  
result in the loss of all involved -- their lives  
thrown away in an action with nothing in return.

**Curufin:**

Obviously if there were any hope of it succeeding  
we would certainly be the first to offer our support  
-- but we hold our responsibilities as guests of  
Nargothrond no less sacred than your duty of hospi-  
tality extended so freely towards ourselves. If the  
leadership of the realm forgets duty towards you, may  
you not then in good conscience seek good leadership?  
If your overlord chooses for you a path that is  
wrought of disaster, leading only to destruction,  
is it not your duty to take heed for your families,  
your lives, your lore? And make no mistake, this  
path leads to destruction.

[Getting into full demagogue cry here]

If you have no care for yourselves, consider your  
children -- your sons dead in battle, gone for what  
might as well be forever, or hurt so badly that they  
fade regardless of the breath remaining in them, your  
daughters injured in the wrack of war, trapped in the  
mindless wreckage of battle that spares not beauty,  
the flames and the falling walls, your life's work  
both living and breathed forth in art all gone, or  
ruined past repair! Think on your friends and far  
kinsmen doomed to endless war, the heartbreak of civi-  
lizations shattered and lore forgotten, the songs  
silenced, the harpstrings mute forever, the holy words

lost for good, the fountains running red with blood and black with ash, empty the halls where children children sang, no sound but that of innumerable mourners, and afterwards a scattered and a broken people, remembering not even their own true names, wandering lost in forests of shadow and terror, with neither cirth nor tengwar to bear the memories of wisdom to after generations, becoming even as than the Turned Ones, as though you had never been anything more -- is this the future that you want? Because it certainly isn't the one I'm hoping for!

[it's clear this is having the desired impact on everyone present, the imagery at least, if not the implied politics]

Because what I hope for, for Nargothrond, which is now my adopted home as it is your own, is a future in which the great works you have already accomplished here in such short time, with such heroic effort in a land that might have been entirely new for all the untamed wilderness that surrounds us, all the beauties you have made -- are nothing. That's right -- nothing. --Not because they are destroyed, but because they are nothing as compared to what we will create in the days to come! I do not wish to insult you by naming you cowards, too ensnared by the webs of fear and memory of Darkness to go on -- rather I wish to praise you by naming you wise, wise enough to move onward in new directions entirely, free of the shackles of hidebound tradition and outworn custom. Let us stand together, friends!

[he pauses, panting, while general acclaim begins to rise in volume]

**Steward:**

Lord Curufin?

**Curufin:** [extremely wary, but hopeful -- winning the King's right hand lord over would be the coup of the coup, so to speak]

What would you like to contribute, my Lord Edrahil? I know that your work must give you a particular awareness of the value of civilization and the need for cooperation in caring for and preserving it.



**Steward:**

I think no reasonable person could disagree with any of the sentiments you've so eloquently expressed just now. But, my lord, I cannot tell from your words whether you are endeavoring to convey that our King's endeavor will lead to war against Morgoth -- which is the state that currently obtains, not peace -- or to war against Doriath, stars know why, unless you're planning on starting one, -- or to a civil war of your following in Nargothrond against the House of Finarfin. --Or all three.

[shakes head]

In all my years' service in my capacity as Herald I never yet heard such a discordant mix of half-lies and half-truths and serpentine redoublings of one across the other -- save when we received the occasional bribe-and-threaten from across the Leaguer. Would you care to explain in as simple language as is possible for you, so that I can render it into plain Sindarin for the benefit of everyone else?

[Curufin looks at his older brother with a You-want-to-take-this? expression]

**Celegorm:**

War is war. --As you ought to know. The end result's the same -- burnt cities and mourning widows -- wherever it happens, or who's involved.

[This oblique and shameless reference to the Kinslaying shuts Finrod's partisans up for the instant, dumbfounded]

**Beren:** [finally turning to speak]

--Look, this is crazy. I'll just do like I was originally going to do, and infiltrate Angband by myself. I'm not going to start a civil war here!

**Celegorm:** [dropping the good-will act]

If you dare to claim what's ours, we will hunt you down to the ends of Arda, mortal.

**Beren:** [shortly]

You're welcome to try.

[to Finrod]

Sir, with your leave I'll take your intent for action and consider the debt paid, and leave myself to remove the occasion for trouble in your realm.

**Finrod:**

That's not possible, I'm afraid.

**Beren:**

Sure it is. As the party collecting I should be the one to say when it's fulfilled, shouldn't I?

**Finrod:**

Not for that. --You've never held command in your own right, or ruled over your own organization, and there are vast, vast differences.

**Beren:** [stiffly]

That may be true, Sire, but I am still as responsible for my own actions.

**Finrod:** [smiling dangerously, speaking not just to Beren]

--No, Barahirion, you do not understand. This is not like your Northern woodsmen, when your father made suggestion that they abandon their homes and holts for the safety of your hall, and they instead thinking, "I cut this clearing out with my own hands, and my parents before me, and theirs before them, and when fire has burnt or storm has shattered we have rebuilt, and now we have laid down our lives to hold it, and surely we can keep on doing so, and if not, well then--," chose rather to face the night and perish. These are my thanes, my trusted ones, who have taken my name and my glory to shield them, while they dwell in the halls I hewed for them, and have been glad enough to own themselves Nargothronders while I asked nothing of them. This -- is our hedge of thorns.

[Sees that Beren understands, sort of. To the Counselors and Commanders:]

Well, then -- you're supposed to be the wisest of the wise, what do you in your vast wisdom say to solve this dilemma? What a choice! between on the one side the manifold calls of honor, of duty, of friendship, of all the years of service given and accepted from the House of Beor, of my own long service to build you a home of safety and repose, of the task of our

people to waylay and harass the Enemy, all these things, so many reasons for!

[There is silence from his Chiefs of Staff]

And what have we on the other side? A pair of free-loaders and the rag-tag of their glorious Host, who left us waiting on the wrong side of the Sea just a short while back, or have you completely forgotten about that? Are we not still the greatest Elven dominion this side? Or are you completely intimidated by the Feanor mystique? Or have my cousins cast a glamour over you, that you'd sooner be shamed before both Kindreds and the Powers themselves, than lose their favor?

**Guilin:** [sternly]

Sire, neither are you nor your House themselves Powers either, and it is ill-behooved of you to issue ultimatums and demand loyalty tests as though you believed yourself a god. We are not children -- nor mortals -- to be lectured so by the son of Finarfin: we, no less than yourself, are Noldor of high degree!

[There is a lot of loud public agreement to this. Finrod freezes in the middle of starting to answer, his expression shocked but filled with comprehension of the Pattern. A longish pause.]

**Celegorm:** [snorting]

I rather think that says it all, cousin?

**Finrod:** [ironic smile]

So this is how the game goes, eh? Winner takes all? Like that game where you change all the tiles over at a go, white to black, not contending square by square, foot by foot for the mastery but at one fell swoop shifting the play of power from opposer to victor? Very well. The board is yours.

[to the rest of the hall, his face very taut, his voice harsh with control:]

You -- may do what you please. This set is ended, and you'd best find yourself another harper to play for you from this day forth. I -- have no choice. My faith has been given, and if I refuse to keep it I might as well have died in Ard-galen. King or no

king, I hold my life a gift of worth enough that I will repay it at whatever cost to myself -- and if you are the sort of people who would feel otherwise, receiving such a grant, then I am pleased to part from you!

[a general outcry, all at once:]

**Orodreth:**

Finrod, you don't mean what you're saying--

**Steward:**

My lord--

**Guilin:**

These are wild words, Sire--

**Third Counselor:**

Your Majesty, consider well before you stoop to folly--

**Finrod:** [interrupts them all]

What, you will have me here a tame and captive King, to follow when it pleases you, and dismiss when it doesn't? You will call me your lord, and pretend to obey my rule, and let me work to order your lives when you can't be troubled to it yourselves, but when I ask anything of you in return, -- or not in return, but merely in duty -- then you will turn deaf ears to me, pretending the inconvenient demands haven't been made?

[shouting:]

--NO, I say--!

[takes off his crown and slams it down on the floor -- it rolls circularly along the dais with a ringing sound. Continues, not shouting, but still quite loud:]

Let us at least have it plain, gentles, without a false plating of silver over casting of lead! If you will not trust me, then you will not trust me. No one here may say truthfully that I don't take counsel, that I do not consider the well-being of all, or that I haven't ruled you well all these centuries. Or why haven't you complained before this day, then? But comes a time, in peaceful hall as in field of war, that counsel must cease and deeds begin. Since you

will not allow my leadership, I cannot allow you to claim it.

[to Beren -- very formally and calmly]

My lord of Dorthonion, I beg you to accept my apologies for failing in my assistance to you. But where one had planned to go, alone, two shall surely stand better chance. I cannot pledge any more than this, my own sword and strength to your aid -- though I had hoped at least that I'd rate better than nothing for a retinue!

[looks around the hall, not really seeing any of those present]

Will none of you come with me, then? For the hope of glory, if nothing else, or from vanity, so that Nargothrond will have some tiny crumb of pride left? Or are you all cowards now? Did every scrap of moral integrity and courage get burnt in the Dagor Bragol-lach as well? Must I be evicted from the refuge I built for you with nothing and with no one to take my part?

[The Steward rises and moves to stand beside him.]

**Steward:** [gently]

Sire -- you had only to ask.

[Finrod gives him a Look of exasperation and apology, still shaking with fury]

**Captain:** [as quietly]

Actually, you didn't.

[over his shoulder, louder]

--Lads? For the old songs' sake?

[The two Rangers who were present the night of Beren's arrival and this morning come forward with the Soldier and the Guard, ignoring the "don't be insane" remonstrating of friends and colleagues in the crowd.]

Anyone else? It's no different from any other mission: you'll either be coming back or faring-forth -- there aren't any safe times, when arrows miss and axes don't cut, you ought to know that by now!

[The Cavalry Commander's aide rises and shoves back his chair -- his chief gives him an angry look, and the Warrior stares down his CO and goes across to stand beside the King. He is joined by the three Guards who were at the Fens -- the other turns away from his friends' expectant looks. Gwindor jumps up, and is grabbed on the one hand by his father and the other by his fiancée, who assail him silently with pleas until he sits down, biting his lip in shame, head bowed.]

Is that it?

[The Captain looks around at the volunteers, raises an eyebrow]

Just like old times, eh, Your Majesty?

[Finrod gives a short bitter laugh]

**Steward:**

My lord, what arrangements are to be made for the government of the realm?

**Finrod:** [shrugging]

I don't know. It isn't my job any more.

**Steward:**

Surely you will not give your city over to these strangers' authority?

**Finrod:** [offhand]

No, I don't need to -- Nargothrond seems to have done that for me.

**Steward:** [giving up on rational persuasion]

My lord, hear me--

[He kneels to pick up the crown and remains on one knee as he speaks:]

Perhaps they have not realized this yet, and perhaps they choose to ignore it, but regardless of what has just taken place, you are still as much their King as you are mine. You must not leave Nargothrond leaderless, -- for you have not that right, any more than these have the right to do what they have done, to set aside this burden unconsidered. You must choose in your turn a steward for the realm, to hold it in your absence.

[The King gives him the Look again, but nods heavily and comes to accept it with careful graciousness from his hands]

**Finrod:** [tiredly]

Very well. --Orodreth, you're next in line, it's yours by right: if and when I come back I look to you to make me a full report on what you've accomplished, but until then, it's all yours -- Catch!

[He tosses the crown to his brother]

**Orodreth:** [catching it and looking at it in dismay]

What can I possibly say in return? I cannot even thank you without sounding like a hypocrite, as though I wished for this -- or as though I'm mocking you.

**Finrod:** [mild tone]

You're welcome.

[There is a pause, in which tension seems to dissipate and people look at each other all through the hall, seeming slightly stunned]

**Beren:** [to self, half aloud]

I thought I'd already known the worst of fear, and guarded against it.

**Finrod:** [distantly]

Well. It's always clear after the fact, isn't it? Weird, isn't it, how one can't change it, even forewarned, even prepared, no matter how one tries . . .

**Orodreth:**

What are you talking about? --Do you mean that nonsense about the dream you had, the one that 'Tariel was so worked up about at the housewarming party? You do, don't you?

**Finrod:**

--Not a dream. --Nothing so clear.

[lightly]

Well, one good thing's come of all this -- I won't have to shout at people for not building my arbalests and not telling me about it.

[He is a little short of breath when he speaks]

**Orodreth:** [earnestly, sotto voce]

Finrod, you cannot mean this. It's -- insane, utterly and absolutely insane. It's all very well to honor one's bargains, but not to the point of self-destruction and forfeiture of everything one has worked for. With a little careful negotiation I'm sure this unfortunate business can be put behind us, you can satisfy your honor with some reasonable grant of assistance, and we'll figure out a way to placate the Sons of Feanor -- I know you didn't anticipate this, but--

**Finrod:**

You mean you didn't realize this was a possibility? I thought you were the shrewd one, brother. Of course I knew it might happen this way: why do you think I grovelled so carefully and consideredly to our cousins all day, -- and set only guards that I tr-- that I thought I could trust?

**Orodreth:** [incredulous]

Are you telling me that you had thought of this beforehand? That this isn't some impulsive gesture of yours, but that you actually planned to go through with this mad scheme? You really mean to risk throwing away your life for the sake of this mortal bravo and his, might I say upon reflection, extremely offensive endeavor? Bad enough that you lavished miruvor on him as though it were wine, as though he could appreciate it! I know the Beorings saved your life once, but you cannot actually believe that there is a real equation--

**Finrod:** [quietly but fierce]

Orodreth -- do you realize what you have just said?  
-- Because I certainly hope that you do not.

[He stops talking, looking rather pale]

**Orodreth:**

Don't take that tone with me. You're not Father. Not that you listened to him either. He was right to turn back -- if only you'd shown half the sense--

**Finrod:** [interrupts]

I didn't make you follow me--

[checks again, his face drawn]



**Celegorm:**

Are you going to take all day, Finrod old chap? Could you hurry it up there, do you think?

[Beren, dead white and shaking with fury, stalks over to the Sons of Fëanor. Apprehensively the Captain and the Steward trail him, ready to restrain him, but he just stops a pace away and stares at them for a a long moment.]

**Beren:**

You know what? Orcs don't pretend to be your friends -- they just try to kill you. That's the only difference I can see--

[Curufin's smile falters for an instant. Celegorm reaches down to shove him away, but Beren grabs his wrist and they stand there locked, the Elven prince unable to pull away without undignified brawling. Curufin looks over at Finrod, warningly:]

**Curufin:** [half-lifting his knife from its hanger]

Leash your hound, cousin. --Leash him, before I crop his ears for you!

[Finrod's chief officers catch hold of Beren's shoulders, but he does not move at their urging, still locking stares and arms with Celegorm.]

**Finrod:**

Beor!

[Beren allows the Captain and Steward to draw him back with them, turning away as though the Sons of Fëanor are not even worthy of his contempt.]

**Curufin:** [lightly]

That boy's a wild animal, brother. I'm surprised our cousin isn't afraid to have such a beast at his side.

**Celegorm:**

No doubt the wolf's-head will turn on him in time.

**Curufin:** [evil smile]

Barahirion: did your mother perchance wear such warg-hide buskins as yourself? Was she a warrior, too?  
--Or were you just raised by wolves, eh?

[Beren's companions make sure they're blocking him securely, but Beren only glances over his shoulder at

the Sons of Feanor, almost bored.]

**Beren:** [coldly]

My mother was worth ten of you.

[looks them up and down and sneers]

--She could have taken you both.

[While no doubt more loyal than accurate, this assertion is not exactly the response that Curufin was anticipating, and he cannot think of anything to say for the moment.]

**Captain:** [softly]

My lord -- he isn't worth your time.

**Beren:** [ignoring him]

When we come back -- you're going down. My word on it.

**Celegorm:**

So you do fight against the Eldar, --Elf-Friend.

**Beren:**

I hunt fell things. And I keep my promises.

**Finrod:** [quietly]

Beren. To me.

[At once Beren strides over to the King, wheels and drops to one knee at Finrod's left side, rips off the peace-bonds, sets both hands on his sword-hilt, and does not move. He knows exactly what statement he's making, and Curufin can't match him for sardonic looks. The King lays his hand on Beren's shoulder, ostensibly in approval, but he is actually leaning rather heavily on him for support.]

[mindspeech]

They are no concern of ours henceforth. Hush! Do not speak your thought. Attend me -- as did your father in the Fens.

[Beren, startled that the King is reading his unvoiced worries, and still more so by his first encounter with one of the greatest legends of his people, nevertheless says nothing, but rises gracefully, continuing to bear Finrod's weight without seeming to do so.]

--It's only a little dizziness. Stay me for a few minutes more.

[aloud, to Orodreth]

Brother, we will not trouble you. All I ask is that you ensure we are not troubled in our departing, and that my people are not detained or maltreated prior to our leaving, which will be as soon as we can possibly make it.

[At that moment only Beren knows that Finrod can't see straight, and that he's faking being okay to a large extent -- and gives away nothing of the King's weakness by his stance or expression.]

**Orodreth:** [bitterly]

What makes you think I can ensure anything?

**Finrod:** [low voice]

I would not ask, if I did not. The people have accepted you. They require your authority now, lest they scatter like doves at the shadow of the hawk. You must be there for them. Give them such orders as they can obey, and will take honor from obeying. Do not contend openly with these rivals. Let the City have rest from strife. That's about all I can give you for advice, except -- Good luck.

**Orodreth:**

Will you always be walking away from your responsibilities, Finrod? How many times does this make? First Mother and Amarie, then Father, then the Host to follow this hobby of humans, then haring all over Beleriand setting up a pocket empire and not sticking with any part of it long enough to see it through -- and they laugh at me for running away -- once! Whatever are you going to be when you grow up, Finrod?

**Finrod:**

What, exactly, would "through" consist of --?

[stops, shakes head]

Orodreth, you don't want answers to those questions. I don't do rhetorical well, and real answers would take us months, or years. It's late to be bringing all this up, and bad timing to set upon me now. I cannot and will not fight with you here, under the

shadow of the Oath. I'm just asking you, please, to help me prevent anyone getting hurt today.

[holds out free hand to the Prince, who turns away angrily with folded arms]

**Orodreth**

Of course I'll do what I can to prevent violence. Of course. But don't expect to smile and get away with everything this time. I don't forgive you for placing this burden on me -- though why I'm surprised, I don't know.

**Finrod:** [genuinely confused]

When have I ever wronged you? By giving you the crown? Should I have given it to another? Whom, then?

[stops suddenly again, sighing]

--Never mind.

**Orodreth:**

Running off with your mortal friends again? Off to play soldier now?

**Finrod:** [refusing to be drawn]

Yes. --Edrahil, see that the corridor is cleared and the doors all sealed. I don't wish to be cut off, unarmed as I am save for yourselves. I'm fairly certain all will respect your authority still.

[The Steward goes quickly out, his hand resting automatically on the hilt of the dirk Beren gave him.]

**Orodreth:**

Finrod, you can't be imagining--

**Finrod:** [grimly]

I can imagine anything. I've seen worse. --As have you.

[mindspeech]

--Beren. I'm all right. Don't answer me aloud or in gesture. Can you match strides with me? And not too fast -- it might come back. Good. Everyone! When Edrahil returns we go, and we do not stop until we reach my chambers which have been secured to me and mine alone since The Beoring's arrival. There we'll

take as our base of operations until we depart for good. --Someone get the maps.

[The Steward reappears in the doorway of the throne room and nods to the King. Finrod straightens, shaking off the weakness that has touched him and smiles with a somewhat mocking expression.]

All right, lads, all clear. Form "nernehta" -- only without the shields, of course!

[Against the hostile watchfulness of the Sons of Feanor across the room and the guilty stares of the citizenry, the Ten set themselves into the ancient moving defensive formation composed of a doubled wedge, surrounding their King and his liege as they sweep rapidly from the scene of the debacle of Nargothrond. On the opposite side of the throne room Curufin, Celegorm and their adherents-by-default go the other way; Orodreth and the others of the King's family and near-kin remain in stunned disarray.]

## SCENE VI

**Gower:**

In silence Beren now attends upon the King  
--sovereign at least of the few yet owning him--  
musing on the grievous claiming of the ring's  
right, and how from one wreck to another grim  
(and more so indeed it seems) he moves,  
that catastrophe doth dog his steps--  
until in time needs must shatter all he loves,  
Tho' wherefore truly and for what past slips  
as punishment or payment kens he not.

[Back in the royal apartments, where the mood of the antechamber is anything but peaceful and conducive to thought, Finrod is exhorting his remaining troops:]

**Finrod:** [urgent and grim]

My friends, go and make such farewells as you will,  
to persons or to places, and ready what you must.  
What you lack of gear, from use or wear, speak to  
Edrahil of it, and he'll make sure it's taken care  
of. Do not engage in altercation. That includes --  
conversation, discussion, argument whether voice or  
mindspeech -- or looks! -- as well as any physical  
hostile contact. Even accidental--

[pointed look at the Ranger Captain]

--is strictly to be avoided. I enjoin you, upon your proven loyalty -- obey me in this! We cannot afford to have blood spilled this day. I cannot afford to lose one of you.

**Captain:** [without resentment]  
Shall I bond weapons, then?

**Finrod:**  
Nay, friend, I trust you -- and will not have any of you defenseless. --Be careful.

**Captain:**  
We shall.

[No one else speaks as they leave, subdued. Finrod looks at the Steward, who has not gone with the rest.]

**Finrod:**  
No farewells?

**Steward:**  
Not this side of the Sea, my King.

[Finrod sighs and nods. Stiffly he leans against the table, his shoulders falling, now that there are only the three of them.]

**Finrod:**  
Holy stars -- I've not been so tired in -- ten years. That took everything I had and then some, to keep at bay. It nearly had me a time or two there. --But Namo and his House will have no occasion to complain of me today.

**Beren:** [faintly]  
I don't understand what happened.

**Finrod:** [ironic]  
I prepared for the wrong treason. I warded against Alqualonde, and I should have looked back farther -- to Morgoth's Parole.

[laughs slightly, shakes head.]

**Beren:**  
You are giving up your kingdom.

**Finrod:**

I am their lord -- however ungrateful my people seem, I cannot be their lord and consign them to civil war and slaughter unawares. Far better this, a wrong but a lesser wrong, and in time reparable. I hope.

**Beren:**

But now you are no lord either!

**Steward:** [ferociously]

Is he not your lord as well as mine? Or will you too forsake him now?

[Beren stares at him, shocked, then rips off his sword-belt and slams it down on the tiles in front of the King, falling on hands and knees, head bent. Finrod gives his Steward a reproachful look.]

**Finrod:**

That sword's passed so many times between our Houses that I think we may consider it given, Beor. I need no pledges from you, my friend, I know what you meant. --Get up, get up!

[To the Steward:]

Will you please see to darkening my armor? And Lord Beren's, with your own? I need to reconsider what we shall do now, in the time that remains.

[The Steward nods and leaves the room]

I mean to be ready to go at sunset, when neither the eyes of dayfarers or of nocturnal spies will be on the wing or at their best. Ask for whatever you need as well--

**Beren:** [urgent]

No. No, look. My original plan will still work. Give me supplies and a map of the passes and I'll leave under the cover of darkness and trouble you no more. This shouldn't be happening.

**Finrod:** [shaking his head]

It doesn't matter. It's happened.

**Beren:**

No, I'll leave, and it will be all right.

[casting around the chamber]

Where's my stuff? I'll go now, before anyone knows -- they won't even care, will they? Unless I come back with it--

[he starts rummaging frantically in his pack.]

Where's my gambeson? He said something about mending it -- and the rest of my knives -- my armour--

[not speaking coherently or tracking at all]

Let me get my cloak -- I was going to sneak in as a thrall anyway--

**Finrod:**

Beren, stop.

**Beren:**

No, I can't, I've got to go, this is insane--

**Finrod:** [catches hold of his arm]

It's not that simple. You can't change what's happened--

**Beren:** [wrenches away -- or tries to]

--but I can disappear, and then it won't matter -- please, let me go--

[tries to pull away again. Finrod shoves him against the wall.]

**Finrod:**

BEREN!!!

[effects: reverb and a brief flare of white light. Beren freezes.]

**Finrod:**

Beren -- I am not Morgoth: I cannot reshape your will even if I would. All I can do is set you in bonds rather than let you run mad to your destruction, like any mortal lord -- though you hate me for it after. But I will do so if I must -- but I entreat you, son of my friend, do not make me do so!

[cautiously releases Beren.]

**Beren:** [hardly audible]

Sire.

[he slips down to his knees, bowing his head]



**Finrod:** [kneeling with him]

Are you master of yourself, now? You will not try to flee again?

[Beren, eyes closed, shakes his head, leaning back against the wall. The Steward returns, having heard the shouting, and looks on in concern.]

When I finish we will speak a little. Just -- rest, be calm, and endeavor to accept what you cannot understand for the present.

[Still frowning, Finrod returns to the table and starts retracing lines on the diagrams laid out there. Beren is expressionless and silent, but not managing to stay calm, it seems.]

**Finrod:** [gently]

You're clamouring louder than an army, and I can't seem to shut you out, and I cannot work this way. Can you not still your thoughts even a little?

[Beren, jaw clenched, nods and tries to stay calm -- outwardly succeeds, at least. A short pause: Finrod sighs, sets down maps and goes to kneel by Beren again.]

Beren. You did not bring about your father's death.  
--Do you think any mortal man could have returned faster than you did -- that if you had only somehow pushed yourself harder you could have warned them in time? And do you truly think your presence at the attack would have changed anything except the number of the dead? Were they not too many for you to fight, after? Did they not take care to surround the camp and cut off all avenues of retreat beforehand? You could not have sacrificed yourself to guard their escape -- only died with him.

**Beren:** [self-loathing]

You weren't there -- I should've--

**Finrod:** [flinches]

--I am there now. And I see -- as you cannot -- that with what you were given, of strength and knowledge, you could have done no more. Be at peace, my friend: you are not the primary agent of disaster in Middle-earth. Leave that blame where it belongs -- on Morgoth's doorstep.

**Beren:** [bleakly]

My father apologized to me before he sent me off that last time. It wasn't like there was any reason for him to, I drew the lot fair and square, he didn't pick me in particular -- though he should have, given the situation. Only -- if I'd been on point instead of the guys, maybe . . .

[looking at the King]

Are you all right, sir?

**Finrod:** [sad smile]

Only a trifle jealous. I parted ill from my father, and I do not know how or when I shall ever be reconciled with him.

[Beren is quiet, his face expressionless -- outwardly; whatever is unvoiced causes Finrod to recoil as at a blow.]

**Steward:** [softly]

My King, I would say were he one of us so cruelly held in Memory, to take him beside the Falls and let the voice of the waters calm him.

**Finrod:**

I would say the same, mortal or not, but with the unsettled situation, I cannot dare that.

[remains frowning in deep thought for a long moment before an idea occurs to him]

Edrahil -- bring me my harp, if you please.

[the Steward nods in surprised approval]

**Steward:**

Of course. You'll want it tuned in "Stars", correct?

**Finrod:**

Yes, thank you.

[checks]

No -- wait. There is one still more restful in its accords. The tuning "Treelight", if you please.

[The Steward looks at him oddly]

**Steward:**

It goes against all custom, sire.

**Finrod:**

Custom appears to have been banished to the Void this day. And none of us three shall be offended, unless you think it ill done in itself--?

**Steward:**

Never, my lord.

[He exits, leaving Finrod beside Beren. They do not speak before the Steward returns with a small but exquisitely-elegant harp of wood inlaid with gold. Finrod plays a run of notes ascending and descending, and frowns.]

**Finrod:**

It's a trifle flat.

[He retunes quickly. This is clearly a small ritual between them of longstanding custom; the Steward smiles a little despite his obvious worry. He begins to play, at first a rapid piece with much counterpoint and a rather martial air, only gradually slowing it down and introducing less abrupt changes of interval and harmony, until at last it is at a tempo and modality free of agitation and stress.

(If you are fortunate enough to have a copy of The Harper's Land by Ann Heyman and Alison Kinnaird you will have an inkling of what it should sound like. --For equestrians, it is similar to getting a nervous, jiggling, high-strung beast down to a proper collected-yet-relaxed gait -- not just throwing a switch from one to the other.)

[When the set is finished he continues to block out chords and let them ring in a low, continuous background. Beren has slipped farther to lie curled up on his side, eyes closed, on the floor.]

**Steward:** [low voice]

Does he sleep?

**Finrod:** [frowning]

I can't tell. But his pain no longer consumes his thought.

[looks up at the Steward. Hesitantly:]

You should not have bespoken him so harshly. My honor is not worth such zeal in defense.

**Steward:** [bitterly]

I beg you, do not remind me. --We failed them, my King. Did we not?

**Finrod:** [closing his eyes]

Yes.

**Steward:**

They were betrayed. And not by our neglect alone.

**Finrod:**

You sensed that too?

**Steward:**

He strove to conceal it, but the fact was too much for him. And yet there's no anger there, either.  
--Only for the Enemy that caused it.

**Finrod:**

Would we all had such wisdom.

[sighs]

I think -- I think we have just seen what happens when the Oath encounters a mortal soul.

**Steward:**

Not a pleasant sight, indeed. As though not strong wine had mastered him, but almost as if he'd taken the flat of a blade, helmless.

**Finrod:** [anxious look]

Edrahil, do you think it possible for words to invoke themselves? For a Doom to call itself down?

**Steward:**

How so, my lord?

**Finrod:**

I don't understand this at all, this business from start to end, coming now and seemingly from nowhere. Why should Elwe -- Elu -- suddenly ask for a Silmaril of all things? He's never even seen them. And as far as I dare read, no one had been speaking of them to suggest it, not Luthien certainly, not from his thoughts--

**Steward:**

There is a not-incomprehensible association, perhaps -- in that the Silmarils are the most rare and precious of all things in existence, and the daughter of Melian and Thingol the most precious of all things to them, and hence the idea of one infinitely-valued and inaccessible treasure to be set as price for another?

**Finrod:** [unconvinced]

Hm. --I still don't like it. If an impossible quest was what was needed, why not ask for Glaurung's tongue to prove him killed? No less inaccessible, and certainly more useful than a Silmaril.

**Steward:**

My lord, you're the one with Vision; my talent is for overlooked-but-necessary details. Do you think it possible for the Curse to waken itself again?

**Finrod:**

I don't know. . . It tastes of Morgoth's will to me, though I can't see how he could directly influence any of it. I could spend a dozen years pondering the implications of this--

**Steward:**

But we have not twelve years, my King -- nor even ten--

[breaks off]

**Finrod:**

Speak your mind, friend.

**Steward:**

It comes to me that these last ten years have been the most dearly bought of all my life, at least, and that I should have spent them in better use.

**Finrod:**

I know. --Where did they go, master of my Household? How shall we account for them? Two years of grim hornlocked contest, driven back hoof by hoof until the slip and rout of Minas Tirith, leaving the winner to bellow and tear across the North without bar; five years after of grateful respite, when our Enemy seemed content to hold what he'd taken without further onslaught, barring us in turn, testing us in small

ways that did not cost us much, and we recovered from the Burning or so it seemed, so far as that could be. And then after it was done we learned of the trials of the far marches, and their silent fall, and we knew why we had had so much of peace -- "so much" I say, when it was in truth as an hour, was it not?

[The Steward nods]

An hour that slipped by unnoticed, and they were gone from this world. And I mourned them, as did you all, and reproached myself, and knew it vain, and set my mind to the safeguarding of the West, and the keeping of this City, and the inevitable clash that is to come -- and thought to honor them in this way. And then the strange news came, in the very days that war kindled anew against my kinsman, and I much distracted, of one the Singers said the woods themselves sang of, and a name not yet dead under the stars, and I rejoiced with you, and before I did anything word came hard upon the first that he was gone, overwhelmed by an army of wolves and dark sorcery. And again I mourned, and thought the song of Beor was done--

[as he speaks he rings the lowest string of the harp, twelve times, and then once more]

until the hour that he came before me, famished, in rags, far past his strength -- asking only because what had been demanded of him was beyond any mortal measure -- No sword, no spear or bolt I've ever taken has hurt a fraction as much -- not the Cold, not the sight of the fires in the East -- only that other Fire, and the fall of knowledge that my brothers were gone: for I knew then that Morgoth's lies were true, that we should spend their brief lives in lieu of our own, and think no more of it than of a faithful hound slain by wolf or boar--

**Steward:** [anguished]

No, my King, not so--

**Finrod:** [ignoring him]

--And Nienna witness for me, I knew the same terrible joy-in-sorrow as at the Fens of Serech, when the ox-horns sang out of the ash cloud and out of utter destruction came our redemption. What price for a

King of the Eldar, then? More than a pretty trifle,  
a "thing made by craft," indeed? Time to find out--

**Beren:** [with tremendous effort, not otherwise moving]  
Gentles . . . I am not asleep . . .

**Finrod:**  
Your pardon, Beren.

**Beren:**  
If you'd prefer . . . I'll retire apart . . . my  
lords.

**Finrod:**  
I'm not leaving you alone. I have nothing to say  
which should be safeguarded from your hearing --  
neither of you, nor of any other. But if you need  
silence to rest we will converse in silence, though  
I think it rude to do so before mortals.

**Beren:**  
That doesn't matter -- I can rest in a hurricane.

[Slowly he pulls up onto his side and draws up his knees,  
locking his arms around and resting his head on them.  
He looks sick and more than a little dazed still.]

But you don't want me hearing -- that--

**Finrod:** [coolly]  
Do you presume to tell me my own will? If you had  
been truly asleep you would have heard and known it  
upon waking. If I had not wished you to hear, I would  
not have spoken. You are Edain, not Eldar, Beren:  
remember that there are many things you cannot  
understand.

**Beren:**  
Including what you said. I don't blame you for not  
understanding what Time is to us, how could you? but  
what--

**Finrod:** [breaking in]  
--Do you recollect the words of your kinsman Bereg?

**Beren:** [stiffly]  
We don't talk about him.

**Finrod:**

Nevertheless, as with most of the lies of our Enemy, what was said in those days had not a little of truth in it. Not always the same, perhaps -- I trust I have taken more care than say, Caranthir, for all of my subjects, not simply those my nearest kin -- but it might be argued that the Elf-friends have had precious little in return for their friendship to us.

**Beren:** [dismissive]

That wasn't what I was asking about. I meant, what did you mean about the Oath trying to start all this? It's not real, is it? It can't do things, like a person? Unless you mean it was what started the War in Middle-earth in the first place, because what started this was me getting stuck on the southern border and not being able to get around the cordon. Otherwise I'd have gone west to Brethil, obviously, not down into Doriath, and none of this would ever have happened -- You're not saying the Silmarils are doing it somehow? Are you?

**Finrod:**

No. Not quite. What do you remember learning about the Night of Darkness, about the Jewels and Feanor, about the Doom?

**Beren:**

Um. Huh. "--There was considerable disagreement as to what should be done next. Mistakes were made. People got hurt. --Here we are."

**Finrod:** [covers eyes briefly]

Ah. --Was I really that reticent?

**Beren:** [trying very hard not to sound at all critical]

There was more, but I was pretty young and it didn't make a lot of sense to me then. My cousins and I couldn't get it. We figured it had to be something Elven, or maybe just Feanor -- the -- with the . . . the Kinslaying. We were just happy to play at being mythic heroes battling Morgoth and not worrying about the details. Now . . . being older and possibly wiser, I've seen enough of what stress does to ordinary people to realize that no, it's not that completely incomprehensible after all.

[pause]



And yeah, I think that probably a lot got left out, or maybe we just didn't bother remembering it, because now that I think about it it took longer for my uncle to recap the story of The Business With The Vaharions' Five Sheep, Or Was it Seven, And The Rights To The Salmon Pool In Northfell when he got back from sorting that all out, and that was probably a bit less complicated in reality than the history of the Noldor returning to Middle-earth.

**Finrod:** [quietly]  
--Probably.

**Beren:**  
But I still don't get it about the Silmarils. This place is full of jewels. Are they that different? What kind of magic spell is on them that makes people go crazy in their presence? Or even outside it, like you're telling me now? How are they different from the things I've seen here today?

**Finrod:** [remembering, rapt]  
They're like nothing on Arda -- quite literally. All that remains of the First Song is in them, the first calling of the world into the Void. They sing, you know, like blossoms themselves, they're alive as the Trees from which they were taken, they inhabit the shells of Earth as the souls of Elves and Men inhabit our bodies, and they shine like all joy and all hope together. In a way -- and I know this sounds almost blasphemous -- but they were almost more wonderful than the Trees themselves, for being the work of hands, of a mere Elf, whose years are to the gods' not as the years of Men to ours, but as a butterfly's in the Song of the World. And they are deadly -- the Starqueen blessed them so that no heart given to evil may endure them, and any that dare to lay hands on them unrightfully will be burned by their light as with fire. --And yet Morgoth cannot lay them aside, though they torture him, for the glory of them, and the living delight of their song . . .

**Beren:** [quiet -- in shock]  
I didn't think you wanted the Silmarils.

**Finrod:** [matter-of-fact]  
I don't. I never have. --What does that tell you?

**Beren:** [flatly]

That I should be more terrified than I already am,  
only I don't think I can be.

**Finrod:**

Don't be. It's counter-productive after a certain  
point. It doesn't change the odds any.

[pause]

But they have a power over mind and heart that cannot  
be measured -- they are so far beyond any other  
earthly thing that, next one of them, this--

[touches the Nauglamir at his neck -- think if Lalique  
had worked at Amarna!]

--would be no more than a strand of such pebbles as  
your forebears counted precious, bright and glittering  
but nothing of depth and light in them, no mystery to  
hold the spirit enraptured. For them, one might  
consign the whole world else to Darkness everlasting,  
and keep them for one's self alone, without any  
thought to any other or care for any lesser thing.  
One has -- and, indeed, two. Who can say what mastery  
they might have, not in imagination but seen in their  
living selves?

**Beren:** [sharply]

Tinuviel's not a thing.

**Finrod:** [grave]

Neither are the Silmarils. --But I have no doubt of  
you. I only warn you, for your own reckoning.

[laughs]

It may well be that all of our people failed at first  
because it was fated that your Kindred should take  
part in their redemption, and that ere this hour all  
other attempts were useless. It would be a strange  
thing, if it should fall to my hand, and yours, would  
it not?

**Beren:** [whispering]

Sir . . . why did you come here?

**Finrod:**

I think--

[stops]

No, I'll not burden you.

**Beren:** [gently]

Isn't that what a liege's for?

**Finrod:** [distant]

. . . I never wanted a domain, a name of glory and renown as my sister and our poor brothers, and our cousins did -- I sought only like our father to save what could be saved from the wreckage of that Night, to guard those who gave no thought to the future, and could not guard themselves. And I did that, and I did it well, as well as might be done, I think I may say without boasting. But who can say truly what he does, and whether his motives are unmixed? It would take a wiser heart than mine--

**Beren:**

Will they remember what you did for them? When you return, will Nargothrond accept you again?

**Finrod:** [easily]

Oh, we won't be coming back here. Orodreth can have it -- he'll do well enough. I couldn't bear it, and neither could they, if I returned to take up the crown, whether I sneered at them more scornfully than Fëanor himself, or smiling forgave all. But I'm done with cities, anyway. There are lands to the East you've never seen, lands beyond Gelion where the Singers travel, beautiful country of many rivers, and mountains beyond that. We don't need strongholds: we did without them before, we can do without them again. The nomad tribes manage well enough -- you yourself attest to that, needing no roof nor wall -- perhaps we will find the scattered ones and bring them together and create something new never before known upon Arda, a civilization without a city, mortal and Eldar together and making not the old mistakes, but a new music that has never been heard yet--

[Beren looks rather wide-eyed at this; the Steward enters with the King's armour in time to overhear this last and looks quietly horrified. Finrod notices -- penitently:]

--I'm sorry, Edrahil. You must be so weary of my wanderings and wild fancies--

**Steward:** [who is fully armed now save for gauntlets and helmet]

My lord, have I ever complained of them?

[answers self]

Indeed, yes, often. Do I miss the delights of the field or the allure of sleeping under the stars? Not away from them, no. Would I forgo the right to attend you in peace to any lesser member of your household? No more would I yield up my place at your right hand beneath your guerdon.

**Finrod:**

It won't be like last time, my Herald. No fanfares, no glories, no brave ridings-forth this venture.

**Steward:**

--Or ever again in Middle-earth, it seems. I know.

**Finrod:** [with gentle regret]

How should I have managed without your good help, my friend?

**Steward:** [dryly]

No doubt as I should have done had my comrades succeeded in persuading me to accompany them with the foremost, on the Ships -- that is to say, ill.

[An Age of shared battles, disasters, expeditions and simple day-in, day-out work underlie the smile that follows between them. Regretfully:]

And now, unfortunately, it falls to me to make the perchance-unwelcome point that certain matters needs must be settled, and settled publicly, before we depart. It cannot be seen that there is any confusion in the chain of command, my king. While it is true that we undertake this errand on Lord Beren's behalf and at his behest, it is not and must not appear so that he leads, or that you obey him, rather than answer a vassal's just appeal for support. It were better he should swear you fealty before all, needless though you think it, than that your shield-band be troubled at heart.

[to Beren]

I ask your pardon for such chill words, milord.

**Beren:** [unoffended]

No, you're right. Certainly there should be nothing left up in the air, we don't need any more trouble. Shall I swear now, before you?

**Steward:** [shakes head]

Better that all should witness, Heir of Beor.

**Beren:**

All right.

[Finrod sighs.]

**Steward:**

Will you arm, sire?

**Finrod:** [quietly]

--In a little. I need rest, and it will not take long to ready with your help.

[He begins to play again, not just tonalities, but very quietly, eyes closed, leaning his cheek against the soundbox of the harp. Softly and without disturbing his playing, the Steward kneels behind him and removes the Nauglamir. When he returns from placing it in its casket, he begins to braid back the King's hair -- evidently it isn't Elvish custom to just rip out any bits that catch in the links if it's gotten long enough to snag in one's mail. Beren watches from the hearth, forlornly, remembering when he too had people to look after, and to help him.]

[Little by little the tempo of the music increases, Working in reverse this time, not to agitation and haste but to a steady driving pulse like the sea at incoming tide, as the King begins to recover. More and more themes enter and are brought into harmony despite the complexity. Beren starts, as though almost recognizing what he hears, and begins to actively follow the melodies, alertness starting to replace his mindblasted expression.]

[Very quietly -- or at least as quietly as is possible for a Hound larger than most ponies -- Huan slinks in along the edge of the door and around the wall to Beren's side, dropping down on the floor next him. Head on paws, he too listens to the King's music. Just as it seems that there can be no addition to the richness of it, Finrod straightens and begins his Song:

**Finrod:**

Sing ye stars and storms of the heavens,  
sing ye beasts of earth and sea,  
sing ye eagles of the air,  
and all growing things!

I will sing at my rising  
and at my going forth  
and at my returning

[The other nine return, singly or by twos, during this time, to set their packs down and sit beside them on the floor, listening in silence]

Sing all works of hands, all arts of the mind  
sing all things shaped and shining  
sing every craft of deed and voice--

I will sing at my rising  
and at my going forth  
and at my returning

[Beren joins in, hesitantly at first, on the last two verses -- much to the amazement of the others, both that he knows the song and that his voice is so good.]

With the mountains and the great seas,  
the deeps of the forest and the deeps of the earth  
and the unfathomable deeps of the sky--

I will sing at my rising  
and at my going forth  
and at my returning:

I will ever sing the Secret Fire,  
the Light Beyond,  
the Flame Unburning  
for all my days.

[by the last stanza all have joined the chorus, impelled by example. When the final chord has almost died away the King stops it and sets aside the harp.]

**Finrod:**

My friends, my faithful ones -- I ask your forgiveness for rash words spoken this day in your presence. I did ill to shame you before you had a chance to speak your choice. I would not have anyone come with us who comes out of shame and not in freedom -- if anyone here has been compelled thus, be

free to go, with all my blessing and thanks for your many years of service and hardship, from Helcaraxe to the Siege of Angband.

[No one moves. Finrod looks away for a moment, overcome]

I too was impelled to go on a quest as well you know, both you who came and you who joined us hereafter. It may well be, as it now seems likely, that my destiny is to wrest from Morgoth the Light he stole and return it to the world once more -- and ever has been so, and for that reason I was driven across the Sea not wholly of mine own desiring, though of my own will indeed. It may be. At any rate, we resume at long last what we came here to do, and perhaps through the strange workings of Doom we will accomplish what all our agelong warfare has not done, in secrecy and seeming folly. There are no guarantees -- but I need not tell any who stood upon the fields of Ard-galen so!

[he smiles wryly, stands and crosses to the room's center, where he picks up Dagmor]

We are joined in this endeavor by one far from unknown to you, either in his person or his race, The Beoring, who makes now his own personal deed of faith to lay beside yours. Beren?

[Beren rises and comes over to kneel at his feet. He is tracking better and appears in complete control now, but there should still be a slightly concussed shading to his movements and expressions, as compared to his normal mode.]

Beren, son of Barahir, son of Bregor, in direct line of Balan known as Beor, will you exchange faith with me, acclaiming me as your King, to serve with truth in word and deed for so long as you shall live, accepting this sword of my hand in mark of my faith in you, to wield only against the Darkness beneath the light of moon and sun and stars?

**Beren:**

For so long as I live, my King--

[Finrod places the blade across his outstretched hands and sets his right hand on Beren's head in acknowledgment briefly. As Beren rises the others come to take his

place, the Captain foremost, and kneel before the King]

**Finrod:**

What's this? It has been long, since you swore me fealty--

[looking at the youngest Ranger]

--and not long at all, since you gave me your faith  
-- you cannot think I have any doubt or need at this hour . . . ?

**Captain:**

Doubt, no -- yet perhaps need no less--

[He offers up his blade to the King, who shakes his head, but takes each warrior's oath in turn, after which each goes to stand beside Beren. Finrod, not trying to conceal his tears at their gesture, nonetheless raises an eyebrow when the Steward kneels at the last.]

**Steward:** [smiles]

Shall I ask, then, what I refuse myself?

[receiving his sword back from Finrod, sheaths it and rises. As Finrod waves his two chief lords to the map table, the Steward takes up the King's mail-coat and arming doublet and proceeds to help him out of his silken over-robcs and into his battledress while they speak. There should be no awkwardness: after more than 400 years of war this isn't something that requires much effort or thought.]

**Finrod:**

Those are the only two realistic options that I see -- but give me your opinions. Scaling Ered Gorgoroth is out of the question, and it would be folly to go all the way round East through milords' brothers' lands, even had we the resources for it. Either we must go as we planned originally, with stealth rather than speed, and quietly, along Sirion and up through the Fens -- or else work farther to the West up through the mountains and down into Angband from the Hithlum side. Your thoughts?

**Steward:**

I agree that East is ruled out no less than North-east, but to cross the Ered Wethrin twice in going



and returning is suicide, in my judgment. --Stand straight, the shoulderline's still twisted.

**Captain:**

Winter approaches, Sire, and it is ill to be caught in the mountains then, even for us. I know The Beorning has endured it, but I think it a grave risk to compound what will not be an easy business.

**Finrod:** [troubled]

I would say that our best chance should be to traverse this path, along the river valley, through the forest screen and stay out of the line-of-sight of Tol Sirion for as long as possible. We know that territory well, our Power should defend us against its Darkness and if on the return we were forced to take the mountains to Mithrim, and thence to the waterways, still the worst of the effort would be behind us. But there is Barahirion to consider in that, too -- can I in conscience take him so nigh Delduath?

**Captain:**

The Lord of Dorthonion can pass its shadow unscathed, my lord.

**Finrod:**

But he's--

**Steward:** [kneeling to buckle on the King's greaves]

--mortal. I know. But so he says, and I believe him. And surely with your Working it would be safer still for him.

**Finrod:** [looking over his shoulder]

Beren? Is that true? That you can venture Tar-na-Fuin in safety?

[Beren is sitting on the floor with the others, gently stroking Huan's ears and feeding the Hound the last of his scavenged bread.]

**Beren:** [vaguely]

What? --Yes. For a while at least. At least a year ago I still could.

**Finrod:** [concerned]

Beren! You are not yet armed! Prepare yourself -- we have little time, we cannot spend another night beneath these stones. Shall I assist you, friend?

**Beren:**

No -- no, I -- I'll do it right now.

[scrambles up]

Where's my stuff?

**Steward:**

In the next chamber, on the press -- some of it seemed beyond not only repair but usefulness, and I made bold to supply alternatives, but presumed to discard nothing -- it's all there for you to decide of.

**Beren:**

Thank you.

[As he goes towards the inner door the King's Guard and the young Ranger intercept him.]

**Ranger:**

My lord, we do not wish to insult your competence, but if you would have aid in donning your gear and mail, we stand ready to your help.

**Beren:**

I'd not presume--

**Guard:**

Sir, it were our privilege to serve you.

**Beren:**

I--

[in the background]

**Finrod:**

. . . perimeter, and I'll join you in short order.

**Steward:**

Farewells, lord?

**Finrod:** [shaking head]

Checking the wards.

**Beren:** [gives up the useless pride]

--would be honored and grateful for the help.

[As they enter the other room:]

How do you make the metal not shine? Magic?

**Ranger:** [confused]

No, my lord, just -- a Noldorin Working.

**Guard:**

One persuades it not to reflect but absorb and to refract, so that the light is not cast out but held within, and such as escapes is scattered dimly, and doesn't give off flashes.

[Obviously this is perfectly reasonable and unmysterious to them]

**Beren:** [shrugging]

--Ah. Right.

**Gower:**

--Nargothrond, now kingless,  
waits like the calm of birds before the storm:  
not daring to make merry yet, for shame,  
yet fearing to speak of things to come  
lest Truth should happen to force Thought,  
Words breed Deeds, Will become Act.  
Preparations, hasty and diminished,  
with courage to fill what's lacked  
of force of men and of materiel,  
now come to their quick fruition;  
plans made with confidence of weal  
now yield to need's tuition.

The several Dooms,  
spun from the earliest hours of time,  
now spiral to a single thread,  
crime mounteth upon crime --  
the Hidden Realm, faithlessly entrusting  
its faith to the faithless, lies bereft.  
Good-byes, private and most painful,  
have been said. Now all that's left  
is the leaving--

## EPILOGUE

[Note: everything is very hushed and dim; the scene is almost without words.]

[At the gates of Nargothrond. Ten warriors wait around the entrance, some standing, some crouching, keeping watch both inwards and outwards to the gray autumnal woods. They are equipped in dark battle-dress and heavily

armed. The number does not include the Steward, and does include Beren, seated against one of the two giant stone posts that supports the lintel, head resting on his forearms. He is wearing his own old gear, with some of the worst-tattered bits replaced in the same Elven winter camo that his companions display. They do not speak, though some of them sharpen swords and knives. It is almost sunset, but under a sky that is too overcast for more than a hint of gold to indicate where She is.]

[A disturbance within the vestibule: the King appears, striding along. Orodreth to his right is talking and attempting to get him to answer, affirm, or at least make some ameliorating noise -- but in vain. Finrod takes his helmet from the Steward at his left and buckles it on, ignoring his brother. In their wake Finduilas tags along accompanied by Gwindor for moral support, and followed by Huan: all three appear extremely worried. Orodreth tries again to gain acknowledgment, then gives up. Now that his brother is no longer talking, Finrod turns and embraces him quickly, putting a hand to his mouth when he tries to start apologizing again -- Not now. The waiting soldiers rise and form ranks, Beren with them. He looks deathly ill; the Captain pats his shoulder reassuringly.]

[Finrod slings on the pack that is waiting for him there. Finduilas rushes up to him and clutches his arm; reluctantly he accepts her tearful embrace and finally returns his niece's hug. She is completely devastated -- looks apologetically at Beren but he does not see her at all, staring right through everything and everyone around him. Gwindor looks thoroughly wretched and ashamed. The King goes to each gatepost and presses his hands against them in a final warding, then begins a last-minute inspection of everyone's gear.]

**Captain:** [aside to the Steward]

--How does our lord?

**Steward:**

How do you think? --But he will not show it before them.

[He glances aside to within the shadow of the entrance, where Elvensight might decry some one -- or ones -- standing hidden from Mortal view.]

**Captain:**

When we return they'll laugh the other sides of their faces -- and without teeth, so help me Tulkas!

**Steward:**

--When.

[He smiles bitterly]

**Captain:**

You do not think we will return?

**Steward:**

I do not.

**Captain:** [harshly]

Have you Seen it, then?

**Steward:**

I have not. --But it is nearing Winter. And a plan that was dangerous when conceived with three wings of cavalry is now to be undertaken by twelve. --Even if one of said twelve is The Beoring.

**Captain:** [snorts]

Well. For my part, I place my trust in the King.

**Steward:** [taking no umbrage]

As do I. But I do not think that I, at least, will ever come to Nargothrond again. Whether the King carries on with his mad plan to start elsewhere anew -- or not.

[calm, ignoring the other's worried look:]

It does not matter. He will not need a herald in this venture or banner-bearer to go before him this time; but sword and shield he still has call for, and he may set mine wherever need requires.

[Before the Captain can respond, the King finishes up inspecting the rest of the company and turns to his Commanders. They exchange looks. Finrod sets a gauntleted hand on Beren's shoulder and holds him with a worried stare until he snaps out of his trance. They begin to cross the terraces, ignoring the sentries posted around the gates, who likewise affect not to see them.]

[Huan begins to bay in that sudden, heart-jolting, rip-all-your-nerves-out-of-their-sockets way that guard dogs

have, only this is not Death-to-trespassers! but the miserable Please-please-don't-abandon-me! bark instead. Beren drops out, hurries back and attempts to comfort him, patting his head and letting the Hound lean on him for a few moments. Then he turns again without a second look back and double-times it to catch up with the others. In the twilight and muffled in cloak and armor, it isn't obvious that one of the twelve companions is not Eldar.]

[They pick their way North along the river and file out past the hidden sentries and guardposts without exchange. Very shortly they are lost to sight in distance and darkness. Slowly, as though going to meet a grim fate, instead of to rejoin the world of light and society, the kin of Felagund return indoors, drifting back like ghosts. Huan alone remains, looking forlornly out the great gates into the rising mist.]

## AFTERNOTES

# The Leithian Script — Why?

*Well, it's more fun than the Cliff Notes...*

Seriously, it was forged out of a combination of several consecutive retellings of the story, set into the wider Arda Mythos context on the fly, to younger, teenage Tolkien fans who had either not read *Silmarillion* or not lately; several particularly inane Usenet statements and a general tone of obliviousness cluelessness as to character motivations; and a free morning when I didn't feel like cleaning the house...

It had started as nothing more than the cartoon which accompanies it, the mental exercise of imagining how the throne room scene would appear if one were actually there to witness it having caused me too many fits of giggles not to inflict it on — er, share it with — others. Unfortunately, the rest of the scene insisted on playing itself out, and thus “The Script” was born...

Then, although it was only conceived as a one-off short sketch, I was urged repeatedly to keep going, which didn't happen until I finally figured out how to do this — it truly is a very complicated architectonic and stylistic construction, and not a simple matter of translation at all. Then a way to make it work, as a unified drama, occurred to me, and the madness went on...

Here I show you the ropes and pulleys, the gaffers and grips, making it all happen — that is to say, the textual citations, in-jokes, obscure/obligatory references, and terrible puns, along with interpretations and interpolations of Canon — and ultimately the answer to “Why?” such a project at all...

## ALL ACTS

Now, as far as “The Script” goes, overall I'm following the story and Canon as set forth in the 1977 *Silmarillion*, which as far as I can tell from subsequent reading is close to, if not quite identical with, the unpublished 1930 *Silmarillion* for the story of Beren and Lúthien. However, I also have made massive recourse to the Fragments of the *Lay of Leithian*, written out in the last half of the '20s, mostly, and found in *The Lays of Beleriand* together with the earliest version of *The Lay of the Children of Hurin*, which I will refer to as *LL1* and *LL2*, the latter being a revision of some of



the cantos begun ca. 1950. Generally speaking I will take the *Lay Fragments* as primary, though not always, when there are differences.

I have also utilized where I have found them relevant facts and information from elsewhere in the History of Middle Earth, where sometimes a small sentence or aside will provide vast insights into the connections or complications of the story. And, of course, there is the whole question of variations internally, which I treat by a) picking the versions I like best; b) acting as though the writings are actually translations of pre-and post-Atalantean works recovered by Professor Tolkien, which have been mucked about with and partially mangled and partly forgotten and often rewritten, just like *The Song of Roland* and other real epics and romances of the Primary World. So “The Script” is, on one level, an attempt to harmonize these various rescensions of Canon, just as it is on another level an attempt to make the obscurer parts comprehensible to a modern audience.

Three things are important to remember: first, the *Silmarillion* version of Beren & Lúthien is complete in length, but not in detail; secondly, the LB versions are not complete in length (what I would not give for the lost 3.5 cantos!) but much fuller in detail; thirdly, there are hints and crucial elements developed in the adjunct notes and summaries jotted down as Tolkien developed the plot more fully. But the *LB* is very hard to work with, due partly to the typeface and partly to the masses of interpolated scholarly commentary, which are useful on one level, but do not make for easy or fluid reading. And it’s poetry in a high-medieval style, like that of the famous “Ubi Sunt” — which goes like this in part:

Were beth they biforen us weren,  
Houndes ladden and hauekes beren  
And hadden feld and wode?  
The riche levedies in hoere bour  
That wereden golden in hoere tressour  
With hoere brightte rode...  
...Were is that lawing and that song,  
That trayling and that proude gong,  
Tho havekes and tho houndes?

which is not a style natural to us these days, (or most of us, at least) and requires some adjustment to be readable as a novel is to us. But oh, it has some grand stuff in it, and I at least enjoy “the character of its hero,” and do not find it merely “a treasure chest of trivia,” as the blurb on the back cover calls it.

He grew afraid  
amidst his power once more; renown  
of Beren vexed his ears, and down  
the aisled forests there was heard  
great Huan baying.

Why did I choose to render it in a pseudo-Shakespearean format, modeled on *Henry V* with the device of the Narrator, Gower the medieval poet-historian, on loan from that play? (And also from *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*.) Partly because it's fun to do neo-Elizabethan verse (at least for me) and partly because it allows me to add commentary and make connections past what information would be available to the characters at any given scene.

And because it bridges well the divide between the epic story and the flippant modern style I've adopted, and provides an almost-plausible (I hope at least) framework with which to counteract the synapse-shortening dichotomies — in *Henry V*, the Narrator exists “outside time,” speaking to the audience directly from the context of the theater group which is thus acknowledged to exist and to be merely portraying the events, and so the artificiality of the play-world is thus dissipated by recognition, and anachronisms and historical differences are likewise obviated.

In other words, Gower can talk about computer screens, and it isn't “wrong” any more than when he asks us to imagine that “this wooden O” is the battlefield of Agincourt or the hall of the King—

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**Ardalambion:** one resource I have found very helpful throughout is this site dedicated to the languages of Tolkien's world — <http://www.uib.no/people/hnohf/>

# ACT I — An Appointment in Menegroth

The title of course refers to the traditional story, “An Appointment in Samara” with its invocation of Fate and the ironic consequences of elaborate precautions to avoid it. It is told in *Silm.* how Elu Thingol, King of Doriath, in justifiable apprehension of the consequences of having scads of ambitious, powerful, talented, troublesome relatives and their entourages grabbing up territory on all sides, refused to open his borders to the returning Noldor and warned them against displacing the native peoples of Beleriand.

We are also told that he had had premonitions in prophetic dreams of doom and destruction concerning mortal Men and the future of Doriath, and so unlike others of the lords of the Eldar, refused to allow Men into his kingdom or into his service at all. Read the *Silm.* chapter “Of the Coming of Men into the West” to get a lot of backstory on the political situation of Beleriand (which is a lot more interesting than modern Earth politics, since we don’t have Oracles and acknowledged Powers involved in the affairs of nations these days) and the foreshadowing of Doom in the conversation on all this between Melian and her apprentice, Finrod’s little sister Galadriel...

Act I, being very brief, is really a quite straightforward take on the scene as presented in *Silm.* and *LL1*, my own interpolations and emendations being limited to two (besides the fact that I’ve “translated” the dialogue into the modern style) of significance.

The first is the presence of Mablung and Beleg at the Court — although they are not specifically mentioned, and given the rather unregimented style of Doriath could well have been anywhere in the realm, I chose to include them for several reasons.

The foremost is to provide a foreshadowing/unifying to the end of the story, as they are, so to speak, “in at the kill” and involved deeply along the way — also, introducing them as ancillaries to the scene allows for a slightly less entangled version/vision of events than is available to any of the participants, including Daeron, whose wierd behavior we are told has been noted, if not understood, by other people in the community.

The second is assuming that the description of Beren in *LL1* as making his dramatic exit and farewell to Lúthien so abruptly before the thrones of King and Queen is more bardic traditional than historically literal — I

consider it justifiable artistic license to give them a longer and semi-private leave-taking, as the Doriathrin aren't monsters nor is saying goodbye anywhere else in the story ever shown to be quick or easy any more than for lovers today — “There isn't enough room for all the truth in songs,” is a saying I've heard, and any comparison, or simple consideration, of the needs of narrative compression will prove this.

## Scene I.

**“brainwashed slave”** — this refers to one of the major security concerns in *Silm.*, “Of the Return of the Noldor”, described as Morgoth turning the power of his eyes on any of the Eldar he could take alive, and so daunting them “that they needed chains no more, but walked ever in fear of him, doing his will wherever they might be.” This fact features majorly in the Nargothrond interactions, when the sheer number of freed thralls, and the fact that they're escorted home by Huan, makes it darn hard to ignore them or turn them back at the borders. It also features not insignificantly in the Gondolin story... It's my assumption that one of the uses of such victims, in addition to the canonical use as spies, would be as assassination attempts, (perhaps unwarranted and caused by too many viewings of *Manchurian Candidate*, but I doubt it.)

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**“different for us”** — referring to the story of Thingol's meeting with Melian and their subsequent marriage as related in *Silm.* and *LL1*. Er, it wasn't that different, really.

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**“labyrinth”** — Thingol does threaten to trap Beren in the maze of the Girdle, and hence avoid technically breaking his promise to Lúthien, which Beren calls him on, (whether it would have worked or not, now that they knew he was there, is an open question), comes from *LL1*. Beren's compulsive mouthing-off to powerful people who mean him no good is Canon from *Silm.*, but even more amplified in *LL1*.

## Scene II.

Again, pretty obvious, I tend to think. For amendment, only the assignment of the suggestion/reminder to seek out Finrod Felagund for assistance to Lúthien is really mine. Beren is certainly no fool, but the creative genius of the pair is Lúthien, and particularly considering the stressfulness of the recent scene, it isn't a stretch to think her cool-headed enough to make the

association for him.

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**“low-impact lifestyle”** — what, you think that’s funny? That is exactly what he’s been doing, and no more. (—Okay, it is supposed to be funny...)

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I get the impression that Lúthien never talked about her family because she just assumed everyone in Doriath knew who she was, and that Beren assumed she was on her own completely, until the fateful moonlit evening when she says, “My parents want to meet you...” “—You have parents? — Here?”

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**“my parents’ dilemma”** — Emeldir, called “Manhearted”, would rather have stayed and died fighting in the defense of their homeland at the side of her husband and son — yet duty compelled her to take the last survivors of Dorthonion out of the war zone to shelter with her mother’s side of the family in Hithlum. Included among those were her two nieces, Morwen and Rían, who will later marry Húrin and Huor of the House of Hador; they and their children of course are famous and infamous in their own rights; qv. the stories as told in *Silm.* of the Children of Húrin, and The Fall of Gondolin.

I wrote this before I was aware that there was a statement anywhere in *HOME* that fifty was the ordinary age for getting married right away, as early twenties in the present day and mid teens in past centuries — being aware that Elves age slower than mortals to begin with, and simply looking to find a fraction of millennia+ that would be equivalent to “too young” — and absurd given that Lúthien is almost a millenium and a half old; so I should possibly change this. However, that is for Aman, after all, and might not be the same in Middle-earth.

## Epilogue.

**“Fell”** — this entire exchange refers to both the continual assaults on the outskirts of Doriath beyond the Girdle which accompanied Morgoth’s unre-sulting efforts to see past Melian’s defenses, and the horrible mutative effects which occurred along the northern borders where the residual traces of Ungoliant’s time there not only corrupted the environment but interacted with Melian’s power and created, we are told, still more hideous things which only grew worse as time went on. (They weren’t half so bad a few generations ago when Haleth led her people through to Brethil, for example.) I don’t know that any of them were multi-headed monsters, but

in the vague descriptions of the half-seen creatures of Dungortheb it is implied that they had more eyes than creatures should, and not all of them were spiders...

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The Captains of Doriath have had some encounters with mortals — Beleg, for example, took a relief force to help the Haladin during the aftermath of the Dagor Bragollach into Brethil some seven or eight years prior to this occasion, when Tol Sirion fell to Sauron — but as the Haladin live outside Doriath proper (obviously) and keep to themselves, even as the people of Doriath, at this point in time it is unlikely that they would be terribly familiar with Men, unlike the Elves of Fingolfin's House and of Nargothrond.

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**“Twenty-five”** — Beren's age is never given in the stories themselves, and only according to early and rather doubtful chronologies is any mention made, from which it is said that he was thirty when he began the quest. However, according to the *Silm.*, the sixth generation of the Edain was not yet fully grown, when the Dagor Bragollach erupted, and as far as I can work out it is ten years, between the battle and Beren's arrival in Doriath — two years after the battle when Tol Sirion falls to Sauron, and Emeldir takes the children and other women left into the western mountains; four years after that when Sauron is sent in to personally deal with the Dorthonian Rebels, and Barahir is killed with his men; four more years that Beren wages a lone war against the Enemy, and then about a year and a half that he lives in Doriath, from his arrival after the winter crossing of the mountains to seeing Lúthien for the first time in the summer, to the following spring when they meet, up to the end of summer when they are betrayed.

Hence I give his age as “about twenty-five” because that would make him fifteen at the Dagor Bragollach — any older, and I cannot see any reason why he would not also go with the muster to the Leaguer, like his cousins — and that would make the explicit statement that Finrod recognizes him without need of token an irrelevance not worth mentioning; obviously the King would recognize someone he'd met before. “About” because after living so long in the wilds without human companionship, no communal events or celebrations, calendars would be essentially irrelevant to him, and similar seasons flow together.

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Beren's remarkable outdoorsmanship is repeatedly invoked in the Lay — he is described as being “elf-wise in wood” as well as “tireless on fell, light on

fen,” — and there is a supernatural aspect hinted at, in that he is protected by the trees, the free beasts and birds, and even by the obscure spirits of the place that inhabit the rocks and wilds of his homeland. This is of course something that deserves a great deal more consideration, and comparison to the archetypes both of folktale and mythology; but for the present I will only remark that for him to remain unobserved, though granted in a deserted border region of Doriath, for several seasons, and to be uncaught even when his presence is revealed by Daeron and the King sends search parties to arrest him, until he arrives voluntarily with Lúthien at court, indicates that there is no exaggeration and that he is at least the equal of an Elven Ranger.

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Doriath really does run in this rather informal way — after all, they have enjoyed an impenetrable security system for centuries upon centuries — and in the story of Turin it is related how Beleg would spend time at any of various lodges he had around the kingdom, or staying with friends, while in the account of the Nirnaeth it is told that after Thingol refused to send troops to the war where they would be serving alongside the House of Fëanor, both Mablung and Beleg object that they can't just stay on the sidelines of history, so he says to the effect of “Oh, all right — just make sure you march with some other commander, okay?”

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Lúthien's final speech is not a throwaway line. Remember this bit: it will come back to haunt everyone.

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## Frontspiece — Meeting the Parents

This is the heart of it all — the original scene that endeavored to explain why, just possibly why, on the most basic level, Thingol and Melian might not have been entirely thrilled over their daughter's choice of prospective husband. Your brilliant, talented, grown-up daughter it never occurred to you not to trust on her own, shows up with a (significantly!) younger guy, who just happens to be homeless, jobless, broke, and living in your woods for the past year. The fact that for the past half-dozen years and more he's been a guerrilla warrior and besides owning no other property than the armor and weapons he's wearing, has no other skills to offer besides killing monsters is just going to be added insult — most parents are not going to be leaping ecstatically up to welcome him into the family, regardless of race and immortality issues, oracular forebodings, or anything else. Not in my experience, at least...

This sketch is a little rougher than the ones which followed, as it was only a dashed-off idea, essentially, and I'd never done a cartoon at all. But the intent is to convey the organic and woodland style of Menegroth, together with its brightness and glory, contrasted with the utter scruffiness of Beren and how far out of place he is there — at least superficially. And you may notice a slight ancient-classical influence in Melian's costume, as in Lúthien's — this is deliberate, and refers to the archetypal antecedents of women of divine origin met in groves of nightingales and offering wisdom and song, or taking earthly lovers. Remember, JRRT was a trained and practicing Classicist before devoting his life to other projects...

Tulkas, of course, is the Power you want on your side when you need someone pounded but maybe not necessarily to go into too much detail about why — the Wrestler is loyal, brave, enthusiastic, but he's not terribly much interested in the finer ins and outs of theory and so forth!

And yeah, Lúthien does pretty much start out thinking that simply meeting Beren will be enough to convince her family of how wonderful he is — I wouldn't call her dumb, myself, though, but rather that she expects the best from the people she loves, the same high standards they've raised her to believe in, and is sadly disappointed...



## ACT II — The Sojourn in Nargothrond

This section gave me a double problem to resolve throughout.

Typically in fairy tales, fantasy and science fiction, there is a viewpoint character to reveal the tale's Wonders to us, the Ordinary Fellow, who witnesses them vicariously and reacts to them as we would. (C.S Lewis also addresses this at length in an essay on sf which has lots of fascinating revelations about the different kinds of speculative fiction and how they work.) And ordinarily, this is how a story of a mortal hero wandering into the Land Beneath The Hills would work — how most folk tales work, indeed, whether he be prince or a weary soldier returned from the wars, or the youngest son of a poor widow — or she be the merchant's youngest daughter, indeed!

But — Beren is anything but an ordinary guy by this time — not that he ever was, being “being born in charmed hour” under a great Doom to a house of Elf-friends and extraordinarily motivated (not to say driven) and duty-bound people devoted to Powers they'd never met. So his reactions are not going to be the same as someone from a developed nation who's never spent years being hunted through the woods with a price on his head, four of them entirely apart from human companionship, let alone been chosen as the True Love of the immortal daughter of a demigoddess — which brings me to the singular irony of the Elven realms.

Namely, that they are far closer to our age, and our developed world, than anything Beren would have known even in peacetime. For the lifestyle in peace of the Men of Beleriand is only a little removed (if at all) from the pioneer experience, which people tend to forget when they think “Middle-earth = Medieval” — archeologist Kate Elliott in her *Crown of Stars* series is the only contemporary author I know of who seems to be aware that Europe even as late as around 1000 years ago was essentially a jungle, mostly covered with dense old-growth forest full of wild animals through which, and around which, people cut clearings and eked out a living and fought to tame. Hence in the Exeter Book the Anglo-Saxon riddle about the plough calls Men “the wood's old foe” bringing axes and fire to the forest.

After five generations of settlement, the Northlands would be somewhat tamed, but still rather in the mode of the old Highlands, or the hill-and-forest-clearing fields of New England before the rise of the mills and mass transport. No shopping malls, no mass-production — and not even great

Fairs, like in the high Middle Ages, because no walled cities and roads to carry goods on. Small farms, small communities like those of the Viking sagas, mostly independent, not tightly organized nor “feudal” in the image we tend to have from movies. And this is a dangerous way to live when being invaded, as the ordeal of the Haladin earlier in *Silm.* portrays, but it is the way that independent and self-motivated types have historically chosen to live.

Thus, the Nargothrond setting, with its centralized government, organized services, modern conveniences and assumptions of what a proper lifestyle entails, is in a real sense us — magic indistinguishable from technology and vice-versa, if sufficiently advanced — revealing another world and lifestyle to our sensibilities in their reaction to Beren.

I’ve made the dialogue of Nargothrond more formal and archaic, slightly, than that of Doriath, as a consideration of their more sophisticated historical background and more unified culture. Again, see the *ROTK* Appendices for a detailed discussion of the employment of different modes and dialects to convey meaning in Tolkien’s own words.

## Scene I.

We are told that Beren was received with great courtesy (despite the fact that he looked like a bum) as he was arrested on his careful and public entry into Nargothrond. Given that for five generations previously his family had not only sent troops to the Leaguer but sent squires to Nargothrond of whom some remained there like Bëor, who gave over the headship of his tribe and ended his days in service to the King,

I imagine that there would be considerable *deja vu* among the native Nargothronders (though not necessarily for the recent influx of Fëanorian partisans) and most especially among surviving veterans of the Leaguer, on encountering Beren.

## Scene II.

This scene is indeed my own, but should not be seen as contrary to Canon but simply gapfilling: how in detail might Beren’s welcome and arrival play out, how would Nargothrond react, what political and personal complications are already existing there and what might they look like? Obviously,

something had to happen during all those hours; I'm just taking a stab at, possibly, what. Could any or all of the other characters present in the City have encountered Beren? Sure! What would their likely reactions and interactions have been, given what we know of their personalities? relationships? —That's all.

Oh, and it provides a useful way of indicating just how much unlike your typical fantasy hero Beren is, which is something [else] that tends to get lost in the usual summaries and renderings of the tale. Not only is he not just some random warrior, which I emphasize by the use of his title in formal exchanges; — Conan “Dark Lord killed my family? Constant fighting? Giant spiders? Piffle!” the Barbarian he ain't. (No more than he is “Bond — Whoops, did I lose another girlfriend there? —James Bond”.)

Even before he leaves Dorthonion one step ahead of the death squads, he is already practically the poster child for PTSD. He isn't even your modern typical commando dude who can count on being extracted from enemy territory and taken home to first-world luxury and safety at mission's end.

He doesn't even have the support structure of a Rebel Alliance to give some assistance and comfort while being hunted from system to system. It's hardly surprising that he is described while in Doriath as being “as wild and wary as a faun/that sudden wakes at rustling dawn, and flits from shade to shade, and flees/the brightness of the sun, yet sees all stealthy movements in the wood,” even when no one is actually out to get him.

And things just keep getting worse...

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**manchets** — round loaves of white bread

**subtleties** — pastries, desserts (often in decorative shapes)

**viands** — meats (by derivation main dishes)

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**wolf, wolf's head** are traditional Old English terms for “outlaw.”

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**Indis** — Fëanor's stepmother, Finrod's grandmother and Curufin & Celegorm's step-grandmother — a *Silm.* reference to the line “the sons of Indis” from the Morgoth-sponsored rivalry between the sons of Finwe.

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Before forks became popular, everyone did bring their own knives to the dinner table.

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Being a vegetarian in a pre-industrial war zone would have been a lot of work, and indicate a tremendous amount of stubbornness and ingenuity as

well as idealism. This is, by the way, straight canon from *Silm.* and amplified in *Lays*, where it's made clear that before his companions were wiped out he was a hunter of great renown (and thus, one assumes, bore tremendous responsibility for helping to provide for his people which would increase as farms and communities were destroyed by the war.)

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It is remarked in *Letters* that Elven illusion would have been used for amusement and as art.

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**“familiar”** — either during the course of the Leaguer or in the aftermath of the Dagor Bragollach when in the confused days following the Lords of Aglon-and-Himlad attached themselves to Finrod's party, it seems likely to me that they would have inevitably run into some of the Bëorings helping to run the siege.

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***Tengwar*** was the Quenya alphabet; *cirth* the runes invented long ago by Daeron, Beren's rival for Lúthien's affections.

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Thanks are due to Finch for reminding me that Finduilas' lost lover who returns with Turin to Nargothrond is defined in *Silm.* as the lord of Nargothrond whose brother was lost in the Dagor Bragollach and proven to have been a POW as he is brutally slaughtered in front of the armies of Maedhros' alliance, to provoke them into premature and reckless attack. (In the earlier LCH this is not the case, though the story is still tragic enough.)

This required reworking of the scene and of the subsequent Act III, but allowed for more irony and angst in referring of course to the future tragedies of the Nirnaeth Arnoediad and fall of Nargothrond. It also made for some interesting dramatic possibilities given that a new significance is lent to Gwindor's statement that Turin is no Beren — no longer an abstract remark but a personal comparison by someone who knew them both.

Thanks to NovusSibyl for taking part in clarifying discussions on the question of whether or not the battlefield survivors would have had any awareness that Gelmir was a POW, which is usually assumed by readers but not warranted in my opinion either by canon or by Primary World experiences of war...

### Scene III.

“Fair were the words of Narog’s king  
to Beren, and his wandering  
and all his feuds and bitter wars  
recounted soon. Behind closed doors  
they sat, while Beren told his tale  
of Doriath; and words him fail  
recalling Lúthien dancing fair  
with wild white roses in her hair,  
remembering her elven voice that rung  
while stars in twilight round her hung.  
He spake of Thingol’s marvellous halls  
by enchantment lit, where fountain falls  
and ever the nightingale doth sing  
to Melian and to her king.  
The quest he told that Thingol laid  
in scorn on him; how for love of maid  
more fair than ever was born to Men,  
of Tinúviel, of Lúthien,  
he must essay the burning waste,  
and doubtless death and torment taste.”

I have endeavored to do justice here not only to the texts but to the whole backstory that leads to this meeting and exchange “behind closed doors.”

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**main-wrought** — “hand-made,” with overtones of “cobbled together” and “brute force”; my own coinage. —Hey, if Shakespeare could do it...

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**Huan** — I’ve taken the artistic liberty of introducing Huan to this scene, as to the previous, for several reasons. It’s never stated that he wasn’t present, after all, so this isn’t a contradiction of Canon. But it is stated several times in *LL1* that Huan is a friend of the King, and given Huan’s attraction to people of good alignment and his independent behavior, throughout the story, it’s plausible to me that he would have wanted to hang out with them. (It’s also plausible to me given my experience with ordinary mortal dogs, who make friends without their owner’s permission.) There’s another reason for making Huan present now, but I’ll cover that when we get there.

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**Emeldir** — Here indeed I build much upon little — but the foundation is, I believe, secure. We are told in *Silm.* that, as referred to in Act I, Emeldir was a warrior, called “the Manhearted” by her neighbors, who led a final group of refugees to safer lands ahead of the invading forces of Angband. And who would rather have stayed to die with her husband and son, but

didn't. While working on an idea for a sketch of her, I realized that I had simply assumed she had the usual Edain coloring of the Third Age, but I really didn't know: the personal appearance of any of the Bëorings in particular is not a relevant plot point in the story, (except for the parts about Beren looking a wreck after too many adventures, and that still, he too is "fair" — at least in Lúthien's eyes.)

Researching this I discovered that not only was that assumption incorrect, so too the assumption of similar coloration for her son. According to notes in *HOME*, though Emeldir was born in Dorthonion, of the tribe of Beor, her mother was of the ruling house of Marach, and her father was also of matrilineal Hador descent. (Stories there, for anyone who wants to explore First Age peacetime life, the journeys and meetings and daily experiences of the Edain...) So Emeldir is blond like her great-nephew Tuor, and her son inherits lighter brown hair and is taller than Barahir his father, and we can gather that she too is both tall and robust, very likely taller than her husband. And an extremely good fighter, given that she successfully got a party of women and children through two sets of mountains full of Orcs to safety in her ancestral homeland.

There are a few other elements upon which I draw: first of all, that Beren is not Túrin. Granted, there are many ways in which one could not be like Túrin, but taken into combination with what we do know of Beren's character, this makes it easy to shade in the portrait — in any given circumstance, not dealt with in the extant texts, a good many responses can instantly be ruled out this way? i.e., "How would Túrin react? Ok, that wouldn't happen here, then." Nor, despite his long years as a solitary rebel warrior, does he become a psychopath like Túrin's outlaws. This says two things to me: very strong moral fibre, and a very good upbringing.

And so I can't help but see Emeldir of Dorthonion as someone highly principled, absolutely uncompromising when it comes to demanding the best from herself and everyone around her, considered a bit eccentric in peacetime but not concerned with people's opinions of her (only whether they're deserved or not), willing to give her all and sacrifice her own wishes to duty, and — when the menfolk are off at the War — the Lord as well as Lady of the place, just as in medieval and frontier times. And, equally naturally, her son's first teacher and example during those those years. Was she a good and loving person as well as a brave, strong, and dutiful one? Just look at how her son turned out...

And the relationship between his parents?

Well, Beren is neither threatened by, nor resentful of, a woman stronger than he. (Absolutely terrified that she'll end up like Eilinel as a result of her association with him, but that's only natural.) And that says more to me than almost anything else...

---

**“my uncle”** — One other thing I wanted to convey here is a fact that isn't obvious if you merely read the chapter “Of Beren & Lúthien” in *Silm.* and don't go back and read the rest of it, in particular about the Dagor Bragollach, to see where they're all coming from. And that is — Beren is not the ordinary “heir to the realm” of Dorthonion. Yes, he was born into the ruling house, yes, given the uncertainties of life it was always a possibility — but he was merely the Lord's nephew, the son of the younger brother of the head of the family who already had two living older sons of his own.

(In fact, had Barahir died otherwise, and the rest of the band still survived — or if the war had not overwhelmed Dorthonion in the first place — based on authentic medieval precedents, it's anyone's guess whether Beren or one of his cousins would have been acclaimed chief of the tribe.) No automatic assumption of inherited privilege at all — not that there would have been, really, anything like what we tend to think of as “aristocracy” for the Bëorings in any case. He inherited a duty, without any perks whatsoever by the time he got it, simply by default. And tried to fulfill it, singlehanded, for as long as he possibly could, until it was made irrelevant by forces outside his control.

It's even more interesting that his uncle Bregolas died alongside Finrod's brothers in the fighting — Angrod and Aegnor had been the lords of Dorthonion as vassals of their brother the King before the land was given to the Bëorings, who took the defense over from them, and with whom they still defended the frontier of that country. The connections and parallels are more complex and deeply woven than at first sight...

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**“two noble kinsman”** — an ObRef to a play cowritten by Shakespeare and John Fletcher, based on the story found in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, a story of rivalry and broken faith and a battle for the hand of a lady...

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**Elwë/Elu** — Who does, and who doesn't, bother to use the modernized version of Thingol's name, is not random. People from Aman will know of him first as Elwë, people born in latter days won't even know there was another way of pronouncing it necessarily, and the Sons of Fëanor aren't

going to give him even symbolic deference *in absentia*.

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**Caranthir** — perhaps I read too much ancient history and political intrigue, but I can't escape the conclusion that for some reason, the Haladin found their rescuer even more scary, and the thought of his active involvement in their lives a worse prospect, than Orcs. One doesn't become refugees for no good reason, particularly just after having fought a hard war. Add that to the chroniclers' asides as to Caranthir's insolence, arrogance, hideous temper, and later actions — and it adds up, for me, to a picture of someone charismatic, dynamic, charming, and violent, whom you don't ever, ever want to tangle with if you have any sense... He is after all a Son of Fëanor too.

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**Haleth** — It's been at least three generations since the legendary Chieftain of the Haladin led her people to a new homeland in the western forests, and for most of us, fifty years ago is — a long time. A hundred years ago is a long time. A hundred-fifty years ago is a long time...two hundred a really long time... Intellectually we may even know that, realize that compared to say "geological time", it's nothing, but on a basic personal level — it's all "a long time ago." Even for those of us who really know history and study family lore, there's a certain cognitive dissonance involved in keeping the relative scale present. I do think that this would be the case for Beren, who never even had the opportunity to achieve the level of accustomed familiarity that his older relatives had with Elvenkind in the Leaguer — and that it would trouble Finrod, divided as in Canon between loyalty and prudential considerations.

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**Lúthien older than Finarfin's children** — Thanks to Finch for supplying this fact, which, though not appearing to make a whole lot of difference, affects a lot of things when the implications are drawn out.

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**Burning Brier, Sickle** — the Seven Stars of the constellation we call the Great Bear or the Big Dipper, or of old in England, Charles' Wain — a sacred symbol to the Elves, who called it the Valacirca, the Sickle of Elbereth which she placed in warning and challenge to Morgoth in the northern sky, and to the Edain as well, who named it additionally the Burning Brier, which evokes the idea of a thorn-hedge/spear-wall of defense against Angband. It's particularly meaningful to Beren, according to the Texts...

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**the ring of Finarfin** — this is the second time I discovered I had in fact correctly intuited The Professor's intentions, which is a bit disconcerting.



Any time you take something past a sketch or an outline you have to make all kinds of nitpicky decisions, from stage direction to set design — and hence consider the text and implications in far more careful detail than, say, for an essay test. One thing I found myself wondering was — when and why did Finrod give back the ring to Barahir’s son? Since it has to remain in the family for the later descendents in Númenór to bring it back to Middle-earth, so that it becomes the signet of the Kings of Gondor.

Because — for me, at least — implicit in the notion of a pledge is the fact of the exchange: the token is given the first time as the visible sign of the vow, and then returned in the claiming of it. So although it’s nowhere explicitly stated that Beren gave the King back his ring, it’s still there, unless contradicted. And lo and behold! in *LB* there is, it turns out, a marginal note in one of the manuscripts that at some point Finrod should give the ring back to Beren. —Disconcerting, but also a bit of a morale-lifter for a scriptwriter. Obviously it’s my call here, but I think (hope) not implausible.

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“vassal” — this exchange isn’t just here to clarify something that tends to be obscure to modern readers, especially fellow Yanks — there’s a critical plot point going on here that gets borne out later, namely — when, why, and under what circumstances is it not only permissible but required to “betray” one’s allegiances, and is it even properly treason at that point? What legitimate mechanisms exist, morally speaking, to permit transfer or withdrawal of loyalties? So that one is not simply obligated to follow orders, however ethically unsupportable they may be, nor even permitted to “stand idly by and see injustice done”?

Because Huan can’t simply leave Celegorm and follow Lúthien because she’s “the damsel in distress,” nor help her and Beren against his lord because they’re cooler people than the Sons of Fëanor. He has too much character and integrity for that — nor, in fact, does he. It takes him a while to decide, remember?

This is the problem of *Antigone*, by-the-by, which is answered pretty definitely in the same way by Aeschylus: Justice and the general moral imperatives trump all earthly laws, and political obligations. Of course Huan’s situation is even more complicated in that he’s already disobeyed one divine mandate as less binding than an earlier one: by taking part in the flight of the Noldor, but given to Celegorm as liege-dog by Oromë. Huan is a very angsty character, and the complicated development of the

plot outline involving his decisions in the versions and notes to the story is well-worth considering. But more on this in Act III.

## Scene IV.

Here's where I really get going with the compare-contrast-equate business of Elven-Mortal/Modern-Archaic cultural assumptions. Again, I don't consider this counter-Canonical, simply interstitial — not that I ever consider anything of my supposing to be Canonical in the sense of reflecting The Professor's intentions (unless some obscure note discovered proves it so) but simply that I try to make things plausible as I render them in more detail — what happens in the “meanwhiles” and “elsewheres,” is all.

The overwhelming material prosperity and high standard of living of Nargothrond is one thing I wish to convey, but another, which is in fact more significant even, is the difference between even our Age and society, and Elvendom — that is, the relative time-scales and the inability to get past them. (And yet — we tend to be rather isolated, don't we, both on a personal and national basis, the concerns of our own lives overriding the sense of what is happening elsewhere, until it comes home to us somehow...)

---

The fact that the last remaining companions of Beren in Dorthonion and the ten warriors of Nargothrond who accompanied Finrod into exile were all at the Fen of Serech is Canon. I've simply drawn out and made plain what is only implicit in the originals, yet perhaps all the more powerful for its subliminality: the realization of the parallels buried throughout — but only scarcely covered! — *Silmarillion* and *HOME* has been one of the unfolding delights of venturing into the regions I once thought of as arid background material...

Another is that the Fall of Nargothrond dates from this point — it takes a while for the collapse to become total, but the foundations are blasted in this time. And why not? It isn't just that Orodreth is not as good a ruler as his brother. The combined forces of expiation and revenge and the fact that morale and leadership have been repeatedly shaken are powerful factors in the actions of the Nargothronders at the Nirnaeth Arnoediad, and afterwards. Túrin's coming is like the echo that starts the avalanche — but the careless climber didn't cause that buildup of thousands of tons of snowpack up above.

What about the gap left by the loss of those who went with the King? This is surely no small factor either. They would not have been nonentities, random losers whose absence would make no difference to the life of the City, to be able alone of all the realm to disregard the danger, the Oath, and the overwhelming popular opinion against them — though not all, necessarily, of high political rank or standing (no more than a certain gardener in another Age) and thus I have taken the artistic liberty of sketching roles for the Ten, “who had ever fought/wherever his banners had been brought”, and whose names, unlike those of the Beornings, are not given, save one. This is not an accident, though what it says about Arda may be a little disconcerting: the *Silmarillion* is the Elven history of Middle-earth. —They know who they are.

---

**“short enough”** — unlike Túrin or Tuor, Beren is never once described as “tall” in any of the texts that I can remember. He is described in a note in *HOME* as taller than the norm for the Bëornings, again an inheritance from his mother’s Hador side with his lighter hair, but the fact that the other legendary heroes are as tall or taller than most Elves being so frequently mentioned leads me to think that Beren wasn’t. Also, though this is not conclusive without a security tape of the event, the way the incident with Curufin trying to shoot Lúthien plays out leads me to this as well — the angles could have been so as to contradict this, but with Curufin shooting to kill, I assume he’s aiming for her heart, and when Beren jumps in front of her to take the arrow, he gets it in the shoulder. —Just another for the visual image of someone Totally Unsuitable For Her...

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**“summon kings”** — ObRef to the fact that Celebrimbor was vitally instrumental in the making of the Rings of Power, so important in the Third Age. —Sorry, I couldn’t resist this one.

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**“cavalry”** — the Valinorean horses were brought over by Fëanor’s partisans in the stolen ships, and after the rescue of Maedhros and the reconciliation between the branches of the family, Maedhros ceded up a large number of their herd along with the overlordship of the Noldor to Fingolfin.

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**“Amrod-and-Amras”** — this is a reference to an obscure latter development in *HOME* where it’s chronicled that Amras, the youngest of Fëanor’s sons, was lonely for Valinor and spent the night that they landed before marching on aboard one of the ships. Fëanor decided to burn them lest any think of turning back, and forgot to do a head-count first. Yet in *Silm.* it is said that the twins stayed together in Middle-earth and ruled jointly over their

region, and were finally killed in the same battle. Which story is true? Well, in a world that has Balrogs and Barrow-wights and the Grey Company, it doesn't have to be an "either/or" question... This also makes use of various *HOME* remarks on the possibility and effects of possession in Arda. I don't know that Beren's cousins were twins, too, but given that they do run in families and the sons of Elrond being twins, it's not a random interpolation.

---

**The Legend of Beren the Outlaw**, stated to have spread even into Elven lands, from *LL2*:

Danger he sought and death pursued  
and thus escaped the doom he wooed,  
and deeds of breathless daring wrought  
alone, of which the rumor brought  
new hope to many a broken man.  
They whispered 'Beren', and began  
in secret swords to whet, and soft  
by shrouded hearths at evening oft  
songs they would sing of Beren's bow,  
of Dagmor his sword: how he would go  
silent to camps and slay the chief,  
or trapped in his hiding past belief  
would slip away, and under night  
by mist or moon, or by the light  
of open day would come again.  
Of hunters hunted, slayers slain  
they sang, of Gorgol the Butcher hewn,  
of ambush in Ladros, fire in Drûn,  
of thirty in one battle dead,  
of wolves that yelped like curs and fled,  
yea, Sauron himself with wound in hand.  
Thus one alone filled all that land  
with fear and death for Morgoth's folk;  
his comrades were the beech and oak  
who failed him not, and wary things  
with fur and fell and feathered wings  
that silent wander, or dwell alone  
in hill and wild and waste of stone  
watched o'er his ways, his faithful friends.

The legends and ballads of Beren's heroic one-man stand against Morgoth are chronicled in brief here, as well as the inspiring but ultimately useless effect they had on their hearers.

This is my play with the problem of canonicity, and which versions of a

story are the “right” one — the changing and exaggerating of legends, the loss of some details and the inclusion of others. I recommend that everyone read JRRT’s essay “On Fairy-stories” where he discusses this at some length in regard to the identification of various “legendary” stories with various historical figures, and what this means about human beings.

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**Beren’s sword** is identified as bearing the name “Dagmor,” which has to break down as “Dark Battle” [dag~, dagor = battle, mor~ dark/black] but which since only two swords actually of black metal are ever spoken of in Middle-earth, and their forging is a singular event (Túrin’s blade Anglachel, and its twin, by Eöl) I assume that the name has the appropriate significance of “ambush” or “sneak attack” or “night fighting” or all of the three.

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**“wolfskin”** — concealing the out-of-place and distinctive smells of plastic and metal as well as breaking up outlines and killing reflections are very much concerns of modern hunters, and iron has an even stronger smell than steel. But it’s also foreshadowing...

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**“mail that wouldn’t rust”** — while Beren’s hauberk is never explicitly said to be of mithril, it’s described as dwarf-work and resistant to arrows and blows, and hence I think it a reasonable guess. As to where the House of Bëor would have acquired Nogrod-manufactured armour, it seems obvious to me that it would have come from their liege lords. The circumstances are of my own devising, but not fabricated at random: I want to recall the facts of the Bëorings’ historical connection not with Finrod alone but with all his House, and the political ramifications thereof for the keeping of the Northern Boundaries. And assigning the gift to the Canonical deeding of Ladros — a province whose description is intensely evocative of the Highlands in *Silm.* — allows for a reminder of Third Age connections as well. Names no more than words come out of nowhere...everything’s got a history.

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One thing that is important and seems to be overlooked, perhaps as a consequence of taking the Geste in isolation from the rest of the history of the First Age, is how deep, in fact, the debt is that is owed to the House of Bëor. There is this tendency I’ve noticed to look at it alternately as indeed I show Orodreth doing in the next scene, as a vastly disproportionate sacrifice — or as an example of irrational pride and devotion to an arrogant “honor” on Finrod’s part. I hope I have succeeded in showing that it is a bit more complicated than that... Certainly the Elvish historians think so, at least.

The sons of Finarfin bore most heavily the brunt of the assault, and Angrod and Aegnor were slain; beside them fell Bregolas lord of the house of Beor, and a great part of the warriors of that people. But Barahir the brother of Bregolas was in the fighting further westward, near to the Pass of Sirion. There King Finrod Felagund, hastening from the south, was cut off from his people and surrounded with small company in the Fen of Serech; and he would have been slain or taken, but Barahir came up with the bravest of his men and rescued him, and made a wall of spears about him; and they cut their way out of the battle with great loss.

—*Silmarillion*, “Of the Ruin of Beleriand”

“Their names are yet in elven-song  
remembered, though the days are long...  
For these it was, the chosen men  
of Beor’s house, who in the fen  
of reedy Serech stood at bay  
about King Inglor in the day  
of his defeat, and with their swords  
thus saved of all the Elven-lords  
the fairest...”

(From *LL1*; Inglor/Ingoldo are variants of Finrod’s mother-name.)

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**Hathaldir** is called “the young” in *Silm.*, and hence like Beren for the reasons previously stated I have judged that likewise he (and perhaps others) might not actually been at Serech and yet still be part of the collective group, and known as one knows colleagues’ family members by conversation. Beren’s dogs are nowhere named, so I have given them traditionally-inspired mastiff names, but that he and his father had hounds, and loved them, and that he talked about them is Canon — Lúthien discusses this with Huan during her enforced hospitality at Nargothrond later.

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The fate of Beren’s cousins, from *LL2*:

“since the black shaft with venomous wound  
took Belegund and Baragund,  
the mighty sons of Bregolas...”

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“**the Singers**” — though called the Nandor, the ones who turned back, by those who went on to Aman, the Green-Elves, or Laiquendi, of Ossiriand called themselves Lindar, and were known as the greatest of singers among all Elves, despite their primitive lifestyle and lack of sophistication. The connections and implications of the various ethnic tensions among Elven groups is deserving of a much longer exploration than I have time for here.

(Thanks to Ardalambion for this piece of information.) But it is Canon that they were upset by the coming of the Bëorings and asked Finrod to get these tree-killing people out of their territory, which of course is what happened — see *Silm.*, “Of the Coming of Men into the West” for details. Later on, after the final meltdown of civilization in the First Age, there were “back-to-nature” movements among the surviving Elves and though merged with other elements, Green-Elven culture did become dominant once again, but none of that could have been predicted at this time.

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**High Faroth** — According to some rescensions, in the very vague and indefinite hints of Beren and Lúthien’s second life, one of the places they stay for a time is this upland region — which puts a very eerie significance to Beren’s Canonical sighting of it through the rainstorms.

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**Dungortheb** — “not least among the deeds” of Beren, according to *Silm.*, and tremendously evoked in Canto III in flashback. But he wouldn’t ever talk about it in detail, for the reason stated.

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It’s stated that there was never anywhere as beautiful as Menegroth, where Melian reigned, and which indeed was like a living woodland underground — not like a mortal palace at all. Although Finrod patterned Nargothrond on Thingol’s city, it isn’t said to be the same in its design, and I tend to think the “outdoors” elements of Menegroth would have appealed very much to Beren.

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**Taliska** — the native language of the Beorings, of which a partial grammar is said to exist but has not ever been released. (Thanks to Ardalambion for this information.) It might also be of interest to the reader that, according to a note in *HOME*, the only reason that any of it survived at all was due to the interest and efforts of Lúthien: Beren didn’t see any point in preserving the lore of a dead nation, when in his view Sindarin was a far more beautiful language. She, however, thought she ought to learn his as well, since she had given up on her home in turn. More of this in Act III, however.

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**“I saw this thing once”** — this is a dead literal translation of the pattern that begins many of the great Anglo-Saxon Riddles, like the one about the Iceberg, which take some everyday thing and redefine it in mysterious terms which are nevertheless completely accurate.

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All three of these amplified kennings, however, are mine, so don’t blame the Anglo-Saxons for any lapses here. But there really is a constellation in

Arda called the Butterfly — *Wilwarin* — though your guess as to why Varda put it up is certainly as good as my own.

Ic þa wiht geseah	on weg feran
I saw this thing	on the wave faring
heo waes wraetlice	wundrum gegierwed
it was well-wrought	wonderfully crafted
wundor wearð on wege	waeter wearð to bane
wonder went on waves	water went to bone

—*Exeter Book*, Riddle LXVIII

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**chronometer** — what use, really, would the agrarian frontier lifestyle of the Edain have for sophisticated metrical devices? But as Really Cool Works of art, they have historically have had an appeal far outweighing any practical application. The one I have given Celebrimbor is inspired, ever so faintly, by the Great Clock of Wells Cathedral, where the Moon watches over all and knights joust and a messenger rings a bell — as well as by the latter inventions of clocks from the Renaissance and Baroque eras that look like palaces and fountains and wedding cakes and not like our mundane devices at all.

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**“that project of your grandfather’s”** — ObRef to the story that Fëanor created the palantiri — whether he actually made them, or simply designed them, is not certain. That they don’t show up in Middle-earth until they’re given by the Elves of Aman to the Númenóreans, is certain.

## Scene V.

Again, mostly just painting out the truth behind the songs — realities of logistics and terrain and the Arts of War, assumed common knowledge, assumed as default in the epics and chronicles and hence not requiring explication. I’ve conjectured and translated — but you will find no real anachronisms here, no more than anywhere else. The archaic custom of sword-bonding does, for example, equate to a safety-catch on a modern weapon — though peace-strings serve more for an accidental going-off of the user, than the weapon itself...

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***Alquantar*** — Quenya plural, “swans.” The temptation to conflate with *alae*, a “wing” of cavalry from Roman tradition, was irresistible — and the research necessary to find the plural of swan yielded up one explanation



for the idea-linkage of swans and cavalry in Middle-earth, a tradition I am assuming here goes far back before Dol Amroth's founding. The word-root of "swan" in the Elvish languages is "rushing" — which also invokes the wonderful Anglo-Saxon Riddle from the Exeter book about the silence of swans in the water and the singing ruckus of swans aloft in headlong flight. Add to that the wedge-shape of waterbird flocks and the intimidating size and ability to do damage of an angry swan, combined with their grace and the arched necks of horses, and it becomes an almost inevitable equation.

And yes, that does make for a pun there in the original Elvish...

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My assumptions in regard to Beren's likely riding experience are derived from:

- 1) the fact that after confiscating Celegorm's horse they keep on walking, rather than ride off, which makes a lot of sense given that if one is not a particularly confident rider that one would not want to attempt such an exit with a rather nervous and shaken animal especially, any more than an amateur pilot would be likely to hop into an F-15 and take off;
- 2) the fact that the Beornings do ride to the rescue of Serech, but live in rugged highlands and mountain forests, not good horse country at all, and terrain where typically the riding beasts are small, scruffy, tough and bloodthirsty;
- 3) the question of where in Dorthonion at the height of the invasion, Barahir's outlaws would be likely to keep horses — cavalry, even ponies, being comparatively high maintenance, noisy, and not especially happy living in swamps for the most part — they're certainly not using them by the end;
- 4) the fact that by the time they reach the borders of Doriath the first time, Beren is sufficiently comfortable with the horse and with riding generally to undertake the long retracing of the journey back to the borders of Angband at high speed.

Hence I tend to think that he would have had early experience with horses, using the term very loosely, probably never have seen a full-size ancestor of the *mearas* before getting nearly run over by Celegorm, and given the combination of his ranger skills, empathy with animals, and low intimidation factor, wouldn't have taken very long to not only regain his earlier riding ability but to be at ease with a steed easily twice as tall and much faster than anything he would have ever ridden before.

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**The Plan as conceived in full detail** — I don't believe that Finrod would have neglected to work out a plausible, essentially practical scheme for recovering the Silmarils, but this mission is entirely my own invention. I hope that

it is essentially a practical one:

- using light cavalry as it was anciently used, the equivalent of an airstrike, but here for transport and extraction purposes;
- moving throughout the night so that any halts could be kept to daylight when Morgoth's creatures would be restrained by the Sun, not a problem for the forbears of Shadowfax nor their riders;
- staggering the paths of each group slightly so that any guards roused by the first units would not be in exactly the right place to interfere with subsequent movements;
- avoiding getting bogged down in engagements altogether for obvious reasons of casualties and speed, because the longer spent in any one place, the more time the Enemy has to move in troops;
- criss-crossing the river to forestall the Enemy anticipating of their route and placing blockades in advance of them, since it wouldn't be clear at once where they would be at any given time in the valley;
- using the same kind magical defensive illusions to confuse and deceive Enemy aerial intelligence found even as late as the Third Age, just as today electronic countermeasures, signal jamming and chaff, are used;
- coming out on the eastern side of the Fens to avoid the narrowness of the valley on the west shore of Sirion and getting entangled with the mountain spurs there, and forming a single consolidated force to add momentum and prevent loss of stragglers when breaking through any Enemy outposts guarding the forts along the headwaters of Sirion;
- using the forts of Fingon as a base of operations to regroup, repair and reorganize for a commando style raid on Angband, with a safe assumption that not only would the barest duty of hospitality be offered, but enthusiastic assistance and probably limitless volunteers;
- taking all three if the opportunity presents itself, but considering the mission accomplished with the taking of one and proceeding with extraction plans if it seems too dangerous to go on;
- coordinating so that following the completion of the mission the cavalry would be ready for pickup on the opposite side of the plain. This means that they would not have to retreat down the obvious route, back where the Enemy would be expecting them to return, but past the unsuspecting Enemy forces stationed in Northeast Beleriand and avoiding those mostly by staying up between the dunes and the burned forest of Nightshade, where nobody goes voluntarily.

Morgoth still doesn't know exactly where in Beleriand Nargothrond is, only

that it exists and somewhere out there in the old-growth canopy, shrouded by Mirkwood-like deceptions and guarded by extensive outposts is an Elven City that formed a major part of the Leaguer and is full of angry survivors led by Felagund; he knows Fingon is out there and where he stays, 'cause he's looking right at him across the Anfauglith, and he hasn't been able to dislodge his forces for the past decade; he hasn't been able to beat through or down the consolidated forces in the East of Beleriand under Maedhros and the other Sons of Fëanor — so the successful close of the mission would have left him in essentially the same state as before, only a lot angrier.

Would it have worked? The critical and unplannable part, what happens after scaling the gate-tower-mountains and breaking in, remains just that. A highly-coordinated and determined force of experts led by one, probably two, Noldor kings, prepared far more than they were ten years ago even merely psychologically for nasty surprises and taking full advantage of their own surprise and deception tactics and the resulting confusion among the Enemy of “This can't be happening!” — hard to say. (After all, they wouldn't have had Lúthien with them...) But it would have been spectacular, successful or not, is my guess—

We go up in fame  
or we come down in flame  
but nothing can stop  
the Army Air Corps

—as my people used to sing...

---

The text of the Oath derives from *The Lays of Beleriand*, from an early fragment of a poem from about 1925 which describes the scene after the Treeslaying and contrasts ominously the three hosts of the Eldar as they react to the Darkness, the Foamriders wondering what is going on by the piers, forshadowing the ship-taking later that evening, and the earlier care-free day of the Vanyar giving a concert for Varda at her home on the holy mountain, together with the imagery of Fëanor challenging the Host to follow him with blazing torches in hand as he declaims his fiery rhetoric.

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“Sparkly” is the literal translation of Finduilas' nickname, Faelivrin, referring to the effect of sunlight on water.

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The course of my hubristic attempt to write out what the SOF's canonical seduction of Nargothrond might have sounded like, under the invocation

of the Oath and the veiled threats of renewed Kinslaying, no doubt fall far flat of what would have been. But I wanted to try to make the scenario as plausible as I myself find it, working with the awareness of the terrible blow taken by the City in the Dagor Bragollach — not an abstract matter of troop numbers, but of lots of family members lost horribly in a small society, and the awareness of how the shadow of Alqualondë hangs over all the deeds of the Noldor in Beleriand, and understanding how *geassa* — being the Western-Indo-European form of karma — always involve past acts of injustice (sometimes vicarious) as part of the balance of dharma/righteousness.

Things don't just happen out of nowhere... The occasional necessity of abdication to prevent bloodshed is found not only in the Celtic tradition but also in the Confucian writings of Mencius, and are in the spirit of the *Tao Teh Ching* as qualities of true leadership and authority, which is not about force or power but care and guidance.

Also the fact of the social fragmentation and uncertainty in Nargothrond following the Defeat is in part inspired by the events chronicled in *Silm.* and the rest taken from my own observations of history and group interactions. I can't imagine that someone as cruel and cynical as Curufin would have failed to make use of Beren as an object lesson in his rhetoric, either...

The bit about the fault-lying in the failure of the Leaguer is particularly audacious, given that we're told in *Silm.* that the Sons of Fëanor were chief in those objecting to any offensive action, against the High King Fingolfin's recommended tactics, because of the inevitable casualties caused by taking the battle to the Enemy. Of course, in the end, keeping him locked up only resulted in more casualties.

And the "jewel/girl" line is an ObRef to the actual text of Celegorm's Curse as given in full in the *Lay*:

"Farewell," cried Celegorm the fair.  
"Far get you gone! And better were  
to die forhungered in the waste  
than wrath of Fëanor's sons to taste  
that yet may reach o'er dale and hill.  
No gem, nor maid, nor Silmaril  
shall ever long in thy grasp lie!  
We curse thee under cloud and sky,  
we curse thee from rising unto sleep!"

—It's a doozy, all right.

---

Finrod's assessment that the successful theft of even one Silmaril would severely damage Morgoth's credibility in the eyes of his commanders and troops derives from a line in *Lost Road* where it's noted that following the actual theft, Orcs laughed about it behind the Dark Lord's back — I imagine him perceptive enough to guess that consequence in advance. (And I can't help but imagine that happening, the Morgoth imitations and raucous laughter, given Uruk-hai humor in *LOTR*...)

---

I would never have thought of this myself, history is really stranger than fiction — Roman generals have been reported to carry specially-designed mosaic floors which could be dismantled for transport to furnish their command pavilions, so that barbarian dignitaries would be sufficiently impressed. When I first read this, (aside from thinking "I wonder if I could make one?") I had to wonder what the Imperial GIs thought of that...

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**"bribe-and-threaten"** — invoking Yeats' great ghost story *The Black Tower*, excerpted here:

Those banners come to bribe or threaten  
Or whisper that a man's a fool  
Who when his own right king's forgotten  
Cares what king sets up his rule.

If he died long ago  
Why do you dread us so?

There in the tomb drops the faint moonlight  
But wind comes up from the shore.  
They shake when the winds roar  
Old bones upon the mountain shake.

---

The canonical interchange over the succession is my warrant for assigning the role of King's Steward to Edrahil, described as the "foremost among the ten" and based on my own experience that people tend to use idioms natural to them and familiar from their own work. (Not to mention that there is no greater position of trust and responsibility, when you come right down to it.)

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Yes, I actually used "weird" in a statement about Fate. So the sentence works in both Old English and Modern English, because if you replace the word with its original, "wyrd," which means simply "Doom" or "Fate," it's also a correct and perfectly reasonable, if rather tautological, Anglo-Saxon

declaration. I should probably pay a forfeit for macaronic (multilingual) punning, but it is an established tradition from the Middle Ages. Refers to *Silm.*, the end of the chapter “Of the Noldor in Beleriand”.

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I have to think that “Your mother wears combat boots” would fall rather flat addressed to the son of a Shieldmaiden of the North.

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“**To me**” — a traditional battle cry, but also evoking the shepherd’s call to his herd dog — “Away to me,” meaning circle around widdershins and come to a down-stay at heel. The continual equation of Beren, like Cuchulain of the Celtic sagas, to a loyal hound is not at all mine, but The Professor’s, by the by.

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**nerhneta** — the discussion of Noldor tactical survivals and terminology is found in *Unfinished Tales*, “The Disaster of the Gladden Fields,” where, pinned down in a swamp by superior forces, Isildur’s forces cannot use a flying wedge to break out but instead must form *sandastan* (Qu) or *thangail* (Si,) the thorny hedge of spears projecting from a staggered shield-wall which can be tightened up into a circle — and I imagine the formation employed in the Fen of Serech.

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## Scene VI.

**Morgoth’s Parole** — referring to the sowing of discord and seduction to rivalry carried out undercover by Morgoth after his release from prison following his first attempt to destroy all light in the world, when he was allowed to go about freely just as though he’d never done anything treacherous before and all was forgiven.

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**gambeson** — a padded undertunic worn beneath mail for protection.

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The healing effect of water and water’s sound is a common theme in Middle-earth, and like the protective aspect of water against Darkside influence derives from the presence of the Lord of Waters, the Vala Ulmo, who as the “Loyal Opposition” continues to actively meddle in the doings of the Elves after the Rebellion and the Ban, most overtly in the Tuor-Gondolin situation, but always and everywhere as he explains to Tuor. (See also *FOTR*.)

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“**Treelight**” — My own invention, but I assume that the Elven cultures would have had far more complicated and subtle and beautiful tunings and scales than even we have, of which there are far more than merely “major”

and “minor” though this fact is often concealed like forbidden lore from beginning music students. And that, since they gave grammatical forms cool names, their musical modes would have cool appropriate names too.

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Moving the discussion of whether the Oath somehow works on its own in the world from the prior discussion between Beren and Finrod is my one significant variant (as opposed to filling in detail) from canon: artistic license taken for dramatic balance, and not significantly affecting the story — in fact, I indicate that they’ve talked, as per canon, about the SOF problem already before the scene opens. But thinking about this in detail just made me start seeing parallels to the working of the Ring in the Third Age, and I wanted to give it its own particular emphasis.

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**“thing made by craft”** — what Beren said in contempt about Thingol’s demand for dowry, rating the Silmaril against Lúthien, presumed here to be recollected from his earlier recounting of events.

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**Bereg** — one of two rebels among the Edain who were tempted by Sauron-in-disguise to reject the Eldar and return back East across the Blue Mountains. Amlach of the House of Hador tumbled to the fact that he was being used and had, and returned to the war against Morgoth with renewed fervor, but Bereg of House Bëor led a group of discontented partisans back East, where they disappeared from recorded Middle-earth history. See *Silm.*, “Of the Coming of Men into the West,” for details; particularly invoked is his line, “Let the Eldar look to it! [ie, the Leaguer] Our lives are short enough.”

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The presumption that Finrod might have been not completely thorough in his account of the Revolt of the Noldor is based on the fact that he and his family didn’t happen to mention it to their hosts Thingol and Melian until forced to, and his and his siblings’ reluctance to speak ill of others, as well as the wretchedness of the past events. And that Beren might well have not paid a lot of attention to that part of the Lore as a kid comes from the common response of a lot of us, apparently, to that part of the History — that troubled combination of Eeeegads! and What???

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**“lands beyond Gelion”** — as eventually this is exactly what Beren does; I provide this here as foreshadowing, inspiration, unifying of themes, any or all of these. The fact that some of the inhabitants of Ossiriand are of the same tribes that historically have been allied with Doriath, whose king and royal house died coming to the rescue of Doriath in the days before

Melian set the Girdle about it, and who gave up on warfare and involvement in the war thereafter is merely one more link in a very complex mesh of implications.

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**Finrod's song**, apart from the obvious invocations of the Arda Mythos, is modeled in part on the Canticles in the Hebrew Scriptures of Daniel and some of the Psalms, in part on G.M. Hopkins' *Pied Beauty*, and in part on the Anglo-Saxon Metrical Verses from the Exeter Book which begin "Cyning sceal rica healden," contain the line "orthanc entea geweorc," and are often aka "the Gnomic Verses" pronounced of course "Nomic" — and thus I am both repaid in kind, and justified in my punning by the highest authority...

The epithet "Unburning" derives from the symbology of Ghanian traditional reincarnatory monotheism, where the idea of that which burns eternally without being consumed or destroyed is used as one of the ways to describe the Divine; it is also evocative of the Stoic belief in Fire as the Element underlying the universe, and the essential nature of the soul.

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The discussion re darkening their armor (reference *LL1*, Canto VII) both invokes the canon of Elven magic being a natural, not a supernatural process, and the entire question of what's "magic" being confusing to them (*FOTR*, the conversation with Galadriel in Lothlórien) — and various exchanges I've had over the years regarding technologies that more sophisticated people don't even question, such as polarization, after which explanations I tended to go away thinking "Yup, — magic."

## Epilogue.

I just tend to think that the SOFs are the sort of people who wouldn't be able to resist coming down to gloat, even if, for prudential reasons, discreetly.

And Huan, who we are told in *LL1* loves the King, would surely also be there to say goodbye.

## Frontspiece — Houseguests from Hell

The three tile designs behind the throne represent three sigils used by Finrod in Middle-earth — the first two are traced directly freehand from JRRT's own designs, and the third is my interpretation based on textual



description of a device that I have not seen any authoritative rendering for as yet but only verbal descriptions.

The uppermost and central design is the emblem of House Finarfin, with golden sun rays which also evoke Egyptian lilies in their termini. As Finrod is in the peculiar position of having taken up the overlordship of his group after his father's conscience will no longer allow him to go on, and in a sense is the vicarious king of his people here in Middle-earth, it seems fitting to me that he would employ the heraldic device of his father's House, just as Fingolfin, as High King of the Noldor after Maedhros' relinquishment of the right of the Eldest, bears his father Finwë's symbol of the Sun-in-Splendour for his own.



The left sigil is Finrod's personal badge representing his role as liege-lord of Bëor: the symbols of a harp and blazing torch on a green field are invocative of the history recounted in *Silm.*, wherein Finrod is inspired to wander off on his own while hunting with his kinsmen and discovers the first of the clans of the Secondborn, who have crossed the mountains to find peace and hope to discover the Valar, based on tales and rumors from the Avari who taught them in the East. There he took up the harp of their leader, Balan, as they slept, and began to sing to them of the story of the making of Arda, and the Marring, and the High-Elven lore, and both they and he found that he could understand their thoughts and convey his meaning to them with his music, and thus they were able to work to a common linguistic understanding.



After convincing them that he was not in fact a Vala, Finrod assumed the role of protector and teacher and became ultimately their King, and Balan received the accolade of Bëor, which is translated as 'vassal,' and Finrod got the often thankless job of mediating between the other Elven kindreds and the influx of Mortals from beyond the mountains, those who became the Edain. The Harp and Torch are therefore both historically literal and symbolically figurative.



The rightmost symbol is the device found also on the ring given to Barahir by his King after the Battle of Sudden Flame: Finarfin's personal badge of obscure origin, showing two golden serpents beneath a crown of flowers, that "one upholds and one devours" — in this instance I've made the device rendering in a more Indo-European style, reminiscent

of the protective serpents rendered in exquisite goldwork knotted through jewelry from the height of Classical Greece and Rome. This design fit the area better than the alternative, a caduceus-style layout, as well as fitting the text.

The Nauglamir design is entirely and hubristically my own, but inspired by the fact that it's described in a term that I have only heard used of the kinds of great gemmed collars such as the ones made for Tutankhamen — both graceful and weightless-seeming on



whomever wore it. The weight and balance of the Egyptian collars and the exquisite detail and technical skill employed in crafting them does in fact seem magical. But in addition to the agrarian themes of the original collars, with their gem-crafted Seeds and Flowers, and the wings of the sacred birds, I've worked in the common world mythic elements of the Sun and Moon and Stars, the Indo-European symbols of Salmon and Wave and Beech Leaf, and the bird opposing the Eagle is the Swan which is mighty in Celtic lore as well, and in the center is the flame representing the Secret Fire, the Flame of Anor, which the wearer serves. I've attempted to do the idea of it justice...

For the design style of Nargothrond, as opposed to that of Menegroth, I've employed a form of the Industrial Design version of Art Nouveau, of which Christopher Dresser is one of the more famous workers — it seems with its splintering rays and angles that could be light, could be leaves, could be mathematical paradigms, (could be birds' wings, too, for that matter) to be particularly appropriate for the Noldor. However you'll note that the more organic Sindarin style is employed as well where apt, and that every individual's gear and costume is different and unique — neither mass-production nor conformity being particularly characteristic of Elven society! (And, consistently, Beren's own sword-belt is held together with knots — replacement buckles, and blacksmiths, being no doubt hard to come by under the New Regime in Dorthonion.)