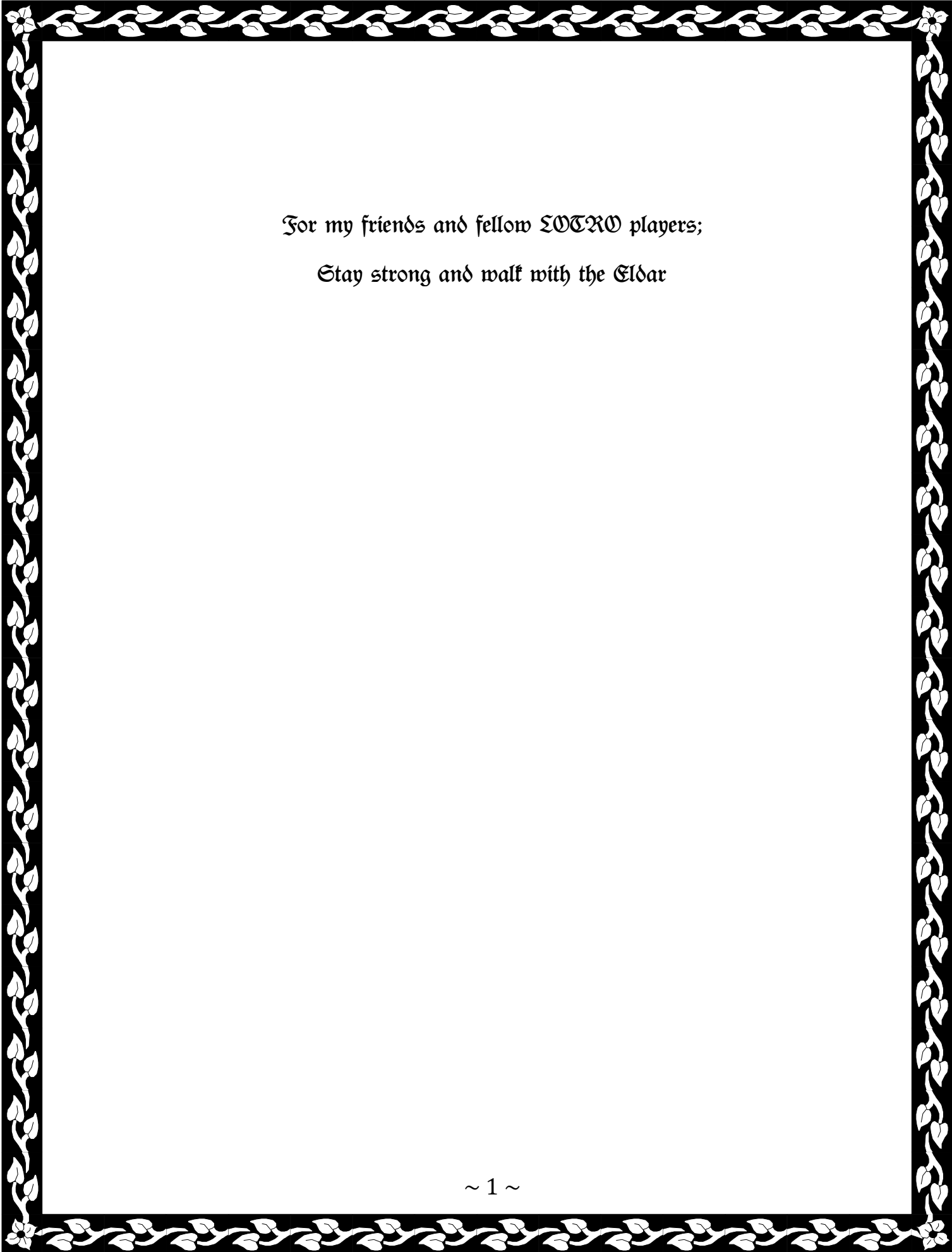


Marilyn and
The Black
Peak Goblins

By

Snore23



For my friends and fellow LOTRO players;

Stay strong and walk with the Eldar

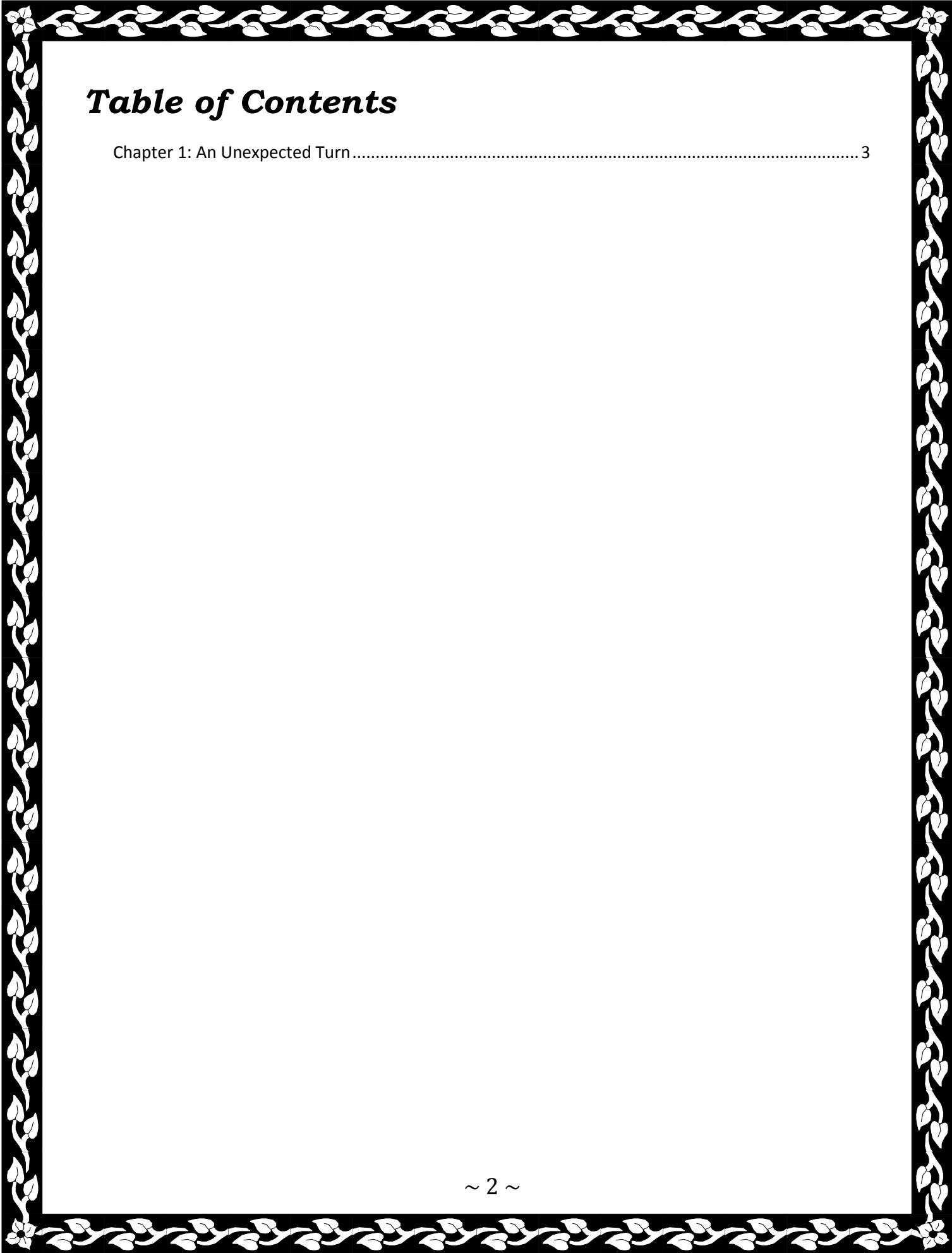


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Chapter 1: An Unexpected Turn

Under the lofty peaks of the Misty Mountains, in the great halls of Moria, the stony corridors and feasting chambers echoed. Not with the savage gutterings and mutterings of the Orc and goblin, but with cheerful singing of dwarves and the beat of hammers in deep forges. Light burned in the depths of the great chimneys, not the weak light of goblin cook-fires, but great hot flames to melt Mithril and gold.

In one of the upper halls, in the audience chamber of mighty Grizzlebeard the dwarf, pleasant music created a soothing atmosphere. It seemed almost as if a person shut their eyes, they would see the beautiful boughs of the elven forest and tread amongst its solemn giants. In this chamber, at least, silence but for the music, reigned supreme. Jarilin the elf kept her audience spellbound, enhancing her music slightly with her magic to get the added emphasis to her song. The dwarves certainly seemed pleased with her efforts, she wryly noticed. Every one of them hung on her tune, tankards forgotten in front of them and plates of food untouched on the tables.

"-and so ended the grim travels of Bilbo and his friends through the leafy halls of Lothlorien, the clever hobbit spiriting his comrades through the stone fortress of the King and down the rushing river to Laketown." she finished in elvish. It was a risk, she knew, to play this part of the saga in the presence of so many dwarves, but she felt that the ultimate success of the hobbit in outwitting the guards thanks to his magic would cheer the dwarves.

"'T'was very well done, mistress elf." grumbled the king. "But you forgot to say it was the dwarves themselves that outwitted the elves in the first place."

"How so, master dwarf?" Jarilin inquired politely. She found herself genuinely curious to hear how the dwarves saw Bilbo's adventure.

"Why, did not Thorin Oakenshield bring that excellent burglar along? And did he not give specific instructions to the halfling to free them? Really, it was Thorin who won the day, giving the orders for Bilbo. All the hobbit had to do was carry them out."

"Indeed." Jarilin murmured. "And yet, according to both Gloin and Balin, it was the hobbit that crept in quieter than a mouse and led the party to the cellars for the barrel ride down the river."

"Well, that is true. There was that deviation and a most uncomfortable one too!" the old dwarf harrumphed. "Still, it was all done under Thorin's watch, so in actuality it was his efforts that led the party to escape your people."

Not wanting to anger her host, and desiring a warm bed and a small mug of wine, Jarilin acquiesced to the dwarf king's point. Bowing lower with a flourish, she left the small stage for her turn at the meal tables.

Eschewing the meat of the boar offered by her hosts, she took instead to the small salads that the dwarves had left untouched, preferring to leave such "rabbit" food to their guests. There were a couple of humans in the hall as well, and though they liked meat nearly as much as the dwarves, they did enjoy the fruits of the land as well.

As Jarilin ate, she listened to the conversations around her. Most of it was about mining the Mithril that ran deep within the mountain, and some was on veins of gold that had been discovered further on in the mines, and some on the forging and shaping of such raw metal. Some, however, spoke of travels further to the East, and those interested her much more. She pricked her ears up as she listened to an old dwarf merchant discussing his last trip from the Lonely Mountain to the Mines of Moria.

"-and the road was terrible. Especially when we passed out of our lands and went into Mirkwood itself. The Great Road is completely gone."

"I thought the elves and men had worked to remake the road there." his friend interrupted.

"Yes, some time ago they tried. It was rumored that they had even managed to make it to the far side of the forest and thus reconnect the trade routes. It was on this advice that I went on my travel, and what did I find when I get there? The road was incomplete, the humans laboring long and hard to make the road usable, and the elves having declared it hopeless and wandered back to their leafy halls. Mark my words, our friends the woodsmen will find that their labors will be for naught. Those thieving elves will let them finish the work and then claim the road as theirs, charging honest merchants' great taxes on all goods passing through the road!" The auburn-haired dwarf grumbled. He took a swig from his great oak cup and wiped his mouth with his hand before continuing.

"And as if that wasn't bad enough, I encountered goblins on the roads west of the forest!"

"Goblins!" the other dwarf said in surprise. "But they haven't been seen since we took the great Moria mines back!"

"Aye, those scum scurried back to their dark halls after we took back our rightful home, but now I say they're back, and wreaking havoc on the road between Moria and Erebor. Those scum are raiding caravans now, but mark my words, they'll get bolder as long as they think they can get away with it! And what will the elvish king do?" he snorted derisively. "Nothing, and yet he is quick to stop any caravan trying to make its way through that cursed forest of his and demand his tolls! Well, we found for ourselves we had to stand on our own! We took care of those beasties right handily, though we lost several of our number in the process. Good lads, every one a' them. But we made it here at last."

The merchant fell silent at last, and Jarilin turned to her meal as she reflected on what she had learned. If the king was letting the Beornings do all the hard labor with the plans of assuming control of the roads after it was complete, then that was ill news indeed. She had always felt the Beornings were good people and solid allies. To alienate them in such a matter was folly.

She, too, reflected on the words of the dwarf on his encounter with the goblins. More than likely some of his tale there was...enhanced a little. But how much was the naked truth? Her people prided themselves on being able to understand more than what was said, but she felt that most of what the dwarf said was true. So, then, it seemed the goblins were back after a short absence. That was troubling. After the defeat at Mordor, it was thought that goblins and orcs had fled Middle Earth, never to trouble them again. She would have to be extra cautious on her trip east then. It was likely that she would have to think about changing her route. She could head a little further north, away from the main road. Most of the attention of the raiders would most likely be on the Great Road.

As she walked out of the crowded hall towards her room, she made her decision. She would head for the secret path of the elves. The irony tickled her sense of humor; she would be treading the same path as the great Bilbo Baggins and his company of heroes. That was her last thought before sleep came to claim her.

Jarilin set out early the next day, her pocket jingling slightly with the gold coins given to her for her performance. Jarilin was a firm believer in doing good works for some profit. After all, there were plenty of expenses that seemed to empty her pockets faster than she could fix them. It would be nice to have enough to get by on for a few months.

The sturdy horse beneath her seemed to frisk slightly the further they got from the mountain. Jarilin couldn't help but smile at the mare's eagerness.

"I would guess you disliked the stone stables of the dwarves Lilly?" she asked in elvish. The horse cocked an ear back at her and then forward again, as if in agreement. Jarilin gave a musical laugh that the mountain pass threw back at her in an echoing aria.

They didn't stop until late evening, when the sun dropped below the horizon, and darkness had closed in. Even then, the starry night sky above filled her camp with plenty of light. Nibbling on the last of her lembas bread, she didn't bother to light a fire, preferring to stare at the cold light of the stars and the mysteries they provided.

Jarilin broke camp early the next morning and found herself on the saddle before the morning rays of the sun kissed the sky. She ignored the clouds of crows in the distance, no doubt they were circling some unlucky carrion or something. Nothing at all to do with her! She engrossed herself in studying the small book in front of her as Lily plodded contentedly along the trail in front of her. The horse knew the path nearly as well as Jarilin, so she did not fear of getting lost. The tales of Arlowyn the Brave made for excellent reading and time passed quickly. Before she realized it, the sun had passed its zenith and started its long journey behind the mountains.

Pulling Lilly to a stop, she slid off gracefully and bustled about making camp. She had made good time northward from Moria, and now rested in the shade of a small gully near a spur of the Misty Mountains. Silent stony faces towered above her, nearly blocking out what little light there was from the sun. The fire crackled merrily on the dry brush and twigs she fed into the dancing flames. When the cookfire was hot enough, she roasted a small stew of berries and dried bread. Leaning back, she decided that she would wait the night here before moving on. She was barely two day's ride from Moria. There was no need to guard her sleep against more than the odd night predators, and she felt the fire should be more than sufficient.

Checking Lilly to make sure she could find plenty of food through the night, she strung the rope at the entrance of the cove. Lilly wouldn't pass the rope willingly, so Jarilin had no worries about her wandering off. Searching for a comfortable spot near the flames, she set her pack down to use as a pillow, stretched out on the soft moss that covered the ground, and placed her head on the rough leather and fell asleep.

he came awake to the sound of Lilly whinnying in terror. As she shook off the thick cobwebs of sleep, she saw her fire had burned low; it was barely giving off any heat. The feeble light was enough however for her sharp elven eyes to see goblins rushing to her from the far side of the camp. Lilly's warning had given her just moments to react.

So fast was her thinking that she realized it would be quite impossible to reach her lute, or even gather the magic necessary to repel so many. Instead, she'd have to rely on the belt knife. Snatching it from her belt, she was just in time to repel the first swing of the lead goblin. With a twitch of her knife she knocked the blade away. A stab dispatched her foe, and she moved on.

The next few minutes were a blur to Jarilin. It was all she could do to keep the goblin's blades from reaching her. The foul stench emanating from the black metal told her all she needed about what she was facing. *Some sort of poison, or I'm a bearded dwarf!* Jarilin had no idea what kind of poison was on those swords, but she didn't dare let them touch her. Steel rang on steel, echoing off the walls and creating a terrible din that deafened her. No doubt it was the reason she didn't hear the goblin sneaking up behind her, his great iron-tipped club raised for a deadly blow. However, his shadow gave him away.

Jarilin caught sight of it, wavering and thin, behind hers. She spun, her knife coming up to block the blow. Too slow! The knife never made contact, but the goblin's aim was off. The killing blow only grazed the side of her head. Jarilin gasped as blinding white light seemed to burst behind her eyes. She dimly realized her cheek was pressed up against the cold dirt. She rolled over, looking for her knife. The last thing she saw was a goblin boot rushing towards her face.

Jarilin woke to the sound of chanting. As her mind cleared, she translated the foul speech of the goblins. She did not like what she heard one bit.

*Come down to our dark town
Where you'll never leave
From our dark town
Yes our dark town.*

*You've been caught, there's nary a doubt,
You'll work and slave with no hope about
Until you die and we shall feast hiiiigh*

Down down in our dark town alone you'll cry!

And many more verses they sang, but Jarilin stopped listening. It would do no good to lose her spirits now, and the crushing weight of those words threatened to drown her soul in misery. Instead, she concentrated on testing her bonds without, she hoped, giving herself away.

If there is one thing I can say for certain about goblins, she thought wryly, is that they know how to tie an accursed knot! Struggle though she might, she could not undo the rope that bound her hands, without giving herself away. She would have to wait for an opportunity to present itself, before she could afford to risk moving. But where was she? That was important, if she was in the open, then she stood a better chance. There was only one option, cracking her lids slightly; she waited for her eyes to adjust.

Rock passed above her. For a ridiculous moment, she thought she was back in the mines of Moria. That was foolish thinking, and she realized with a sinking feeling that she was in the goblin's foul cave. There would be little chance of escaping now, unless she was just at the entrance...?

"Gurzag! She wakes!" shrieked a voice in her left ear.

"No matter. The she-elf is too deep to escape, and bound to tight. Wake her fully, boys. Time for her to start carrying her own weight around here." The guttural voice gloated.

There was a general smattering of laughter, and Jarilin found herself without breath as a storm of goblin fists and boots hit her ribs and back. She quickly straightened to get away from her tormenters, trying to kick the hands away that restrained her. When she managed to stand, all fight fled her and she struggled against a wave of despair. Unbidden, the images conjured of the original Goblin Town came to her mind: great wooden scaffolds with a collection of haphazard huts jammed cheek-by-jowl, leaning

threateningly over the cleared spaces of the square. It seemed as if the merest breath of wind would push them over the edge and into the darkness below.

No, she corrected herself, not completely dark. Torches provided the sole illumination, casting pools of light where they shone. The farther away they stood, the smaller the pool until they were mere stars burning in the dark firmament. There were a great many stars in that massive cavern, both above and below her, with more winking on until she felt as if she were floating in the heavens, surrounded by winking dots of cold, eerie light. She felt a chill crawl up her spine. There were far more lights than there should be...the goblins *couldn't* have this many in one place, right? With the fall of Gundabad and the other purges made by men, the goblins should have retreated into the densest wilderland they could find!

She was interrupted in her musing by the sound of low chuckling that overrode the other goblins. Icy fingers clutched her neck, and she looked up into the biggest goblin she had ever seen. Most were small, dwarvish height or so, but this one was as taller than she was, and seemingly built like a troll with his massive slabs of muscle. His sneering face was typical of most goblins: squarish with long, hooked noses and pointed, wiggling ears, cruel piggy eyes the color of black stone and hardly any softer as they gazed down at the captured elf. All of these details Jarilin noticed later. Right now, her attention was drawn to a long, curved scar that ran from the top of his left brow, across his nose, and deep into his right cheek. The scar tissue was thick and knotted, giving him an evil look.

"What'cha bring me today, Gurzag?" His gravelly voice held eagerness.

"Elvish scum, milord." The lead goblin grinned nastily. "We caught her trying to make her way through our front yard."

"Hmph." Jarilin grunted sourly. She hadn't been in anyone's front yard!

"Really." The goblin leader's leer widened. "And such a pretty she-elf! Hard to believe. What's your business here?"

"My business is my own, Goblin." Jarilin said coldly. "I have no interest in meddling in Goblin affairs, and am merely on my way to visit my kin who are expecting me." She added.

"I doubt that highly." The great goblin sneered. "You're a thief, most likely. An assassin, trying to make her way into our safe home. A murderer, not unlikely."

"I am none of those things." Jarilin snapped. She tried to rein in her temper. "I am a minstrel. Nothing more."

"Really. Then where is your instrument?"

"Back at my camp." Jarilin replied.

"She lies. We saw no sign of an instrument in this one's camp. But she did have this!" and he held aloft Jarilin's small dagger. It glowed fiercely blue in the presence of all these goblins.

"So, just a minstrel, eh? And yet carrying a blade of lost Gondolin?" The goblin chief sneered.

"It is an heirloom of my house, and I would like it returned to me." Jarilin spoke haughtily. Her mind raced as she tried to figure out her next step. The blade truly was of Gondolin, she had carried it for years though never truly had much occasion to use it, her magic usually enough to stop harm from coming to her. Now, she was without her magic, her music, and weaponless. This was not looking good.

"Well now, you appear to be frightened." The goblin gloated. He had a wicked grin as he stared down at his captive. "What fun!"

That's hardly the word I would use. Jarilin kept quiet though. If she used her head and outwitted her opponent, then she might stand a chance. Of course, that assumed she could make it as far as the gate. She had to end the gathering, and that would take time, time she was desperately running out of.

Whatever she was about to think, she didn't get a chance for the next words out of the chief's mouth drove them straight from her head.

"Take she-elf to chambers for night. Tie up good."

Jarilin felt her heart stop. There was no force on Middle Earth that would let her stand still to be used by this...this...pig! She opened her mouth and spat at the goblin chief, using her great strength to tug at the goblins holding her.

Bodies flew and goblins shrieked in surprise! They had not expected a struggle at this point, and so relaxed their guard. Lunging to her feet, Jarilin threw herself forward, directly at the goblin chief. She thought that if she could get her bonds around his fleshy neck, she'd be able to choke him and perhaps use him as a shield to escape.

Her hands closed on the thick chain that encircled his neck like a twisted necklace, holding skulls and bits of unrecognizable trophies. Giving a pull with all the strength she could muster, she nearly jerked the goblin off his feet. Stumbling with a gasp, she spun around behind him, the rope in her hands coming neatly around his neck. Jarilin felt a thrill of accomplishment-everything was going according to plan. And the next instant it all came apart.

The rope she held tightened painfully on the chief, and his roars of anger turned to anguished gurgles as his breath cut off. Jarilin felt sure in her victory over the chief and her eyes darted around to find the nearest escape. Several tunnels led into the darkness, and Jarilin was unsure which one she had been brought down. At this point she had quite lost her bearings and was still trying to recover her wits.

As she dithered, a small goblin jumped onto *her* back and sliced her shoulder. Not deep, but very painful. Her hands let go of the rope in shock. Recovering, she tried to grab at it, but the slippery strands evaded her grasp, and the chief threw himself out of her embrace.

Rolling to his feet, he rubbed his neck and glared angrily at her. Jarilin realized she had overstayed her welcome, and darted towards the crowd. Surprised goblins gave way before her as she hurtled towards the dark opening of the far left tunnel. By now however, the shock had given way, and goblins pressed in on her once again to prevent her escape. She swung her fists wildly, not having another choice, and bashed goblins on the head again and again, their bodies falling before her and being trampled by their companions.

By sheer weight of numbers, however, they forced the elf back to the ground. Jarilin's eyes stared at the tunnel mouth, so close and yet so far away. She realized bitterly that she'd never get near it now, the goblins were ready for her.

A hail of fists and boots rained along her body. Jarilin did the best she could to shield her face and neck from the blows, letting the rest through as the price for her foolishness. The beating seemed interminable, but at last rough hands snatched her bruised body up off the cold stone and half-dragged, half-carried her back to the great chief.

Jarilin could barely focus anymore, and the chief appeared to be just a blur in her teary eyes. She could tell he was angry, and waited quietly for her punishment. If she was *really* lucky, a quick death would be in store for her. Goblins were cruel and enjoyed spinning their punishments out for long periods. This time however, she would be in for a surprise.

"Take her below. Let her rot in the cells with the others. Perhaps some time in the pits will change her mind." The goblin snarled hoarsely.

Jarilin barely stirred, but her mind latched onto the information and worried at it as they hauled her away, snapping a leather collar round her neck and exchanging her ropes for chains. It was obvious they weren't going to kill her right away, which meant she would have time to rest and possibly recover her strength. *If I stay strong and be observant, I might be able to find the right path out of this foul goblin nest and back to the free world.* The thought comforted her, and she followed meekly behind the goblins that led her down, down, down deep into the twisted bowls of whatever mountain the goblins called home.

At the bottom Jarilin found herself in a large circular cave with wooden bars set into alcoves in regular intervals all around and reaching far below, connected by a wooden boardwalk that extended several turns below her. It looked like a giant honeycomb, but Jarilin realized what it really was. Cells, she thought numbly. Hundreds of them. There was room enough for every elf in Imladris, and Lothlorien, with room to spare. What could the goblins want with so much wasted space?!

She didn't get an answer to her unspoken question, as the goblin guard in front of her made a guttural snarl at one of the doors before opening the door and gesturing for her to enter. Jarilin limped slowly to the door, playing up being hurt to lull the guard's suspicions, but the goblins weren't having any of it. Several hands on her back propelled her into the small cave as the door rattled shut behind her. Foul words were spoken outside, and Jarilin stiffened as she recognized Black Speech, and the familiar tingle of magic being worked. They were placing wards on her cell! There would be now breaking the bars now.

Jarilin sighed as she eased carefully down on a small cot that was barely more than a scrap of rotted cloth stretched between two poles set into the rock. It was painfully hard and most uncomfortable, but better than the cold stone. She grimaced in distaste and turned her thoughts back towards creating a workable plan of escape when she realized she wasn't alone in the cell.