

FĚANOR

WORLD' S WORST SON- IN- LAW

Chapter 1 A Letter from Nerdanel

Mahtan held the iron in the coals, careful not to look directly into the flames. He enjoyed watching the fire as the metal heated but knew that if he did, he wouldn't be able to see its color when he pulled it out, and color was the only way to judge whether the glowing metal was soft enough to work.

Aulë always said, "Don't look into the fire. When you most need to tell red from orange, all you'll see is a dark blob." This was an old conversation between them. After all these years in Aulë's service, it was more of a ritual than actual advice.

Mahtan was the first of the Noldor elves to apprentice under Aulë the Smith. With Mahtan's age and seniority, he was a friend to Aulë, as well as being a student.

At some point, Aulë came over to see what Mahtan was working on and nodded with approval. "That's your best work so far, almost like something Mairon would have done."

"Mairon?" Mahtan asked Aulë's retreating back, but Aulë didn't hear.

Curumo, the most gifted member of Aulë's household and chief among his servants, waited until Aulë was out of earshot. "It's Quenya for 'Requires excessive admiration.'"

"Why would they name someone that?" asked Mahtan.

Uvatha the Horseman

"Probably because 'Inflated sense of his own importance' doesn't roll off the tongue as easily," said Curumo.

Mahtan turned back to his own work. Curumo had astonishing skill, but he wasn't pleasant to be around. And besides, Mahtan had come here to work with Aulë, not to get involved in the endless feuding among Aulë's servants.

Mahtan worked through the afternoon until his arm would no longer lift the hammer from the anvil. He didn't feel tired, and he still wanted to work. He rested a few minutes and tried again. Aulë must have noticed him picking up a smaller hammer, because he said kindly, "Go home. It will still be here tomorrow."

Mahtan left Aulë's forge and made the short walk to his cottage outside the gates of the Mansions of Aulë. Mahtan had a house in the village, or rather, hamlet. Actually, it would need about two more houses to qualify as a hamlet.

Inside, he took a moment to appreciate the peace and tranquility of their lives, the flowers in the garden, the beeswax polish on the wide cedar boards of the table, the fact that every day was the same, filled with a day's labor making useful and sometimes beautiful things.

The war raged in a distant land. It didn't affect them here, and for that, Mahtan was profoundly grateful.

In the kitchen, his wife was arranging wildflowers in a pottery vase she'd made herself. Both of them were skilled craftspeople. The textured fabric of her dress, twisted strands of copper and red, was made from yarn she'd spun and woven herself, he noted with admiration.

They were well-suited to each other. They'd both awoken, fully grown, on the shores of Lake Cuiviénen, the first of their kind. Hers was the first face he remembered seeing, ever. Like most people with no parents or siblings, they created a family of their own by marrying and having a daughter together, Nerdanel, their beloved only child.

Mahtan's wife looked up from the bunches of delphiniums and foxglove. Her hair was the color of cedar, and it hung in a braid over her shoulder. She held up a square of parchment with the seal broken. "I've had a letter

from Nerdanel. She'd like to visit during the week of the Festival, and she asks if she could bring the family." She smiled, and her cheeks were pink.

It would be wonderful to have her and her family visit during the Homecoming festival, which was held just before the spring planting. While every other festival involved public feasting and music and parades, the Homecoming festival was celebrated privately with extended family, household, or tribe. For most, it was a time to gather and catch up. But after Nerdanel moved away, Mahtan and his wife had celebrated it quietly with just the two of them. It was the best possible news. Mahtan missed her terribly.

Mahtan walked over to a shelf where they kept small treasures and picked up a small glass globe Nerdanel had made when she was young, right around the time they were becoming aware of her great talent as a sculptor. It was the work of a child, a little uneven, not quite finished. That didn't matter. He treasured it for its childish imperfections.

Inside the globe, the green forests hugged a deep lake, the shores of Lake Cuiviénen. The colors were the dark blues and greens they would've been at the time of the Awakening. Back then, the only light came from stars. The globe was filled with liquid, and when you shook it, it looked like it was snowing inside.

When Nerdanel married, everyone said she'd made an excellent match in marrying Fëanor. It wasn't just that he was the greatest craftsman living. He was gifted in both physical beauty and talent. Mahtan hoped the boys would inherit their father's good looks and intelligence. If they also inherited their mother's good nature, so much the better.

Mahtan had welcomed her new husband into the family, and taken him on as his own apprentice, teaching the budding craftsman everything he knew. Their first child, Maedhros was born. Maglor soon followed. A proud grandfather, Mahtan felt blessed.

Nerdanel and Fëanor now had seven sons, the oldest ones already grown to manhood. Mahtan didn't see them nearly as often as he would have liked. He couldn't wait.

Chapter 2 The Clan Arrives

There was a heavy knock on the door, and the sound of laughing outside. Mahtan got up to answer it, but his wife beat him to it. She flung open the door, and the sounds of shrieking and laughing filled the house. All at once, a great many people spilled into the front hall.

Mahtan knew that Nerdanel had seven boys, but seeing all of them for the first time was sort of overwhelming. "Most couples have one or two children. But seven? What are you, ranchers?" he asked.

Nerdanel entered with her husband. Her reddish-brown hair hung over her shoulder in a simple braid. Fëanor had jet black hair. He was slightly built compared to Mahtan, with the delicate hands of a craftsman. The boys seem to be evenly divided between red-haired and dark, and ranged in age from children to young men.

"Nerdanel, I've put the two of you in your old room. The younger ones will sleep on the floor in the front parlor, and I've made space for the three older boys in the hayloft," said Mahtan's wife.

"Where did the blond come from? Did you bring one of the neighbor's by accident?" Mahtan asked Fëanor, who'd knelt to unbuckle the straps of his saddlebags.

"Sometimes the people next door will slip one of their children in with ours. They think we won't notice. We do notice, but it might take a few days."

"Dear, that's Celegorm. He's one of ours," said Nerdanel.

"Right. I knew that," said Fëanor.

Admittedly, there were a lot of them. Mahtan wondered if their parents knew all of their names. He turned his

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attention to two small redheads who looked exactly alike.
"And these?"

"Those are Amrod and Amras. You never see the one without the other," said Fëanor.

Mahtan embraced his daughter. "I'm so glad to see you. I thought you usually spent the Festival with your in-laws in the city."

"We haven't seen you in a while, we thought this would be a good occasion for a visit," said Fëanor.

"I thought it was because of the restraining order," said one of the dark-haired children. "After that incident with the knife, Father's not allowed within five hundred paces of Uncle Fingolfin. We can't go to Grandpa's if he's going to be there."

A flush crept up Fëanor's face from chin to hairline. "And this is why some animals eat their own young." He went outside, muttering something about bringing in the rest of the bags.

Mahtan invited his daughter into the kitchen for a cup of tea. Her mother set the mug on the table, and Nerdanel wrapped her hands around it. Nerdanel's eyes shone as she spoke. "You can't imagine how clever Fëanor is, Daddy. When I was growing up, you taught me to make useful things from metal. But Fëanor goes beyond that. He makes things you can barely even imagine, even if you're holding them in your hand."

Mahtan enjoyed seeing his daughter so much in love. And she was right about her husband's talent. The young couple had stayed here for a few years shortly after they were married before their first child was born. During that time, Mahtan taught both of them the basics of the craft he'd learned from Aulë.

One of the boys came in a moment later, a dark-haired youth who looked overly tall for his weight, as if he'd been stretched. "Is there anything to eat in here?" he asked, and began going through the pantry.

Fëanor rolled his eyes. "Pardon my son. Curufin eats like a bird, twice his own weight in a day."

Uvatha the Horseman

Mahtan's wife set a roast chicken on the table, an unusually large one because there were so many of them. The skin was golden and crispy, and she'd rubbed it with rosemary and sage before putting it on the spit. The aroma filled the room.

"Mahtan, can you bring another pitcher of milk?" she asked, slicing bread for her grandsons.

"Now boys, what do you say?" she prompted.

"He who eats fast eats twice," said Maedhros, a tall redhead, as he grabbed a slice in each hand.

"Celegorm, aren't you having any chicken?" asked his mother.

"I understand the speech of all the animals. I won't eat one of them," said the blond.

"I'm guessing he likes a girl who doesn't eat animals," said an older boy, whose name was Maglor.

Mahtan got up from the table and stepped outside to the spring house, where they kept the butter and eggs. When he came back, the bones of the chicken had been picked clean as if by locusts. Two of the boys were fighting over the last scrap of meat. Their plates showed no sign of having been used at all.

"Did you lick them clean or did you skip the plates entirely and eat directly from the serving platter?" asked Mahtan.

One of the boys snagged something from his neighbor's plate. "He who eats slowly goes hungry," said the thief, licking grease from his fingertips.

"Caranthir, that wasn't yours. You took it right off my plate!" said Maglor.

"That's a fact. I'd have taken it out of your fingers if you weren't bigger than me," said Caranthir.

Mahtan sat down to an empty plate, feeling hungry and slightly annoyed. His wife got to her feet. "There's lots of bread and butter, and if you give me a minute, I can find some cheese. But I wouldn't let go of the milk jug until you've filled your glass."

"And after you've poured, you might hang on to your glass. They can get pretty aggressive at feeding time," said Fëanor.

Chapter 3 The Seeing Stone

Sweetheart, show my parents what you're working on." Nerdanel gazed at her husband with pride.

Fëanor pulled a small glass orb from a pouch at his belt and handed it to Mahtan. It fit neatly in his palm. It was heavier than expected, and as far as Mahtan could tell, the dark-colored glass was opaque and featureless. "It's not finished, but I built a scale model to try out the concept."

The orb grew uncomfortably warm in Mahtan's hand. Its center swirled with what looked like wisps of purple smoke. It cleared to reveal tall stalks of delphinium covered with blue and purple flowers. A honeybee landed on one, and it bobbed beneath its weight.

Mahtan's wife leaned over his shoulder. "That's my garden!" She clapped her hands.

"We're looking directly at it. The stone sees through walls. Try moving, and see what happens," said Fëanor.

Mahtan rotated the stone in his palm. The image didn't change.

"Try moving around it," said Fëanor.

Mahtan leaned to the right, and the image slid to the left. The orb showed chickens scratching the ground inside a woven willow fence.

"Those are my chickens!" cried his wife.

"This one doesn't have much range, but the larger ones will be able to see for miles, and will even be able to see into the past," said Fëanor.

"And the future?" asked Mahtan.

"Yes, but seeing into the future isn't very interesting. We all have free will, so there are countless versions of the future," said Fëanor.

"In a few days, I'm going to show it to some people I hope will Demonstrate their interest with gold, enough to to build a foundry large enough to make a real one.

"A few days? Won't you be able to stay out the week?" asked Mahtan.

"I'm afraid you're going to have to leave two days early. I'm meeting with someone who might agree to fund the foundry large enough to make one that can see for hundreds of miles." Fëanor looked nervous. Mahtan couldn't remember ever having seen him look nervous before.

"It's an impressive device. How does it work?" asked Mahtan.

"Well, it's like a spyglass, a spyglass that can look through walls," Fëanor spoke as if Mahtan were a child, which was sort of off-putting.

"No, I mean, what makes it work? The glass it's made from? The enchantments cast over it? The person using it?"

"It's too complicated for you to understand," said his son-in-law in a condescending tone.

Chapter 4 Funny Cat Videos

The next day, Mahtan noticed the red-headed twins, Amrod and Amras, sitting in a comfortable bay window lined with pillows looking out onto the garden. And beyond that, the house next door. They were crouched over something, laughing hysterically. Mahtan paused to listen.

"Look, he tried to jump on the table but missed. Now he's washing himself," said Amrod.

"It's that, 'I meant to do that,' mannerism," said Amras.

"Oh look, he's about to try again. Come see this, Celegorm," said Amrod.

"I'm busy. Can I ignore you some other time?" said the blond.

Their mother came in from the kitchen. "What are you doing?"

"We're using the seeing stone to watch the neighbor's cats," said Amrod.

"Not me. I'm a dog person," said Celegorm.

"You're looking into the neighbors' house?" Nerdanel looked appalled.

"Of course we're looking into the neighbors' house. This thing doesn't have much range," said Amrod.

"And it's no worse than looking through windows," said Amras.

"Which we were doing earlier," said Amrod.

Fëanor stormed into the room, waving the empty pouch.

"Where is ..." He crossed the room in a few long strides.

"Give me that!"

The twins bolted from the room faster than Fëanor could shove it back into its pouch.

"Are you sure it can only see as far as the neighbors?" Mahtan hoped they weren't spying on the Mansions of Aulë. He had a good relationship with the Holy Ones. He wanted to keep it that way.

Chapter 5 Not A Good Person

By noon, the noise and commotion in the small house had risen beyond what someone who prefers peace and quiet could stand. The moment the table was cleared after the noonday meal, Mahtan escaped to the Forge. It wasn't just an escape, Mahtan wanted to ask Aulë if his grandsons could come over to see the Forge.

But when he arrived, the cavernous space was empty. The fires had been banked down and the tools hung neatly on their racks. It appeared that Aulë's servants hadn't yet returned from the midday break.

Mahtan followed the short gravel path to the three-story stone building and rapped on a side door. A servant he

didn't know answered his knock. "You can find my master in the great hall." He pointed Mahtan towards a narrow hallway leading to the back of the house.

Mahtan had never lived in the Mansion and didn't know his way around inside. He followed the servant's directions and hoped for the best. At the end of the hallway, a door stood ajar. Light poured through it, and the murmur of conversation. Inside, a vaulted ceiling soared above the flagstone floor, and panels of ancient wood glowed in the light from clerestory windows.

A long wooden table filled the hall. At least twenty of the Holy Ones sat around it. Mahtan knew many of them from the Forge, but there were a number who were strangers to him. And at Aulë's right hand, a place had been set for someone who wasn't there.

Mahtan pushed the door open further. The wood scraped against the slates, and everyone looked up at once. Mahtan cringed in embarrassment.

"Excuse me, Lord Aulë, I didn't realize you were still at table." Mahtan cringed and backed away with as little sound as possible.

Cheeks burning, Mahtan went back to the Forge and found some small chores to keep himself occupied. Curumo was the first to return after the midday meal. "I imagine you've never seen the dining hall so crowded," he said.

"I've never seen the great hall at all. I've only been inside the Mansion a couple of times." Mahtan realized he had no idea how many spirits had come with Aulë from the Void, or how many of them lived under his roof at the moment.

"It's not usually so packed, except during the holidays. Lots of people come home for the Festival every year, some from across the sea," said Curumo.

"Why was there an empty place at the table?" Mahtan asked.

"That's for Mairon."

Mahtan didn't know what to say. "How did he die?" he asked, finally.

"Oh, he's not dead. He left to fight in the war. Aulë hopes he'll give it up and come home someday."

"He's fighting the enemy?" asked Mahtan.

"He is the enemy. He's fighting on the other side," said Curumo.

"But Aulë treats him like a hero." Mahtan struggled to understand.

Curumo leaned against a workbench while he considered his words. "Sometimes when a person is greatly admired, those who care about him overlook the fact that he's not a good person."

Aulë came back to the Forge later in the afternoon. Mahtan had a chance to speak with him bringing the boys to the Forge. Aulë offered to conduct the tour himself, and volunteered to help each of them to make something by himself.

At the last minute, it occurred to Mahtan that Aulë might want to see Fëanor again. "My son-in-law is visiting for the week of the Festival. You haven't seen him since he moved away, years ago. Shall I include him on the tour tomorrow?"

"No, that's alright," said Aulë.

Something's going on here, but Mahtan didn't know what it was.

Chapter 6 The Ring of Doom

Back at the cottage, Mahtan didn't see as many of the boys as he would have expected. Their father seemed unconcerned. "They wander off. Sometimes we don't see them for days."

The missing ones, Maedhros and Maglor, turned up when Mahtan's wife was setting the table for supper.

"Where were you?" asked Mahtan.

"We went to see the Ring of Doom," said Maedhros.

"It's not a public place. What were you thinking?" said Mahtan.

"That it would be cool to see," said Maglor.

"Sometimes when I look into your eyes, I can see the back of your head," said Fëanor.

"And anyway, you've been there yourself. Didn't you tell us you spoke in front of a whole lot of important people?" asked Maedhros.

"It's called a trial. I was the defendant," said Fëanor.

They sat down to supper, and Mahtan addressed the group around the table. "I have a treat for you tomorrow. Aulë himself will give us a tour of the Forge, and each of you will have a chance to make something."

Dark-haired Curufin looked up with what could only be described as longing. All around the table, dark and red head nodded in agreement and began talking excitedly among themselves.

Chapter 7 A Tour of Aulë's Forge

The next morning, Mahtan's grandsons assembled for the tour. Nerdanel had joined the group, too. Mahtan counted heads. Including Nerdanel, there were seven in all, three dark and four redheads.

"Where's the blond one?" Mahtan asked.

"Celegorm wanted a turn with the seeing stone," said Curufin.

Mahtan sighed. That only works until his father notices the seeing stone has gone missing again.

Mahtan assumed Fëanor would come want to come on the tour, too, but his son-in-law said, "I know what the Forge looks like. You took me there when you taught me how to make hardened edges."

Hardened edges were secret to making scythes and axes. It was the most advance skill of the smith's craft. Mahtan had learned it from Aulë and passed it on to with Fëanor.

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There was nothing mysterious about blacksmithing. Iron was put in the fire to make it soft. When the piece was red-hot, it was as easy to shape as modeling clay.

But hardened edges were different. The metal itself had to be transformed into another substance entirely. It was done by adding a pinch of charcoal to the molten metal. The piece had to be quenched in oil rather than water and allowed to cool overnight in a bed of sand. Nothing about the process was intuitive, and unless it was done exactly right, the piece would bend the first time it was used, or shatter like glass.

It was the secret to making tools with hardened edges. Unfortunately, it was also the secret to making edged weapons. The first thing Fëanor did with his new knowledge was to make a blade and use it on Fingolfin, which was why he hadn't been invited to Fingolfin's house for the Festival this year.

Nerdanel and the boys followed Mahtan through the gates around the Mansions of Aulë and across the grounds to Aulë's Forge.

"I haven't been here in forever. It makes me feel young again," said Nerdanel.

Aulë greeted them at the entrance to the Forge. He was enormously tall, and his shoulders were correspondingly broad. His black hair was braided into half a dozen plaits, and his beard hung down over his leather apron. He held a hammer in his hand. Mahtan had rarely seen the master smith without one.

Mahtan made the introductions. "You know Nerdanel, of course, and these are her sons Maedhros, Maglor, Caranthir, Curufin, and Amrod and Amras." And please don't ask me which twin is which.

Aulë led them inside. The fires had already been built up, and it was warm inside

the Forge. Mahtan retreated to the side of the room to let the young people have all of Aulë's attention.

Curufin was the first to make something by himself. Aulë stood nearby and gave him one-on-one attention.

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When he was finished, Curufin held up a twist of iron with a delicate leaf at the end. For a beginner, it was excellent work.

"You have natural ability," said Aulë.

Maglor, another dark-haired boy, went next. He tried something more ambitious which involved heating a thick bar of iron yellow-orange. It was awkward and dangerous to lift with the tongs, and he was obviously struggling with it. Inspecting the finished piece, he muttered, "It didn't turn out so well. I could have done better."

"You've got that right. Whatever it was supposed to be, it isn't," said Caranthir.

Aulë picked up the piece Maglor had made. "You have a gift. You should nurture it."

Maedhros looked wistful. "He's the artist in the family. I'd give my right arm for talent like that."

One by one, each of the six boys made something by themselves. All of the boys showed a talent for the craft. Mahtan could tell, even from across the room, by the way they swung the hammer and how quickly the iron took shape beneath their hammers. Aulë must have thought so too, because he said, "Maybe you'll like to come here to study under me. But decide quickly, there are others who want the position."

Mahtan glanced at Nerdanel. She nodded, and the corners of her mouth lifted in a smile. Since their mother approved of the plan, it might really happen. In his head, he was already building an addition to the cottage to make room for them.

"That's a great honor. Aulë rarely invites students to apply here. There's fierce competition for the few places he makes available," said Curumo.

Mahtan jumped. He hadn't noticed Curumo enter the Forge. He hadn't seen him at all until the chief of Aulë's servants sidled up next to him.

Mahtan nodded. "Agreed. I hope the boys will take advantage of it." Mahtan wondered what it would be like to

have his grandchildren living here. He smiled at the thought.

The ring of hammering on the anvil started up again. Sure that they wouldn't be overheard, Mahtan leaned over and asked Curumo, "Why didn't Fëanor ever study under Aulë? Surely he was good enough."

Curumo shrugged and looked away. "Fëanor learned Aulë's craft from you. It amounts to the same thing." Mahtan didn't believe him.

After they returned from the tour of the Forge, Mahtan helped his wife to prepare supper.

"Aulë invited the boys to stay here and study under him. They haven't decided to do it yet, and only Nerdanel's given permission so far, but what would you say to having them stay with us?" asked Mahtan.

He hoped she'd say yes. He'd already become attached to Maglor, who was artistic and kind, and to Curufin, who of all of them was the most mechanically inclined.

"It's the best possible news!" She smiled, and her eyes lit up. "I'd love to be able to spend more time with Celegorm. He loves animals. He helped to the chickens. You should see him with them. They eat right out of his hand."

Chapter 8 Hopes Dashed

Afterward the tour, Mahtan took the boys back to the house. They swarmed inside, eager to show off their work. They found Fëanor at the kitchen table, hunched over a dozen sheets of paper covered with sketches. Crumpled balls of paper littered the corners of the room.

"What are you working on?" asked Nerdanel.

"In just three days, I have to show the seeing stone to investors. They have to believe in it. They have to believe in me. This demonstration needs to be nothing short of amazing." Fëanor looked more anxious than Mahtan had ever seen him before.

Nerdanel's paperweight sat on the table, waiting down a sheath of papers. Fëanor picked it up and turned it over in his hands. Snow swirled inside the glass.

"I've made the stone look an hour into the past, but in theory, there's no limit. I have three days to figure out how to make it see the distant past. Imagine if I could show the investors Lake Cuiviénen! It's an ideal example. Everyone knows what it looks like, and they know that it doesn't exist anymore." Fëanor's eyes glittered with excitement.

"To Cuiviénen there is no returning," said Mahtan, quoting the old proverb.

Nerdanel entered the kitchen. "Dear, something wonderful happened today. Aulë invited the boys to come here and study with him." Her voice was filled with pride.

"What, and leave home? No, I won't split up the family." Fëanor turned back to what he'd been doing.

"Well, suppose we all came here? We're banished from Tirion, but we don't have to stay in Formenos forever. You could work with Aulë, too," said Nerdanel.

"No, that wouldn't work." Fëanor didn't even look up.

Mahtan leaned against the door jamb, listening. He'd just lost the chance to watch his grandsons grow up. Disappointment washed over him.

Chapter 9 Lake Cuiviénen

Mahtan came downstairs to breakfast the next morning before the rest of the household was up and found Fëanor already awake.

"You're up early," said Mahtan.

"I haven't been to bed at all. I'm looking at the world through yesterday's eyes," said Fëanor. His words tumbled out one after the other, and his eyes were wild. His eyes shone with triumph.

"I've done it! It happened just once, when I least expected it, after I'd been trying all night. I don't know if I

can do it again, but I've seen Lake Cuiviénen. I saw the deep lake, and the forests around it, and the people on the shores. I saw the Awakening." His face was full of wonder.

"How did you do it?" Mahtan pulled up a chair at the kitchen table and sat down beside his son-in-law.

"The stone is controlled by the will of the user. A strong-willed person can make it do more, can steer it to greater ranges or look further back in time," said Fëanor.

Strong-willed? His son-in-law certainly was that.

"So what happens next?" Mahtan asked.

"I practice until I can do it on command. I don't have much time. I met with the investors day after tomorrow." Fëanor jumped to his feet and began to pace the room.

Fëanor was in a bad temper that morning, snapping at the boys for no reason. Mahtan glanced at Nerdanel and raised an eyebrow.

"He didn't come to bed at all last night, and he's worried about his meeting with the investors. So much hinges on it. He can't take it to the next step and build a full-scale one without a new foundry. It's more than one family can pay for," she said.

The boys fled the house, saying they were going out exploring. Fëanor took the seeing stone and sat in a chair by the fireplace, which was cold at the beginning of April. He composed his features in a mask of calmness, and gazed into the glass, but seemed to give up in frustration. He took a break and came back to it, but soon became frustrated again.

Nerdanel grew impatient with him. "You need to go for a walk and calm down. When you come back, it will go better." Fëanor stepped outside into the brisk spring air, and in his absence, the entire household seems to relax.

Mahtan used the quiet time to knead bread dough. He had just put half a dozen loaves in the oven to bake when the front door banged. From the kitchen, Mahtan heard, "Amrod and Amras, I told you not to play with that. Give it here!"

Mahtan dusted flour off himself and looked through the kitchen doorway. Fëanor was leaning over the twins, who were camped in their usual spot in the window seat. He took the stone away from them and took it over to the chair by the fireplace.

Fëanor cupped the stone in his hands. His manner was more meditative and calm than it had been earlier. After a time, Mahtan saw his eyes fill with a look of wonder. "I did it. I saw them. I saw the Lake and the forests around it in starlight, and the Firstborn dwelling on its shores." Fëanor's voice was reverent.

Chapter 10 The Switch

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"I practice until I can do it on command. I don't have much time. I met with the investors day after tomorrow." Fëanor jumped to his feet and began to pace the room.

Fëanor was in a bad temper that morning, snapping at the boys for no reason. Mahtan glanced at Nerdanel and raised an eyebrow.

"He didn't come to bed at all last night, and he's worried about his meeting with the investors. So much hinges on it. He can't take it to the next step and build a full-scale one without a new foundry. It's more than one family can pay for," she said.

The boys fled the house, saying they were going out exploring. Fëanor took the seeing stone and sat in a chair by the fireplace, which was cold at the beginning of April. He composed his features in a mask of calmness, and gazed into the glass, but seemed to give up in frustration. He took a break and came back to it, but soon became frustrated again.

Nerdanel grew impatient with him. "You need to go for a walk and calm down. When you come back, it will go better." Fëanor stepped outside into the brisk spring air, and in his absence, the entire household seems to relax.

Mahtan used the quiet time to knead bread dough. He had just put half a dozen loaves in the oven to bake when the front door banged. From the kitchen, Mahtan heard, "Amrod and Amras, I told you not to play with that. Give it here!"

Mahtan dusted flour off himself and looked through the kitchen doorway. Fëanor was leaning over the twins, who were camped in their usual spot in the window seat. He took the stone away from them and took it over to the chair by the fireplace.

Fëanor cupped the stone in his hands. His manner was more meditative and calm than it had been earlier. After a time, Mahtan saw his eyes fill with a look of wonder. "I did it. I saw them. I saw the Lake and the forests around it in starlight, and the Firstborn dwelling on its shores." Fëanor's voice was reverent.

Chapter 11 The Relatives Depart

Before dawn, Mahtan woke to the sound of slamming doors and the tramp of feet on the narrow stairs. He went downstairs. The kitchen was bright with yellow lamplight, and the younger boys were standing up to their breakfast. Each one had a slice of bread and butter in his hand.

It was just beginning to get light outside, and the dew was still on the grass. It weighted down the stalks of delphinium and hollyhock along the side of the house. Nerdanel was studying them as if saving up good memories of her childhood home.

The pack horse was already harnessed between the traces of the wagon. Mahtan stood with his daughter, watching his son-in-law and the boys lift trunks and bags over the tailgate.

Fëanor yanked one of the bags loose and retied it more neatly. "I swear, if your brain exploded, it wouldn't even mess up your hair."

"I'm sorry Dad. I did my best," said Caranthir.

"That's what scares me. From now on, I'd prefer if you did someone else's best."

"Do you have to leave so soon? Couldn't you stay another day?" Mahtan's wife asked Fëanor.

"I have to show some investors the seeing stone. It was very hard to get this appointment, so I don't want to blow them off." And I can't possibly risk being late."

The last bag was put in the wagon. Their horses were gathered from the pasture and saddled up. The last of the boys swung into the saddle, and they started to move out.

Fëanor touched the pouch at his belt and nodded. A twin sat bolt upright in the saddle. He looked almost panicked.

"Dad, I need to go back to the house. I'll only be a second." He kicked a foot loose from the stirrup and swung a leg over the saddle to dismount.

"Twenty-one seconds, to be exact," said the other twin.

"You should've thought of it earlier. Cross your legs until the first stop," said Fëanor.

"But Dad..." The boy's eyes were pleading.

"Ooooh - waterfalls, fountains, mountain streams. Once you start thinking of them, you can't stop," chanted Celegorm in a sing-song voice.

Nerdanel scowled. "Amrod, please obey your father. If you didn't have to go two minutes ago, you don't have to go now."

Amrod looked from her to Fëanor and back, his eyes pleading with desperation. Both parents stared back with their hands on their hips. He shrugged his shoulders and put his feet back in the stirrups. "Whatever happens later, it's not my fault."

Mahtan's wife stood on the steps watching them go until they couldn't see the dust from the wagon wheels.

Chapter 12 Mahtan's Revenge

Mahtan and his wife returned to the cottage. "Well, that was like being hit by a whirlwind, although a pleasant one," she said. She moved around the room, straightening up and putting things back in their place. "Where's the little paperweight Nerdanel made, the one with the scene of Lake Cuiviénen?"

"I thought I saw the boys playing with it. It must be right around," said Mahtan. He straightened up the pillows in the window seat, and his hand closed on a glass globe. "Here it is."

Purple smoke swirled inside the orb. It began to clear, and he saw a stretch of the road just beyond a rise that blocked the view.

"Oh oh," said Mahtan.

"Fëanor needs the stone to show his investors. Do you think if you left now, you could catch up with him?" asked his wife.

Uvatha the Horseman

"It would be tough. They left an hour ago." A man on horseback could overtake a party with a baggage wagon, if he was willing to ride hard.

"Well then, you'd better hurry," said his wife.

Mahtan threw on traveling clothes and sat on the stairs to pull on his riding boots. He frowned with irritation. He didn't owe his bad-tempered son-in-law any favors, not after the way Fëanor had been so inflexible about letting the boys come here to study.

He led Martensite¹, the younger and swifter of his two horses, from the stall and teased the bit into the stallion's mouth. He lifted the saddle onto the horse's back. It would be a long, hard ride, and Mahtan wasn't looking forward to it.

Fëanor needed the orb. Mahtan could imagine what might happen if he didn't get it. Mahtan could envision it as clearly as if he had a stone to see a day into the future and hundreds of leagues to the North.

The investors were old enough to be to have a lot of money and shrewd enough to be careful with it. Fëanor wore his finest clothes. He was a little bit nervous. More than a little bit. He would clear his throat and wipe his moist palms on the sides of his tunic.

Fëanor began his pitch. His voice was energized. He was a visionary, and he believed in his creation. "Gentlemen, what I'm about to show you will allow us to look into the past and the future. It will change our world. About me to show you a working model. Look into it, and you will see the shores of Lake Cuiviénen."

With a flourish, he withdrew the orb from his pouch and held up the little snow globe Nerdanel had made.

As he was tightening the girth, the memory of "dumb as a bag of hammers" hit him like a physical blow. His hand froze over the buckle, leaving the girth half-fastened, and imaginary steam pulsed from his ears. And then he did the only mean thing he'd ever done in his life.

Mahtan came back into the house and said to his wife, "I don't think I can catch up with them. Let's keep the stone in a safe place until he sends for it."

1 A blacksmithing pun. Martensite is the "brittle as glass" phase of high carbon steel.