

Elboron and the Ship King Children

Elboron said to his wife at dinner, "We should probably have poor Lord Thorongil and his family around, now that the question of wedding dates has been ... resolved."

Galadhel said, "Yes, let us reassure the poor boy." Then she frowned. "Who are his family again?"

"Minor nobility of Lossarnach." Consequently, he penned a note to Thorongil asking him and his family to join Elboron and his wife for lunch two days hence.

Thorongil replied that his parents were currently in Minas Tirith, as were his oldest brother and sister-in-law, and would be delighted to attend. Then, somewhat cryptically, he wrote that his brother was a Judge, but that his name could not be mentioned. Elboron found this curious, and went down the corridor to see Lord Justice Carandir.

Carandir looked up. "Elboron! How are you?"

"I am very well." Elboron paused. "Do you have any judges who cannot be named?"

Carandir snorted. "No! Why do you ask?"

Elboron handed Thorongil's letter over to Carandir.

"This is from the quiet, red-headed lad who was at the baths at Emyr Arnen last time, no? The one who is courting Little Cat? His oldest half-brother is a remarkably pompous man whom I appointed for some reason, as my tipstaff reminds me when I complain about him." Carandir's face shadowed. "In any case, the half-brother is named after your late grandfather on your father's side."

Elboron winced. "Thorongil is thoughtful, then."

"I liked him a lot better than his older brother. He had some really interesting observations on Haradric customs and laws, and has promised to send me some books. I said that if they wanted to swap positions, I'd rather have him, but he seems set on being a diplomat—"

"It looks like Idis will be going with him to Harad in the next rotation," said Elboron.

Carandir frowned. "Really? How will *that* work?"

"They will marry in six weeks time," said Elboron. "I am just warning you—"

Carandir said, "Ah, really? Like Cirion, then. She is not—?"

"No. Luckily, and it is a matter of luck, I gather."

Carandir smiled, and winked at Elboron. "Well, it had to happen to *at least* one of you."

"Mother and Father said the same thing," said Elboron, keeping his face neutral. His and Galadhel's pre-marital experimentation in the four weeks before their wedding had meant that she had discovered that she was pregnant with their eldest son just before their wedding. He reflected that at least they had been well and truly engaged.

He could hear still Carandir laughing halfway down the corridor after he left.

Several days later, on the third bell, the butler informed Elboron that the guests had arrived. Elboron went downstairs and tried not to let his surprise show on his face. Thorongil's family were rather unusually clad. Thorongil himself was in a smart green suit, looking awkward. The two women were dressed up as if for one of the King's Balls, the older brother was in black judicial robes, and the father was in a tweed jacket with leather patches on the arms. Two thin dark haired boys peeped around from the back of the younger woman, also dressed in extremely formal clothes made of a dark material.

Elboron said, "Greetings, please do come in."

He was not quite sure what to do with the unexpected children; his own children had already been fed and were upstairs. He took them all into the formal dining room, and said, "This is my wife, Galadhel."

"This is my mother, Almarian; this is my father, Beren; this is my brother ... er ... the Judge and his wife Lúthien, and these are their sons, my nephews, Ciryandil and Hyarmendacil."

Elboron's heart sank at the names which had been inflicted on the wide-eyed boys.

"Would the boys like to come up to the nursery and have some lunch?" Gala said. "I am afraid that our children have already eaten, but I can ask our cook to prepare something for the boys."

"O you are so kind," trilled Thorongil's brother's wife. "Come on boys, thank the Lady. And go and play nicely with Lord Elboron's children."

The boys bowed stiffly and chorused, "Thank you, Lady Galadhel."

Galadhel led the boys away, and Elboron bade everyone sit.

"Well," said Thorongil's mother, widening her eyes, "this is so EXCITING, is it not? Thank you so much for having us over—"

"It is a pleasure, my Lady," said Elboron. He turned to Thorongil. "I wanted to ensure that your son felt welcome to our family."

"Thank you," said Thorongil. "It is really more than I expected. You have all been most kind."

"We cannot *wait* for the wedding," said Thorongil's brother's wife. "We just cannot *wait*, can we dear—?"

She turned to her husband the judge, who said stiffly, "Indeed."

At that point, Gala came back down and sat by Elboron. "There, the children are all nicely settled and I have asked our children to look after them."

"Thank you so much," said the sister-in-law widening her eyes, in thrilling tones. "Lady Almarian and I were just saying how much we are *looking forward* to Thorongil's wedding."

"It is all so SUDDEN!" said the mother, happily. "I do not know why Gilly has to be so SECRETIVE!"

"Leave the boy alone, Alma dear," said the father, gruffly, and made brief, somewhat desperate eye contact with the judge.

"I agree, Mama," said the judge.

Elboron inferred from this that the men of the family had an idea of what had happened, whereas the women of the family had no idea. The latter was probably just as well.

He attempted to change the topic of conversation. "Thorongil, I believe you may work with an old friend of mine, Arahaelon?"

Thorongil smiled gratefully at Elboron. "Yes! He is Deputy Ambassador!"

"Is he still very ... sober?" said Gala.

"He's apparently a terrible grump, but he thinks very highly of Gilly," said Thorongil's mother.

Thorongil coloured. "Mama!" The judge looked like he wanted to put his head in his hands, but was masterfully keeping a polite smile on his face.

"Arahaelon is indeed a terrible grump, but a good fellow," Elboron interjected.

Thorongil looked earnest. "I am very happy to work with him. I would say that I am looking forward to his return, except that I do not think he will be happy when he sees what has been happening in his absence. I doubt he will be able to take that sabbatical."

"What a dreadful shame," said Gala.

"I do not know why Gil has not been more forthcoming about colours," interrupted the mother. "All he has said is 'green'! I still want to get my outfit made up before I go home."

"Colours for what, my Lady?" said Elboron, wondering what this had to do with Arahaelon.

"For the wedding of course," sighed the mother.

"You can get measured up and he can tell you the exact colour later, Alma," said the father.

Elboron laughed. "You should talk to my sister Morwen about colours—"

"O, that is just what Gil said too!" said the mother.

"As long as you never mention dusky rose in my presence," muttered Thorongil, who had been entirely silent until this point.

Elboron started to laugh, and it got worse when he looked at Gala. Suddenly he, Gala and Thorongil were all laughing hysterically, and it was not even very funny. He felt awful.

"I am sorry," he said, as the first course was brought out: a leek and potato soup. "It is just that one of my other sisters, Morwen, has been rather ... particular about the colour of the dresses for her wedding, and your son has reminded me of it."

"We are all very sick of shades of rose," said Gala, covering her mouth.

"I once had a case where the colour of a particular item was of the utmost importance," said the judge. "It was a case involving rival businesses, and much money was wound up on it, so of course, I was entrusted with it—" He droned on for some time, making much of how he was the only person who could possibly have solved the dispute. Elboron made polite noises, and ate his soup. The father yawned extremely loudly and drained his wine glass.

Then someone said, "Bron, you did not invite me to this lovely lunch with my fiancé?"

Elboron looked up and saw his second oldest sister Idis in the doorway, dressed in somewhat dusty brown riding breeches, a jerkin, and riding boots, with her hair in a braid.

"Idie, you absolute pest—" He was interrupted by the clatter of a chair falling over. Thorongil had leapt up and knocked over his chair.

"O Idis!" Thorongil ran to embrace Idis, and they held each other for some time. His sister murmured softly in Haradric, "I am sorry, my heart; I know you must have been anxious—"

"I am relieved and happy to see you, my beloved," said Thorongil quietly, in the same language. "My heart sings." They briefly kissed one another on the lips.

"O how ADORABLE!" said Thorongil's mother, clasping her hands under her chin, and her eyes bright. The sister-in-law was gaping, but Elboron was unsure why. He wondered if it was the Haradric conversation.

Idis let go of her fiancé, and looked him up and down. "You are wearing the suit I had made for you again?" she said in Westron.

Thorongil looked shy. "Mama made me wear it." Then he took Idis's hand and said, "This is Idis, everyone. Idis, this is my mother Almarian, my father Beren, my brother the judge whom you have met already, my sister-in-law Lúthien."

Elboron wished (not for the first time) that it was socially acceptable to have a small piece of paper upon which he could note names. He said, with a sinking feeling, "Idie, I suppose you may as well join us for lunch since you are returned."

Idis curtsied, her eyes cast down. "Lovely to meet you. Thank you, Bron and Gala for accommodating me—"

Meanwhile, long-suffering Gala had fetched another chair. "If everyone can shift down a little, we can squeeze Idie in between Thorongil and his brother?"

Elboron started to chide his sister. "It is customary to warn people before you just turn up unexpectedly—"

Then he saw Thorongil blush, and recalled that the current mess had occurred because of his sister's tendency to turn up inappropriately in places where she was not expected. When Elboron had passed on this information to his second brother, Cirion had roared with laughter, and said, "I really cannot blame the poor man! If Fíriel turned up in her nightgown and climbed into my bed naked before we wed, I would have done the same thing."

Gala cleared her throat. "I hope you told your parents that you were coming here, Idie?"

Idis looked guilty. "I left them a note! And they can see that my horse is gone."

Thorongil snorted. "Idis does not like saying farewell to people."

"You are correct. She does not like greeting people either," Elboron said to Thorongil, "but I had never observed it before."

"Greetings and farewells are awkward, but I am practising, dear Thor—" said Idis, and then paused as smoked trout and salad was brought out.

"This is *delicious*!" said Thorongil's sister-in-law (*Lúthien, Lúthien*, Elboron repeated to himself).

"Where is it from?" said Thorongil's mother.

"It is from my parents' estate in Eryn Arnem," said Elboron. "It is particularly good at this time of year, is it not?"

"Are these the trout you caught, Gil?" said the judge.

Thorongil laughed. "Maybe."

"I once had a case with fish," said the judge. "It involved the question of ownership of fish within an open-ended net from which the fish could swim in and out. Of course, I was the only person who could resolve this difficult issue—" He continued on for some time.

Elboron jumped when he heard a snoring noise. It was Thorongil's father.

"Beren!" said Thorongil's mother, poking the father in the stomach with her finger to no apparent effect. "Really!" She turned to Elboron. "I am sorry. He has one glass of wine in the middle of the day and—"

"Do not fear, Lord Mandos, our late Lord Chief Justice, often fell asleep in Council meetings," said Elboron to the worried woman. "He awoke whenever someone mentioned a topic he was interested in."

Thorongil's mother winced. "I do not think that Beren is so sensitive." Then she brightened. "I can only try, can I not?" She leaned over and said, "Crop rotation system," into the father's ear.

They all watched curiously, but the father simply snored again.

Thorongil laughed. "I could have predicted that, Mama."

The mother said, “Lady Idis, I have been simply DESPERATE to ask, and Gilly is no good at telling me details—how did you two meet? He said something about the Archives?”

Idis beamed. “Yes. That is true. We met in the Great Archives.”

“It is all very typical of Idis, really,” said Elboron fondly.

“You see, I had to talk to him because of the assassins—” said Idis. Elboron did not miss Thorongil’s look of horror, or the fact that the judge finally gave into temptation and put his hands to his face.

“ASSASSINS!??” shrieked Thorongil’s mother, which had the unexpected benefit of rousing the father.

The father shook his head and looked at his wife. “What was that, dear?”

“I have not actually told Mama and Papa about the assassins yet, Idis,” muttered Thorongil.

“O horse’s balls,” said Idis in Rohirric.

Lúthien blinked. “Is it usual for the House of Húrin to be afflicted with assassination attempts, Lady Idis?”

Elboron could not help but admire her effort to maintain politeness.

Idis laughed. “O, they were not after me, my Lady. They were after Thor—”

At this, Thorongil’s mother gave a sigh, her eyes rolled back in her head and she slumped against her husband.

“You see now why I did not tell Mama about the assassins,” said Thorongil to Idis.

To Elboron’s interest, the judge agreed. “You were quite right not to do so, Gilly,” he said, frowning at Idis. “Mama gets quite upset about these things—”

The father patted his wife’s head. “Wake up, Alma. Gil is fine: he is still with us, and getting married, remember.” As the mother stirred, the father frowned at his youngest son. “What I do not understand is why any assassins would want to chase Gil anyway?”

Thorongil shrugged. “You may as well tell them now, Idis,” he said with resignation.

“They were Khandians.” Idis put up her chin. “Personally, I can think of many reasons why someone might want to chase Thor—”

Fortunately, before she could outline the reasons, the main course arrived, a venison stew with chat potatoes, and everyone was distracted.

Then, unfortunately, Thorongil’s father said, “This is why I told you that you should never have gone to Harad, Gil. I do not understand why you did not take that nice job as a magistrate near us?”

From the looks exchanged by Thorongil and his older brother, this was not the first time this conversation had occurred.

“He likes Harad because it is exciting,” said Idis. “Personally I am very much looking forward to it.”

Lady Lúthien lifted her perfectly plucked eyebrows in horror. “You *are*? Is it not sandy there, Lady Idis?”

“It is a common misconception that Harad is simply a sandy desert—” said Thorongil, drawing in a somewhat frustrated breath.

“O do not lecture us on this again,” said his older brother, which Elboron thought was rather hypocritical given the judge’s lectures on exceedingly boring legal disputes.

“Aunt Nilofar had to hide in the desert for quite some time when she was young,” said Idis. “She said it was very horrid, and she could not wait to get back to her books. The only good things about the desert were apparently the hamsters and the absence of civil war.”

“This is true,” said Elboron. “Of course, Aunt Nilofar is odd.”

“Well, of course she is: she is married to Cousin Amrothos—” said Idis, and Thorongil laughed. Clearly he had heard the stories.

“But what about the *assassins*?” said Thorongil’s mother, fanning herself with her hand.

Idis beamed at her. “You need not worry about them, Lady Almarian. They are all dead now.” To Elboron’s horror, she flicked her wrists twice and produced daggers in each hand. The sister-in-law screamed (her name had escaped Elboron again) and clutched her husband and Thorongil’s father sat back in his chair and exhaled.

Before Elboron could tell his sister off, Thorongil paused from eating his stew, and gently folded the daggers up. “Put them away, love, not at the dinner table—”

Elboron looked at his wife and had difficulty from keeping from laughing at the entertained look in her eyes. He was sure that this man would suit his second sister very well.

After a long moment of silence, Thorongil’s mother brightened. “Well, I suppose that if someone tries to attack Gilly again we never have to worry that he is undefended?”

“Most certainly not,” said Idis.

“I never heard why anyone would be attacking him in the first place,” grumbled the father at the same time. “I still think it would be better if—”

“I was caught in the middle of a battle between Haradric and Khandian *café* merchants by accident, Papa,” said Thorongil.

The judge’s brows had been lowered since Idis produced the daggers, and he began to intone in a judicial manner. “Lady Idis, I should warn you as one of his Majesty’s justices that it is an offence for a person to carry concealed weapons in public places in Minas—”

Idis smiled. “Ah, unless a person happens to have a special dispensation from the King.”

Elboron was inappropriately amused to see the judge's mouth snap shut, but not as delighted as Thorongil, who started to laugh, and had to cover his mouth with his hands.

Elboron said, in an effort to make things less uncomfortable, "The King thinks all this is very funny, by the way."

The judge bristled. "The King thinks I am—?"

Elboron sighed. "No, not you: Thorongil and Idis. King Elessar offered of his own accord to officiate the wedding when he was told of it. He laughed heartily."

Gala said, "He has a very strange sense of humour, much though we love him."

Thorongil's parents and sister-in-law gaped. The mother was the first to recover. "How FABULOUS!" she said. Elboron did not think he had ever seen a woman smile so broadly. "I cannot believe that the KING HIMSELF will be at MY SON'S wedding."

"He would have been there anyway," said Idis. "But I am ever so happy that he will marry us."

The father frowned and looked at the mother, and plucked at his jacket lapel. "If the King is there, does this mean I cannot wear my tweed jacket, Alma?"

The sister-in-law and the mother shook their heads at him. "You were *never* going to be allowed to wear the tweed jacket anyway," said the sister-in-law, kindly, and the father pouted.

"Should we check on Tarannon and—erm, the other Ship King child?" asked Elboron.

"Ciryandil and Hyarmendacil," hissed Thorongil.

"I always get the Ship Kings mixed up," said Elboron, waving a hand, and his wife shook her head, but hid a smile. Personally he thought he had done quite well to even get close to those ridiculous names.

"The boys will be *fine*," said the sister-in-law. "I am sure it is *very good* for them to spend time with your children, Lord Elboron."

Elboron could not help heaving an internal sigh of relief when the dessert came out. It was, of course, made with almond shortbread and honey from Eryn Arn, and local cream and fruit.

"Oh MY," said the mother. "LOOK at this construction, Beren!"

"It is rather marvellous, Alma," said the father, whose cheeks were now rather red as a result of the wine he had been consuming.

"It seems a shame to break it," said the sister-in-law wistfully, inspecting it closely.

"Mmm, it is delicious," said the judge, who evidently did not share his wife's qualms, and had carved off a large piece with his spoon.

"I agree," said Thorongil, taking a large spoonful of cream from underneath the shortbread and looking at Idis as he ate it.

“Thor, that is unfair,” his sister muttered, blushing.

Thorongil cackled. “Revenge is mine, at last!” Elboron decided it must be some kind of irritating private joke, as everyone else was looking at them with equal incomprehension, or ignoring them.

The sister-in-law leaned over to Idis. “Lady Idis, can I ask you a question about the colour scheme for the wedding?”

“Green,” said Idis, in between mouthfuls. “We have agreed on green.”

“O you sound like Gil,” said the mother. “What KIND of green?”

Idis looked at Thorongil and shrugged. “I like the colour of your suit? In fact, you could even wear that? It would solve a problem—”

“All good by me,” said Thorongil, diffidently. “Will you tell Morwen?”

Idis nodded. “I will. She will be pleased to have more precision.”

Elboron laughed. “Dusky rose—”

Idis put her hands over her ears and glared at her brother. “Those words are like to curse words to my ears. Why must you tease me?”

“Because he is a brother,” said Thorongil, and he and the judge laughed.

“Does anyone want tea or *café*?” said Galadhel. She paused when no one answered. “The *café* is Haradric, not Khandian—”

“Ah, in that case, I can have it,” said Thorongil gravely.

The mother said, doubtfully, “Should I try *café*? I have never had it.”

The judge and Thorongil looked at each other. “I do not know, Mama,” said the judge. “It is bitter.”

“O, in that case I will have tea. I like things to be sweet.”

The father said gruffly, “That is because you are a very sweet woman, Alma,” and the mother smiled coquettishly, while the judge rolled his eyes at his younger brother.

Finally, to Elboron’s relief, it was over, and the Ship King children were collected from upstairs where his children had been trying to encourage them to join some kind of wild game.

They went into the front hall. “It was such a pleasure to meet you all,” said Elboron.

“Yes, I do agree,” said Gala.

“We will see you at the WEDDING!” said the mother. “What a LOVELY family Gilly is marrying into. It was a pleasure to meet Lady Idis—”

"It was actually pleasant—" said the father, cheerfully, and Thorongil and the judge looked mortified.

"I must agree with Lady Almarian," said the sister-in-law swiftly. "Thank you for the *beautiful* food and for looking after my *darling* boys. Boys, say thank you! In fact, why do you not say thank you in Sindarin?"

"Thank you," chorused the boys in atrocious accents.

"You are welcome," Elboron said to them back in Sindarin.

Thorongil embraced Idis, kissed her on the cheek, and said in a very formal version of Haradric, "Thy love delights me, my darling; 'tis better than wine; and thy perfume more fragrant than any spice. The taste of my lover is honey on my lips; I cannot wait to taste it again when we wed."

Elboron pretended not to understand, but he thought it was a variation on the words of an ancient Haradric poet, and made a note to reassure Ecthelion that, as Elboron and Cirion had argued, the physical attraction between Idis and Thorongil was evidently mutual. If Thorongil had been entrapped, it was evidently because he wanted it to be so.

Idis blushed and said in Westron, "Six weeks cannot pass quickly enough—"

"So SWEET!" said Thorongil's mother. "We will see you then! In green, I am glad that is settled."

The family headed off down the hill.

"Why were the mother and the sister-in-law wearing ballgowns?" wondered Elboron.

Idis guffawed. "They were horrified by my riding outfit!"

"The boys were a bit odd," said Barahir, Elboron's eldest child. "It was as if they were scared to join our game—"

"Those names," said Elboron. "The Ship King names. Why would one inflict those names on anyone?"

"It was an unusual lunch," said Gala. "I think they have good hearts, however."

Idis said, "I can see why Thor had to join the Army. They love him, but they do not understand him." Then she hugged Elboron. "Thank you for welcoming him to the family. I am glad that everyone seems to understand him on this side, despite my actions making it harder—"

Elboron raised an eyebrow: he could not resist teasing his sister. "He cannot wait to taste honey again?"

Idis blushed furiously. "O, I forgot you could understand." She fled upstairs.

Gala shook her head. "What was that about?"

Elboron laughed. "I will tell you later. I should have taken notes."