

The Tale of Maewen and Sorondo

~ ~ ~

Once upon a time there lived an Elven-maiden in Doriath, the hidden kingdom of Elu Thingol and Melian, and she was fair like the young morning and her voice was as beautiful as the song of the nightingale in summer twilight. Maewen she was called, for she was well-shaped as a slender tree.

It was her delight to listen to the words of bards and to the stories from faraway places, the tales of the light of Aman and of the valiant deeds in the war against the Dark Lord far north. Yet at that time Elu Thingol had forbidden the entry of the Noldor into his kingdom by pain of death, so these tales were rarely heard. And yet one day a traveller brought an account from the north, the weary words of a Noldo wandering close to the Thangorodrim cast in rhyme, and the words touched Maewen's heart, for there was sadness and longing in them unlike in any of the Doriathrim. And as she walked close to a murmuring stream in the afternoon sunlight, she made a tune to fit the words and sang them in her clear voice.

It happened that a nightingale sitting hidden between the branches of a tree heard her song and listened to it carefully. And when Maewen finally had passed by and her singing vanished between the woods and the water the nightingale began to sing on her song touched by the love in it. And the singing bird flew far into the north always looking for the Noldo whose words had affected the young Sinda.

Far it flew, far across dark forests and mighty streams and high mountains, until at last after many days it reached the bleak hills encircling the Anfauglith. Here it sat down, weary from the long flight, on a dark rock looking out across

the plain to Thangorodrim, the mighty stronghold of the Dark Lord. It was silent, only the lonely tune of the wind, ever-stirring the dust could be heard. But after a while the bird began to sing, and the song pierced the silence like the first ray of the morning sun drives away the night. A Noldo on his dangerous guard raised his head and listened to the song in wonder. The melody seemed strange, yet familiar and beautiful, and suddenly it was as if he could hear a clear voice singing the words of the tune.

It was that moment when he knew it were his words the melody was made for, and tears came to his eyes when he listened. Enchanted by the song of the nightingale a great desire filled the Noldo's heart and he wrote a few rhymes about this feeling. And then he turned to the nightingale which had just finished its singing and asked: „Little bird, will you carry this for me to the one who made this tune?“ And the nightingale took the message and flew back, the long way back to Doriath.

Many days passed, and the long days of summer were vaning when Maewen in hidden Doriath again sat by the stream she loved so much. And dreaming of faraway lands, she was suddenly aware of a small bird sitting on a stone amidst the running water, watching her. Curious, she studied the bird when she noticed a worn message tied to its foot. When she approached, the bird was quiet and let her take the message, watching her curiously. And when she began to read the words the bird had carried, her heart was suddenly filled with fierce joy and love, such as she had never known before.

Again she began to sing a new melody fitting the words the Noldo had sent her. And it was a song full of love and happiness. Finally she wrote another message and gave it to the nightingale. „Little bird, I thank you so much for that message. Will you carry this one back to him and sing my song for him again?“ The nightingale, so deeply touched and knowing it was a good thing to help these two elves who shall never see each other, took this message as well, and when it had vanished flying into the North again, Maewen still stood near the stream smiling and whispering the Noldo's name: „Sorondo.“

Often now flew the nightingale back and forth between the two and carried their words and songs. Sorondo would wait for the sound of its wings in the silence of his guard, and he would stare into the star-crowned night sky and dream of the young Sinda whom he loved more and more. And yet he knew he could never cross into Doriath where she lived, and often sadness about this came upon him when many days had passed without a word or song from his beloved Maewen. But when the nightingale finally arrived, his heart would leap in joy again and the face he saw in his dreams grew more beautiful with each passing day.

Those days were the happiest Maewen had ever seen. All day long her heart was singing and like she was drifting on clouds she walked through the woods, dancing. And many times a day she returned to the stream always hoping for the nightingale to come back with a message from Sorondo. And in the night she watched the same sky as he did far away, and dreamed the same dream as he did - a dream that might never come true. Though, just to know he was there somewhere in the North and thinking of her made her feel happy... Until one day after staying away far too long the nightingale returned, scared and without any message.

Winter was high upon the mountains in the North, and Maewen was desperate. At first she tried to calm herself and told herself that Sorondo would soon find another way to send her a message. But in her heart she knew that he had been too near the enemy, and that he had lived in danger all the time. The beauty and quiet of Doriath would not calm her, and the murmuring stream she had loved so much would only remind her of Sorondo. In her despair, she tried to ask leave of the king, but Thingol would not even hear a tale involving one of the exiles. Finally she sat down and wept, and looking to the mountains marking the border of Doriath, she whispered: „I wish I was a bird and could fly across these mountains which divide us...“

And when the night came, she fell asleep sitting in the same place. And in her dreams, she heard a great voice like a roaring storm, but also whispering like a

gentle wind. „Do you truly love Sorondo this much?“, the voice asked of her. „I do“, she answered. „But does he love you the same?“ - „He does“, she answered without hesitation. „Will he recognize you when he meets you?“, the voice asked further. Maewen thought for a moment, then she answered: „I trust that his heart will tell him.“ - „Then, I grant you to be changed into a bird and fly to your beloved. But you will only ever be in Elvish shape if he recognizes you and addresses you with your true name - if he fails to do this, you will remain a bird forever. Chose wisely, if you want to place this trust into your lover!“ Maewen again thought deeply, but then she answered: „Then let me be a bird and fly to him.“

Sorondo was sitting in a deep hole in the rocks and daylight was just fading. He had already stopped counting the short days when the sun glimpsed over the edge of his prison for a few hours, and the long nights when the cold crept under his clothes and won't let him sleep. His heart filled with anger when he recalled what had happened: Too weary had he been that day so he had nearly fallen asleep on his guard when suddenly a great noise had arisen around him. The Dark Lord's vassals had attacked him and after a short fight which he had never been about to win they had taken all his properties and imprisoned him in this hole. He had also stopped asking himself why they had not killed him - this place was worse than death. But the worst thing was that there had not been any sign from Maewen since then.

More than ever he longed for her, but how could the nightingale find him here... Maewen would think he was dead when the nightingale returned to her without a message from him. „Will she cry about me?“, he asked the cold stones around him. „Will she forget me?“ Tears filled his eyes and the little hope he had kept began to vanish with the fading light. Clouds began to cover the sky and when he looked up some little raindrops fell on Sorondo's face mingling with his tears. Staring into the gloom he suddenly became aware of a bird's shape at the rim of the hole. „Nightingale!“, he cried out hopefully, but his heart sank when the bird cried back to him a shrill cry like mourning when it

came flying down to him. It was not the nightingale - before him on the stony ground a sea-gull sat down.

In despair he sank to the ground and turned away from the bird. Was this another cruel game played by the enemy, to rise his hopes and crush them again? „Go away! Leave me alone!“, he cried to the bird. And after a while the bird took flight. But with the next nightfall, the gull came again, its lonely cry piercing the night. And again it would descend into the hole and sit next to Sorondo for a while before flying away. And with each passing day at which the bird returned, he began to see the gull less and less as a tool of the enemy and more as a friend in his loneliness.

Having no one else to talk to in his prison he finally began to talk to the gull. He told the bird about his travels, about wise and foolish things he had done in his life, and about his love to an elvish maiden he only ever met in his dreams. And when he told that story he thought he could see the gull's eyes filled with sorrow for him and his beloved, and it cried a sad cry as if it wept.

„My gull, you have come again for me!“, he spoke to the bird whenever it appeared above the hole. But after one long and cold night, deep in remembrance of Maewen's words, he spoke in the tongue of Maewen's people instead: „Athólel nin, maewen!“, for 'maewen' means 'my gull' in the language of the Sindar. But he could not speak further for the gull suddenly began to grow changing its shape. And out of an holy light, like sent by the Valar, a golden-haired maiden stepped towards him.

And in the next moment she held him in her arms and whispered his name while tears shimmered in her eyes. And he held her tight, never ever wishing to part from her and whispered full of wonder her name: „Maewen.“ And their lips met for the first time for a long kiss. And after they had held each other for a long time, laughing and crying and kissing each other, Sorondo finally looked into her eyes and said: „Maewen, I love you so much that I cannot bear the thought that you too should end in this hole! For how should we escape?“ But suddenly Maewen understood. She kissed him again, and a light shimmered in the hole before two birds took flight.

The dark of night wrapped around them they escaped the watchful eyes of the enemy. But even if someone would have seen them he would think he was dreaming that night when the strange couple flew southwards; a gull and an eagle crossed the grey and dusty lands heading for the mountains where they hoped to find a good place to rest.

And they found it. Suddenly a tree-entangled valley spread before their eyes and the moon mirrored in a little brook winding through the woods. They landed on a clearing near the brook and at the same moment changed into two elves again. The wind was whispering in the trees and far away the rumbling of an approaching storm was to be heard. Maewen came close to Sorondo. „The storm will be here soon“, she said without really caring about it. Sorondo said nothing. He looked down into her face which shone white in the moonlight, then he reached for it and let his hand run through her golden hair. She looked up and raised her hands to his face touching it softly. They came closer to each other and Maewen thought she could hear Sorondo's heart beating fast when they kissed again. And during that long kiss overwhelmed by a wave of warmth a great desire took them both and their spirits faded out of time to make a moment last for ever. The silver light of the moon vanished when the dark clouds appeared over the mountains. The wind blew stronger now and the splashing of the brook was drowned by the rustling sound of leaves. And then it began to rain, cold rain fell until the end of the night.

Finally at dawn the clouds parted and a bright, clear morning sun cast its golden light over the two elves. Sorondo slept peacefully in Maewen's arms when the light stirred him awake. For the first time in many months he did not feel miserably cold but instead he felt the warmth of her body close to him. Softly he turned and studied her beautiful face in the morning light as if to remember it forever. The last day and night had just been like a dream for him, but now he felt alive and awake. And yet a shadow began again to grow in his thoughts, for he had given an oath to fight the Darklord for as long as he could draw breath, but many Noldor had died on the dusty plains of Anfauglith, and

he could not bear the thought of bringing Maewen into this danger, but neither did he wish to be parted from her after they had finally found each other. And while he was still in thought, Maewen began to stir and he banished all doubts for a moment and kissed her gently awake.

She opened her eyes and looked into his face. „I thought it was a dream“, she said. „No“, Sorondo answered with a gentle smile. „It was all real.“ They spent the rest of the day walking through the valley, sitting under large trees beside the brook, talking and laughing. In the afternoon dark clouds arose again from somewhere behind the mountains and brought a warm summer rain. They stood in the rain and suddenly Sorondo asked: „Mairwenya, why does it always rain when I am with you? I should call you Rain-maiden.“ They laughed. When night approached the clouds were gone and they sat on the mossy ground watching the sun setting.

But then Sorondo could not delay it any longer, and he spoke to Maewen in a grave voice: „Maewen, I love you more than my life, but there is a duty that calls me. I have sworn an oath to fight the Darklord, and while I am still alive, the oath binds me. And yet, I cannot bear the thought of taking you into Anfauglith. It tears my heart, but I fear that we have to part again, even so soon after we found each other, and to wait for better times when we can be reunited. Will you wait for me, even if I have to leave now?“

Maewen looked to the ground in silence, then she began to speak slowly: „I knew that we will have to separate again - I just hoped it not to be too soon.“ She looked up into his face. „I understand that you must leave“, she began. „I will wait for you, for however long it takes before we can meet again. And I too have things in my home that I will have to say goodbye to, for you will never be permitted to enter Doriath. But all I ask now are three more days that we can spend together, then the memory of this time will bring me through the dark times when we are separated.“ Sorondo kissed her gently: „Gladly I will stay with you for three days.“

And on the evening of the third day, finally the time came to part. „Let us go without many words“, Maewen said. Sorondo agreed. A fine rain fell from the low dark clouds. Sorondo reached for her and kissed her a last time. Then, as Maewen turned and walked away, her shape grew one with the mist. But when he could no longer see her, he heard the faint words of a tune out of the mist:

*Now life gives to the world the drop of rain which may
let young and fragile sprouts bloom at the end of eve,
draws back the dust, unveils the fresh green of the leaves;
though ev'ry time it comes right onto us seems gray.*

*In silence weeps the sky about a sunny day
which vanished into gloom, by dark sun's radiance flees,
obscure clouds coming near the blue of heaven grieves,
the moment which kept hope has faded soon away.*

*A distant rumbling tells 'bout times of creepy murk,
through branches sneaks the wind like on perfidious lurk,
crows gather on the field and gruesome sounds their cry.*

*The rain did always fall when we met under sky,
thus smile my eyes by rain, however dark it be,
the drops of rain are like a kiss of thee for me.*

And suddenly he felt the despair that held him lift, his heart was glad and he smiled. Slowly he turned away and started his long way back to the fortresses of the Noldor.

The End

written by Thorsten Renk and Katharina Golz; sonnet „Rain“ (German original „Regen“) by Katharina Golz