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Eowyn as Queen

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Eowyn, by societies standards, is a shieldmaiden of Rohan, niece of the King of the Mark, and sister to the heir of the throne. Though her character is more than just a fair princess, she possesses the qualities of a great warrior and a just leader, as well as the passion to do what needs to be done to protect her country and those she loves. Her life had been a series of tragedies and disappointments, forced to live the life of a shieldmaiden when all she wished was to prove her capabilities as a leader of the people. Throughout Tolkien's legendarium, few women are present in the tales told, though those that are present, play integral roles in the progression of Middle Earth, providing strength and courage to defeat evil and save the day. Eowyn continues this theme, ensuring herself a place in the War of the Ring and the history of Middle Earth, though not always in the way that she so desired. At their first encounter Eowyn falls in love with Aragorn, heir to the throne of Gondor, but their love cannot be, for Aragorn's heart lies with Arwen, the Lady of Rivendell, and Aragorn takes Arwen to be his Queen. In early versions of the text, before his extensive revisions, Tolkien envisioned Eowyn to be Aragorn's love, only adding Arwen to the story late in the writing process. Based on the qualities that Eowyn embodies as a character, such as her loyalty to her people and her strength of body and of will, and the direction that Middle Earth is headed at the end of the Third Age, Eowyn would have been a more fitting queen to lead the race of Men into the new age, the Age of Men. While Eowyn may be the more logical choice to be queen of Gondor, the love between Arwen and Aragorn is a beautiful recreation of the legendary love between Beren and Luthien, and the mirroring of Beren and Aragorn gives the new king more agency as he sets himself upon

the throne to lead men into the next age. While Arwen does provide Aragorn with the connections to the legendarium and his lineage that exemplifies his right to the throne, Eowyn could have provided both Aragorn and the people of Middle Earth a powerful, yet peaceful, queen to usher in the Age of Men.

While it will not be used for the argument at hand, some background on the possible story lines by which Eowyn's character developed should be useful for the understanding of Tolkien's writing of her story. In the published legendarium, Eowyn slays the Nazgul King and is gravely injured as a result. While recovering in the Houses of Healing, Faramir and her fall into love, leading to their marriage and life in the realm of Ithilien. This outcome was made possible by the addition of Arwen into the story, allowing for Aragorn's love to be elsewhere and Eowyn finding happiness with Faramir. Before Arwen had been inserted into the tale, Tolkien had experimented with different versions of the way Eowyn's life played out. After deciding early on that Eowyn and Aragorn should not be wed, he began to write a version of the battle between Eowyn and the Nazgul in which she lost her life along with the destruction of the wraith. In Christopher Tolkien's *The War of the Ring*, a chapter discussing a version of Book V that was not completed contained notes outlining the battle with the Nazgul King, a battle during which both Theoden and Eowyn are killed as well (*The War of the Ring*, 256). This outline is called, II, and provides further reference to the funeral of the King and Eowyn, which supposedly takes place after the coronation of Aragorn as king, though there is no mention of Arwen in this outline. The outcome of this version leaves Aragorn as king without a Queen, though this idea was unable to develop on account of Aragorn bearing no heir to his throne without a queen. This outline never progressed any farther than a scant outline of "the ten chapters that were to constitute Book V and complete *The Lord of the Rings*" (*The War of the Ring*, 256). In the next

outline that Tolkien produced, III, he was even less descriptive before ending the idea, though he did at least make the change that Eowyn would survive the battle with the Nazgul King, though Theoden would still perish by his hand. Even though the addition of Arwen at such a late point in writing did require some patching of holes, the vision that Tolkien had for the lives of Eowyn and Aragorn required a third party to enter, to prevent their love from flourishing or the need to remove Eowyn from the story. With that slight history of character and storyline development, certain aspects of her character become clearer, especially with regard to her capacity as a leader.

When Eowyn is first introduced into the story, her presence is overshadowed by the state of despair that Theoden and his hall are in under the corruption of Wormtongue. It was not until after Theoden had risen and exited the hall that she was fully acknowledged, it was clear that she was of noble blood and of great beauty, though “grave and thoughtful was her glance,” indicative of the toils she had faced already and the strength she possessed (*The Two Towers*, 504). As her and Aragorn lock eyes, she senses the great power and potential that he bears with him, loving him for the great man that he is. Aragorn too senses the connection between the two, though the love cannot be, especially not with so much uncertainty left in the world and the upcoming war. It is this unspoken understanding that gives Eowyn more depth in her initial introduction, signifying that she is more than a fair maiden ready to give her heart to the first hero that comes along. She knows who she is and what she is capable of achieving; though until then she had been unheeded, save by the wretched Grima. Since Theodred, son of Theoden and next King of the Mark, had been killed in battle with Saruman’s orcs, Eomer, sister of Eowyn and nephew of Theoden, is next in line for the throne. This places Eowyn in a powerful political position amongst the Rohirrim, further hindering her chances to prove to the men around her that she can be more useful as a rider in battle than a maiden at home. However, at each crossroads, she

always remains loyal to the king's orders, staying with the women and children to lead them to the safe haven of Dunharrow while the battle raged at Helm's Deep. It is at Dunharrow, after the arrival of Aragorn and his decision to set forth upon the Paths of the Dead, that Eowyn's loyalty is put to its greatest test and her chance for gaining the heart of Aragorn slips away at the same time. It is here that she proclaims the true desires of her heart, the first of which is to ride forth in battle for the protection and sacrifice of her home lands and the people that she loves so dearly, the second is the love that she holds for Aragorn, placing both of these wishes out in the open to be accepted or refused as one. It is now that Aragorn explains that his heart lies with another, in a place he desires, but cannot go to for his fate leads him elsewhere. Even knowing she cannot hold his heart, Eowyn wishes still to ride with him, to ride wherever he made lead and gave renown and glory in battle. It is here that we see clearly for the first time, as Tolkien described it to possible publisher Milton Waldman, the "theme of mistaken love in Eowyn and her first love for Aragorn" (*Letters*, 161). Eowyn loves Aragorn for the opportunity that his love would provide for her, for if he were to take her with him on his journey and into battle, then she would surely find the glory that she so craves. Even if following Aragorn would lead to her imminent death, Eowyn cares not for the pain or suffering of death, only of the chance to make herself useful to the people of her country. Aragorn is able to convince her not to follow him on the Paths of the Dead, though only by using her loyalty to the King and her people as ammunition in his argument. It is this undying loyalty to her country and those that she loves that would make Eowyn a fitting queen, no matter the hardships or decisions that must be dealt with, she would hold the best interests of her people at heart, not wasting a second if she were to be the cost of their survival.

Eowyn's loyalty to the wishes of Theoden and Aragorn provide insight into the possibility of her being queen, but her strength leaves nothing to be guessed at. Her physical strength in battle and, more importantly, her emotional strength under stress show directly the great deeds that she could accomplish if made queen. The greatest testament to her prowess as a warrior is her duel with the Nazgul King, one of the few personal battles between good and evil in *The Lord of the Rings*. Standing before the most dreadful foe that no man can defeat, Eowyn declares "But no living man am I! You look upon a woman" and, filling the Nazgul with doubt, sets herself apart as the bravest of heroes (*The Return of the King*, 127). While she begins to avenge the death of her uncle, the decapitation of the fell beast the Nazgul rides upon is her first great feat. With the death of the winged monster, the darkness about the enemy dissipated, tall and proud she stood, while "a light fell about her, and her hair shone in the sunrise" (*The Return of the King*, 128). Through her skill with the blade and the agility of her body, she thrives in the glory of her battle that almost certainly will lead to her death. Glowing with vitality and strength, she stands before the Nazgul, unwavering in her courage and desire to make her mark on the Great War. After withstanding the crushing blow from the giant mace, with broken arm and some help from Merry, Eowyn deals the death blow to the Nazgul through the power of the strike and of the shadow expelled from its physical form nearly kill her with her foe. The strength within her body and her heart barely cling to life as the chill from the Nazgul consume her, but she is able to keep hold of herself and, through Aragorn's healing, she is able to recover from the dread of killing the evil wraith.

During her time in the Houses of Healing, Eowyn is tormented by doubt and worry over who she is to become and what path her life will lead her down. She still wishes to be on the front lines, fighting alongside Aragorn and the rest of the men, and feels lost knowing she

cannot. She is plagued by this heartbreak until she is granted leave to wander the gardens and meets Faramir, who is now Steward of Gondor, when he falls in love with her upon first sight. As they spend the days talking and discussing matters, his love for her is revealed and Eowyn begins to have a change of heart. The world is brightening as the war is coming to its end and the Ring has been destroyed, Eowyn comes to the realization that there will not always be the need for her to ride off into battle; there will be peace in the world. This realization opens her eyes to the love she feels for Faramir, a love that Tolkien describes in a draft of a letter to a reader, as true as the first love she felt for Aragorn, “but in a different mode and intensity” (*Letters*, 323). When she fell for Aragorn, she yearned for death and glory on the battlefield, to ride forth and provide for her people the only way she thought she could, but the ending of the war brought to her a knowledge that she had not seen before, knowledge that she could find fulfillment in a world that is not broken and at war. It is at this point in her story that Eowyn becomes the woman that would be so great a queen; she knows that she “will be a healer, and love all things that grow,” using her passion and desire for change to bring about the age in which evil has been defeated and new life can once again grow freely (*The Return of the King*, 271). Aragorn is destined to be a king of peace, he does not accept the crown until a time when Sauron is defeated and no enemy still stands before Gondor, for this reason he should have a queen of like mind, a queen to nurture and support her king and the people as they set about rebuilding a world so stricken by evil deeds. Through the union of Aragorn and Eowyn, the world would be able to rebuild and move forward without the threat of outside evils causing destruction and pain, for their king and queen had already vanquished the evil, and so proven themselves in battle that no feasible foe could bring their reign to an end. We learn of the great realm of Ithilien, ruled by Faramir and Eowyn at the wish of Aragorn, how it became, once

again, the Gardens of Gondor, and was the most beautiful of all of men's dwellings. This peace and prosperity that Faramir and Eowyn brought about shows the power the Eowyn possesses to be both a warrior and a healer, to be a great leader of the people under any circumstance that is asked of her, be it in war or in peace, she has the capability to bring about change in the world for the better. This great change in the vision that she has for herself and the effect that she can have on the world is quite drastic and appears to happen at a moment's notice, but Tolkien comments on his own experiences of such a phenomenon that "feelings and decisions ripen very quickly (as measured by mere 'clock-time'...) in periods of great stress, and especially under the expectation of imminent death" (*Letters*, 324). This change of heart that Eowyn suddenly feels is not at all indicative of a wavering spirit or a settling for second best, the combination of Faramir expressing his love for her, in conjunction with the bright future of the world around her, that opens her eyes to the true potential that she holds, that she is destined to be so much more than a warrior that gives her life on the battle field. Eowyn's character traits and personality speak volumes towards her ability to be a great queen, thought the direction that Middle Earth is headed and the future of the Men also suggest that Eowyn would have done great things as Aragorn's queen.

With the fall of Sauron and the destruction of the Ring, the Third Age of Middle Earth was brought to an end. So began the Fourth Age, or the Age of Men, for the last of the race of Elves were about to set forth on the journey west across the seas to the Undying Lands of Valinor, leaving Middle Earth to be governed and controlled by men. Since Aragorn is the first king to rule in the Age of Men, it would be fitting that he chose a queen of the same race, to bring about a lineage to rule the people of Middle Earth in continued peace and prosperity. By choosing Arwen, who is an elf, Aragorn establishes a kingship much the way the doomed

Numenorians had, a line of kings that are more noble and greater than the average man. Having half-elf rulers in a world that is solely populated by men ensures that the kingship will only be passed to those of that lineage, whether they be fit to rule or not, until the grace and beauty of the elf blood is lost to time. By wedding Eowyn and making her his queen, Aragorn would have solidified the union of Rohan and Gondor as one kingdom, allies against any threat that either faces. The people of Gondor and Rohan, as well as the Dunedain in the north, would benefit greatly from having a queen of the people. Eowyn fought, and almost died for the sake of mankind, and had lived for her entire life under the shadow of impending doom set forth by Sauron and exemplified by Saruman's treachery. She understands the trials that men face and the spirit with which they can rise up and turn the worst situation into hope and revitalization. Even though it would be fitting and wonderful for Eowyn to be queen of Gondor, she does not wish to be queen by the end of the war, she wishes only for the chance to make beautiful and whole her place in the world. This sets the stage for Arwen to renounce her immortality and marry Aragorn to be his queen.

The love of Aragorn and Arwen is more than just a beautiful love story between star-crossed lovers with the odds stacked against them, their love is a mirroring of the legendary love between Beren and Luthien Tinuviel. In the time when Morgoth still held the Silmarils, Beren, a wandering outlaw of a man, encountered Luthien, the daughter of an elf and a Maia, singing in the enchanted woods and he named her Tinuviel. They fell in love and Beren perished in the fight for the Silmarils with which he would win the hand of Luthien, to save him, Luthien renounced her immortality and became human so that they could be together. Arwen is of the lineage of Beren and Luthien, and while "Arwen is not a re-incarnation of Luthien...but a descendent very like her," she too renounces the immortal life in the Undying Lands for the pain

and death of human life in Middle Earth so that she may be with Aragorn (*Letters*, 192).

Because Luthien became human, she moved passed the Halls of Mandos to wherever human souls go, therefore, Arwen could not be a true reincarnation of her distant ancestor. She is, however, the most beautiful of the entire elf kindred, second only to Luthien, and bears her resemblance in body and in spirit. The union of one race with someone of a greater, more powerful race is an occurrence that Tolkien uses for characters that will one day change the world. The being who marries above their races has great effect on the time that they live in, just as Aragorn brings about the beginning of the Fourth Age, and their offspring have a lasting effect on the world that they live in, just as Arwen and her father Elrond have shaped Middle Earth in anticipation of Aragorn's arrival. Just as Beren encountered Luthien in the woods, Aragorn first saw Arwen singing in the haven of Rivendell and called to her "*Tinuviel, Tinuviel!* even as Beren had done in the Elder Days long ago" (*The Return of the King*, 383). This connection brings Aragorn closer to the great heroes of old, furthering his right and his agency to be able to lead men into the new age and to defeat the evil of Sauron. Each step that Aragorn takes towards his rightful place on the throne of Gondor ties up a loose end from ages past and prophecies set down for the time when Elves would leave Middle Earth and the world would be left to the devices of Men. The love of Arwen and Aragorn persisted for much longer than the lives of most men, since Aragorn is descended of the Numenoreans, and she was a Queen of Elves and of Men. Perhaps most importantly, through the union of Arwen and Aragorn, they were able to bear a son, Eldarion, who would be heir to his father's throne and continue the great lineage of kings of the Dunedain. If Aragorn had married Eowyn and borne an heir, the child would have less noble blood than Aragorn, shortening the extended life and continuing the trend of the dilution of Dunedain blood with that of lesser men. The mixing of elf and human blood brings

about a greater knowledge and livelihood with which the line can rule as kings. Even though Eowyn possessed the traits of a great queen, the love of Arwen and Aragorn had greater implications for the history of Middle Earth as a whole, connecting the past to the present and setting the stage for a prosperous future.

As the Third Age is brought to an end and the Age of Men, the Fourth Age, begins, Eowyn proves time and time again that she could help Aragorn bring about the time of peace and growth that Middle Earth is entering. Her intense and unwavering loyalty to her king, her country, and those she loves, provides an insight into the sacrifices she would be willing to make for the rebuilding of life without evil. The foundation for this leadership is grounded in the immense strength that Eowyn carries in both her heart and her body. Her prowess as a warrior allows her to conquer a foe that no man could have hoped to accomplish and the strength within her heart allowed too her survive the repercussions of the great battle. The wisdom within her mind and her ability to see that strength does not always require fighting bring her potential as a queen to light. After bringing about the end of darkness with her sword, Eowyn sees that it is time to give up fighting to use her power to heal and to remake all that was once good. She can see that the world is changing and there will no longer be battles to be fought and glory to be found on the battle field, the true glory lies with the chance to bring about beauty and rejuvenation to a world that has for so long withered. While Eowyn does possess all the qualities of a great leader, the love between Arwen and Aragorn completes the legendarium by mirroring the greatness of ages past and giving validity to the reign of Aragorn as king. Even though Arwen and Aragorn bring about greatness and prosperity to Middle Earth in the beginning of the Fourth Age, Eowyn had the qualities that a leader needs, the capability to bring about a chance

for peace with the use of her sword and skill in battle, as well as the power to ensure that the peace is put to good use for the betterment of mankind.

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