

## 'Azughâl (Those who are warriors)

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# 'Azughâl (Those who are warriors)

by [Meysun](#)

## Summary

Twenty-seven years after the Battle of Five Armies, as each year at the beginning of spring, Dwalin visits Thorin's tomb. He offers words. He offers memories.

This is the story of Thorin's fourth ring, as told by Dwalin son of Fundin.

## Notes

This fic is for Guest. Because you asked me for it and because I love your reviews, and the thoughts you share with my about my stories.

It was supposed to be part of Dwalin's fic and somehow did not fit. I hope you will like it as it is here.

Thank you to you all for following, and enjoy I hope! Take care, Meysun.

# Prologue

The sun shines brightly, today – throwing its rays through Erebor's narrow windows, through the adorned lattices of her *sanashîl*. The Mountain is full of secret lights, her marble embracing us as in a soft, green canopy, announcing spring and all the hopes it brings.

Hope, but also remembrance.

And *Zulu 'Azughâl*.

The day of those who are warriors – the day we remember them even though they are no more. The day we kneel upon their tomb, laying down a gift to tell their Souls they are still revered, and cherished, even though the Dwarrows we loved are no more.

We are all warriors. There is no difference between miner and swordsman, between toy-maker and goldsmith, between Dwarrowdams and Dwarrows. We all endure. We all strive. We all fight hard for our days to hold meaning and purpose, to endure and entrust our children with a better world. We lead our wars, day after day, in our never-ending quest for peace.

And this you knew, Thorin. Do you remember *Zulu 'Azughâl*, in the Ered Luin – the way it became more than a day for battle-deeds, the way you managed to share Erebor's strong-word with each and every Dwarrow, Longbeards, Broadbeams and Firebeards alike...?

*Mahizli*.

Remember.

The word your grandfather chose, to fuel his ardour in rebuilding something, in telling the world that he remembered friends and allies, and never forgave traitors and foes.

The word you chose to try and unite them all – the remaining Longbeards, left broken and bleeding, and the Broadbeams and Firebeards that had lost their trust and their hope. Gauging you. Waiting for you to show them what was in you, what you would give them – if you would treat them right or simply use them, looking down on them as lower tribes.

You never did. Never.

They had lost *Tumunzahar* and *Gabilgathol*, long ago. And we had lost *Gundabad*, *Zeleg'ubraz*, *Khazad-Dûm*, and *Azsâlul'abad*. We had all suffered losses. We all had memories of better days engrained in our mind and Souls, like veins of ore in rock and stone.

You were no King of gilded Halls, Thorin. You knew dirt, and mud, and soot – you shed sweat and blood for them, and tears of anger as well, because people still dared to look down on us, because some Dwarven tribes turned their back on their own kin.

Not anymore. Dáin has us united again – and though I wonder what you would have said, and done, though I cannot help but think you would have found it very hard to forgive the Orcarni for their coldness and carelessness, I am glad we are.

I have had enough of war, Thorin. I am still fighting, teaching the lads mostly – it is my way to stay close to you, somehow each time I move in battle I see you, the shadow of a swift, dark-haired shape, so skilled, so unique... Sometimes they must wonder why I smile, what I see beyond their tiny shoulders – but they never ask. They just do as I tell them, because believe it or not, Thorin, they actually *fight* for a lesson with me...

And I take them all in. One after the other. Because they all deserve it, because none of them is above the other. And at the end of each lesson, they bow, gravely, just like you used to with your own masters – and the smallest of them hug me, tightly, because I help them cleaning their weapons, and because I never repeat any secrets they entrust me with, in the sheltered corners of the armoury that is now restored, just like you would have loved to see it.

Of course I remember, Thorin. Who do you take me for? Whose name would fill my *Zulu* 'Azughâl but yours, and the lads'...?

*Hers.*

Is it a whisper or the echo of my own thoughts, Thorin? I often have this strange, doubtful impression that something between us endures – how else is it to be explained, that bone-deep *conviction* that you just spoke, that I can almost feel the silken touch of your hair against my shoulder, as if you had just leaned against me...?

It has been twenty-seven years, Thorin. And the first hurt so much I can barely remember them. But gradually, it has lessened. Not the sense of loss, not the pain of having nothing but a marble tomb to kneel upon, and runes to trace with my fingertips, knowing you have found eternal sleep underneath... But the numbness. The feeling of having lost my way.

This has lessened, Thorin. There are still hard days, but it is better now. It is better because there is so much to build, every day, because there are so many little Dwarflings so *eager* to show me that they matter, that they have life before them and want me to be part of it...

It is better because the fear has gone, as well. The fear of forgetting you. Of letting you slip away and become nothing but a memory. I was so afraid to forget your face, the sound of your voice, the touch of your hands, the swiftness of your moves...

But you are everywhere, Thorin. Everywhere, in a soft, soothing, and deeply right way. You are with me. Sometimes I close my eyes, I fold my arms against my chest and I swear you are here, caught in my embrace for a second... It always warms me up. It makes me feel so alive inside...

I never told anyone. They would think me nuts. Gone soft in the head. I have a reputation to hold, after all, have I not? And what's more... this is private. Between ourselves. I know you, sparrow. You wouldn't want them to know your Soul is such a tender one, would you? *If* it is your Soul, and not one of my delusions...

You would rather have them abuse you, calling you flawed and mad. Discuss your faults openly, and have them turn away from your tomb. You, the mad King who led his nephews to their ruin...

But you did not.

How many times do I have to tell you, how many times do I have to run my thumb on the runes adorning the marble below which you are stretched, gently removing dust, thinking it looks almost like *míthríl* there, in that secret, shaded light of the crypts...?

She never resented you.

She simply wept. For all of you.

My *sarnûna*. The greatest warrior of you all – my Queen, my other love, who is now free, and whole, and at peace, because she joined you that autumn, because her tomb is right there, without any dust. Close to the grave of the mother she never knew. Facing her sons'. And yours.

Aye, Thorin. She is in each and everyone of my thoughts. Of course she is. But I only feel relief, now that death claimed her. It has been soft. It has been swift. She has not suffered, and she has lived enough to witness Erebor rise again from her ashes, and help the Mountain to do so.

She left once peace was achieved for good. Once there was nothing left to bind her – no duty, no pressing issue, no need for another leader but Dáin.

And I have been with her, this time. She asked for me, that evening, asked me to come, and she embraced me, as you would have done, her silver-streaked hair spread across my chest.

This time I have been there, Thorin. And she must have known how much it mattered to me – must have known that despite the pain, it also brought healing. To have been able not to fail her. To know I have done everything I could for her. To let her go knowing it had to be so.

This is why I do not weep for her, not today. I just bow before her tomb, I just say her name softly for myself – there is nothing left to say, between us. We already shared it all.

But you, my sparrow...

You, I need to tend to properly. It is so strange, the utter surety I have that, though you are the eldest, though the lads were mere children compared to the warrior you were, it is your Soul that remains restless. Your Soul I have to soothe, once more, because it struggles and quivers like the wings of a caged Raven – and do not deny it, Thorin.

I feel it. Deep inside. I cannot explain it, but I feel it. It aches right below my heart, like a soft sob I cannot seem to get rid off, and it always happens on *Zulu 'Azughâl*.

Because that day, they say Souls are closer to this world, waiting to be appeased.

*My fault.*

*My failure.*

*Forgive me.*

Oh Thorin...

There is nothing to forgive. No fault. No failure.

And yet it hurts. I can feel it. You are so stubborn, Thorin, I bet the Maker Himself is beginning to wonder of which rock exactly your skull is made...

I have a gift, Thorin. I have saved it for today – shaped it, in the past weeks, knowing it would be needed. I could not wait to share it with you – it has been my own, very private silver line to come down and offer it to you.

Because I miss you.

Because I could never get enough of you.

Your turn, now, Thorin. Listen. For my gift to you is a memory.

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**Neo-Khuzdûl translations :**

- *Sanashîl*: ahem. No proper Khuzdûl. Arabic actually. It's another word for mashrabiya – oriel windows enclosed with carved wood, their main purpose other than decorating being “see without being seen”, something I find very Dwarven, which is why I use it here.

- *Zulu 'Azughâl*: the Day of those who are warriors. A completely invented Dwarven celebration where they honour those who have fallen – and as Dwalin says, it does not have to be in war...

- *Tumunzahar*: Nogrod, lost Dwarven city in the Blue Mountains
- *Gabilgathol*: Belegost, lost Dwarven city in the Blue Mountains.
- *Gundabad*: lost Dwarven city in the Misty Mountains.
- *Zeleg'ubraz*: Golden Stair, a Longbeard city in the Grey Mountains where Thrór grew up – and I think it is canon, this time...
- *Khazad-Dûm*: uuuuhmmm, Moria? You shall not pass...
- *Azsâlul'abad*: he he he, it's the Lonely Mountain! I thought that now that Dwalin has found a true place to call home, he tends to name them more openly in Khuzdûl...
- *Sarnûna*: dancing-lady, Dwalin's nickname for Dís.

## Zulu 'Azughâl

Do you remember that sunset, so long ago...? That twilight in spring that had us both together, walking along the walls, me showing you the progresses of fortifications, and you listening. Touching the stone, the palm of your hand resting against these walls that meant so much to you, because they stood for safety. For the right to close our boundaries.

The right to stay there and to call these lands ours.

It had been hard years of treaties and of grim negotiations – weeks of travelling, of writing down clauses and setting clear limits. It had taken so much will, so much energy, so much strength – but you had them, Thorin, you had them all back, because there was purpose in your life again, two little Souls needing you with all their heart, just as you needed them.

The walls, the boundaries, that iron will that would not deny them any of their rights to live and become – it was all for them.

And I was so glad to see your eyes shine, that evening. So full of joy to see you lean against these walls, not because you needed their support, but because your palms were finally finding their way back to stone.

“They should do...”, you said softly, and of course I knew you were seeing other walls, other walks, far mightier, and out of reach.

“Course they will. They know we are here now, Thorin.

- Aye...”

You walked on, your hand still touching the wall lightly, and I saw the beginning of a smile stretch your lips.

“What?”

You shook your head, and earned a nudge in the ribs.

“Out with it.

- I was thinking...

- Mahal save us...”, I sighed, and I saw your shoulders shake slightly as you went on, unmoved: “They know *you* are here. They might even fear you more than me, as a matter of fact.

- Their mistake. I have *none* of your grumpiness.

- You watch it.”

You turned, your shadow stretching across the walls – and I do remember your eyes, their unabashed look and the way amusement sharpened your striking features even more.

“I have walls around my so-called grumpiness now.”

Do you have any *idea* what it did to me? To hear you joke, to see you smile – to find a tiny sliver of pride in your words at last...?

I do not remember who got the last word. I just remember walking at your side, and thinking it was worth it. The striving. All these years. I would have done thrice as much for you, Thorin, without a second thought, be it just to see you like that, upright and proud at my side...

We reached the training ground as the sun was beginning to set – and there we found a pretty commotion: old Dagur trying to hold back Kíli, who had spotted you and was trying fiercely to reach you and run towards you.

“Hang on, lad, I am not done!

- Let me go, let me go, let me *go*!!

- Have you listened to a word I said? Did it enter your skull that you cannot just do things like that, hurling yourself at others, hitting them like a maddened boar?”

This time Kíli did not answer. He just bit his lip, still struggling fiercely, and you broke into a run, understanding within seconds that Kíli's behaviour had nothing to do with joy.

“What happened here?”, you asked, and the look you cast on Kíli was severe, but it still made him shake himself free from Dagur's half-hearted grasp, running towards you, and within moments his face was buried in your tunic, barely reaching your waist, his small arms hugging you tightly.

“Kíli, turn around at once. Apologize to Master Dagur, tell him you have listened, and thank him for his patience. I am waiting.”

It was hard to withhold your urge to embrace him back. Hard to keep your voice firm, and severe – but the lad needed it. He was not crying, just hiding his face away, fiercely.

“I am waiting, Kíli.

- I listened. But I'm not sorry, Master Dagur. I'm no liar, and I won't say I'm sorry when I'm not.”

And there the little lad turned, and you took a sharp intake of breath seeing his blood-smeared face, his flushed cheeks and the fierce tears in his eyes.

“I'm no liar. I'm *no liar*.

- Got you, lad. Fair enough. Never said so. But you understand there are rules, right? Especially on the training ground, with weapons around. You could have injured yourself

severely, and this is something I do not want. Not on my watch.”

Kíli nodded, biting his lip, his small chest heaving – it was getting hard to fight back his sobs, his pride was slowly breaking apart, and Dagur ever was a fair one. He bowed to you and took his leave, while you finally allowed yourself to put one knee on the ground.

He crashed against your chest instantly, and this time you embraced him, shielding him against you, trying to soothe him now that he had got his lecture. No scolding for Kíli, not this time – not with that blood-smeared face and that bright, savage look, these dishevelled, sweaty brown locks and that small body, quivering with anger and hurt. No scolding, but your hand on his hair and softness in your voice, as you turned towards Fíli, your eyes searching for his.

“What happened, Fíli?”

Fíli had stayed mute all this time, his small fists balled, biting his lip stubbornly. There was pain in his gaze, pain and the kind of repressed fury he only ever voiced with you – and though it hurt you, you also knew it for the form of trust and love it always was.

“Tell me, *bunnel*.”

Soft words, and tightly balled little fists, as he shook his head, tears welling up in his eyes as Kíli lifted his face ever so slightly, his words choking around repressed sobs:

“He won't tell because he... because he... because he's with them.

- Not true”, Fíli let out through clenched teeth, and Kíli's anger broke free.

“Yes you are! You said... you said I was wrong... that I could not do it, that it was forbidden, and... You said I was stupid, that I knew nothing...”

- Because you don't!”, Fíli spat out. “You never knew him! And you have no right to just... pretend he was never there!

- Yes I do!”

By then Kíli had lifted his face, hot tears running small lines through the caked blood on his face, his fists balled around your tunic.

“I don't care if it's wrong! It's not wrong! You are wrong! You know nothing and if I want to... if I want to give it to uncle I can! And no one... no one has to laugh because if they do, uncle and Dwalin just beat them up and break their noses and then they'll cry and call their '*adad*, and I will laugh and say uncle is better than any '*adad* and they'll shut their mouths forever!

- No. They'll beat you up and break your nose. Just like they did today. And you will be snivelling and crying and calling for me but I won't come. I'll let you be beaten up because that's what you deserve.

- I don't, I don't, I don't!!!”

Kíli was sobbing by then and you were still holding him, your eyes travelling from his face to Fíli's, and I could see some understanding begin to shadow your gaze as you realised what it was all about.

“Hush now, *bunnanun*. Hush. Let me see your nose.

- It hurts.

- Yes, *bunnanun*. It does.”

Soft, soft words and even softer fingers, carefully probing the swollen little nose, gently wiping away tears and blood with the hem of your sleeve.

“I did not cry, uncle. I promise.”

His little chin lifted, his brown gaze searching for yours, still brimming with tears – and your hand cupping his cheek, running your thumb against his skin, wordlessly.

“Let us wash your face properly, now. You don't want to have *'amad* all worried, do you?

- No.”

Kíli shook his head, his short braids a mess under your fingers, eyes still locked with yours.

“But I am not sorry. I won't say I'm sorry.”

Something shifted in your gaze then, and I knew you were seeing another dark-haired Dwarfling, just as passionate and proud, just as angry and hurt.

“Did you hurt someone, Kíli? Was someone injured because of you?”

Your tone was stern but Kíli held your gaze and shook his head.

“No, uncle.”

He looked downcast now, his pride hurt.

“I tried to. But Húni and Regar were stronger. They hit my nose. They said they would fill my mouth with earth. Fíli made them stop. But I never asked him to. I never asked you! I don't want your help!

- They were *sitting* on your chest. They'd have broken more than your nose”, Fíli let out, his eyes bright and burning.

“No. I don't care! I don't want you, because you don't understand!”

And then he threw his arms around your neck, pressed his small body against yours and sobbed, all pride and pretence forgotten. And you circled his back with your arms, hugging him tightly, kissing his hair and hushing him, while Fíli watched with narrowed eyes, his face closed, still biting his lip.

“You did right, laddie”, I let out, careful not to touch him, and his clear blue eyes met mine for a second, full of repressed hurt. “Don't let them hit your brother.

- He started this. He's a fool”, Fíli spat out, fiercely clenching his fists.

“He's small...”, I merely answered, and I saw Fíli's shoulders slump at these words, and extended my hand wordlessly, waiting for him to lean into my embrace until I was able to draw my arm around his shoulders.

“Small brothers do a lot of foolish things”, I whispered, and Fíli looked at me, taking my face in with an expression far beyond his years.

“Well yeah, lad. So did I.

- I don't believe you”, he answered, and I just brushed his shoulder.

“Trust me, I did.”

Kíli's sobs had ebbed, slowly, and you picked him up, still holding him against you, cradling his head against your shoulder. Your gaze fell upon us and I saw relief soften your features when you saw that Fíli was not standing alone anymore – relief, and some pain because he was clearly refusing to meet your gaze.

“Two against one is no fair game”, you said. “They got what they deserved. So did you, and this is a good lesson to learn. Now let's go home.

- But I want to give it to you...”

Kíli's tiny voice came low against your neck, but he had turned his blood-smeared face towards us, challenging his brother silently. Fíli crossed his arms and averted his gaze, his face hardening, and I could see you waver, trying to find the right words.

“*Bunnanun*... I already have more than I could wish for.

- But I made it for you... Uncle...”

Soft, pleading words, and so much love in his brown eyes. You swallowed, and drew a shuddering breath, and then you simply nodded. You crouched, putting him down on the ground, facing him silently, and Kíli took a second to wipe his eyes and face.

“It's not as pretty as I wanted. They did not want to give me any stones, uncle. They said I'd just waste them. And Narvi helped me but it's still crooked. I don't know if it will fit. They all say it is ugly. Even Fíli.

- I am sure it is not”, you replied, earnestly, and the little lad looked at you, before he dug his hand in his pocket, his tiny fist clenched around something.

“I don't want to wait for *Zulu 'Azughâl*. I don't care for what they say. It is for you.”

And there, in his small palm, was a heavy, somewhat crooked, metallic ring. The one that never ever left your hand, the one always drawing the ghost of a loving smile on your lips whenever your fingertips brushed it. The ring that came after Erebor's, after Itô's, after your father's and grandfather's royal seal – speaking of a boy's love for the one who was almost a father to him.

“You like it?”

Kili's voice was quivering slightly, because you were staring at it, crouching on the ground before him, and I could see your eyes fill with tears, slowly.

“*Bunnanun*...

- I know it's not pretty. I don't know how to make it better. And I don't want to give it to '*adad*. I don't want to be like Fíli and put it on his tomb. I don't like it. It's cold and sad and '*amad* always cries. I want *you*. I love *you*.

- And I you”, you voiced, and it was hitched and broken because you were fighting hard to hold back tears. “I love you more than anyone, Fíli and you. But Kíli... I am not your '*adad*. I will never take his place. I am your uncle.

- I know. But '*adad* is dead and I don't remember him. How can I make something for him if I don't even know... what he likes and... and how he was and...”

Small tears were running on his cheeks again and this time there was no anger, just bone-deep sadness and loneliness.

“He won't like it...”, he whispered, and you reached out for his face, brushing his tears away, kissing his brow softly.

“Of course he will. I knew your '*adad*. I knew what a wonderful, brave, caring, loving and cheerful Dwarf he was. I knew what he would have liked, and so do you. And tomorrow, in the forge, tomorrow, *bunnanun*, I promise you, we will go there together and you will tell me exactly what kind of ring you want to shape, and we will carve the runes there together so that he gets the most beautiful present on *Zulu 'Azughâl* a Dwarf can dream of.

- Promise?”

Earnest little lad, facing you, his small frame cradled between your fingers. And you, crouching before him, your dark hair shielding your chest and your eyes so bright...

“I promise.”

He nodded, then, and stepped up to hug you, leaning against your chest, tiredly. You rubbed his back, gently, and I could see your body relax in unison with his, embracing him, soaking in his warmth and softness.

“Will you take it, uncle? It's not pretty. Maybe we can make one together for you...”

- No. Kíli. It is the most beautiful ring I ever got.”

He smiled, then, turning his face towards you, and how much love there was, in his gaze and in yours. You did not say a word when he took your hand, gravely, and slid the ring around your second finger where it has sit ever since.

“It fits...”, he whispered, and I saw you close your eyes for some seconds, determined not to let them shine or spill.

*“Maikhmin, bunnanun.”*

You kept your word. Washed Kíli's face, brought them both home, did not urge Fíli into confidences, left it to me to brush his shoulder, and to Dís to scold and comfort them both. But the day afterwards you were in the forge, as promised, Kíli's tiny hands between yours, and you made that ring – a perfect hexagon where runes were carved carefully, runes speaking of the love of a son for his unknown father, their letters drawn together into the silver, around small ambers you had chosen yourself.

You carved, allowing Kíli to chat and believe he was doing it with you, and Fíli to watch wordlessly, not missing any move.

And when *Zulu 'Azughâl* came that year, when it was time for those who had once lost a father, a brother, a cousin or a friend to head for name-stones or graves, I watched you step up to his tomb with Dís and the lads, and look as they gravely put their gifts upon the marble stone.

A dagger Fíli had taken pains to carve and forge himself, for days. And the ring you had made with Kíli. He was holding his mother's hand as he put it down, and she embraced her boys, her eyes closed, in a gesture so like yours it hurt.

Balin and me carried no gifts. There was no tomb for my father, just the runes of his name close to so many others. Close to Frerin's you had carved yourself, and that your eyes refused to meet, that day, turning to other runes instead, allowing your hand to brush the familiar shapes, as your hair fell down to shield your face.

*/ Thráin Nû' /*

*/ Thrórul /*

*/ Zê' Uzbád ni Adlâg /*

Usually it was Dís. Putting her hand on your forearm, waiting for you to lift your face, the tears you had shed quietly mirrored in her gaze. Smiling at you, until you bent your head and touched foreheads, forearms locked tightly. Until it was possible again for you to move, until the love in her gaze was enough again to silence the raging guilt in your mind and heart.

But not that day. That day the hand finding yours was tinier. That day golden locks pressed themselves against your chest, fiercely. That day, strong little arms threw themselves around

your back, wordlessly. And that day, you knelt once more, so as to be able to lean your cheek against Fíli's hair, and held him as he cried, silent tears running down your face as well.

“Uncle, I...

- Hush. *Bunnel*. My boy. Hush.

- I never meant to...

- I know. I know, *bunnel*. He would be so, so proud of you. I would not have expected anything less from the wonderful son you are. You are... you are more than I could ever have wished for. You and your brother.

- Uncle...”

You quickly raised your palm, wiping your eyes, feeling him move, and when you faced him your face betrayed no tears.

“I am your nephew too.”

Earnest blue eyes, locking with yours, and so much love in them.

I did not dream it. Do not say I lied, Thorin. Do not dare to believe they ever stopped loving you, that they thought you unworthy – that they ever stopped seeing you as the uncle who raised and cherished them, as the King and leader they were both determined to shield through the end, and as the Dwarf they both loved and admired most.

Don't you dare. They loved you so much more than that.

And you know it. I know you do. I know it because the faint ache in my chest lessens, because as I am kneeling there I can feel the light change, ever so slightly.

Flickering, the space of a heartbeat, like a soft sigh of both pain and relief, like the faintest of nudges against my forehead.

Aye, Thorin. I'm there. Of course I am. Of course I am...

Warmth against my chest. Around my neck. On my shoulders, as I close my eyes. You are always there. You always find a way. It lasts just a second, and yet it fills my chest for a whole year.

One more year.

I am still smiling as you leave.

Spring has come.

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### **Neo-Khuzdûl translations :**

- *Bunnel*: treasure of all treasures, Thorin's nickname for Fili.
- *Bunnanun* : tiny treasure, Thorin's nickname for Kíli.
- *Maikhmin* : thank you.
- *Thr á in Nû' / Thr ó rul / Zê' Uzbad ni Adlâg* : Thráin the Second/ Son of Thrór/ First King in Exile [and no, this is not Thráin's tomb, mainly a name-stone Thorin made for him].

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