

EÖNWË'S NARROW ESCAPE

Beleriand, FA 400



önwë inched along a narrow shelf of rock on the slopes of Thangorodrim, trying to get as close as possible to the gates of Angband.

The Prison Fortress of Angband, Melkor's stronghold, was heavily fortified and cloaked in fumes to conceal the doings of its inhabitants. Eönwë, Herald of Manwë Súlimo, was often sent by the Valar to report on the Enemy. He was brave, and he tried to fulfill his duty even at great personal risk. After completing several reconnaissance missions successfully, he was emboldened to press closer and stay longer than was prudent.

On this mission, he'd managed to get closer to the Enemy's fortress than he'd ever been before. From his perch twelve or fifteen feet above the road, he could the conversation of a group of soldiers. He found that was a particularly fruitful source of intelligence.

"Did you hear? His Nibs is breeding dragons." said one of the Orcs.

"Nasty lot, that. I won't go anywhere near 'em." said another.

"Are you sure? Who do you think will muck out the dragons' stalls? It won't be the Swells, I tell ye that much."

Eönwë had already been able to learn the layout of the fortifications and the routine of the defenders. Now he had to get back to his own camp, and report what he'd learned.

It was close to time for the guard to change. The gates of Angband swung open. The first shift started to gather up their weapons and gear. They greeted the relief shift and told them all was quiet, then headed toward the fortress. Several of the relief shift left to patrol the perimeter.

It was time to go. Eönwë inched along the ledge, away from the gates of Angband. It had rained earlier in the day, and the hillside was muddy. He put a foot wrong, and a handful of gravel cascaded down the side of Thangorodrim. He saw the orcs look at the spot where the pebbles bounced on the road, but they didn't look up. Eönwë held his breath. That was too close.

Eönwë remained motionless for several minutes before he attempted another careful step. The rock shelf collapsed under his weight. He heard himself scream, then felt his head strike the flagstones. When he came to, he didn't know where he was. He was lying face down, his cheek against the flagstones. His lip hurt, and he tasted blood.

He lifted his head. He saw four or five pairs of boots and the hafts of spears. He looked up. Legs, mail coats, Orc faces beneath steel helms. One of the Orcs was smacking a club into the palm of his hand.

"Awake, are we? Not for long!" said the Orc. He raised the club over his head, and brought it down hard.

Much later, Eönwë moaned and opened his eyes. He saw torchlight, stone walls, and an iron grating over the doorway. Iron rings were embedded in the walls, with chains hanging from them.

He guessed he'd been captured, and was now locked in the dungeons of Angband. He knew he would face harsh questioning. It would be unpleasant, particularly if he resisted revealing his mission and the information he had discovered.

Eönwë's Narrow Escape

Eönwë had no intention of telling them anything. Feeling uneasy, he lay down on the straw to wait for morning.



Sauron, Melkor's second-in-command, heard the news of Eönwë's capture and imprisonment. Late that night, he went down to the dungeons to see his former friend.

He found him easily. The cell was at the end of a short passageway. It was brightly lit, and two guards were stationed at its head. Eönwë, the Herald of Manwë, was the most valuable prisoner they'd ever captured. They weren't going to risk losing him.

The guards stood aside as Sauron swept in, grim and angry.

Sauron stood outside the cell for a moment, regarding Eönwë's form on the dirty straw. Then he unlocked the cell door and yanked it open. The squeal of iron against iron woke Eönwë from a fitful sleep. He lifted his head, blinking in the torchlight.

The guards overheard snatches of their conversation. Sauron's tone was gloating. They heard him address the prisoner in a cold voice.

"I have a score to settle with you. Do you remember a certain young woman who left me for you?" [1]

There was the sound of a blow, and the prisoner cried out in pain.

"You are going to have a really bad day tomorrow. You may walk with a limp for the rest of your life. You may lose your sight, or the use of your hands. And I'm going to be there to watch it happen."

He shut the cell door with a clang of iron against iron, and leaned against it. He said through the bars, "Look at you. How handsome would she find you now, filthy and exhausted, lying on a dungeon floor? And after tomorrow, you'll be a cripple."

With that, he turned to leave. Before departing, Sauron pulled the two guards aside.

"Look, that was a private conversation not meant for your ears. There's no reason to tell anyone how I spoke to the prisoner? Good man! Look, why not spent the rest of your shift in the guard room? The beer's on me. There's no need to stand in the hall until dawn."

The guards looked at each other. "Sounds like a deal!" the senior one agreed.



Sauron was awakened in the morning by insistent pounding on his door. The messenger shouted that Lord Melkor wanted to see him right away. Sauron said he could be there in ten minutes. No, it had to be now. Sauron left the bed unmade, pulled on yesterday's clothes, and followed the messenger down the corridors, doing up the last buttons at his throat just as he entered the audience chamber.

"Yes, my Lord?" he said in the tone of one curious about what was happening, but not anxious.

Melkor's face was like a thundercloud. "The guards tell me you were the last one to see our very valuable prisoner last night."

"I was. I had a personal score to settle with him. I wished to do so in private."

"You left the cell door unlocked. He's gone, escaped." said Melkor.

Sauron froze. Very slowly, his eyes widened. He put his hand over his mouth. "I remember shutting the door. I have no memory of locking it. Aaaa! I didn't lock it!"

Melkor backhanded him across the face. Sauron fell to his knees, saying "I'm sorry, I'm sorry! Please forgive me!" He threw himself down on the floor at Melkor's feet, saying "I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" over and over again.

Sauron wondered what Melkor was going to do to him. It would almost certainly involve pain. Sauron was extremely stoic. He could handle pain, but he didn't like to be humiliated. He feared Melkor would make an example

of him, summoning the rest of the court to make them witness punishment. He didn't like the idea of people seeing him sobbing, particularly people who resented his promotion over their heads. They'd enjoy it too much.

Especially Gothmog. Gothmog had been Melkor's second-in-command before Sauron arrived and took his place. Now Gothmog was just the Lord of Balrogs, no longer Melkor's favorite. Sauron and Gothmog could work together and be civil to each other, but they would never be friends. Sauron guessed that Gothmog was going to get a lot of enjoyment from watching whatever came next. He minded that more than the punishment itself.

Melkor made his decision. He ordered two of his personal guard, "Take him to his room and lock him in. You can release him at this time tomorrow."

"We should only let him out for meals?" said the guard.

"No, bring him a tray." said Melkor.

"What about call of nature?"

"No, that's what chamber pots are for."

Sauron closed his eyes and went limp with relief. It wasn't anywhere near as bad as expected. And Melkor was only punishing him for negligence, for failing to lock the cell door.

It could have been worse. Melkor didn't know Sauron accidentally drew Eönwë a map of the route back to his camp. Or that he'd accidentally given him all the money he had on him. Or that he'd accidentally traded clothes with him, to make it easier to avoid the border patrols after exiting the escape tunnel he'd accidentally shown to him.



Eönwë arrived back at his own camp in the grey dawn an hour before sunrise.

Sauron had imposed one condition on Eönwë for helping him escape. He made Eönwë swear an oath not to reveal Sauron's involvement. Eönwë's word was good.

However, he was not any good at lying. It was just not something he did. Once, when they were young, Sauron tried to teach him how. Sauron, even then an accomplished liar, advised him to tell the truth, just not all of it. Taking his advice, Eönwë decided not to tell anyone he'd been captured.

"You're late. You've never been this late. We were worried." said the guard at their camp.

"Just a little difficulty getting back. I had a hard time avoiding the patrols." said Eönwë.

"I can't help noticing, those aren't the clothes you set out in. In fact, I don't believe they're yours at all. What's that about?"

Eönwë said he was exhausted and wanted to go to bed. He crawled into his cot and closed his eyes. In the few minutes before he fell asleep, he thought about how he'd been awakened in the dungeons of Angband hours before. When Eönwë opened his eyes, Sauron put a finger to his lips, signaling Eönwë to be silent. Then he mouthed the words, "When I clap my hands, cry out."

Ten minutes later, Eönwë was outside the escape tunnel, the nearly invisible door now closed behind him. He breathed the clean air and looked up at the few stars visible through the clouds. Then he set off westward, moving fast to put as much distance between himself and Angband as possible.

When he awoke that evening, having slept the whole day away, the matter had been forgotten because some other crisis demanded everyone's attention. No one remembered Eönwë came back wearing a tunic with Melkor's badge sewn onto the shoulder. Eönwë made sure to burn it before anyone else saw it.

[1] For more on this love triangle, please see the excellent fanfiction "Nár Tinwen – Story of a Maia" by Arwen Imladviel