

Chapter 1 The Vision



he Witch king of Angmar followed Sauron as they left the Audience Chamber. Sauron met with the ambassador from South Harad, Mordor's close ally.

After concluding the audience, they entered the robing room located behind the Dark Throne. Sauron pulled off the veil concealing his face and shrugged of his sable robe, handing them to an aide who stood waiting to receive them.

Formal duties discharged, they walked along the corridor to go back to whatever they were doing before the audience. Sauron paused, and put a hand over his heart. He drew a few deep breaths. "I feel so strange," he said, putting a hand on the wall for support. His face was colorless. He took a single step forward and collapsed.

"What happened?" asked one of the Black Númenorians, a trusted advisor.

Angmar knelt beside his Master. "He fainted," he said.

One of the others ran off to get Akhorahil, the fifth Nazgûl who was also Sauron's personal physician. Sauron didn't appear to be breathing, and Angmar couldn't find a pulse. He held his Master's lifeless hand, already growing cool. "Mairon¹, if you can hear me, squeeze my hand." Nothing. Angmar noticed that Sauron had the extreme stillness of a corpse, which can't be faked by a man holding his breath and lying very still. His lips and fingernails were blue. Angmar fought down a rising panic. He was a soldier, hardened by battle, but right then, he was as frightened as he had ever been. Images

¹ Mairon ('Admirable') is Sauron's Quenya name. Sauron ('Abhorred' or 'Lord of Filth') is his Sindarin name. He liked his Quenya name better.

crowded in his mind at once, none of them welcome. Of his Master lying in State on a bier before the High Altar, dressed in ceremonial robes, wearing a crown for the first time since Angmar had known him. Tar-Mairon, king and god, ought to lie in state wearing a crown. Angmar deeply regretted having to bury his Master without the Ring on his hand, but it was unavoidable since the Ring was still lost.

Of the almost certain internal disputes over who would be the next Dark Lord. The Witch King of Angmar, who didn't want it, was first in line to inherit the Dark Throne, while the Mouth of Sauron, a master of court intrigue who wanted it very badly, was second.

Of their enemies across the Anduin, who, as soon as they heard Sauron was gone, would strike hard and mercilessly. The orcs and trolls, normally under the Will of Sauron, would not answer to the Witch King. Without Sauron, they couldn't withstand the attack. Mordor was finished, and so were they.

Akhorahil arrived within a few minutes, carrying a medical kit. He knelt beside the patient. Angmar moved aside to give him room. Oddly, Akhorahil didn't look concerned. "He'll be all right." Akhorahil pronounced. "What do you mean, he'll be all right?" Angmar asked, his voice rising in near hysteria.

"He's having an out-of-body experience. It's a Maia thing. He warned me this might happen." said Akhorahil.

"How can you be sure?" pleaded Angmar.

"Think about it. When he was killed in the Battle of the Last Alliance, his body crumbled into dust. You witnessed it yourself. But that's not happening now, because he's coming back." said Akhorahil.

"When the Ring was cut from his hand, he hadn't yet crumbled into dust."

"He was mortally wounded, but he wasn't dead yet, he was unconscious from loss of blood. The Ring was cut from his hand, and he died a few minutes later." said Akhorahil.

Angmar looked away from Akhorahil and back at Sauron. He still wasn't breathing, but now he looked like a person lying very still, and not like a lifeless corpse. Angmar, who was still holding his Master's hand, felt his fingers twitch almost

imperceptibly and felt the warmth was beginning to return to them. Presently his eyelids fluttered. "He's breathing." Akhorahil announced. He felt for a pulse. "And his pulse is back. See? I told you there was nothing to worry about."



When Angmar first entered his service, he didn't know Sauron was a Maia. Angmar had heard of the Valar and Maiar, had even studied their language and history in school. But to him, they were ancient beings who walked the earth before men existed. Who still walked the earth, but only in inaccessible Valinor in the uttermost West where the Ban forbade them to sail. Angmar did not expect to meet one of the Holy Ones in everyday life, ever.

As time went on, the Nazgûl speculated about their Master. They knew he was a powerful wizard and that he was exceedingly old. They knew only as much about his past as he told them, which was very little.

At first, because of his age and his vision into the non-physical world, they assumed he belonged to the race of Elves. And when he returned after the drowning of Númenor, they assumed that, against all odds, he'd escaped the disaster much like Isildur and Anárion had.

But after they saw him killed on the slopes of Orodruin and witnessed his body crumble away to dust, then saw him take form again a thousand years later, they knew it was something an elf could not do. That was when they really began to wonder if their Master was one of the Holy Ones. They asked him outright, but he was evasive. Finally Adunaphel, the mouthy one, told him, "By the way, you can stop being coy about it, because we all know what race you belong to." She didn't, of course, but she pretended to.

Sauron never admitted he was a Maia, but after that, he became careless about concealing it, once letting it slip that he was older than the oldest of the elves. They knew he'd lived in Angband, but now he mentioned he'd been in Utumno as well.

The Vision

Angband was destroyed after the Awakening of the Elves, but Utumno was destroyed before.

Angmar smiled, thinking of how many discussions they'd on the subject and how long it had taken them to figure out their master was a Maia. Because with the knowledge he had now, he could spot a Maia easily by looking for the telltale off-round pupils they all had. The feature even had a name. Maia eyes.



After they left the robing room, Sauron found himself struggling to breath. He was taking in air, but not getting any benefit from it. He started to pass out. He couldn't see. He grabbed the wall for support, but staggered forward and fell.

He found himself on his knees in the Timeless Halls, looking up at Ilúvatar. He froze.

Ilúvatar spoke. "Mairon. You will go to Aman²."

"Oh no. Oh please no. No no no no no nooooo!" He began to wail.

"Be silent. You will go on an errand for me ..."

"Don't make me go there! Take me now! I'm begging you!" He said more, but it was unintelligible.

"Mairon! You're not a good listener, are you?" said Ilúvatar. With a motion of his hand, he struck Sauron dumb. Suddenly, he could make no sound other than his breathing, broken with sobbing.

"You will go to Aman, to the Mansions of Aulë. Yavanna is in Arda right now. She will tell you where to meet the ship, and when to be there."

"When you arrive, you will find a way to reconcile with your Master Aulë. How you do it is up to you. You will be there for two or three days. Manwë knows that you are under my protection and that you have immunity from arrest. Afterwards, you will return to Arda and continue doing ... whatever it is you do."

² Aman refers to the Undying Lands, Valinor and Tol Eressëa, and Arda is Middle Earth.

Ilúvatar released Sauron from his constrained silence. “Do you have any questions?”

“Why is this happening now?” asked Sauron.

“I have recalled Aulë to the Timeless Halls. I want to give him a chance to say goodbye to all of his people, including yourself.” replied Ilúvatar.

“One more question? What happened to Melkor after he went into the Void?” Sauron pleaded. “Please, is he all right?” Sauron prayed for Melkor often, so Ilúvatar was not surprised by the question. He just chose not to answer it.



Sauron opened his eyes and found himself lying on the stone floor in the corridor. He started to sit up, but Akhorahil gently pushed him down again.

He looked at Angmar with eyes that wouldn't focus yet. “Tindomul.” he mumbled.³

“I'm here.” said Angmar. What happened?”

“I had a vision. I have them sometimes.” Sauron answered.

“Why didn't you didn't warn us about them?” said Angmar.

“Until now, they only happened when I was alone.” Sauron answered.

“Are you going to tell us what you saw in the vision?”

“No.” Sauron said firmly, and the matter was closed.



Later, Angmar asked his Master, “Why don't you wear a crown? Your master Melkor wore one, and so do I.”

Sauron answered, “The first and only time I tried on a crown, it slipped off my head. I tried to grab it, but it landed on

³ Tindomul son of Ciryatan is the name Iron Crown Enterprises (ICE) gave to the Witch King of Angmar. Tindomul is Quenya for 'Twilight Son', so named because he was born during a solar eclipse and because he has jet black hair. Later, as a Black Númenorian, he went by the title Er-Mûrazor. ICE names for Nazgûl are non-canon but widely used.

The Vision

my foot and broke my toe. Since then, I haven't liked crowns much."

Angmar said, "My crown isn't heavy, even though it's made of steel. And crowns of gold can be thin, so they aren't heavy either. How did a crown break your toe? And how did you fail to catch it?"

"It was heavy because it was made of iron. And I did catch it, but I let go when it burned my hand. I never did like Silmarils, and after that, I liked them even less.

Chapter 2 The Journey



Khamûl was riding border patrol in the woods near Dol Guldur when a woman stepped out of the woods and met his eye. She had raven black hair and wore a green dress that looked like leaves. He sensed that she knew who he was. She walked up to him and handed him a folded piece of paper. "Can you deliver a message for me?" Khamûl didn't even think of refusing. When she had gone, he looked at the sealed letter. There was a single word written on the outside. Mairon.

Of course Khamûl knew that Mairon was Sauron's real name. How could he not know? For as long as he'd served his Master, Sauron had fought a losing battle to get his servants to call him Mairon. When he conquered large swaths of Eriador, he tried to get his new subjects to refer to him as Tar-Mairon, or King Mairon. But it was hopeless. His people called him Sauron, and as far as they were concerned, that was his name. Sauron hated it because it meant Lord of Filth, and wouldn't allow the name to be spoken in front of him. However, he was aware that the name was in near universal use. When dealing with other nations, his ambassadors referred to him as Sauron, so he felt compelled to sign official correspondence and legal agreements using that name because it was expected of him.

The compromise he reached with his own people was that he pretended not to know they called him Sauron, and they pretended they didn't do it. And when they slipped up, which happened a lot, he pretended not to notice. They had no other name to call him by, so they normally addressed him as My Lord, which was a polite way of saying Hey You.

The Journey

Sauron sat in the Council Chamber with Angmar, looking at maps and planning their route. Sauron would travel through Mordor and leave through their southern border into South Harad, accompanied by only his personal guard. Angmar insisted on leading the guard, even though Sauron would have preferred to have Angmar stay at Barad-dûr, standing in for him during the weeks he would be gone. But Angmar would not leave his Master, so the Mouth of Sauron was assigned the role of Regent in Sauron's absence. There was nothing really dangerous about the trip, in that they'd travel only through the lands of friendly allies, but Angmar was unhappy about his Master leaving the safety of his own fortress.

Their destination was the port city of Umbar, far to the south of Gondor's influence. Sauron would go there to meet a ship there, but he hadn't told them where it would take him. Sauron wouldn't say anything about the reason for the trip or where he was going by sea. Angmar had been told that he was not coming on the seagoing leg of the trip, and he was even less happy about that.

They set out two or three days before the appointed day to meet the ship.

To mark the occasion, Angmar wore his favorite shirt, the one he wore whenever he felt the need for extra protection or luck. Strictly speaking, it wasn't his shirt, it was Sauron's. Sauron had a very poor sense of time, probably because he had lived so long. He wore his clothes until they were falling apart because in his mind they were still new. The servant who waited on him took it upon himself to throw away his Master's worn out things and replace them with identical new ones, without his Master's knowledge or consent. Angmar sought him out and paid him for one of Sauron's old shirts. The fabric was worn through at the elbows, the cuffs were frayed, and the seams barely held together, but Angmar considered it very precious.

Traveling south through Mordor, they quickly left the black fumes of Orodruin behind them. Soon they found themselves traveling under blue skies. The land became greener the further south they went, as volcanic slag was replaced by small farms

tilled by individual orc families. The prosperous farmland hardly looked like part of Mordor, although actually it was typical of the whole of the south.

On sunny days, the fields and roads were empty, as orcs do not love sunlight. But when the sun was hidden, on rainy days and after twilight, the travelers saw them working in the fields or walking along the country roads. The male orcs were away at war, so the only field workers they saw were the womenfolk, often accompanied by their children, called imps. The little ones did small chores in the fields, like picking rocks and pulling weeds.

All along the road, and in every village they rode through, the village folk stopped what they were doing and stared at them, open mouthed with astonishment. They had simply never seen Mordor's nobility before. Or horses, for that matter.

Presently the small group crossed out of Mordor into the lands of their close ally, Near Harad. The road went through a pass in the southwest corner of the Ephel Dúath or 'Outer Fence', the Mountains of Shadow that defended Mordor from Gondor. Mordor's southern border with Near Harad was undefended except by the mountains. There was no border guard where they crossed the border, even though the road was a major highway between the two lands.

They headed due south through Near Harad to avoid South Gondor. When they entered Haradwaith, they turned southwest toward their destination, the Havens of Umbar, the city of the Corsairs.

The walled city of Umbar sat on a high bluff. It dominated the harbor below. The main road from the desert to the harbor passed through the main gate of the walled city, went through city center, and left through the harbor gate on the opposite side.

When at last they came to the Havens, they chose to follow a small footpath that wrapped around the outside of the city, in the shadow of the city walls high above them to reach the harbor through a section of the harbor wall that had fallen down and not been repaired. .

The Journey

Angmar was glad they were riding around the outside of the walls to meet the ship, rather than passing through the gates and going through city center.

He shivered at the thought of being in Umbar again. There was a public courtyard in the heart of the city where important civic and political events were held. It was the site of one of the worst days of his life, and he had no desire ever to see it again.

That awful day was thousands of years in the past, but even after all this time, Angmar had no desire to visit that cursed place again, ever. Being near Umbar, so close to the site of his Master's humiliation, was deeply upsetting to him. He looked straight ahead as he rode. His mood was grim.

Angmar rode beside Sauron as they made their way around the high walls encircling the fortified city of Umbar. Angmar was closely attuned to his Master's moods, even more so than the other Nazgûl. He was surprised when he sensed that his Master's mood was merry. Angmar looked at him questioningly, and Sauron smiled back at him.

"Do you remember last time we were here?" asked Sauron.

"As if I could ever forget." said Angmar.

"Ar-Pharazôn wanted long life more than he wanted anything in the world, and I actually had the ability to give it to him, yet somehow, the subject failed to come up." Sauron laughed.

"You'd have made him a Nazgûl?" Angmar didn't like the idea of someone he hated that much being included in their exclusive, tight-knit group.

"No, of course not. To be allowed to wear one of the Great Rings is a privilege not given lightly. I chose each of you for a reason." said Sauron. "I never would have chosen someone I didn't like, and he wasn't exactly my favorite person."

"What I meant is that I could have given him a lifespan as long as one of the early Númenorian kings. He could have lived four hundred years or more, like the Númenorians had in your day. I think he would have given anything for that. He might even have given me my freedom in trade for it. Although I no longer wanted to be released after I realized the only way I would ever be admitted to the Númenorian court was by being

carried there as a hostage. My intention was to do him in and take his place. I would have married his widowed queen, if that's what it took to make my claim on his throne legal.

He thought for a minute. "But even if I'd wanted to make the trade, it wouldn't have worked. It's not like agreeing to a prisoner exchange or paying a ransom for a stolen object, where both sides can see what they're getting in advance."

"I could have made him a lesser ring to extend his life, but he'd only have my word for it that it worked. And after I gave it to him, I'd only have his word that he'd release me. Once it was out of my hands, I wouldn't be able to break the life extending spell, so he'd still have a few hundred extra years, even if he didn't let me go.

No, a trade like that wouldn't have worked. It would have required two untrustworthy people to exchange two intangible things.

"The irony is, for someone who cared so much about long life, his association with me shortened his life considerably. He died younger than any other Númenorian king. And if he hadn't made me swear not to hurt him, he'd have died about fifty years earlier than he did." Sauron laughed. "A pity he didn't make me swear not to talk him into hurting himself.

Chapter 3 The Ship



he ship sent to meet them was tied up at the quay, waiting for them. A woman Sauron knew was aboard, and she greeted them from the deck. By listening to their conversation, Angmar learned that her name was Aiweneär ('Seagull') and that she was Sauron's female cousin.

"I don't want to leave you." pleaded Angmar. "I don't think this is safe, and I don't think you should go alone."

"Where I'm going, you can't follow." Sauron said firmly. His mind was made up, and Angmar knew he couldn't be swayed. He wouldn't even say where he was going, which Angmar found frustrating.

Sauron instructed Angmar and his personal guard to wait in Umbar city until he returned. He thought he'd be gone for two weeks, but not to worry if he was delayed, just stay put and keep waiting for him.

He left them with enough money to be comfortable while they were there. Mordor had shortages of certain things like horses, and sometimes food was in short supply when the army was large, but they mined more gold from the ground than most realms, so they had plenty of gold coins to spend in the inns and taverns when they traveled.

Sauron said goodbye to Angmar, stepped onboard the ship, and went below with Aiweneär. The tide was turning. Sailors loosed the ship's moorings and raised the sails, which billowed with the freshening breeze. The ship pulled away from the quay and turned its bow toward the setting sun. They were going into the West.

Angmar grew up on an island renowned for the skill of its shipbuilders and the daring of its mariners. His father's given name, Ciryatan, was Quenya for 'shipwright', a builder of great fleets, sailing north, south, and east. His father was also the first of the Númenorian kings to become frustrated the Ban of the Valar which prevented him from sailing west. Angmar shared his frustration. He personally had sailed to the very edge of the furthest west that the Ban allowed, and with his own eyes, had seen Tol Eressëa, the island on the easternmost edge of Valinor. That the greatest mariners of their time were kept on a short lease and not allowed to sail any further West had frustrated him his whole life.

Angmar grew up around ships and the sea. He knew everything there was to know about shipbuilding. He knew how to climb aboard a ship from just about any angle, and he knew where all the hiding places were. If he had wanted to stow away, he could have done so easily.

The Havens of Umbar are at the tip of a firth, a long, narrow bay. It took many hours to sail the length of it and emerge into the open ocean. The ship then turned south, following the coast as long as possible, and then turned West into blue water ocean, leaving all land behind. White seabirds followed their vessel, calling.

Around sunset, Sauron came up on deck and leaned against the rail, looking over the stern in the direction where Arda was still visible, but receding rapidly. He was lost in thought when Angmar joined him at the rail, crossing his arms on top of the rail in imitation of his Master. Sauron was so used to being shadowed by his second-in-command that he didn't notice him at first. Then he did, and was furious with him. Aiweneär heard the yelling and came on deck to investigate.

"It's too late to turn back. He'll just have to stay on the ship when we get there." She added, "I don't see any harm in it." Sauron was only partially mollified.

At dawn the next day, Angmar looked back at the coast of Arda, below the horizon now. His experienced navigator's eye could tell where land was, even when it was out of sight. Mountains can create clouds. Looking across a featureless sea

The Ship

and an empty sky, a sailor who spots a towering formation of cloud tinted green by the reflection of the green land beneath it knows that he's looking toward land.

Angmar would have liked to take a turn at the wheel and to help navigate, but although he asked, he was forbidden to so much as look at the charts or put a hand on the lines, not even to cleat and coil them. Angmar, a born sailor who truly loved the open ocean, found it hard to be idle while others worked the vessel. But instead, he spent the day scanning the horizon and studying the surface of the sea, noting its color and the texture of its surface, in which he could read the winds and currents.

Sauron and Aiweneär were downstairs in the Great Cabin, engaged in intense conversation which occupied them for most of the day. Aiweneär was a Maia to Yavanna. When Maiar were alone together, they would inevitably talk about Maiar stuff.

After discussing people Angmar didn't know and events he didn't understand, the conversation moved on to the Ainulindalë. The Ainulindalë was the Music of Creation⁴. The Valar and Maiar who sang in it created the world. It was the single most important event of their lives, and once they got going, they discussed it for hours and hours. For a mortal to be allowed to overhear anything about the Ainulindalë was an almost unimaginable privilege. One could learn the secrets of the creation of the world and everything in it, as well as their purpose and reason for being. Angmar knew it was important, but he could only listen to ten minutes of Ainulindalë talk before keeling over from boredom.

That's why he was up on deck now, enjoying the feel of the wind on his face and watching the sail canvas sag and then fill with a crack when the wind picked up. Being on deck was his preference, anyway.

Late in the afternoon, a great line of squalls started to form in the west, and the wind picked up noticeably. The sky was

⁴ The Ainulindalë ('Eye new LIN da lay') or Music of the Ainur, was sung by the Holy Ones when they created the Earth. It wasn't really a song, but music is the metaphor used to describe it.

still blue overhead, but it was black and threatening on the horizon in the direction they were headed. There was a flash of lightning in the clouds, and then another. The sailors began to shorten sail and secure anything loose on deck. The swells got bigger and formed whitecaps.

Angmar thought it was going to be a pretty bad storm. Ossë's storms were greatly feared by mariners. Angmar had been caught in many of them in his life, and each time he prayed to Ossë to spare them. He was praying to Ossë now.

Aiweneär came on board and assessed the weather with a worried look. Then she went to the prow of the boat and, gripping the forestay for balance, she shouted into the wind, "Hey! Ossë! Knock that crap off right now!"

She waited a few minutes. The squall line broke up and the swells settled down until there were no more whitecaps.

Angmar looked at her in astonishment. He prayed to Ossë whenever he got caught in one of Ossë's storms, but he had never, ever seen someone yell at Ossë and get results.

"How on earth did you do that?" Angmar wanted to know.

"Oh, you just have to know how to talk to him." Aiweneär said. "Plus, I used to date him before he married Uinen. I expect that's a factor."

Angmar was on deck that evening. He loved the sounds of sailing, the hiss of the prow cutting through the water, the slap of the halyards against the masts, the wind filling the sails. He turned his face into the wind, savoring the feel of it as it tangled his long black hair. All around him was pitch blackness.

There was a moon that night, but it was obscured by clouds. Had it been clear, Angmar would have recognized Tol Eressäa, the Lonely Island, when it appeared over the horizon in the West. He would have seen it pass abeam of them, and been astonished to see it left behind in their wake, far to the East.

He didn't know it, but they had just gone further West than the Ban allowed. They were in Valinor.

Chapter 4 The Beach



A few hours later, close to midnight, the ship reached its destination. There was no port city and no dock to tie up to. The pilot ran the ship aground onto a sandy beach at low tide. Angmar, sound asleep in his bunk, came suddenly awake when the ship rammed into sand. He could hear the surf and the seabirds, and feel the motion of the ship as it was lifted and then dropped onto the sand by the waves. However, the voices of the sailors told him that nobody was panicked or upset, so he guessed that running aground was just how ships were landed here.

Angmar went up on deck. Aiweneär was holding up a covered lantern. He saw two flashes in the distance, up in the dunes. Aiweneär held up her lantern and worked the cover to reply. Apparently it was a prearranged signal. Angmar guessed that the ship was guided to a safe spot on the beach with the help of the unseen lantern bearer. He also guessed that person was there to meet them and take them on the next leg of the journey. Covered lanterns and prearranged signals were something he associated with secrecy and tight security and also with careful planning. He wondered what was going on.

Angmar looked around. The cloud cover was breaking up, and he could see some of the landscape by moonlight. Up the beach to the North, he could hear the sound of a shingle beach, which had more stones than sand. The stones, lifted by incoming waves and dropped again as the waves pull out, makes a clattering sound. To the south, a significant way down the beach, there was a great stone bluff, a cliff high above the sea. Where they were, it was all wide sandy beach with sand dunes above the high tide mark. Now that his eyes had

adjusted, he could see the silhouette of a horse and wagon in the same place he'd seen the two flashes of the signal.

Sauron had come up on deck by now, not quite awake yet. He carried a bag for the things he would take with him on the final leg of the trip.

In the dim light, Angmar could make out the silhouette of a person climbing down from the wagon box. He walked over the dunes and down the beach toward them. When he was close enough that they could speak without shouting, he looked up at the deck and greeted Aiweneär by name. She greeted him by name in return.

"Just the one?"

"Yes, but he's an important one."

Aiweneär walked toward the bow of the vessel, and Sauron followed. She waited for the wave to pull out, and on her signal, they both jumped into the surf onto a sandy bottom, into water that was little more than knee deep. Easy. They waded out of the water and up the beach toward the wagon. The tide was coming in. Each wave was a little higher, and went a little further up the beach. Angmar could feel them lifting the vessel, which moved more in the waves than it had a few minutes ago. Soon they would sail.

Angmar didn't understand the significance of this place. If he had, he would never have done what he did.

He walked to the bow and jumped into the surf before anyone could stop him. The water came up to mid thigh, and surged even higher when the swells crested and broke. He waded out of the surf, his wet clothes sticking to him and flapping around his legs. The sea foam was white in the moonlight. It washed around his boots with each breaking wave and then pulled back.

Angmar had always loved the music of the breaking surf. It was as if the sea were whispered to him, calling him by name.

When he reached the hard packed sand, just below the high tide line marked by a wavy border of shells and kelp, he looked up and saw Sauron staring at him in horror. He had expected his Master to be angry, perhaps angrier than he'd ever seen him before. But he had not expected to see him in a state of mute,

The Beach

abject terror. Sauron tried to say something to him, but no words came out. Then he looked toward the dunes, as if expecting to see something come over those hills that would annihilate both of them at any moment. Then he looked back at Angmar, stricken.

Finally he got over the shock enough to be able to speak again. "Do you know where you are? You are standing on the very spot where Ar-Pharazôn first set foot in Aman, when he landed here to invade Valinor."

The man from the wagon, a Maia of Aulë whose name was Celebtan ('Silversmith'), walked over and joined them. "No, you're mistaken." He looked down the beach and pointed toward the rocky bluff to the South. "The spot where Ar-Pharazôn landed is at least three hundred feet south of here. Those are the cliffs that collapsed and entombed him."

They stood still for a few minutes, waiting. Nothing happened. The ban prohibited any mortal man from setting foot on these shores. In theory, the Valar should have descended and wiped him out, but in practice, the Valar weren't paying attention and didn't know they were there. Aiweneär asked Sauron, "Didn't you tell me your servant is immortal as long as he's wearing a ring you gave him? And he's wearing it right now? There's your legal loophole."

"Technically, he's not immortal, he's undead," said Sauron.

Celebtan shrugged and said, "Well, he's here now. He might as well come along."

He suddenly remembered something important. "Wait." He pulled out a badge embroidered with the Eagle of Manwë, which he pinned to Sauron's tunic. "This says you have immunity from arrest. You must wear it until you leave Aman, and are far enough away that you can no longer see Tol Eressëa. Even when you are sleeping, you must wear pin it to your nightshirt."

With that, he told Sauron and Angmar to climb into the wagon bed and lie down. He covered them with blankets, and then with hay. The two Maiar climbed up into the wagon box. Celebtan shook the reins, and began a journey across country that lasted until the sky began to lighten in the east.

Chapter 5 The Barn



They traveled until the sky began to lighten to the grey twilight of predawn, finally arriving at a small village. A dozen small cottages lined a single narrow street. There were no lights on yet, and no people were awake and stirring.

The most prominent dwelling in the village was a huge manor house at the end of a long driveway, with expansive grounds around it. The Mansions of Aulë.

The wagon drove through the wrought iron gates. Angmar couldn't see anything from under the blanket and hay, but there was an ominous yellow sign on each half. Bold letters proclaimed, "This Dwelling is Under Quarantine. You may Enter, but you may not leave." The others were unconcerned about it. They entered.

Celebtan stepped down from the wagon box to pull the gates shut and secure them. He climbed back up and drove up the driveway and into the barn, where he again climbed down and closed and barred the barn doors.

Aiweneär called out to them, "All right, boys. You can come out now."

They climbed out. Angmar looked around. There were at least a dozen horses stabled there, and farm equipment and tools. They stood in the middle of a large open space where the wagon was parked.

"Help me take the harness off the horse and get him and the wagon put away." Celebtan told them. Angmar assumed all the servants must be asleep, which was reasonable at this hour. Or that every aspect of their journey was being conducted in such secrecy that even the household servants weren't allowed

The Barn

to know they were there. That would be consistent with everything else he'd seen so far.

"Put on these cloaks and cover your faces. We're only walking a short distance to the house, and nobody's up yet, but let's not take any chances of you being seen." Aiweneär handed each of them a heavy wool cloak.

Angmar noticed Sauron glance at the back wall of the barn in front of the wagon. A shadow passed over his face. Angmar guessed that he was remembering something unpleasant.

He asked him, "What's the significance of the barn wall?"

"Nothing." Sauron replied, too quickly.

Celebтан said, "Are you going to tell him, or shall I?"

"It's nothing important." Sauron said. "I stood there with my hands against that wall and received the worst beating of my life. That's all."

"Aulë beat you?" Angmar asked in astonishment. In the time and place where he grew up, children were lectured but not beaten. He'd been even further protected by his royal blood.

"Like a drum. It's no big deal. It was our custom at the time, and we thought nothing of it." Sauron shrugged.

"What had you done?" Angmar asked, still appalled.

"The worst thing I'd ever done. I stayed out far past curfew and came home knee-walking drunk."

Angmar blinked in surprise at hearing his Master describe coming home drunk as the worst thing he'd ever done. Compared to, say, having his former best friend tortured to death. Or requiring the conquered peoples of Eriador to worship him as a God and offer him human sacrifice. Or cutting down the White Tree and having it burned. Or ... it was not a short list.

"I wouldn't have said coming home drunk was all that bad." Angmar observed politely.

"It is when you're underage. But that wasn't what I was punished for. Aulë brought me into his office and asked me about it. I said I went to bed early and never left the house. That was my big mistake, looking him in the eye and lying to his face. He already knew the truth from other sources and

considered me lying to him a slap in the face. So he said, 'Let's go to the barn.' Normally it would have been, 'Let's go the woodshed.' where he would have taken off his belt and used it on me. I couldn't imagine why we were going to the barn. Until we got there, and he picked up a horsewhip." Sauron was silent, remembering. "The thing is, I now know that I could have said, 'I don't want to talk about it.' and he would have let it go at that."

Celebтан told Angmar, "It was the worst beating Aulë ever gave anyone. He gave him stripes from neck to ankle. He actually beat him unconscious. The apprentices here still talk about it, even now."

"You're exaggerating." Sauron said. "He didn't beat me unconscious. I fainted. There's a difference."

"What's the difference?" Aiweneär asked.

"When we were walking to the barn, I was scared. I was hyperventilating. Then, when I was standing against the wall, I held my breath because I was stubborn and was determined not to cry out."

"You, stubborn?" thought Angmar sarcastically. "You have single-handedly cornered the market on stubborn."

"He told me to reach up and put my hands against the wall." Sauron said. "It turns out that if you hyperventilate and then hold your breath with your hands over your head, you'll pass out in less than a minute. But I didn't know that, then. Passing out had nothing to do with the stripes."

"In Yavanna's household it was different." said Aiweneär. "I'm one of Yavanna's people, and she never laid a finger on any of us. But if we did something, there'd be lectures. She'd let you know she was disappointed. You'd apologize, but the matter wasn't over. The guilt could go on for weeks. Even worse, sometimes you wouldn't even know she thought you'd do something wrong, you'd just sense it. Some of your responsibilities would be taken away. You'd be excluded from her inner circle. But nothing would be said. There was this tension, with no way to resolve it."

"I was actually jealous of Aulë's people. When one of the boys, they were mostly boys, got in trouble, Aulë confronted

them right away. He told them what they'd done wrong, then punished them in proportion to the offense. Then it was over, the offense forgotten. Forgiveness was immediate and complete. So even if the boy ate his supper standing at the mantelpiece that night, and I hear it happened a lot, he didn't feel ill-used."

Celebtan added, "Except that Aulë held Mairon to a higher standard than the others, and beat him for minor infractions that would pass unnoticed in the others. Later, Aulë believed that was why Mairon left him, and he blamed himself."

"That is not why I left." Sauron looked annoyed. "Aulë beat me because I deserved it. I never held it against him for being tough."

"Hey, Mairon, do you know what I'm noticing?" Aiweneär said. "When you should get mad at Aulë, you don't. Instead, you find a way to explain it away, or make it your fault instead of his. And when I point it out to you, you get mad at me for criticizing Aulë and jump all over me."

Chapter 6 The Front Hall



With the two Maiar who brought them here leading the way, they walked the short distance to the house, all four of them wrapped in cloaks with the hoods pulled low over their faces. The path, of gravel and crushed shells crunched beneath their feet. The sun would rise soon and birds were singing, but other than that, there was no sound. The grass and shrubbery were wet with dew. Their shoes and the hems of their cloaks quickly became damp.

From what little Angmar could tell in the pre-dawn light, the house was huge, a country manor house that housed many people run by a large and efficient staff. He was used to the heroic scale of architecture on Númenor, but even he thought this house was large. It was made of stone, with construction and detail work of very high quality.

The house was surrounded by lawns and gardens that stretched off into the distance. They reached the house and mounted broad stone steps leading to the formal front entrance, where a recessed alcove with stone benches built into either side framed a pair of tall wooden doors decorated with ornamental iron work, the finest Angmar had ever seen. The doors bore the same yellow sign as the gate. "This Dwelling is Under Quarantine. You may enter, but you may not leave." Angmar looked at Celebtan questioningly, as if to say, "Is this really a good idea?", but he was more focused on getting the visitors inside and out of sight.

Aiweneär explained about the quarantine signs. "Don't worry about it. It's one of our security measures, a ruse. It's to protect the fugitives visiting here during the Reunion. They all

The Front Hall

have immunity from arrest, but we aren't taking any chances. People can come here to visit, but they can't leave with the news that fugitives are being harbored here. They won't be allowed to leave until after all the fugitives have left and gotten far enough away to be beyond reach."

Celebtañ opened one the heavy door. Again, Angmar was surprised he didn't knock and wait for a servant to open it, but there seemed to be no servants about at this hour. They followed Celebtañ into the formal Front Hall.

Angmar looked around while he turned and secured the front door by fastening the lock. It was a grand room, appropriate to the scale of the house and the importance of its owner. The hall was paneled entirely in warm colored wood, carved in patterns of stars, geometric patterns, and leaves and vines.

To one side of the grand staircase was a panel of particular importance. It was ornately bordered and filled with writing. Angmar looked more closely. It was a list of names. At the top, in large letters, was the name Yavanna. In smaller letters, and indented a little, were twelve or fifteen names below hers. Four or five names down, he saw Aiwendil, Radagast's real name. Just below it was Aiweneär. Angmar guessed they were listed either by age or rank.

They walked across the room toward a side door. When they went passed it, Angmar noticed a matching panel on the opposite side of the staircase. In large letters at the top, it said Aulë. Fifteen or so names in smaller letters were listed below Aulë's name. Angmar saw Sauron glance at the panel, and then saw him stagger. Then Sauron looked away, his eyes straight ahead, a muscle in his jaw twitching.

Angmar looked at the panel again. The second name on the list was Curumo, Saruman's real name. The first name had been scratched out. Not just carefully carved away, but hacked and mutilated in anger. Score lines from the chisel went far beyond the original length of the name, which was still legible. Mairon.

Chapter 7 The Cellar



he door on the side of the Front Hall led to a long passage way reaching all the way to the back of the house. A door at its end opened onto the kitchens and servants hall. She went in and motioned for them to follow. The servants hall had big, comfortable rooms, furnished simply, with sturdy tables for kitchen work. A long wooden table, where the servants sat to eat, stretched the length of the room against the back window. Plain wooden benches were arranged by either side of the table. There were a few chairs and stools in the room, but Angmar guessed that servants stood most of the time, except at meals. Still, it was a comfortable space. The room was warm, it smelled of cooking, and its rustic appearance was domestic and homey.

Angmar wondered why they were being shown this part of the house. He'd played in the kitchens as a child, but never entered those spaces once he was grown. It wasn't his place, and it upset the servants if a nobleman invaded their space.

Aiweneär lit a lamp, and led them to a door leading to steps down to the cellars. Before descending the steps, she said, "I apologize for the primitive accommodations. We have a great many people who've come from all corners of Ea to attend this Reunion. Half a dozen people came from even further away than you have. We've tried to make due. The boys laid in a huge supply of wood and canvas, and made enough folding cots for everyone, we hope. You'll be sleeping barracks-style in the cellar, boys and girls together. That means be considerate of the others and don't sleep in the nude. Even if you do it at home, don't do it here."

The Cellar

They went downstairs. She set the lamp on a stone ledge, to give them enough light to pick out folded cots from a stack and wool blankets from another stack. Every bit of floor space in the cellar was occupied by cots holding sleeping bodies. There was some snoring, but mostly just the slow breathing of people sleeping. The only available floor space for additional cots was near the foot of the stair, so she had them set up there. Tossing each of them a pillow, she bade them good night and left, ascending the cellar stair to go to her own more comfortable bedroom.

Angmar was appalled by being housed in the cellar among the kitchen servants, although Sauron seemed content with the arrangements. But then, their expectations were different. Sauron often said, "Your idea of luxury is palaces with scores of servants. Mine is sleeping indoors." He wasn't kidding, either. Sauron said that the greatest improvement to his standard of living occurred when they went from Paleolithic to Neolithic, when they gave up following the wild animal herds and learned to farm and, drum roll please, to build permanent dwellings. Angmar, who was close to five thousand years old, had trouble even imagining how old Sauron really was. Angmar imagined asking his Master, "What was it like when you were young?" and being told, "We were very excited about the invention of fire."

Sauron stripped off his outer clothing, leaving on a thin shirt that fell to mid-thigh. He transferred the immunity badge from his tunic to his shirt. Folding his outer clothes carefully, he piled them at the foot of his cot beside his bag. Then he lay down with an arm across his eyes and was almost instantly asleep. Angmar followed suit, stripping down to his shirt and piling his clothes at the foot of his cot. He'd had enough presence of mind to bring along a courier bag with enough clothes for a few days, which stayed with him through all his unauthorized adventures, first stowing away and then jumping onto the beach from the ship.

Angmar thought he'd barely closed his eyes when he heard a woman's voice calling them. He later learned her name was Mircaewen ('Jewel in the Earth'), a Maia of Aulë. "Time to get

up, boys, if you want breakfast. Its mid-morning, and we're about to put things away."

No sunlight reached the cellar and Angmar had slept five or six hours without stirring. He must have been tired, because even though he'd always been a light sleeper, he hadn't stirred when the others in the makeshift dormitory got up and dressed, or later when they walked around in the kitchen directly over his head.

Angmar got up and put on his clothes. He sat on the cot and pulled on his boots, dry but stiff from the seawater he'd waded in yesterday. No, earlier today.

Sauron, on the other hand, was a very sound sleeper, so it was no surprise that he didn't stir when the woman came downstairs to wake them. Angmar shook his Master's shoulder to wake him. Sauron opened his eyes, taking a moment to remember where he was. Then he got up and pulled on yesterday's clothes over the shirt he'd slept in, remembering to transfer the immunity badge to his tunic.

Chapter 8 The Kitchen



They followed Mircaewen up the cellar stairs to the kitchens. Makeshift cheesecloth blackout curtains covered the lower half of all of the windows. That was another security measure. It prevented anyone outside from seeing the fugitives. Without the curtains, they would have had to stay in the cellar for the duration of the reunion.

The long table was full. Angmar recognized Saruman and Radagast among the people sitting on the benches, visitors like themselves. Angmar also noticed many curious eyes on Sauron. Apparently he was something of a celebrity.

Mircaewen told them, "Breakfast is nothing fancy. We have bread and butter, there's cheese if you want it, and we still have some coffee left. Everything's on the sideboard. Help yourselves, and wash up when you're finished."

Angmar finally asked, "Don't you have servants to do all that?"

Sauron looked surprised. "Of course we have servants. This is the servants hall." He indicated everybody in the room, including himself. "We are the servants."

"But everybody in the room is a Maia." said Angmar. "The Holy Ones. Sacred beings who sang in the Ainulindalë and created the world. Not ordinary domestic servants."

"Maia means Servant." Sauron explained. "Everyone here in the servants hall is someone like me."

"It doesn't bother you, being a servant?" Angmar asked.

"No, of course not. I was created to be a servant to a Vala. It's the natural order of things. I've never minded." he said. "It was leading armies and calling myself 'Lord' that didn't feel

natural at first. Although I did manage to get used to it, eventually." He laughed.

Angmar considered what he'd heard. If a dozen or more people, each similar to his Master, were the household servants of a Vala, he couldn't even imagine how powerful a Vala must be. The stories about Valar ripping mountains out of the earth and throwing them at each other, of destroying whole continents when they fought, suddenly seemed plausible. Angmar also had a new appreciation for his Master's fear of them, given that he was on their bad side.

They fixed plates and sat down at the long table. As they ate, Angmar listened to fragments of conversation among various people in the servants hall. He was surprised to learn that Mircaewen was Sauron's oldest sister. Angmar thought she was mouthy and vulgar, and he didn't like the way she talked to him. She teased him a lot, and some of the things she said to him were pretty crude. But Angmar also noticed how relaxed Sauron was around her, and that she made him laugh.

When they finished breakfast, Sauron picked up his plate and Angmar's, and took them to the sink to wash. Angmar jumped to his feet. There was no way he would allow his Master to wait on him, but Sauron told him to sit down. One of the others asked, "Why are you waiting on your own servant? Shouldn't he be waiting on you?"

"He is my servant, but not the kind that waits on me. He's a great general who leads my armies. He's my chief advisor. And if anything happens to me, he'll be the next Dark Lord." Sauron explained, "Angmar was born into the upper reaches of the aristocracy. No, that's an understatement. He was born into the royal family of Númenor, the highest civilization in Arda, and the mightiest. He does not do menial labor. I forbid it."

"But you *do* do menial labor?"

"Sure. Not a problem." Sauron replied.

Sauron was a snob about the pedigree of his most powerful servants. Virtually all of them were nobility, and in a few cases, royalty. He did not allow them to work with their hands, or to do menial labor of any kind. On the other hand, he thought of

himself as working class, and didn't feel that his prohibitions against menial labor for his captains applied to himself.

After breakfast was put away, Sauron disappeared into the washroom to rinse off the dust of travel. He came back in clean clothes, the best he brought along on the trip. Sauron hadn't talked to Aulë since he'd left him to follow Melkor. A lot had happened since then. Aulë had disowned him, for one. Sauron was understandably nervous about the upcoming interview. He dealt with his anxiety by focusing on the preparations.

At the moment, Angmar was trying to shave his Master with a straight razor. Sauron was seated in a straight backed chair, slid forward on the seat, with the back of his neck on the chair back. His head was tipped back and his hands were folded in his lap. The chair had been moved close to the window to take advantage of the bright sunlight.

"If you want me to do this, you can't talk. Or fidget." Angmar said, exasperated.

"You know, if you assumed an Elvish form like the rest of us, you wouldn't need to shave in the first place." observed Mircaewen. "Or, if you insisted on keeping your Mannish form, you could wear a close-trimmed beard in the Númenorian style. Either way, it would be less work."

She may have had an elvish form, but privately, Angmar didn't think there was anything even remotely elvish about Mircaewen, other than being tall. She was plump, and her hands were red and raw from hard work. He could easily imagine her standing around with the other farm wives, talking about chickens and making crude observations about their husbands. There wasn't a thing about her that was refined or highborn.

Saruman was still reacting to what Sauron said earlier about the succession. Saruman was Sauron's next-of-kin. He'd just assumed he was Sauron's heir, without anything having been said. He hadn't known that Sauron had named the Witch King of Angmar as his heir instead. Saruman wanted to be the next Dark Lord. He wanted to claim the Ring and wield it. He resented it that his brother chose a Nazgûl as his successor rather than himself.

"I'm surprised you let your second-in-command shave you." said Saruman, far too casually. "I mean, think about it. He was already your most powerful servant. Then you gave him the a ring which doubled his power and made him immortal. From what I hear, you allow him almost complete free will. And just recently, you declared him your heir." Saruman studied his fingernails casually. "I don't know, I just find it interesting that you let him hold a straight razor to your throat like that, given that, if there's anyone among your people who has a reason to assassinate you, it's him."

Sauron abruptly shoved Angmar's hand away. Angmar stepped back, his feelings badly hurt. Then Sauron doubled over and sneezed.

"Bright sunlight." he explained. "It makes me sneeze."

He leaned back again. "Okay, I'm better. Continue." Except that Angmar couldn't, because Sauron had a very hard time going for any length of time without talking. True to form, Sauron looked right at Saruman and said,

"Oh, and by the way, my most trusted advisor and heir has a name. It's Tindomul, son of Ciryatan." ("Twilight Son, son of Shipwright") he said, indicating Angmar.

A group of Maiar were sitting at the kitchen table were the morning light was good, working at various small chores. Sauron was trying to repair a delicate piece of machinery made from complex brass parts that were rather small. He had taken it apart and laid the pieces out methodically on a folded white cloth so they wouldn't roll away and get lost. He'd arranged the little brass screws by size and lined them up in neat rows, perfectly vertical with the heads at the top. In spite of all the care he took, it wasn't going well. He had just dropped the same tiny screw for the third time, and now he couldn't find it. He sat with his hands clenching the edges of the bench, taking deep breaths, trying to calm down.

Saruman said, "Take a break, I can take over." Saruman was much better than Sauron with small, delicate work. His approach was patient, deliberate, and careful, where Sauron's approach was often one of becoming impatient, getting angry, and applying more force than necessary.

The Kitchen

Sauron slid over on the bench to make room for him, which put him at the edge of a group of Aulë's apprentices, people he knew when he was young. There had brought in an armload of harnesses and bridles to repair. Normally that work would be done in the Forge, but they weren't supposed to be out there during the quarantine. Sauron picked up the broken buckle from a piece of harness. He dipped a rag in machine oil and began to clean it, nonchalantly eavesdropping on their conversation while pretending he wasn't paying attention.

Celebтан, Aulë's apprentice who met them at the beach with the wagon, was in the middle of a story. "You know my friend who's one of Namo's people? Well, I was talking with him a few days ago. He said that someone dared them to spend a night in Melkor's old cell. Only a few of Namo's people have ever seen it. My friend wasn't one of them, and he thought this was the only way he'd ever get to see it. Luckily Namo got wind of the plan and put a stop to the overnight part, but he still took them down there to have a look.

"You know how Mandos means Prison Fortress⁵? The prison is in the basement. You go through a guard room to reach a corridor going back to the cells. The ordinary prison cells are small square rooms, stone walled and windowless, with a stone bench for sitting or sleeping on, and a bucket for a privy. Each cell had a heavy wooden door with an iron lock and a small barred window for the guard to look through.

"At the end of the corridor was a closed door. Behind it was a steep, narrow stair that went deep below the basements. At the foot of the stair, there was a short hallway that led to a heavy door, locked and barred. This door was different than the ones on the cells upstairs. It was made of iron, the barred window was smaller and covered by a metal plate, and the lock was made of steel. Namo told us the lock was Aulë's work, and couldn't be defeated by force or enchantment.

"Namo warned them never, ever to go in the cell without someone standing outside, because the door was designed to

⁵ Mandos (mand = prison, os = fortress (see also Angband, ang = iron, band = prison)

swing shut and lock itself. Even if someone had the key in his hand, there's no keyhole on the inside of the door, and he would be trapped.

"Namo slid back the metal cover over the barred window and invited them to look in. My friend said there was nothing to see inside but liquid blackness. Namo produced a key, unlocked the door, and held it open for us. Someone stood in the doorway and held up a lamp.

"The cell was cut into the living rock. It was the same width as the cells upstairs, but longer. An iron portcullis divided the cell in half and created a cage in the back half of the cell. The cell was absolutely bare. The only features he saw were iron rings sunk into the walls and floor as attachment points for chains, and a hole in the floor. He said he could tell this cell was made for a really, really dangerous prisoner, because there was a line on the floor warning you to stay at least arms' reach away from the portcullis. An almost tangible evil clung to the place, as though it were still haunted by the presence of its last inhabitant. It was completely creepy. He said they couldn't get out of there fast enough."

Although he never let on that he was listening, Sauron had nightmares about that cell for years afterwards. His Master had been imprisoned there for three long ages, and he knew that if his own luck went bad, he would go there too.

Late in the morning, Angmar saw the Maiar look at each other restlessly. All conversation stopped. Apparently they sensed the presence of one of the Valar coming in the direction of the servants hall.

The door opened, and they all rose to their feet. When a tall woman with long black hair and a green dress entered the room, they all bowed their heads. Angmar didn't know it, but it was she who gave Khamûl the letter. And while Khamûl had spoken to her respectfully and done as she asked, it was nothing compared to the deference shown to her by the Maiar of the household, her Maiar and Aulë's both.

She spoke. "Your attention please! Aulë wishes to speak with each of you, one at a time, throughout the day. When the messenger comes to fetch you, please be ready to drop

The Kitchen

anything and come upstairs right away." She spoke to one of Sauron's sisters, one of the younger ones. "You will be first. You can go up now."

"Thank you, Mistress." She curtsied low, and headed for the servants' staircase.

Yavanna saw Sauron, and walked over to him.

"Mistress?" He'd bowed his head like the others when she came in, but now he lifted it and met her eye.

"Nothing yet. I'm still trying." Yavanna said.

"Thank you, Mistress." He bowed low.

Angmar had never seen his Master acting subservient toward anybody. He witnessed him feign submission towards Ar-Pharazôn when he was captured, but this was real. Angmar felt strange about it.

Throughout the day, the messenger comes into the kitchen and informs one Maia or another that their presence was required upstairs in Aulë's study. Each time the messenger appeared, Sauron looked up expectantly, and then was disappointed when someone else was summoned. Invitations went to the Maiar of both Aulë and Yavanna.

Toward late afternoon, when almost everyone had had a turn, some people were called up a second time. Angmar knew that Sauron was beginning to worry, although he made an effort not to show it.

Chapter 9 The Herald of Manwë



Late in the day, Yavanna came into the kitchen a second time. She was followed by a visitor, a pleasant featured young man with yellow hair and a kind face. No introductions were made because everybody already knew who he was. "That's one of the things I don't like about being here." Angmar thought. "I keep feeling like I've come in during the middle of a story. I don't know who anyone is, and I don't know any of the background story."

Aiweneär, the one who had been with them on the ship, understood this. She pointed out various people to him, and explained who they were. She leaned over to Angmar and whispered, "That's Eönwë, the Herald of Manwë. He carries Manwë's standard into battle. The Standard Bearers are the most powerful of the Maiar, and the most ancient. Some say they're actually Valar. It might even be true. Standard Bearers sometimes have a few Maiar of their own as servants, and that's part of the definition of a Vala.

Eönwë had to make a substantial investment of time to visit Sauron. He could enter the house easily, but once inside, he couldn't leave because of the quarantine. The fugitives had to be safely away before anyone who had seen them was allowed to leave. Of course Eönwë knew ahead of time Sauron would be in Aman, even before Sauron arrived. Manwë had been informed, and because Eönwë was Manwë's aide-de-camp, Eönwë knew too. But he was still bound by quarantine rules, and couldn't leave the house for the next three or four days. It was a measure of the strength of his past bond with Sauron,

and the importance he attached to it that he came to see him at all.

Sauron greeted Eönwë warmly. He was about to step forward and embrace him, but there was a coldness in Eönwë's eyes, a stiffness in his posture. Sauron hesitated.

They hadn't seen each other since the end of the First Age, just after the War of Wrath. Eönwë commanded Sauron to turn himself into Manwë to receive justice and pardon, but Sauron failed to show up. He then went on to commit even worse crimes than the ones he would have been tried for the first time around.

Angmar watched Sauron closely. He could tell that he felt crushed. Sauron had so many things he had wanted to say to Eönwë, so much catching up to do. He stood there silently, trying to think of how to get Eönwë talking so he wouldn't turn on his heel and leave, but he couldn't think of anything.

Believing he only had a few minutes left with Eönwë at most, he asked him the question he's been carrying around for the last two Ages. "Eönwë, please. I need to know. What happened to Melkor at the end?" Eönwë had led the Host of Valar that shattered the fortress of Angband and hunted Melkor down like an animal. For all Sauron knew, Eönwë had been the one who swung the sword and struck the blow that finished him.

Eönwë considered the request. He was angry with Sauron for going Dark, and for failing to take what had been a very generous offer, the best opportunity for pardon he was ever likely to receive. The offer was better than Sauron deserved. It had been made only because Eönwë liked him. When Sauron didn't take it, Eönwë felt like he had been slapped in the face.

Eönwë began to talk. He described in clinical detail what had happened, making it more graphic than necessary to tell the story, because he was mad at Sauron and wanted to punish him.

Angmar looked at Sauron. All Sauron's attention was fixed on Eönwë, listening to his story. His face was white. Eönwë held his gaze, his eyes cold and angry. Eönwë had just gotten to the part where they chased Melkor into the furthest corner of

deepest sub-dungeons of Angband, the moment when Melkor realized he was trapped. That it was over. How he threw down his weapons, flung himself at their feet, and pleaded for mercy. The panic in his eyes when he realized there would be no mercy. How he tried to get up and run, but a great two-handed sword took him down and he fell, hard. Unable to get up, he knew he was finished, but there was not a single thing he could do about it. He lay on the floor, sobbing.

Sauron was holding onto the edge of a table. His knuckles were white, his eyes were closed, and he seemed to be having trouble breathing.

Eönwë started to describe how, when he approached Melkor, he stepped over part of a boot with a foot still in it. Without a sound, Sauron crumpled to the floor, going down like a tower whose foundations had just collapsed. Angmar immediately started to go to him, but Eönwë was faster, circling the table more rapidly than Angmar thought possible, and kneeling beside his friend. The coldness was gone from his eyes, replaced by worry and guilt.

Others in the servants hall quickly became aware that something interesting was happening, and came over to watch. Soon a crowd formed around Sauron's unconscious form. Someone went to fetch Yavanna, who as the Lady of the house, was responsible for the health and wellbeing of all its inhabitants. She came into the kitchen carrying a small box of medical supplies. The crowd parted enough to let her in, and she knelt beside Sauron.

"What happened?" Yavanna asked no one in particular.

"I told him how Melkor died, and I made it really graphic." Eönwë said miserably.

"That would do it." she said. She had known Sauron all his life. "Talk of blood or injuries makes him faint."

She took a vial from her box, removed the cork, and held it in his face. He gasped and tried to twist away. His eyelids fluttered.

"He'll be fine." said Yavanna. "Just don't let him get up right away."

She turned to Eönwë, looking at him sternly. "And no more gory stories."

"Yes Ma'am." Eönwë looked contrite.

Eönwë sat with Sauron until Sauron felt ready to get up. When he was, Eönwë helped him to his feet. They walked over to a quiet part of the room and sat on the floor together, leaning against the wall.

Angmar felt more than a little put out, seeing Eönwë effortlessly usurp Angmar's place as Sauron's protector and best friend. Probably Eönwë wasn't even aware he'd shoved Angmar aside and taken his place.

Angmar watched them together. Eönwë touched Sauron's Badge of Immunity, and the corners of his mouth twitched. He leaned over and whispered something into Sauron's ear, and they both started to laugh. In a moment they were howling with laughter, bent over double and slapping their thighs.

Angmar walked over and asked them, "What was so funny?" "Oh, you had to have been there." Sauron was grinning. Eönwë was still laughing, wiping tears from his eyes. Sauron looked at Eönwë. "Go on. You tell the story." Eönwë held his face very still, as though he were guarding a secret.

Sauron looked at Eönwë, and said very seriously, "I release you from your oath."

Eönwë still wouldn't say anything.

Sauron said, "All right, I'll tell the story. During the First Age, Eönwë was captured and held prisoner in Angband. I helped him escape, which, among other things, involved trading clothes. Dressed like me, he got away from Angband easily, but he had to return to his own camp wearing my clothes, which meant that he was wearing Melkor's badge on his shoulder. I bet that gave people the wrong impression!"

"Awkward!" Eönwë agreed.

"Anyway, we were laughing because the Immunity Badge I have to wear is based on Manwë's badge. I feel weird about wearing it, given it's the badge of Melkor's most bitter foe." Sauron explained to Angmar. "So Eönwë tapped it and whispered, 'Turn About is Fair Play.' And I knew exactly what he was talking about."

Angmar wandered off while Sauron and Eönwë talked, catching up on half a lifetime spent apart from each other. Aiweneär saw him standing by himself, and came over to talk to him.

“Isn’t that cute?” she said. “The Standard Bearers are sitting together.”

“Those two are both Standard Bearers?” asked Angmar.

“Yes. Eönwë carries Manwë’s standard, and Mairon carried Melkor’s. Among the Maiar, The Standard Bearers are special. There are four of them, Eönwë, Ilmarë, Ossë, and Mairon. They’re the most powerful Maiar, and they serve the most powerful Valar. It’s interesting that those two have been best friends their whole lives.”

“They’re exactly the same age, which means they’re exactly equal in personal power. It’s also said of them that they’re ‘cut from the same cloth.’ I’m sure you’ve noticed they have the same presence.” Angmar had noticed. When he sensed his Master’s presence, he looked up and saw Eönwë instead. It was unsettling.

“Neither one can sense the other’s presence, because their own presence masks the presence of the other. Or at least, that’s the excuse Eönwë gave for not finding Mairon in the ruins of Angband, the day Tulkas pulled Melkor from of the ruins of Utumno.

“Why do you say they’re cut from the same cloth? They have very different personalities.” said Angmar.

“Some aspects of their personalities are different, like good vs. evil, patient vs. impatient, kind vs. cruel.” she said. “But I think the similarities are more important. They have similar age, power, and presence. In addition, they’re both highly intelligent. They stood together during the Ainulindalë and both of them paid attention, which is said to be the source of their wisdom. They’re both the Responsible One in their respective households. They’re both intensely loyal to their master. They both have great physical courage, and both have a larger than life quality.

“They’re cut from the same cloth, but they came from very different parts of the pattern. Eönwë came from the part that’s

fair and uncomplicated, while Mairon came from the part that's dark and complex.

"Is that unusual?" asked Angmar. "Are there any others who are 'cut from the same cloth'?"

"I can think of half a dozen. Like, Oh! Here's an example. Melkor and Aulë. One is rebellious and one is obedient, but they both have a drive to create new life, which is forbidden to the Valar. They also have the same presence, and they were best friends too, when they were young.

Angmar wandered back to the quiet spot where Eönwë and Sauron were sitting on the floor and leaning against the wall, talking. Angmar listened to them without seeming to.

"I don't know. When he came back, he was different somehow. Before, if I had to describe him with one word, it would have been Exuberant. After, it would have been Grim. I don't know that I ever heard him laugh again." Sauron looked at the floor, remembering. "At some point, I started to wonder if his grip on reality was looser than it should be. No, that was disloyal of me. Forget I even said it." Eönwë listened without interrupting, patient and uncritical.

Yavanna's First Maia Rilaiseth ('Crown of Leaves') who was in charge of the kitchen called out the chore assignments after dinner. "Handmaidens, clear the table. Istari, bring in some firewood from outside. Standard Bearers, dishes don't wash themselves!"

With so many visitors present, and all Maiar accustomed to helping with chores, there were many extra hands available to do the ordinary work of the household. The chores got done earlier than usual, leaving the Maiar with unexpected free time on their hands.

The Standard Bearers had returned to their quiet spot against the wall and were once again deep in conversation. Angmar saw one of Yavanna's Maiar walk purposefully up to them. She had been drinking, and her manner was aggressive and rude. Angmar later learned her name was Penithurin ('Hidden One'). She wore an immunity badge on her shoulder which marked her as one of the fugitives. Angmar wondered what she'd done.

She had a question for Eönwë. “You know how, whenever there’s a really crap job that one of the Valar wants done, it’s one of us that has to do it? Like when Yavanna decides to put down an animal that’s really suffering, and then she gets Aiwendil to do it?” Radagast overheard her, and nodded in confirmation. He looked miserable, thinking about it.

“Well, it seems to me that you, Eönwë, are going to get the worst crap job of all, sometime in the foreseeable future.” Eönwë didn’t need to be told. He knew what it was, and had been careful not think about it ever since he arrived.

“Someday, your little friend here is going to make a mistake, and he’s going to get caught. And Manwë will decide to have him killed⁶ rather than make him stand trial. And do you think Manwë’s going to do the deed himself? No, I didn’t think so either. So who do you think he’s going to foist it off on? Clever boy! Right on the first guess!”

Eönwë looked sick. Sauron reached over and patted him on the arm. “I’m okay with it. Really.” He looked at Eönwë and told him, “If it comes to that, if you have to do it, I give you my permission.”

Later, Angmar asked Sauron how he could possibly be okay with having Eönwë as his executioner. He answered, “Several reasons. He’s skilled. He won’t botch the job, so I won’t suffer. Secondly, he won’t enjoy doing it. There are some who would. They’d gloat. They’d make the moment before starting last longer than necessary. They’d do it slowly and twist the knife. But the bad part is, if Eönwë ends up it doing it, I won’t suffer, but he will. I don’t want that.” He fell silent for several minutes, trying to decide to do the right thing. “I doubt the situation will come up, but if it does, I’ll ask that he be released from the task.”

Another woman walked up to them, holding two wooden spoons. “Just as a purely intellectual exercise, what would happen if the two of you faced each other in single combat, and

⁶ “Killed” in this context refers to the physical body. The fëa (spirit) of an immortal creature cannot be killed, but the hröa (body) can be. This method of execution involves separating the fëa from the hröa before sending the fëa into the Void.

Eönwë defeated Mairon? I mean, what would happen next? I'm not trained in arms and haven't been to war, so I really don't know." She tossed each of them a spoon. "The bowl is the hilt, and the handle is the blade."

They looked at each other, grinned, and decided to humor her. Everyone in the room was bored, and nothing much else was happening.

Eönwë and Mairon stood up and faced each other, in the posture of swordsmen. Both were right handed, and they were the same height and build. They represented Aman vs. Arda, Fair vs. Dark, Good vs. Evil.

The swordsmen looked equally matched, but Angmar knew his Master was only an average swordsman, who relied on brute force rather than skill. He didn't lack courage, he just lacked ability. Angmar reflected that a blacksmith can be good at making swords, but less good at wielding them.

Angmar was an excellent swordsman, one of the best. There was a time when he used to spar with his Master in practice, but they were mismatched in ability, so Angmar preferred not to spar with him anymore. It was embarrassing. And he just learned Eönwë was the single greatest swordsman on the planet. On the other hand, he reflected, how much trouble can you get into with kitchen spoons?

The two swordsmen saluted each other, the ancient formal gesture that signals the start of single combat. The match began. They circled each other, crouched and menacing. Each extended a spoon handle in their right hand, and held the left hand out to the side for balance. A crowd began to gather again, although this time they stood well back to allow the combatants room to move. Each swordsman's eyes took in everything about his opponent, particularly the sword hand of the other. Angmar noticed that Eönwë also watched his opponent's foot, looking for the twitch that precedes a lunge.

Then it began. Lunge, thrust, parry, thrust, counter parry. Blows that sliced the air where their opponent had just been. Advance and retreat. Angmar watched his Master's face, entirely focused, carefully neutral, emotions masked. It was the

look of Sauron at his most dangerous. Eönwë's expression was exactly the same.

All too soon it was over. Feint, thrust, and then Eönwë parried a blow that sent Sauron's weapon spinning across the flagstones. Eönwë advanced towards Sauron, the handle of his spoon pointed at Sauron's throat. Sauron raised his hands in surrender and backed up, until his back was against the wall and he could retreat no further. Eönwë slowly closed the distance between them, his aspect menacing. Both of them were breathing hard from exertion. Sauron looked afraid.

Sauron sank to his knees, his hands still raised, looking up at Eönwë. Eönwë moved behind him and grabbed a handful of his hair. He pulled Sauron's head back as far as it would go, lifting his chin to expose his throat. Angmar saw the pulse beating in the large vein in his neck. Sauron's eyes were closed, his lips moving in prayer.

Eönwë placed the handle of his spoon over the pulse point, positioning it carefully. With a swift jerk, he drew the spoon handle across Sauron's throat. Sauron gasped, then swore softly. His hand went to his throat, and he looked as though he were in pain.

Eönwë let go of Sauron's hair and stepped away. Sauron fell forward, catching himself with his hands. His head hung forward and his hair covered his face. It looked like he was trying to get to his feet, but his arms buckled and he fell facedown onto the flagstones. He lay at Eönwë's feet, motionless. Eönwë prodded him with a toe, looking for signs of life, but finding none.

"In answer to your question, that's how it would play out." said Eönwë.

Eönwë extended a hand to Sauron, who took it and let himself be pulled to his feet. They stood together and took a bow. The whole room applauded, whistling and stamping their feet.

When they talked about it later, both Sauron and Eönwë said they found the performance cathartic. Angmar, on the other hand, found it deeply disturbing.

Chapter 10 The Rejection



People were still milling around after the performance when Yavanna came into the kitchen again. She had come in person to fetch Sauron and deliver him to Aulë, who had finally agreed to grant him an interview. Sauron followed her into the Front Hall and up the Formal Staircase. Maiar normally used the servants' staircase, but could use the Formal Staircase if they were doing something for one of the Valar.

Sauron was excited because he was finally getting to see Aulë, but he was also apprehensive. After the Invasion of Valinor, along with the withdrawal of Manwë's open ended offer to stand trial, Aulë disowned him and cursed all his works. Sauron worked hard to persuade himself that Aulë didn't really mean it. Aulë was not a concrete thinker. Things right in front of him were real, while things out of sight and out of mind were not. To reject a far away traitor was one thing, but to reject a former favorite when they were alone together was another.

After all, he was here in the house attending the Reunion. The disowned wouldn't normally be allowed on the property.

His name may have been scratched off the panel which listed Aulë's Maiar, but it was still legible. Aulë could have obliterated it if he's chosen to. For that matter, Aulë could have replaced the panel with a new one that didn't include his name at all, but he hadn't done so.

After Sauron left to follow Melkor, Saruman has taken Sauron's place as First Maia. Saruman took pains to inform him of it. Sauron chose to believe that if he came back here to live,

he would be restored as First Maia, and Saruman would drop back to second place.

Sauron tried to be optimistic. His great fear was that Aulë really had repudiated him, renounced him, cast him off. He was terrified that Aulë would no longer acknowledge his connection to him. But maybe Aulë was just mad at him, and would get over it.

As unpleasant as it was to face Aulë when Aulë was mad at him, it was the best option he dared hope for, at the moment. He mentally rehearsed how it might go. He must listen while Aulë talked. Or yelled. He must admit fault and take personal responsibility. He must show remorse. Whatever he did, he must not lie to Aulë, not even lies of omission. Aulë hated being lied to, and Sauron was a habitual liar. If Aulë wanted to beat him, he would submit to it. He didn't fear it because the rod and the belt were an easy path to forgiveness in the Mansions of Aulë. Unpleasant to be sure, but it would be worth it. He worked hard to feel optimistic.

They were outside Aulë's study. Yavanna turned to him and said, "You have five minutes." Sauron was taken aback. The others were granted twenty or thirty minute each, and several of them had been called back a second time.

Sauron walked into Aulë's study and saw Aulë sitting at his desk. Aulë looked exactly as he had when Sauron saw him last, wild hair, long beard, a huge figure with the massive shoulders and arms of a blacksmith. A thousand warm feelings and happy memories from his youth flooded over him all at once. Without waiting to be bidden to speak, he cried, "Oh Aulë!" He was about to say, "I missed you so much!" but didn't, because the look on Aulë's face stopped him in his tracks.

Aulë leaned back in his chair, regarding Sauron with a cold, unfriendly stare.

"Sauron Gorthaur." Aulë said in an ice-cold tone. "So we meet again."

"Aulë, please!"

Aulë called me 'Sauron Gorthaur', he thought. Bad sign. Very, very bad sign. Sauron felt tears stinging behind his eyes

The Rejection

and fought them back. He remained standing in the doorway because Aulë had not asked him to come in, much less invited him to sit down.

"I never expected to see you again. Nor do I want to."

"Aulë, please! Don't say that." Sauron was being destroyed by it.

"I hear you've developed a cruel streak. That bothers me most of all. You never used to be cruel. I feel like I don't know you anymore.

Sauron had been trying so hard not to cry, but just then, the tears he'd been holding back spilled down his face. He didn't dare wipe them from his eyes, because he was afraid to call attention to them. Aulë hated tears. For that matter, he didn't like the messiness of emotions in general.

"I don't even know why you're here." Aulë said, in an angry tone. "This is a gathering for my people, not Melkor's. You've already overstayed your welcome. I suggest you leave."

Sauron was sobbing openly now. He assumed he would never see Aulë again. Whatever he needed to say to him, now was the time.

"I'm here because I needed to say goodbye to you." He turned to go, then added, "I've always loved you. I've missed you so much." Without waiting for a reply, he turned and fled.

Sauron stumbled out of the room and ran down the servants' stairs, tripping, blind from tears. There was a lavatory at the base of the stairs. He barely made it there in time. Mircaewen saw him go in, and paused outside, listening. She heard him crying so hard he threw up. She followed him in and held his hair while he was sick. When he was done, she brought him a glass of water and made him drink it.

Sauron wiped his mouth, and went to the door in the kitchen leading to the cellar stairs. He closed the door behind him quietly. Angmar got up to follow. Mircaewen put her hand on the door, holding it closed.

"No." she said. "Give him some peace. It's what he needs right now."

Angmar waited an hour before going downstairs to check on him. He found his Master lying face down on the damp

stone floor in the most distant corner of the cellar. His head was pillowed on his folded arms. He made no sound, but his whole body shook from sobbing.

"Are you all right?" asked Angmar.

Sauron shook his head 'No'. After a while, he said, "I don't want to live anymore."

That really frightened Angmar. He was concerned enough that he went to find Eönwë. Angmar had some vague idea about setting a suicide watch on him until he was feeling better. But Eönwë, although kind and attentive, didn't take his fears seriously.

"Just leave him be. He'll be fine." Eönwë said, unconcerned.

"You don't understand. I've never seen him like this before. I don't dare leave him alone because I'm afraid he'll do something to hurt himself." Angmar was pleading.

"Honestly, you don't have to watch him. He's not going to hurt himself. He doesn't have the ability to. None of us do.

Angmar went back downstairs to check on his Master, who was still saying, "I don't want to live anymore." Angmar was exasperated with him. He snapped, "Well, since you're immortal, that isn't really one of your options, is it?"

"No, I guess it isn't." Sauron agreed weakly.

Yavanna had always been protective of Sauron. She didn't like the way her husband spoke to him, especially when she knew how excited and hopeful he had been feeling about seeing Aulë again. She went upstairs to confront him and they had heated words on the subject.

"He came all this way to see you, at considerable personal risk to himself. He really did want to see you." Yavanna said.

"He came here because Ilúvatar commanded him to. He's under Ilúvatar's protection and he has immunity from Manwë, so he wasn't taking any risks." Aulë replied.

"What did you say to him? He went up to see you so hopeful and excited, but came downstairs crying so hard he threw up." Yavanna told him.

The Rejection

Aulë was actually kind of impressed. He hadn't known that his rebellious Maia cared about him that much. Then he started to wonder if perhaps he'd been too hard on his former favorite.

"Tell you what. I really didn't let him talk. I'll invite him up again tomorrow, and give him at least an hour. I'll let him explain himself all he likes. He's a manipulative creature and hard to read, but I'll try to get inside his head. Good enough?"

"Good enough for now." said Yavanna.

When it was time to turn in, Eönwë came downstairs and set up a cot for himself next to Sauron's. Sauron moved his closer to Angmar's to make a space for Eönwë. The cellar barracks was getting more and more crowded as visitors kept arriving. Some of them, like Eönwë, lived nearby, but had to sleep here because of the quarantine rules.

Angmar had a sudden thought. The Circle of Doom was near Eönwë's house, if not in it. Eönwë lived nearby.

"How close are we to the Circle of Doom?" he asked Sauron.

"It's about half an hour from here on foot." Sauron replied.

Angmar shuddered. That was the place Sauron least wanted to be in the world. Angmar sat up in bed, and turned to his Master with another panicked thought.

"Mairon, did you remember to pin your immunity badge to your nightshirt? Well, do it now. No, it *is* important." 'Whoa!' he thought to himself, 'I just barked orders at my Master. And it seemed like a perfectly natural thing to do.'

A lamp was left burning in a niche in the wall, just like the night before. Sauron and Eönwë kept talking in low voices while others went to sleep. Angmar couldn't make out the words, but he could still hear their low murmuring voices long after he dropped off to sleep.

Angmar woke up during the night and realized his Master was awake. He could tell from his breathing that he was crying. Angmar wanted to reach over and touch his arm, but he also wanted to give him his privacy. He lay awake, embarrassed, not knowing what to do.

Then Angmar opened his eyes, and it was morning. It was still pitch black in the cellar. Sauron's older sister stood on the

Reunion

lowest cellar step shouting, "Time to get up!" People started to stir in their cots. Eönwë, bare shouldered, reached for his shirt on the floor. He wrinkled his nose in disgust. "Phew! I wore that too many days in a row!" Eönwë didn't know about the quarantine when he came over, and hadn't brought a change of clothes. Sauron took a clean shirt from his own bag, the last one he had, and tossed it to him.

"Thanks!" said Eönwë, surprised.

"No worries." Sauron told him.

"It's just like old times. But where's Melkor's badge? It ought to be right here, on the shoulder." teased Eönwë. They both doubled over laughing.

Chapter 11 The Hazard of Serving Two Masters



They all went up to breakfast. Sauron accepted a plate from his sister Mircaewen, but just pushed things around on it. He was trying not to show it, but he was too upset to eat. Rilaiseth was assigning morning chores. She looked around the room to match people to tasks. "Goldsmiths, you're shelling peas. Animal Tenders, there's about fifty pounds of potatoes that need peeling. Standard Bearers, you're making bread for tonight."

It was a big task to run a large household that had swelled to forty or more people with the influx of visitors who had come for the Reunion. Rilaiseth, Yavanna's First Maia, was in charge of running the kitchen. In fact, responsibility for all the logistics associated with the Reunion had fallen upon her. She had a strong personality and was organized, so she ran it like a military operation.

The menus for each day were posted on the wall, along with lists of ingredients for each item and quantities required. She had huge stores of supplies laid in, but expected to run through them all within three or four days, and she didn't allow any deviation from her posted plans. Each additional unexpected visitor, like Eönwë, who had to stay for the duration because of the quarantine, threw her planning off slightly. She didn't like that. The others tried not to cross her.

Sauron got up and looked at one of the lists. He pulled bowls and measuring cups from shelves and drawers. He knew where everything was kept. "I've been gone how long, and you still keep everything in the same place?" he asked no one in particular.

Eönwë stood nearby watched him assemble equipment and ingredients. As often as he'd been here, this wasn't Eönwë's kitchen and he didn't know where things were kept.

Angmar followed him to help, but Sauron said, "Sit. You're Nobility. You don't work with your hands." Eönwë joined Sauron at one of the big work tables, and together they measured and stirred and kneaded. Angmar perched on a stool close enough to listen in on their conversation. Angmar had never thought of his Master as knowing how to cook, although obviously he did. All Maiar did, it seemed.

Angmar had a question for Eönwë. "Is it the same in your household? Do you do kitchen chores there, too?" Or are you a servant to Manwë like I am to Mairon, a general and councilor?" Eönwë answered, "Both. I led Manwë's army in the War of Wrath and I'm his chief advisor, but when I'm staying at the house, I fetch wood and wash dishes and cook. My bedroom is a small windowless attic space under the eaves, which I reach by climbing three flights of servants' stairs from the kitchens. And I consider it a privilege of rank that I have my own room, even one that's small and unheated. Most of Manwë's Maiar have only a narrow bed in a dormitory to call their own. It's the same for Maiar in every Great House. The Valar live in the formal spaces, and the Maiar who live in the servants' quarters take care of them. It's the natural order of things. No one questions it.

"Well, is it natural for the Valar to beat their servants?" Angmar asked.

"It depends on the Vala. The ones who are very physical are more likely to discipline their people by physical means. The ones who are more cerebral tend to lecture, or to assign an odious chore. Aulë is very physical, and so is Ulmo. Ossë, First Maia to Ulmo, is wild and reckless, and Ulmo beats him more severely than Aulë ever beat Mairon. On the other hand, Manwë is cerebral, and so are Varda and Yavanna. They rarely lay a finger on any of their people.

"So Manwë doesn't beat you, not like Aulë beat Mairon?" asked Angmar.

The Hazard of Serving Two Masters

“Oh, right. You just go on believing that, if you want to.” Eönwë laughed. Then more seriously, “For most of Manwë’s people, a typical punishment is a lecture, missing an activity, or being grounded. But I’m First Maia in Manwë’s household, and I’m held to a higher standard, so he’s harder on me. I’ve eaten dinner standing up plenty of times. It’s just part of being First Maia.”



It was mid morning, and the Maiar were sitting around the kitchen table doing various small chores. Sauron was sitting with his sisters and female cousins, who had put him to work mending clothes and sewing on buttons.

A messenger came into the room.

“Mairon, Aulë wants to see you upstairs.” the messenger told him.

“What were his exact words?” asked Sauron nervously.

“He said, ‘Please send Mairon up. And tell everyone else to stand down for now, because he’ll be here an hour or more.’” Sauron thought, “He called me Mairon. Maybe things will be all right, after all.”

Sauron leapt to his feet and went up the servant’s stair at a run. Like a little kid hoping that maybe this time, he’ll win his father’s approval, Angmar thought.

Eönwë remained sitting at the table with the others when Sauron went upstairs. He knew Sauron envied him for his respectability, his quiet conscience, and the fact that he didn’t have a warrant out for his arrest. Sauron didn’t know, however, that Eönwë also envied him, in certain ways. For instance, the adventures he’d had. The freedom he had in serving two masters, neither of whom communicated with him, which in practice meant he served only himself. And for one other thing. Like most Maiar, particularly obedient ones, Eönwë was a virgin. Sauron wasn’t.

His sister Mircaewen watched him disappear up the stairs and scowled. “Mairon makes me think of a puppy that’s been kicked too many times. I always thought Aulë was too hard on

him." She spoke quietly. "But here he is, coming back for more."

"Aulë was harder on him than on the others, but it was because Aulë thought he was the best among us, and he wanted him to be perfect." said Celebtan.

"Mairon adores Aulë. He won't allow a word to be spoken against him either. I don't think he feels ill-used. I think he really does feel like the favorite." said Mircaewen.

"Which, to be frank, he is." Saruman added. "He was the oldest, the responsible one. He was the most skilled craftsman, and he got more attention from Aulë than any of the rest of us."

"Why do you suppose he left?" said Celebtan.

"I think Mairon was susceptible to Melkor's promises because he thought of himself as bad." said Eönwë. "Mairon is bad, in certain ways. He's a liar, and angry, and controlling. Those traits, taken in combination, can make for a very dangerous person."

"Aulë beat him for the tiniest infractions, which he didn't for the rest of us. And if tiny infractions weren't enough, remember the time when he stayed out late to lay with a girl, and got caught? Aulë horsewhipped him for that." said Mircaewen.

Angmar didn't like Mircaewen. He thought she was vulgar.

"I don't think Mairon ever had more than that one experience, but it greatly increased his prestige among the other Maiar. It was supposed to be this big secret, but of course we all knew. Before, he was a big shot in Aulë's household. Afterwards, he was also a rogue, dangerous and exciting. We were fascinated by him. But perhaps the incident caused him to believe he was bad. It may have been the turning point when he started to rebel." said Mircaewen.

Celebtan explained to Angmar, "Maiar are chaste, as a group. Only a few of us have ever married. Plus, some of the Valar require their Maiar to be absolutely pure. Aulë in particular is a stickler about the purity of his Maiar. Mircaewen is the only one of Aulë's Maiar who's married, and I can hardly tell you how much grief she caught for it.

The Hazard of Serving Two Masters

After ten minutes or so, they heard Aulë say, “You did WHAT?” so loudly they could hear it in the kitchens, even though they were on another floor and in a different part of the house.



An hour or so later, when Sauron was released from his interview and came back to the kitchen, inquiring faces turned toward him, waiting. He took a seat on the bench between Eönwë and Angmar, and resumed mending clothes as if nothing had happened. Radagast and Saruman were sitting opposite. Everyone in the room was silent, and was staring at him.

Finally his sister Mircaewen said, “So. What was all that about?”

“What was all what about?”

“What was ‘YOU DID WHAT?’ about?”

“Oh. That. Nothing important.”

“Tell.”

After enduring many minutes of nagging from everyone at the table, Sauron finally gave in.

“Aulë doesn’t accept that I serve two masters. He says I quit his service and entered the service of another. He says he won’t even consider taking me back unless I renounce Melkor, which I’m not willing to do. I keep trying to tell Aulë that my relationship with him and my relationship with Melkor are so different, they have nothing to do with each other.”

“How do you figure that?” asked Mircaewen.

“The best analogy I can think of is, it’s like being a dutiful daughter who falls in love with a dashing rake and runs off to marry him. Is she still her father’s daughter? Of course. Is her relationship with her father the same? Not exactly, but they still love each other, and they’re still important to each other. I told Aulë that he was like a father to me, where Melkor was more like a lover. The two relationships had nothing to do with each other.” explained Sauron.

“Aulë didn’t buy it. He said, ‘Why would you describe Melkor as a lover?’ I was stammering. But he pressed me, and

whether he believes it or not, I'm still his Maia, and he can make me talk. So I told him we were lovers."

His sister asked him, "You and Melkor? What does that mean? Did he leave a flower for you where you would find it? Or write a few lines of poetry to express his feeling for you?" his sister speculated.

"Be real. This is Melkor we're talking about." said Sauron, rolling his eyes.

"Or did he tie your wrists to the bedposts and make the headboard bang against the wall?" she asked.

"There you go." Sauron answered, and went back to what he had been doing.

"Aulë asked the same question. 'What does that mean?' I said it meant he used to summon me to his room. 'And then what?' Well, what do you think? And then I lay with him. Get a clue. Aulë finally got it. That's where 'YOU DID WHAT?' came from."

"One question." said Mircaewen. "You said you lay with him. But dude, you're not a girl."

"Oddly enough, it wasn't a deal breaker." Sauron said.

Saruman's jaw was open. He wasn't the only one. Sauron looked at the faces around the table and asked, "Show of hands? How many of you have heard this story before?" Eönwë and Angmar raised theirs, but no one else did. Sauron feigned surprise. "What, I tell two people in deepest confidence and neither of them tells anyone else? Don't people around here repeat gossip anymore?"

He went on. "The meeting had a good outcome, anyway. Aulë now agrees the relationship I had with Melkor was really, really different than the one I have with him.

There was a long and embarrassed silence. Finally his sister asked, "The 'wrists tied to the bedposts' thing. What was that like?"

"At first I thought it was going to be really stupid." answered Sauron, playing along. "But it turned out to be pretty cool."

Saruman, who had been listening without saying anything, interrupted. "I hope you're kidding. You are kidding, right?"

The Hazard of Serving Two Masters



Someone mentioned later, “You know, a lot of Maiar serve more than one Vala. Olórin serves both Manwë and Varda, and I think also Nienna. Melian serves both Vána and Estë. So there shouldn’t be any issue about one bond being broken because you formed another.”

“Before the Rebellion⁷, if I’d served both Aulë and Melkor, I don’t think it would have been a problem. But I formed the second bond after the Rebellion, when they fought on opposite sides of a deadly conflict. Then, my divided loyalty was definitely a problem.”

⁷ For details of the Rebellion, see “Milton’s Paradise Lost”. Melkor is modeled after Lucifer, and Sauron is modeled after his sidekick, Beelzebub.

Chapter 12 The Change in Plans



herald came into the kitchen to announce that all hands were to assemble in the Great Hall on the hour, fifteen minutes away. They began to move toward the Hall en masse at it got close to the appointed time. The Great Hall was a part of the house Angmar hadn't seen before. It was finely appointed and built on a grand scale, and the woodwork and trim was very finely make. This was a room built for the Valar, not for their Maiar servants, which is why Angmar hadn't seen it before.

Another surprise was the number of people present, at least thirty five or forty. Angmar had counted no more than twenty in the servants hall where they spent most of their time. Sauron's sister explained that there were a number of Maiar among their siblings and cousins who weren't speaking to Sauron because of his association with Melkor, or his crimes, or his disowned status. Those Maiar were staying in another part of the house and sleeping in a different makeshift barracks.

Angmar counted three fugitives among the group, each wearing Manwë's badge as a token of the immunity that allowed them to be here. He had seen the one woman before, the belligerent one who had initiated the sparing match. But the other one must be housed with the people avoiding his Master. Sauron's sister told him that she had been a servant of Melkor also, and had rebelled and fallen like Sauron. She was mad at him for fleeing the field of battle during the War of Wrath, and she blamed Melkor's death on Sauron, who as his Standard Bearer, should have been there to defend their Master. Angmar

The Change in Plans

knew Sauron blamed himself for Melkor's death also, and thought it just as well the two were being kept apart.

Just before Aulë entered the room, they all fell silent and rose to their feet, heads bowed. Aulë entered the room and walked to the front. He turned to face them, Yavanna by his side. Aulë began to speak.

"I have good news. There's been a change of plans." Aulë told the assembly. "As you know, I was commanded by Ilúvatar to return to the Timeless Halls and serve him there. Ilúvatar has agreed to allow me to remain here most of the time, if I agree to go to him in the Timeless Halls from time to time, but it wouldn't be permanent, and it wouldn't be for very long at a time."

There were gasps from the crowd, and cheers and applause that went on and on. People embraced each other. Sauron clasped his hand over his mouth, as if this were the best possible news he could imagine.

Privately, Angmar didn't like the way Aulë treated Sauron. He thought Sauron was putting much more into the relationship than he was getting back. But Angmar was willing to be happy for him, if this was something he wanted that badly.

Chapter 13 The Test of Loyalty



round sunset, another messenger came down to the kitchen. "Mairon, Aulë would like to see you upstairs now." Sauron jumped up and followed him upstairs to Aulë's study.

Aulë invited him in, asked him to take a seat, and called him Mairon. All excellent signs. Sauron allowed himself to feel more hope than fear. Aulë got right to the point. "I've willing to take you back." Sauron's heart soared, and relief washed over him. "on one condition."

Sauron had already told Aulë he would not renounce Melkor. He loved Aulë, but he simply would not budge on that one. Aulë read his face. "No, the condition I require of you is not as easy as swearing an oath to renounce an old allegiance.

"I will take you back on the condition that you agree to be arrested and stand trial." Those were Aulë's terms. A loyalty test. Aulë was going to put him through a loyalty test. He shouldn't have been surprised.

Sauron knew what a loyalty test was. Sauron's friend Ossë had been through one, too. When Ossë joined the Rebellion, and later changed his mind and asked to come home. Ulmo put him through a loyalty test before he agreed to take him back. Sauron didn't know what Ossë had been made to do. But it must have been so bad, Ossë would never have done it unless he really, really wanted to come home, more than anything in the world. And if Ossë hadn't done it, Ulmo wouldn't have taken him back.

Aulë himself had been through a loyalty test once. When he created the Dwarves without permission and got caught,

The Test of Loyalty

Ilúvatar commanded him to destroy them. Had he refused, Ilúvatar's good opinion of him would have been lost, maybe forever. But he obeyed, and passed, and was allowed to keep both the Dwarves and his place in Ilúvatar's inner circle.

Sauron had been through a loyalty test himself. Not long after he joined the Rebellion and swore fealty to Melkor, Melkor asked Sauron to renounce his allegiance to Aulë. Sauron refused, arguing there were plenty of Maiar who served two Valar. Melkor accused Sauron of being a spy from Aman who inserted himself into Melkor's household. Melkor told Sauron he'd have to pack up and leave, unless Sauron could prove he really was Melkor's Maia and not Aulë's spy. Melkor asked Sauron to do something no spy would ever agree to. If he agreed to do it, he could stay.

But the task was so unreasonable and so appalling that Sauron refused to do it. In fact, he was furious that Melkor would even suggest such a thing. But Melkor was serious. Sauron couldn't stay unless he either renounced Aulë, or else passed the test and proved his loyalty. So Sauron, who wasn't about to renounce Aulë, and who adored Melkor and wanted to stay with him, submitted to the test. He hated every minute of it, and wept from pain, but he passed. Much later, it occurred to him that Melkor never doubted his loyalty, he just pretended to because it allowed him to create a loyalty test that required Sauron to lay with him.

Aulë elaborated on his terms. "You must agree to stand trial and serve any sentence, either prison term or penal servitude, that the Council of Valar chooses to hand down to you. When your sentence is completed, you will be returned to my service." Aulë spoke in neutral tones. "The conditions are the same as they were at the end of the War of Wrath, when Eönwë commanded you to go to Manwë and seek pardon. You've heard them before."

"But Manwë's offer was withdrawn at the end of the Second Age." protested Sauron.

"He's agreed to put it back on the table at my request, but only for a day. You must decide by this time tomorrow." Aulë said. "It's a good offer. Frankly, I was surprised you didn't

take it the first time. This is your last best chance. But you have to decide quickly.

“Agree to stand trial, and I’ll take you back.” Aulë leaned back in his chair. He watched Sauron closely, his hands folded behind his head.

Sauron had trouble believing the old offer was back on the table. “I was already tried in absentia. They sentenced me to the Void. How is that consistent with me serving a sentence and then returning to your service to lead a normal life working in the Forge?”

“In absentia trials always hand down exaggerated sentences, and their verdicts usually get thrown out later, anyway. I wouldn’t worry about it. When you stand trial, you’ll get the same sort of sentence that Melkor got the first time, prison followed by servitude. I’ve made arrangements to insure will be served under me rather than, say, Tulkas. There’s nothing to worry about. They’re not planning to put you into the Void.”

Sauron had other niggling doubts which he hadn’t shared with Aulë. The first was that he’d left Aman because he preferred to live in Arda. He considered Aman small, provincial, and overly constrained by rules, whereas Arda was vast and beautiful and wild. He loved Arda. And there was another thing he liked about Arda. It gave him pleasure when others bowed down and call him Lord.

Finally, he was afraid that, after he finished serving a long and unpleasant sentence and returned to Aulë’s service, he would chafe against the constraints so typical of life in Aman and rebel all over again. He was afraid that, when he got out of prison, his relationship with Aulë would fall apart exactly like it had before, only faster.

Melkor persuaded Maiar belonging to every Vala in Ea to follow him in rebellion by offering each of them the thing they wanted most. When he first approached Sauron, Melkor offered him power. Sauron was tempted, but after seriously considering it, turned him down. It was a measure of his devotion to Aulë that, even though he was infatuated with Melkor, he chose to stay home and watch the excitement and

The Test of Loyalty

freedom of the Rebellion from the sidelines, but it was hard. As one of the more powerful Maia, almost a Vala, he was starting to be an adult. The lack of independence and self determination which are the lot of a servant began to oppress him more and more.

Later, when the Rebellion reached its peak, Melkor approached Sauron a second time. This time, he offered him the independence appropriate to an adult, and complete artistic freedom. Sauron had very little of either as Aulë's servant. Melkor watched his face and knew he had him. He reached out his hand, and Sauron took it.

"It's a good offer." Aulë said.

"I need time to think about it." said Sauron.

"Of course. But you have to reach a decision, and inform Manwë of it, by sunset tomorrow." Aulë indicated that the interview was over.

Sauron came down to the kitchen by the servants' stair. It was beginning to get dark outside. Each choice, to accept or to reject Manwë's offer, involved giving up something precious. One choice required him to give up his relationship with Aulë, who was essentially his only parent. He remembered how he felt the previous day, when he believed the relationship was already lost. The other choice required him to give up his freedom and his life in Arda. Even if he returned to Arda after he got out of prison, so much time would have gone by that everything would be changed, everyone dear to him would be gone. In his mind, the two losses were equal in magnitude. He could have gone either way. If he were a different person, he might have been trapped by indecision. But Sauron was decisive. By the time he reached the bottom step, he knew what he was going to do. Now he just wanted to be alone.

He headed for the cellar door, and was beginning to turn the knob, when Rilaiseth put a hand on the door to keep it closed. "I'm sorry, but there's someone else down there who's been having a really bad day, and she needs some quiet time. I'm not letting anyone else go down there right now."

At a loss for what to do next, he looked around for some useful work he could do with his hands. His sister, who had

been watching him, touched his arm. "Dude, we've having onion soup tonight. I need you to chop about twenty pounds of onions."

Mircaewen was a very kind person, and she loved her older brother. The chore she picked for him was a good choice. For the next half hour, he was working with his hands, which gave him peace. And if tears streamed down his face while he was working, no one noticed or attributed it to anything other than the onions.

Not everyone saw the wisdom in her choice, however, and she caught a fair amount of grief for it. "Soooo ... You have a dangerous felon, and when he's terribly upset, you give him a task that involves working with extremely sharp knives. Good one, Mircaewen."

An hour or after he came downstairs, Sauron sent word that he wanted to see Aulë. He had reached the decision that he was willing to stand trial and go to prison, if that was the price for being reinstated as a Maia in Aulë's household.

Then he spoke to Angmar privately. He made it as terse as possible, believing he only had a few minutes and that they might not see each other again.

"Angmar, listen to me." Sauron spoke quickly. "There's been a change in plans. I will remain in Aman. You will return home as planned. When you get back to Barad-dûr, invoke the succession plan. Legally, it's airtight, but be prepared for some squabbling over possession of the position I'm vacating. The Mouth of Sauron will likely be your chief rival, but you must also watch out for Akhorahil and his niece, who are also masters of court intrigue."

"Let the others have the throne. I don't want it!" Angmar cried out.

"I chose you for a reason." said Sauron. "You're like me. I didn't want to be the second Dark Lord either, not if it meant losing my Master. Yet the Lordship was forced on me, and I had to take it."

"One more thing. When the Ring is found, claim it for yourself. This is how you do it. You must put it on, hold it over your head and say, 'I declare myself Lord of the Ring and Lord

The Test of Loyalty

of the Earth.' The exact words don't matter, but you must speak them with absolute conviction. You may continue to wear your own ring, although it won't be necessary."

"But ... " Angmar felt a rising sense of panic.

"Aulë will see you know." someone called across the room.

"I may not see you again. Remember everything I told you." His voice was impersonal, distant. "I have to go." With that, he turned and followed the messenger up the servants' stair, not looking back.

"No! Don't leave me!" Angmar shouted at his Master's retreating form, but there was no answer. Tears ran down his face and fell onto his shirt. He didn't even notice them.

Angmar was a second son, raised to assist his older brother who would inherit their father's throne. Angmar had never wanted to be king of Númenor. And now, he didn't want to be Dark Lord either. His ambition in life was to have a place at his Master's side, his helper and councilor, trusted and indispensable. If he lost Sauron, he lost everything in the world that mattered to him.

Chapter 14 The Arrest



Sauron stood before Aulë, ashen faced. "I have chosen to accept your terms," he said. Aulë leaned back in his chair. He was pleased, but he kept his face neutral. "All right, then. No time like the present. Give me your immunity badge." Sauron unfastened it from his shirt and handed it over to him. Aulë tossed the precious badge aside, as if it were a thing of no value.

A servant was sent downstairs to look for Eönwë. Eönwë came upstairs and entered Aulë's study. Aulë asked him if he would be willing to carry a message to Manwë, and Eönwë agreed. Aulë sat down at his desk and wrote out a short note. He folded it and affixed his seal. Handing it to Eönwë, he said, "Take this to your master, Manwë Súlimo, and return here with whomever he chooses to send."

Then he summoned two of his people. Sauron knew them slightly. Mortan ('Blacksmith') had been an apprentice to Aulë when Sauron still lived here, and he'd seen the younger one in the kitchens once or twice. Both of them were practical blacksmiths rather than goldsmiths. They did the ordinary work of shoeing horses and making tools and were the ones best able to make shackles quickly. Aulë told Sauron, "Please wait outside in the hall, we'll just be a few minutes." and shut the door in order to speak privately with them. Sauron stood in the corridor, leaning against the wall. He could hear only a few words through the door, but it was enough to know Aulë was instructing them how to make a set of chains as quickly as possible. "... skip the detail work like hinges and locks ... just make two halves that bolt together .. need them in an hour ..."

The Arrest

The idea of wearing poorly made chains bothered him more than he would have expected. Sauron leaned against the wall and felt wretched.

The blacksmiths came out of Aulë's study after a time. They walked up to Sauron, studying him. Neither one spoke to him or asked permission to touch him. They approached the task with no more emotion than they would have for shoeing a horse. Mortan had a measuring string which he used to measure Sauron's wrist, ankle, waist, and neck. The other one held a slate and slate pencil, which he used to write down the measurements as Mortan called them out. Sauron hated it but endured it in silence. When they were finished, they went downstairs and headed in the direction of the Forge. Sauron heard Saruman's voice offering to help them make the chains, and heard them accepting. He punched the wall softly.

Aulë called Sauron back into his study, and gave him a chair so he could sit down. Sauron didn't feel like talking. After an hour or so, the two blacksmiths returned with a wooden box, obviously very heavy.

Aulë spoke to him seriously. "Do you know why we had the chains made?" Sauron was silent. "It's so you wouldn't get hurt when you're arrested. Tulkas won't have any reason to take you down if you're already in irons. Are you okay with that?" Sauron nodded mutely. "You don't mind going down there and being seen in chains in front of your friends?" Sauron said nothing. Aulë gestured to one of the blacksmith, who opened the wooden box and lifted out the heavy chains. Sauron put his hands over his face

A crowd was beginning to gather in the Front Hall. Sauron heard the front door open, and Eönwë's voice answering the greetings of the people assembled. He wasn't sure, but he imagined he heard Manwë's voice, and Tulkas'. This was going to be bad.

"It's time." Aulë said. "You can still back out, if you want." Aulë told him, not unkindly. Sauron shook his head. He had already agreed to this. It was the price for being Aulë's Maia.

Angmar was downstairs, at the edge of the crowd watching the staircase. From the buzz in the crowd, he expected to see his

Master brought downstairs in chains and handed over to Manwë's people for arrest and trial. Angmar had tears in his eyes and he was having trouble seeing clearly. He wanted to say goodbye, but the crowd was so thick, he thought he wouldn't be able to push through to get close enough. He was frantic.

Then Eönwë knocked on the front door and was admitted. With the door open, it was easy to tell that the light rain of the late afternoon had turned into something much harder. Eönwë's fair hair was plastered to his face and shoulders. He carried a sealed document in his hand that he'd somehow managed to protect from the weather.

The murmuring got louder, and people in the crowd shouted questions at Eönwë. "Is that the arrest warrant?" "Who else have you brought with you? Will Tulkas be here soon?" Eönwë said no, no one else was with him. He went upstairs to deliver the document to Aulë.

Sauron was sitting in a chair in front of Aulë's desk. Aulë was standing in front of him, waiting for an answer. Funny, Sauron hadn't seen him get up and come around the desk.

"I, well, ... umm," He had no idea what had just been said to him. "What was the question?" Sauron had been far away in his own mind and was having trouble coming back to the present.

"I asked you if you were all right. But I think you just answered my question." Aulë looked at him closely. "You're dissociating, by the way."

"Wonderful." Sauron thought. "I'm about to be arrested, and now I'm losing my mind, too."

"You had the thousand yard stare. I walked right up to you and passed my hand in front of your face. You didn't blink. You don't remember that?" Aulë looked concerned. "In fact, you didn't blink at all, for minutes. It was kind of scary, actually."

"Me, scary. Who'd a thought?" Sauron thought sarcastically.

Outside, rain beat against the windows. The wind was picking up, and there was an occasional crack of thunder.

The Arrest

Sauron thought vaguely about how they'd been planning to leave here after everyone else was asleep. They had planned to travel all night to meet the ship. The trip across country would have been pretty miserable in this weather. Probably it would be too rough to sail tonight, anyway. It was pointless to think about, though, because he would spend the night in a cell, anyway. He hoped the sound of the chains wouldn't wake him when he turned over in his sleep. He hated the sound of chains.

Eönwë came upstairs. He knocked on the open door of Aulë's study and waited to be invited in. Eönwë handed the sealed document to Aulë, who tossed it onto a heap among the litter of papers already piled up on his desk.

"Technically, you can't be arrested because you have still immunity, even though you turned in your badge. So as of right now, you can still back out." Aulë leaned back and studied Sauron for minute, giving him time to answer. Sauron said nothing.

Then Aulë picked up the document and broke the seal, spreading out the pages in front of him. He picked up the first sheet. "This is your arrest warrant. But before you can be arrested, you have to surrender your immunity. You do that by signing this waiver."

Aulë indicated a pen and inkwell on Sauron's side of the desk. He placed the waiver in front of him. It listed the formal charges, which, as far as Sauron could tell, were all things he had actually done. Near the bottom of the page was the statement, 'I voluntarily surrender my immunity from arrest. I acknowledge my guilt and submit myself to judgment.' Below the statement there was a signature line.

"Once you sign, there's no going back. Will you sign?"

Sauron picked up the pen and signed.

He pushed the inkwell and paper away and put his head down on Aulë's desk, resting his head on folded arms. His thoughts turned to scenes from his youth, when everything seemed so much simpler.

He came to with a start when Aulë touched his shoulder gently and pushed him upright in the chair. He was vaguely

aware that Aulë had been talking to him, but he didn't know what had been said. He didn't care all that much, either

Without looking behind him, he listened for the sound of chains being taken out of the box. He wondered how they'd feel. Cold, probably. He hated the sound of chains. The thought of wearing them, and the knowledge that other people would hear them clinking when he moved, made him cringe with shame.

Aulë was studying him. "You're not a good listener. You haven't heard a word I've said, have you?" he said.

"I'm sorry." Sauron said. "I was daydreaming."

"You weren't daydreaming, you were dissociating," said Aulë. "Let me start over. I'll give you the highlights. I made you take a loyalty test. You passed, by the way." Aulë regarded him warmly. "I claim you as a member of my household again."

"My condition for taking you back was that you agree to stand trial. I required you to agree to it. I didn't require you to actually do it. In fact, I feel it's not in your best interest to stand trial, so I won't permit it." Aulë picked up the immunity badge and handed it back to him. "Put it back on." he commanded.

"You passed the loyalty test the moment you picked up the pen and signed. But I intended to let the scenario keep running for another hour or so to punish you for joining the Rebellion.

"However, I decided to end it early when you began to go to pieces." Aulë explained. "So we're going to skip the part where we put the chains on you, take you downstairs, and make you kneel in the Front Hall for an hour in front of all your friends, supposedly waiting for Tulkas to arrive." Aulë watched Sauron closely to see if he understood.

"But you sent a letter to Manwë requesting an arrest party. And Eönwë just brought my arrest warrant." Sauron was still not getting it.

"The arrest warrant was a forgery." said Aulë. "So was the waiver I put in front of you and made you sign. I wrote both of them myself, earlier today."

"The document Eönwë delivered concerns a different matter. As you know, you were tried in absentia for the

The Arrest

Invasion of Valinor and convicted unanimously. You were sentenced to the Void. When you agreed to be arrested, I wrote to Manwë to withdraw my vote to convict. Eönwë brought it to him and just now returned with his reply."

Aulë searched through the litter of papers on his desk and pulled out the document Eönwë had just given him, still sealed. He broke the seal and read it. "Manwë wrote to acknowledge I withdrew my vote. The sentence requires a unanimous verdict. Without it, the sentence is set aside. So as of today, you can no longer be pushed into the Void without a trial.

"You're not going to be arrested tonight. You're my Maia again. And you can go back to Arda whenever you like." Aulë said.

Sauron looked at him stupidly, still not understanding what was being said to him.

"Don't you get it?" said Aulë. "The preparations to arrest you were a hoax."

Chapter 15 The Fight



Angmar heard a scream of rage. A long, loud, piercing wail that went on and on. Heavy footsteps ran down the back stairs, then a door slammed in the kitchen. Several people ran toward the kitchen, but Angmar was one of the first to reach it. Sauron was striding across the kitchen. He passed near Saruman, who whispered, "I helped make your chains. I wish I could have seen you wear them." Sauron shoved him aside hard enough to make him stagger. Saruman, furious, went off to report him.

Angmar quickened his pace and caught up with Sauron. Sauron stopped and turned around to face him. Angmar demanded, "Is it true? You had immunity, but you surrendered it and agreed to stand trial." Sauron, looking infinitely tired, said yes. Angmar felt like he was watching from far away while someone he didn't know clenched his fist and pulled it back, stepped into the punch, and swung with all the force he had. He heard the crunching sound of bone against bone. It sounded like something broke.

Angmar watched with a certain emotional distance as he saw his Master knocked backwards by the blow. He fell hard against the table and took several chairs down with him. He lay on the floor, propped on his elbows looking up at Angmar, astonished. Angmar stood astride over him, menacing. Blood gushed from his Master's nose, soaking the front of his shirt and dripping onto the stone floor.

"You gave up your immunity on purpose? How could you have been so fucking stupid?" Then he turned away and strode

The Fight

off to the furthest corner of the room, where he crumpled against the wall and fell to the floor, sobbing.

After giving him some time to calm down, Sauron summoned Angmar. Angmar ignored the summons. After a while, someone came over and tapped him on the shoulder. "Yavanna wants you to help with Mairon." He reluctantly got up and went over to him.

Sauron was still lying on the floor, being treated by Yavanna, who was getting ready to splint his broken nose. The injury had left him with a lot of bruising, including two black eyes. Angmar also noticed he had a badly cut lip. But the worst of it was the fact that his nose was noticeably off-center. Sauron saw Angmar standing over him.

"You owe me an apology."

Angmar didn't know where to begin. He stammered, "I am so very sorry. I don't know what ..."

"Apology accepted. Let's move on." Sauron practiced Aulë's policy of 'confront, address, forgive'. If he said the apology was accepted, then it was, and the matter was over.

Yavanna directed Angmar to sit on the floor behind Sauron and hold his head in his lap. She asked Sauron, "What happened to you?" He told her, "I fell." Yavanna looked at him, looked at the blood on Angmar's split knuckles, and frowned.

Angmar held Sauron's wrists tightly to prevent him from touching his face. Mircaewen wrapped a strip of leather around a wooden dowel, saying, "You'll want something to bite." He leaned forward and let her put it between his teeth.

Yavanna told Sauron, "Hold your breath for a count of twenty, and stay as still as you can." When she touched his nose, his body went rigid, his back arched, and he screwed his eyes tight shut. Angmar struggled to keep hold of his wrists. The bone fragments made a scraping noise as she teased them back into place. It took several tries. Angmar wanted to be sick, but fought it back.

When the bone pieces were lined up, she had Aiweneär position the splint and tape it into place. When Aiweneär was done, Yavanna traced her finger along the side of his nose, and the bone pieces knitted together. He still had a cut lip and

purple bruises under his eyes, but they were left to heal in the conventional way.

Then Yavanna looked at Angmar. "Your punishment is to clean up all the blood. You'll have to wash it out of his clothes and hair, then scrub it off the flagstones. Rilaiseth will get you a bucket and scrub brush. You might as well get started." For once, Sauron didn't step in and forbid Angmar from doing menial labor.

Angmar stood over the sink, washing Sauron's shirt. Mircaewen came over to see how he was doing. Looking at his bleeding knuckles, she said, "You know, you're putting more blood into that shirt than you're washing out." That wasn't true, the front of the shirt was completely soaked with Sauron's blood. It got into the cuts on Angmar's split knuckles as he scrubbed it.

"Does this make us blood brothers?" Angmar asked Mircaewen. He knew it didn't, but the thought pleased him, and he smiled to himself.

Saruman came back into the kitchen, having been unable to get anyone interested in the fact that Sauron had shoved him and almost knocked him down. "Hey, Curumo! Too bad you left the room, because you missed a really good fight. Mairon's own servant slugged him and broke his nose." They were right. Saruman deeply regretted missing that.

When they were lying in their cots that night, Angmar asked Sauron, "Why didn't you punish me for hitting you?"

"I did punish you. I made you watch them setting my nose. You almost passed out."

"No, I mean really. The things I said to you, like 'How could you have been that stupid?'"

"You were angry because I voluntarily surrendered my immunity and agreed to be arrested. I endangered all your lives, back home. When you asked me, 'How could I have been that stupid?' I didn't necessarily disagree with you. I was wondering the same thing myself."

"As for slugging me, let's just say there's a precedent there. Someday when you're a Dark Lord, and you get slugged by your second-in-command, just remember it's a tradition."

The Fight

“There’s a story here. Are you going to tell it?” asked Angmar.

“Not a chance. It’s too embarrassing.” said Sauron, and with that, the topic was closed.

They were supposed to leave late that night to make the six hour trip to the coast and sail with the tide before dawn. Traveling all night in the wagon would have been possible but very uncomfortable, and not entirely safe in the thunderstorm. But the storm made sailing impossible, since the ship couldn’t approach the beach safely in heavy surf.

With the trip home delayed by a day, they got to go to bed and sleep the whole night with no expectation of being awakened at midnight, and to let the next day unfold with nothing to do but enjoy the sunlight after the storm.

Chapter 16 The Forge



hey had whole extra day in the Mansions of Aulë in front of them, hopefully one that would be drama free. Actually, the day began with drama, but it was expected. An arrest team arrived for one of the fugitives, Penithurin, a Maia of Yavanna. Angmar overhead some of the others talking about her. She was the belligerent woman who proposed the fencing match between Sauron and Eönwë. Apparently she'd had a pretty rough time of it during the reunion. She was the one in the cellar weeping, when Rilaiseth barred Sauron from going down there when he needed quiet time so badly.

Angmar learned that she was going through about the same thing with Yavanna that Sauron went through with Aulë. Her crime was less severe, but she was made to agree to be arrested and stand trial. It was decided that the arrest team would arrive for her in the morning, as soon as it got light. Angmar woke up during the night and heard her weeping. He found her arrest disturbing, given how he'd waited in the Front Hall with the others yesterday evening, frantic about his Master's arrest.

The ones who came for her met her and Yavanna at the gate at the end of the drive. They couldn't come any closer to the house because of the quarantine. Even so, the other fugitives had to stay well out of sight, hidden in the furthest reaches of the cellars just to be on the safe side. Angmar was just as glad, because while it was unlikely that Tulkas was part of the arrest team, Angmar didn't want to run the slightest possibility that his Master and Tulkas would run into each other. The fugitives

didn't come up from the cellar until someone came down and gave them the all clear.

Breakfast was being served when the fugitives were finally allowed upstairs. Sauron entered into an intense conversation with someone about the arrest that had just happened. Clearly that discussion was going to take a while, so Angmar fixed himself a plate and sat down at the long table near several of the blacksmiths. He thought one of them was called Mortan, but he didn't know the others.

"Soooo ..." said Mortan. "Your name is Angmar, right? I've been trying to place you. I don't remember you singing in the Ainulindalë."

"No, I wasn't there." Angmar said.

"You missed it, then? You must have been created later. There's no shame in that. Even some of the Valar, like Tulkas and Nessa, are younger than the Creation of the World, and nobody thinks any the less of them for it.

"Good to know." Angmar said.

"I guess that's a long winded way of asking you, where do you fit in? Who's your Vala?" Mortan said.

"Who's my Vala?" Angmar asked, puzzled.

"Or are you assigned directly to Mairon? He's had Maiar of his own before, you know, including Thuringwethil, Draugluin, and Carcharoth." Mortan said. "And word has it that he's looking to persuade the Valaraukar in Moria to enter his service." Mortan added. "I expect he has an eye on Curumo, too."

Luckily Saruman wasn't close enough to overhear, because he would have been seriously offended. Although the way he'd been flirting with the Dark side lately, he might well find himself in Sauron's service sometime soon.

"Oh, you must be confusing me with someone else. I'm not actually a Maia." Angmar protested.

"Yeah, right. I can sense your presence, and from it, I can guess at the strength of your personal power. Don't tell me you're not a Maia. You're stronger than some of the others here, and for a young Maia, that's pretty impressive. Usually

Reunion

personal power and age are related. That's why the Standard Bearers are the most ancient Maiar of all.

Mortan leaned closer and studied Angmar's face to see if he had Maia eyes

"Besides, you have ... wait. I can't actually tell."

Angmar's eyes were almost as black as his hair. It was impossible to tell whether the pupils of his eyes were round or elongated.

Angmar wondered whether it would be a good idea come out and say he was from the race of men. He was lucky that the Ban prohibiting mortal men from setting foot in this land apparently wasn't being enforced today. But if people here thought he was a Maia, or an elf, they would assume the Ban didn't apply to him. He decided he would just keep his mouth shut.

Sauron and the others finally finished their conversation about Penithurin's arrest. He came over and sat down next to Angmar, and his sister Mircaewen sat down across from him to keep him company while he ate.

Angmar had had an insight the previous day which made him look at Mircaewen in a different light. He decided he liked her, much to his surprise.

When Aulë had called them into the Great Hall to announce the change in plans, Angmar learned that there were people at the Reunion he never saw. They were staying in a different part of the house presumably to avoid his Master, the family black sheep. And while Mircaewen made vulgar jokes at her brother's expense, she was right here, sitting with him and keeping him company. She had urged him to eat, had tried to distract him when he was upset, and held his hair when he was being sick. He realized that if he looked past the rough exterior, he could see how kind she was to her brother and how much she loved him. He wondered why he hadn't seen it earlier.

After breakfast was finished and cleared away, they sat around the long kitchen table with a group of Maiar with time on their hands, bored again and looking for some new drama.

The Forge

“Angmar said the blood from your shirt got into the cuts on his hand. I guess that makes you blood brothers.” Mircaewen teased her older brother.

“We have been for as long as we’ve known each other. A ceremony wouldn’t change anything.” said Sauron.

“Oh, so what you’re saying is, you’re afraid to cut yourself?”

The Mansions of Aulë were well stocked with every kind of tool imaginable. She quickly found a small razor-sharp knife and slid it across the table to him. She held him in a long stare. “I dare you.”

Sauron looked at Angmar as if to say, “Do you want to do this?” Angmar nodded. Sauron pushed the knife towards him. “Don’t slash your palm, just make a nick.” Angmar held his breath and made a small slice in the web between thumb and forefinger. It took a few tries, which left him with several small hesitation cuts. On the third try, he drew blood. He wiped the knife clean and handed it back to his Master.

“I bet you had him go first ‘cuz you’re scared to do it. But you can’t have someone else make the cut for you, you know. You have to do it yourself, to prove you’re really motivated to do this.” his sister teased.

Sauron picked up the knife and, after a few tries, made a cut in the same place as Angmar had. He reached for Angmar’s hand and placed his palm against Angmar’s, first checking to see that the two cuts were on top of each other. He gripped Angmar’s hand tightly. Angmar gripped back. They held it for a minute, and then it was done. Mircaewen handed him a clean cloth, and he wiped the blood from his hand. She remembered to give one to Angmar, too. The cut stung for the rest of the day, but Angmar felt enormously happy about having done it.

One of the visitors sent word to Aulë that he’d like to see the Forge again. Aulë came down right away and gathered up as many visitors from among his Maiar as were interested, which turned out to be all of them, plus a few more who lived there all the time. Aulë was pleased to lead a tour of the Forge and show it off to as many people as possible.

Reunion

The Forge was outdoors and a fair walk from the house, so it was too exposed for fugitives. Saruman noticed Sauron looking disappointed. But Aulë said to him, "Mairon, you don't want to miss this. Just wrap up in a cloak. If you keep your face and your badge out of sight, you'll be fine." Sauron jumped up happily, and rushed to catch up with the group, with Angmar following.

Aulë set off to show the visitors the Forge. The visitors followed him eagerly. They'd spent most of their youth there, and they hadn't it seen in a long time. Saruman looked to see who was in the group. Saruman's brother-apprentice who made the initial request, Saruman, Sauron with his little undead shadow trailing behind him as usual, and several more of Aulë's people. Saruman had been working in the Forge the night before, but he was looking forward to seeing it again in daylight.

Walking through the Front Hall on the way to the Forge, Saruman noticed a smell of new wood and of varnish drying. He hadn't noticed it earlier, but then again, as a servant he didn't go into the formal parts of the house much. He shrugged and forgot about it.

The fires in the Forge were hot, even though officially, no one was supposed to be working there during the Reunion. The elven smiths known as the Aulëndil, the Friends of Aulë, had been told to stay home during the quarantine. But Mahtan was stubborn and kept showing up in spite of orders to stay away. It was Mahtan who lit the fires first thing that morning and who had been working there ever since. Saruman couldn't have known it, but just a few minutes ago, Aulë had asked Mahtan to take a break to allow the tour to come through unobserved. Aulë wasn't worried about Mahtan, anyway. He kept to himself, didn't notice the people around him, and never repeated gossip.

Saruman saw Sauron step forward and reach for three notebooks on a high shelf, without asking Aulë's permission first, like he owned the place. He pulled them down and opened the first one. "My old notebooks!" he said with an almost reverential tone. Saruman didn't see how old notes from

The Forge

his apprentice days could be such a big deal. Sauron opened one and turned the pages, brittle with age, with great care. The pages were vellum. If they'd been paper, they would have crumbled into dust in his hands from age.

Saruman watched with little interest as Sauron leafed through his precious notebooks. Aulë was interested, however, and moved closer, his hand on Sauron's shoulder as they read the pages together. Saruman noticed Aulë made the gesture of affection easily, and that Sauron was so used to getting attention from Aulë, he didn't appear to notice. Saruman longed for Aulë to pay attention to him too.

The notes were definitely rough copy. All the entries were the same handwriting, the same as the Ring Inscription. No surprise there. On most pages, a careful flowing script shared space with a hasty scrawl. The writing had lots of crossings out and marginal notes, some of which were unrelated to the project, like his 'to do' lists and columns of numbers documenting his household expenses. The text was well illustrated with drawings, some little more than doodles, while others had been executed with great care using drafting tools.

There was one page with a diagram illustrating a logical argument. Apparently the logic fell apart unexpectedly, because the careful writing quit suddenly, and the line below it read "AIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII!" in huge block letters. Below it, there was another line in tiny printing, "never mind, i'm better now." There were no more entries until months later, suggesting that the author had taken a break from the project for a while.

Sauron leafed through the pages, looking at a page every few months. Saruman noticed that dates had been written at the start of each entry.

Apr 21st, SA 1598
Sept 12th, SA 1598
July 23rd, SA 1599

All of a sudden, Saruman felt the ground drop from under him. the One Ring had been forged on Mar 25th SA 1600.

Reunion

Sauron wrote in these notebooks as he prepared to forge the One Ring. The notebooks were a record of everything he was thinking and everything he did in the days leading up to it. These notebooks documented of how he did it. Saruman began paying attention with every fiber of his being.

Sauron kept leafing through pages, but he went at a slower pace, looking at a page every few weeks.

Dec 10th, SA 1599

Jan 16th, SA 1600

Feb 27th, SA 1600

Sauron picked up the third and final notebook. As he got close to the end, instead of quickly leafing through many pages at a time, he began to turn over each page individually.

Mar 12th, SA 1600

Mar 14th, SA 1600

Mar 15th, SA 1600

He turned pages one by one.

Mar 24th, SA 1600

This entry was dated the day before he forged The Ring. The design must have been final by that point, or as near as could be. Saruman tried to read the page without being obvious about it. However, so many words had been crammed into so small a space, the final text was printed in letters so small it wasn't legible. Phrases lined out and rewritten where there wasn't space for them made the text even less legible. Whole paragraphs were crossed out, put back, and taken out again.

He tried to get closer in order to see better, but Sauron's undead goon prevented him from getting close to his master. Saruman doubted the ringwraith was smart enough to figure out that Saruman wasn't interested in Sauron, only in the notebook he was holding. More than anything, Saruman

The Forge

wanted to see the ultimate instruction guide for forging the One Ring.

Before Saruman could even begin to make sense of it, Sauron turned the page, expecting to see the entry made on the day he forged the Ring.

It was blank.

Sauron blinked in surprise. Saruman saw him looking carefully at the binding, apparently looking for signs that the critical page had been cut from the notebook with a razor. It hadn't been. Then he leafed through the remaining pages to see if the last entry was further back, perhaps after some pages that had been left blank by accident. No, all the remaining pages were blank. The entry for Mar 25th 1600 simply wasn't there. Sauron looked visibly distressed.

"The final page is missing. A day or two before, I had an insight that resulted in a major change to the design. It didn't even resemble the designs I'd been pursuing up until then. And nothing about it is written down here." He studied the space between the last entry and the first page that was blank, still looking for signs that any other pages had been cut or torn from the notebook.

Then he remembered. "The final entry is missing because I never wrote it down. After I forged The Ring, I meant to document what I did, but I was busy and never got back to it." With a sigh, he closed the book he was holding, arranged the volumes in chronological order, and returned them to their place on the shelf.

Saruman looked at the spines of the notebooks, back on the shelf. He couldn't pull them down and look at them here, not with everybody watching. He'd been out here for over an hour last night, when he'd helped the two blacksmiths make the irons that Sauron never wore. He saw the notebooks on the shelf last night but hadn't attached any importance to them. Now he was kicking himself.

"I read through your notebooks, and I couldn't figure out how you did it." Aulë said. "You wrote down every idea you had and every blind alley you explored, but you never said

which ideas were used and which ones were thrown out. And, as you say, your final design is not there.”

Saruman was an expert at Ring Lore, and he could have learned a great deal more from Sauron’s notebooks than anybody else could have, even Aulë. Saruman actually knew more about ring-making than Sauron did.

Saruman had studied the forging of the Three Elven Rings and knew many of their secrets. Saruman had access to the Three because they were in the possession of members of the White Council, and he was the Head of the White Council. He knew who wore them, and where they lived. He had seen all of the Three up close and even tried them on. He interviewed Celebrimbor’s surviving apprentices who had worked in the Gwaith-i-Mirdain at the time when the Three were forged and learned how they had been made.

Sauron, on the other hand, had never seen or touched the Three, and knew very little about them.

The first rings made by Sauron and Celebrimbor in the Gwaith-i-Mirdain were the lesser rings, the “essays in the craft”. Sauron and Celebrimbor then made the sixteen Great Rings. But the Three were the greatest of the Great Rings. They were as much above the previous sixteen Great Rings as the sixteen were above the earlier ‘essays in the craft’, and they were made by Celebrimbor working alone. And the One Ring, made by Sauron working alone, while the most powerful of the twenty, was in some ways the simplest and most crudely built of all the Great Rings.

Saruman believed it shouldn’t be too hard to make another One, if only he could learn how the original had been made.

“How did my notebooks come to you, anyway?” asked Sauron. “I always assumed they were lost in the rubble when Barad-dûr was pulled down, or that they ended up in the Great Library at Minas Tirith, misfiled and unnoticed.

“None of the above. The elves recovered them from your workshop in the Sammath Naur and brought them to Imladris. One of the elven smiths who come here to study brought them with him and gave them to me, to see if I could make any sense of them.” said Aulë.

The Forge

On the way back through the Front Hall, which still smelled of fresh varnish, Saruman suddenly identified the source. The panel listing all their names had been remade. Finally! For years, he'd wished they'd make a new panel. When Aulë disowned Sauron at the end of the Second Age, he'd hacked Sauron's name off the list of his people. Saruman moved up to become First Maia, but he didn't get to enjoy the sight of his own name prominent at the top of the list, because the old panel was left where it was. Since the end of the Second Age, Saruman's name sat in second place, beneath the mutilated wood scored by chisel marks.

Saruman looked at the new panel with happy anticipation, savoring the moment. His eye went to the very top of the list, to the First Maia's position. Then he read the name. Mairon. Saruman just about screamed. Sauron was First Maia again. Saruman looked at Sauron, standing beside him. He had just realized that the panel had been replaced, but his reaction was very different from Saruman's. He took a step backwards and put his hands over his mouth, not daring to believe it. At least at that moment, Saruman hated him.

Saruman had a complicated relationship with his brother. Of all of Aulë's Maiar, he was the nearest to Sauron in age and rank. They were together most of the time as apprentices when Aulë instructed them. Their beds were next to each other in the dormitory. Obviously they knew each other well, but they had never been close.

Saruman hero-worshiped his brother. He was jealous of him. He wanted to *be* him. He wanted to see him get knocked him down a few pegs. He was fascinated by him, and studied him closely with an eye to taking his place. He envied the attention he got from Aulë. And while he found Sauron's relationship with Melkor reprehensible, he was jealous of the way it elevated him in rank and power.

Sauron's relation with Saruman was simpler. He paid attention to Saruman when he wanted something from him, and ignored him the rest of the time.

They headed back into the kitchen. While the others were occupied doing chores to get ready for the midday meal, Saruman slipped back outside and headed to the Forge.

Saruman expected to find the Forge deserted during the quarantine, because as long as the quarantine signs were posted, the Aulendil, the Noldor elves studying under Aulë, were supposed to stay away. Saruman was surprised to find Mahtan working there. He couldn't have known that Aulë had chased Mahtan out of the Forge just before the tour, or that Mahtan came back as soon as they were gone. Mahtan had no life other than working in the Forge. He chose to ignore the quarantine rules.

Mahtan had his head bent down over his space at the workbench, making something from copper and paying no attention to Saruman. Watching Mahtan to be sure he was unobserved, Saruman went straight to the shelf where Sauron's notebooks were kept. He was already reaching for them when he realized there was a gap on the shelf where the notebooks had been. He looked away and looked back again, but the notebooks were still gone.

Desperate, he asked Mahtan how long he'd been there, and who he'd seen in that time. Mahtan hadn't noticed. Typical. Then he asked him if there were any locked cabinets or drawers in the Forge, and could Mahtan open them for him? He said, Yes he knew, Yes he could, and No he wouldn't. Ask Aulë if it's that important. "Right, thanks for nothing." thought Saruman.

Saruman wondered how Mahtan, who had poor social skills, had dealt with having Fëanor for a son-in-law. Fëanor was a handful, to say the least. No wonder Mahtan hid out a lot.

"I'm not saying Fëanor was hard to get along with." Saruman thought, "It's just that, if there were a list of World's Most Difficult People, when Fëanor was around, Melkor would have temporarily dropped down to second place."

The Forge

He was thinking of a screaming argument between Fëanor and Melkor that happened right after Melkor got out of prison.⁸ Fëanor chased Melkor off his land through sheer force of personality. And if Melkor, the most dangerous creature on the planet, couldn't stand up to Fëanor, there was no reason to think that shy, non-confrontational Mahtan could either.

Saruman wondered why Fëanor had never apprenticed under Aulë. Perhaps he wanted to, but Aulë hadn't accepted him. It wasn't that Fëanor wasn't good enough. He was the greatest craftsman who ever lived, even better than Aulë. Fëanor made the Silmarils and the Palantir. Perhaps Fëanor was just too hard to get along with. For whatever reason, he apprenticed under Mahtan instead.

If Saruman had been able to study the notebooks, while he wouldn't have learned the final design, he would have been able to tell which design themes Sauron had considered and which ones were absent. He would have seen which designs had been rejected, and those which had consistently been a part of Sauron's thinking. And he would have come away with the knowledge to make a Ring like Sauron's, only better.

Saruman didn't plan to use Sauron's design, because he believed he could do better. He planned to achieve Sauron's results more elegantly, using a smaller infusion of personal power and a far less dangerous process to forge it. Saruman did not have as much power to put into a Ring as Sauron did, nor did he have Sauron's tolerance for risk.

From what he could reconstruct, Sauron's process for forging the Ring had put him in great physical danger. If anything had gone wrong and the Forging had failed, Sauron would have lost that portion of his power he meant to put into the Ring and been crippled. Nothing had gone wrong and he hadn't gotten hurt, but that was due more to good luck than to good planning. Saruman, on the other hand, planned to develop a process that was fail safe and not expose himself to danger.

⁸ "Get thee gone, thou jail bird of Mandos." And slammed the door in the face of the most powerful being in Ea. (find exact quote) The Silmarillion.

Saruman was still working alone and in secret. He still hadn't figured out what Sauron knew, that forging Great Rings was too big a task for any one person, even himself. If Sauron had been paying any attention to what Saruman was doing, he would have thought, "I'm not going to worry about Saruman being a Sauron-wannabe until I see him spending all his time with a Celebrimbor-wannabe."

Saruman left the Forge in frustration and decided to look for the notebooks in the house. It was noon, so everybody in the house was at table for the midday meal. He avoided the kitchen and all the people he'd run into there by going through the Front Hall and up the Formal Staircase. He really had no business using it. It was for Valar, not Maiar. And using the Formal Staircase took him right by the hated panel. It still stung. Maybe that's why he did something he wouldn't normally do.

He went up to Aulë's study and surreptitiously looked around. The surface of Aulë's desk, usually very neat, was cluttered with legal documents and what looked like an arrest warrant. He ignored the papers. Saruman was looking for the three notebooks, but they weren't stacked on the corner of the desk. They weren't in any of the bookcases, and they hadn't been left on the seat of a chair or on a windowsill. Driven by desperation, he pulled open the middle desk drawer. All the while, he listened for the squeak of a foot on a stair tread or for footsteps coming down the hall toward him. He had no reason to be there. His heart pounded. One by one, he looked in all the other desk drawers. The notebooks weren't there.

By now he felt like a criminal. Having crossed a line, he decided to go one further, and search Aulë's bedroom. He wasn't one of the servants who brought coals for the fireplace or emptied the wastebasket or changed the linen, so he had no good reason to be there. It was extremely foolhardy to even consider it. Leaving Aulë's study, he stood in the hall and listened. Nothing. Everyone was still eating or washing up afterwards.

Saruman went down the corridor toward Aulë's bedroom. He took a deep breath and began searching for the notebooks.

The Forge

The whole time he was there, he was ashamed of what he was doing, and terrified of getting caught. Almost the first thing he learned was that Aulë and Yavanna slept apart. That hadn't been true when he lived here. It was none of his business and he wished he didn't know. He kept searching, but became more and more frustrated as it became clear there were no notebooks in Aulë's bedroom. Saruman admitted defeat. He came downstairs and went back to the kitchen.

Actually, searching Aulë's bedroom wasn't the first wicked deed Saruman committed in his journey to become a Ring Lord. He'd done something much worse eighty years earlier. In addition to trying to forge his own Ring, Saruman was actively searching the Gladden Fields for Sauron's Ring. If he found it, he planned to claim it for himself.

No one else knew, but he'd already found Isildur's body in shallow water among the reeds on the West Bank of the Anduin.⁹ He knew the bones were Isildur's because they were found with things that had belonged to Isildur, his crown and a small gold case on a chain. The crown was an heirloom of unimaginable value, but in Saruman's mind the gold case was the great prize. Isildur had worn it around his neck, and in it, he kept the Ring.

When the case was delivered to him, Saruman couldn't open it right away because his hands were shaking too hard. He was sick with fear and giddy with triumph, all at the same time. He hesitated, trying to make the moment last a little longer. Then he took a deep breath, opened the little box, and looked inside.

It was empty.

Furious, he had the bones burned. Isildur deserved a state funeral and a magnificent tomb, but for that to happen, Saruman would have to admit what he'd been doing, and that wasn't going to happen. With the bones destroyed, he locked the crown and the little gold case away in a secret steel closet

⁹ The story of how Aragorn discovered the hidden closet in Isengard, containing Isildur's crown and the box in which he carried the Ring, is described in the Unfinished Tales.

he'd had built at Isengard and tried to get over his disappointment. He kept on searching for the Ring in secret.

Descending the servants' stairway to the kitchen, Saruman thought, "And when I find it and claim it, the ringwraith will bow down and call me Lord. And as for that one?" He looked at Angmar. "I'll be his master, and I'm going to make his life a living hell."

In the kitchen, he saw Sauron, who as usual was being trailed by his undead bodyguard, in a group of visitors that was headed up the servants' stairs. Saruman could tell from their conversation that they were going to see the dormitory where they'd all slept when they lived here. He decided to follow them, because he enjoyed revisiting old haunts himself and he'd been away from home for a long time.

Sauron was saying to his sidekick, "...the house is being repaired constantly. It's over fifteen thousand years old, but wood and brick and tile only last so long, and even stone wears away eventually. The original house may be long gone, but they're constantly replacing the parts that wear out with new ones that look exactly the same, so to us, it's the same house.

It's the same with the furniture. You're not going to find a three thousand year old bed or chair in the house because pine and oak just don't last that long, but new pieces are made that look exactly like the old ones. Even the textiles, the tapestries and rugs and bedspreads, are replaced with ones that look exactly like the old."

The apprentices' dormitory was on the third floor of the house, under the eaves. Saruman was the last one up the stairs and the last to enter the room. Saruman had slept in this room from the time they first occupied Aman until when he left to go to Arda as an Istari. His bed had been next to Sauron's. When the house was first built, the Maiar were arranged in the dormitory by their age, with the oldest and highest ranking Maiar ones being assigned the best locations.

When Saruman caught up with the others, he saw Sauron and his undead friend sitting on Sauron's old bed. The roof sloped down steeply in that part of the room. Sauron was tall for a Maia, and the ringwraith was just as tall, so neither of

The Forge

them were able to stand up straight here. By the bed there was a small window under the eaves, a luxury and a privilege of rank in this mostly dark and airless attic dormitory. The window was much of the reason the First Maia got this particular bed

Sauron was telling Angmar what it was like when he was young. When he saw Saruman, he pointed to the bed at a right angle near his, and said it had been Saruman's once. Angmar looked at Saruman, who nodded.

The young Maia who now slept in the bed that had been Sauron's came into the room. He froze when he saw all these strangers in his space. Annoyed, he said,

"That's my bed you're sitting on."

Sauron got up and said, "I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking. It used to be mine."

The young apprentice's eyes widened. "You must be Mairon." He clasped a hand over his mouth. "The living legend. Aulë talks about you all the time. His highest praise is, 'That's a truly excellent piece of work, only Mairon could have done better.' or 'Your skills are superior, maybe someday you'll even be as good as Mairon.'"

Saruman looked daggers at Sauron, but Sauron didn't notice. "Aulë makes you sound so amazing, I wasn't even sure you were real." The young Maia looked at Sauron with open hero worship. Saruman rolled his eyes. He was getting bored with this conversation.

Back in the kitchen, Saruman watched as Aulë came into the kitchen looking for Sauron. "Mairon, come with me. I have a task for you that ought to keep you busy all afternoon." Sauron got up and followed him. After a moment's hesitation, his undead sidekick got up and followed at a respectful distance.

Saruman listened to find out what was going on. They headed into the Formal Dining Room. Saruman could hear a murmur of voices. He heard Aulë's voice saying, "Here are your notebooks. I spent a lot of time trying to figure out how you did it, but I never could make heads or tails of it. And, as

you said earlier, you never did write down anything about your final design, or the breakthrough that got you there.”

I want you to do something for me. Write me a letter, three to five pages long, describing ‘How I Did It’. Make it as short and clear as possible, but include enough detail that someone else could duplicate your work. It’s for the historical record, and I’m the only one who will see it.

“I want you to document everything: what alloy you used, what temperatures were used at different stages of the process, what fabrication techniques, what spells you cast. Describe both the final design you picked, and the process you used to forge it. List the steps taken in the order they were performed in, and the timing. Include as many drawings and sketches as you think would be helpful.

“I want to know, why was the Ring plain? Was that important to the design, or did it just reflect your personal tastes? Why did it lack a gemstone, given that all of the other Great Rings had gemstones.

“Was the inscription crucially important, or was it just a decoration? Did you physically engraved it into the metal, or was it created by an incantation? Was the language of the inscription important, or just its meaning? Did it have to rhyme? Why was the writing on both the inside and outside of the band? Did it have to be done in Tengwar cursive script, or is that just what your handwriting looks like?

“How does it change size? Why can’t it be melted in fire or be damaged by tools?

“How much of your personal power went into it? Could you have used less and still gotten a good result? Did everything go according to plan, or did you have to put more of yourself into it than intended? What would have happened if something had gone seriously wrong, and did you have a plan to deal with it? When it was done, how did you claim it? And when did you know if it worked?

“One thing I especially want to know is, how did you bind the Great Rings to the One? Sixteen of them were your own workmanship and were in your possession, so I get that. But what about the remaining three? You had no role in making

them. They weren't in your possession, and you'd never even seen them. In fact, you had very little knowledge of them at all, and they were different than the first sixteen. They were much greater, much more powerful. Yet you bound them as well. How on earth did you do it?

"Leave out anything that was considered and rejected, or alternatives that could have worked equally well, or philosophical musings about how you arrived at the design. All that's in the notebooks anyway.

"When you're finished, come find me and we'll read through it together. I'll give you a critique of your design, and then we can think of ways your process for forging could have been done with less danger to yourself."

Saruman just about died of frustration. For however much he wanted to read the notebooks, the 'How I Did It' letter would be pure gold.

Just then Aulë noticed Saruman standing in the hall, eavesdropping. "Curumo, could I ask you to stay clear of the Dining Room for the rest of the afternoon? We're handling some information in here that's closely held, and none of my people will be permitted within sight or earshot of this room until we've finished for the day."

Saruman was looking in the room because Aulë was addressing him. He could now see Sauron's undead sidekick, the ringwraith, sitting in the room and privy to the conversation between Aulë and Sauron. The ringwraith, however, had the look of someone stuck in a really boring conversation who can't leave because politeness forbids it. His eyes were glazed over with boredom. He was looking out the window, at the wall, at anything but the wealth of text and drawings and process diagrams and alloy descriptions laid out in front of him, each of them containing priceless information. Saruman would have given anything to trade places with him.

Later, Saruman looked through the ashes in the Dining Room fireplace, where Sauron had burned notes and rough copy of the precious ring-making instructions. A single crumbled ball of paper had escaped the flames and was only partly burned. Saruman unfolded it and smoothed it out, his

Reunion

heart hammering with anticipation. But of all the pieces of paper created that day, this one was the most useless, because it contained only questions, not answers. It was the list Aulë wrote out and gave to Sauron to answer.

- alloy
- temperature
- process
- timing
- personal power put in
- inscription
- incantation
- preparations
- binding
- claiming

The list mocked him. Each item on it had been checked off. Somewhere in this house there was a five page letter, legible and organized, that answered every one of the questions on the list. That completely described how to forge a Ruling Ring, in enough detail that someone with Saruman's skills could make one of their own. And Saruman would never see it.

Chapter 17 The Voyage Home



While the others were still putting away the last of the supper dishes, or sitting around the long table telling stories or making music together in small groups, Angmar followed his Master down the cellar stairs to pack and get ready for bed. They went to sleep early in preparation for getting up at middle of the night and traveling all night. They'd received word that the storm passed through, and the sea had calmed enough to permit them to sail. Sauron had said goodbye to Aulë and to Eönwë in private.

Angmar didn't know what was said between them, but Sauron came back from those meetings solemn and not in the mood to talk. He didn't say goodbye to anyone else, because the fact of their departure during the night had to be kept secret until well after they had gotten away.

A few hours later, Celebtan came down to the dormitory to wake them. He was carrying a lamp in one hand, and seemed anxious to be going. He would drive them back to the coast where the ship was waiting. They dressed quickly, and Angmar checked to make sure Sauron remembered to fasten the immunity badge to his outer clothing.

The weather had improved greatly since the night before. The storm had moved on, the swells had decreased enough to sail close to shore safely, and they would sail with the tide before first light. Celebtan observed, "Ossë and his storms made it impossible for us to leave yesterday, but we ought to be fine today."

The trip out was a reverse of the trip three nights ago. In the Front Hall around midnight, they cloaked and hooded

themselves as quietly as possible in preparation for making the short walk to the barn. Before they left the house, Aiweneär went outside to make sure there was no one outside who might see them.

In the barn, Aiweneär brought the horse over from his stall, and she and Celebtan harnessed him up and buckled him into the wagon traces. She told Sauron and Angmar to climb up into the wagon box. They lay down and she covered them with a blanket, and then she spread a thick layer of hay on top of it.

Angmar felt the wagon shift as Celebtan climbed up into the wagon box. He heard Aiweneär pull out the wooden beam that barred the barn doors shut. Then he heard the squeak of iron hinges as she pushed first one and then the other of the barn doors open. Celebtan clucked the horse forward into the night air. It was chilly outside, and there was a misty drizzle. It wasn't raining exactly, but the blanket covering them soon became damp.

Aiweneär closed the barn doors behind them and climbed up into the wagon box with Celebtan. He shook the reins and clucked to the horse again, and with a jingle of harness, they started down the long gravel drive. At the end of the drive, Aiweneär jumped down to open the wrought iron gates which still displayed their yellow quarantine signs, now wet and tattered from the storm yesterday. They passed through the village, its dozen or so cottages dark at this hour, on the road that would take them all the way to the coast.

The trip to the coast took most of the night. The roads were muddy from the storm the night before, and they made less speed than they had on the trip in. The moon was clouded by overcast. Off and on a light rain fell, enough to soak them through the hay and the blankets that concealed them in the wagon bed.

When the wagon reached the dunes, Celebtan called to them come out from under the blankets. He lit his covered lantern, faced it out to sea, and opened the hinged cover twice. A minute later, Angmar saw two flashes in reply from beyond the surf line. Celebtan stayed behind with the wagon, watching as the three of them crossed the sand. The tide was at a little

The Voyage Home

more than low tide, but they could tell that each new wave came up a little higher on the beach.

The cloud cover had begun to break up, and while the moon had set, the stars provided some useful light. The sun would rise in a few hours. They walked through the dunes and sea grasses, through the heavy loose sand. Below the high tide line of shells and washed-up driftwood, they reached the hard packed sand that the incoming tide would soon cover. It was very dark, but they could see the silhouette of the ship as a black outline against the stars behind it.

A high wave carried the ship up onto the sand, then pulled back, leaving the keel exposed at the prow end. A rope ladder was tossed over the rail near the bowsprit. One by one, the three of them climbed on board, getting soaked to the thigh or even to the waist by the surf. When Angmar reached the deck, his wet clothes stuck to him and his leather boots were full of water.

Angmar leaned on the rail looking back toward the dunes where he thought the wagon was, but he couldn't see it anymore. The horizon was showing the first hint of grey light to the east, the direction of home, but it was pitch black on the western horizon over Valinor, where it was still raining.

The tide was coming in faster now, and it lifted the ship a little higher with each incoming wave. It was a strange feeling, to stand on deck and feel the ship sometimes floating and sometimes resting on sand, as the waves came in and retreated. But soon the ship was lifted enough that, with an offshore breeze in the sails, it floated free and they pulled away from the beach into deeper waters.

Angmar stayed on deck to watch Tol Eressëa passing abeam. This was something he's longed to see all his life. The sun had not yet risen, but in the predawn it had become light enough to see the Lonely Isle easily. When the island was so far behind them it was almost out of sight, Sauron asked Aiweneär "Now?" He meant, "Are we out of Aman yet?" She nodded. Sauron unpinned the hated badge from his clothing and flung it into the sea.

Angmar went below, intending to lie down in his bunk and close his eyes for just a few minutes, but instead he fell instantly and deeply asleep. He lay motionless for hours. Sauron came down to check on him, but was careful not to wake him.

Angmar thought that traveling all night, especially twice in three days, was what made him sleep all day. He didn't appreciate how much his Master's near arrest had drained him emotionally, or how, when they crossed the invisible boundary separating Valinor from Middle Earth, putting them beyond the reach of the Ring of Doom for his Master and the Ban for him, he had just about collapsed with relief. He didn't realize that, after what he'd been through, collapsing and sleeping like the dead was a perfectly natural reaction.

And he always slept better at sea than he did on land. Even unconscious, he could hear the sound of water gurgling under the keel, the creak of the hull, the clunk of the rudder on its pintles as swells passed under the stern, and the crackling of sea creatures too tiny to see. All the different sounds of the sea made their way into his dreams, and for a time, he was a young man again, following his ship-building father and older brother out to sea.

He came up on deck late in the day, still trying to wake up. He saw his Master talking to a woman he'd never seen before. She wore a blue dress the color of the ocean where it's very deep, with crystals that looked like drops of water sewn into the fabric. It was a small vessel, and they were in the middle of the ocean, so the appearance of new person among them was surprising, to say the least.

After a time, their conversation wound to a close and they said their goodbyes. She flung a leg over the rail, stood on the other side, and executed a clean dive, slicing into the water with hardly a splash. Angmar waited to see her surface again, but she didn't. Sauron turned away and showed little interest in the place in the water where she went in as it retreated into their wake. Angmar thought that was strange of him. Pointing to the empty ocean where the woman disappeared, Angmar said, "She hadn't surfaced yet. Aren't you worried about her?"

The Voyage Home

“Not really. She’s a water spirit. The ocean is her home.”

Angmar thought for a minute, then asked him, “Can you do that?”

“I’m an earth spirit, not a water spirit.” Sauron replied, as if that explained everything. Then he added, “No, I can’t.”

After a minute, he said, “That was Uinen, one of Ulmo’s people. She’s Ossë’s wife. She says Ossë’s still not speaking to me. Ossë and I used to be friends, but he never forgave me for recruiting him into Melkor’s service. He left the Rebellion almost as soon as he joined, and went back to his old life in Ulmo’s household. I’d hoped to talk to him about what happened after he came home and asked for pardon, and what it was like to serve a sentence of penal servitude. But I can’t, because even after all this time, he still won’t have anything to do with me.”

Chapter 18 The Inn



They spotted land around noon a few days later, when the coast of Arda far south of the Havens of Umbar came into view. They turned north sailed not far offshore, hugging the coast. By midmorning the following day, the ship entered the long narrow firth which was home to the Corsairs, and they sailed east with land close on each side. By afternoon, they were tying up at the quay below the walls of Umbar.

One member of Sauron's person guard was there watching for them. He left to fetch the rest of the guard, who assembled on the quay within a short time. The captain of the guard had been a little bit concerned when their master was a day late in returning, but he wouldn't have gotten really worried until the ship was a week or more overdue. Plus, the weather had been bad, with lines of squalls and heavy swells, and that always caused delays.

Sauron's guards had not been idle or wasted their time in port. They explored every tavern and inn in this large and international seaport, and could report on which had the best food, the best drink, and the best musical entertainment. They had also rented a large house, vacant while its merchant owner was in another realm purchasing luxury goods, in a quiet and secluded location at the edge of the city but still safely inside the city walls. The captain felt this provided better privacy and security, which were often the same thing, for his high profile master.

The captain realized that the security precautions probably weren't necessary. Umbar went back and forth between being controlled by Gondor and being controlled by Gondor's enemy,

The Inn

the Black Númenorians. The Black Númenorians were in power now. Gondor once installed a huge monument commemorating Sauron's capture here by Ar-Pharazôn. Almost as soon as they took control of the city, the Black Númenorians pulled it down. Sauron wasn't in any danger here in Umber. If his identity were discovered here, probably nothing would happen other than he would be mobbed by curious people who wanted to see a celebrity up close. But the captain wasn't taking any chances. There could be a Gondorian assassin in the crowd, and the captain felt that they should keep as low a profile as possible and not draw any attention to themselves.

The captain's plan was that they would go back to the house as inconspicuously as possibly, send one or two of their number out for food, and leave the next morning on horseback an hour before dawn to get well away from the city before anyone was awake and stirring.

That would have worked, if their master had seen the good sense in the plan and cooperated. But no. Sauron, a natural extrovert, did not like being cooped up. He minded it that he did not get to go out much. And tonight, he wanted to go out to the biggest, noisiest tavern in the Havens of Umbar, preferably one that drew a crowd from all corners of Arda.

So here they were, ordering dinner, drinking beer, and looking around the room at travelers even stranger than themselves. The captain had at least persuaded his high profile charges to exchange the fine garb of the Númenorian nobility for the plain tunics and leggings of ordinary people from these parts wore. The Captain had purchased inconspicuous clothes for them in town during his week of idleness, although they were intended for the ride home, not for a night of tavern-going.

At least they were seated at a large table against a wall. And at least Sauron had agreed to sit with his back to the wall, with a bodyguard on either side of him and a protective line of men-at-arms seated in a row on the far side of the table.

This tavern, the largest and most cosmopolitan in this bustling seaport, was known for its music. It had a stage where

professionals hired by the management performed, but it also had a custom of amateur performances by the patrons. In fact, it was the amateur performances that the tavern was famous for, because people with talent came from far away to sing and play, and to hear others like themselves perform¹⁰. The professional performers were really just to provide background music before things really got going, which is to say, before the patrons had begun drinking and were still feeling a little bit inhibited and shy.

They heard a variety of really good music, singing a cappella or accompanied by harp or lute. The performers were mostly individuals and small groups of the mannish races. The atmosphere got more lively as the evening wore on. One of the customs of the establishment was challenges. The group that had just performed could challenge another table to perform next. If the next table didn't want to sing they could chose to forfeit, which meant they had to buy a round for the challenger's table.

There was a group of elves at one table. It was a mark of how cosmopolitan this city was, that elves would venture into this land controlled by friends of Mordor. But they were merchants and traders, and there was a profit to be made in Umbar for those who were brave enough to seek it, so here they were. They were looking standoffish and superior in the manner of elves everywhere. The elves were challenged to sing, and of course they accepted the challenge since they knew they were good. And they sang beautifully. Really beautifully. Theirs was simply the finest performance of the evening so far, nobody questioned it. When the last chord faded, there was a hushed silence in the tavern, and then a thundering round of applause that went on and on.

It so happened that the Mordor table was the one closest to the elves', so when the elves challenged the next group, it was themselves. The captain pulled out his purse with a heavy sigh,

¹⁰ The reader may recognize this as Gus O'Connor's Pub in Doolin, Ireland, world-famous for the music performed by its patrons.

because he was worried about expenses, and started to ask the serving maid to bring a round to the elves' table.

"No. We accept the challenge." This was from Sauron. He was drunk.

The captain, first of all, did not want to do anything to draw attention to his high profile master. Secondly, he did not want to let his master to embarrass himself, although this was not officially part of the captain's job. But still.

Sauron stepped up onto the bench, collected his thoughts, and drew a deep breath. The captain thought, "At least he didn't climb up onto the table and draw even more attention to himself, especially if the table collapsed under his considerable weight." But he still thought this had disaster written all over it.

Sauron began his song. He only sang a few verses, but it was the most astonishingly beautiful thing the captain had ever heard. It was supernaturally beautiful. Actually, it probably was supernatural. What the captain really noticed were the faces of the elves. He couldn't have known, but the elves felt like they were hearing the opening notes of the Aινulindalë, the song of the Holy Ones that created the world. They listened with their jaws dropped open, transfixed. And when Sauron finished, they clapped harder than anyone. The elves, with all their sophistication and refinement, were the ones in the best position to appreciate what they'd just heard.

When Sauron finished his song and jumped down from the bench, Angmar noticed two of the elves elbowing each other in a "You do it", "No, you do it" kind of way. Finally both of them approached the table, looking shy.

"I wanted to ask, I just wondered, where else have you sung?"

"You mean, professionally?" Sauron asked. He knew he was good.

Angmar thought the elves were getting way too close to his Master, leaning across the table and peering into his face. Then all of a sudden, he understood. They were trying to get close enough to study his eyes. Based on his singing, they wanted to know if he had Maia eyes.

Reunion

Angmar had always thought his Master had really strange eyes. The first time they met, when Angmar first came to Barad-dûr to study under the famous sorcerer, he noticed the pupils of Sauron's pale eyes were almond shaped. He assumed it was a flaw from birth and avoided mentioning it out of politeness. It wasn't very noticeable. He wouldn't have noticed at all, had Sauron's eyes been dark. But later, he learned it was a racial trait with a name: Maia eyes. All of the Holy Ones have eyes with off-round pupils, taller than they are wide.

Even in the dim light, the elves couldn't have failed to see the shape of his eyes, and they obviously knew what it meant.

"You sang in the *Ainulindalë*, didn't you?" one of the elves said. It was a statement, not a question.

Sauron smiled, and didn't answer.