

Far Over The Misty Mountains Cold

By cruel magics Random awoke at Sauron's feet. Three blinded elves stood behind him, an army of dark creatures hooted in the shadows, and behind the Lord of Middle Earth rose a spire of rock a hundred feet tall. Near the pinnacle two great, thin spars reached down and held a black orb. Above it hung a thick black sky of volcanic ash across which spiders of lightning crawled. Random felt bitterly cold and his head ached.

"Behold the King of Excellence," said Elrond as Random lifted himself to hands and knees.

"Mairon, Lord of Middle Earth," said Glorfindel as the king of Amber raised his head.

"Master," said Galadriel.

All three spoke with limitless pride and eagerness, yet Random saw tears cutting through dirt on their faces.

Sauron, Dark Lord of Middle Earth, stood thirty seven feet tall. He was the most beautiful man Random had ever seen, in shadow or in Amber. Black hair framed a fair-skinned face. His jaw was finely made and came to an elegant chin. His eyes implied wisdom and kindness. Sauron had the aquiline nose of emperors and soft cheekbones under those all-knowing eyes. Random could not discern their color, but he always thought of them as black. The Dark Lord wore gold and black: a mantle of mithril and boots of ebony. On his right forefinger he wore one plain ring, the smallest of rings, save it fit his hand as if it was made for him.

There was something beyond perfect about him. Sauron's skin defied the marble of great sculpture as flawed. He was symmetric, and his hair fell exactly where it meant to. Seeing him, Random felt a pressure on his mind to give in to the all-powerful Lord of Middle Earth and accept his grace, and felt ashamed for being so little in his presence. He rebelled against it, but the thought faded before his arguments and memories. Random felt bad about that too.

The thought came unbidden that this was whom Vialle wished she'd married.

Robed in mail and cloaked with shadow like the wings of balrogs, Sauron kicked Random over and stepped on him like a bug. Random's arms and legs stuck out around the foot. Sauron leaned low.

"Submit to my will." The perfect voice spoke slowly with compassion, and up close he was even more beautiful.

Random said something obscene involving procreation.

"No," said Sauron.

The lord of Middle Earth stood up and ground his boot-heel on the Lord of Amber's chest. Random grabbed the ebon boot and strove against it. For a moment he alleviated the pressure on his chest before Sauron leaned heavily. The foot slammed back against Random, drove the wind out of him, and ground him into cold, hard-packed earth. A noise escaped Random like a sigh before Sauron stepped away. The king of Amber curled up, hacking and coughing as he sucked in air and got grit and dust.

"Do not fear. I mean you no harm, mortal," said Sauron. He folded his hands behind him and regarded the occluded sky. Pleased, he turned and smiled gently again.

"I'm going to give you a gift. It has happened that nine rings of mine have come to your family. They are worn by your family. They are mine, and I have bound all power and will within them.

"Your people talk of you endlessly. They talk of your skills in awed tones. Mortal, they talk of your feuds and your curses. This curse of your blood, something you can speak but infrequently, is your only means of reaching out across shadow and time to Amber.

"You could speak your curse against me. You're thinking about it. But you will watch your kith and kin fall under my sway, wearing my rings, and they will bend to my will. And the idea is already within them that only thing that keeps them from the throne is your wife. You and Oberon were alike in but a few ways: blood and marriage. So they will take her or kill her, but they will remove that obstacle. For is your family not a most pragmatic one?

"And you have a curse. So you can curse me here, in this place, and I will sit and wait. Or you may wait and watch for your siblings to realize you are gone, the throne is open, and all they need to be king is kill your wife. Or take her. And if you save your curse for the most ideal moment, perhaps you can use it to save Vialle the blind. Will you speak your last word against me and have nothing left to say when they come for her?

"Your difficulty, mortal, is your curses are vague and broad. Your dead brother used one to open with a pathway to Amber. Your other dead brother spoke one against the enemies that trod it. Your curses are plagues and fires and cataclysms, but to save your wife, you will need a razor."

Sauron stomped on Random again, suddenly, and very nearly crushed him. But this time the King of Amber was slightly more prepared, and he caught the ebony boot. His arms shook. His body broke through the hardpan. He strained.

Sauron reached down and patted Random's head like a dog. His touch made Random's skin feel like it was covered with ants. The position increased the Dark Lord's weight threefold.

"And I am going to give you power, control, and the will to use it. Random, I am going to give you a ring."

The beautiful man stepped away to look to the sky and speak to the orcs. "Bind him," he said, and they did.

Random fought and slew many, until the crevices of Golgoroth ran thick with orc blood. It froze black on rocks and dirt. Sauron watched and smiled. But there were many orcs, and in the end they took him into the tower of Barad Dur.