

## Chapter 4

And lo! A light arose in the East. It was me.

("Yeah, shut up, buddy," said Merlin.)

Hey!

("Merlin, you stop picking on the Dark Lord right now. That wasn't nice," said Vialle. She tsked firmly.)

"He's the Dark Lord! He's not nice!" said Merlin, but Vialle interrupted him.

"That's no reason to sink to his level. Now, sir, apologize."

"I am not apologizing to the lord of evil," muttered Merlin.

"You're being immature.")

If SOMEBODY can remember their manners, I will continue.

("I am not taking that from the DARK LORD!" yelled Merlin)

*As I was saying,* I can't be the Dark Lord. I'm a light arising in the East.

You need to improve your listening skills.

I set my hands to burdensome tasks, making for the fair Ursula something less shabby than her old dwelling. In the midst of great

seas, a ridge of mountains rose. Their foundations were basalt; their crests obsidian. In the deep places magma flowed in rock tunnels, and in the shallows, fronds of kelp made a forest. Here I built a minor castle. It was good enough for a summer home.

I began with the deep gabbro, ancient rocks that had endured for eons. While lesser lavas flowed over top, these ancient rocks had cooled in slowness, forming great crystals. I built them into walls. Battlements and ramparts I topped with garnets. From the shallows I quarried huge limestone blocks.

The castle rooted in the deepest crevices of this subnautic ridge and climbed above the highest peaks. Lavas I bound with mighty spells until molten rock flowed like rivers of light. Higher, I built veins of obsidian and quartz to carry the dawn's light to the deep places. Its apex rose from the waves like a black spire turned to white. At the crest I laid blocks of limestone and chalk so the summit glittered in the sunlight. The summit of the highest tower resembled a pyramid, but instead of a capstone I laid my throne of gold, inset with jewels of the sea. At sunrise and sunset, it glittered like the touch of an ancient god.

(Several of his guests, who had been fighting, paused. They looked up, and the words of Sauron still possessed a power of imagery. In the air before the towering figure a new vision appeared, one of stone and sea where transparent waters veiled but did not conceal the magnificence of cornice and pillar. They saw a rising tower with its roots in ocean bedrock and its spire in the open air, done in colors of red and green, wearing a sargasso forest like a cape.

And they saw Sauron building, laying stone on stone, scrapping barnacles, tending to currents. They saw him finish quartz with ancient magic so the corridors miles deep had the warm light of shallow beaches. They saw tropical fish among the roots of the castle, swimming in water warmed by magma. They saw boudoirs of rocklight where dolphins played, and windows open to the ocean where Sauron stood with the many-legged Ursula under his arm.

"Like, dude, why don't you get out of the conquest business and become an architect?" asked Random.)

Architecture is just a pastime.

("And you made this for the sea witch?" asked Flora.)

I made it for her for our dalliances, but alas, she betrayed me. I left her to her cold demesne, unwarmed by my presence.

("You got into a fight with her and left her a palace?" asked Flora.)

A mere palace. Without me, it's only stone under water.

("Baby, how you doing?" Flora quickly fixed her hair.

"Aunt Flora, what are you doing?" asked Merlin.

"Shut up, Merlin. I like tall men."

"Tall? Tall is six-two. He's Godzilla with greasy hair!"

"Sweetie, hush! Mommy is working."

Random made a noise like he was trying to inhale a piglet, and Vialle patted his arm. Corwin stepped around Flora to take Merlin aside. He lead his son some distance from the others and spoke to him in a low, fast tone with several stabbing motions. Gerard and Llewella waited and watched. Julian decided he was smarter than everyone else and looked it.

"I'm going to regret this, but I want to hear what she did to you," said Fiona. "How did she betray you?"

You too wish to hear of my sufferings?

("No! No, I- Oh, dammit, yes, I guess I do.")

Truly, I will give you the gift of understanding. Though it wounds me anew to repeat my travails, I will tell you of my problems.

(And Fiona sighed. She looked so sad.)

Lo, a light arose in the east! It was me. Hear me, Scions of Amber, and I will tell you of my troubles.

("Thanks, Fi. Thanks," said Corwin.

"Yup," said Fiona.)

As deep and mysterious as the seas are the wiles of women. Their plans unknowable, their feelings incomprehensible. Who among us can foresee the inexplicable and ineffable natures of them all? No one. No one knew what terrible doom hung over my head, nor understood the nature of the conflict that would shortly consume me.

Bright and brilliant rose the Sun on the day of Doom, though less bright and less brilliant than me. I had finished the construction of the outer palisade, weaving rivers of lava through walls of obsidian, and the whole tower glittered with light and shadow. Volcanic glass carried the warmth of molten rocks to the otherwise grim seas, and creatures of the surface dallied with those of the depths. Corrals, red, white, and green, grew thousands of fathoms below the waves.

Shrimp and lobsters scuttled over reefs. Sunfish swam lazily like ghosts, and schools of fighting fish battled among the basalt. Even those lazy, good-for-nothing neighbors, the merfolk, came to investigate this new realm of peace and magnificence. From the nadirs of the oceans to the thin airs above where my throne awaited me, the work of my hands inspired awe.

No sooner had I finished my toils than Ursula approached me.

"Mairon the whatever, are you done yet?" she asked, not as respectfully as one could hope.

"I am. I have finished all things, and they are complete. See how the merfolk come to regard my labors--"

"Yeah, about that. I want to see other people."

"...What."

"Mairon, it's just not working out between us. You work too much."

What did she mean? "What do you mean? I work to build a dwelling for us both, a palace of special--"

"But you're not here!" she interrupted me.

"I am here! I'm in the garden!"

"But where are we?"

I was confused. "In the garden?" Was that not clear?

"Where are we going?"

"Inside?" I suggested.

"No, Mairon, that's not what I mean." She shook her head. Her tentacles shrugged.

"What do you mean?"

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"Inside?" I said again. "I just answered that. Though, we could go to the spires of Mt Mairon the Greatest, for I have built—"

"You named a mountain after yourself?"

I nodded. "It is the greatest."

"Mairon, that's what we need to talk about. You see, I have needs."

"You need a mountain?"

"Not a mountain."

"Baby, I can get you a mountain."

"Mairon, shut up about the mountain."

"You brought it up!"

"I did not!" she exclaimed. "You mentioned Mt Mairon the Greatest! You're bringing up the mountains right now!"

"Yeah, I did," and I winked lasciviously at her. "I'm bringing it up now."

--There seems to be an odd bit of yowling and gagging from the audience. I would appreciate if you held your noises until I pause for questions.

Thank you.--

"I'm breaking up with you," said Ursula, and the mark of doom was spoken.