

Chapter 5

So anyway, long story short, I forswore women for real after managing to burn my crotch in an affair with the Volcano Mother.

This was my second attempt at avoiding women. Ursula wounded me. She batted her eyes, wiggled her tentacles, made me feel all squiggly inside, and when I'd given her everything, betrayed me. That's when I should have given up dating all together, but mistakes were made.

I don't make mistakes, mind you. Other people did. If Ursula hadn't betrayed me, I wouldn't have gotten magma burns on my tender areas, and so everything that happened is her fault forever.

And I knew the truth. From that point on, I would devote myself to my work. No more ladies, especially not evil ones, and at the absolute least, they had to have legs. I have standards. I'm worth it.

No ladies, I'm too good for you all.

(Flora stared at Sauron with a determined frown and sighed. Fiona seemed to be watching him philosophically, much like she might view archival footage of ancient disasters: terrible, and yet long past the point where anyone could be saved. Random had taken a seat with Vialle beside him, and they listened without judgment. Corwin and Merlin stood aside as the father smoked and son watched. It was an old argument of theirs, mythical regeneration vs filthy habit, and had passed into the realm of unresolvable yet unimportant tragedy.

The other Amberites sat in various still positions, and around them orcs hooted, capered, and cavorted in obscene glee.)

You see, I had left my true work alone for too long. Melkor needed me. He yearned for my continued aid, for without me, he could not claim the throne of the Dawn Gods. I was to build the true magnificence of creation. My work would be the apex of all things.

I returned to the Logrus. Back then the shadows were not as fixed as they are now. I had no need of black roads or artifice. I reached out with the power, drew myself across space and time, and returned to the palaces of ancient myth. Melkor had assembled a great host, and he spoke to us of his own journeys.

Before the maiar of old, he said, "Hear me, minions. I have gone forth into the world, and heard the songs of the enemy. Three themes he has played and within them he seeks to create. I have chosen to allow this, but shall take it for my own purposes, to perfect and improve his work. I shall bring conflict and greatness to these songs."

"Lord," I interrupted. "I have returned."

"I didn't know you had gone."

"I had. But I'm back now."

"Good. Shut up."

He was overwhelmed with joy that I, his equal, was with him again.

"Minions, including you Smoky, we are going to a new world, and there we shall make ourselves the glory that befits us. Come with me and rule as kings, or stay here and serve."

So we traveled forth.

The shadows then began to harden as they are now. It was the songs of this enemy Melkor found. The music gave form to the light over the deeps, and it was a terrible mistake. I could have done much better. But we journeyed.

In time, we came to a peculiar shadow, one unlike the rest. It was specifically touched by the endless music, and around it lay an outer darkness, kept out by the Gates of Night. It was a world set apart, one of music and of language, wherein a power of spirit moved across the earth. It was in many ways like shadow, for it had no form and yet was, it had no hands and yet crafted, and its work was in words and sound. At the Gates of Night, this form spoke to us, and asked us why we had come.

And Melkor said he had come to take part in creating this new world, and we had come with him.

I hadn't come with him, per se, as I was here myself and he had just happened to be going in the same direction, but it didn't seem like a good time to argue.

And the Spirit of the Music looked down on Melkor and said, "Be welcome, Child. The fullness of my grace is before you, and I grant it to you gladly. But know, beloved, that my will is grace and joy, and the music that is."

"Is that a threat?" asked Melkor.

"No," said the Spirit of Music. "I wish you delight and joy, and if you join my makings, delight and joy will come from you."

"Of course it will," said Melkor. He smiled.

And the Spirit of Music smiled as well, yet seemed sad. But the music was, and we passed through the Gates of Night into a new world, and dwelt there in a place that would be called Arda.

In this time we had comrades, and they were called the Ainur. They did much and made much, and Melkor dwelt among them. I worked with them, and joined the band of the one known as Aule. They asked me sometimes of Melkor, but I said I didn't know him. Among the people of Aule, I worked with iron and steel, silver, stone, and the hard and enduring things of the earth. I did not speak to the others of Melkor, for they believed me when I denied him.

But to me Melkor gave special orders. And when no one looked for me, I would leave the people of Aule and go east.

First I came to a sea, and passed it for the wiles of Ursula still wounded my heart. Then I came to mountains of fire, and passed them, for they're hot and all, but definitely not worth it. And finally I came to a new place, one unlike any I had been to. The earth was deep and strong. The soil was cold, and yet could be hewn into frozen blocks. A dark sky rose overhead, and far behind me the lights of day and night shone upon the world. But no one could see what I built in the north, and I was protected from my enemies. Already the Valar sought to spy on me, and they meant me harm. I set to work building a new fortress. It was meant to be, in some future time, the palace of all creation, and I named it Utumno.

It was mine, though Melkor later claimed it for his own.

(And of all who watched, Random sighed. Nearby stood Corwin, and Corwin showed nothing. But his brother, the king, looked terribly sad, and if any of Oberon's children later described Random hearing the story of Sauron, they always used the same word to describe it. They said he was so very, very disappointed.)

It was Melkor who brought the denizens of Utumno to me. He brought orcs and trolls, and in the deep chambers made new creatures. I worked with stone and iron, but Melkor worked in flesh. He bred vampires and wraiths. He took the shadows and made from them something like life, and took the creatures of the forest and made them like shadows. My halls were always quiet, sterile, and perfect,

but it was Melkor who introduced things that ran, climbed, and fought among them.

(And at this the orcs of Mordor bowed low and paused their capering for a while.)

Crisis happened and the Valar cruelly prosecuted us, but in time Melkor came to Utumno and I moved to a new realm called Angband. In that place, I went upon my work, but a servant of Melkor came with me. She was to be a great aid to him, and would serve him in one of his greatest actions. Her name was Ungoliant, and she was a thing out of legend.

I do not know if Melkor created her or found her, but she was the epitome of all his power. She had a form inverted, her bones outside and flesh within, great body segments, and immense powers. Her sent her to Angband to grow strong, for Melkor had an idea within him. By now, the world was dark save for two Trees growing in the west, but I did not understand his mind.

Indeed, I did not seek to. For Ungoliant had come to me, and I looked upon her that was most fair.

"Hey, baby," I told the spider. "Nice legs."