

~ A Time of Thunder ~

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~ A Time of Thunder ~

by [Spiced_Wine](#)

Summary

Sequel to 'The Once and Future Kings' .

There are rebels in Valinor but Fëanor knows they have not the power to defeat the Valar. They have to leave. Yet more sons are born to he and Fingolfin and they will not subject their children to the probable dangers of a wild and unknown Endor.

Fëanor, however, has touched the totality of the Flame Imperishable and more wonders and brilliance are born from his mind and hands.

And now is the time for Melkor to be released, apparently penitent. Or does his probation serve a different purpose?

In the modern world, Vanimóre means to return to the Monument to track down everyone involved the child trafficking ring but Edenel and Coldagnir are concerned that he will never return.

These are Times of Thunder

~ Between Slivers of Glass ~

~Between Slivers of Glass ~

~ Valinor ~

~ Nerdanel slept, and his sons too. Fëanor did not sleep or have any desire to. He sat in the quiet outer chamber and thought —

— He thought that no matter how many allies they might gain, Eldar or Maia, they could do nothing against the Valar. Nothing would ever change in Valinor. The Powers did not want it to. If the Eldar wanted change and freedom, they *had to leave*. (And a little warning voice whispered ‘*If we can*’. He snarled at it, and burned it away).

As they were, they could not topple the Valar from their thrones and yet even that would be easier than changing their stone-set attitudes.

Quietly, Fëanor checked his sleeping children, knowing that he would not subject them to unknown lands at their young age. For a time, he was tied to Valinor.

Except — he was not. As Laurelin’s gold trumped Telperion’s silver he smiled as his fingers turned the Mirror case. He was no fool; he had seen and felt the Outside, but it served as a reminder that the cage of Valinor was permeable. There were ways out. He touched the case as if it were a talisman. Or a key. It was certainly the latter and helped him to view the coming years with something at least approaching equanimity.

Eönwe had left them with warnings: ‘While we may meet and talk, we should be cautious. There are many who are bound to the Valar, who revere them and they may carry tales. Could thy minds stand against the Valar’s sight? And even if they could, Manwë waits only for an excuse to banish thee — and kill thee.’

Fëanor tossed his hair back, hot words ready to spill from his lips, but Fingolfin caught his wrist in a steely grip which brought his head around to the burning star-blue eyes. He said, instead: 'We will be cautious.'

And after, when Ingwë and Eönwë had gone, he forgot all caution in the magnificent convulsion of sex. It had been wilder, more savage, more angry than at any time before. 'The secrets we share also keep us apart, Fingolfin had said. Yet he, too, had been glowing, after and Fingolfin thought: Whatever we are growing into is glorious.'

After Maglor's extraordinary performance, which seemed to affect him not at all, Nerdanel was eager to leave the next morning. Indis was conspicuous by her absence whereas before she would have called Nerdanel to her chambers. Finwë looked as if he held his temper tightly in check and there was a frown between his brows. Fingolfin (superbly haughty) stood beside their father as Fëanor and his people rode out of the ward and toward the great gates. Fëanor, not turning his head, sent a stinging mental kiss into his brother's mind. He felt the hot shock of its return and smiled. And, as they rode he thought of Vanimöre's kiss, an inferno that some inner alchemy had turned to a burning cold.

What happened to thee?

There was no answer, and he knew there would not be. Not yet. Vanimöre had put up barriers as high as the Pelori and as impenetrable. But even that mountain chain was split by the Calacirya. Fëanor would discover the chink in that armour one day and not from prurient curiosity, but sympathy. For now though, he must return to Formenos; there was Hilyaro (Sáro) to see.

And the bard came only three days later. He arrived quietly and Fëanor had him brought to his private study. He was not inclined to look with favour upon anyone who touched his sons but if Hilyaro knew something, if it explained his actions, Fëanor would listen.

'High Prince.' The man looked uncomfortable but the long, sour set of his mouth was nowhere in evidence. 'I must tell thee I am here in defiance of King Finwë's orders.'

Fëanor rose from his seat. 'Indeed?' This played so neatly into the lie of a schism between Tirion and Formenos it seemed unlikely to be true. Fëanor planted the palms of his hands on the great desk and stared at the bard.

'Why would he object?' he asked, thinking he knew full well but wanting to hear it.

Hilyaro hesitated. Fëanor waved him to a chair.

'The King does not like such things spoken of,' he replied expressionless. 'Cuiviénen,' he added.

'I know,' Fëanor responded dryly. 'This is about my son's voice? The Power of Song as thou didst call it.'

'There were some in Cuiviénen who could use their voices thus, yes. A few. Everyone had different talents, but then...' He looked down. 'It was like a game, but if it were trained...'

It could be a weapon, Fëanor nodded. 'Different talents,' he repeated. 'Yes...Thou art thinking that those who were snared by the Dark God could have fought back had those talents been trained?'

Hilyaro's eyes came up. They were very dark and filled with an old and helpless pain. 'We cannot

know, and we are not gods but when thy son released the power of his voice...' He groped. 'There was one I served. He did not have that power but one of his friends did and they were taken. If they had known how to use it, direct it...'

'Thou didst not serve Finwë, then?'

The man flushed. Fëanor, impatient, said, 'I do know he had a twin.'

Hilyaro came up from his seat. 'You know about Élernil?'

'Yes. I know he was taken by the Dark God.' And such was the expression on the bard's face that Fëanor wanted to tell him that Élernil, now Edenel, had survived, as had others. But Eönwë's warning echoed in his memory, and the wings of fear for his children, for Fingolfin, cooled him.

'And Finwë never searched for him. He forbade it after some of our people went and never returned.' There was so much rancour in the reply it could not be mistaken but neither could Fëanor dismiss the suspicion that Finwë had sent him as a spy.

'So, if thou didst feel so passionately, why didst thou come to Valinor?'

Hilyaro said on a breath of cynical laughter. 'I thought the Valar would do something!'

Fëanor was momentarily surprised but it made sense did it not? The Valar, the apparent rescuers of the quendi were gods. They had waged war on one of their brethren.

His hands clenched. He said, 'And they did not?'

'They said that when they descended into Utumno, they found abominations and slew them.'
Hilyaro's eyes closed briefly as if to trap the horror within, but Fëanor felt it like an emanation of heat.

He very much doubted the Valar would ever send a spy whose work entailed expressing disapproval of them. Their egos were too great. If Hilyaro were a spy he was one of Finwë's. There was one way to find out: Edenel still walked upon Endor.

'Thou may dwell here in Formenos and teach Maglor,' he said. 'But touch him again and I will pull out thy heart.'

Hilyaro did not react in the way he expected. Instead, he flushed, and Fëanor recalled that he was not born in ever-bright Valinor and was of an older time and world. 'For that,' he said. 'I am sorry.'

Fëanor regarded him. 'Very well. And thou wilt also apologise to him.'

~ Fëanor had seen visions of Edenel in the Mirror shard, but had only spoken to the one from the old universe. Because, he thought *the one here, who walks on Endor does not have a piece of the Mirror*. It was obvious once he considered it. And he remembered the shards spinning out across the multiverses and that *he* had made the original.

It is my creation. I can control it.

He briefly considered stepping into the *Outside* again, peril be damned. Vanimöré had warned him and he well recalled the horrific feelings he had become entangled with, but at no time had he felt any fear. It was tempting. It *was* yet...he had two shards now.

He waited until the Mingling fell, after the evening meal, when most of the workshops were closed up. Not all; there were always some where the men and women worked at any hour; he did himself. But habit was strong in Valinor, and most were accustomed to using the Mingling hours to sleep.

Nerdanel had been in her own workshop today and he was glad to see her returning to her craft. But after the meal she had gone to bed, pleading tiredness. Fëanor spent some time with his boys before they too, slept, and then went to his study.

He closed the thick drapes against the light and sat down, drawing the Mirror case and the shard from his pocket. He opened the case and set both on the table.

The blank silver showed him nothing but his own reflection. He delved deep into his mind, and commanded: 'Show me!'

The surface of the Mirror rippled then cleared to a wheel of stars.

No. Not that. Not yet. Show me Endor.

Green leaves in an embroidery of full-leaved lushness: a place of trees; a small hillock from whence a fresh of water burst, cascading down a ferny rockface.

Show me...my father.

His heart pounded at the words, at the meaning of them. A remembered loneliness felt like a misstep he might take and fall into a crevasse.

And walking out of the trees came an Elf. Élernil. Edenel. Scorched-white hair braided back with black raven feathers, startling against its pallor, wound into it. He was dressed from throat to feet in soft hide, and looked wild and strange and powerful. Yet his face might have been a carving. It held no expression at all.

The way he walked was like Vanimöré and Fëanor recognised it now. It was purely dangerous, alert, ready to flash into movement, yet smooth as the slide of honey down glass.

What was done to you...what was done to him...?

Edenel paused, unslung a leathern flask and held it under the flow of the water, stoppering it once it was full. He drank from the flow, shaking the wetness from his fingers. Fëanor slowly pushed his hand through the Mirror and at once could hear the sounds of the world, not merely see it. The breeze through the branches, the flow of water, birdsong. Fëanor flicked his wrist and released the shard. It struck the rock, tinkling, bounced down the tiny gulley and landed at Edenel's booted feet.

The reaction to that sound was instant. A pair of knives seemed to spring into the Elf's hands with a spark of light. He went into a crouch, eyes scanning the surroundings. Whatever he heard or felt eased some of the tension. Birds still sang; there were no alarm calls as they fled disturbance.

He sheathed one knife, reached and picked up the shard. Fëanor's long perspective changed in a blink to a close one of Edenel's face, eyes staring into the Mirror, a faint frown between his brows. Tiny silver and gold sparks lit the white of his eyes.

Fëanor's throat tightened. Heat swept up his body, bloomed across his cheeks. 'Edenel,' he said. 'Élernel that was. I am Fëanor and I speak to thee from Valinor.'

~ Villa Fiorini. Lake Como ~

~ Lake Como eventually (reluctantly) released Raymond Callaghan's body as if bored with the taste and spitting it out. Vanimöré tipped a mental nod to his sister and waited for the official announcement. He had been politely requested to remain at Villa Fiorini until the body was recovered, which he had expected.

The body was something of a shock to the divers and the forensic pathologist — and Howard, who returned from the autopsy looking exceedingly grim. Vanimöré poured him a tot of cognac and waited while he sipped. Howard glared at him, but it lacked a little of his usual force. 'Nothing is simple with you, is it?' He gestured with his glass. 'Nothing is ever bloody simple.'

Vanimöré quirked a brow. 'Well?'

Howard drank again and closed his eyes.

'Callaghan's body was found a lot deeper than it should have been. There was a large, very wide piece of wood found lodged up his rectum.' He coughed. 'Very wide. Another down his throat.'

And—‘ as Vanimöré’s expression remained unchanged. ‘There were *bite marks* on his body that had torn off flesh, and hand prints — all of them were small. *Young*. And that,’ he ended. ‘Is classified at the moment. As is the fact that Callaghan did *not* drown. Not enough water in his lungs.’ His eyes held Vanimöré’s for a long moment of silence and when Vanimöré only steeped his fingers, Howard burst out: ‘You *knew* didn’t you?’

Vanimöré shook his head. ‘So how did he die? Trauma?’

‘Pretty much. Shock, blood loss. Technically, homicide.’

‘And a most poetic ending. Especially the use of the branches.’

‘What’s *down* there, Steele?’ Howard barked. ‘In that lake?’

‘My dear Howard, nothing,’ Vanimöré said. ‘Or not now. I trust the report will omit this?’

‘Consensus on that is in agreement across all the services. He drowned.’

‘Well done. You may have your Christmas bonus after all.’ He absorbed the baleful glare. ‘So, his son James is arriving today. Will he want to see the body?’

‘Apparently not. It’s *you* he wants to see.’

James Callaghan was not under arrest — yet — no-one was, although the veracity of the witnesses to his father’s unequivocal admission of guilt had placed him in the spotlight. The investigation had begun and it had lit a fire under a great many powerful people.

‘Be careful,’ Howard cautioned. ‘On the surface, James Callaghan’s blameless but he does inherit his father’s empire. Callaghan has a daughter who lives in New Zealand and cut ties with her father twenty years ago. We’ve begun following that up but she’s being unhelpful. No love lost there though she lives on money he sent her monthly. She’s the oldest child. James is from another wife and twenty years younger. Not rich in seed, Callaghan.’

Neither did James look anything like him. His mother had been a former beauty queen and he took after her, tall and blonde and leggy. A golden boy with a golden tan and short, thick golden hair, suave and smooth and primped and scented, glossy as a male model. He was suited in charcoal grey, possibly as a nod to his father’s death, though his tie was a rich blue that matched his eyes. Vanimöré had seen him before albeit briefly and from a distance, and read all the information the DDE had gleaned but now, seeing him in the flesh, he took a second look.

Camino, who had shown him in, shut the door and James Callaghan stopped dead. A look of puzzlement swept across his face, banishing the annoyance that no doubt stemmed from being searched for concealed weapons before entering. He glanced around the salon as if expecting to see someone else in the room, then his eyes came back to Vanimöré.

He said, ‘You *can’t* be Lucien Steele.’

Vanimöré rose from his chair. ‘If I’m not, then you are most definitely in the wrong place, Mr. James Callaghan.’

‘But—‘ He stopped. ‘I’m sorry, I thought you would be older.’

Ignoring that, Vanimöré gestured to a chair. At that moment, one of the staff entered with a tray of coffee. One of Howard’s staff rather than Vanimöré’s own. They set it down and retreated. Vanimöré poured the tea.

‘Do help yourself to milk and sugar.’

James took one of the delicate cups with well-trained social grace. He was not awkward here, in this beautiful room; it was something his life had accustomed him to. Yet he held himself stiffly. It was not the surroundings that made him nervous but the meeting, the man he had come to see. Well, it did no harm for him to be off-balance. People in that state of mind were prone to make mistakes and Vanimöré was quite prepared to *push*.

Hesipped the tea. It was Lapsang Souchong, rich and dark and smoky.

‘You wanted to meet me,’ he said. ‘That interested me. Your life is almost as elusive as mine.’

James had been his father’s shadow, and groomed (though the connotations of the word were unpleasant) to take over Callaghan’s empire — or so it was widely believed. Educated in the United States, he had then gone to Cambridge. Married and divorced at twenty-three, he was now twenty-nine. Apart from photographs of his father, in which he often appeared, very little was known of him. No spreads in Tatler or Harpers, no newspaper articles. For a billionaire’s handsome son, he apparently lived the life of a monk which was interesting in itself. Callaghan senior had held the reins tightly.

James gained time to answer by drinking the tea, then put the cup down on a small table.

‘Thank you for seeing me.’ Stiffly. ‘I understand this meeting is off the record.’

Vanimöré nodded. It was an ongoing investigation; legally they should not be speaking with one another.

‘You are not here,’ he agreed.

Taking a breath, James hesitated then said quickly: ‘When I contacted Apollyon to try and arrange this meeting I was told that it was unlikely I’d be able to see you. Later, I was called by Howard Wainwright.’

‘Yes.’

‘I wanted to meet you to ask one question. I asked Mr. Wainwright and he told me nothing. I’m hoping that you will, Mr. Steele.’

Vanimöré spread his hands. ‘Then ask.’

James eyed him as if he mistrusted this openness, and he was right to, but he took the plunge regardless.

‘Before the police were called here that night, one of my father’s security staff phoned me. He told me what happened. Then, I assume, he went to try and find him. Or that was his intention. He didn’t.’

‘My father was...I’d call it excited but that doesn’t cut it. He was *triumphant* when he was invited here. Yes, it was Héloïse Gauthier’s May ball but the villa is yours.’ His hands gripped together. Vanimöré said nothing, only waited.

‘Everyone who’s anyone wanted an invite. So my father’s bodyguards were wired with a recording device.’ Colour mounted into his cheeks. ‘He hoped to speak to you and incriminate you in some way that he could later use...for blackmail.’ He spoke with a well-educated and modulated voice rather like David’s, save the American accent was far more apparent. Both young men were of the same mould: only sons of rich and powerful men. But whereas David’s dark time in London had matured him, James Callaghan seemed younger than his years. Not juvenile, Vanimöré thought, not unworldly but rather as someone who has been shut away from the world. Yes, that was it.

‘I suppose they destroyed it,’ Vanimöré murmured, as if it did not matter at all. Howard had said that every guest should be searched for both weapons and devices. Vanimöré had taken it on

himself to downvote the motion. On his head be it. And it might be useful.

‘I told him to give it to me,’ James Callaghan told him. ‘I wanted to hear it.’

‘And did you?’

‘Yes.’ It came out curtly. ‘It’s my understanding that...’ Again he paused. ‘That my father and Mortimer Worth abused Worth’s son, Blaise.’ He swallowed. ‘There seems to be no doubt that there were others.’

‘That is my understanding too,’ Vanimöre replied, watching carefully. Then, with a sudden bite: ‘How much did you know?’

James sat up. His eyes looked almost blank as if the mind behind them had closed itself off.

Vanimöre sipped his tea, then said, his voice hard as hammered steel: ‘Your father’s words before very credible witnesses, his attack and later murder of Mortimer Worth and his own death has set off a fuse, James. It is not the end; it is hardly even the beginning. MI6 and many other agencies across the world are collaborating. Already, as you must know, people who knew your father and Worth have disavowed any knowledge of child sex abuse. As they would. Others have gone completely silent. Your father and Worth were only two people. This organisation has tentacles that spread around the globe. If you knew anything, it *will* come to light. And you *will* be looking at dying in jail, I promise you that.’ He watched the blue eyes widen. ‘No-one involved in this is going to escape. It is not going to be brushed under the rug no matter how important, influential and wealthy the people involved are, it is not going to be bogged down in legalities for years. And at some point, someone is going to squeal like a stuck pig and give *names*.’ He put his cup aside and rose, using the power of height to intimidate quite deliberately. He stared down at James Callaghan who looked back at him as if turned to ice. ‘But the fascinating thing is, that I am not seeing a man in grief for his father’s death. I am seeing relief. And that interests me considerably.’

The lovely old clock ticked in the quiet.

James shook his head in an odd bewilderment.

‘My lawyers have told me not to talk to anyone. They don’t know I’m here. But as far as I’m concerned this investigation can uncover what it wants.’ His mouth compressed. ‘I — you don’t know my life, Mr. Steele, but I can assure you my movements are all accounted for and none of them lead to a child sex ring.’ He pushed out through his teeth. ‘Am I shocked? No. I could never be shocked at anything my father might do. He was... Wait a minute, please —’ as if Vanimöre might begin to speak and stop him. ‘I thought — Blaise Worth. Is he dead? Do you know?’

Vanimöre blinked. ‘Blaise Worth vanished seven years ago,’ he said hardily. ‘His father searched for him but so did yours. Some of the private investigators Worth hired died or are still missing persons. I assume that the people your father hired did that. Possibly Mortimer Worth wanted to find his son for laudable reasons, but I doubt Raymond Callaghan did. Blaise was out from under their surveillance — and I think he *was* surveilled from the time he was abused, all the way through Marlborough. When he fell off the radar, that represented a danger to them.’ He saw the quick contraction of the sleek brows and James said, ‘I heard the accusation after the play. Was Blaise in contact with MI6? How else would they know? And they must have told you, so that you could set the trap.’

Vanimöre frowned, regarding him. ‘You should, by rights, be here either to attempt to threaten me, cut some kind of deal, or to convince me of your own innocence. I would not advise it, by the way.

Yet you want to know about Blaise Worth. That is the question you came here to ask. And I must ask *you*. Why?

James stood. He was tall, but still had to look up. He shot his cuffs, adjusting the gold links. 'Because I think he's my half-brother.'

OooOooO

~ Behind the Bars, A Shadow Waits ~

~ Behind the Bars, A Shadow Waits ~

~ Taniquetil. Valinor. ~

~ By agreement, there were only three of them here. Manwë knew that if necessary he could influence or even bend others to his will, but Oromë, Estë, Ulmo and Nessa were always difficult, Nienna too far gone into her madness, and Irmo was often incomprehensible.

And so the great chamber held only himself, Varda and Námo. Even Eönwë and Ingwë were not in attendance; not for this. A wind, lifeless, smelling of agelong ice moaned through the immense arched windows and hummed about the pillars.

‘Thou wouldst say our brother is penitent?’ he asked and not for the first time. Melkor was not one of them, but naming him thus avoided the mystery of his origins. Melkor had not come into existence with the Valar; the universe seemed to have spat him out of its dark core. And with that arose something equally disturbing: it was not possible for the Valar to read his soul. Any attempt glanced away.

Námo’s hooded head lifted. ‘I have said so.’ Infinitely patient.

‘But how do we *know*?’ Manwë spoke the nagging doubt, eliciting a bony shrug of Námo’s shoulders.

‘I judge by his words. We set the time of his sentence: Three Ages. It is almost upon us.’

‘It could be prolonged.’

‘I could be, but I advise against it. The Halls are...changed since he was bound there. They are dark even to my sight, filled with whispering shadows. His presence has affected them and my

thought is that they are warped and may — possibly — weaken.’

Varda turned her haughty head and raised a brow. ‘It was my belief that thou hadst utmost control over thy halls?’ she challenged with a mocking lift of her brows. ‘That thou didst create them and that they are inescapable. Thou art telling us they are *not*, and that Melkor may break free if he is not released?’ She swung to Manwë. ‘My Void-cell would have held him until this universe dies!’

Of all of them, only Varda had been able to experiment with the universe itself and the beyond, where nothing existed, antithetical and terrifying even for gods so that they had named it the Void or the Everlasting Dark. She had been successful in making a prison from a sliver of it and encircling it with her power. The act had irreparably drained her and the cell had never been used. Yet its creation had been useful; Námo had thought long on it and so his Halls came into being. In some way, they were part of his labyrinthine mind, both internal and external to it. Varda’s jail was only a part of the whole of the Void, yet limited so that ‘cell’ was an apt name for it.

‘We wanted Melkor held close,’ Manwë reminded her coldly. He was (or had been) more powerful than they were. It had taken all of them and the army of their Maia servants to capture him. Individually, he was immeasurably more mighty. Námo however, said that his tampering with the life force of Arda had drained him much as Varda was diminished after creating her cell but still he was perilous.

‘Yes, thy prison may yet be used, Lady,’ Námo bowed to her. ‘And for others beside Melkor. But we must release him and not only because we set his term and the end of it draws nigh. Think on it.’ A pale hand emerged from its sleeve, almost skeletal and the digits abnormally long and spidery. ‘Fëanor forms a court to rival Tirion and his mind is one of creation and fire. Aulë admits that Fëanor has outstripped his tutelage and because he is no god, he *innovates* and discovers. Many wonders he creates but he is dangerous. He has no respect for our Laws.’

He would not name what he suspected; neither would Námo. It was enough.

‘He has no respect for *us*.’ The insectile chittering became more audible when Námo was enraged, his back more bowed and hunched. ‘He will raise his children to follow in his steps, and he is the High Prince of the Noldor not some house servant whose words would be dismissed out of hand or punished. He exercised an unhealthy influence on his brother, though that *appears* to have waned — if reports be true.’ His head swung to Manwë.

‘I believe the reports of Eönwë,’ Manwë said dismissively. ‘He is bound to me and cannot lie. Olórin, too, went to Formenos. The foundations of this schism between the half-brothers were built long ago when we permitted Finwë to remarry so how can it surprise thee that Fëanor’s jealousy and arrogance have splintered their early friendship? All we need to do is encourage it, drive the wedge deeper. If Fëanor becomes an anathema to his father and the great lords, Fingolfin may — and with the approval of the Noldor, and us, naturally — become High Prince.’

‘Leaving Fëanor free to spread further sedition,’ Varda pointed out. ‘Banishment is not enough. Why not kill him?’

‘Thou knowest why,’ Manwë snapped. ‘The Eldar who transgressed and were rightly punished were then not wholly under the influence of the Holy Nectar but enough so their people made no great outcry and were satisfied by the answers we gave them. They knew our Laws and one cannot break them with impunity. The Trees have been wronged and their dew no longer imparts tranquility and obedience. We cannot suffer a rebellion among the Eldar. True, we could destroy them if they rebelled against us, but then what?’

Then what? They would have no pretty servants or so few that it would be unsatisfactory. The

Eldar who worshipped them and loved them would be made to see that their kindly overlords were tyrants. There were Elves in Endor, but they were the descendants of those who had turned away from the Great Journey or never chose to set foot upon it. And now, there was no Tree dew to tame them.

The Valar were accustomed to lordship. It was what had brought them from the Timeless Halls to the nascent Arda in all its young fire: the visions of the Children who would come, born to the world and free. They were strange, they were beautiful. They would make the most wonderful little slaves, decorative and useful for they had minds that thought and sought, hands that fashioned, hearts that could love — or hate.

The Valar could not leave Arda; they were trapped here and so could find no other world to begin anew. And what is a god if they are not recognised as such? What is a god if they are not *worshipped*?

‘Yes, the Holy Nectar,’ Varda said with fragments of ice in her mouth. ‘And still we do not know who is responsible for that crime. And others.’ The indelible marks like bloodstains that marred the statues, the sensation of being watched by unseen eyes. ‘Unless it *is* Eru.’ She looked pointedly, mockingly, at Manwë.

‘It is not.’ Manwë could say nothing else as the purported mouthpiece of the One. But in truth he did not know. The Timeless Halls they had found upon awakening...existed. The great mountain-throne with its stupendous palace was inaccessible but it was not abandoned. Living power shone from it as if the mountain were a burning sun. But whoever had created it did not step forth to speak with the new-born Valar. So they had imagined a Creator and Manwë claimed that the Creator spoke to him alone. But there was nothing. There never had been. If it were indeed Eru who silently meddled in Valinor then there was no defence and inwardly Manwë (and all of them) feared.

‘Let us not stray from the path,’ he intoned and nodded to Námo. ‘Say on, brother.’

‘Fëanor is dangerous,’ Námo reiterated. ‘And his — passion,’ he picked the word and dropped it before them as if it were something unclean, sullyng the white floor of the chamber. ‘Ignites hearts. Oh, many go to Formenos to learn, or so they tell themselves, but it is truly to be near *him*.. He has a kind of attraction that is potent, it seems. And Fingolfin possesses the same, though his temper is less volatile. It is providential that they are now unfriends. The two of them allied could be...difficult.’

Manwë had known passion only once, under Melkor and, because he loathed that he had been used and then mocked, that Melkor had treated him as if he, Manwë, were *nothing* after ripping his purity away, he turned away from the memory as from filth. That was the chiefest reason for his wishing Melkor to remain imprisoned. For so had he possessed that kind of magnetism, at least in the ancient days.

‘Melkor too, created though his makings were abominations, as did his mightiest servant, Mairon whom Aulë still mourns,’ Námo said insinuatingly. ‘What would be more natural than for Melkor, when he is free, to seek out Fëanor, one of his own ilk. And who better to destroy him, leaving our hands clean?’

The words hung like a bloody banner on the mournful wind.

‘Melkor is arrogant,’ Námo continued. ‘Fëanor is arrogant. They will clash heads like two bulls. And neither of them forgets a slight. But Melkor *is* a Power. Fëanor, for all his fire, is but Elda. And then —’

‘The Noldor will demand justice,’ Varda mused. ‘Or even declare vengeance upon him. And we, of course, have the perfect excuse to imprison him again.’ She glared at Námo’s faceless hood. ‘*If we can.*’

‘He is not undefeatable,’ Námo reminded her but none of them (save Tulkas) had *enjoyed* their battles against Melkor. They had known pain — and fear, too. ‘Let the Noldor take up arms against him, then. We would prevent full war of course, but Melkor has no other allies here, not Mairon, none of the fire demons. Even a brief conflict against the Eldar — before we stepped in to halt it — might be enough to weaken him at least a little. Then send Eönwë and his legions and Tulkas into battle.’

Varda said silkily. ‘But the Eldar here are not trained in arms.’

‘But they did use weapons,’ Manwë said. ‘Mostly for hunting or sport. Not for war. And some are used in the athletes fields: spears, bows. They simply have to be...reminded.’

‘Then send Eönwë to train them,’ Námo suggested.

‘And what reason do we give?’ Varda inquired, sounding uninterested. She had only twice descended from Ilmarin; once to welcome the three tribes of the *quendi* to the Blessed Realm then to sit in conclave in the Mahanaxar where the Valar debated Finwë’s wish to remarry. She preferred her icy-white chambers elevated far above the masses where she might contemplate the stars she could never return to. She had attempted it and with her failure came the realisation that they were as bound to Arda as the mountains and seas. More bound even than the Elves as their experiments had shown. Námo might suck souls into his endless Halls when they were newly ripped from the body and vulnerable, but if he permitted release, the Elf’s spirit went beyond the Valar’s knowledge. They could feel it, free and brilliant for a moment. It was not extinguished like the light in the dead body’s eyes. But they could not trace where it went. That was disturbing and another mystery to lay at the feet of the Creator. Better to gather those souls quickly. So far there had been few. As for the Elves on Endor, their fates on death were unknown.

‘Let Eönwë enact friendship toward them,’ Námo said. ‘Let him murmur words of battle since Melkor, as is known, was a murderer and torturer of *quendi*. He will speak only to the princes and lords of course, and they will train others. They will *want* to. No doubt there will be some rivalry. Let it be so. Great Houses in competition with others. Yes.’ The word drew out like a serpent’s hiss.

Manwë considered it. Eönwë was his, part of his status as King of Arda. He had bound the power of storms and drew it from his herald whenever he wished yet something in Eönwë remained out of reach, aloof. *Stormrider*. *Windweaver*. But for all that, he was wholly obedient (for he could be nothing less) and was the only one suited to this task. He was the greatest warrior in Arda not excepting Tulkas, whose mighty bulk might be stronger but lacked the speed and finesse of the Maia. He had only thrown down Melkor after Eönwë fought him. And Tulkas did not use weapons; he wrestled. The Eldar wrestled for their games and needed no teaching.

‘Very well,’ he said, and summoned his herald.

~ Forest of Taur-im-Duinath. Endor. ~

~ He was a hunter, a tracker, a warrior. He was Chieftain of the *Ithiledhil*. He was a survivor. Perhaps, as Mairon had said in the red-lit depths of Utumno, he was *a different kind of monster*. But before all those he was a survivor. All his people were.

In the south, on the edges of vast *Taur-im-Duinath*, spring green deepened into summer gold. It was a rich time of warmth, of short, light nights and misty mornings that rolled lazily into hot days of dappled sunlight. Sometimes, storms rolled in from the Bay of Balar and the great trees roared like surf but often the summers settled into a calm that bleached the grasses. To the East the Gelion still flowed deep, fed by the seven rivers running down from Ered Luin. Even in the driest summers, yonder Ossiriand was green.

The *Ithiledhil* had not crossed Gelion since the Nandor Elves came across the mountains some years ago and settled in that rich, quiet land.

Denethor, son of Lenwë had led them and so changed were the *Ithiledhil* that they shunned other Elves lest they be seen as abominations. Only from a distance, and more silent than hunting foxes, they watched and withdrew. After, they hunted north toward the lone hill of Amon Ereb and sometimes further or struck south following the river and the forest edge. Game was bountiful in those years and a time when the *Ithiledhil* rested.

Not healed. Never healed. The abyss of dark Utumno split their souls asunder. But the ‘Heat’ came upon them, a terrible, violent release of their torment. They fashioned it, learned to control it, for the abandonment of ecstasy and agony was too furious, mindless, leaving them open to ambush or attack. And so they set aside certain times for its release: midsummer, midwinter, the time of flowering (Later called Tarnin Austa), a day when autumn sank toward winter and mists stalked the forest — and with them, sometimes, the houseless souls of the Dead.

But the spring-time of the ‘Heat’ had passed. The forest dreamed and though Edenel ranged far on his lone patrol, there was no danger in the woods or the green margin of land beyond. But he was not relaxed. He could never allow his attention to sleep, not for a moment. None of them could. (*Because the screams were always there, that blinding horror, the black crush of a mind like a mountain, the long, long fall that never ended.*)

And, because he was a warrior and a survivor when the bright thing struck the rock and fell into the rivulet of water, he instantly tensed into battle-readiness. Ironic, thought that ever-watching guardian that barred the doors to madness, that he had learned this in Utumno.

But the forest sang easily to itself. The birds called and the water danced like a maiden of

Cuiviénen in the days before the Shadow came down from the North. There was no scent of danger in the bright, warm air. Sometimes the miscreatures of Utumno, the giant Fell-wolves, roamed south in winter — and there were other things. Once, Edenel thought he caught the stink of Thuringwethil, blood and old death and sour, tainted earth.

The *Ithiledhil* hunted the Fell-wolves, remembering too well that Mairon could take that form. But they never glimpsed that huge white wolf with its glowing eyes, only those of its dark seed.

Slowly, when he was certain that nothing stalked the forest margins, he picked up the glinting shard of glass.

In Utumno, he had not dreamed. Melkor was within every part of him, violating the soul. He could follow one into sleep; there was no escape from that colossal, eviscerating Mind. But after...after he had — all the *Ithiledhil* had.

Edenel dreamed of a terrible light, of a titan tower rising into a sky of dust; he dreamed of a Mirror and winter and people he had never seen before but *knew* to the core of his soul. He could not name them but their faces were like the glance of sunlight on dewdrops, brilliant and brief. Those dreams were shared by all of them.

And this was a face he knew from those dreams. It was like and unlike Finwë's enough for Edenel to instantly recognise it even without those fragmented visions. And with that came pain and relief like a sword in his heart. This man was his blood. And his twin's. But *stars*, he had the face of a god. His eyes were backlit by a stupendous and uncontrolled *light*. His brow seemed to flicker with the ghost of a crown.

And then came the shame, not wanting this man to see him as he was now, after Utumno. He controlled it and his expression. The desire to *know* waxed greater.

Edenel had seen the hammer of Melkor's black sorcery and Mairon's cruel, artistic magic so the artifact he held did not startle him unduly. The man and his words, did.

'Fëanor?' Edenel ran the unfamiliar name across his tongue. 'Thou art his,' he said and then with utter certainty. 'Finwë's. He lives? And Míriel and Indis?'

There was a tiny silence. Fëanor said. 'Míriel was my mother. She...died.'

Grief caught, unexpected and burning, in Edenel's throat. But he saw its shadow, too, in those diamond-fire eyes.

'I am so sorry,' he said tightly. 'She was a friend, and somewhat more and dear to me.' Then: '*How?*'

The shadow deepened, sharpened by anger. 'They believe it was me. That I took her life, her energy.'

'No.' But Edenel's mind flashed back to the women in Utumno, their rapes and following births, if one could call them that. Many died, and they were the lucky ones. But Fëanor was no monster.

Not a monster. But *something*...something only barely constrained by his form.

'Indis is bound to Finwë.'

Edenel only nodded. Fëanor followed his words quickly. 'There is so much I must tell thee, and so much to *ask* thee. But my brother — son of Indis — and myself mean to leave Valinor and our children too. Endor is our home. Valinor was a trap made to look inviting, baited with honey that turned sour on the tongue.'

Edenel listened in deepening horror as Fëanor told that the *quendi*. His *people*, his soul-brother, Míriel, Indis, so many others, and Ingwë, wild and beautiful under the bloom of stars, shackled to the Power who called himself the King of Arda. He heard of the Two Trees, awful and beautiful and unreal, of the dew that dripped always and was gathered, and had drugged the *quendi* into somnolence. Had. But no longer. When Fëanor related the god from the *Outside* who had entered Valinor like a thunderclap and negated the effects, Edenel drew in a breath. Fëanor paused in his tale.

‘The Dark Warrior. The god who walked the stars,’ Edenel murmured. ‘When we opened our eyes here, for a moment... We saw him.’

Fëanor’s eyes blazed with affirmation. ‘Yes,’ he said.

‘Who is he?’

A stunningly attractive smile, wry, brilliantly humorous, swept over Fëanor’s face.

‘Someone,’ he said. ‘Far more powerful than the Valar, but that, Edenel, is the problem.’

Edenel raised his eyes, looked around. The woods dreamed in the hot afternoon. Even the leaf rustle was stilled under the sun. He went down into a hunter’s crouch from where he could spring up at a thought, a sound.

‘Tell me.’

‘His name is Vanimöré.’

~ Villa Fiorini. Lake Como. ~

~ Vanimöré had not expected this revelation and yet...he was not wholly surprised. He had, since James Callaghan came in, been subconsciously tracing the bones of the face, the set and shape of the eyes, the elegant height.

'I see,' he said slowly. Although he did not, as yet.

An oversight. Mine, probably.

James said as if pushed, words tumbling: 'He's darker, yes, but —' And then his voice changed completely, the colour of anger hit his tanned cheeks and he cried furiously: 'Did my father *really* abuse him? Did he—' Then his teeth snapped shut. His eyes burned, then the lids dropped to hide them.

'Yes, Vanimöré said harshly. 'He did. So did Worth. And there were others, too. This is a worldwide ring of child abusers, as I have said. Blaise was allowed to live — perhaps Worth put his foot down, though a man who would rape his own son can have no conscience. But I think the others were killed. If you knew nothing, suspected nothing, Callaghan must have kept you as confined as Danaë.'

James opened his eyes. If he was acting he was an excellent performer and wasting his life. But he was not. Vanimöré could feel the intensity of his emotion and it was completely authentic. Anger and horror have colours: firestorm red and black-shot white.

'He did,' James replied in the same tone though a quiver, tamped down, had shaken it. 'Since I left university anyway. I suppose Cambridge was safe as I wasn't around him, and didn't know what he was doing. He always said it was in my best interests to keep out of the limelight, that he was training me to be his partner and eventually his successor. He might have owned a media empire but he didn't want his son to make any headlines.' An odd, shaken laugh escaped him. 'And all the time... But I need to know about Blaise, if he's alive. I met him once, but then, I didn't know anything, it was only after—'

'—Where did you meet Blaise Worth?' Vanimöré asked abruptly. 'You were not at Marlborough.'

'Oh, no. Virgin Islands. My father was staying on Guana. Business and pleasure. Sometimes I sat in on the meetings but mostly he told me to take the yacht and have fun.' A bitter non-smile came and went. 'And that's how I met Blaise. He wasn't with Worth but a friend from school. Two or three families had met and their kids hung out together.'

He and Blaise had immediately hit it off (James said) and for a week or so, whenever James came over from Guana, all of them formed a group. He took them out on the yacht. There were a few parties, 'Not too wild, just fun.' He was a couple of years older than the oldest in the group and 'I was like a surrogate big brother.' They dived and swam or just cruised on the yacht.

'The master was a decent man. I assume he was supposed to report to my father, but I don't think he ever did; he said I should enjoy myself. And I did. It was the best holiday I ever had.'

Which said a great deal.

'Did you tell Blaise who you were?' Vanimöré asked. He sat down again, crossed one leg over the other.

'No I—' A shrug. 'I didn't want to use my father's name. I just wanted to be me.'

I absolutely understand that. He had made a name for himself but under his father's hand he had been 'The Slave'.

'How did you come to think that he was your half-brother?'

'Have you ever met anyone you thought you *knew*?' James walked back and forth and then sat back on the edge of his chair. 'It's just a kind of recognition.'

'I know what you mean,' Vanimöré assured him.

'I kept thinking that I must have met him somewhere, and then one of the others said we looked as if we might be brothers. I remember that we laughed, but it made me think, after...' His voice trailed off. He looked at the teapot and, when Vanimöré nodded, poured. It was no longer hot but he drank it anyhow.

'My father was leaving in a few days. We exchanged numbers, but I didn't put them on my phone.' He paused. 'Even then I was careful, but not careful enough.' Then he said, as if to himself: 'It's all going to come out anyhow. *All* of it. Everything.' He looked up at Vanimöré and again that expression of puzzlement fleeting across his face. 'Once I finished university and went home, it felt as if my father locked me into that world. His world. Even my marriage was arranged like a business deal. I thought *everything* was business for him, but clearly I was wrong.' The brief flare of anger lost itself in what was unmistakably a resurgence of horror. 'And you might think how can anyone control an adult that way — in the West anyhow — but it's easy enough. It always comes down to money or threats or both. Not against me, he added. 'But he bought security for me, and he had all his staff in his pocket. They were afraid of him.' He straightened his already perfectly straight tie. 'A cleaner must have found the phone numbers from the holiday and given them to my father. He called me in to see him and asked me why I hadn't told him at the time. His questioning was too...too intense. He grilled me. And that made me suspicious because he didn't care about the others, didn't ask about them, only Blaise.'

And Callaghan's strange attitude had the effect of making James close up, dismiss the matter as a brief holiday friendship. But his father seemed to want to know everything Blaise had said, the minutiae of their conversations. Nothing important, James replied. Vacation talk, made soft and lazy with sun and sea.

It was only after the long vacation, when he went back to university, that he began to really look into it, to search. He had been aware, the rest of his holiday, that he was watched. His father discouraged his going out on his own. If he did, he was followed.

Back at Cambridge he had used a university computer to search for Blaise Worth and his parents. He had met Mortimer Worth once or twice and not taken to him; like his father, he was a cold man who seemed to love only money. His son had been entirely different. And then he found a picture of Joanna Darling, Blaise's mother, who had left her marriage and husband when Blaise was a boy and returned to Bermuda. She died a year later in a boating accident.

Like James' mother, Joanna was tall and blonde and lovely. The photograph he found had appeared in Harper's magazine and was taken on a yacht during her marriage. She was all long tanned legs and sun-bleached hair. James saw Blaise's features in her own. But that was not what startled him, made him sit back and look into the distance at nothing. What he recalled was a memory long buried and forgotten as childhood memories often are.

'Did you know that my...' He hesitated as if to choose a better description, but went on: 'My parents were married for just two years?'

Vanimöré nodded. 'Solange Berkeley. Yes. Do you ever see her?' The reports Howard had gathered said that mother and son had no relationship.

'No,' James replied curtly. 'I don't even remember her. From some of the staff, the yacht master for one, Louis — we used to have a beer in the evenings sometimes and talk — I gathered that she gave as good as she got. And I definitely got the impression — from him — that she despised my father. He never talked about her. There's a saying that *people who marry for money always end up earning it*. I think she did. You see I think...no, I'm *sure* that Joanna Worth, nee Darling is

Blaise's mother. And mine.'

OooOooO

~ The Touch of a Cold Wind ~

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

~The Touch of a Cold Wind ~

~ The only outward expression Vanimöré allowed himself at James Callaghan's words was a faint uplift of the brows but his mind reached instantly to Edenel and Coldagnir. Since Fëanor had entered this world and Vanimöré had stated he himself must return to the Monument, they had been especially vigilant of his movements. He felt their mind-flares, sun-storm and the ice-wind of deep winter.

Contact Howard. Tell him that James Callaghan believes that Worth's former wife Joanna is both his mother and David's. It might even be true; we will need DNA testing.

Howard was only a few rooms away, but Vanimöré could not speak into his mind, or not without it causing pain. Some minds 'received' far easier than others. While excellent at his job, Howard's mind was not one of them. Insofar as was possible, he ignored the 'paranormal' elements of the DDE and concentrated on ensuring the general public ignored them too.

Neither did Vanimöré wish to pause the conversation lest James think better of speaking to him. He was in the mood now to open his heart and Vanimöré could not snap that fragile thread. But the DDE needed to act on this information (supposition?) quickly. Vanimöré wondered, smiling a little, if Howard's bellow of annoyance would be audible across the villa. He could delegate and would but the DDE were a small team; the kind of people that Vanimöré needed were exceptionally rare.

James stood up, walked to the windows and looked out. Vanimöré watched the rigid set of his shoulders under the expensive suit jacket and thought how David had held himself just in that way: taut and braced. But there were differences as well as similarities. James had inherited more than a little of his father's assurance; it had rubbed off on him through proximity. A child will mimic their parents. Vanimöré knew he had adopted some of Sauron's mannerisms.

Blaise once possessed the confidence of his schooling but, dropping into the black underbelly of London at age eighteen had known a very different, dangerous, shadow-life. There was no security, no-one to turn to. His taut wariness was borne of that life. Too, there were none of the signs that Callaghan had abused his only son, rather he had wanted him kept close, almost protected.

‘So you see why I want to find Blaise Worth?’ James asked, not turning.

‘If it is true,’ Vanimöre murmured calmly. ‘Then naturally.’

‘It’s true. I think...I’m almost sure.’ His shoulders rose and fell. ‘I should start at the beginning.’

‘Certainly, if you feel it is any of my business.’

James swung back to him, eyes oddly piercing; the dead father’s confidence showing, for a moment, plainly in the son.

What is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh. Vanimöre thought of Fëanor’s bloodline and Fingolfin’s. But James had inherited nothing physically from Callaghan. He must be all his mother’s.

‘I’ve never spoken of it to anyone else,’ James told him. ‘I can’t now discuss it with my father. I never would have. And you seem, Mr. Steele, to have connections with MI6 — and *someone* told them about Blaise’s past.’

‘Then I am at your disposal. More tea? Or a drink?’

James glanced at his watch. It was going on for six o’clock.

‘Stay for dinner,’ Vanimöre suggested. ‘It will only be myself and Mr. Wainwright.’

‘I was going back to the Palace.’ James seemed to weigh something in his mind before accepting. Naturally. Raymond Callaghan had been lured here and died here, or at least very close by. Then, as if coming to a decision, James said, ‘Thank you, I will.’

Vanimöre nodded. ‘A drink then? Dinner is at seven.’

‘Thank you.’ His smile was genuine and appealing. A boy’s smile.

No, I do not think he is guilty of anything only ignorant and overwatched.

When the drink was poured, James took a sip and exhaled. Then he began to speak.

‘The beginning then: I vividly remember a night when I was young, four, five and couldn’t sleep. I had bad dreams, sleepwalked sometimes. Night terrors the nanny said. Still get them sometimes. Never mind that.’ He gestured it away with a motion of his glass. ‘But this wasn’t one of those times. I got up and left my bedroom.’

His father’s house in The Hamptons was enormous and mostly empty save for staff and his nanny who slept next door. Raymond Callaghan might have guests to stay there on occasion, but most of the bedrooms were empty, the staff living in their own quarters. James recalled the long dark corridors and how they had frightened him as a child. That night there were unseasonal high winds and rain and he could hear the rolling boom of the sea, the pebble-scatter of rain against the windows. It was that, he thought, that woke him.

Then, along the corridor he heard a woman’s voice carrying, a laugh trailing off. James trotted toward the sound but stopped when he reached the wide landing.

He saw a woman walk toward the head of the stairs, tossing a fur wrap over her shoulders. The low lighting illuminated her fair hair. He saw the gleam of gold on wrists and hands, and could smell her rich perfume. She looked, he thought, like a princess, fair and glittering.

She stopped, one hand touching the bannister and turned. She had smiled and even then, a small boy, he had seen something in it that made him shrink back into the shadows. A smile like a bared knife. No innocent Disney princess this, but something far more dangerous.

Raymond Callaghan had come to her. He was dressed as the boy thought 'for bed', in a short silk dressing gown. He was far too young to attach any significance to it; only years later did he make any connection.

'I can't remember everything that I heard,' James said. 'When you're young, adult talk often goes over your head, unless it's directed at you and then you recall it sometimes, especially if you were afraid or excited at the time. The woman said something to my father that I didn't really hear, and then turned away and looked directly at me. I don't know how she saw me; the corridor was unlit, but she did. She dropped her wrap and walked toward me. And I was...frozen.'

'She stooped and reached out a hand. Her nails and rings seemed to burn me as she stroked my face and smiled again. And she said, "*How's my boy? Pretty little thing, isn't he?*" My father followed her and was obviously angry with both of us. He started to say something, but she raised a hand. She said—' He stopped and then clearly, enunciating each word: "'*He's mine as much as yours. And he'll be useful when he's older, when you're gone, Ray. No-one lives forever.*" She laughed again but there was no laugh in her eyes and she was still looking at me.'

His own eyes came back from their frowning distance. 'My father snapped, ordered me to bed, but she kissed my forehead and said, "*Go on now, son.*" I ran back down the corridor to my room. I could hear them arguing and she said something like: "*He's a baby. He won't remember.*" And: "*Be sure you look after him.*" And I did forget until I saw her photograph years later. Joanna Darling was at the house that night. She must have had Blaise nine months after that. She was wearing a long sheath dress, silver, it sparkled and she was *slim*. I thought how tall and slim she was. She wasn't pregnant then.'

'She could have been very early in her time,' Vanimöre pointed out. 'And you have a remarkably good memory from all those years ago. So, you believe she was carrying on an affair with your father when she was married to Worth? And that she, not Solange Berkeley, is your mother?'

'You think I've made up some kind of false memory,' James stated.

'A child's memories would not stand up in court. And Solange is registered as your mother.'

James offered a cynical smile. 'Wealth can buy anything, Mr. Steele. It bought her silence. I was a home birth. Solange received a very large divorce settlement not eighteen months later and from a man who notoriously hated to spend money unless it was on himself or his companies. He was not a generous man, my father.'

'True.' He steepled his fingers under his chin. 'Well? You recollected that childhood memory when you met Blaise?'

'Not then and might never have,' James responded dryly. 'Had not my father been so particularly interested in the fact that I met him. A week or so later we were back at The Hamptons and there was some bad weather. Maybe that was it: The rain, the wind, just like that night when I was a

child. I woke up and lay there. And I remembered. It was *so incredibly vivid*.'

But he had said nothing to his father. He returned to Cambridge and considered contacting Blaise at Marlborough (so the loss of his phone number had turned out to be unimportant) or even driving down to see him.

'I would have liked to see him again, but—'

'Yes?'

'I don't know...I felt that unless I had proof I shouldn't involve him and even if I did, how would he take it? And I began to realise that even at Cambridge I was watched.' A faint smile flickered. 'Or thought I was. I was afraid I was becoming paranoid. As it turned out, I wasn't.'
'Then I finished university and went home and my father arranged my marriage.' His expression closed like a door. 'It was my *duty* and it would give me greater responsibility.' The way he said it was a quote. Vanimöre could imagine Callaghan's dry voice intoning it. 'And we were to live at his homes, wherever he was, following him as part of his damn entourage. I wanted to buy my own place. I could have. He employed me — Yes nepotism at its finest!— but he wouldn't hear of it.'

'No,' Vanimöre drawled. 'He wanted you under his eye.'

'Yes, and I knew it. My then wife, Gina, didn't mind, but...' He stopped and then said coldly, 'I'm sterile.'

'I see.'

'My wife wanted children, and I couldn't give them to her.'

'You were not married long. It can take time.'

'She's been married before, had two children one after another. She was older than me, but not so old that *her* fertility had dropped off a cliff. So...' It was clearly difficult for him to speak of this but he went on with something of a snap: 'We went to a clinic. It was me, not her.' He shrugged, his colour rose. 'My father was involved in a business deal with her father and thought the marriage would be a good idea. Security, if you will. Antiquated. But I went along with it because...I had no choice.'

Vanimöre left that for now.

'That doesn't matter,' James went on quickly. 'The marriage pretty much ended after that. Then I heard that Blaise had gone missing. I overheard my father shouting into his phone to Mortimer Worth. He was furious. I only caught the tail-end of their conversation. My father ended the call and turned his anger on me. Then he seemed to think better of it and sent me off to Dubai for a business meeting, with one in London on the way back.'

He was glad enough to go, he said, to be out from under Callaghan's shadow even for a few days. He needed time to think about what had happened, what he had heard. The meeting went well, and he booked the return flight with a two night stopover in London.

That evening, he had contacted a private investigator to search for Blaise Worth. He had very little information to give the woman save age, appearance and name — and that he had been at Marlborough, but her voice, dry and clipped and businesslike, accepted that.

He explained that she must not call him and was given the link to a chat room where messages would be deleted within seconds of reading them. It seemed dubious to James and Ms. Evans admitted such rooms were often used for darker purposes, but they were also untraceable, at least at the moment. It was surprising, she added, how many people who used private investigators wanted to remain anonymous.

Payment was a problem, since his bank accounts were monitored.

‘Not really a problem,’ she told him, making a suggestion that raised his brows but agreed to, enacting an apparent sexual transaction that his ‘watchers’ (the security staff sent with him by his father) would only smirk at. Which they did.

Ms. Evans arrived at the hotel as ‘Lara’, a sex worker in a red wig and smoky-dark eyes. James had seen her when he went out for lunch (and almost laughed at how she walked up the street playing at her ‘game’). There was more than a little of the performer in Janet Evans or perhaps she was simply used to the vagaries of secretive clients. He arranged a meeting then and there, unable to will down the flush that rose to his cheeks knowing that his security detail were watching and commenting. But at least it bypassed a need for the computer.

Underneath her assumed appearance and the conformable suit that passed her as ‘business’ to the hotel staff, she was a dark haired woman in her thirties whose definite attractiveness paled against her intelligence. She seemed to find the situation more amusing than anything and left after two hours with a substantial amount of cash in her purse. She promised nothing which he said was fair enough considering the paucity of the information he had, and told him to check into the chat room weekly at a certain time.

‘Did she find anything?’ Vanimöré asked, interested.

‘Nothing,’ James replied flatly. ‘I employed her services for over a year. Blaise flew to London from JFK and just vanished.’

Yes, Vanimöré thought, he had.

‘I told her to keep looking, even if it seemed useless, which it was in the end, but I did find something else in London that I wasn’t looking for.’ He took another sip of whiskey. ‘Joanna Worth, who was supposed to have died in a boating accident years before.’

Vanimöré said softly, ‘Are you sure?’

‘I saw her,’ James said emphatically. ‘As far away from me as from here to the doors.’ He pointed.

‘Where was this?’ Vanimöré leaned forward.

‘Covent Garden. When we were leaving I saw her, she dressed to the nines and with a man. She turned toward him and it *was* her. She looked no different to her photograph or the woman I remembered, and I will never,’ he added. ‘Forget that smile. Or his.’

A ghost-breath blew on the back of Vanimöré’s neck. It came from another world, so far gone in time that only its dust remained and still, after everything, his muscles locked into tension. ‘Can you describe him?’

‘Tall. Not old. Maybe my age now. Slim. Fairer than I am. Almost white hair, long.’ He made descriptive gestures with his hands. ‘Drawn back in a ponytail. He wore dark glasses, which was strange, but some people do. He had this attitude about him.’ His eyes narrowed as if to bring something into focus. ‘As if he owned the place.’

The ghost-breath turned to ice.

Sauron.

Vanimöré had not seen him in this world. Sauron had sent out Thuringwethil — who died at the hands of Claire James. That must have irritated him, but there would be others. Sauron had never lacked followers.

‘It might be useful if you remembered the date and performance,’ Vanimöré said, controlling his voice.

‘I made sure to remember it,’ James said grimly and wrote it down. ‘I kept the programme; it was the first time I’d been to see a performance of the Royal Ballet. But I can tell you the date and time without that.’

‘You seem very sure it was her.’

‘Oh, I am.’ His posture tightened. ‘They were leaving the Grand Tier, so were we. They were ahead of us and walking quickly; most people were lingering, making their way out slowly, chatting, but not that pair. I wouldn’t have seen her if she hadn’t turned her head. And then she looked over her shoulder and straight at me. She was still smiling. She blew a kiss and then carried on walking. The man looked back, too, for a moment. The same smile, a closed smile, a dark smile.’ Straightening, he blew out a breath. ‘So yes, I’m sure. I thought of following them but I was a guest of Max Nelson and couldn’t just rush off. I wished after I had. I messaged Ms. Evans on that chat room, asked her to find out anything she could about Joanna Worth.’ He shook his head. ‘Of course she couldn’t. Joanna died in Bermuda. Except, she *didn’t*. And she didn’t give a *damn* that I saw her.’

‘“*He’ll be useful when he’s older, when you’re dead,*”’ Vanimöré quoted. ‘That is what you heard her say to your father?’

‘Yes.’ James’ eyes narrowed. ‘And now he is dead. Do you think — what *do* you think? You know something. Don’t you. *Don’t you?*’

‘I think,’ Vanimöré rose. ‘That your life might be about to become very interesting in the manner of the Chinese saying. And we should talk to Mr. Wainwright.’ He walked down the salon to the door.

‘Coming?’

~'We will speak again,' Fëanor said to Edanel, not wanting to go wanting, with a dreadful ache, to pass through the Mirror Shard into that green world beyond the Sea, to hold his father in his arms.

'Yes,' Edanel affirmed. Beautiful and aloof and dangerous as the ice-winds atop Taniquetil, yet something in his voice and eyes had warmed as Fëanor spoke. He told Edanel things he would never tell Finwë, could not in all fairness, he did understand that Finwë was bound by kingship to the Laws of the Valar, even if he detested it.

But Fëanor did not tell him that he and Fingolfin were Edanel's sons. The words had been *there*, imperative, clamouring to be spoken, yet Fëanor bit down on them. *Not yet*. Fingolfin must be present for that denouement. Nevertheless, Edanel learned of Valinor and the Valar, of their crippling Laws and that Fëanor and Fingolfin were determined to leave.

Speaking as if the very words made it a fact, an *inevitability* helped in the days after, when time seemed to go nowhere and nothing happened.

Tirion preserved an aloof silence. Fëanor assumed he was still under a cloud of disapproval.

He spent his days in his workshops teaching, overseeing but did little. He became conscious of a sensation familiar to him now; that he had experienced before creating the Lamps and the Palantiri. It was a growing emptiness, a hollowness as if his creativity were being drained away like water running into a crack in the earth. His soul was waiting for *something*. Making space for it. He did not have any inkling of what that was and knew not to push for it. The vision would come. Freedom, too, he reminded himself, would come. Still, the slow days seemed interminable. Only with his sons did he find any peace.

And of course things did happen. Even Valinor was not stagnant. Under Hilyaro, Maglor began to train his voice. They had to be somewhat careful. Fëanor believed that Formenos was one of those places where the Valar were deaf and blind, and with good reason, but there was the possibility of Elven spies. He thought ruefully that protection or no, precautions or not, Maglor's voice might be heard on Taniquetil; it shattered glass, snapped metal, made crystals chime.*

In the end, they could not test to the limit of what Maglor might do. When the marble floor of the room cracked from end to end Fëanor, laughing helplessly as Hilyaro dropped his head in his hands, nonetheless decided to terminate that part of the music lessons. Maglor, glowing, proud, utterly unabashed, was clearly well pleased with his talents and reluctant to stop. He almost (not quite) rebelled, wanting to test *himself* but when it was made clear to him that such power was dangerous, that the Valar might disprove, he nodded solemnly.

Fëanor hated to involve his sons in the danger and secrecy of his life. Afterwards, he accepted that they acted as a rein on him, at least when they were young. But they comprehended much more than he thought they did — or should. Either others talked, Rúmil perhaps or his wife Laurorne, or they were simply subconsciously aware. Anyhow, another door closed on discovery. For now.

Fëanor's impatience mounted, making him feel too tight in his own skin. Trapped. He wanted to *do* something, to act, to break out. In the world where Vanimöré dwelt it had been almost wholly dark, a state that did not exist in Valinor. Edenel, in the Outer Lands, had been in a forest where sunlight made moving dapples as it fell through the leaves. It was so different from the Tree Light.

So many worlds. So much to learn. All of it stymied — for now.

More than once, unsleeping and restless, he thought of the ring he had deliberately left with Vanimöré and contemplated returning for it. There was more than a little mischief in that but also that ever-present yearning to know *more*. Vanimöré fascinated him, so unlike the Valar and immeasurably more powerful. A Power that could send part of itself onto a world, leaving the Totality behind on the *Outside*. Fëanor had seen both.

The world beyond that one room he had stepped into (and that was interesting enough in itself) beckoned, but so did Endor, so did the terrible, lonely Monument and the *Outside* and that perhaps more forcefully than anything because it was far stranger. Boundless. It was perilous and danger fired Fëanor's blood like levin. There was, he thought, an infinity of discovery. But not here, not in Valinor.

And then a cold wind sighed down from Ilmarin and cut through the ennui of sameness. It touched calm white Valmar, hurried down to hum through the towers of Tirion and raced further to Alqualondë and the glimmering shores of the sea. The wind whispered a rumour: Melkor was to be released from his long imprisonment.

The rumour grouped the Elves into quiet clusters of conversation, frowning and muttering. When the murmurs reached Fëanor he reacted like one of the half-wild white cats that roamed Valinor and the hair of his scalp seemed to lift. He remembered the pain-vision of Edenel and his memory of earth-crushing and obliterating Power.

'It is said he is penitent,' murmured Rúmil.

'Who says?' Fëanor demanded. His nails dug into his palms carving bloody crescents. Rúmil spread his hands.

'After what he did, how could they even *think* of releasing him?' Yet Edenel had spoken of it, the *other* Edenel, relict of a dead universe. It happened there. It would happen here.

Does everyone and everything tread the same path, then? The thought brought a spark of panic.

'Manwë enjoys a show of penance,' Rúmil said with a wicked and accurate sharpness. 'He does like seeing people grovel.'

Fëanor looked at him, gave a short bark of laughter. 'Indeed.' He thought of Ingwë, and Eönwë, chained. 'He does.'

'Now if only thou were to learn that art, he would look upon thee with favour.' Fëanor thought he was jesting until he saw that Rúmil's face was perfectly serious. 'It is because thou wouldst not, that he deems thee dangerous and rebellious. That and the outrageous and public flirting with thine own sex.'

'If that is what the Valar deem outrageous—' Fëanor began. Then came a knock at the chamber door.

At Fëanor's 'Enter' a messenger came in. His livery was Finwë's and he bowed, holding out a sealed scroll.

‘From the King, High Prince.’

‘My thanks.’ Fëanor opened it and read. ‘My father calls a council of all his High Lords. That includes his sons.’ He drew vellum and a pen toward him and dashed off a response, handing it back to the messenger. ‘I will be there.’

‘The clouds lift a little it seems,’ he said dryly when the man had gone. ‘Politically at least.’ He slapped Finwë’s message with the back of one hand. ‘It will be about Melkor, naturally. What does he think a council will achieve?’ He doubted his father was going to object, yet Finwë *knew*, or at least must guess what had happened to his twin, and most of his High Lords were unbegotten. All of them had known someone taken by the Dark.

Nerdanel elected not to travel to Tirion and, as she was often in her own workshop these days, Fëanor took Maedhros and Maglor.

The mood in the city was somber; the people who watched Fëanor’s entourage ride in were quieter though they bowed and others waved. In the palace too, there was a sense of watchfulness. Faces were unsmiling.

Finwë came to greet him, mouth straight, though to Maedhros and Maglor he spoke kindly. He looked troubled, as if the kingship weighed heavily and waited until Fëanor’s sons were settled in bed before speaking.

‘Thou wilt have heard the rumours,’ he said.

‘Of course.’ Fëanor flung himself onto a cushioned settle.

‘Fingolfin,’ Finwë shot him a swift, wary look. ‘Advised me to call my Lords into council.’

About to reply ‘Good for him’, Fëanor recollected he was supposed to be unfriends with his half-brother.

‘Did he indeed?’ Seemed to suit. And: ‘Wouldst thou have done the same had *I* advised it?’

‘Fëanor! I would have considered it, yes. But the both of thee are young!’ He stopped, took a breath as if to curb his annoyance. ‘Others advised me also,’ he said shortly. ‘There is much discomfort in Tirion at the thought of the Dark God walking among us.’

Fëanor sat up and poured glasses of nectar. ‘Somehow,’ he said. ‘That surprises me not at all. So. Have the Valar spoken to thee of it?’

‘Eönwë came from Manwë. He went to Olwë, too. I am assured that Melkor has learned penitence and that he is on parole.’

‘Grovelled, has he?’

Finwë said coldly, ‘I do not know what has passed. But surely *they* know his heart?’

Fëanor’s teeth locked. ‘Just like they know ours?’ He raised a brow over his glass and drank, watching the colour come into Finwë’s face.

‘Fëanor—’

‘Please. Spare me the homily. The Valar do not know us because they have never cared to. All they want is pretty little slaves! They only see what they *want us to be*.’ He replaced the goblet on the table. ‘What is this council supposed to achieve exactly?’

‘Thou art deliberately obtuse and understand nothing, ever,’ Finwë snapped, turning to the outer door. ‘We are to welcome Melkor — if he comes among us — as one of the Valar. *That* is what this council is about.’

Fëanor stiffened. Revulsion shivered through him in a cold, rippling wave.

‘Is that the *command* come down from Ilmarin?’ he demanded and when Finwë did not answer, he came to his feet. ‘Well? Do they expect us to worship him, too?’

‘Do not be a fool. But he is to be accorded the same courtesy and respect as the Valar.’ Finwë opened the door. ‘Thou may speak of thy concerns in council,’ he said and then, not to Fëanor but someone in the passageway beyond, ‘He is in no mood for reason.’

Fiingolfin’s lovely, steely voice replied, ‘I can but attempt it.’ And he entered the room, holding the door ajar. They looked at each other in a hot and fulminous silence.

‘Beginning to show some spine, half-brother? Beginning to think for thyself?’ Fëanor sneered, knowing Finwë would hear. ‘Asking for a council meeting?’

‘Any High Lord of Tirion may request,’ Fingolfin shot back. He closed the door behind him and his steps quickly crossed the distance between them. Fëanor saw the silver star-flashes, brilliant in the backlit eyes and then they clashed together, all heat and hardness and need.

But the marble walls of Tirion were thick and Finwë, departing, did not hear.

OooOooO

Chapter End Notes

* When I wrote of Maglor’s voice being powerful enough to break glass, (The Once and Future Kings, chapter 26) I borrowed the idea from Encairion. (As far back as 2007 on LOTRFF.com I was writing Maglor as the embodiment of the Great Music but *not* as using his voice like this, so credit must go to Encairion).

At the time of posting that chapter the story in which it appeared hadn’t been uploaded to AO3 though Encairion had sent me the chapter via email last summer. Since then she has uploaded her magnificent ‘Heralds of the Dawn’ and I can properly credit her.

It is from this chapter.

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/35647444/chapters/88881586>

Caranthir shielded Fëanor with his body, but no glass rained down on his back. He looked up. Enel had Sung a shield over them. Not even Maglor could have lifted a shield over them in mere seconds. With training, Caranthir was sure Maglor could have achieved such a feat, but Caranthir had never seen Song used like this on a battlefield. Songs had been woven from the rearguard, deep notes of Power that built and built, sinking themselves into the earth, saturating the air, cracking stone and throwing back Dragon-fire. Those Battle Songs that Maglor excelled at had carried hurricanes of Power within them, but needed *time* to lose.

~ The High Clouds Darken ~

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

~ The High Clouds Darken ~

~Lake Como. Italy.

~ Howard Wainwright was not impressed. Howard was not inclined to be intimidated by powerful people or their sons, only thoroughly exasperated by this fresh development. He glowered at Vanimöre, glared balefully at James Callaghan and puffed out a breath.

‘The first thing,’ he decided. ‘Is to find out all we can of the late (or not) Joanna Worth. I’ll get back to you. But this is departmental business.’ He shot a look at Vanimöre who gave an infinitesimal gesture that only someone familiar with him and watching for it would have picked up.

‘We will eat,’ Vanimöre said. ‘And talk.’

They ate dinner in the great dining room with the long windows open to the evening, and Howard’s unobtrusive staff ensuring no-one overheard their conversation. The first few bites seemed to improve Howard’s mood a little but he did not return to the subject of Joanna. He waited, Vanimöre knew, for James to broach it. Which he did, soon enough.

‘I don’t understand,’ he said. ‘*Why?*’ He laid down his knife and fork; they clattered against the bone china plate. ‘I always thought my father was a misogynist. He *was*. I never knew him to have mistresses. And his confession here at the ball...He was a child abuser.’ His eyes closed and his head shook a little. One could almost see the ripple of revulsion that shook through him. ‘*Why* would he be with Joanna Worth? And why the hell would she be with *him*? For money? Worth had plenty of his own.’

‘*If* you saw Joanna Worth,’ Howard said, clearly unconvinced. ‘Could have been any tall, blonde

woman. You were a young boy.'

James' eyes narrowed. 'I know what I saw, Mr. Wainwright. And what I heard.'

'We will act on the assumption that it was Joanna Worth,' Vanimöré intervened calmly. 'And so yes, why was she there? Did she not come from a wealthy Bermudian family? And she married a multi-millionaire so money seems unlikely, but look into it, Howard. Was she left nothing by her family and therefore dependent on Worth; was it an attempt to make Worth jealous? He was reported to be a cold man who saw very little of his son. Or was it none of those things?'

James laughed derisively. 'No,' he said firmly. 'If you think she was in love with him...it didn't come across that way. I know appearance isn't everything, but my father was a bastard to women. He treated his female staff with contempt. I've been to meetings with him where he reduced some of them to tears. It wasn't even sexual, but genuine contempt for what they were: women. Don't tell me that's appealing, unless you *enjoy* being treated like shit. But *she* looked as if she were used to being treated like a queen. And there was nothing about her that suggested she was attracted to my father at all. Rather the reverse.'

'She was on assignment,' Vanimöré murmured. 'Callaghan was part of it. I think Mortimer Worth was, too.'

'For whom?' James looked from one to the other. Both faces were very carefully blank.

Howard deliberately forked a delectable mouthful, chewed, swallowed and wiped his mouth. He glanced at Vanimöré then sat back and said to James, 'You could be in danger.'

'From *whom*?' James repeated exasperatedly.

Vanimöré gave a slight shrug. Howard narrowed his eyes and grated, 'He may use several names and that is the problem. We have no images to run through facial recognition software unless the Royal Opera House has CCTV. I'll get onto that, but you know what CCTV images are like and even then—'

'It is a place to start,' Vanimöré said, and then to James. 'But you may need a security detail.'

'I have security. Always have had. My father always had it. And much good did it do him.'

'Are they vetted?' Howard asked. 'They must be.'

James raised his hands. 'I assume they would be. It's not something I've looked into yet.'

'Do you know if your father employed them himself?' Vanimöré asked mildly.

'No,' James shook his head. 'His secretary, Peter Thomson. He's been with us longer than I've been alive.'

'Then I'd like all the information you have on *him*,' Howard said. 'If he's still employed.'

'Of course. And yes he is. He didn't want me to come here. At all.' He smiled faintly but there was a hardness to it.

No amount of stress or annoyance could spoil Howard's appreciation of fine food and he attended to his meal in silence. James looked questioningly at Vanimöré who simply shrugged. Only when

Guila's desert was eaten and the coffee poured did Howard sit back.
'I'll need to talk to you, Steele and then to you,' he looked at James. 'Ten minutes.'

Vanimöre waited until Howard opened his laptop.
'Who could we insert as a security detail for him?' he asked.

Howard frowned as if he wanted to find something to disagree with in the suggestion but couldn't.
'We're stretched really damn thin if this really is AB.'

AB or Agent Beta as Sauron was named by the DDE. Howard couldn't bring himself to acknowledge let alone say *the* name and any report noted him as a non-human intelligence from another world with godlike powers. Maglor was AA, as he had been upon this world long before Sauron. There were several such lists and each dealt with different non-humans operating or seen upon Earth. Vanimöre was primarily concerned with those from Middle-earth.

'I am certain of it,' Vanimöre said sombrely.

One could see Howard mentally change gear. Whatever his personal views on the paranormal, this was deadly serious.

'I'll have to trace Solange Callaghan as was,' he said. 'We'll speak to some people in Bermuda about Joanna Worth's death but if it was a staged death then I doubt there's much to find, not now, so many years later.' He sat back in his chair, stared at the screen. '*If* Joanna Worth is working for him, what the hell does he want? You think she bore James on his orders? David too?'

'It is possible.'

'And why was James left untouched and David abused?'

'Mortimer Worth was wealthy but he did not have the international clout that Callaghan possessed,' Vanimöre said. 'He wanted James to supersede Raymond Callaghan, to take over from his father and be unspoiled. No mental health issues. James is accustomed to *obeying* his father.' He smiled acidly to himself. 'Not permitted to live in his own house, marrying at his father's command. A permanent fixture in his father's entourage; living in his shadow.'

Howard nodded slowly. 'Right, so if AB now targets him, he is manageable.'

'Manageable, and malleable. And our esteemed AB is far more charismatic and persuasive than Callaghan senior.' And far crueller.

'The sex trafficking? Laying enticing bait for Callaghan?' Howard tapped the keys.

'He would have known about it, I am sure, but involved? I doubt it.' The Sauron of this world was not his father, but one could only assume that he was not far different in temperament and character.

Vanimöre thought of Utumno seen through the memories of Edenel and his own early life in Angband. Mairon's tolerance for children extended to how he could mould them to his will and in Vanimöre's case, that had not included sexual abuse. That came later, when Vanimöre was older

and was a punishment, not something he indulged in for pleasure. Sauron used sex as a weapon.

‘He knows human frailty very well, and I believe he had Joanna Worth warn Callaghan against subjecting James to abuse. As for David—’ He paused, thinking. There was something scratching at the back of his mind. He sought it but it eluded him.

He *had* to go to the Monument.

Seeing Howard watching him warily, he said, ‘Perhaps AB genuinely did not know about David. Worth was lured in by Callaghan. Possibly that night, when Worth gave his son to Callaghan and his cronies was his first time.’ His mouth moved into distaste.

Howard grunted. ‘Makes sense,’ he agreed. ‘I doubt it’s worth looking at any CCTV. AB would fry the camera.’

‘In more ways than one.’ Vanimöre gazed into the distance for a moment. The long study curtains rippled in a soft breeze.

‘This investigation into Callaghan’s death is winding to a close. I want to see David before he goes to St. Andrews, after that...’ He had been idle too long, not only here but the measureless time spent at the Monument. He needed to *do*.

Suddenly, he smiled. A laugh rose in his throat.

‘Howard. I have *just* the person to watch James Callaghan.’

~ **Tirion. Valinor.** ~

~ ‘There is no time.’ Fingolfin’s words were a hot whisper that tore at the edges. ‘*Now*, Fëanor. *Now*.’

Sometimes there was a battle for domination, but only when there was time to spare for it. Fingolfin came out of another savage kiss and seized Fëanor’s face with one strong, slim hand. The pressure of his fingers, the power in the grip was delicious.

‘I am prepared for thee,’ he hissed. ‘Another time, thou wilt do the same, but now, *Now*—’

They were two fires that could burn alone, but when they came together were a conflagration.

He is a star wherein one could forge sword-metal to break worlds.

Their unions were a way of becoming *themselves*. No lies, no artifice, only the truth of what they were.

Fëanor pushed Fingolfin's neck down, black hair sifting under his hands, and Fingolfin bowed to it like a conquered king. Yet it was no abnegation; it was an temporary acquiescence. Every taut line of his tall body quivered with the willpower it took to submit. He resisted, his opening tight, until his head dropped lower in surrender and Fëanor entered in one violent drive. He saw Fingolfin's hands stretch and flex and then grip hard to the back of the settle, saw perspiration spring and sleek his sinews like silver, heard his groan muffled as he bit into a cushion. And then he saw and heard nothing as reality was burned away. He pushed toward the core of the starfire, that place that welcomed him where he became *himself*.

There was a place...he could almost touch it. The heart of the inferno, where stars collided, where universes were born. He strove, even as his body strove, a thunder of power that Fingolfin accepted and met and joined and *demande*d. At this level, there was no domination, no submission. Nothing so simple.

*Break the glass. The Mirror. The shattered Mirror. Take Fingolfin with me and **become**...*

And just for a moment, there was an infinity of starlight and the vast pinwheels and clouds of galaxies that he knew and a Song that resounded through all of it and a terrible and beautiful light...

He blinked, trembling. Fingolfin's skin slipped under the hard grip of his hands, Fingolfin's own fingers were still tight-gripped to the back of the settle. Then his head rose, and his silk-black hair rippled and spilled. Fëanor withdrew and Fingolfin straightened. When he turned, his eyes still held the blue-white fire of the stars. He stared at Fëanor then abruptly drew his head forward and kissed him.

'What art thou becoming?' he whispered, his breath dusting Fëanor's lips with the taste of blood and wine.

Fëanor shook his head. 'What are both of us becoming?'

'Fëanor—'

'I do not know. I do not know. But I *will*. We both will.'

Fingolfin drew a sharp breath. 'I cannot stay. Father — I *have* to think of him and call him that — will probably be waiting. But never think to go where I cannot follow thee, Fëanor. Because I *will*. I *will follow thee*.'

An icy frisson sparked up Fëanor's spine. Into the luminous glare of those eyes, he affirmed: 'I shall not.'

~ As they quickly washed in the bathing room, Fëanor, his eyes appreciative as they mapped

Fingolfin's body, said, 'So this council meeting is simply to publicly declare Finwë's loyalty to the Valar? That is *it*?'

Fingolfin dried himself and drew on his breeches. Speckles of water still marked his lean torso. 'Yes. He *had* to call it, the High Lords all-but demanded it.' He threw his braids over his shoulders. 'So,' his mouth twitched. 'How do we enact this?'

'I have already argued about it with him, but I am sure thou art aware.'

'So I support him.'

Fëanor nodded. 'Not that the Valar would care if we refused Melkor entry into Tirion.'

'No. Fëanor—'

There came an upsurge of the near-panic, the feeling of being trapped. He could sometimes forget it in Formenos, but the palace seemed to close around him like a first. Fëanor's teeth clicked together. 'No,' he said. 'Listen, I must tell thee: I spoke to Edenel, the Edenel of *this* world.'

'What?' Fingolfin's brows drew into a sharp frown. 'Why?'

Fëanor laughed suddenly. 'I wanted to know if he knew Hilyaro, lest that one be a spy from Finwë. In fact I forgot. But I did tell him everything about Valinor and that we were going to leave.' As Fingolfin's lips parted again, he added. 'I did not inform him that we are his sons. It is something we should tell him together.'

'I thank thee for that.'

'This is a game. It is not real,' Fëanor told him stiffly and Fingolfin stepped up to him, stared into his eyes. As one, they grasped each other's jaws in strong fingers. They held in that position for heartbeats; Fëanor watched as Fingolfin's pupils widened to black pools and felt a resurgence of his own arousal.

'I remember,' Fingolfin hissed. 'And I do not want thee to forget it.'

'So when shall we speak to Edenel together? Canst thou think of a reason to come to Formenos?'

'As the King's emissary? Undoubtedly. But —'

'But what?'

'I like this not at all. Yes, we began this but it took nothing at all for others to follow. I did not realise that people feared thee.'

Fëanor frowned. '*Fear* me?'

Fingolfin's head tipped. One side of his mouth curled up. 'I wish thou couldst see thyself as others do. Much of it is jealousy of course, or devolves from Mahtan who hoped to be elevated after thy marriage to his daughter.'

Anger bloomed. 'Mahtan betrayed my trust. I will never forgive him for that!'

'And he knows it. One of his apprentices sought to leave and go to Formenos and he forbade it. There is bad feeling.' Fingolfin frowned. 'Jealousy, malice even, and *I* am supposed to lead this faction. I abhor it.'

‘I abhor that we must do this,’ Fëanor agreed. He brought Fingolfin’s head forward and their brows touched. ‘But to be with thee is worth it. And it is not just for us.’

‘No,’ Fingolfin murmured. ‘For our sons and all those who would be free.’ He drew back slowly. ‘I have to go. To continue the lie.’

Fëanor watched him leave. As he opened the outer door Fingolfin’s other persona descended on him like a cloak. It was in the set of his body, the clench of his jaw, the tilt of his head drawn back by haughtier and the heavy weight of hair. It was the pose of a man who had just argued bitterly with another.

It was perfect. Fëanor wanted to call him back, watch him turn and shed the act. Instead he followed, ensured that anyone watching would see him slam the door behind his half-brother.

He hated it. And yet...it was exhilarating. Closing the door, he leaned against it and closed his eyes.

OooOooO

~ ‘In the light of what Melkor has done in the past,’ Fëanor said, rising in his seat. ‘He shall not be welcomed in Formenos.’

It was an illuminating council meeting. The factions were clearly drawn, black and white; those who would support their king and those whose memories were too bitter to do so. Some of the latter camp surprised Fëanor. What surprised him the more however, was how they looked *to* him. These were people who had, not so long ago, treated him as a precocious boy. He laughed to himself though anger was uppermost.

‘The Valar have decreed he *will* be welcomed.’ Finwë’s voice was strained. ‘He is on parole. The Valar have seen into his soul and judged that he has served his sentence and is penitent or they would never release him.’

Finwë sounded as if he were trying to convince himself. The council — both factions — wore stony faces.

‘It seems there are some who do not forget,’ Fëanor’s eyes swept the great hall. ‘What Melkor is responsible for. And yet the Valar would allow him to walk among the kin of those he captured and tormented.’ There was a sudden outcry, voices raised and Finwë rose, grasped his staff of office and thumped it down on the marble, commanding silence.

‘These are the words of Manwë Sulimo, High King of Arda,’ he proclaimed. ‘And they will be obeyed.’

‘And *I* have spoken,’ Fëanor returned.

‘Formenos is in *my* gift,’ Finwë reminded him stonily.

Fëanor, who had turned to leave, whirled back. What was in his face he did not know, only that the King stiffened and Fingolfin stood up eyes blazing. The silence crackled.

Fëanor swept out without a look back.

The council broke up then, whether Finwë willed it or no. Shouts followed Fëanor as he crossed the enormous entrance hall. He had readied his people to leave immediately and his retinue waited in the courtyard.

Light footsteps sounded behind him. ‘High Prince?’

He turned to see the High Lord Nullion, a hot-eyed beauty with hair and eyes the colour of worked iron, appropriate since his House owned and worked the iron mines to the south. Due to his interest in metallurgy, Fëanor had met him before but knew none of his father’s lords well. He had spent most of his time in the workshops and so quickly had he been married off and then moved to Formenos that there had been no time to become acquainted with the people who made up Finwë’s council.

‘Yes?’

‘Thou art not alone in this,’ Nullion said quietly. ‘The King seeks to fulfil Manwë’s commands but even a Power cannot command the hearts of the Noldor.’

Fëanor nodded. ‘Walk with me to the courtyard.’

They passed down the shallow steps. Maedhros and Maglor were already mounted and waiting. Fëanor smiled across at them and said to Nullion, ‘Art thou Unbegotten?’

‘No, a First Child, a Woman Born. I was young when we began the Great Journey.’ Nullion walked swiftly. ‘Young but accounted an adult. My mother chose not to come and my father...’ His mouth twisted. He lowered his voice. ‘It was not the same then. There was no marriage, no *family* save the clan. My mother informed me of her choice but no-one could have forced her. My father came here but—’ Fëanor’s giant stallion moved with a clash of hooves, and beneath it, Nullion said, ‘He is one of the vanished.’

Fëanor laid a hand on the glossy, muscled neck. Huiro stilled. ‘The Valar took him?’

Nullion’s hot eyes burned with steady, banked fires. He nodded briefly then swept on intensely: ‘High Prince. Thou shouldst have a presence in Tirion. It would be a boon for those of us whose

tempers and thoughts do not always align with the King.’

Fëanor experienced an odd and contradictory desire to defend Finwë and it annoyed him. ‘He is in an invidious position,’ he said.

‘That I will grant,’ Nullion allowed.

‘And there is no second court in Formenos, whatever rumour may say.’ Fëanor looked back toward the wide double doors of the palace. ‘It is my home and the place where I work.’

‘And yet rumours flourish when the High Prince shuns his own city and gathers more people to him by the day.’

Mounting, Fëanor looked down at Nullion. ‘People come to Formenos to learn or perfect their crafts.’

‘Of course they do.’ Black lashes dropped but not in time to hide the twinkle of amusement. Then they lifted again, and all humour was gone.

‘They come because of what thou didst say in the council. Because there are things that thou wilt not bow thy head to, and rightly.’ He rested a lean hand on the stallion’s neck. ‘Be a presence in Tirion, High Prince. Thou hast friends here, or would if thou didst but see that.’ Stepping back he aimed a bow that included Maedhros and Maglor. They gravely inclined their heads.

Fëanor stared at him. ‘I will think on it,’ he said, and turned Huiro. His escort, waiting, fell in behind him and they clattered out of the gates.

OooOooO

Chapter End Notes

Work is really giving me a good kicking. I have to get stuck into it until I can create a proper space of time for myself to write. And I will :)

Also a big shout-out to Ellspeth and Sonia. Slate Magazine ran an interview with them about their 5 million plus word *At the Edge of Lasg’len*

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/7899862/chapters/18045334>

Ellspeth was kind enough to cite Zhie and myself as writers who had inspired her. I was so startled I blushed enough to toast bread 🍞 I don't know if this is why I'm suddenly getting lots of Tumblr follows or what but people were also PM-ing me on various sites saying had I seen it.

(Also thank you to Ellspeth for writing an '*authentic*' Vanimöre 😊)

Slate article is here. It was also picked up by Tor, Winter is Coming.org Reddit and others.

<https://slate.com/culture/2022/02/lord-of-the-rings-longest-fanfiction-tolkien.html>

It's actually a really good article as most I have seen prior to this are contemptuous or mocking of fanfiction.

Thank you Ellspeth and Sonia and many congratulations. This is a huge achievement (and in what? 6 years?!) I'm happy to be known as an unofficial 'muse' 😊

~ Shadows of a Future Past ~

~ Shadows of a Future Past ~

~ The Mahanaxar. Valinor ~

~ The Unchaining of Melkor was to be a spectacle. A showing of the Valar's power and benevolence.

For the first time in years Manwë and Varda descended from Ilmarin in great state with Eönwë carrying Manwë's banner and his host of Maia warriors in their train.

Under the enormous pillars, the Valar's thrones were arranged in an inward-facing circle. The floor, made of some opalescent stone, blossomed outward from a circle of plain black where the one who came before the Valar would kneel.

Only Námo was absent when the Valar seated themselves. Eönwë stood behind Manwë's seat and Ingwë sat at his feet. Beyond the pillars the Eldar began to gather. All had been invited (commanded?) to come.

A spectacle, thought Ingwë dourly, designed to show the errant Melkor the glory of the unfallen Powers and the Children they ruled.

They had chosen the Mingling as the time, perhaps to show the wonder of the Treelight at its most beautiful. Yet for an eyeblink, the Light seemed to fail when Melkor came.

A grey mist rose from the black central circle, spinning upward. It fell back suddenly as dropped dirt; some of it bounced and a piece landed by Ingwë's booted foot. Black, sharp, like chips of metal or glassy obsidian. It steamed with an unearthly cold.

Silence fell like a palm pressed down upon Valinor and Ingwë saw Námo, hooded, holding the ends of a great chain. The chain seemed to run into what was no more than a black shape, an occlusion of the air. Then it coalesced into form.

Ingwë's stomach clenched as the figure raised its head and the hood slipped back.

He had never glimpsed Melkor, only the shadows of his hand; he thought that sitting at Manwë's white-shod feet might have given him an inkling of what to expect. It did not. Melkor was nothing like the Valar.

His eyes, spacious and black-fringed, burned in the perfect architecture of his face. They were so dark they looked black until one realised they were the darkest blue and shot with light like a star field and a strange opalescence. Hair like a flood of poured jet fell back over the wide shoulders. The skin was so flawless and so white that the light of the Mingling drew deep bluish shadows under high cheekbones.

The simple tunic and breeches befitted one come from the Halls of Námo as a released prisoner. Nothing else did. He was a Power. More than a King.

And cold. Cold. A pitiless cold like the corries of high mountains where the ice never melts but grows, year upon year.

Those eyes flicked over Ingwë as if he were no more than a butterfly resting on a stone but the cold from them, the awful power flashed like pain across his skin. He felt like a mouse scuttling through broken stems of hay when the shadow of a hawk falls over it.

The Valar did not rise. Námo walked to his own seat.

'Brother,' Manwë greeted Melkor without warmth even, Ingwë thought, with wariness. 'The time of thine imprisonment is over.'

Melkor did not reply, only inclined his head a little. The shining hair slid and shone.

'Our brother Aulë has built a place for thee near his halls. In Valinor thou may walk freely if thou wilt. Thou seest the Children who live here under us. They have their own abodes, their cities and lands which they farm and mine. Among them also thou may go, in peace.'

Oromë sat directly across from Manwë. Ingwë saw him shift restlessly, his eyes boring into the back of Melkor's head. From the sudden swift blink, Melkor must have felt it.

Then he spoke. He had a voice like dark thunder.

'I thank thee...brother.' White teeth showed in a flashing smile that never reached his eyes. He turned his head looking out past the pillars to the Elves who watched silently. He glanced back down at Ingwë and this time the smile was genuine; the dark, shifting eyes glowed.

Ingwë smelled burning, like molten metal, like the ash that had fallen over Cuiviénen after the Unroofing of Utumno.

OooOooO

Fëanor had felt Edenel's horror and terror. He thought he knew what to expect.

He was wrong.

He had not expected the Dark God's charisma, the beauty and an emanation — that the Valar wholly lacked — of sexuality. Fëanor's every muscle locked, braced as if to attack.

He cast a look to where Fingolfin stood with Finwë and Indis, saw his brother's lifted head, his fixed, and frozen stare. Then, as Fëanor turned his eyes back toward the Mahanaxar, the Dark God's eyes met his, brief as the gliding stroke of a flame and a weight like iron.

Fëanor moved, tossed his head as if to throw the weight from him. There was a clangour at the back of his mind; the roar of a furnace.

Then the Valar rose, walked through the pillars. Manwë, with Melkor at his side, raised a hand.

Fëanor thought: *He is not like them.* I anything, Melkor was even more alien. And, *They are afraid.*

Tulkas glowered under his heavy brows, Oromë shifted like a wild stallion, Varda's head was high on her long neck as if reaching away from this situation. Irmo wore a faint troubled frown. Ingwë, who had paused beside the pillars, was white as his hair only, under the arch of dark brows, did his cobalt eyes look hard as coloured glass.

'People of the Eldar,' Manwë called and his voice sounded thin and high. 'Behold our brother Melkor, once wayward, now returned to us. Greet him in peace.'

Peace? There was no promise of peace in this Dark God, neither in his bearing or his eyes. *Surely now,* Fëanor thought, *Surely now was the time for the kings to speak up, to object?*

Manwë expected the Eldar to bow, simply because they always did. But Melkor expected it also. He too was accustomed to obeisance.

Fëanor had no intention of lowering his head, and could not bear to see if Fingolfin or Finwë abased themselves. The shame of it! Instead, he stared at Melkor half-fascinated, wholly repulsed. A sighing rustle went through the ranks of the Elves.

The time was then, and it had passed. Furious, Fëanor gestured to his companions who fell in behind him as he whirled away. There was a whip of fire on his back. He flung around— away from the burn, toward the threat?— but saw only the gathered Valar and the tall, dark figure of Melkor within them.

Two days later, when Formenos was quiet, Eönwë came.

Fëanor was in his workroom but for once, he was not working. Seeing Melkor had shaken him. It was not a power he was familiar with. He saw shadows in the brightest noontide of Laurelin, remembered the feeling of a whipcrack that seared and burned, saw Fingolfin's upright, rigid stare as if recognising something that was...that was...

The scent of storms brought his head up. He rose.

'I am commanded,' Eönwë said, his eyes like the break of stars through flying black cloud. 'To teach the Noldor to fight.'

Ice. A wind whipping dry snow like sand across a cold and somber land...

Shadow.

Flame.

Burning.

~ Villa Fiorini. Lake Como ~

~ Vanimöré waited. Howard swung himself entirely round and spread his hands.
'Well? Who?'

Smiling, Vanimöré watched the dawning horror. Howard looked as if he had swallowed a small frog.
'No. Oh, no.'

'I have done this kind of thing before, Howard. Before your time.'

On his feet and waving his arms in front of his face as if to ward off an oncoming train, Howard

reiterated 'Nonono.'

'The easiest way to protect someone — or to kill someone is to be close to them, be trusted by them. It will not be in your records.'

Howard's eyes narrowed, eyes flicking aside as he sought mental information on high-profile criminals or drug lords killed by one of their bodyguards. Vanimöré continued,

'David is much safer than James. No-one — we sincerely hope — knows Blaise Worth is even alive and that is how it must remain, at least for now. James, however, is in a great deal of danger.'

'You want to put yourself in the sights of —' Red in the face, Howard gestured wildly at his laptop screen. 'You've said more than one he's more — he's stronger than you are.'

'That is true.'

'And if he cottons on to who you are? There isn't a man born who won't break under torture, eventually.' Then, as if realising what he had said, he added hastily. 'Everyone can break.'

Vanimöré nodded.

'And you don't care.'

'If his attention is focussed on James Callaghan or even on me, then it is not upon our friends, is it? He came too close when he sent one of his agents to follow Claire James.' He thought of the sports car and the body of Thuringwethil buried deep under the grounds of Summerland.

'Exactly.' Howard jumped on it. 'Too damn close. I'll find someone.'

'No-one knows him better than I do.' Even the torment. And that would feel familiar, would give Vanimöré a taste of the old world long gone. He shook his head briefly. A dangerous mood for a strange evening.

'I was a bodyguard to Prince Edward of England for three years.' Vanimöré told Howard, who stared. 'I can produce excellent references.'

'You were *not*.'

'The records will say I am, and the prince will cooperate.' Vanimöré rose. 'Now, we need all the information we can get on the late and unlamented Raymond Callaghan's secretary.'

'Where are you going? Look, Steele, you can't do this, what about—'

'I can keep in touch through Eden and Aelios.'

'Why can't one of them—?'

'I want them where they are.' He nodded to the laptop. 'Peter Thomson.'

James stared at Vanimöré and exclaimed, 'You?'
His tone left absolutely no doubt of his opinion.

'I know many forms of combat, and can use weapons.' At James' expression Vanimöré smiled faintly.

'Don't misunderstand me,' James said hurriedly, colouring. 'You do carry yourself as if you know how to fight —'

'Thank you.' Vanimöré said gravely and the flush deepened on James' tanned cheeks.

'My father's bodyguards don't mess around,' he said urgently. 'I've seen it. Some of them are ex-mercenaries; he used to boast of it. They're brutal.'

'Not a problem.'

'But why?'

'Because the man who Joanna Worth is working for will approach you as soon as the furore over your father's death dies down and you take the reins of his empire.'

'To kill me?'

'To control you and what *you* control.'

'The media,' James nodded. 'Are we talking about unfriendly foreign powers or—?'

'In a way.'

James dropped his head, gazing at the floor.

'I would advise you,' Vanimöré continued. 'To give Peter Thomson a golden handshake, dismiss the present security staff and employ new ones. Howard is looking into Mr. Thomson but even if he is merely a loyal secretary, with his long service, he is likely to think he knows better than you.'

Straightening, James frowned. 'Oh yes,' he said grimly. 'He does.'

'I have an old gardener here, employed by the previous owner, a decayed nobleman.' Vanimöré told him. 'He does exactly what he wants, no matter what *I* say. He considers me *nouveau riche*, a usurper. In my gardener it matters not at all. In your secretary, James Callaghan, it could matter a great deal.'

Blue eyes sharpened. 'I'm not a complete fool, Mr. Steele.'

'Now is the time to make some changes.'

'I *was* raised to take over,' James said thoughtfully and then, with a short, hard little laugh, 'I just don't think he ever thought he would really die.'

'Did he ever say so?' Vanimöré asked mildly.

'No. It was just his attitude.' He moved his shoulders. 'You're not just a billionaire are you?'

‘It would be so dull to be *just* a billionaire, do you not think?’

James paced. ‘There’s going to be an inquest,’ he said. ‘In Milan. I’ll stay for that.’

Howard entered the room frowning.

‘Peter Thomson’s done quite well for himself,’ he said without preamble. ‘A shareholder in Canning PLC — whose shares are currently falling off the bottom of the world, by the way.’

James did not seem perturbed. ‘Yes, I know.’

‘Went with your father everywhere.’ He glanced briefly at Vanimöré. ‘He’s still at Callaghan’s house in the Hamptons.’

‘He was always with my father, yes, as long as I can remember,’ James replied. ‘And he didn’t want to come; said there was too much to arrange there.’ His brows rose. ‘I’m impressed, Mr. Wainwright.’

‘He made a call just now,’ Howard told him. ‘Mobile phones are a personal beacon, everyone knows that. But so are landlines. Seems like he wants to ride this out, though he’ll be questioned. But he hasn’t dived for cover, yet.’

And Thompson knew, Vanimöré thought. Thomson might have been present at the house where the young Blaise Worth was raped. Anger lashed him and James, at the same moment exclaimed, ‘He knew, didn’t he?’

‘It must have occurred to you,’ Howard said in a dry voice.

James looked at both of them. ‘He’s older than my father; a dry stick. I don’t know,’ he said in a rush of what sounded like grief. ‘How the hell many people *did* know, and how many mouths were closed.’

‘Most of the children,’ Vanimöré said harshly. ‘Their mouths were closed — permanently.’

James flinched. ‘But not Blaise—’

‘It killed him, too. There is more than one way of dying.’

‘If he’s alive,’ he said. ‘I need to find him.’ James’ voice cracked on the last words. He looked stricken. ‘I didn’t come here to talk about my father though everyone thinks I did, or about Canning PLC. I told you. I came here because of Blaise, because he, or someone who knew him contacted you and told you what happened to him.’

‘Classified information,’ Howard responded. ‘If he’s still alive with the ant-heap stirred up by your father and Worth’s death I assume he’s intelligent enough to stay dark.’

‘You mean,’ James said slowly. ‘That he’s still in danger.’

‘This was a global ring of abusers. If he were alive to give evidence...’ Howard was extremely good at this kind of inference. His face was bland as if it were of no interest to him one way or the other, but there was a little furring of doubt that gave the distinct impression he felt it unlikely Blaise Worth was alive.

James gazed at him, then his mouth set in a hard line.

'Then I hope they're brought to justice. And I have to believe Blaise is alive. I don't mean to play a tiny violin but I— he's my brother.'

'You have not mentioned that to anyone, I hope?' Vanimöré asked. *'Not Thomson, not a friend, anyone at all?'*

'Of course not. One becomes accustomed to being... silent, Mr. Steele. Look, can't you even tell me how the informant contacted you?'

Howard said as if reluctant, 'Wouldn't do you any good. It was a public phone in London. Greenwich. Look, Mr. Callahan—'

'James, please. I'm not in the least proud of that surname.'

'James. It might be someone who knew Blaise Worth, even years ago. The call was to the Met Police. They have a line for reporting sex crimes. They contacted us.'

Nice improvisation, thought Vanimöré, watching James' face. It was to be hoped he did not contact the Met himself.

'But why? Why would they and why now, years after Blaise vanished?'

'Unknown.' Howard shrugged.

James' face set grimly. 'Well, I'm going to try again, hire some people to look for him on the quiet. If he's dead or alive — I want to know.'

'So would we,' Howard responded easily.

The press, once again, were clogging the roads, though most of them had never left. A lot of them represented Callaghan's newspapers. James, leaving for his hotel, wore a look of anger as he drove out through the gates. Unlike his father, he did not use a chauffeur.

'Good luck,' Vanimöré replied with amusement. It was not as simple as that and James knew it, or if he didn't, was about to learn it. The editors-in-chief might have jumped for Callaghan senior, but the son had his work cut out.

All sons have to prove they are not their father.

'Thank you.' James held out a hand. *'Would it be possible to come back tomorrow?'*

'If you wish,' Vanimöré said. 'Although at the moment there is little else I or Howard can tell you.'

'Not that.' His head shook decisively. 'About my security detail.' A faint smile glimmered. Vanimöré returned it.

'Very sensible. Then yes, of course.'

Howard was waiting in the study, glowering at the laptop. As Vanimöre entered he said, without looking up, 'If you're thinking he can change his father's media empire into liberal and left-wing-looking force for good, I think you'll be disappointed.' When there was no answer he turned. *'Raymond Callaghan was a ruthless, perverted bastard. But he had drive. This boy doesn't. He's not his father.'*

'Rather the point.'

'He hasn't the backbone, Steele.'

'No sons like to be judged by their fathers,' Vanimöre said coolly. 'James has not had the chance to see what — or who — he might be. Wrapped in cotton wool on Joanna Worth's orders. Wholly unlike David because the son of Raymond Callaghan would be more influential than the son of Mortimer Worth.' There was a coldness in that attitude which was wholly Sauron. *Vanimöre sat down and crossed his legs. 'Change takes time. People — even the best of them — like to live in echo chambers that reflect their own beliefs. When I ruled—'*

Howard interrupted him hastily. 'I do not want to hear about some mythical kingdom in never-never land, Steele—'

'It was an Empire,' Vanimöre gave him a limpid look from under his lashes. 'Or the second one was. The first was a city-state. So I did tell you?'

'No. I just think—'

'If Sau— AB wants to influence Canning PLC with its enormous media reach, I think we should ensure he is not pulling the strings of young James. Agreed?'

'Agreed,' said Howard. 'I just think that potentially putting yourself within the jaws of the lion is irresponsible.'

'It would not be unfamiliar territory.'

'What? No, never mind. Okay, so Solange Berkeley, Callagan as was—'

Vanimöre hid laughter. 'Go on.'

'She was English,' Howard said crisply. 'She came back to England after her divorce, and was a resident at the Dorchester for a few months. Then,' he glanced up under his brows. 'She became a patient at Rampton in Nottinghamshire.'

All amusement quenched, Vanimöre sat up. 'Rampton?'

'It's a secure psychiatric hospital. High security. Complete psychotic break, apparently.' He turned back to the screen. *'Hallucinations, paranoia, terrified to sleep —'*

'She saw something, or heard it.' Vanimöré rose. 'They could not afford for her to speak. Poor woman.'

'You think it was deliberate? Callaghan, or—?'

'Callaghan would not have the ability to drive her mad.' Vanimöré paused. 'She is dead.' And at Howard's swivelling look, 'You said she was English.'

'Yes. Died two years ago. Cause of death: heart attack.'

'And James never knew.' Vanimöré moved toward the door. 'Rampton would keep records of her, of what she said, what terrified her. Get someone on that Howard. Oh, and we need a blood sample from James tomorrow for the DNA test. We can say the DDE needs it in case Blaise Worth were ever to show up.'

'You seem to trust James Callaghan,' Howard remarked. 'And in my business, snap judgments can sometimes come back and bite us on the ass. Hard. He wasn't even that surprised that his father should be a child abuser.'

'He knew nothing about it, Howard. But no, he was not surprised. Subconsciously, he did realise his father was capable of anything.' Setting his hand on the wood panel of the door, he turned. 'I can scent a pervert, Howard.' To him, they seemed to stink of unwashed, sour body fluids like the Mouth whose mind was a midden of sex and the need to cause pain. Toward the end of Sauron's reign, secure in his power and longevity, he would masturbate in public, insatiable and unable to wait for privacy. His hands had reeked of his seed. Sexual perverts all seemed to carry that stench about them, be they never so clean.

'James is not of that ilk, I promise you. Trust me on this.'

'Hmm.' Howard puffed out a breath. 'Okay, but I was thinking along different lines. He says he's seen Joanna Worth and AB. But what if he spoke to them; what if he's working for them and his coming here was an order?'

'That is a possibility,' Vanimöré admitted. 'I do not think so, but I have been wrong before.'

'Really?' Howard said sardonically. 'Where are you going?'

'To speak to Eden and Aelios.'

'Well, maybe they can persuade you not to be a fool.'

Pushing the door open, Vanimöré smiled. 'You are an optimist,' he said.

Howard, in a goaded voice, invited him to explore his own anatomy.

~ Darker Distances ~

~ Darker Distances ~

~ Valinor ~

~ Fëanor rounded the table, eyes fixed on Eönwë's.

'Manwë ordered thee to teach us?' He could not credit it.

'He trusts neither thee nor Melkor,' Eönwë replied evenly. 'And so he would prefer, if Melkor were to rebel, that his eye be fixed upon thee, not the Valar.'

'Rebels,' Fëanor repeated with a harsh laugh. 'People who think for themselves?' And with gathering anger: 'He would pit the Edar against a god? In battle? We know nothing of war. And if the Valar are so concerned about him, why release him at all?'

Eönwë smelt of snow and thunder. 'Nor wilt thou know anything of war, until it comes.' He paced around Fëanor as if measuring him for new robes. 'I can only teach thee to fight. The Valar are not natural warriors save perhaps Oromë and Tulkas. They fought in the Wars of the Shaping against Melkor when Arda was unformed. Most of them fear war for though they cannot die, they can be hurt.' He stopped, facing Fëanor again. 'And pain is an anathema to Manwë. As to why they released Melkor I know not, there is something...some secret.'

Fëanor shifted, still feeling the burn across his back. There was nothing there, no mark, yet it hurt.

And I have felt it before.

His eyes strayed to the Mirror case on the table, one shining object among many, then back to Eönwë.

Secrets...

'Swordplay will become another competition in the Games,' Eönwë continued. 'Already arrow,

spear and unarmed combat are practised.'

'The first two are used in hunting,' Fëanor observed. He did not tell Eönwë that Vanimöré had begun instructing him and Fingolfin in swordplay and knife-work. 'What thou wilt teach us—'

'Also takes lives. And thou wilt need those skills, Fëanor.'

OooOooO

~ It was not only Eönwë who taught the Eldar but his Maia warriors too. They drifted quietly down from the Mountain and Fëanor had to laugh at their supposedly elaborate secrecy. Manwë was not supposed to be aware, Eönwë had told him, as if Eönwë could do anything without Manwë's direct order.

So Fëanor took up his sword again. It felt as natural in his hands as did the tools in his workshop. There was just one thing lacking: He did not need Eönwë to tell him (as Vanimöré had also stressed) that practice was not the same as reality.

'Do not underestimate the memory thou wilt build into thy muscles,' Eönwë told him with a cold little smile. 'Thou art not Maia, Fëanor, and so this training is vital. When the time comes — and I think it will — thou wilt act on reflex.'

Six days later Fingolfin cantered up the road from Tirion. It looked like a hasty visit; it was certainly unannounced. He did not come in state and brought only two companions, one of which was Nullion. Controlling his curiosity and eagerness, Fëanor walked swiftly to the mansion. Nerdanel was in her workshop; Maedhros, young as he was, would have acted as his parents' proxy, but was at his lessons. The sensescal had shown them into the hall and provided them with wine.

Fëanor inclined his head. 'To what do I owe this pleasure?' he asked sardonically.

Fingolfin's eyes flashed wonderfully; it might be interpreted as anger or passion— or both. Perhaps

it *was*> both. Nullion, Fëanor observed, smiled a little and tried to hide it, which was interesting.

Eönwë has come? Fingolfin asked and Fëanor gave an infinitesimal nod. Fingolfin paused and his chest rose and fell. *Nullion is here as an intermediary between us. The king appointed him to come. But we need to speak in private and talk to Edenel.*

Aloud, Fingolfin said, 'The King wishes me to speak to thee of Melkor.'

'Of course he does.' He gestured to the curving stairs. 'Come to my study.' He turned to Nullion. 'Welcome to Formenos. I will have Mistress Melehte show thee around while I speak to my half-brother.'

Nullion looked from one to the other, no doubt wondering if he ought to leave them together. Apparently satisfied by what he saw he acceded with a bow of his head. 'My thanks. I would indeed like to see Formenos.'

When the tall Melehte had guided Nullion away, Fëanor mounted the stairs, showing Fingolfin into his study and closed the door.

'What happened?' Fingolfin demanded, pushing him back against the door.

'When?'

'Melkor.' Just the name but Fëanor's skin tightened. 'I saw thee,' Fingolfin pressed 'What was it?'

'I am not sure. A feeling like fire, a whip of flame.' He shook the thought away, 'And thou? Yes, I saw thee, too.'

Fingolfin shook his head. 'I am not sure either. But not fire—' He broke off abruptly. 'I wanted to speak to thee but...what if he could overhear? I had to come.'

Since Fëanor had wondered the same thing, he did not scoff.

'We will speak to Vanimöré about that,' he said. 'And then to Edenel. But first, tell me of Nullion. Dost thou trust him?'

'It did not go unremarked that he followed thee from the King's council and spoke to thee.' Fingolfin smiled. 'And so he was judged the right person to come. Though in fact...trust him? Would I trust anyone?' He laid a palm flat against Fëanor's breast. 'Like him, yes. He sees as we do. I expect he will follow thee sooner or later.'

'He would be welcome.'

'I am sure he would, but dost thou not see?' Fingolfin traced his hand up to Fëanor's face, then around to the thick braid of hair which he seized. 'The schism is *there* whether we will it or no. *And I am on the wrong side of it.*'

Fëanor, pulling back against the grip of his hair, glared at him.

'Gods!' The breath exploded out of him. 'I hate this place. I hate this *lie*.'

'Are they all lies?' Fingolfin slammed back, shocking him. 'The rumours that say thou doth resent me and even Finarfin—'

'Finarfin? I hardly know him! He is a boy—'

'— and that thou wouldst fain see us gone from Tirion but will not return while we dwell there.'

‘Who says these things?’ Fëanor demanded. ‘Who?’

‘No-one knows. It is always “*I have heard that...*” and “*I was told.*” No names, no way to trace whence these rumours come. Is it not the same here?’

Fëanor opened his mouth then closed it again. He wanted to say he paid no attention to gossip, which was true enough, but he had indeed heard his people murmur that Fingolfin sought to have him, Fëanor, displaced as High Prince. Because the whispers were often followed by denigrations of his half-brother, he had to ignore, or refute them, losing his temper in the process.

‘Let go,’ he tugged at his hair irritably. Fingolfin’s grip tightened, then fell away. ‘I do not start such rumours or heed them,’ Fëanor told him. ‘And no more must thou. Perhaps Nullion was right in saying I should spend more time in Tirion.’

‘Yes, he told me he had mentioned that. And yes, he is right. It is the distance, Fëanor. It breeds silence, it builds walls; it allows people to create the most egregious lies and sews doubt.’ Fingolfin shook him, eyes wide and burning. ‘We want people to believe we are unfriends, not bitter enemies. Is that not why we began this?’

Yes, and Indis, clever woman, had known that this would happen, that the rumour mill needed no more than a whisper to begin turning.

‘Very well,’ Fëanor said. ‘But do not doubt *me*.’ He drew their heads together. ‘Do not doubt *us*..’ It did not occur to him that anyone could. ‘Not now.’

‘One forgets,’ Fingolfin said after a quick-breathing silence. ‘In Tirion. That is why I want thee there. The air feels cleansed as with fire.’ He drew back.

And I feel the trap pressing in, constricting.

‘I have said I will come. Now, we do not have much time, so let us use the Mirror.’

‘There is never enough time.’

They clashed into an embrace that held no tenderness, only desperate hunger. Fingolfin raised one long leg over Fëanor’s hip and drove against him. Fëanor pushed him to the table and bent him back. Parchment and scrolls hissed aside and fell.

No time, just enough to unloose their breeches and for flesh to touch flesh, for the hardness to become unbearable and their breath to mingle in rough orders and pleas and groans. Fëanor detested concealment and the reasons for it. His ever-simmering rage, his loathing of deceit and secrecy poured into this brief, snatched half-coupling and was matched by Fingolfin. In the white, thundering pulse and rush of release he saw a flash, felt an obliterating energy that seemed to pass through him like a wave of lightning.

He pushed himself up, looking into the silver-blue eyes below him. Fingolfin’s hands dug into his arms.

‘What was that?’

‘Didst thou feel it too?’

‘Yes. Like soundless power passing through me, and...an unbearable light.’ He slid upright. ‘Like a memory.’

Fëanor’s eyes widened. ‘Yes.’ He turned his head as if he could see its passage, through the walls, across Valinor, but there was nothing.

Memory.

Fingolfin turned his head back. 'Flame of my heart, we must wash. I have to return to Tirion before the Mingling.'

Passing through the inner door, Fëanor brought a washbasin and cloths. When they were clean and fully dressed they sat down at the cleared table, (Fingolfin cast a glance at the scattered papers and smiled) and Fëanor opened the Mirror case.

There was a rich, warm golden quality of light in that other world, in the room where Vanimöré spoke to them. Not the same room Fëanor had stepped into but as elegant, white and gold, uncluttered and spacious.

'How may I help?' Vanimöré asked. He smiled faintly, genuinely, but there was a certain wary attentiveness there. Fëanor recalled the tall body against his, the unexpected softness of that scrolled mouth and the sinews taunt as steel wire.

Fëanor said, 'Melkor is freed.'

The smile fell away; black brows drew down as if at a spasm of pain. His eyes went elsewhere for a moment then returned, acute and blazing.

'It was to be expected. So, what were thine impressions?'

'He is not like the Valar,' Fingolfin said.

'No. He is something else,' Fëanor agreed. 'Though they call him "brother". But when I saw him, I was reminded of—'

'Of what?' Vanimöré prompted.

'Of thee, a little.' It was Fingolfin who answered.

Vanimöré's face became completely closed, unreadable. Fingolfin's cheeks mantled with faint colour and Fëanor stepped in quickly.

'It is true. He is stunning. He has a dominating *presence* unlike the Valar, and a power that feels quite different. *That* is the similarity. But he repelled me, and thou — as thou must know — have quite a different effect upon me.'

Fingolfin's brows rose at that. Mirth sparked in Vanimöré's eyes.

'Fëanor, how *very* diplomatic of thee.'

Fëanor cast up his eyes, but smiled.

'What is he?' Fingolfin asked.

Every vestige of humour departed, Vanimöré said, 'Melkor is — at its simplest he is an amalgamation of parts of me and Eru. The worst parts.' He stopped. 'In that universe— ' gesturing to them. 'He is a memory that did not vanish into nothing. All those facets, those aspects coalesced into one being: Melkor. Our thoughts *create*.'

'Thou didst *create* him?' Fëanor demanded, appalled and yet curious. 'Then cast thou not destroy him?'

A strange expression flitted across Vanimöré's face.

'We did not create him knowingly. Perhaps it would be better had we owned our own darkness and kept it entombed within us. But the multiverse contains everything, Fëanor. Light and Dark and all that lies between. Melkor is a force of destruction, greed, violence that had a mind and will behind it and a memory he does not even know: of rejection. But he cannot be destroyed without changing everything and disrupting the balance.' He tilted his hand back and forth.

There was a small silence in the study. Fëanor glanced at Fingolfin and saw the sleek brows drawn into a concentrated frown.

'So it has always been thus,' he half-stated, half-questioned. 'In the old universes.'

'Yes, Fingolfin. There is no such state as perfection. Or rather there is.' Vanimöré regarded them with a dark, wry self-deprecation. 'It is *Nothing*. The only time when there is the possibility of perfection, before reality destroys the dream.' His eyes closed briefly, then opened again. 'I am sorry.'

Fëanor's pulse jerked, started a rapid tattoo. The last words seemed separate to the rest, springing from a very different thought.

'There is no true contention,' Vanimöré continued. 'For both Light and Dark serve a purpose. One must try to find the balance between them and the balance is within *us*, not some external force.' His long hands steepled as he looked at something beyond their range of vision. 'The Valar believe that they represent all the goodness — the Light — upon Arda. They tried to create their perfect place upon Almaren and when that was destroyed, in Valinor, guarded by the Pélori. But it is not ideal for the *quendi* is it? And so, there is no such state as perfection. Assuming that what is ideal for you is ideal for everyone else is the height of arrogance.'

'And the Valar have released Melkor into their perfect world,' Fëanor bit out.

'I doubt it has been perfect since the Tree Dew was changed,' Fingolfin offered. 'Not for the Valar, anyhow.' Vanimöré nodded. 'Eönwë has been ordered by Manwë to befriend us, to teach us his skills.'

'I see. Thou wilt need those skills, I am afraid.'

Fëanor thought of the Elves, vulnerable now as children and leaned forward.

'And we must learn quickly. What does Melkor *want*?'

'Everything,' Vanimöré returned. 'And most of all? The Flame Imperishable. He never found it, before, and could not have held it if he had. The Flame is why the desert blooms, why flowers grow from a handful of dust. It is even within Melkor but he cannot harness it, and so he made a mockery of life — and hated it. When thou findest it, thou shalt know it.'

'One moment.' Fëanor raised his hand peremptorily and saw an appreciative gleaming smile flash out and fade. But Vanimöré had the look of a man who was about to leave them for other business, like Finwë or himself when he had finished listening to the petitions of his people. 'Before we

spoke to thee we felt something, like an invisible wave of impossible energy that passed through us. Yet there was nothing. It felt like a memory. What was it? This Flame that thou speakest of?’

Vanimöré regarded them. ‘In a way. A memory, yes. The end of the old universe. Its ending created...ripples and they still move throughout the multiverse.’

There was nothing to say to that. Fëanor observed that sculpted face but it might have been a statue’s, yielding nothing. At last Fingolfin’s voice, low and somber, broke the silence.

‘Melkor— can he overhear us when we speak mind-to-mind? Can he feel the Mirror shards?’

‘No,’ Vanimöré replied. ‘But do not grow careless or —’ He stopped with a tiny upcurl of his lips. ‘I was going to say “do not draw his attention” but that cannot be avoided. Now,’ he said crisply. ‘I must leave thee. Oh, but wait—’ He moved from their view for a moment then returned holding Fëanor’s ring between finger and thumb. ‘Thine, I believe?’

Fëanor smiled as Fingolfin’s eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

‘Keep it.’

‘Until it is time for thee to take it?’ Vanimöré’s brows lifted.

‘Exactly so.’

‘Fëanor. The time in this world and thine does not pass at the same speed. Thou couldst enter this world, this place to find me gone; in fact that is very likely, and so I *will* keep this and take it with me. This world is not one to walk into without great care.’ His eyes held a clear warning. Fingolfin half-turned to Fëanor, his own echoing it, but there was something else there too: a deep glitter of fascination.

‘Am I a fool?’ Fëanor demanded, annoyed.

‘Intemperate, impatient and arrogant,’ Vanimöré rapped. ‘And liable to act before thinking.’

‘And *that* was supposed to be diplomatic?’

But Fingolfin was smiling. ‘Ah, a man who truly does know thee, and is not afraid to speak the truth.’

It snapped Fëanor’s rising temper. He cursed and laughed.

‘All of those,’ he acknowledged. ‘But not quite a fool.’ And he gazed at Vanimöré. *Yes, we knew one another. Can I remember that dead universe? Maybe not here, but on the Outside...?*

‘Do not be,’ Vanimöré returned, with something in his eyes a little like love and a great deal like sorrow. Then with an inclination of his head at both of them, he was gone.

~ Edenel and Coldagnir were alert and waiting. Vanimöré expected some protest to his plan but it did not come. They were, he realised, more concerned at his returning to the Monument and remaining there than working undercover as a bodyguard. And he did have to go there but despite the lure of oblivion he had a duty to discharge.

Is there anything else we can do other than be thine intermediary to the DDE Coldagnir asked.

Unknown. There might be occasions when thou canst move much quicker than the DDE. The situation will be aah...fluid and to paraphrase: "rumours of my death will be greatly exaggerated".

Vanimöré. There was a warning in Edenel's voice.

I mean it would not matter; it is hardly permanent. When he spoke again, he made his voice businesslike. I estimate my new job could begin in a few weeks. I leave for England tomorrow to see David before he goes up to St. Andrews.

St. Andrews, Coldagnir said thoughtfully.

Smiling, Vanimöré said, Yes. And no, I had nothing to do with that choice. As Blaise Worth he was preparing to go there before he lost himself in the underbelly of London. His heart was set on St. Andrews. It would have been wrong to guide him toward a different place.

It is not entirely safe there, Edenel remarked.

I know. A pity that there were not others to keep an eye on the place. The DDE could only do so much, and some things they could not see. But Sauron's attention is, I think, elsewhere for now. Howard does have people there, and will assign more for David. Speaking of which... He told them of James Callaghan and, more to the point, of Joanna Worth and her connection to Sauron.

He sews seeds, Edenel mused. And if this woman bore both of them on his orders, those two boys are in more danger than they know, at least this James Callaghan. No-one should know that Blaise Worth is even alive. Hence thy plan. It is not just to find the abusers but to protect both David and James.

James has been too used to taking orders, yes. A babe in arms compared to Sauron. He would buckle too easily. Probably.

Coldagnir said, Be careful.

Of course. Once (long ago) in that odd, wonderful interim between the Elves apotheosis and Dagor Dagorath he would have called it a challenge and accepted it with anticipation. But then, he

always knew he could go back. To the Timeless Halls, to walk among those he loved. Just to see them. It was enough; it was more than he had ever hoped for.

Now, there was nowhere to go back to.

OooOooO

~ There was a wind that night, blowing down the lake, sighing in the tall pines. Vanimöré closed his eyes to its rhythmic sound — and opened them to the *Outside*. A wind blew here too; the lifeless moan of it was unceasing.

But...

He was not within the structure itself, that mad, mated creation of chaos, Barad-dûr driven into the bulk of Angband like a sword into a stone. He stood in the endless desert that surrounded it, a place he never walked because it lead nowhere. The Monument rose before him, a black shape veiled by wind-driven dust.

A dream. I am not here.

The dust glittered across his view; rust and diamond dust. Raising dream-eyes he looked up — and up. From this angle the Monument took a different, paredoilian aspect, fooling the eyes into seeing it as a man on one knee; the spikes of the topmost battlements might have been the excressances of a helmet or a crown.

Or...the hilts of two swords.

With a movement as graceful and immense as the curl of a tidal wave the shape shifted, rose to fullest height. It blocked the ceaseless moaning of the storm, cleaving the dust as a ship's prow cleaves the ocean and stood, feet planted a little apart, head aloft, the long tail of hair a tumbling banner.

I am the Monument.

He closed his eyes and stood upon the topmost battlements — and saw himself. He stood as he often did, bracketed by the black spikes, gazing into the nothingness beyond.

A dream.

Then the image of himself — himself and the Monument *itself* — turned.

‘No dream,’ he said. ‘In physical form the body is bound to the world. Thy mind is not. Each time thou goest forth from here thou must leave most of what thou art behind and forget. There is no

other way. *That* is why thou art always thinking that thou must come back, to *remember*.'

'It is why I *must* come back.'

Vanimöré was not accustomed to looking at himself in mirrors and loathed the figure before him, eternal power, unassailable and permanent as the black rock he stood upon; Barad-dûr, raised by Sauron's mind. The alien eyes held the loneliness of power and, if one looked deeper, galaxies wheeled and vanished into impenetrable blackness.

'I cannot be separated, no matter how many avatars of myself are sent out to different universes and realities. Thou must learn to connect with me from there. It is what Eru can do, or so I think.'

Something...a whisper from another world...*I have not yet learned to forge that connection*. But Eru had learned and used it.

'And the Flame Imperishable too. We all have totalities.'

'Yes.' Vanimöré faded until the dust blew through his shape, yet the eyes still gleamed in a blackness that was darker than the Void.

I ate Darkness, here, before the Dagor Dagorath.

Yes. It was a sigh through the wind. *Take the knowledge thou doth need and go.*

His own exhalation sounded as weary.

'I should stay here.'

'Thou art here. Always. And so are they. The Flame. Eru. It is the only place we can truly exist, is it not?'

The figure solidified again, stood in the whipping winds, twin swords forever rising behind his shoulders, body locked in that stance where it might at any moment reach for them and stride into battle.

'Take the knowledge and go.'

The child abusers, yes. Their eyes met and they smiled; it was a smile as merciless as Utumno's pits.

'Too easy to kill them from here.'

'Those children suffered, their victims. Blaise was perhaps the only one who survived. And their abusers think their wealth, their position makes them immune to justice. They have nothing but contempt for the commonality. Well, they are going to learn. It is so much more satisfying to do this face to face, no?'

'There is that,' he admitted. 'Despite everything.'

Everything.

The supple black armour faded. White flesh glowed faultless for a moment — and then it was overrun and the mapwork of injuries blossomed like rot on fruit.

Vanimöré had gained the reputation of being unkillable but it had not come soon or easily. His bastard blood, Noldo and Maia in unholy union had given him advantages: only certain poisons could induce fever, and he healed swiftly. But such quickness of knitting bones, sinew, organ and flesh brought its own pain. Before his eyes the history of that pain wrote itself and faded out, every

injury, each bruise, cut, gaping wound. But for that core, blazing red-shot black, a pain that was not of the body. Unquenchable. He ignored both.

‘But how do I hold the knowledge that I cannot hold when I leave here? How do I recall it?’

‘Why wouldst thou think I would make it easy for thee and tell thee? When did I ever make things easy for myself?’ That smile, so self-mocking, self-hating, so pitiless. Vanimöré tilted his head in wry acknowledgement. ‘It can be done. It will be done. So do it.’

In the dream, he followed *himself* down the spiralling stairs to the great chamber where the Portal shimmered. He watched himself pluck the shining time streams multi-web like a master harpist. So easy to see what he needed, to track down the abusers of that child sex ring. Rage made the glittering lines spark red where he touched them.

And now, Joanna Worth...Long fingers moved through the dimensional webwork faster than even the dream-eye could follow.

Shock broke the dream open. He sat up to the peaceful, lulling sound of the wind in the trees. For a heartbeat dream and waking blurred together so that he saw the interdimensional glitter of the portal transposed upon the calm, dim bedroom. The former winked out. Like a dream that is so vivid and fades on waking, the knowledge slipped away easily as a fish down a river. He grasped at it knowing it was vital, that he must remember but though it winked at him tantalisingly, it refused to return.

Cursing, he rose. It was early, just after dawn and the wind had died. The lovely light lay over the gardens and lake soft as silk.

He breathed slowly, remembering how he had trained himself to *go within* when things were unbearable, deep into meditation. In a way it had been unsuccessful as a place of mental retreat, because in that deep state visions could come and few of them were pleasant. They were like faces bursting out of the dark, vivid as a blow.

It was worth the attempt. He quickly showered and dressed and left the house, walking down to the lake terrace. It did not trouble him that Mortimer Worth had died here, that the lake had claimed Raymond Callaghan’s body and given up its tortured remains. All battlefields were graveyards and battle was his milieu.

He went down to the jetty and with a breath fell into his training moves, the lethal speed of battle slowed to a concentrated dance-like fluidity. It was, in fact, a little like Tai Chi and anyone observing might have thought it was, but he had developed this in Angband. Over the years it had grown and changed as he learned from every fighter he came in contact with: orc, troll, Balrog, Elf, Mortal. Every careful, controlled, balanced move allowed him to free his mind.

He closed his eyes. His father had blindfolded him in Angband. It improved balance, so Sauron said, forcing him to rely on senses other than eyesight. There were, naturally, more injuries at least at the beginning, but desperation is a marvellous teacher and now, it was as natural as a breath taken and released.

He pivoted, bending one knee, lowering himself as he did so like an ice dancer...

...To slice at the achilles heel, and turning, turning, rising on one leg...To stab behind the knee... Swift enough and one could go here, under the plate of the kneecap, even detach it if the armour were loose or weak.

The Monument. Endless wind. Blowing sand.

He resisted the temptation to seize and examine the image, let it hover there at the borders of his consciousness as he rotated behind the invisible foe to bring the edge of an imaginary blade up to stab at the kidneys. Still slowly spinning he envisaged one of his foe's arms raised and stabbed up into the armpit, then whirled again to return to his first position.

The groin. Often heavily protected, even in orcs and trolls, but for the sake of mobility there were always gaps. One must gauge the timing to the very moment.

The Portal.

Vanimöré increased his speed. The dance of the swords, the dance of death. Faster until his surroundings blurred into the memory of his own hands racing over the web of the portal...

He came out of the spin in one move. The lake shocked back into his vision, but he did not see it or the race of otherworldly wind that flashed across the water like the pressure wave from a low flying jet fighter.

Ah, Vanimöré! Thou didst speak to Fëanor of arrogance, but what of thine?

Joanna Worth...It was not something he had known and forgotten because he had never consciously looked. He had not truly cared. He thought he had known enough.

And he was wrong. It was appalling. It was very, very Sauron.

Howard's reaction, he thought, was going unprintable.

Fëanor is not a fool no. But I am.

He turned and raced up to the villa. Behind him, the lake settled like a breath in the quiet morning.

OooOooO

~ Blood of Darkness, Blood of Kin ~

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

~ Blood of Darkness, Blood of Kin ~

~ The villa lay quiet in the dawn. Banked by flowers, guarded by pines, it looked, in the mellow and lovely light, like a painting, or something from an older, quieter, more elegant world.

Those within slept. It was not an establishment where the owner demanded the servants be up at four o'clock preparing breakfast, though under its late noble resident it had been. Only when Vanimöré had guests did he bother with more than coffee and he was quite able to make that himself. Camino and Guila did not rise until after seven and Vanimöré considered them the true residents of Villa Fiorini and himself and occasional passer-by. He was a passer-by everywhere save Summerland— or the Monument.

Two of Howard's staff were just coming off night shift. Vanimöré made them coffee as they prepared their reports then took his own cup to the terrace. In this green place, surrounded by roses, he drank without tasting, looked without seeing.

Secure in his knowledge of Sauron, he had made assumptions: The first and greatest was that Sauron was interested in him which was true as far as it went. There had been a Vanimöré in this world and presumably Sauron thought that his son had either survived or died and been reborn. The only thing one could say was that he, too, predicated his plans on assumptions.

But Sauron was not yet ready to approach Vanimöré directly. Thuringwethil's death at the hands of Claire James had possibly caused him to rethink and anyhow, he had other irons in the fire; he had not been content to wait until he could claim his son back.

Vanimöré decided not to wake Howard; he would have more than enough to deal with when he woke. If he did not know the man actually thrived on pressure (despite outward appearances) Vanimöré would be looking at sparing him the knowledge. But that was impossible; the DDE needed to know.

And so did Edenel and Coldagnir. Not yet though. The immediate and instant emotion of outrage had separated into aspects that he had to examine and more importantly to control. He needed time to assimilate.

Sauron.

He could have killed his father. He had not. By the time he had been powerful enough to effect such a thing, he had outworn the desire. Once, he and Sauron had performed what amounted to a supremely perilous play in the Mines of Moria wherein Vanimöré did indeed *appear* to kill him.

All artifice, but for a purpose: He had wanted the people involved in that ambush and battle to *believe* that Sauron was gone.*

Even long after, when he could have wholly unmade his father, he had withheld. The roots went too deep, were too contorted ever to be unravelled.

I remember everything. The betrayal, the horror, the agony, the soul-destroying *shame* and self-loathing that followed — and the times when Sauron talked to him like an equal, as someone who could follow the working of his mind.

Vanimöré had never fallen into the trap of thinking his father respected him; he knew perfectly well the game Sauron played, yet he longed for and cherished those times. Only then did he feel more than nothing, more than *the Slave*. Sauron knew that, of course and Vanimöré hated that he did. He detested himself for needing that kind of validation of his mere existence.

There had been no name for it then, but he fully accepted that his father had deliberately fostered a kind of Stockholm Syndrome. Even then he had known that Sauron played him. It made no difference in the end.

He could not kill his father, had told himself that others had a greater right to vengeance. Then came Dagor Dagorath. That Sauron had survived it was ironic. He was now guarded in the Timeless Halls.

Can I kill this version of him?

The answer was clear. From the Monument he could have done it already and with just a thought.

Guila's arrival at the table with breakfast brought Howard in her wake as if conjured by the smell of fresh coffee and croissants. Suited, neat and dapper, he grunted a 'good morning', which was all anyone would get from him until his first coffee. Vanimöré poured and handed him the cup, assessing the expensive suit with a flick of his eyes. Even on the rare occasions he had visited Howard's substantial London home, he had never seen the man without a suit, winter or summer. One of his staff had said 'He never takes his business head off.'

A breeze sighed in the pines and stirred the roses, wafting their scent across the table. A perfect morning to spoil, Vanimöré thought grimly.

'Well,' Fortified, Howard sat back and wiped his mouth with a napkin. 'Nice morning,' he observed as if seeing it for the first time. 'When is James Callaghan arriving? I have to get—'

Vanimöré lifted a hand. 'I need to speak to you.'

Suspicion leapt into Howard's eyes. 'Oh god, *now* what?'

Vanimöré rose and gestured to the villa. 'After you.'

Howard did not immediately explode. He spent at least a few seconds in mute shock beforehand. Vanimöré simply waited through the storm that then broke over his head as Howard paced and jabbed a finger at him. At last, he ran out of breath.

'You are completely correct to berate me,' Vanimöré said calmly. 'I simply did not consider this possibility. Pure ego, I admit.'

Howard shot him a look, dropped into his chair and opened the laptop. 'What will you do? Correction: What will *we* do?'

'Wait until she approaches her son. She will.'

‘How touching, a real family reunion.’

‘She is not my sister.’ The rebuttal sounded, in his own ears, like a charge of shot and certainly brought Howard up short. ‘Not in any real sense, just as the Sauron of this world is not my father. He believes he is, which gives me something of an advantage.’

‘The multiverse.’ Howard regarded him with an odd expression. ‘But why would he do it?’

‘Every ruler needs his faithful commanders.’

‘And Joanna Worth is his? So, who was her mother?’

‘A woman in his employ.’ At least it had not been a horror of rape and torment this time although later Sauron had killed her quickly and painlessly like putting down a sick pet. Naturally. He wanted the child to be influenced only by himself.

Joanna’s upbringing, too, had been very different to Vanimöré’s. She had been taught to be emotionless, calculating and clever but there had been no rape. Discipline, not torture had refined her. Sauron was creating a useful tool, not a weapon, and Vanimöré doubted Joanna would survive once she had served her purpose. His father was utterly without sentimentality. He had sent Vanimöré from Angband before the War of Wrath and from Númenor before it was destroyed. Neither time had been from care or if it was, it was the care afforded a half-finished weapon that he had not finished working upon.

‘If she sees you, will she know you?’ Howard asked.

‘Quite likely. Kate Barrington, as she called herself when tracking Claire, had a picture of me on her phone. After she was dealt with, I deleted it. But I wonder if she took it herself, or *he* did?’

‘It’s always been an article of faith that you *can’t* be photographed,’ Howard interjected. ‘I’d have liked the department to have examined that picture.’

‘Neither can I under normal circumstances, but he is not normal; not even human, and he is brilliant.’

‘Then you *can’t* do this! Send Eden or Aelios—’

‘Howard, they are far more conspicuous than me.’

That was undeniably true. Hair of flaming red and milk-glass white turned heads far more than black and that was not taking into account their eyes — however much they tried to conceal them. Like Vanimöré they at times used coloured contact lenses but they were effective for only a short amount of time. They were gods in this world and disguise could only go so far. Howard’s glare subsided; he sank back in his chair then a moment later sat bolt upright again and exclaimed, ‘Your sister! She could—’

‘No.’

‘But—’

‘No.’

Balked, Howard swore. ‘Why the hell not?’

‘My sister will involve herself if she believes it necessary or if she decides to,’ Vanimöré said

harshly. 'She is not at my command — nor anyone's. I know you do not like going there, Howard but we are going *there* just for a moment. On this world — any world — Vanya is immeasurably more powerful than I. She oversees Apollyon Enterprises when I am away as a personal favour to me and because she has some interest in my work. She knows I can deal with anything else. She is *Gaia*. Her concerns are different. Also, goddesses do not view life and death in the same way as humans do. It is not, in the grand scheme of things, that important. They take a very, *very* long view.'

Howard's mouth had opened. He closed it again. He took a long breath. Vanimöré released his own, deliberately relaxing his tense muscles.

Looking at his laptop screen, Howard clapped his hands together.

'You've proved my point.'

'What?'

Swivelling round, he raised his brows. 'You jumped right in there Steele. Vanya is your sister. She doesn't need protecting, but you flung yourself into her path like a fucking silent film *hero* rescuing a helpless female from the path of an oncoming train — and you probably *would*. Joanna Worth is not your sister, you say, because of the *bloody multiverse*, but she's a woman.' He pinched the bridge of his nose. 'I know how you regard women, Steele. You respect them. You're *gentlemanly*, and now you're going to — probably— confront a very dangerous member of the sex. Someone like you. *His daughter*. Do you see what I'm saying here?'

Vanimöré's jaw set. Howard was no craven and his shoulders straightened as he made an admirable attempt to meet the unblinking stare.

'Howard, you are under-appreciated and I do not pay you enough.'

Since Howard's annual wages topped six figures, he looked bewildered for a moment. Then his eyes narrowed suspiciously.

'That needed to be said,' Vanimöré told him without heat. 'And you are quite right of course. I'm aware of my ah...consideration toward women, thank you. And I am *still* the best person to deal with this.'

Howard puffed his cheeks. 'Why?'

'He did not raise Joanna in the same way I was raised.' Vanimöré smiled coldly. 'She probably believes he is fond of her. Father's beautiful daughter whom he trusts absolutely and takes into his confidence. She clearly has an immense ego. But she is only a tool. A baby-making tool. She is no fool, surely? The thought has to be there, under the glitter, the money and the beauty.'

A frown furrowed Howard's brow.

'Granted, but.'

'But what?'

'But what if she tries to seduce you?'

Vanimöré looked at him. Howard shifted on his seat.

'I am more inclined to believe she will try to seduce her son.'

'What?'

‘She will have been raised to believe *anything* is permissible,’ Vanimöré said patiently. ‘That laws and societal mores do not apply to her.’

‘Fair enough. But...two birds with one stone?’

‘Then she will find out I am — and always have been — extremely choosy.’

Howard shrugged a grudging assent. He knew better than most that one could dig in the dirt for ten years (Callaghan’s papers already had and the DDE had, on the quiet, dug even more extensively) and find Lucien Steele linked to absolutely no-one romantically, be they male or female.

‘What about James? What will you tell him?’

‘Well,’ Vanimöré grimaced faintly. ‘I am not going to tell him he is Sauron’s grandson. At least not today.’

But he would have to know sooner rather than later.

And, eventually, so would David.

OooOooO

~ Ednel and Coldagnir were not as shocked as Howard; they were what they were. Both of them had known Sauron and knew what he was capable of. Vanimöré skimmed over the fact that he had been to the Monument and what he had learned (always known?) of his place there. The fact hovered over their conversation but could wait. After all, he had returned.

What does it mean for those young men? Coldagnir wondered.

Nothing good, was the answer. Vanimöré wondered now if Sauron had allowed Blaise Worth’s rape. Two sons: one sheltered, the other thrown to the wolves as he himself had been. Experiments, both, usable either way. And if they were not, he had a beautiful, fertile and unaging daughter who could produce as many children as was required.

He wondered suddenly if Sauron had tried to trace Blaise when he fell out of sight. Had he even found him but elected to let him live that life until he was tempered — or destroyed?

Didst thou not feel anything? Ednel asked. *That they were not wholly human?*

There is something about them certainly, Vanimöré replied consideringly, fixing his mental gaze upon both. *I never thought of it, and even they are not aware, as if that blood is sleeping. They certainly have inner strength; David to survive what he did and I have seen it in James. I thought it*

was his father's character coming out in him, but perhaps not. I am not sure that the fathers' count for anything. James and Blaise both have a similarity to their mother if one looks, and seem oddly young to me, which would make sense. And their eyes have a peculiar brilliance. He paused, frowning. James has a remarkable memory too; he recollects things from young childhood to a degree which seemed abnormally vivid. That could also be an indication. We will carry out DNA testing to confirm they are related though for Howard's benefit and James', not mine. I do not need that proof. I saw it. It makes me think of my Khadakhiri, he added with a resurgence of the old, old sorrow. Sauron's blood, my own blood and yet there was nothing to see or feel, unless one looked, for twenty or thirty years. And godblood is...ambiguous anyhow, neither good nor evil until the one who bears it decides.

Vanimöré— Edenel broke in.

Forgive me that I did not tell thee I was going, he apologised formally. I promise thee that while I feel I have a duty, I will not stay there.

It would have to do. They did not need to know that he was always there. There was nothing they or anyone could do about that, and the idea of limitless versions of himself in other realities was not something he could afford to dwell on at this time. He had to suppose (and hope) that his totality had everything in hand.

I have found out a way to access the information, as one might say.

Yes? Coldagnir asked sharply. *Good.*

Unseen, Vanimöré smiled bitterly. *As thou sayest.*

OooOooO

~ James arrived just after ten o'clock. Guila brought coffee into the sunny salon.

Vanimöré had had endless (wearisome) practice at showing an expressionless face and he secured it firmly in place as he searched for the similarities to Sauron in James.

They were there, as they had been in David; Vanimöré had simply not known to look for them. His only thought has been how unlike their respective fathers they were. Joanna Worth was tall, fair and beautiful — and so was Sauron. David's hair was darker, but the clean, hard lines of his face and luminous eyes belonged to neither of his supposed parents. Vanimöré knew he would not be able to see either of them as anything but Sauron's grandsons from now on and that was hardly their fault. He would need to watch his step.

‘How goes it with the reporters?’ he asked smilingly.

James paused the cup half-way to his mouth. ‘You knew didn’t you,’ he said. ‘That it would not be easy.’

‘I find that threatening to kill them is effective.’ And it was not entirely a jest. It had certainly worked in Sud Sicanna and the Imperium simply because it was no mere threat. It would work in some countries in this modern world. James’ eyes widened then narrowed.

‘Unfortunately I think there are laws,’ he said.

‘Do you think your father lived by any law save his own?’ His own certainly did not. James flushed and looked away.

‘You are an unknown quantity,’ Vanimöré said. ‘And his shadow lies long and dark over you. No, they are not going to jump when you say “jump”. You will have to make it clear you mean business, that you are not asking but telling.’

There was a tiny silence. James carried the coffee cup to his mouth and sipped.

‘Was it like that for you?’

‘It was. We are not them, but we have to prove it.’

‘Yes. Well.’ Rather deliberately he replaced the cup on its saucer. ‘You’re right about that. I heard from my lawyer this morning that I *will* be investigated to see if I’m implicated in my father’s crimes.’ His head shook slowly. ‘I did half-expect it but it’s still...unpleasant. I am seriously considering selling everything off.’

‘It’s an option, certainly.’

The doors opened to Howard and one of his staff. With a nod of welcome, Howard addressed James:

‘Morning! I’d like a blood sample from you while you’re here, in case Blaise Worth ever shows up on our radar.’ His tone was so casual, Vanimöré inwardly applauded. The DDE already had Blaise Worth’s blood; it was standard procedure. It had not yet been tested but Howard was flying out tomorrow with the sample from James and both would be tested in London. Vanimöré was interested to see the results.

‘Of course.’ James said willingly, taking off his jacket and rolling up his sleeve. ‘Let’s hope, but I *do* intend to look for him myself, or hire people, at least.’

Howard shared a quick glance with Vanimöré.

Once he had gone, James rebuttoned his shirt-sleeve and sipped his coffee.

‘What would you do in my shoes?’

‘When the wolves gather my instinct is to face them,’ Vanimöré responded. ‘And they *are* gathering, are they not? Especially with the shares plummeting.’

‘You know that as well as I do, I’m sure.’ Something of a snap in that reply. ‘And it’s not wolves, but vultures. Will Apollyon buy it out, Mr. Steele?’

‘I could, of course.’ Without the power of Callaghan’s Empire, what good would James be to Sauron? Vanimöré considered. If it was known that James was selling off Canning PLC, in fact dismantling the empire, Sauron would have to move fast. ‘We might talk about that. But at the moment, for your own safety, say and do nothing, at least until after you are cleared of any wrongdoing.’

The blue eyes watched him. 'I wondered if...it crossed my mind if that was why you agreed to see me and why you proposed to be one of my security detail...if you're serious about that?'

'Would that it were that simple.' He rose. 'And yes I was and am completely serious. Last night we spoke of Joanna Worth as working for someone who was likely to approach you once the fuss has died down. You saw her with him in London.'

James came to his feet. 'You've found out more about her?' he questioned sharply.

'Oh yes. She *is* working for him, but he is not her employer.' He watched James' face intently without seeming to do so. 'He is her father.'

OooOooO

~ Edanel was on Amon Erebor when he felt the nudge in his mind. The *Ithiledhil* kept a camp there; it provided a superb view across the lands: West along the line of Andram, south to the vast, dark sprawl of Taur-im-Duinath, Eastward to Gelion and green Ossiriand and beyond to the hazy peaks of the Ered Lindon.

And North. Always they gazed northward. There had only been hints as yet: scents carried on the breeze, a dark hand on the heart but the *Ithiledhil* were ever vigilant. They had seen the monsters that had once been *quendi* and killed them. Some of the horrors had survived the destruction of Utumno. Marion and at least one of the Balrogs had also escaped.

Nothing is over. Nothing is ended.

But now, early summer lay across the land in kindness. A time of leaves, a time of warmth. Amathon and Arassel, who had accompanied him, cooked a grouse over a low fire. The day was grey but the wind blew mild from the great landmass to the East.

All the way from Cuiviénen.

The *Ithiledhil* had never returned there, to those abandoned settlements, to the echoes sweet and

sour, to the few who lingered on the great shores, in the Wildwood.

Edenel watched his companions feeling, like the beat of blood through his veins, the bond that was far more than blood, more even than love. These two had ever been his friends, tracing him even into Utumno's blackness. He would have done anything to prevent their torment. And he had, but they, like all the *quendi* who had been swallowed by the Underworld, did not escape. There was no mercy in the Dark God. No pity. His unhuman and titan power had broken all of them.

Black-haired they had been once *As I was*. Now their hair, braided with crow feathers was stark as snow.

Edenel did not know why some of them, a score only, had burned into this whiteness but his gratitude that some at least had survived was bottomless. They were forever set apart from their kind, but they were not alone. The bond between the *Ithiledhil* was deeper and stronger than the Dark God's corrupting sorcery.

Edenel had felt that same connection between the two who had spoken to him from the Mirror shard. Since then, journeying Northward to Amon Ereb, he had thought of little else.

None of the *Ithiledhil* forgot their past — how could they? — but the chasm of the Underworld lay between what they had been and what they now were, between what Melkor had called his White Slayers and their kindred. There was no returning, but they had, once, been *quendi*.

Fëanor, who had spoken to him, seemed unsurprised by his appearance and asked no questions. When he had closed the connection, promising to speak again, Edenel walked long in thought. Returning to the *Ithiledhil* he spoke to them because that faraway land of gods concerned them, too. All of them had lost someone to that Great Journey.

'Thinks't thou that they will indeed return?' Tathreniel asked. She was of Ingwë's people — or had been. The 'willow dancer' she had been called for her matchless grace. Now she used that grace to hunt and kill. Her chosen weapon was the spear, and she used it with terrible precision.

Fëanor had spoken of Ingwë as High King over all the Elves in Valinor, and of how he had sat at the feet of the King of the Valar for years before awakening as from a drugged sleep. He had also admitted that those who wished to leave Valinor might not find it easy if the Valar decided they should remain.

'Some,' Edenel told her. 'I think some may, if they can.'

He sensed, rather than saw the communal flinch away. *Soiled. Corrupted. Unworthy*. He felt it in himself; he knew the shame and grief that lay on their souls and felt his own swell to encompass them in unalloyed love. They inclined toward him as a flower to the sun. They had made him their leader and he bore their pain as his own, as any ruler must.

'We are the *Ithiledhil*.' His voice rang through the clearing and into the trees. 'I need tell none of thee that the Darkness was not destroyed. We watch and ward against its coming and if those who departed this Middle-earth do return we will aid them in all the ways we can.'

They extended their right hand, palm out. 'We are the *Ithiledhil*.' In that echo Edenel heard the blood and thunder of their first oath; their rejection of Melkor.

By the scent, the grouse was almost done. Edenel turned.

‘I will fetch the mead,’ he said and the two white heads rose and nodded. There were springs on the hill and he had lowered the mead into one to keep cool. It was merely an excuse, now, to retrieve it. The pull on his attention was stronger, peremptory, a knock on the heart.

The spring welled like tears, shadowed over by wind-writhen hawthorns. They formed a little dell, a cup in the hillside, with a view that rolled East to Gelion and the mountains. The lands lay serene and calm under the clouds.

Slowly, Edenel reached into his tunic and drew out the strange Mirror. He had looked at it since that strange conversation but saw nothing but his own reflection and that in itself was so disturbing that he had immediately thrust it back. Now, he waited, breath coming short and sharp. His heartbeat dinned like muffled thunder in his ears.

The Mirror surface shimmered like lake-water then cleared to show Fëanor and beside him another man so similar that Edenel knew this was the half-brother he had spoken of, son of Indis. Fingolfin. His eyes blazed silver-blue fire.

‘Edenel,’ he said.

‘We needed to speak to thee together,’ Fëanor told him. His face was unsmiling. The brother’s turned their heads to glance at one another and their profiles, fine and hard as etchings, caught Edenel’s breath and stopped it.

They looked at him again and his mouth dried.

‘What is it?’

‘Thou didst call me Finwë’s,’ Fëanor said. ‘And I did not correct thee.’

He felt it like an approaching storm, something immense and shattering that had built on a far horizon and was now about to fall upon him. Yet in their eyes, diamond and star-brilliant, he saw only a reined, impatient eagerness.

‘Not his sons?’ he asked slowly. ‘Then—’

‘Not his,’ Fingolfin agreed and reached out a hand. ‘Thine.’

OooOooO

Chapter End Notes

* In Dark God

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/84857/chapters/137698#workskin>

~ Truth is Like a Far-off Shore ~

~ Truth is Like a Far-off Shore ~

~ Amon Ereb. Middle-earth. ~

~ ‘But that is not possible.’ Edenel’s voice came thin and high as the cry of the hawk over the thunder of his heart. ‘It is not. We followed the Great Journey. I *saw* Míriel and Indis, even unto the shores of the Sea. They were not with child then —‘

‘It was the gift of a Power,’ Fëanor told him, his eyes lucent with that unearthly light, like a wolf’s eyes caught by firelight. ‘Listen.’

Edenel’s blood hissed. He closed his eyes. Opened them. The world was the same. But the words Fëanor and Fingolfin uttered reshaped it moment by moment.

An unknown goddess who had walked Arda and reached out her hand, stilling the seed in the women’s wombs until they reached Valinor. Finwë believed that Fëanor and Fingolfin were his sons but Indis knew the truth. None of them had enlightened Finwë.

‘I cannot,’ Fingolfin admitted slowly, with a sideways glance at Fëanor. ‘Say then, I will not. He is lonely.’ Then, looking straight at Edenel: ‘Dost thou not feel it?’

Edenel was mute. He thought of the spirits of wood and water and stone, of the bright, wild airs, and of the Dark God under Utumno and Mairon. All were powers of varying degrees, unhuman and ultimately unknowable, but he had never imagined some overarching goddess of the land, though it sounded *right* for was the land not their mother?

The *Ithiledhil* did not weep. Utumno, and the fire that had burned them white had scorched all tears out of them. Nevertheless, he felt the shiver in his chest that presaged tears and their faces blurred into bright shadows. His sons?

He said, hammering control into his voice: 'It was Finwë who wanted children.' And was willing to do anything to have them. 'I was not moved by the same need as he.'

'But my mother and Míriel both foresaw thou wouldst father their children, did they not?'

Edenel hesitated. 'They said they had dreamed of it,' he acknowledged after a moment.

'And they were certain they had kindled. But nothing happened at least not then, and not in Middle-earth.'

'But *why* — why?'

'Because,' Fëanor said. 'It should have been so. Dost thou ever dream, Edenel?' he asked. 'As if thou hast lived before?'

The wind passed through the hawthorn boughs. Edenel, silent, thought of his dreams. 'Perhaps,' he said.

'We did, we have and that universe ended. I know not how or why, but *we* were reborn into this one and it is very like to the old one. And that one left echoes, like ripples passing to the shore, breaking on the sand.'

'There were a very few survivors,' Fingolfin said. 'Thou wert one of them, and all the *Ithiledhil*.'

Gateways and doorways. Openings to another time. Visions and dreams, glimpses —
— White fire spat across the Mirror. Edenel almost dropped it. He jumped back. But there was no heat, only a prickling in his fingers like the bite of frost.

'What was that?' Fëanor's voice sounded startled, even angry. Slowly, as through a clearing mist, their faces returned.

'These Mirror shards,' Edenel said urgently. 'How many are there? Who might possess one?'

'A very good question,' Fëanor replied. 'I wonder...' Then, 'Edenel, we must go for now, but dost thou believe what we have told thee?'

Both of them looked at him with such burning need that his throat closed. His sons, not Finwë's, who had so yearned for children. It seemed unfair, and yet Fëanor had told him of Valinor, the strict Laws that one must follow or be punished. And Finwë adhered to them stringently, as if he had forgotten, or put away the memory of their transcendent bond, their love.

He said, 'Believe? No. I feel it. I...there are no words. I am *humbled*. And I was Élernil, then, not what...I became.' They were sons from the man he had been, unbroken.

'Thou art a survivor,' Fingolfin said sternly. 'And a magnificent one, as are all the *Ithiledhil*. We are proud to have thee as our sire.'

How could he accept that? Yet there was no mockery or derision

‘Is it possible,’ he ventured quickly. ‘That I could speak through this connection to Indis?’

Again the brothers exchanged a glance. It reminded Edenel so *much* of that long gone time, when he and Finwë could communicate without need of words. And with that, the realisation.

‘Thou art lovers,’ he exclaimed softly. ‘And the Valar consider it a sin.’

‘Yes,’ Fëanor confirmed, glittering. ‘And yes. If we — or any like us — wish to love openly, it will not be in Valinor. We are unfriends — publicly. We have to be. It was Indis bethought the idea and it works. Rather too well,’ he concluded dryly. ‘But one day when we are free...’ The look he turned on Fingolfin surprised a shock of blood into Edenel’s loins, so desirous was it. He thought of the earliest days when none of the Unbegotten had even thought to question he and Finwë’s relationship. But then, they were not born of women. Was that even important?

‘There is another matter,’ Fingolfin said, though his high cheekbones bore a flush of colour as the recipient of that burning. ‘Melkor has been freed by the Valar.’

Black fear choked Edenel’s throat. That *presence*, eyes like the slaughter of worlds. Before them he was *nothing*. Less than that — or more mayhap — because he was *something* in that Black God’s eyes: a *thing* to be used, experimented upon, to suffer agony and terror with no appeal. It would be better if such a Power did not see or notice the *quendi*. But he had.

‘Why?’ It emerged as a breathless rasp. (His throat remembered the screams). He swallowed but there was no moisture in the tissues of his mouth and the air felt thick and red and hot. ‘Why — They descended upon Utumno, and took him away. Thou hast told me he was imprisoned. *Why?*’

‘There was a term to his imprisonment,’ Fingolfin said through set lips. The Valar abided by that term. We saw him. His release was a full spectacle.’

Ah, stars, no. ‘They cannot know what he is,’ he said in a cold and rising rage. ‘Or...do they?’

‘They know,’ Fëanor nodded. ‘We do have some allies in Valinor. Eönwë, the Herald of Manwë and the finest warrior in Valinor has been sent to train us in arms, purportedly in secret because he wishes to help us, but in actuality by Manwë. If Melkor rises again, his target is to be us.’

A species of helpless horror descended like a mudslide upon Edenel. The world felt hostile, dark, for if the Powers that claimed it as their own kingdom had no humanity the inhabitants of Arda were at their mercy. His eyes closed; his head bowed and then, as in Utumno, he lifted it as if against a mountain of iron.

‘I saw Eönwë. The winged warrior. But even with such a tutor Melkor is not...’ He ran out of breath and forced it into cramping lungs. ‘He cannot be defeated.’

The *quendi* believed all life, even earth and stone possessed some kind of inherent soul, but if Melkor owned one it was of an order Edenel could not fathom, an external thing, dark and vast and utterly unhuman.

‘Well, not yet,’ Fëanor returned with a bright, hard, challenging smile. The words would have seemed foolish coming from anyone else, but the protest on Edenel’s tongue withered. For a moment fire seemed to burn about Fëanor’s head.

Then he and Fingolfin turned as if hearing something beyond his view and Fingolfin said quickly, ‘We must go.’ His eyes warmed to stunning deep-water blue and he smiled. ‘Father.’

‘Father,’ Fëanor echoed. They placed their hands on their breasts in the old gesture of respect and

bowed their heads to him.

Edenel leaned forward, touched the glass as their image faded. 'Be careful,' he begged them.

The wind blew through the dancing leaves and the pool rippled, clear and deep. His heart wrung itself out then raced forward again. He was tortured upon an altar of exalted grief.

Be careful. Be careful.

Lake Como ~ Italy ~

~ James started for a long frozen moment at Vanimöré. A breeze billowed the long curtains, snapping his head around as if he expected an attack, or the flash of a paparazzi's camera. There was nothing, just the wind. He looked back and exploded from raw nerves: 'That's *impossible*. I saw him. He was *young*.' Into the continued and unruffled silence his voice stuttered and broke. 'You...you must be mistaken.'

'Unfortunately we are not.'

'But who is he?'

'He goes by many names. He has wealth and influence and wishes to expand that influence. Both he and his daughter are interested in you.'

'And you want me to meet them?'

'He is pertinent to the interests of MI6, Howard's department in particular. The question is: Do *you* want to meet your mother?'

James, his face strained, hesitated. 'I don't know,' he admitted after a moment. 'I don't *know*. This is why she had me, and Blaise too? To use as pawns?'

'Yes.' There was no way of softening it and Vanimöré was not sure he would have, anyhow. This

young man was going to go through the fire whether or no. Sauron, certainly, would not be gentle. But James, like Blaise, had never known a mother, only a distant or domineering father, and the pull of the mother, a figure of nurture, was strong.

‘I want to ask her,’ James said in a flustered burst. ‘I want to ask her *why it was so easy to give me up!*’ The words seemed to surprise him with their vehemence but not Vanimöré.

He said like a dash of cold water: ‘Then you hand her — and her father — everything with both hands and immediately concede the battle. For make no mistake, it *is* one.’

James flushed as if he had indeed been slapped, and his mouth closed in a firm line. Vanimöré imagined he must have done this all his life when chastised by his father. Held it in, seethed in silence, choked it down.

‘They do not want to contact you because they *love* you,’ he said, deliberately brutal. ‘They want to claim you for a very different purpose. To use you as a tool. Is that what you want? After the way your father treated you? Or have you grown to like it?’

He *wanted* James to react; he had injected enough contempt into that last question to rouse the mildest of men. And James took two swift steps forward, fists knotted in the first sting of rage. ‘No, I...did not! What the hell are you trying to say?’

‘That freedom is not easy.’

The young man stopped, turned his head toward the ceiling and closed his eyes. Pent breath billowed out of him.

‘I know. I *know*.’ He looked down. The blue eyes had heated like burnt gems. He had been raised to hide his anger, but he was not devoid of it; it had just been buried too long and too often.

‘Yes, and so do I, which is why I will be one of your security detail in the near future.’

‘You’re *serious* about that?’ James blurted.

‘I am involved with the DDE, and have been for a long time. Yes, I am serious. Are you returning to New York?’

‘Yes, briefly, but I called a meeting of the Editor-in-Chief of the *Towncrier* and the *Latest*. I need to be back in London for it.’

The two red-tops were rankly Right-wing. The ‘*crier*’ had been delving into ‘Lucien Steele’s’ life (or attempting to) for years. Notwithstanding, it considered itself a serious newspaper, which was the cause of raised eyebrows and a few sniggers in the halls of the *Times* and *Guardian*.. The *Latest*, far more lightweight, dealt with celebrity gossip and scurrilous stories.

‘Really?’ Vanimöré lifted his brows. ‘Why?’

‘Surely you — the man they’ve kowtowed to for decades, writing everything he wanted them to write, was a child abuser!’ James threw out his hands. ‘You set him up, yes, but you were *right* to. They slavishly followed the wrong star, and I want them to lay off you.’

‘And do you think they will?’ Considering both of them had known.

‘If they think you’ll sue them into the next millennium.’ James smiled and it was hard and glittering. It reminded Vanimöré shockingly of Sauron, but then he laughed.

‘There was never a cause before,’ he said. ‘Speculation as to my sex life and whereabouts and genealogy is hardly grounds for legal action, merely distasteful. But in this case...’ Suing would not go far enough.

‘I’ll say that,’ James nodded. ‘Not quoting you, of course.’ He shook himself a little. ‘I wanted to ask: Can I see where he died?’

The day had strengthened into heat but the breeze tempered the sun’s glare, pushed the brilliant water into whitecaps. The encircling mountains looked hard and stark against the depthless blue of the sky, cut off abruptly at the waterline. An illusion; this hollow cupped the lake; the mountains plunged down into the cold depths and further, to roots of hidden fire.

Vanimöre stopped in the lake terrace and gestured.
‘Mortimer Worth was shot here.’

There was a stain still on the ground. James frowned, then followed Vanimöre down the steps to the jetty and walked to the end of it.

‘I don’t understand why the body took so long to recover.’ Lifting his head, he looked across the water. ‘But it’s deep, isn’t it?’

‘A glacial lake, yes.’

The wind lifted James’ thick hair. Such a pale gold. Because of his tan, Vanimöre had assumed that his hair was sun-bleached, perhaps dyed. It was not; this was natural. Blaise, darker, still showed those sparking golden highlights. How bright and glittering Sauron’s hair had been in the glowering red-dark of Angband. A torch to light his service to a God.

James gazed into the water. ‘I’ve been trying to summon grief,’ he said emotionlessly. ‘I find I can’t. I’m glad he’s gone. Does that sound terrible?’

Lifting his head he turned and his profile, hard-cut, against the water, brought the taste of ichor into Vanimöre’s mouth. *Ice-hot, potent, sweet and bitter both*. Then he realised it was his own, not the lingering memory of a slave’s service. He swallowed the blood from his bitten tongue.
‘Hardly. He seems to have been no father to you.’

‘No. You said freedom was not easy?’ He walked back to the steps and leaned against the terrace wall. The vines of the pergola dappled his face with light and shadow.

‘One is at their most vulnerable when the chains are struck off,’ Vanimöre murmured. ‘*He* knows that. So does your mother. That is why they waited all these years from your birth — for now.’

His face flinched. He pushed himself away from the wall. ‘How do you know this?’

‘I know it.’

‘I wish...’

‘What do you wish for?’

‘Before this, I thought...I could just *go away*. The laugh came shaken and hollow. ‘Just...wander around Europe. Visit a winery. Learn the trade. Make wine; make things that grow and give pleasure, not exploit and tear down.’

‘There are worse ambitions.’

‘Yes.’ He dropped back against the stone. ‘But I can’t do that now. That’s what you’re telling me.’

That my birth was planned, that I'm a pawn in a game I can't escape.'

'Not a pawn, a Knight or Bishop at the least. And some of us are given no choice, James.'

The too-bright eyes focused on him.

'Is that why Blaise vanished?' His voice rose. 'Maybe he knew, maybe they—?'

Vanimöre stamped hard on that. 'Blaise Worth was sexually abused as a child, by his father and yours. He ran from the unendurable, not from Joanna Worth or her father. And he — or someone who knew him — clearly wanted us to know the truth.'

James' breath shivered into the breeze. He passed a hand through his hair. The flecked sunlight sparked it into glittering cream.

'I'm going to sell the house in the Hamptons,' he said after a while. 'I want to live in London. I'll stay in a hotel for a while and look for a property. Whatever happens with Canning — and I don't care that much, I never did — I do have my own fortune.' He offered a wry grin. 'My father's mother left me some. He was furious but couldn't do anything about it due to the conditions of her will. I want to search for Blaise or be on hand if anything is found. Even if he...he's dead. But I don't feel it. I...' He shot a glance under his lashes at Vanimöre who said nothing. 'Anyhow, I've called this meeting. I can't do anything legally I know, not yet, but I did inherit everything. And I also, personally, hold over half the shares in those two newspapers.'

'I suspect Joanna Worth made certain you inherited everything,' Vanimöre said. 'You would be of little use without that influence.'

'You seem to know a lot about it,' James challenged hotly, then threw up a hand. 'I have something they want. I understand.'

'But at least you know that, and can — I hope — be in your guard. They will be quite persuasive.' He added: 'I know how hard it is, believe me.'

The gold brows drew together. 'Your father was the same?'

'Oh yes.'

'And dissuaded you from having friends because they were only after your money — or a route to him?'

Vanimöre laughed without humour. 'I doubt my father even thought anyone would wish to know me. I was not a person. He gave commands as from a master to a slave.'

'You're not serious?' James stared. 'My god, you are. What did...what did you do?'

'I resisted. I fought. Ultimately, I obeyed. I never thought I would be free of him, but one day, I was. Just as you are.'

'But you must have friends now. I know Madam Gauthier is one.'

Vanimöre smiled. 'One or two, yes.' Because it was almost impossible. Who could be trusted with the knowledge someone they knew was immortal? At the least, the friendship was built on a lie and could not endure. The unchanging face and body would end it long before the Mortal's death did. James would learn this, as would David. Half-Elven blood would eventually be diluted. Ainur blood endured far longer.

I will have to speak to them both, and talk to James before Joanna Worth or Sauron drop that

knowledge on him like a bomb.

Realising the silence had stretched, he shrugged.

‘As for someone just wanting your money, what the hell does it matter? You know as well as I that an obscene amount of wealth is owned by the 1%. Of course some people would want a rich friend, and why not? The point is: Are they decent people? The point is: Do you like them? You will soon see through those who do not care about you in the least; the rest — if you enjoy their company — why not be generous?’ He regarded James through eyes half-lidded. ‘Yes, to simply wander around the world without a name, on your own, would be an excellent experience for you. And perhaps you can — after.’

‘Did you?’

‘Wander? Yes,’ he said. ‘I did. And I consider myself honoured to count Héloïse as a friend. But friends are not what I...er...*do* and are few and far between. In the end, James, everyone has to be able to survive alone.’

The wind riffled the vines. A crow call came from high in the trees, mocking.

‘But—’ James began slowly and then something in his face cleared like lifting mist. His face shone as if hope lit a candle beneath the skin. ‘I have a *brother*.’

~ Over a light lunch, they discussed what Howard called Operation Tense, at which Vanimöré laughed and earned a dour glare.

James was returning to New York where he would present Peter Thomson with his golden handshake.

‘Then coming back to London as soon as possible. The meeting is scheduled for the 21st.’ He’d booked the Townhouse at Great Scotland Yard until he found a suitable property to purchase.

‘Somewhere that’s my own,’ he stressed. ‘Not my father’s.’

‘I’d always advise interviewing and vetting your own security staff,’ Howard said over Guilia’s *Fiori di zucchine fritti e ripieni di ricotta*. ‘But if you need a private secretary-cum-general factotum I know a man who might suit. An ex privy councillor. Retired three years ago when his wife died but regrets it now. He needs something to do and he’s the most close-mouthed man I’ve ever known. Completely discrete. Had to be.’

‘How do you know him?’ Vanimöré asked.

‘Oxford and Cambridge Club,’ Howard said briefly, then expanded: ‘We were on the same rowing team in uni. We go fishing together sometimes.’

‘Ah...perhaps you could send me his name and contact details.’ James looked from him to Vanimöré as if he could feel his whole life falling into a pattern of control and arrangement that was different to his father’s but only in respect of *who* was doing the controlling.

Howard nodded. ‘I’ll do that. Archie Fenwick-Brown.’

‘You have my private email and phone number of course,’ James said, with a little edge and Howard, unperturbed, nodded again. Vanimöré hid a smile.

‘He can arrange for your security staff,’ Howard continued. ‘One of which will include—’ he pointed his fork at Vanimöré. ‘So we’d better get on with that today. Don’t let your current security staff go until Archie is in place. It’s only common sense. Nothing to do with Joanna Worth or her father. You may be innocent as a baby but some people will see you as your father’s son and therefore guilty.’

‘I brought two,’ James said, then caught himself. ‘I’m sure you know that. They’re not here, as the Villa Fiorini has enough security of its own.’

‘I’ll get on the phone to Archie.’ Howard drained his coffee and pushed back his chair. ‘Expect a call today.’

James, thanking Vanimöré for the meal, also rose and said he had a flight to catch. After a slight hesitation he put out his hand. Vanimöré shook it.

‘See you in London, then?’

‘In London,’ Vanimöré acknowledged. ‘For my interview.’

James looked as if he might say more, but did not. Vanimöré watched him drive away, frowning, then joined Howard. He was in conversation with his friend Archie who, it seemed, was perfectly obliging, even grateful to be handed this job on a platter. After a quarter of an hour or so, Howard terminated the call and sat back.

‘Archie practically fell on my neck; said he owed me one. He’s going to ring James Callaghan now.’ He glanced at his watch. ‘I’m flying back to London tomorrow. You?’

‘Yes.’

‘I’m not happy about James Callaghan relocating to London,’ Howard muttered. ‘And he’s not stupid. Sooner or later he’ll remember that Blaise Worth was going to university — and where.’ The look he shot at Vanimöré was withering. ‘Okay, he wouldn’t find him under *that* name at St. Andrews but it’s one of the places he associates with Blaise and might send someone there, or go himself. So...I’m thinking it might be time to identify a body, a drowning in the Thames, maybe. There are always some who are never claimed. One of them could — retroactively — be Blaise Worth.’

It was the sensible thing to do, Vanimöré knew. James would accept it but he thought of the abject loneliness the weight of that news would bring down and remembered his own.

He said, ‘No.’

‘Don’t go soft on me now, Steele!’

‘He’s vulnerable enough as it is, Howard. Add grief — he feels none for his father — to that, and the only way we will stop him falling into his mother’s arms, is force. He wants freedom.’

Vanimöré made the gesture of a bird fluttering away. ‘Well, he cannot have that, not yet; he is a chess piece on a board now, a rather important one; he knows it and resents it. But if he has hope: of freedom, of finding his half-brother, he will be more accommodating of necessity. And, if he is going to turn to anyone, I would rather it be us.’

Howard looked at the laptop screen then made an infuriated sound that approximated to: ‘Argh!’ and swung back. ‘You might be right. I *hate* that. But if you and Héloïse hadn’t practically *thrown*

David toward St. Andrews this job would be a lot easier.'

'And *you*, my estimable Howard, would be bored.'

Howard raised a warning finger. 'Don't push it!'

'I would never!' Vanimöre batted his eyelashes.

'*And*...oh well.' Deflating a little in acceptance of the inevitable, he said grudgingly, 'I'm interviewing next week. There may be some more staff forthcoming. I want you to listen in, of course.'

'Naturally.'

Howard looked around the room. 'Well, back to work, I suppose. But this place is so peaceful. I don't know why you don't spend more time here.'

Vanimöre executed a little bow. 'It is yours, Howard, whenever you wish to come.'

'Thanks, but I think my vacation time is done for a few months.'

'Because this was such a restful break,' Vanimöre said straight-faced. 'A beautiful spot, excellent weather, wonderful food. Uncovering a global child abuse ring. Murder.'

'Yes, like I said, a vacation. Now back to the real world. I'm still concerned about that guy who vanished after the car crash at the crossroads on the B4001.' He lifted his brows.

'He used a portal, so he is rather more than a footsoldier,' Vanimöre remarked with a nod. The knowledge would be there; he simply had to access it.

'We have Ashdown House under surveillance and we'll keep that even after David leaves, I think?'

'That would be wise, yes. And Lord Grey is a nice old boy. It would be a shame if he were dragged into this.'

'You're going up there aren't you? Right, I'll give you the package for David: Burner phone, numbers he'll need if everything goes sideways, escape routes.' He considered. 'I was going to give him a last talk, but you can do that. Just *stress* that he has to maintain his cover.'

'He does realise the seriousness of this,' Vanimöre told him. 'I want him to feel comfortable in his assumed persona, not frighten him into jumping at shadows. That's not how our agents work, either.'

'He isn't one of our agents. He hasn't had the training.' Howard glared. 'But if we have to work with it, we do.'

'We do. And we will.'

The scent of pine and cypress gusted into the room and the drapes billowed and snapped like a sail. Vanimöre went and secured the cord. When he turned back, Howard was staring at him.

'David,' he said reluctantly. 'You don't think there was anything too...coincidental in us locating him, do you? His being Joanna Worth's son—'

'You said it was the work of years to trace anyone.'

'It was, but...' The expression in his eyes was unfamiliar to Vanimöre until he realised that it was

simple *faith*; an expectation that he would *know* which, from Howard, was strange.

‘No,’ he said matter-of-factly. ‘No, David is who and what he is.’

‘Good.’ With a gusty sigh, Howard turned back to his laptop. Vanimöré left him to it. He crossed the black-and-white tiled hall and climbed the curving stairs. In his room he quickly packed, and withdrew the ring that Fëanor had left here. In lieu of a better hiding place, he slid it into his finger. The warmth sank into his skin, deep and rich with a flickering edge of the power that Fëanor owned but could not yet harness to the full.

‘And thou, Fëanor, Flame Imperishable, behave,’ he said softly.

OooOooO

~ A Day of Storms ~ (Modern World)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

~ A Day of Storms ~

~ The sun rolled off the back of night as the Bombardier climbed from Milano Malpensa airport. Over Switzerland, the Alpine peaks were still white but the sun blazed from clear summer skies. Europe sprawled below in mountains, lakes, crumpled hills, rolling to the north.

Vanimöre's original plan had been to fly to Capri and pick up 'Nanny', before returning to England but after the ball, Vanya decided she would go back to Summerland early. Journalists and paparazzi were bound to trouble the village, she said. 'Nanny will see them off.'

It had been an early start and one the flight path levelled off Howard and his staff slept, all save the youngest. With a mere year of service to the DDE, Vanimöre had noted that Bahir seemed to want to prove himself. As he went down to the galley, Vanimöre touched his shoulder, told him to sleep. The rather shy but dazzling smile reminded him of Tanout. He would never (and certainly the DDE would never) employ someone because of sentiment yet over the decades the spark and tug of memory had happened enough times to halt Vanimöre in his tracks. Before the destruction of the old universe it had been poignant. Now, it was painful.

When he returned with coffee, Bahir had reclined his seat back and his eyes were closed, his breathing quiet. The last weeks at the villa had been a time of constant alertness and strain, and all of them had gone above and beyond the call of duty. Howard, though grudgingly, had agreed they take a week off. A considerable bonus was already in their bank accounts.

Vanimöre drank coffee watching the slim white wing of the aircraft slice the sky. He twisted the ring on his finger and closed his eyes, not sleeping, but falling into a state almost of mediation, where the access to his totality was easiest.

Sauron's blood explained many things. Blaise Worth had not been spared because his father balked at murder, but because of who his *mother* was. Joanna Worth had demanded that her son live. Worth *had known*.

Worth was dead. Callaghan was gone. But there were others who had escaped justice. One of them was Ollie Skinner, editor-in-chief of the *Towncrier*., whom James was to meet in a few days time.

After a time, Vanimöre drew himself out of thought, went through to the cockpit. Rick Collins had flown Eurofighters in the RAF and handled the Bombardier with the lazy, negligent ease of a

national hunt jockey riding a gentle old family pony around a sunny paddock. The co-pilot, Tony Brookes, had been a BA pilot.

‘Thunderstorms developing over Île de France, Mr. Steele,’ Rick said in that clipped way of his, a relic of the RAF.

From the cockpit window, Vanimöré could see them, curdled clouds lit to dazzling white by the sun and rising, rising in silent, billowing threat, beautiful and immense.

‘Cu nims at forty thousand feet, and rising.’ He turned his head a little. ‘We’ll fly over them Mr. Steele. No problem.’

The altimeter numbers began to rise as the aircraft climbed. Slowly, the storm crept north, casting its shadow over Paris, the giant cloud below still reaching upward. Fëanor’s ring burned so suddenly hot that he clenched his fingers.

Fëanor. All power answers to power, or perhaps I should say: energy.

He remembered his sister’s words at the ball. He should have taken the ring to the Monument and had not.

I should have. It is an artefact of Power and not of this world. Dost thou know, Fëanor, what thy creations contain, or is it always that the maker leaves part of himself within?

‘Storms forecast to cross the Channel,’ Rick said. ‘But we’ll land before they reach London.’

They did, but the air was humid, breathless with approaching thunder when they came into Heathrow. Vanimöré collected his car and drove into London. The storm broke before midday, washing the dusty roads, gushing down the storm drains. From the windows of his penthouse he watched the flicker of lightning across the black sky, the great window streaming in the downpour.

It was a day of storms and spearing sunlight. Pedestrians moved under umbrellas that mushroomed and collapsed between the thundershowers. Shepherd Market with its market-town charm and little old shops, was a quiet oasis; the rain it seemed, kept the custom to a damp trickle, but the pubs and cafes, their outside tables empty, were busy behind steamy windows.

The tinkling bell sounded tinnily as he pushed open the door of the jewellers. It was like walking into the past, and Bellman and Sons had indeed served successions of royalty for three hundred years. Now, it dealt in rare antique jewellery and watches. The latter was why Vanimöré was there.

After David left the villa, one of the cleaners had found his expensive Breitling in his room. She was concerned that the young guest had forgotten it, and Vanimöré had told her he would return it. He was not going to. David had taken it off deliberately, he knew, hating what he had done to earn it. It was understandable but he would need a watch at university, governed by hours and so Vanimöré had contacted John Bellman and asked him to source one. Within a day, John had done so, a rare Jaeger LeCoultre and almost wept when Vanimöré instructed him to engrave something on the back.

‘Mr. Steele, you’ll deface it!’

‘Think of it as making it one of a kind,’ Vanimöré smiled into the phone.

He had sent the instructions and now the old man, a genius, came with the watch in its leather case.

‘Mr. Steele.’ He blinked behind his glasses, short-sighted from years of close work. ‘You’re early,

sir. And in this weather!’

‘A busy day,’ Vanimöré apologised. At his nod, Bellman senior lifted the watch out and turned it. His expression was a study in pleasure at his art and horror at what he had done.

The engravings were small, delicate and superb. A phoenix, feathered wings outstretched, head pointing up toward a new future. David had carefully packed his fabulous outfit though whether he would have any occasion to wear it, Vanimöré did not know. Still, it would have been a shame to leave it behind.

Across from the phoenix were two crossed palm trees whose roots were the blades of twin sabres facing outward: The insignia of the Dark Prince, ruler of Sud Sicanna. The first time and place that he had truly been alone, himself, without Sauron at his back like the shadow of black wings. It was a thousand years of freedom, growth, and experience.

I made mistakes but it was strange — or not — how I rode so easily on my father’s black wings. Never a doubt that I could do whatever I wanted. He broke me, time after time, and yet (and still) never a moment that I doubted. That immense and awful confidence. Was it Sauron’s? Was it Fëanor’s? Was it mine?

Héloïse had called him intimidating. Héloïse had not seen him on his knees before Melkor and Sauron, that or the other manifestations of torture. The pain was breaking-point but the degradation was worse and lasted far longer.

I understand, David.

Very gently, he traced the engraving with a fingertip. In this world it carried a different meaning: very few people possessed this insignia. To the DDE and its associates it meant ‘instant access’. At a more somber level, if David ever went missing and this watch surfaced, it would provide a lead.

He raised his eyes to the old man’s. ‘Superlative. I expected no less.’

Jon Bellman nodded in satisfaction. ‘If I may ask, who is it for?’

‘A friend,’ Vanimöré said easily. ‘And they will be delighted.’

‘I’m glad. May I offer you coffee?’ As Vanimöré turned away.

‘Thank you but not today. I have an appointment.’

He opened the door to rain and the flickering flash of lightning. The square was almost empty but for a couple hurrying toward him under a small umbrella and a man whose jean-clad legs were the only thing visible under a much larger golfing umbrella that was catching the whippy gusts of wind like a sail. Fëanor’s ring, always warm, throbbed into sudden heat.

The couple stopped, side on under a small awning. Both of them were hooded. The shorter figure, a woman, lowered the umbrella and shook spatters of moisture from it. Pale gold hair slipped from under her hood in a gleaming curve. Through the smell of city rain, Vanimöré caught a whisper of expensive perfume. She laughed, tucking her hair back in. Her fingers were long and white, each one ringed in diamonds. Turning her head slightly to her taller companion she laughed and the sound was like the chink of cocktail glasses, rich, hard, confident.

The photograph he had seen of Joanna Worth in Bermuda had been bleached by the brilliant light and her pose. As she looked back into the square her profile, side lit by the illumination from the shop behind her, was so familiar that Vanimöré felt every sinew tense. She was ten feet away and beginning to turn her head and the one beside her...

The man walking with the umbrella tripped, crashing down almost at Vanimöré's feet. He heard the smack of knees on the stone, heard the gasp and stopped — on something rather more than reflex — to help. The great bell-wheel of the umbrella, still grasped in one hand, acted like a concealing shield.

'Thank you.' A light, breathless, pretty voice and a flash of enormous, startled eyes under a wet hood that clung to his face. Drenched curls, even paler than Joanna Worth's, were painted to his forehead. Then Vanimöré's offered hand was gripped hard. There was a soft exclamation of pain. Fëanor's ring felt like a brand on his finger. It must have been hurting the young man but he did not drop Vanimöré's hand or flinch.

Joanna Worth laughed again, glittering. Vanimöré's head snapped around. He heard the tap of heels and the softer press of a man's flat-soled shoes. Every inch of his skin prickled.

The hold on Vanimöré's fingers tightened. The hooded face before him bowed as if in pain. Long wet lashes were closed over his eyes.

Lighting shocked over the square followed hard on its heels by another tearing roll of thunder.

Both pairs of footsteps came to a halt.

'One moment.'

Sauron's voice, smoothed to a different world but familiar as a touch.

Crouched as he was, the umbrella concealed Vanimöré and he kept his head lowered as the grip on his fingers tightened. He thought of nothing. He was blank as a lead sheet. *I am not here. I am nothing, as thou didst once tell me.*

Then the bell of the jewellers shop tinkled and he heard the hiss and click-shut of the door. As if he could see through the fabric of the umbrella, he stared, eyes narrowing.

Now, that is interesting.

With Vanimöré's assistance, the young man came to his feet, lifting the umbrella. He withdrew his hand. The rain hammered, bouncing off the square, the worn step of Bellmans and Sons where Sauron and Joanna Worth had entered. It streamed down the softly lit windows; the beautiful jewellery pieces, all nested in velvet, were smeared into a reddish, fire lit glow.

Possibilities sparked and faded in Vanimöré's mind. He considered. Wavered. *The moment between thought and action or inaction can stretch a lifetime but it must be seized or it is gone forever.* It had all happened in a minute, no more.

Water dripped from Vanimöré's soaked hair. He strained against the desire to burst through that door and confront Sauron and his daughter. But the ring still yelled a warning and Sauron, in this world, possessed the greater power. There was too much at stake: Maglor and Claire, St. Andrews, David, James, the entire DDE and their operations — although if Sauron were ignorant of that Vanimöré would be very surprised. But, long ago, effortlessly, he had been able to see into Vanimöré's mind. There was no reason that should have changed.

He swung round to the square, empty now of people. The rain fell like silver rods through pewter unlight.

The young man had gone. He saw a shadow fading into the murk. The ring still burned. The door of the jeweller's shop seemed to quiver as if anticipating the moment that Sauron would sense that

hovering power and come out. He had felt *something* and decided, for who knew what reason, not to investigate — at least not at that moment.

There was a spy hole in the door dating from Victorian times. Bellman senior said it was still useful. Was there a lizard-quick flicker there, an eyeblink?

Vanimöré looked quickly away. His back was stiff, like a man expecting an arrow as he walked across the square.

OooOooO

~ The storms had not tracked as far west as Berkshire. Ashdown House rose white against the woods and rolling downland under a mild, dappled sky.

Héloïse, after a day at Henley, had made a flying visit to Paris on business not unconnected to the ball. She had visited her son and spoken to lawyers and was very willing to testify to her part in Callaghan's invitation to the villa. She told this to Vanimöré when he rang before leaving London, adding that David and Lord Grey would be delighted to see him.

Lord Grey certainly was. As the summer stretched toward July, the steeplechasing world was quiet. While Lord Grey had a few flat racers, his main interest was in National Hunt. Many jockeys and trainers took their holidays now, before gearing up for the autumn and with his hip still healing, the old man had little to do. He accepted the wine and cigars with an endearing dignity and Tommy, presented with some excellent pipe tobacco and whiskey, allowed Vanimöré to carry an extremely large F&M hamper into the kitchen.

Héloïse twinkled at Vanimöré. '*Formidable*,' she murmured. 'Now we will not have to eat shepherd's pie. Oh, it's much better now that David sometimes shops but still Tommy cannot cook!'

David came skimming down stairs at that moment and Fëanor's ring pulsed like a hot heart.

The presence of power? Or am I influencing it, knowing what I know of his blood?

There was a change in David: He moved more freely with a grace that had, until not so long ago, been compressed into wariness. Rich, gold-tipped curls haloed his face in glossy profusion and his eyes were brilliant, intensely blue. He had picked up a slight tan, perhaps during his walks and looked much healthier and more vivid than the nervous, too-pale pretty-boy Vanimöré had first met in Italy.

Resilience, Vanimöré thought. Blaise Worth had always possessed it.

The resemblance between he and James Callaghan— and their mother — was enough that a stranger seeing them together would have guessed they were related. Vanimöré had said nothing yet to Héloïse. Later, he would walk with her and talk. He had no concerns of her repeating it or broadcasting her thoughts.

David smiled shyly, putting out a hand, which Vanimöré gravely shook.

‘You look very well,’ he said truthfully.

‘Thank you,’ He glanced at Héloïse. ‘I feel it.’ He almost bounced a little on his toes and said to her, ‘Did you tell Mr. Steele about the flat?’

She smiled with affection and threaded an arm through both of theirs.

‘There has not been time and it is *your* flat *non*? Come let us have tea. It is one English custom I approve of.’

They took tea in the walled garden, Lord Grey saying he could very well manage it.

‘Of course, *mon cher*.’ Héloïse agreed. ‘It is healing well is it not?’

Afternoon tea, courtesy of Fortnums, consisted of delicate little sandwiches and scones with cream. Lord Grey made great inroads and when Héloïse told him what he might expect for dinner, he exclaimed, ‘My dear chap, most kind of you,’ to Vanimöré. ‘I do hope there’s enough for Tommy,’ he added earnestly in an undertone. ‘He’s not really my servant but he does like to pretend he is. Wouldn’t want to leave him out, you know.’

Vanimöré assured him that he had not forgotten Tommy and there was more than enough for everyone. Smiling, David said that Tommy was enjoying his own cream tea in the kitchen while watching the television.

‘Good, good.’ Lord Grey looked pleased. ‘Now, dear chap I’m sure you didn’t come here just to bring gifts. You want to know what young David’s been up to!’

Smiling, David flushed and began to speak of St. Andrews while Héloïse nodded and sipped tea and Lord Grey dolloped an immense amount of cream on another scone, interpolating the odd endorsement when he had finished each mouthful.

That the flat was on Howard Place had indeed made Howard Wainwright groan and declare that Héloïse had done it to annoy him. Vanimöré laughed, but it was in fact a good choice. The garden opposite would be useful for the security detail as would the fact that it was the end house.

When tea had been cleared away, David asked Vanimöré quietly if he could talk to him and lead him to the library. Closing the door behind them he showed Vanimöré the beautiful book sets that Lord Grey had presented him with. Visual arts, philosophy, history, they were bound in glowing calf-skin and clearly heirlooms. They did not even seem to have been read and David handled the

pages reverently. Vanimöré guessed he spent much time in this peaceful room with its scent of old pages, leather, wax.

‘I didn’t know how to thank him,’ David said. ‘I felt I could hardly accept them but he wouldn’t hear of Tommy having to climb all over to put them back.* I couldn’t think of anything else to say but thank him.’ He looked up smiling. ‘He’s very kind. He hardly knows me.’

Vanimöré admired the lovely things. ‘Yes, he is a kind man, and he clearly likes you.’

‘He wouldn’t if he knew what I...what—’

‘You do not know that,’ Vanimöré cut through that. ‘Do you? I believe he would be horrified and pity you.’

‘I don’t want anyone’s *pity*,’ David said with muffled passion as he closed the book. ‘No-one forced me into that life. I chose it.’

‘You did not choose to be raped. You did not choose to be traumatised by it. You did not choose to be targeted by filth. David, look at me.’ The too-bright eyes lifted slowly. ‘You were a victim. But now you are David Balfour who is about to enter a new life. *Live* it.’

‘Yes.’ David nodded jerkily and then with greater resolve: ‘Yes. It still feels like a dream but when I saw St. Andrews it felt that I *should* be there.’ His face changed, warmed as at a memory of sunlight on old stone, the curling froth of waves breaking on long sands, the winds off the North Sea and the wheel of white gull’s wings, the ancientness and learning of the city going deep, deep into the bedrock of the place. His shoulders rose and fell. ‘I’m a little nervous, but...’

‘A positive nervousness,’ Vanimöré suggested.

‘Yes. I...did Héloïse tell you we stayed at the Fairmont?’

‘She did, yes.’

‘It was very...expensive clientele. It would be. Well, she saw someone she knew there and said it would be better if he didn’t see *us*, so we dined in-room.’

‘Ah, yes, Howard did mention it. Jonathon Harlow. I know him, or rather *of* him. It had nothing to do with the ball, David.’

‘He was with a young man. An escort.’ David’s lips curled down in an expression of distaste. ‘Well later I went outside and met him. He was just walking, getting some fresh air as I was. He said hello to me, introduced himself as Nael. Mr. Steele—’

‘Lucien.’

‘I’m sorry, yes. I know I’ve got to be careful and I was but he reminded me of...’

‘Yourself?’

‘I suppose so. He asked me to have a drink with him, and I remembered that I always needed one before my *work*.’ He stared, a little challenging. ‘We talked. Not about that, about St. Andrews. He said there were ghosts and things that were more...more *perilous* was the word he used. It was rather a...strange conversation; I thought he must be self-medicating, Valium perhaps. A lot of sex workers do. I did.’ A look of self-deprecation, a glance into the past that limned his face with shadows. Then he blinked himself out of it. ‘I would have thought it odd: the talk of ghosts, but for

the night of the ball.’ He turned the book in his hands. ‘I think it’s the kind of thing people will tell themselves they misinterpreted or it was quite natural, but I won’t forget the crows and what I thought I saw in the lake and...’ he hesitated then rushed: ‘Other things. In the gardens, at the ball. And...you.’

Vanimöré considered simply staring him down but at the waiting, the need for truth in those blue eyes he temporised.

‘There are things in the world that are not easily classified,’ he said as if it were perfectly normal. ‘In part the DDE exists to monitor and sometimes deal with them. Every government possesses such departments. Some of the things they investigate fall loosely under the category that people might refer to as “paranormal”.’ He smiled in what he hoped was a reassuring manner. ‘And most of them *are* quite easily explained, David. I would not let it bother you that much.’

Not yet, anyway. Complete ignorance would not help him and he had long passed the stage where he might have believed Howard’s mantra of *Nothing happened. No-one saw*. But neither did he need to know everything. He was soon to start a new life under a false name; that would require concentration and caution not the fear and shock of something dangerous and unknown. If he were forever looking to *see* something in the shadows, and was always on guard, it would affect his time in St. Andrews detrimentally and indeed, his whole life. There was a delicate balance here, and Vanimöré was not sure how much knowledge was enough, how much was too much. He would prefer it to come gently and incrementally, not as Claire’s had in smashing blows of fear and pain and the horror of Thuringwethil’s claws and poison kiss.

But is it too late? With his blood...I do not know.

David had been frowning at him and now exclaimed: ‘The *paranormal*? You mean ghosts, aliens?’ A disbelieving laugh stuttered out of him. ‘Like the X Files? What has that to do with Callaghan and my father and child abuse rings? Those things aren’t paranormal. They’re *real*.’

‘Yes, and some of those involved believe in a higher and often malignant power. Ancient gods perhaps, even ones they invent.’

‘That black circle on my father and Callaghan,’ David whispered with a contraction of dark brows. ‘Like a Freemason’s ring? Secret societies you mean?’

‘Yes.’ This was not a far cry from the conspiracy theories surrounding the Illuminati. If David’s mind followed down that path all the better, at least for now.

David’s gaze went distant. ‘Yes, but...that doesn’t explain what I saw at the villa.’

‘You witnessed death,’ Vanimöré said. ‘And yes, you saw or felt other things, because you were in a heightened state of emotion. It is true that some people *do* experience things we would call paranormal for want of a better word.’ He thought of Claire James and tangentially of Héloïse. ‘Yet you must still live your life. Take Héloïse for example. She has seen many, many things and will see more. Yet she *lives*, does she not? It does not alter her existence.’ He laughed. ‘She would never permit it.’

David, after a moment, also broke into surprised laughter.

‘No, no, I can’t see her ever permitting *anything* to disturb how she lives. She would tell the apocalypse or an alien invasion it was being ridiculous and anyhow, she was too busy to deal with it, at least until after Henley.’ He choked. ‘She *is* so superb, isn’t she?’

‘Indeed she is.’ Some of the tension had been laughed out of David’s muscles, which was just what he needed. ‘You could not do better than to follow her example. Even Howard. He knows, just

prefers to pretend that he doesn't.'

David's mouth still held amusement, but he said thoughtfully, 'Yes, I do see.'

'Whatever happened, it did not prevent you from deciding to go to university, did it?'

'No,' David agreed, apparently struck. 'Of course not. I never thought of it that way, but it's true.'

'Let it be the truth. Because it is.'

'Nael spoke of ghosts,' David said questioningly. 'He said he liked to walk the town at night and that some places were unfriendly. He called St. Andrews "*A thin place*." I knew what he meant. He said I shouldn't walk the Pends at night.'

'For purely security reasons, we would prefer you not walk anywhere at night,' Vanimöré told him without stress. 'At least not alone.'

It was not ghosts Vanimöré was concerned about, but other things both human and unhuman who watched and waited and sometimes followed.

David had been holding the book, nervously smoothing the leather. He seemed to realise what he was doing and put it down carefully. 'Anyhow, Nael told me he lodged in the town and I gave him my phone number.' He crossed his arms defensively. 'In case he needed help. Thanks to you I have plenty of money and the thought of him having to sell himself...' His head shook.

David had chosen not to tell Héloïse and Vanimöré wondered why. He frowned a little.

'What was he like?'

David's head tilted. 'He looked like an angel. I'm not exaggerating. Far too innocent to be in that game. Far too fine. Another pretty-boy.'

Vanimöré said calmly, 'If you see him again, let us know: me, Héloïse, Howard. In the meantime, I'll look into Jonathon Harlow and his "boys".'

'Would you? Was I wrong?' he asked. 'I just remember thinking when I was doing that how I wished someone would just sweep in and rescue me.' His mouth crooked wryly. 'And you did.'

'We were far too late,' Vanimöré said harshly, self-condemning. 'We should have found you long before.'

'I wish you had,' David replied honestly. 'But you *did* find me. And I found *him*.'

The meeting had affected him; that much was clear. Vanimöré would have been surprised if it had not.

'You liked him.'

'I hardly know. Felt an affinity with him, yes.'

'I'm sure something can be done. I told Howard that there were worse ambitions than hunting down abusers. It follows that helping the abused is just as important.'

David's face lightened. 'If you *could*. If I see him—' Then reluctantly, 'I did wonder if he was some kind of well...*agent*,' he confessed with some embarrassment. 'But apparently his client often took his "boys" there, and I can't see how anyone would have known Héloïse and I would be at the Fairmont.'

‘Caution is admirable,’ Vanimöré smiled. ‘Just do not let it fall into paranoia. You used the Tor browser to book the hotel?’

‘Yes. I use it for everything.’

‘Then do not worry about it. Was it something about Nael himself that made you wonder?’

David paced to the window and back; his fingers raked his curls in a restless, nervous gesture. ‘He just didn’t look as if he ought to be doing it, or even particularly *bothered* about it.’

‘Neither did you,’ Vanimöré observed, which earned him a grateful, flashing smile and a flush.

‘I think...’ He stopped. ‘When I spoke to you that morning I decided to apply for university, there was something I never told you. I think I should, now.’

‘Yes?’

‘And show you. Would you mind? It’s not far.’

Perseus and Medusa loped ahead as they walked across the field, sending early evening rabbits bolting for their holes. David pointed to Alfred’s Castle.

‘It’s an iron age hill fort,’ he said. ‘I came here before. I don’t, anymore.’ He slid a glance at Vanimöré. ‘It felt as if there was a high, humming wire going through me. There was no-one around. I brought the dogs and there was nothing and no-one to be seen. But it felt alive. Have you heard of Merlin’s Mound in the college grounds at Marlborough?’ A wheatfield rippled under the wind, and a red kite circled far up. A skylark’s song came down like falling jewels. David squared his shoulder looking up at the rise where the ancient ramparts rolled, softened by the mould of time. ‘We weren’t supposed to climb it except for *ad montem*** — but sometimes...’ A smile fled. ‘I went up for a dare one Halloween with a friend of mine. I’d quite forgotten.’ The downland wind swept through his hair. ‘But it felt a little like this, a kind of energy.’

Vanimöré could feel it. *Yes, a thin, humming wire.* Power. He felt he could put his fingers out and pluck it. Fëanor’s ring answered with a greater bloom of heat. He made a mental note to have the current ‘watcher’ here observe this place.

‘Some people believe these ancient sites to be portals,’ he said, gazing. ‘Doorways to other times or places— other realities. There have ever been legends of people who vanish at such sites. Or the Tuatha de Danaan of Eire who walked into the mounds and the Otherworld and became the *Sidhe* of myth, never to return.’

David shook himself. ‘And is it true?’ he asked softly.

Vanimöré shrugged. A plane went overhead, so high above that its sound came later, contrails were already wisping into nothing. The wheat bowed like waves before the wind.

‘I had a dream, after.’ David’s voice broke the quiet that fell back like a cloak. ‘I was running here from the house through a summer night and this place was illuminated, beams rising into the sky. I was terrified and *drawn* and then I was somewhere else. It was winter, sunset, there were ruins against the sky and a man stood there. I thought he was you at first, or rather, as you looked at the ball.’ Again, that flick of a look under long lashes. ‘Long black hair blown back from his face and an ear that was not like...ours.’ He sketched with his fingers. ‘A delicate point. And a woman’s voice whispered close to me: “*He’s not human.*”’

Claire.

Vanimöré had a vision of himself, in the Timeless Halls before Dagor Dagorath ended everything, watching this world through the Portal. Claire and Maglor.

That moment when she saw something that her subconscious had suspected. The sea wind — or the hand of a Power — had exposed Maglor's unhuman aspect and she knew...

'It seemed so vivid,' David said

'I cannot help you,' he lied. 'If dreams carry messages, they will reveal themselves in time but sometimes a dream is just a dream.' He smiled. 'I have something for you back at the house.'

In his guest room, Vanimöré gave him the package from Howard. Already David had a burner phone and his documents but Howard, in a superabundance of caution wanted him to have at least two more phones. Then Vanimöré took the watch case out and handed it to him.

'One of the cleaners found your Breitling.'

David's face hardened. 'I don't want it. I meant to throw it in the lake but the police were there, and divers.'

'I do understand. Nevertheless, you will need a watch.'

Jaw set, David opened the case reluctantly then went very still for a moment. Abruptly, his head reared up. 'It's beautiful! Thank you. I can't—'

'Look at the back,' Vanimöré murmured and David turned it. His fine brows drew together.

'This,' Vanimöré indicated the crossed sword-palms. 'Is an instant access when you wear it. There are organisations beside the DDE who work together at certain times, but even in the DDE very few people know what this is and there are those who are even more secret than they. So few people possess this that unless you and the watch are together it will be ignored.'

With a puzzled glance, David strapped it around his wrist.

'But how would I know?'

'You will come to know if need be. The DDE have their people and I have mine. A very few. And that is for your ears only, David. Even Howard does not know.'

David blinked. 'No, of course. I won't say anything, even to Héloïse.'

Vanimöré laughed. 'Héloïse knows, my dear. She knows a great deal.'

David visibly relaxed, as if the fact that Héloïse knew was a source of comfort and trust. And why not? They had grown close. Vanimöré smiled encouragingly and clapped him on the shoulder. David's eyes, as he withdrew his hand, blinked at it.

'That's a beautiful ring.'

Vanimöré tilted his fingers, regarding it. The wide, flat band of gold was so smooth it looked liquid. There were no marks on it at all and the tiny diamonds blazed in time with its heat.

‘Someone left it at the villa,’ he said. ‘I am merely keeping it safe. Now David, listen: Do *not* worry. You *will* be looked after. Everything else, what you have to be now, your watchers, they will always be there but become background noise in time.’ Or so he hoped. For a while, at least. ‘We want you to live the life you would have lived and I promise that no-one will take it from you. Now, when do you mean to move into the flat?’

The change of subject worked as he hoped it would.

‘Oh,’ David smiled. ‘I think at the end of July. We’re going shopping, and then we’ll drive up. I want to settle in, to get to know the place for a while and buy some furniture, make it more homelike. It’s strange,’ he added. ‘But my brain is almost slotting into the mindset it had before I went to St. Andrews. I can’t explain it.’ He made a helpless gesture. ‘But it feels like a miracle,’ he ended seriously.

‘Good.’ Vanimöré said. ‘Now, I need to talk to Héloïse before dinner.’

‘Tommy will overcook the steak.’ David’s eyes twinkled.

Vanimöré laughed. ‘I will cook it.’

‘Well, that I would like to see. Tommy is very protective of his kitchen.’

‘I can be quite persuasive.’

‘I know.’ David stroked his fingers over the watch-face. His eyes lifted, vivid and smiling.

‘Thank you,’ he said.

OooOooO

*Narya wrote of Lord Grey giving David some beautiful books before David settled into his St. Andrews flat. Thank you for letting me mention it, Narya .

The Way through the Dark. Chapter One.

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/36275257/chapters/90431533>

** Merlin's Mound is a Neolithic monument in the grounds of Marlborough College. At nineteen metres tall it is similar to the more famous Silbury Hill at Avebury which isn't far away.

<https://www.marlboroughcollege.org/2021/10/ad-montem-shell-2021/>

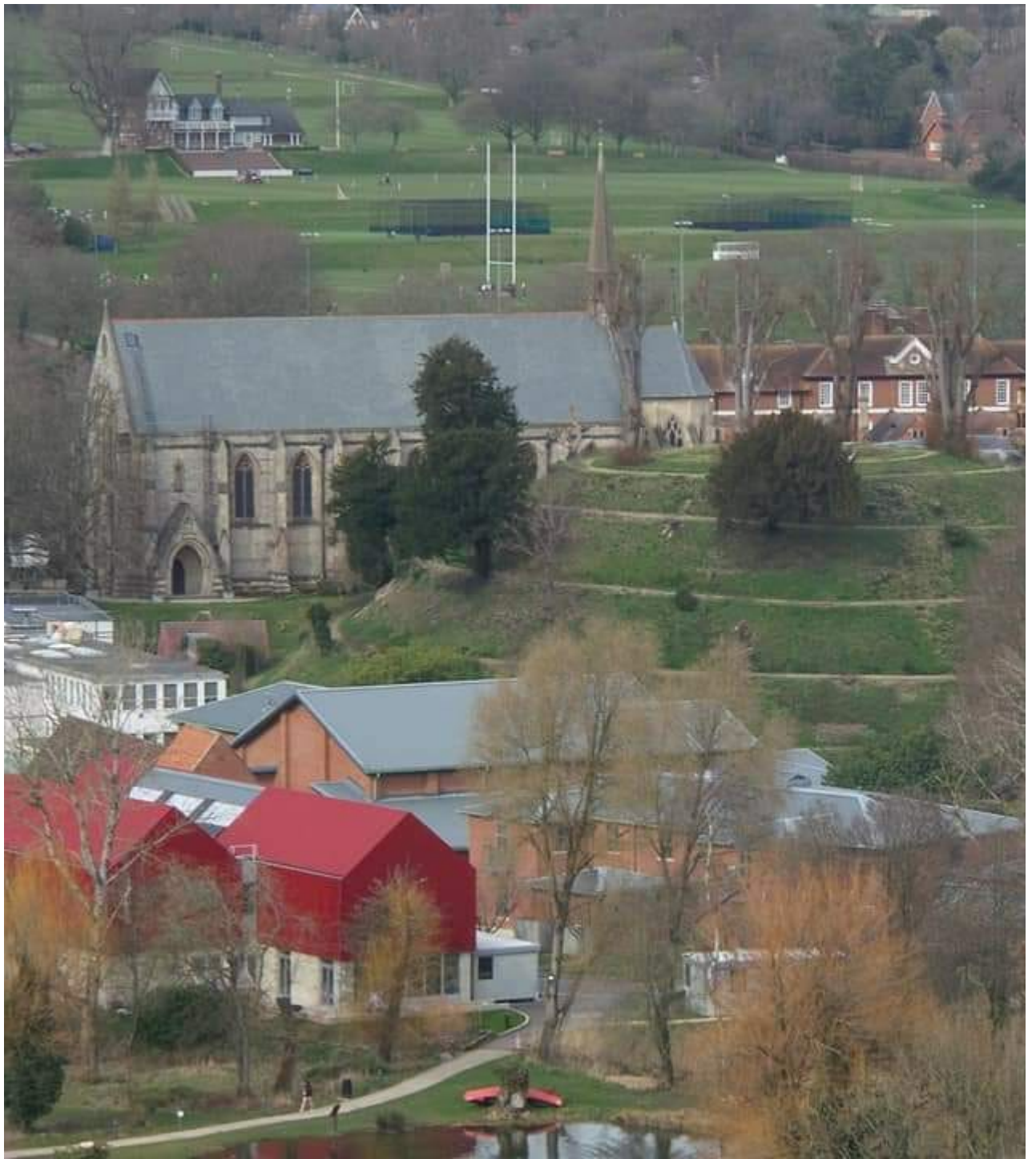


Image from Ridgeways and Ancient Tracks of Britain.

~ Starblood ~ (Modern and Valinor/Middle-earth)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

~ Starblood ~

~ Berkshire, England ~

~ Tommy was driving Lord Grey to Oxford for a hospital appointment and Heloïse decided to accompany them. David, invited, declined, saying that he thought, while he was here, that he ought to visit his foster-mother's erstwhile 'home' near Marlborough.

'I'm not sure it would come up in conversation, but I ought to be able to describe it. Although,' he looked at Lucien Steele, seated elegantly and reading through Lord Grey's Sporting Life. 'I suppose it isn't really mine?'

Lucien closed the paper. 'It very much is, David. Would you mind if I came along?'

A precaution, David guessed. 'Not at all.'

Saying their goodbyes, they went out. David had seen the beautiful black Bentley Continental the day before and paused.

'Beautiful car,' he said, smiling. 'I'd love...but Héloïse agreed I needed a car that wasn't too noticeable.'

'It will not always be so,' Steele told him. Standing by the car, eyes covered by dark glasses, he

looked like something from a *Vogue* advertisement. 'But for now, I agree.' He dangled the key from one hand. 'Would you like to drive?'

'I couldn't. I'm...I'm not insured.'

Steele flashed a smile. 'Unless you drive dangerously you will not be pulled over.'

David fought the impulse and gave into it without much of a struggle. He slid into the driving seat, worked out how to adjust it a little (Steele was taller than he) and clicked the seatbelt into place.

He was careful down the long drive onto the road, but he could *feel* the power in the engine, like a racehorse at a walk, he thought, ready to fling itself into full gallop. Turning onto the main road he gradually accelerated and could not help smiling at the response, the *purr* of power. His fingers flexed on the leather of the steering wheel.

He was careful through Lambourne, cautious all the way to Hungerford and Steele sat in the passenger seat relaxed and calm in a way that gave David confidence. Near Hungerford they turned onto the A4. The traffic here was flying along. He glanced at Steele, saw a faint smile hovering on that lush mouth. He said, 'Seran wants to show you some speed, I think?'

'Seran?'

'I rode a stallion once, black as the eye of night and with a lion's heart. Seran.'

David took a breath. 'Okay,' he said. 'All right.'

The beast that had purred under the hood snarled into life as the Bentley leapt to the speed limit in seconds. It was a fraction of what it could do, David knew but it was potent and exhilarating. He found himself smiling with set teeth as the green landscape poured by each side and cars passed like blurring ghosts.

A mobile rang. Steele's. He looked at it, swiped and answered. Concentrating on his driving, David half-listened.

'Yes, James?'

'Ah, that was to be expected.'

'All of them? I present you my compliments.' A soft laugh. 'No, I do not suppose it was. Watch your back.'

'Very well, yes. Howard will route the phone call. I will see you then. Goodbye.'

David eased down. He felt hot and light; his cheeks stung as if with fever.

'Steady,' Steele said in the same mellifluous tone. 'You had no breakfast. Shall we eat in Marlborough?'

David heaved a breath. Like Steele, he wore dark glasses, but it was unlikely there would be anyone around who knew him. He slanted a small smile.

'Yes,' he said. 'Thank you.'

They ate outside at the Lamb Inn, an old pub with excellent home cooked food. Perhaps he was just hungry, but David felt more stable after lunch. And yet, Marlborough unsettled him. It was so near to his heart, the best years of his life and seemed so long ago as to be another person's dream. Most of the shops were ones he remembered; some had changed, the unevenly worn cobbles, the old stone, the air of quiet prosperity were all the same.

He tensed when the road took them past the entrance to the imposing Master's Lodge; despite the full-leaf high summer foliage, he glimpsed the warm red block of B1. Suddenly as a door opening, he was *there* again hearing the bustle of the halls, the quiet shuffling whisper of class work; he could smell the sun warmed grass of the fields, and the crackle of winter air in the lungs.

He turned the Bentley along Bath Road between North Block and Morris House, saw a quartet of boys, jackets open in the warmth, the familiar ties showing. They were talking, laughing; he heard them as the car passed, carefree as the chatter of birdsong. David's throat closed in a spasm of memory and grief for days lost.

'Do you want me to drive?' Steele asked quietly in his deep, calm voice.

'No. Thank you. It's just...Have you ever wanted a certain time in your life never to end?'

'Yes. Yes, I have.'

David glanced at him. They were out of the town now, and the public entrance to the college lay on their left.

'I was shy when I first came,' he said with a half-smile. 'It took me a while to find my feet. But it was a good place to build confidence.' There were a few students outside, one boy in a turban and he remembered Harilal, the son of the King of Rajkot. David had spent a fascinating and educational month in Ranjit Vilas Palace and formed a close friendship with Hari who'd been a wicked polo and tennis player. Another friendship gone, like Edward, like Jules, and the sisters Bab and Didi Rockingham, lanky and tough and pretty, talking horses from morning to night; studious and brilliant Teddy whose eyes were set firmly on working for CERN.

In those grey, early days in London David had, sometimes, googled their names but the gulf seemed so great he soon stopped. It was better to pretend that Marlborough had happened to someone else. He had to cut it out of him, live from day to day, the possibilities of his youth contracting to a windowless prison cell.

He fell silent, watching the road. The house lay a few miles outside Marlborough on the edge of a small village and was almost hidden from the road by a hedge and tall trees. The drive was closed by ornate iron gates and padlocked. David drew the car in beside them and stopped.

'I don't have the keys.'

Vanimöre reached into the glove compartment and produced a set of keys. They got out of the car and David opened the gates; the squeak that they made fitted the atmosphere of the house better than the warm sunlight, the breeze in the trees.

David had seen images of the house and they did not do it justice. It was a true monster of a place, built in the massive Victorian style that made it look as if only a direct asteroid hit would damage it. Huge and heavy, it seemed to press into the ground. High sash windows under deep stone cornices topped with moulded stone balls, a porch that would have not have looked out of place on a church and deep with shadows.

'Ah...impressive,' David said weakly as he fitted a yale key to the lock.

'There are worse places,' Steele replied.

David thought of some of the grim bedsits he had occupied in London at the beginning.

'Yes...I suppose.'

Steele smiled. 'It is not as bad inside.'

In fact it was not. David had expected gloomy, dark furniture and heavily papered walls, stuffed animal heads on the walls and *memento mori* under glass. There was none of this. Some of the tables, cabinets and dressers were indeed dark and weighty but the rooms were large enough to take it, and the walls and carpets were pale. The few pictures were landscapes and Impressionist. He twitched back a dust cover to see what he thought was a Chesterfield sofa and there was a huge Aga in the enormous kitchen.

But it was a warren of a house. There were three flights of stairs, one from the main hall, another near the kitchen and one from the library. He was rather disappointed to see that this room was bare of books, but there were shelves, a huge table, a shrouded sofa and two chairs. It looked out over the garden and he imagined the empty fireplace flickering with light on dim winter days.

Upstairs, there were seven bedrooms and four bathrooms, numerous cupboards and box rooms. He had expected the rooms to be bare but all contained beds, wardrobes, dressing tables and chairs that were clearly new. He smelled fresh paint, the lingering paste of recently hung wallpaper and the bathrooms had clearly been recently and tastefully redone.

'Did you...did Apollyon decorate it?' he asked.

Steele removed his sunglasses. 'I threw armies of decorators into it,' he acknowledged. 'Héloïse made some suggestions — remotely.'

David laughed softly. 'It's beautiful actually but —' He rubbed the palms of his hands down his jeans and strove for lightness. 'It ought to be haunted.' He thought of...the villa, the crows, figures in the garden, a stag crowned "*brow, bray and tray and three on top*" a sunburst headpiece, a shimmer of autumn and moonlight and the scent of honeysuckle and small, pale hands, reaching for the drowning figure of Raymond Callaghan.

The light dimmed as if a cloud had swum across the face of the sun. He shivered.

'I have never heard that it is,' Steele said calmly. 'Come out into the garden.'

The sun emerged again drawing the sweet, soporific scent of cut grass into the air.

'Gardners, too?' David asked with an attempt at normality.

'Yes, a couple come in twice a week.'

Old oaks and sycamore bounded the walled garden which was broken up into flower-beds but not regimented. The honeysuckle scent was stronger here, the plant climbing the old wall. Bees droned in and out of the tubular flowers, sleepy under the breeze, the sound of a thousand lazy summer afternoons at Marlborough before term's end, early strawberries in the mouth, fresh cucumber in the sandwiches...

David looked back at the house, which still felt immense and foreboding in contrast to the lovely garden or perhaps...he sought for a word, watchful?

They walked along the length of the wall, warm, spotted with lichen and tiny flowers that had made a home in pockets of earth. A sound of trickling water pulled at him and he followed it to a low-built well, weeping into the grass. Maidenhair ferns fronded the old stone.

'A spring,' Steele broke the quiet. 'The water is very pure. It was tested.'

‘Drinkable?’

‘Perfectly.’ He cupped a hand into the water and drank, shaking the drops off. David did the same; he tasted stone and earth and minerals.

‘I don’t know,’ he said. ‘If I should sell the house? Or even gift it to some organisation?’

‘If you wish. Although it is useful to have some rural, quiet place.’

‘A bolt hole?’

Steele’s mouth curled. ‘Exactly.’

David hesitated. He looked back at the house, unable to imagine wanting to visit here and stay, except under extraordinary circumstances, and certainly not alone. And who on Earth would want to come here with him?

Somewhere in the boundary trees a crow called. He repressed a shiver and looked back at Steele who regarded him from eyes that — surely? — held a glint of purple in their darkness. He swallowed, mouth gone dry.

‘I’ll think about it,’ he said.

OooOooO

~ Valinor and Taur-im-Duinath ~

~ Indis, in those days, seemed a woman of steel and stone.

As the cracks in the court widened, as lords murmured in the corridors and arguments and protestations bloomed from low-voiced mutters into raised voices she became more stern. It had been easy, shockingly so, to begin the rumours of a schism but she would not permit anyone to whisper gossip in front of her and could quell a room with one level look from her eyes. Finwë withdrew among his councillors, cleaving Fingolfin to his side. Indis stepped to the forefront of life in the palace.

Anairë drew closer to her. Some kind of slow change was coming over her, but it did not incline her to her husband or son. She veered toward the company of women. With Fingolfin she appeared resigned but not settled.

Fingon thrived, but with Finwë leaning ever more heavily on Fingolfin, he did not see his son save briefly before the obligations of the day absorbed him and later, when he ensured he spent time with the child before he slept. Often Finarfin, stretching taller now, joined him. A quiet boy, he applied himself studiously to his lessons as Fingolfin had, too, in those days that were so recent but seemed like an Age ago.

He recalled Fëanor's stories, and the day he had rushed eagerly from his lessons for an impromptu afternoon beside that quiet pool, riding back on Finwë's great stallion. There was not such freedom now. Finwë seemed afraid that Fingolfin might walk away, as Fëanor had and kept him close.

After the Valar's public release of Melkor nothing happened. Ingwë spoke to them privately from Ilmarin sometimes and said that the Dark God did not come there. Melkor dwelt near Aulë's mansions in his own great house. He was not seen but his presence was felt. Fingolfin likened it to a brooding storm just over the horizon.

Some time before the Feast of Yavanna, Finarfin was invited to Alqualondë. To Fingolfin's surprise, Anairë expressed her intention of going with him. Fingon would remain in Tirion, she said. Fingolfin objected to neither arrangement and suggested Finwë go also.

'Olwë is thy friend,' he said. And, seeing the King's haunted eyes. 'It would ease thy spirit.'

At first Finwë would not hear of it, but Indis added her voice.

'Fingolfin and I are quite capable of overseeing in thy stead,' she told him briskly as if it were a small matter. 'Olwë visits thee often. It is only meet thou shouldst reciprocate.'

A weight seemed to slide from Finwë's shoulders.

'Very well,' he acceded, and then proceeded to give them a long list of instructions that did not cease until his entourage were riding from the gates. A few of his lords went with him; the rest seemed not to dare to leave Tirion lest they miss a single eyeblink within the palace. High Lord Nullion, whom Fingolfin liked simply because Nullion was inclined to favour Fëanor, remained behind.

Fingolfin offered his mother his arm as they turned and went within the great doors.

'I am surprised he did not command me to go with him,' he murmured.

'No, he wants thee here,' Indis returned. 'To uphold his crown. Alqualondë is a different matter.'

'We need to speak,' Fingolfin said softly. 'In my rooms. After the court of petitions.'

She nodded briefly. The court was fortunately straightforward: complaints of land, water and mining rights that were easily dealt with. There would be no feast tonight, Indis had announced. Finwë held them daily and Fingolfin thought the King maintained this show of power and rule because he was afraid. He had to prove that he was King day after day. It must be wearying.

After a private supper, Fingolfin, in soft chamber robes, played with his son, stretching out on the rugs and helping him build a succession of high towers out of light, painted wooden blocks. Fingon, with immense concentration built them and then, with equal glee knocked them down, crawling away with delighted chuckles. Fingolfin scooped him up, tickling him and tossed him over his shoulder. The chuckles erupted into laughter and protestations of 'Papa!'

'He will be walking soon,' Indis smiled from her seat.

'He almost can.' Fingolfin set his son down, onto his feet and balanced him gently. Fingon, grinning, swayed as Fingolfin removed his hands and edged back. 'Come to me, Fingon,' he encouraged and his son, face setting once again into acute effort and swaying a little, lifted his small feet and toddled toward his father, ending in a rush and falling against his chest.

'Wonderful,' Fingolfin picked him up, kissing the smooth cheek. 'That was wonderful. My clever boy.' Fingon dropped his head, snuggling into his shoulder. He smiled.

'Time for bed. Shall we tell a story?'

'Yes, Papa.'

Pulling the heavy drapes across, Fingolfin wove a tale of a world where the night was filled with stars and a silver bird who flew among them. She came with the Moon, the light that ruled the night, and always flew with him, away from the Daystar, the Sun. Sometimes the bird alighted beside sleeping Elves and sang stories of faraway lands. The Elves never woke but dreamed of her tales and remembered them when they woke. At first Fingon watched his father's face intently with those enormous silver-blue eyes and, as children will, was full of questions but then the comfort of his bed, the dimness of the room and his extreme youth crept softly over him and he slept.

Fingolfin waited until the boy's breathing was so measured and slow that he did not notice the hand withdrawn from his own tiny one. He kissed the small brow and drew the covers up.

Indis waited in the next room. She had mulled wine and the spicy scent rose from the jug.

'In Cuiviénen,' she said, as she poured. 'All the tribe would have looked to the child.'

Fingolfin rubbed the frown from his face and sat back.

'Yes.'

'Anairë never wanted children.'

'So thou hast said. I do not blame her for it, never think it. She is fond enough of Fingon. I only wish I had more time with him.' He sipped the hot wine then set it aside. 'Mother, speaking of Cuiviénen — when I visited Formenos, Fëanor and I spoke with Edenel — the Edenel of *this* world who still lives in Endor.'

He watched her face and she stilled then slowly turned her head. 'And told him he was thy sire,' she stated. Her voice was level but her back and shoulders stiff as stone.

'Yes.'

Her long, fair braid draped over one shoulder. She ran her fingers down it, a nervous gesture in one whose every movement seemed controlled and calculated.

'Was he like...his *himself*?' She rose suddenly. 'Like the Edenel I spoke to?'* Her breath rushed out in something not quite a laugh, not quite a sob. 'I lie awake thinking of these other places, other worlds and sometimes I think I am on the edge of understanding, but then...Does he know? Of this older universe that was destroyed?'

'I know exactly what you mean,' Fingolfin assured her. 'And no, he does not. There was little time.'

'Did he believe thee?'

'I think so. Mother, he asked if he might speak with thee through the Mirror shard. He has one. They are scattered throughout the worlds. He believes we are his sons, I *think*, but desires verification from thee.'

Indis dropped her hand, clenched it into the soft folds of her robe. Then she nodded once, decisive. 'Yes.' But her face was moulded and very pale.

Fingolfin drew his Mirror case forth and opened it.

'This is between the two of thee,' he said gently and withdrew from the chamber. 'Call to him, and wait. He will hear thee.'

~ At one moment Edenel was asleep, deep-drowned, then he was awake as if someone had touched him gently, like a lover in the night rousing their bed-mate. He rose at the call.

When first coming to Taur-im-Duinath, the *Ithiledhil* had found a low hill delved by caverns. Whomever had fashioned them — and they were not natural — they were now empty and so the *Ithiledhil* had expanded them, creating a linked complex of caves with a central meeting room. Smoke from cooking fire went up through widened cracks and a stream flowed in the deepest levels. They did not mean to make this their home forever; the forest was their resting-place where they had come to try and heal and it served them well enough.

Edenel drew aside the skin that hung over his sleeping place. He walked silently down the passage past other rooms, and through the central changer where a fire always burned, summer and winter. The passageway curved upward to the entrance, half-concealed by ferns, to the grassy sward that lay beyond the hill like a green lap.

The land sloped down toward the margins of the forest and the trees stood like motionless sentinels under the stars. But dawn was not far off. Edenel paused, scenting the sweet, cool air, listening. There were always sentries but the *Ithiledhil* never truly slept, never permitted their vigilance to lapse.

An owl called; deeper in the forest a nightingale's plangent song echoed. Peace lay over the land.

He walked swiftly, one hand straying to the Mirror shard tucked within his clothing. It seemed to pulse like a heart and he recognised the mind behind the summons.

Lovely as a valley lily that survives the frosts, the biting winds of winter then, when spring comes, is still as beautiful, releasing its fragrance, cool and lingering.

It was very like her brother's soul-touch.

He did not go far, settling at the mossy feet of a huge oak. The pre-dawn wind was wakening, that warm, dry wind from the East that could blow for days or weeks in summer and dried the grasslands to rippling pallor. The oak's leaves rustled; their sound filled the air like whispers of far-off times.

His heart went wayward. Indis had known him before he was changed. It was almost unbearable he should have to show her this face, these eyes.

Unbearable? he mocked himself, who knew just how much a body and soul could bear and still, somehow, live. With a quick movement, he drew forth the Mirror shard.

She was wearing a soft robe the colour of spring bluebells, one light gold braid flowing down across her breast. A woman attired herself before sleep, soft, gentle fabrics. Her face was unchanged, he thought, but for a thought or worry that strained the fair skin across her cheekbones. He saw no shock or revulsion there.

'Lady,' he said softly, then gathering breath. 'Indis.'

Slowly, her free hand rose to her lips. Her lashes sank and a tear, limned silver, traced its way down her cheek.

'Oh my dear,' she said.

'Indis,' he said again, helplessly, refusing to admit the shame and she wiped the tear away, a quick, abrupt flick.

'My son said thou didst desire speech.' She stopped. '*Our* son.' She laid the two words down like a challenge. Then, at his silence she continued breathless, almost girlish, 'I do not understand either, but I knew when he was born. It was impossible, and so I could *not* believe it. Nevertheless.' Her choice evened. 'Míriel knew too.'

'Míriel,' he repeated. *Ah, thou shouldn't not have gone. None of thee.* He said, 'Fëanor told me that the Valar say her death is laid at *his* feet yet also there is no death in Valinor.'

Her eyes moved away from him. He watched them gloss again with tears.

'Sometimes I wonder,' she murmured. 'Thou knowest she was my greatest love.'

'I know.'

'Then canst thou imagine how it felt to be told our love was a *sin*?' Her head turned back to him.

'That I must join my brother and clan and renounce her? That Míriel must be wed to Finwë but not to me?'

'Ay,' he said. 'I do not understand this matter of *wedding* one mate nor why love between two women — or two men — is called a *sin*. I did not even comprehend the word.'

‘An offence against the gods,’ Indis said dry as sand. ‘They are not of this world and came here with certain entrenched beliefs that they wish to enforce. Here in Valinor they can and do and there are none who can stand against them. The Nectar from the Two Trees. Did Fëanor tell thee? It drugged us so that we accepted their Laws and now, even though the dew has been rendered impotent, some of us still feign to accept them. We have to. But as for Míriel...She did not like this land.’

‘I think I understand that,’ Edenel replied gently. ‘She was a woman who wove moonlight and loved the stars mirrored in the inland sea.’

Indis’ face softened, opened to a sudden poignant vulnerability. ‘Yes,’ she said simply. ‘Silver Telperion is no substitute for the Moon, waxing and waning, or for the stars. Golden Laurelin cannot match the touch of the Sun and its going down in splendour on a winter’s night, the sky burning red as embers. But when the Valar speak of Fëanor being her death...I believe it.’ She raised her hand palm out as if he were about to object. ‘Fëanor is thy son but he is...’ Her eyes cast about. ‘I do not *know* what he is, but there is a fire in him that even the drug hardly dulled and I should know for I married Finwë when Fëanor was young. He was angry, moody, rebellious but not half-asleep as most of us were. Everything in him is too *strong* for Valinor. And Fingolfin... there is something within him, too.’

‘Starfire,’ Edenel said. ‘And Wildfire.’

‘Yes.’ Her eyes searched his face. ‘Yes. And they have all *thy* fire. I think Finwë absorbed it from thee and when it was withdrawn — when thou didst go and never come back — it guttered out like a hearth fire that has no more fuel to feed it. Oh,’ the corners of her mouth lifted, wry and dry. ‘He is the perfect king for the Valar. Absolutely obedient. I think he hates himself.’

It hurt. Edenel pressed a hand to his breast. He wished...he wished, but there was no way back and Indis knew it. She would not accept platitudes; she had always looked clearly and boldly at life.

‘He would not return.’ She answered his unspoken question. ‘Because if he has *less* here in Valinor yet he is *more*: an unrivalled King. He *was* thy rival, Edenel, Élernil-that-was. Thou didst not see it, not for a long time.’

Throat tight, he said, ‘I did see it, Indis. I simply did not want to admit what I saw.’

She leaned forward. ‘As for me...Míriel is, as I understand — as we are told — in the Halls of Waiting that are ruled by Námo.’

‘Fëanor mentioned them yet I do not understand how any power can hold sway over our souls. They made themselves thy gods but they are not of this world and have no *right* to command us living or dead.’ He had spoken too vehemently, too loudly. The *Ithiledhil* were quiet, as quiet as they had learned to be in Utumno — beyond the screaming. He caught his breath on the anger, tried to will it down.

Indis was staring at him. Her throat moved as she swallowed.

‘That,’ she said with a quiver. ‘Is so very Fëanor and why thou wouldst never have come to Valinor. I agree, but Námo has the power and we do not. We have been told that his Halls are a place of repose for the soul.’ A hardening of expression showed plainer than words that she was uncertain (to say the least) of the veracity of that tale. ‘But I shall wait. Perhaps, one day, Míriel will return.’

He wanted to embrace her, reassure her, but could not. It was beyond his ken. 'I, too, hope that she does. I know not what happens to our souls at death.' Except...a glimmer in the shadows like dropped skirts of moonlight, drifting, a feeling, sometimes, that one was not alone...

'But Fëanor and Fingolfin desire to leave.'

'I know.'

'Can they?' he asked. 'I mean will they be permitted to? And if Míriel returned, wouldst thou then come back across the sea, Indis Starblood?'

Her lips parted. It must have been long since anyone called her that; it was an honorific, a formal address bestowed on the Unbegotten who had no mother or father name.

Indis shaped the word soundlessly. Her eyes were filled with memory.

'I...do not know,' she admitted, her voice shook. 'Thou hast not asked me why I left.'

'I think I know why. Ingwë's sister — with a responsibility to lead with him.'

'As simple as that in the end,' she nodded. 'I should have known thou wouldst understand. And my brother is Manwë's footstool. Or at least he now pretends to be and was. Whether Manwë would ever let him go...High King of all the Elves, he is called.' Her face hardened like fine marble.

'And for that he bowed and scraped and grovelled under the influence of the Tree Dew and whatever miasma of power leaches from the Valar. As I did,' she threw at him. 'There is shame in it.'

'There is no shame in being the victim of gods, my Lady.' He paused. 'I do understand why thou didst go, and why thou wilt stay — at least for now. We followed thee at a distance to the edge of the sea. Some turned back. I knew thou wouldst not. Thou didst never abandon thy duty.'

Her fine brows drew down. 'Sometimes I felt...Míriel and Finwë too, and my brother. But we never saw thee.'

'We took care not to be seen,' he replied. 'Indis, we are not what we were.' His voice floundered upon the inadequacy of that statement but he made himself continue. 'Thou didst not see what was done to them. Friends, comrades, people that I knew and loved. What happened to them. We kill them now,' he ended, as a cold wind blew through him.

Her eyes flinched. Only that. He would never — and had never — doubted the strength within her. 'Edenel —'

'The Dark God corrupted them, made them into monsters.' His hand curled into a fist. 'We *Ithiledhil* are the other side of that. I do not know why, or how. But it has severed us from the *quendi* who remain. Even if any of thee were to return, how could we stand before thee?'

'Not even thy sons?' she asked and turned his own words back at him, as he ought to have known she would: 'There is no shame in being the victim of the Dark God, *and a survivor*.'

Movement flickered across the Mirror as she rose, and he heard the swish of her robes. A moment later, she lifted the Mirror again and Edenel saw Fingolfin's face beside hers.

'Tell me,' she challenged. 'That thou wouldst not see our son if he escaped this land and returned?'

That dim silver light gathered in Fingolfin's splendid eyes so that they burned like the starfire Edenel had named him.

'Father,' he said, and the haughty upward title of his head was that of a king's. 'Thus I call thee and thus I — and Fëanor — claim thee.'

OooOooO

~ Fëanor brought his family to Tirion for the Festival of Fruits.

The atmosphere was more relaxed than the general consensus might have predicted. The sojourn in Alqualondë seemed to have benefitted Finwë and Anaire and an agreement had been made for Finarfin to be fostered with Olwë. Fëanor and Fingolfin exchanged brief, swift glances when it was announced to the Great Hall for this was a new thing but later, Indis told Fingolfin it was not. In Cuiviënen older children, those on the brink of adulthood, often spent time with different clans to learn their ways and skills.

Fingolfin seized a moment with Fëanor much later when the palace slept. *Finwë's library*, he had said and watched as Fëanor's long lashes dropped in affirmation. Tomorrow was the Feast which would begin with the first flowering of Laurelin and the halls were quiet. It was not unusual for Fingolfin to spend sleepless hours in the library and if anyone were to note him, there was nothing suspicious in it.

As he passed along the dim, silent passages, he thought that he had done this before, but not here and not in memory...*somewhere else* following an unrealised, subconscious sign from his half-brother. He heard, like an echo, the slide of his chamber robes as if a copy of himself walked beside him. Reaching the closed door he stopped for a moment, closing his eyes. A vision formed there. *If I open the door, he will be laid on a settle as if asleep. I will think he is indeed sleeping...*

*

He lifted the latch softly. The library was windowless. Once, it had been lit by oil lamps; now the Fëanorian Lamps were everywhere though only one was uncovered. Its starry glow spread softly over the bookshelves, the table, the reclined figure, a book slipped down on his breast...

This has happened before...

Fingolfin walked over to him, his eyes mapping over features that even in sleep retained their proud beauty, the arch of black brow over lashes like fans.

Fëanor moved, blinked. He said, without moving: 'It was here.'

'Yes.'

'I knew thou wouldst come. I waited, feigned sleep.' He sat up, pushed both long hands into Fingolfin's hair.

'Am I in thy mind, or art thou in mine?' Fingolfin whispered, raw.

'Both. It is the same memory.' *I walked around thee so close I could feel the heat of thy body like a fire on my skin. And I looked at thee and knew I would be here in this place and that thou wouldst come to me.***

Yes. Fire in the roots of his hair, fire pouring down into his loins. Fire in the eyes that fixed upon him, in the fingers that drew away, leaving trails of heat behind.

'Come with me,' Fëanor murmured.

'Where?' Fingolfin demanded.

Fëanor opened his Mirror case.

'Since Melkor was released I have been thinking and thinking,' he said. 'When I saw him I would have known that we would face him even had Vanimöré not told us. And we cannot win, not yet. But there is a place where we can gather power. And... I have to keep my sons *safe*, and thou and Fingon.'

'The *Outside*.'

'Vanimöré believes me too young. *Ustoo* young. I do not feel young, dost thou?'

'No,' Fingolfin said. 'This has happened before. It has all happened before.'

'Yes, and Vanimöré is not here, with Melkor's shadow burning like a black fire in a mine, something beyond sight, yet the shadows around it crawl ever closer.'

That was exactly what it felt like. Fingolfin locked a hand on one of Fëanor's wrists. Like living under a hammer that is raised to fall. He thought of Fingon, asleep, small and wonderful and growing under that shadow. He nodded once.

'Anyhow,' Fëanor's eyes outshone the lamp. 'Vanimöré is not a Power that guides. He wants us to learn, not be ordered, commanded, directed, like a servant. So.' His sudden smile flashed. 'Let us learn.'

The air in the room sang with an energy that shocked across Fingolfin's skin. The surface of the Mirror blazed into starlight rimmed with white fire. So brilliant was it that the library seemed dark. The light expanded, filling his sight, his mind, drawing him in.

There was an immensity of light, of darkness, of flame.

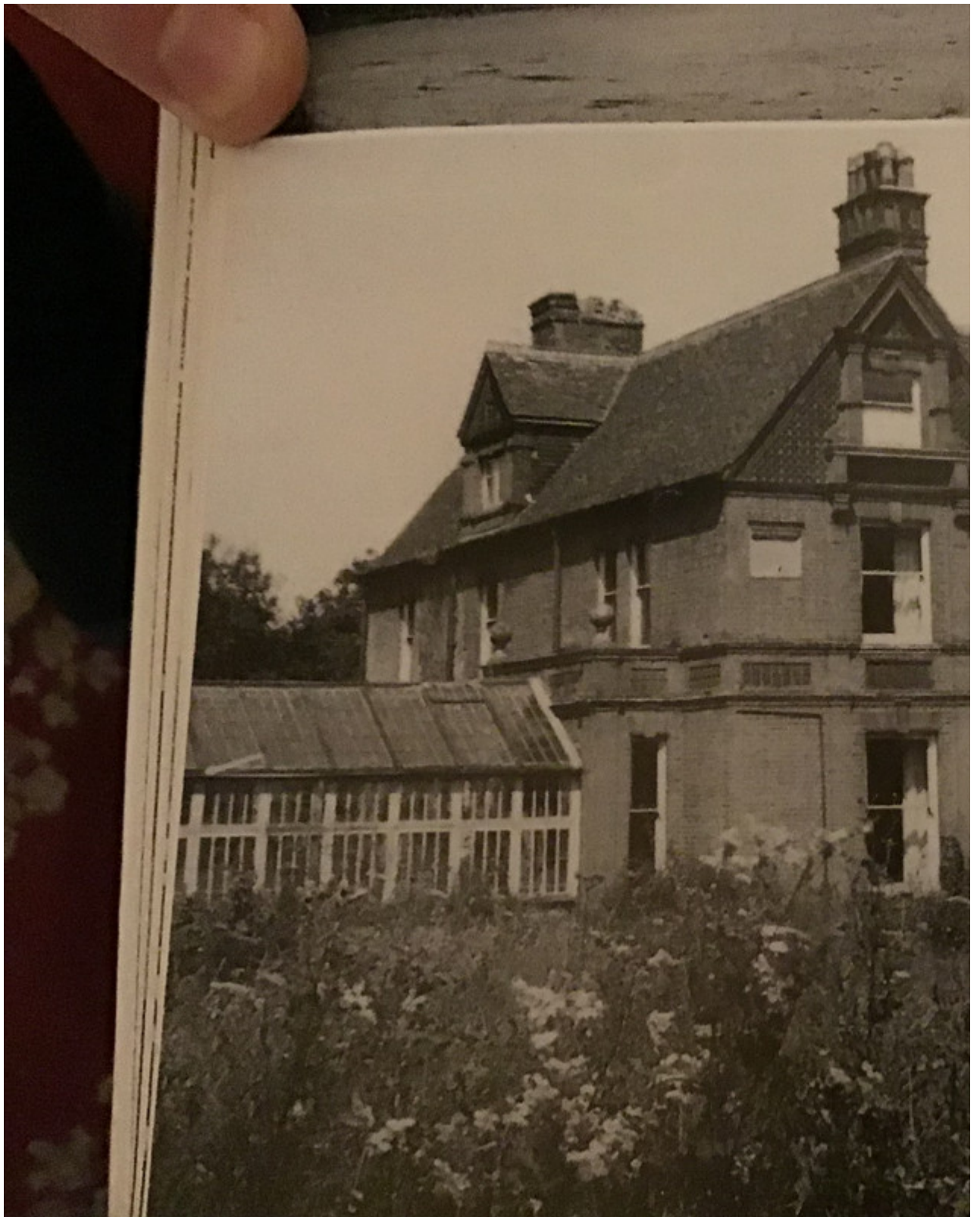
And then he was within it.

OooOooO

Chapter End Notes

I imagine's David's 'inherited' house as looking something like this. This is Pentlow Towers not too far from the infamous Borley of 'The Most Haunted House in England' fame.

I took the picture from a book called 'The Enigma of Borley Rectory'



Indis spoke to the Edenel of the old universe in 'The Once and Future Kings'; she has not yet spoken to the Edenel of this universe.

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/18693037/chapters/83222518#workskin>

Fingolfin's and Fëanor are remembering their old lives as written in 'I Will Lead And Thou Shalt Follow' which I wrote in '06 and posted in '07 on LOTRFF.com and which really began this whole thing.

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/12637/chapters/16080>

~ A Judgment of Power ~

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

~ A Judgement of Power ~

~ The sky to the south and west was an advancing wall of dark cloud against which the summer-rich landscape stood out stark as green paint. Far away, a thin vein of light pulsed suddenly against the black.

‘Tommy said there were storms expected,’ David remarked. Then, as he recognised a landmark, ‘Avebury. I’ve been here.’

Vanimöré, driving now, smiled. ‘Yes. There is no hurry to get back, so I thought we would come this way. An extremely interesting place.’

‘I came with the school, because of Merlin’s Mound in the grounds. It’s similar to Silbury Hill, only smaller and perhaps older.’ He glanced aside and Vanimöré felt the touch of those intense blue eyes against his skin. ‘About the house: I won’t make any decision about it yet. I do understand the importance of a...a bolt-hole. And I thank you.’

Vanimöré began to reply when Fëanor’s ring *burned*, pushing pain into his finger bone. For a heartbeat the Bentley seemed ringed with starfire, rushing forward into a vortex of light.

He swung the vehicle into the lay-by for the West Kennet Long Barrow. The tyres scorched; a following SUV sounded its horn angrily as it swept past.

David had grabbed for the handgrip and turned his head.
‘What’s wrong?’

‘Nothing.’ His phone rang. ‘Howard?’ He got out of the car, gazing down the track that lead toward the barrow.

‘Steele,’ Howard returned. ‘DNA tests have just come in. Yes, I know it took time. Not the tests but burying the results. David and James. Their blood threw up some *interesting* results, but I’m sure you know that. And yes, they’re half-brother’s, and I’m sure you knew *that*, too.’

‘Yes.’ He turned to look at Silbury Hill as the ring pulsed on his finger. *Portals*...some places weighed heavily on the multiverse. Avebury was one immense Portal. He, Coldagnir and Edenel had all used it at one time or another. No wonder...*Damn it to the Hells, Fëanor. Now what?*

He wanted to go to the *Outside*. He did not need to; his totality was already there. He was only operating on the old desire for *control*. Yet there was no time for him to reach out to *himself* and could not leave David here while he investigated.

‘...Steele? Are you there?’

‘Yes.’

‘James Callaghan is flying back to London tomorrow.’

‘I know. He called.’

‘I want to see you before you go undercover,’ Howard said pointedly. It was not a request. Vanimöre could not refrain from smiling.

‘You will.’

He got back into the car. ‘I apologise,’ he said to David. ‘I thought we might have picked up a tail.’

‘Did we?’ David asked anxiously.

‘No. I was being overly cautious.’ He pulled out onto the road. ‘What did you do when you came here?’

‘Oh...we had a tour around the stones and walked up there, to the Long Barrow.’ He smiled. ‘Yes, it was fascinating.’

‘Shall we stop?’ Vanimöre inquired. ‘Héloïse said they would be having dinner on the way back from Oxford. We could eat at the Red Lion, later.’

‘Yes,’ David said. ‘Okay, let’s,’

Vanimöre nodded. Sauron’s grandsons. There was no denying it placed them in a very different light in his mind. He had to continually remind himself that they were innocent, created tools as he had been and it was imperative they not be used. But even were they never to meet their mother and grandsire the blood could not be washed away. Vanimöre was aware of it now, like a deep current of fire under permafrost and that troubled him; he should have sensed it from the beginning and had not. Was it simply that meeting him had roused it from dormancy? Power called to power.

He glanced swiftly at David’s fine profile. There was no sense of kinship. The Sauron of this world was not his own father with all the complications that entailed. It might be the only advantage over Sauron he possessed.

The old pub was always busy but the lunch crowds had gone and the evening diners had not yet arrived. They took cold drinks to the Well table, glassed over and allowing a view far down its stony sides. Ferns grew lushly and there was a glint of dark water deep down. The legend inscribed on the table called it the ‘*resting place of at least one unfortunate villager,*’ whose ghost haunted the inn.

‘Eerie,’ David pronounced quietly, sitting back down. There was only one other couple near the

window, murmuring over drinks. ‘But wasn't it the village well, once? Who'd want to poison their water supply?’

‘You will never make a ghost hunter,’ Vanimöré laughed. The eyes of the two diners passed over his briefly and only he — or Héloïse — would have seen the alertness in them. When David excused himself to use the gents, the man, after a moment, rose to follow. In his jeans and walking boots, his hair tied into a ponytail, he blended in perfectly. His companion remained, pouring idly over a menu.

Vanimöré looked at Fëanor's ring and gently pulled it off, The flesh below was blistered and painful but already healing. Pushing it back, he closed his eyes. No need to seek a portal here in the centre of the henge with all Avebury humming like a plucked harp-string and drawing the storm toward it. All such places were liminal. He only had to *reach*...

The room darkened. There was a sharp pebble-scatter of rain against the window; the door of the inn creaked open and a voice carried: ‘Hell of a storm coming...’

He stared down into the well, past the stone, the lush green growth of lichen and fern and down and down, as into a tunnel, a portal, with darkness at the bottom —

— And stepped through the Portal of the Monument and beyond into the vastness beyond, into the dark energy and the radiance and the *Power*.

And Music. That sound that arced across everything, like the echo of a mighty voice.

The Great Music. Maglor.

The multiverse was rent as with brilliant light, a tear in the aether, and through it came Fëanor and Fingolfin, burning.

Flame Imperishable. Star God.

On Vanimöré's hand, Fëanor's ring blazed like the white heart of an inferno. Then it was as if the *Outside* itself drew breath and slowed. From an immeasurable distance, from his own concealing shadow Eru's head lifted, crowned with stars and shedding them like a perpetual stream of silver. His robes scattered light out into the blackness. His eyes were lucent as crystal and unfathomable. They had always been.

Vanimöré's burst of reactionary rage was instant. It slapped the eternities with black whips. Violet and ember light erupted in billowing violence. The cascade of memory began with the terrible inevitability of an avalanche, image upon image *Elgalad. Eru. Elgalad.* A baby, a child, a young man, a warrior, a lover.

A perfect *lie*.

Concussion ripped through the *Outside*, bleaching it white as burnt diamonds. Vanimöré swung in shock to face it.

The Power strode out of deepest infinity.

Fëanor.

The Flame Imperishable. His hair was fire, running rivers of all the light there was, flowing and flowing. The totality was beautiful beyond comprehension, terrifying. Every manifestation of light

that existed in any universe was uncovered here, the only place it could be. His eyes eclipsed supernovas; his face was sculpted out of starborn worlds, polished like planed gold and silver. About his brow, blue-white stars blazed in a coronal.

The Silmarilli. The true Silmarilli.

Vanimöré collided with his feelings like two planets impacting. *Fëanor. Eru. Elgalad. The Flame.* The agony, the loss, the *hatred* that never dissipated roared back, ravenous.

He could pretend to forget, to endure the pain just as he had endured servitude under Melkor and Sauron because there was no way out but death. Sometimes there was simply nothing one could do but thrust the anguish down into the deepest part of oneself. Now confronted unexpectedly with the one who had betrayed him and the one he had watched destroy a universe (and loved) the control broke like a scream of torture. The eruption of emotion sent blooms of black booming across the multiverse and for a moment it was such a *relief* to release it. Then on its heels came the horror of what he might do — and that cold, aware inner voice reined him in with a hand of steel as, once, Sauron had pulled on the spiked biter-bit to curb him. Then he had obeyed, unable to do anything but rage. Now, he understood that his passion as a living being had no place here and did not resist.

This is not even about us.

And the Flame Imperishable looked at him.

‘Vanimöré.’ His name, like a recognition of something — or someone — long lost.

‘Fëanáro. Fëanor.’

‘We cannot meet in anger,’ The Flame’s voice held the frustration of that impossible impasse. ‘I tried,’ he admitted. ‘Eru veils himself from me like a shadow in a dream.’

‘I know.’

‘I was summoned.’

‘We all were.’

The Flame turned his radiant head, taking the burden of his regard away like a lifted weight and saw them: Fëanor and Fingolfin advancing into this all-in-all like heirs of power toward a throne. And, in a sense, they were.

This was a court, Vanimöré realised. They were its judges, the only ones there were. Nothing else mattered; his feelings were utterly irrelevant.

‘Fëanor seeks power,’ he said, levelling his voice. ‘And to take it back to Arda.’ Too much and too soon. No more could he or Eru walk into any world as themselves. ‘We are to decide if it is permitted.’

‘It is dangerous.’ Eru’s voice hummed with the echo of dead universes.

The Flame flung up his head in a gesture so familiar to Vanimöré that he could have wept. ‘They are in danger, all the Elves, from Melkor. The imbalance must be redressed.’

‘It cannot be redressed in the forms they now inhabit, Fireheart,’ Eru responded. ‘That thou knowest.’

‘Decide,’ Vanimöré rapped. ‘Yay or nay, and if we allow it, how much?’

Three pairs of unhuman eyes fell upon those shapes, bright and small but growing every moment.

‘They cannot see us,’ The Flame said.

‘Not unless we choose it.’

But the *Outside* was not empty nor was it benign. It teemed with intelligences and now other gods drew closer, curious.

And Fëanor and Fingolfin were *not* hidden; they were coming into themselves. Light from blazing galaxies streamed into Fingolfin; his Totality was approaching complete manifestation. The fire from the Flame Imperishable was drawn inexorably into Fëanor. Soon he would become One with it.

The Flame and the Sword.

And the Flame devoutly desired that consummation. Vanimöré could feel the wild yearning of his soul to break out and *burn* upon Arda. And he understood suddenly and completely as he had not before: the Flame had been made manifest in the Ancient Universe, becoming embodied. An existence of simply *being* was not enough and could never be enough. He lived through Fëanor, *being* him, experiencing *life*. And yet he was bound too, perhaps through love (the strongest of shackles) for if he walked upon the Earth his fire would destroy. Worlds would burn in his wake; only ash would remain. He had to remain here, blazing in terrible solitude. Aloneness was natural to Vanimöré; he had withdrawn into the Monument like a wounded beast into its den after Dagor Dagorath. The Flame could never do that.

Vanimöré reached through the incandescence and touched that place where all Life and Light was born, renewing itself even as it gave, like a star that never faded.

‘Fëanáro,’ he said again. ‘*I know*. But it may not be. Not the whole. And that blame is upon me.’ Spinning universes out of blood and grief. Too many memories...

Enough, commanded the cold, clear voice within. It slapped him like a metal gauntlet. He continued, ‘Life must not obliterate Life. Thou canst not enter Arda.’

The Flame’s eyes could have melted suns. ‘I am not Life alone. I both create and destroy.’ He looked down at Vanimöré’s hands that gripped him. The fire flowed into him, and the black tattoos seemed alive.

‘Thou doth take it and it affects thee not at all. Where does it go?’ he asked, suddenly curious.

‘What abyss does it fall into, Dark Prince?’ He turned and levelled his gaze at Eru who lifted his lovely head and stared back mute, unreadable.

‘But let Fëanor take *somewhat*. I will not have him — any of them — tread the same old ground again. I will not allow that!’

Eru’s fine brows flicked up in a gesture unafraid, almost taunting. Puzzled, enraged, Vanimöré’s mind forked like lightning, plunging into possibilities but always and yes, even here he ran into a bright impenetrability.

Eru. What art thou?

‘I agree. They must have something.’ He turned his head away from that collusive little smile. ‘So *enough* — so that Námo may not claim their souls if they die and the Everlasting Dark cannot hold them.’

‘And yet death is a step to ascension Dark Prince, and ultimately to apotheosis.’ Eru’s beautiful, unreadable eyes widened a little then his lashes dropped in a demure echo of Elgalad’s. ‘Didst thou not climb to what thou art by death, Dark Prince? And Fëanor, in the old universe had to be reborn, had to ascend.’

Vanimöré’s emotions strained at the leash and the *Outside* went black — until fire broke through it in a burst like the explosion of a giant sun and the Flame said, ‘Vanimöré! Is it for me now to restrain thee? I cannot destroy him. I seek vengeance, but the two of thee will annihilate all there is.’

Vanimöré snarled like a chained hound who longs to be loosed and leap for the throat of its prey but his rage and anguish meant nothing. If Power had taught him anything it was that what he could *do* was important; his emotions, what he felt were of no consequence. Nothing levelled the ego like absolute power.

He said, choking down the bitter knowledge like a dose of hemlock, ‘I did what I had to and I would not wish that on anyone, least of all those I love.’

‘But is it not the order of things?’ Eru interpolated stressless and milk-calm.

‘Is it? I made it the order of things for myself,’ Vanimöré lashed, goaded, loathing Eru’s tranquility, feigned or not. ‘Was it so for thee? *Ilúvatar?*’

‘Was it not? Did Elgalad not die?’ And Eru handed him the paradox of Elgalad’s life and death like a dagger entering the body, so sharp that the pain comes only when it is withdrawn. And the thought floated like spider-silk between them: *Didst thou not kill him?*

His reaction was instantaneous. He saw a bloody mark, as from a whip, open across Eru’s perfect cheek. It was not real in any sense here, where there was no form, only a vision created out of Mind but for an instant Vanimöré jerked back with shock until he saw the faintest smile bend Eru’s mouth as his hand rose to the wound, and stroked it away.

He tempts thee and tests thee.

The horror of it was that he *could*. After everything.

He did not know, might never know, if Elgalad was real or simply an avatar of Eru.

Cosmic thunder slammed through the multiverse. The Flame came between them, awful and terrible in his full glory. Still Eru’s mouth held in that tantalising cast that begged for conflict. Vanimöré forced his eyes away to Fëanor and Fingolfin.

‘They are orphaned from themselves,’ The Flame said. ‘From what they are. They reach for it, always.’

I know. ‘They take away enough,’ Vanimöré pronounced. ‘And I...’

Eru and the Flame looked at him. He bared his teeth in bitter challenge.

‘I said I could not smooth their path,’ he mocked himself. ‘But I have already interfered. They carry the memories of their other lives and that in itself might be dangerous. Yet it is their birthright.’

A moment passed, an eternity, here where Time meant nothing. He shrugged.

‘I cannot enter Arda in fullest power, either, none of us can. But once there I can call upon what I *know*, and remember.’

‘Thou wilt go there?’ the Flame demanded eagerly.

‘At times, yes.’ He had no idea what he might do, stripped of most of his power but so he had gone down to the modern world and even viewed it as a challenge in those high, heady days before Dagor Dagorath. That joy was ash now but at least he had learned how to reach for his Totality. It gave him certain advantages. He hoped. A sudden frisson racked him and he knew it for anticipation. Of course. He was never meant for a dull life.

Then Eru said in that high, sweet, clear voice that roused such contradictory emotions within him: ‘It is thou art the paradox, Dark Prince, not I. This has all happened before.’ A glimmering veil clouded his features. ‘I say that it is permitted for Fëanor and Fingolfin to draw greater power from their Totalities and take it down to Arda.’ He drew back, vanishing into an impenetrable mist but not before Vanimöre saw the smile gleam out, innocent, reprehensible, a promise.

He wanted to destroy it, to scream out into the unending deeps. He could do neither. Or would not.

‘They must leave now,’ he told the Flame. ‘It is enough.’ Even if they had taken nothing the Power of the *Outside* would cling to them like another skin.

‘Enough to make a difference, perhaps. But *we* want more.’ Those eyes turned to him, a chatoyance of fire and fine metal. ‘To walk in the Timeless Halls again with those we love. To be ourselves. Can it come to that again?’

‘It will be so again.’ He ached. That time was held as a treasure in his heart and soul. ‘I vow it.’

The smile blazed. His eyes moved to Fëanor. ‘I cannot meet with myself here. I *need* too much.’ He caught Vanimöre by the shoulders and his voice resonated like the raw and thunderous blaze of an eternal fire. ‘I want us to be one. Not this existence. Not the *Outside*..’

‘Yes. Yes. I understand.’ He drew their brows together for a moment. ‘But this is where Power resides. It must. We wait, while the story unfolds.’

‘Let me into the Monument.’ The Flame demanded. ‘Thou didst allow Fëanor.’ Power slammed against Vanimöre like a steel door, ‘*Let me in.*’

‘I took him there to show him.’ Vanimöre drew back meeting what was tantamount to a command as he had always met power: blank, resolute, unbending. ‘To protect him. He has no fear at all. Not for himself.’

The Flame laughed. ‘Why should he? He knows what he is in his heart even if his intellect has not yet realised it.’

‘Indeed. And so, I took him there and then sent him back. The Monument is my place. It is my

penance for what happened. I saw thine intention.’ It was too much, that memory. ‘I should have prevented thee.’

The furnace flashed out, sending fire across the limitless expanse.

‘Thou couldst have attempted it. Never try to control the Flame, Vanimöré. It is Wild.’ He drew a hand down Vanimöré’s cheek to wipe away the blood-red tears. ‘I will go. But I will not wait forever. First though, one gift. From myself to...myself.’ He lifted the Silmaril crown from his head and released it. It descended through the spaces between he and Fëanor and settled on his brow.

‘A promise,’ the Flame said. ‘Of course he cannot take it back to Arda but it is there, now and always. And he will know it, and bring the Silmarils into being.’

Then with a soundless detonation of diamond light he scattered into the infinities.

It seemed so dark when he was gone, but then Vanimöré saw the glow behind him, like light entering through a crack in a closed door and he turned.

Fëanor and Fingolfin burned brighter with each passing moment. They looked as if they belonged here or not here — it was as the Flame had said, the Timeless Halls were their milieu.

Neither would he uncover himself. Like the Flame, he needed too much. Gently, he guided them back to the Portal, the Mirror shard that had brought them here. There was one brilliant pulse, then the tear sealed itself. They were gone.

He stood in the *Outside*, letting the galaxies blow through him, then passed into the Monument and the whine of the old, dull wind.

Eru. The Flame. Fëanor. Elgalad.

He spoke into the glimmering ochre dust. ‘I cannot meet him, not here, so he eludes me again and *there are no answers!*’ His cry slammed out, buffeting the storm, then he snapped around, descended the curve of the black steps to the chamber he knew so well, and its flashing, glinting Portal.

OooOooO

~ ‘...think it’s raining too hard to walk around the stones.’

Vanimöré blinked back into Lucien Steele. His physical form had never left; mere minutes had passed, yet the snap-back from there to here required a moment of reorientation.

‘I’m afraid so,’ he said.

‘Mr Steele.’ David stared. His voice hushed. ‘Are you alright?’

‘Of course. Why?’

‘Your eyes look— Or maybe the light...?’

‘Just a moment.’ Vanimöré flicked a look at the two agents, then slid on his dark glasses and rose, crossing through the entrance foyer and through another and larger dining room to the toilets. In the mirror, he saw that the purple of his eyes gleamed through the dark contact lenses and cursed to himself. He drew another pair from his jacket pocket and quickly changed them. He splashed his face with cold water, examined himself for a moment coldly as if daring his reflection to betray him, then went back to the Well Room, walking to the window. Over the village and the great enclosing henge, lightning forked and flickered, an eldritch crown. The rain beat like a drumroll.

‘Perhaps,’ he said, returning to the seat. ‘We might have an early dinner.’

OooOooO

~ The house was night-time quiet. Lord Grey, tired after his psychotherapy and excellent meal, had gone to bed an hour ago. David had just bid them goodnight.

‘I will be leaving very early tomorrow,’ he had told them.

‘What a pity,’ Lord Grey said genuinely. ‘But please do drop by any time, old fellow. Quite welcome, you know.’

‘Thank you,’ he replied. ‘That’s very kind. I will.’

Vanimöré and Héloïse climbed to the cupola. The storm had passed and the air felt fresh. A half-moon showed through the drifting clouds.

Héloïse, sipping from a glass of benedictine listened to Vanimöré in silence. Only her fine brows lifted in reaction.

‘James Callaghan,’ she murmured. ‘I have only seen him from a distance. But yes, he had the look of one...overwatched.’ Her eyes glanced down as if to the bedroom where David had retired. She tapped her lips with two fingers. ‘*His*, grandson. And David, too.’

She did not say the name. Héloïse knew exactly what she wanted to know and nothing more. She knew Vanimöré was not human and that he was the son of the one the DDE listed as Agent Beta. Whatever else she suspected she kept secret to all but herself though he imagined she had read the Silmarillion and was quite intelligent enough to join all the dots.

‘Joanna Worth. He used her to get these boys.’ Her fingers flicked. ‘Ah, do not tell me, I know!’ She tilted her head. ‘And you will meet her, *mon cher*? I wish I could have seen Howard’s face!’

He smiled. ‘You are a wicked woman.’

‘But of course!’ She widened her black eyes.

‘And do you agree with him?’

‘Howard is too cautious, Lucien,’ she scoffed. ‘Me, I see this as an opportunity.’

‘*They* will also see it that way,’ he pointed out.

‘Yes, but they do not know you.’

‘He thinks he does.’ And to a certain extent, Sauron was right. He did know his son, at least the one born in this universe. But that Vanimöré was long dead and Sauron would view him as a failure. He must be curious as to why and how his son had turned up after many thousands of years. Well, he was going to be surprised.

‘I would give almost anything to see it,’ Héloïse said wistfully. ‘But this makes it more dangerous for both James and David.’

‘We will have more security in St. Andrews. Howard is interviewing. I was going to listen in but would you act as my proxy?’

‘*Bien sûr*.’ Her eyes gleamed in the grey light. ‘Howard will hate it. Poor man. Never mind, I will take him out to dinner. Now, David likes the watch?’

‘Your taste is always impeccable, my dear.’

Naturellement! But do we know what AB and Joanna Worth were doing in Bellman’s and is it being watched?’

‘One of his personas has an interest in antiques. It may be only that. But yes, it is now.’

She nodded and laid a thin hand on his arm.

‘You think of what is within them, *non*?’ she asked almost gently. ‘David and James too. Their blood. *Diabolique*.’

‘I am trying not to,’ he said. ‘After all, it is mine, too. Héloïse, it cannot be kept from them forever. They are not going to age, not really and there may be other effects.’

Her brows twitched. ‘Better that he never meets them, no? Shall you arrange it?’

‘James is of greater use if he takes over the reins of his father’s empire and uses it for *good*. He was half-thinking of selling it.’ He frowned. ‘But eventually he would have to disappear or conveniently die and take a new identity. Either *we* arrange that, or his grandfather does. I know which I prefer. And James wants to search for Blaise Worth. He has the resources to do it but then so did others and they never found him. I wonder...some of the private investigators...’

‘We assumed Raymond Callaghan had them killed. You think not?’

‘He may have. Equally possible it was someone who did not want anyone to find Blaise but himself. Howard said he could produce a body, a drowning from the Thames, unnamed until now to throw James off the scent.’

‘Sensible,’ Héloïse allowed judicially. ‘But a last resort, I think? At some time in the future it would be good for David and James to be reunited, *n’est pas?*’

Vanimöré agreed. ‘And if I am acting as James’ security guard for a time I can direct him away from taking too close a look at St. Andrews.’

‘Ah yes, that holiday he spent in the Virgin Islands.’ She nodded. ‘Youngsters, sun and sea and cocktails. David has spoken of it with...’ she snapped her fingers irritably. ‘*Nostalgie!* Of course he would have talked about what he hoped to do.’ She finished her drink. ‘So! I think I should meet James. His father? No and no and no! But you say the son is not like him?’

‘Not at all. I think he is another who does not know who he really is.’

‘I shall invite him to a meal in London,’ she decided. ‘It would be expected, an invitation from me, a...how do you say? reaching out? I held the ball where his father died. And,’ She pointed at him. ‘His security guard must accompany him.’

Vanimöré laughed in appreciation. ‘Very well. You will either charm the poor boy or intimidate him. Or both.’ He looked across the rolling, dark countryside. There was no-one out there in the windy night, only Alfred’s Castle pulsed power away beyond the woods.

‘James is holding a meeting. I should be there for it. Howard wants to see me beforehand.’

She stood on tiptoe to kiss his cheek. ‘*Bon!* Lucien, it is always all or nothing with you. Months and months of nothing then everything.’ She slapped his cheek gently. ‘And the nothing is always so *enneyuese!*’

He laughed softly. ‘I apologise for the boredom, Héloïse. Now, let me see you to your room.’

She took his arm as they descended the steps, keeping their voices low. Outside her room, he kissed her cheek and waited until she closed the door. It was very quiet in the house. He went to his own room next door wondering, as he had not before, about their brief liaison so many years ago. He could not have children, and Héloïse (as she had informed him) was on birth control. Their night of passion had been unprotected. Did his seed, sterile though it was, confer something? He had never thought of it but Héloïse at seventy had the energy of a woman decades younger. Liaisons with humans were so fraught with difficulty that in this world, he could count them on the fingers of one hand. But if that was the only ‘drift’, it was harmless enough. Far less so than the transfer of blood.

He lay down, sleepless gazing up at the dimness as the call of a little owl sounded, far and lonely in the night and tried and tried (and failed) not to think about Eru. And the Flame.

OooOooO

Chapter End Notes

This is the well in the Red Lion at Avebury; it's a glass topped table now and we were sitting just next to it when I went there with AnnEllspethRaven a few weeks ago.



~ Shadows of Darker Hearts ~

~ Shadows of Darker Hearts ~

~ Valinor ~

~ Power like light. Like Fire. An ingress. A door opened and closed. On the other side of that door was *everything* and fragments of it, hot, bright, shining, had come through.

From the mansion Aulë had built, his half-prison Melkor raised his head, scenting as a hunting hound snuffs the air.

There had been something, this tantalising taste and sense of the *Outside* when first he was brought out of that endless jail of no-time. Valinor, home of gods was, of course, more rarefied than Middle-earth but this was somewhat more. In a spasm of doubt he wondered if the Valar were able to pass between Aman and Infinity.

Melkor remembered the *Outside* as a birth into absolute consciousness, into anger, ambition and hunger that was him and seemed pre-existing; it had come with him, fully formed, out of the black blink before awareness. He could not rule infinity; it was already ruled or *was* something far greater. But there were worlds within it where he would be supreme.

Arda was spinning itself out from a molten hot core when he came to the Timeless Halls and found the Valar already watching it, coveting it. Like them, he attempted to break into the great mountain

Palace that dominated that place but had no more success. It was shut tight, his effort less than a butterfly's brush against a steel door.

Piqued and infuriated, he turned his attention to the gods. They did not know him and, then, were intrigued rather than wary. Naturally, he thought with contempt, seeing them for what they were and wondering how they had come into being, into such powers as they possessed. They were mighty, but not as great as he. Yet they could be useful and so, in the time-before-time he had seduced them. It had been easy and they had not liked what he had shown them nor the depths to which he could take them. Even less did they like his flaying, scornful laughter.

Some might still have followed him: Oromë the Wild, Irmo, but not the others. Unable to claim the Valar, bored with their flagellating guilt, he had turned to the spirits of the stars and there he had more success. Only he had tamed the solar flames that, on Arda, became the *Valaraukar* — and Mairon whom had always stood apart.

Upon Arda, the Valar contested with him. The arrogance! It was their world no more than his. But by then, they had feared him. It had taken them all to bring him down in Utumno, and they had only fought after their winged warrior Eönwë and his legions descended. Later, wounded as only gods can be, they withdrew into the land they called the Blessed Realm as, long before, they had contained themselves on Almaren.

Valinor was another island, overbright with the light of their Trees. Always they sought to control and contain, to drive back the darkness, to exist in Light. Oh, he knew them. *He knew them*. He had marked them like the Fell-wolves of Utumno marked their territory. What he sensed was not them.

To Melkor, the world was multilayered; he moved through it like one of the great sharks of the most ancient seas, feeling every current of air, scenting presences in the water, temperature changes, depth. In this place there was a background power, diffused but evident, and Fëanor was a hot point of energy as was Fingolfin, though both were different. He had noted them without seeming to on that day he was released in the Mahanaxar with Manwë gloating and Varda watching as aloof and cold as her chosen stars.

He detested the Valar, but had their measure. It was Fëanor and Fingolfin that had shone and he wanted to know why. Of Fëanor he had heard much from Aulë, who clearly felt a proprietary pride in him. A teacher cannot, perhaps, help boasting of a talented pupil even to a prisoner on parole, but Fëanor seemed to have arrived at his own genius of invention with very little help. Fëanor, *Spirit of Fire*, Finwë's eldest son who had almost turned his back on his father and resented the King's second wife and her sons.

Finwë, soul-twin to Élernil whom Mairon had captured and brought to Utumno. The first of his White Slayers.

His mood soured. A score of them there had been, scorched white in the extremity of agony both physical and mental.

They had been lethal, those *quendi*, far more dangerous than the other creations, twisted into monstrosities (and whom he hated). But somehow they had broken free of his will. Marching out of Utumno under orders to approach and capture more of their people, they had not returned. When he called for them, they resisted and their screams of tortured and furious defiance echoed in his mind for a long time. Wherever they were now, they had never come to Valinor. They, like Mairon and the *Valaraukar* must still be in Middle-earth.

And Melkor, for now, was in Valinor which was a prison, if not that cell of nothingness where Námo had tormented him. Melkor knew the vast spaces of the universe, the singing of the galaxies,

the thundering diapason of dark energy and his own power-delved and immense fortresses of the world. In Námo's halls eternity was crushed and compacted, warped into something that felt both cramped and immense, a cracked-mirror labyrinth without egress. It was a place to drive even a god insane. (It had).

Aman was a step back to freedom, separated from Middle-earth only by the sea — and the Valar's powers. Once, he could have bestrode the oceans. Once. All the gods had lost something upon this world, binding themselves too closely. Melkor had chosen to willingly pour his spirit into it, so that now it flowed in the rivers, the rocks, the soil, the very air and he deemed his sacrifice worthwhile. Mairon said it was the only way for a Power not of this world to gain any mastery of it; for Melkor and the Valar were all interlopers.

'Thou must give to get something.' And Mairon's eyes, backlit by ember fire, held that secret, disquieting half-smile.

That was not in Melkor's nature but he valued Mairon for an intelligence wholly unchained from any sense of morality. Now, there was nowhere not touched by him save Valinor but he was reduced, even as the Valar were reduced, and so he must abide and watch and plan, spin a persona quiet and seeming penitent and allow the Valar's suspicions of him to lull. Their egos would believe his change of heart after three Ages of imprisonment. Not all of them accepted that he was 'reclaimed', or not yet, but Manwë was too sure of his own rectitude. He named himself the mouthpiece of the Creator and believed even gods must wish to bow to him. Blinded by his light, Melkor thought with contempt. He thought he could see into others' hearts and minds. He was blind to Melkor and always had been, and that was a weakness that could be exploited.

It was Námo whom Melkor had to thank for his freedom. There was no satisfaction in seeing Melkor cowed and repentant if it could not be witnessed by many. Námo wanted his humiliation to be visible, paraded across Valinor.

Námo, Death god and so called Doomsman whose appetite for dark torture might have made him an ally but for the thin, grey prudery he had put on like armour after Melkor's seduction. He might delve and peel apart and rape a mind and body and call it justified but he himself was inviolable.

The Valar had told Melkor they had rescued the *quendi* from his malice but also liberated them from their sins. Sins. It was a new word but once Manwë explained it, Melkor saw how well it fitted the narrow white box of his mind.

Prowling his prison-house, spacious enough but another cell to one who had delved the caverns of the Underworld, Melkor put the Valar from his mind and considered the Elves. He had only seen them in torment, never as they had lived beside Cuiviénen, but Mairon had and reported faithfully. Their lives in Valinor were much straightened by the Valarin Laws. Why had they accepted this cage; was it as simple as fear of him, for Melkor; maybe and why not? His power had stretched far over Middle-earth. Yet for all that, he remembered how they had struggled and fought against him in Utumno and could not quite believe it. He needed to know more.

At the beginning of his parole Melkor did not stray far from Aulë's mansions and his own jailhouse. The Elves who worked there, apprentices from Tirion and Alqualondë, did not speak to him. Aulë's orders, no doubt. Their sidelong glances held every emotion from plain terror to defiance, but no welcome at all.

Melkor set his teeth. He was not accustomed to soft play, but subterfuge (call it by another name) was how he had seduced the Valar. He was free of Námo's prison. He could wait. He could plan.

But now this...as if somewhere a gap had opened from the Beyond and allowed Power to enter.

And it was still here.

There were World-spirit guards at his doors. Maia warriors. Once, he could have discarded his form and walked unclad. Could he still? Perhaps, but it would need testing. He needed to find out what had come through.

Again and again, his mind returned Finwë's eldest sons as he had seen them at the Mahanaxar, blazing gems in a crown of beautiful Elves. But their minds were impenetrable; glittering shields raised against his sight.

And that should not be possible.

~ New York ~

~ The airliner flew into the rising sun. James opened his eyes after a sleep he had not expected to take.

'Coffee, sir?' One of the waiting staff appeared at his elbow as if they had been hovering.

'Thank you.'

There was an odd sense of relief at returning to London. New York had been...difficult. He smiled into his cup wryly at that understatement; he had been thrown in at the deep end but sometimes that was the only way. One by one, people who had worked for his father for years had been dismissed and one of them had, very dramatically, committed suicide. James felt the fool Peter Thomson had called him for not anticipating it.

Thomson had been in constant contact while James was in Europe. As soon as the news of Callaghan's death came, he was on the phone to the lawyers. Everything, he instructed as if he, not James, were stepping into the patriarch's shoes, must be locked down tight. James, in a long-deferred spurt of defiance, did not trouble to consult him before leaving for Italy, which resulted in a near screaming telephone call. But Thomson could hardly deny that James had reason to go, though his father's death was not it. The security guard's panicked phone call from the villa Fiorini

had given him the only lead on Blaise Worth in years.

There was something in Thomson's attitude that raised the fine hairs until James realised with a shock that he believed business would continue as normal, that he would work for James as he had for Callaghan.

Could the man be *innocent*? He dismissed that notion almost immediately. Thomson had been a permanent fixture for fifty years or more. Wherever Raymond Callaghan went, business meeting or holiday, Thomson was there, ubiquitous yet unobtrusive, a tall, cadaverous presence; a grey man in grey suits and slicked back hair that year by year seemed to absorb their colour until they, too, were dusty grey. As a boy and teenager, James had shrunk away from him; Thomson reminded him of a butler in some old Hammer Horror film who was privy to his master's dark, secretive purposes. As he grew older that whimsy changed to a dull resentment.

Thomson had known. He had been like a deer caught in the glaring headlights of truth, unable to accept that the man he had served so long and faithfully was dead and forever disgraced. The backlash had hardly even begun.

The FBI had met James off the flight, as had the cameras. He was accustomed to the press who followed his father everywhere except when he required their absence and James had often been there, in his shadow. Yet he recalled the sheltered beauty of the Villa Fiorini enviously. Lucien Steele seemed to have no problem with privacy, but he was clearly in another league entirely and was not at all as he seemed. Back on home turf, James felt peculiarly vulnerable and very much alone, as if a sheltering arm had been withdrawn.

But the one thing he did not feel was guilt. The FBI might have thought to catch him while jet-lagged, hoping he would stumble tiredly into confession but James had never suffered from that penalty of travel. Anyhow, the adrenaline rush of nerves would have banished any fatigue. He had come here ready to face this and if there was any positive facet of being tied to his father's coat-tails it was that his movements were extremely easy to trace. After a long interview the FBI let him go — with certain directives. He was, as they say, "cooperating with the authorities" and, like him, they had Peter Thomson in their sights. James made a suggestion. After a moment of discussion, they agreed. They did not ask him about his meetings with Lucien Steele but perhaps it was not within their purview; they dealt with domestic matters, the CIA with international.

But first things first. James, booking into a hotel rather than returning to the Hamptons, arrived at the Park Avenue office on a morning already hot. The towering ranks of high windows flashed painful prisms of sunlight back at the pale sky and the air already smelt of dried fumes. He had flown into an East Coast sweltering under a week-long heatwave. The Canning building was blessedly cool and quiet after the rush of the streets.

His father would have entered with his usual entourage of secretaries and bootlickers without which, it seemed, he could not function. James was alone and had sent no word ahead. In hindsight that was stupid but he wanted to shake off the associations with his father as soon as possible. The FBI had facilitated that by taking the two bodyguards who had accompanied him into custody.

The ever-present security staff came forward as he crossed the marble-tiled foyer to the private elevator then, recognising him, drew back. Behind their huge marble workstation the receptionists stared mutely as the door whispered shut behind him. He saw their heads turning to follow him, the avid curiosity in their eyes. When he got out on the fourth-fourth floor it was to a muffling silence. No security was in evidence here and his father's personal secretary was absent.

He opened the office door with a gentle, cushioned *whoosh and sigh* of air. The huge space with its chairs and enormous leather-topped desk seemed to still retain his father's presence and the

lingering trace of Cuban cigars. Slowly, he crossed the room. It was an intimidating walk, as if approaching a king seated upon a dais. (Of course, his father had liked to sit there, staring down whomever came into his presence) If he closed his eyes and opened them again James would see him, bald head shining, small height boosted high by the chair, lipless mouth twisted into that perpetual downturned smirk of superiority.

What a truly vile man you were.

He shook himself, strode to the desk and sat down. There was nothing on it but three framed photographs of his father with various billionaires, all smirking at the photographer. A certain bloated self-satisfaction typified those few people Callaghan had called 'friends' and these were no exception. James shook his head as he brought Lucien Steele to his mind's eye; a man so different he might have been from another world entirely. His father had been almost obsessed with Steele and could get nowhere near him for all his media power and wealth. No wonder he had been hell-bent on attending that ball. James wished he had been there. He had received the beautifully presented invitation from Madam Gauthier but his presence was not needed or required, his father said. Accustomed to obedience, James had made no objection.

Two of the photographs were backed by expensive interiors, the other by a glittering blue-green sea. The Virgin Islands, probably; his father had invited several people to his island. He gazed at it as he tried the drawers (all locked), then swivelled around in the chair to look at the inner door. It lead, as he knew, to a private suite. Investigating, he found it locked. He didn't have the code, but Peter Thomson would know it.

Returning to the desk, he set up his laptop and logged into the personnel files.

The first hours were easy enough if not pleasant. He called his father's personal security guards and one by one, let them go. A few did not have phone numbers. He was not surprised; they were the men who had been in Italy with his father.

When that task was completed, he sat back. The whole building felt as if it were waiting as, only recently, it would have waited for his father; he had been the pulse-beat and every one of the staff was attuned to his presence.

Rising, James stretched and went to the windows, swung one of them open. Hot air gusted in, and the sound of snarling traffic rose. He didn't mind. The oppressive quiet of the office was unnerving, closing him off from life as his father had tried to shut him away. He took a long breath and stepped onto the small railed balcony where his father had liked to stand looking over the city like some despot gloating over his domain. More than once he had ushered out visitors who were clearly uncomfortable with the narrowness and dizzying drop while his security hemmed them in from behind. James knew it for a test when he was beckoned out but it seemed heights did not bother him.

There was a stiff breeze up here, funnelled down the street by the skyscrapers. It was dry, hot and brought no relief from the heat. Stepping back inside, he made himself coffee then lifted one of the office chairs to the desk, facing him. At precisely 10.30 reception called up.

'Mr..Ah...Mr. Callaghan. Mr Thomson is here for an appointment.'

'Thank you. Send him up.' He settled himself. Callaghan. He despised the name and meant to change it as soon as possible. Remembering the grandmother who had left him her fortune, he rather thought he might use her surname: Hart.

Peter Thomson entered with a bulging briefcase. His always pale cheeks seemed more withered

and caved than before. His lips were puckered inward as if meditating on the taste of a sour fruit.

‘About time.’ He thumped the briefcase on the table, folded long, thin bones into the chair and snapped this case open and slapped down documents. James glanced over them.

‘Thank you, Thomson. Do you have the code to his suite?’ He gestured with his head.

‘Ah, why...I’ His eyes flicked to the door then returned, weighing something. ‘Of course.’ He unfolded like a mantis. ‘You can close that window. It lets the heat in.’

Yes, this is a man for a cold climate.

‘Thank you for your concern but I need some air.’

He joined Thomson and watched him key in the code and open the door. The suite was luxurious and empty but for a few clothes in the closets. Still, who knew what the FBI might find?

Behind him, Thomson said, ‘If you’ve satisfied yourself, there’s a lot of work to be done.’

James turned. ‘Not for you.’

‘What?’ He blinked rapidly, then an unpleasant half-sneer grew. ‘Your father meant for me to remain if anything happened to him.’ He sounded dismissive, even contemptuous. ‘I hope you intend to honour his promise.’

‘I intend to honour nothing about him,’ James replied coldly. ‘Not even his funeral’

‘You’re not serious! You can’t hope to step into his shoes without me. You’re nothing but a boy.’

It was like turning over a stone and finding something unexpected underneath, some grey crawling creature, slicked with venom. A cold anger rose up, steadying him as much as it surprised him.

‘You knew, didn’t you?’

Thomson glared back at him. ‘This was a set-up. Come on, boy! Apollyon have always had their eyes on your father.’

‘I rather thought it was the other way around. Well, Apollyon might just get his companies. I might sell it all off. Probably at a loss. That would make him spin in his grave wouldn’t it? I *do*. hope you remember I hold the majority of shares in everything? I can’t be outvoted and I know the details of the trust.’ It had always surprised him that his father had arranged it in that way. *But he didn’t. Joanna Worth did.* ‘But first I’m cleaning shop. My father may have paid for your silence all these years, but he’s dead as you have pointed out, I am *not him*.’

‘You don’t have the guts to be him.’ His face had gone white and now blood mottled back into it. ‘You’ve inherited an *empire*—!’

‘The guts to abuse children, the guts to destroy people’s lives because you can? Yes, Thomson I’ve seen that too often. As for the other...My god, I hope you and anyone else who colluded or connived to keep his crimes quiet *rot in hell*.’ His hands slammed down on the table. Thomson’s teeth clicked shut.

‘You can’t do this. You need me—’

‘Need you? What were you, Thomson? His pander?’ The turmoil of fury peaked. ‘He raped and murdered *children*. Did *you*; or did you *watch*?’

His words hardly seemed to register. Thomson took three steps toward him, then seemed to see that Callaghan's son was almost a foot taller than the man he had served, more than forty years younger and was not backing down.

'You'll ruin everything. They can't prove a thing.' He leaned forward on the desk. 'You stupid boy —'

James over-rode him. 'Oddly, I can't seem to trace some of his security guards, and his private secretary is gone, as you may have noticed. And quite a few other people have vanished. I don't think you realise the seriousness of this. But the authorities certainly do.'

'You don't see, do you?' Thomson's breath was rank: coffee and the sour sickness of fear. 'We can deal with this. Yes, anyone that can say anything is gone! Nothing will stand up in court except that Lucien Steele had him murdered—'

'It was an accident,' James interrupted. 'And recorded as such. He killed Mortimer Worth and he admitted before witnesses that he raped Worth's son!'

'That fucking ball was set up to make him confess!' Thomson snarled. 'I advised him not to go. I told him...But we can salvage it and you can continue with his plans.' He scrabbled in the open briefcase. 'Listen—'

James weighed the moment like a fencer. 'His plans? Or Joanna Worth's?'

The office fell silent. A blind rattled in the wind and the city noise rose, the snarl of vehicles, a siren in the distance. Life. Normality; hot-baked dust and exhaust. One of the papers blew from the desk and skidded across the floor.

Thomson's figure crouched like a predator. There was an expression so vicious in his eyes that James almost stepped back. That under-the-stone creature...

'He should have been harder on you. He should have made sure...' His hands groped like clicking talons to return the papers to his briefcase. 'Well, I'll make fucking sure.'

The door clicked open and two men surged in. Strangers to James but not to Thomson, who didn't turn his head. They were big men, swollen with muscle under their suits and both of them carried guns.

'You've forced my hand.' Thomson told him. 'We're going to take a little ride somewhere and I'll explain things.'

A hollow shock opened out in James chest but his heart filled it with hectic, shuddering beats. He looked from the men back to Thomson and forced himself to say, 'I don't think so.'

'Well, I do think so, you pretty-boy little prick,' Thomson said savagely. 'Yes, I remember the Worth kid. Delicate little piece of ass. We should have kept him.' His long teeth bared.

The room darkened before James' eyes and then returned overly-sharp, blanched into brilliant hardness by fury. His head hummed with it. His fingers flexed as he imagined wrapping them around that scrawny neck...Then another sharp gust of wind swept through the office and the open door creaked.

The three men that entered were absolutely silent in their dark suits.

'Drop the guns,' one of them said calmly. 'Now.'

Thomson's men spun, already firing, the shots muffled by silencers, but the MI6 agents were quicker, dropping to one knee so that the bullets meant for them went over their heads and smacked into the wall. The return fire took them out neatly. Thomson started moving even as they crumpled. He grabbed his briefcase and made for the half-open window. James followed, reaching for his jacket, catching it. The fabric tore as Thomson, grunting, wrenched himself free.

'Stay where you are! You too, Mr. Callaghan.'

Three guns levelled on Thomson. He turned, clutching the briefcase to him like a baby. James watched a peculiar smile writhe on the thin lips, the dart of his eyes before they settled on him. The gleeful malevolence in them was shocking.

'You're going to regret this,' he promised. 'You don't know how much. You have no idea.' And he launched himself backward through the balcony window. Warning shots smacked into the glass, blowing it into shards. An alarm shrieked.

Thomson slammed against the railing. His shirt, too, was ripped and flapped in the wind and his skinny chest, over the heart, bore a back circle.

Then, quite deliberately, his eyes on James, he hurled himself back and over the railing.

James was on the balcony in a blink, feet crunching glass. The body plummeted, smaller and smaller above the traffic but James still thought he could see those eyes fixed on his face, the rictus of carious teeth until the final, brutal meeting with the ground. Horns blared.

'Goddamit,' one of the agents swore.

James drew back. 'Get his briefcase,' he said. He turned, strangely calm, walked to the door of the suite and picked up the wind-blown sheet of paper, folding it.

Another meeting or rather a debriefing, followed. James had not expected the plan he had conceived ending quite like that, but he could not say he cared, only that Thomson was dead and there could be no justice and no opportunity to question him.

There was also no recovered briefcase, which could have been just opportunistic theft or something rather more worrying. CCTV was being looked at, he was told.

From the hotel, James gazed across Central Park, beautifully green even as the city baked. The flight to Heathrow was booked and he was packed. The suite was as quiet as the office had been. Once again he felt that acute sense of being alone, unmoored.

He pushed a hand through still damp hair. After returning to the Plaza he'd felt a need to shower again not so much from witnessing a death but the proximity of Thomson.

'You had him and let him go,' one of the agents had remarked. And it was true enough, Thomson, hampered by his precious briefcase, would have been no match for a younger, stronger man.

'His suit tore,' James replied. *But I guessed what he might do. It was in his eyes.* Thomson was not prepared to be arrested and questioned or to go to jail. And he had been there when Blaise Worth was raped. He was one of them, perhaps. If he had not fallen (and the FBI agents had fired to warn not to kill) James would have killed him and damn the consequences. He hoped that the old bastard had felt an eternity of terror during that fall before his body hit the street. And it still wasn't enough.

After a moment, he sat down and picked up a burner phone from the coffee table. The very action of depressing the numbers gave him an odd sense of unreality.

Cloak-and-dagger stuff. He took a long breath.

‘Yes, James?’

The sound of that rich, accented voice was like a draught of red wine, intoxicating and soothing both but not soft; there was a hard, clean edge to it. From the background noise, he sounded as if he were in a car.

‘Mr...’ He hesitated over speaking the name and discarded it. ‘Peter Thomson is dead. Suicide. I’m sure you’ll hear about it.’ He paused, biting down on the resurgence of anger. ‘There was no way he was going to let himself be arrested.’

‘Ah, well that was to be expected.’ Steele sounded almost amused.

‘The ones I could dismiss — those that had files — I have.’ He picked up a beautiful glass paperweight from the table and turned it restlessly in one hand. It was cobalt, swirled through with paler turquoise, like a frozen sea.

‘All of them? I present you my compliments.’ A soft laugh sounded.

‘It wasn’t...’ The blown glass seemed to ripple. He smelt the sea, sun lotion, heard the creak of the yacht, soft, drowsy laughter, the splash of water, a voice languid with the idle drift of the boat and the somnolent air... ‘Wouldn’t it be nice to do this for a week, a month...? What say you, James?’ And he saw the face of Blaise Worth, clearer than in any dream, chestnut curls tipped by the sun’s gold, eyes startling against his tan. Sea-colour. He was smiling lazily from under an awning.

A memory-flash. There and gone. In the air-conditioned suite, a flush of heat prickled into his cheeks.

‘It wasn’t quite what I expected,’ he filled the expectant silence lamely, pinching the bridge of his nose. Thomson’s words about Blaise rolled around his head like a ball bearing in a steel box, trailing echoes of horror. The killing rage still simmered.

‘No, I do not suppose it was. Watch your back.’ There was a definite warning at the back of the light tone.

‘The FBI will see me onto my flight. It’s at 10.p.m. I’d like to talk to you — and Mr Wainwright, although he probably knows what happened already. Nevertheless...’ He set down the paperweight. ‘I’m seeing Mr. Fenwick-Brown at midday tomorrow; he’s coming to the hotel. Howard suggested we conference. Are you with someone? If so, I’ll wait.’

‘Very well, yes.’ Crisply. ‘Howard will route the phone call. I will see you then. Goodbye.’

Unsettled, James rose, nerves shrilling like the sirens that had heralded the approach of police and ambulance on Park Avenue. He closed his eyes and memories flared and faded: His father grinning, Thomson’s open-mouthed glare as his body fell, Joanna Worth smiling at him, Lucien Steele making everything else look like background, Blaise laughing as the yacht skimmed through waters blue as his eyes. and behind them all a briefly glimpsed figure, tall, slim, gold-white hair, eyes shaded by dark glasses who turned his head and smiled as if he had always known James.

My grandfather. Who are you?

He poured himself a shot of brandy, knocked it back, then, as he had been instructed, took the SIM card out of the burner phone and broke it.

OooOooO

~ Time Dreamers ~

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

~ Time Dreamers ~

~ Valinor. Several decades later ~

~ The dream ended with a gasping leap into consciousness that was like opening a door from one place to another.

He lay still. *My room. Formenos. Home.* Every time, after waking from dream he half-expected to be somewhere else.

The chamber was dim save for one slim beam of light through a crack in the shutters that he had forgotten to entirely close. Precise as harp-string, it striped the wall-hanging, bleaching out the blue, and red and gold. Early Mingling lay over Valinor, the quiet time before the day.

He sought out the dream that hovered on the margins of his mind like mist over water. Music running behind it and through it, a voice; a smell, sea-salt and damp stone, a cold, wild whipping wind and a strange amber-fire light...

Alqualondë? No. The light piercing through Calcirya touched the waves with silver and gold. There was always a warmth in the air and water.

Mist, moss grown in damp stony crevices, a wind raw and cold with briny spray, the crash and suck of waves.

Araman? Their father had taken them all over Valinor once the twins were old enough, long exploratory treks to the very borders of the Outer Sea where, far from the light of the Trees, the stars fell into Ekkaia, south to the towering mountains and gloomy ravines of Avathar and northward to the bitter fogs and clashing ice floes of Araman. That was a deeper, biting chill.

Slowly, he drifted back to the dream as if it were a shy animal that might startle. He felt the music on his tongue, in the back of his throat, the swell of it deep within.

It was like nothing he had ever sung before, a simple, rollicking tune and...*It was hot, glaring lights, a platform, some kind of dais? a crowd that cheered and stamped.*

Performing was natural to him and had been since childhood but his audiences had never been so loud in response.

Maglor pushed aside the covers and rose, crossing to a table. It had been some years since he and his brothers had revealed to their father and one another that they dreamed of these strange and otherworldly people and places. Fëanor, too, dreamed and Maglor doubted that his family were the only ones; one could pick it out in conversations, if one listened carefully. Words spoken and not spoken.

He had decided to note down what they could remember to see if there was a pattern, if anything made sense and now opened the leather-bound book of dreams. Carefully, he flipped the pages. Sometimes the writing was harder than others, like attempting to translate words from a language he had no knowledge of; and his father had said it was exactly that. With that illimitable smile that warmed to the bone (and Maglor now understood could likewise burn to the bone) he explained: 'The Elves of the Outer Lands will no doubt speak other languages though they must proceed from one root,' he said. 'Rúmil, and some of the Unbegotten still know our ancient tongue and one can see how it has changed since we came to Valinor. Language is a fluid thing.'

Maglor learned the ancient first-tongue of his people and even some Valarin. All of them had when they were old enough to incorporate it into their lessons; Maglor had not known why then. He did now; it was in preparation for when they would leave Aman. That hope hung before them like a far-off beckoning light.

But the languages he heard and spoke in his dreams were wholly alien, never heard nor spoken in Valinor. When he woke and felt them in his mouth some were hard and awkward as chipped marble, others were softer, like the rolling curl of a wave but all of them were unknown and unknowable. ('As yet,' his father corrected). He wrote them as he heard them, even if the black script that stared back at him from the pages meant nothing at all. But there were images that appeared with them and these he sketched, forming columns of relationship. He never duplicated anything; the columns grew like branches, some interlocking — *perhaps*, he silently amended.

And there were some dreams that he did not commit to paper. There was blood in them and fire, and grief.

Grief. How could he know the word and what it meant? He was born of Valinor. Yet the agony of someone, something he loved ripped from him, gone, completely gone from the world, into the dark—he *knew* it.

The first time he woke from one of those dreams he had been crying out, tears already on his cheeks, stinging, scalding like fresh blood. He had thought to see blood, vivid and awful on the sheets, on his right hand which throbbed agonisingly. But there was nothing to see.

Maedhros had come and comforted him and in their quiet talk, as he settled, his brother admitted that he, too, had experienced similar dreams. He clasped a hand over his left wrist and a shutter closed over the pale luminosity of his eyes and he would say no more not then, and not since.

Secrets. Things not told. Even his father had them. Especially his father. They were a family of secrets...held against the Valar, against their own people and, from love, against one another.

He found the word he was looking for and traced a finger over the column beside it: *Ruin. Sunset. Winter.* Yes, he had dreamt it before, more than once.

None of those words had meant anything to him when he wrote them. It had been Rúmil, years ago, who gave him the words in the old tongue when Maglor described what he had seen in the dream.

‘Ruin. Or *a ruin*, or *ruined*. Places that have been abandoned and fallen back to nature, homesteads, towers... There were few of those in Endor, perhaps an old sheep fold, a hut — a wreck, something fallen in or destroyed. There are ruins on Tol Eressëa where the Teleri dwelt long before coming fully to Aman, mansions, palaces, walls. Thy father saw them years ago.’

‘Yes, I saw them,’ Fëanor agreed with a curling smile. ‘The word is not used much here where there are no ruins. One could perhaps use it to describe a person, too.’

‘And the rest?’ Maglor questioned. ‘The light is strange. It is not Tree-light.’ He had learned as a child of Varda’s Dome. ‘Sunlight, then?’

Fëanor’s eyes had gone distant. ‘A setting or rising sun, from what you describe.’ And for Maglor — all of them — he sketched out a diagram of the Sun and Arda. The Sun was so enormous in size that Arda was a tiny ball against it. *How canst thou know this?* Maglor wondered.

‘The world circles the Sun, and so some of Arda will be in sunlight, other regions in darkness and it will change. Sunset and sunrise?’ Fëanor raised a sleek and quizzical brow at Rúmil who looked thoughtful when he spoke; a man recalling his past.

‘Sunrise,’ he murmured. ‘When we would see the Sun rise above the horizon and climb into the sky. Sunset, the opposite when it sinks behind the world and the dark comes with starlight.’ His words were a poem. ‘The whole sky ablaze with them.’

Maglor absorbed this. ‘And the feeling of cold? Yes, we have felt it in Araman, but only because it is far from the Trees.’

‘Winter,’ Rúmil told him. ‘The dark time of the year, a time of rest for leaf and herb, when the trees are bare of leaf and nothing grows, sleeping, waiting for the spring. There can be snow and frost or wild winds and rain. But a good time ... a time to tell tales at the fireside with hot mead, to spin and weave and for the hunters and the protectors, the land is clear with the trees bare of leaf and one may see far.’ Abruptly he stopped. Maglor, waiting, saw his father’s expression; the snap of a frown, a memory or thought behind it.

The idea of ‘seasons’, was explained to him: part of the turning of the world. Valinor, under the control of the Valar had times of harvest, of cooler temperatures but it was not natural. The land itself, bathed with Treelight, would not have naturally produced fruit or grain, so Aulë told Fëanor years ago; the Valar — Yavanna in particular — had used power to make Aman more familiar to the Elves. Only in the regions distant from the Trees could one glimpse anything similar to the dusk-light of the Outer Lands.

But I know that, too. And not from any dream.

Crossing to the window, he drew back the shutters. The Mingling rushed in, dispelling the gentle shadows. His bedchamber looked out over the sprawling garden, alive with flowers, herb beds, shaven lawns, fountains that threw sparkling curtains, all bounded by fruit trees. Beyond, a high stone wall separated the garden from the stable block. Everything was familiar but what if one day, he opened the window on another vista?

It was quiet now, but soon Formenos would be busy with servants, journeymen and ostlers, brewers and weavers and smiths— all the bustle of a great house. Maglor heard the soft creak of shutters as another pair were drawn back in Maedhros's bedchamber. Naturally his brother would rise early; today was not a normal day, if any could be called normal in this increasingly volatile political atmosphere. It was their cousin Fingon's Begetting Day and the Fëanorions were invited to the palace. The invitation had come written in Fingon's own hand and Fëanor had glanced under his lashes at Maedhros and said, surprising them all, 'Yes, of course we will attend. It would be discourteous to refuse.'

When Maglor was young, they spent little time in Tirion. That had changed quite suddenly and though Formenos was home, they were a presence in the palace. Even Finarfin, who had been fostered in Alqualondë and married Eärwen, Olwë's daughter, now dwelt close by the Great Square below Mindon Eldaliéva. Fingolfin, of course, lived there permanently. The great halls and corridors were busy with the whisper of political rivalries.

Maglor remembered the murmurs of the schism within the House of Finwë from childhood. He had accepted it then, but was saddened; he was fond of Fingolfin. But the half-brother's unfriendship was the one thing Fëanor would never talk about. He did not denigrate Fingolfin when in Formenos but Maglor had witnessed the clashes in Tirion, which ranged from brief vicious sparring to far more spectacular encounters. Fingolfin had a way of withdrawing into — admittedly — splendid and icy haughtier while Fëanor simply burned, intemperate and furious. Yet more than once, Maglor had seen the sword-fire blaze in his uncle's eyes. If he appeared cool and controlled, it was a trained reaction, he thought, not his natural state.

Maglor had been thrown head-first into the political fray a few days after his majority when, walking in the palace gardens he found himself confronted by a disdainful and cold-eyed lordling with acolytes hovering behind. Speaking loudly as if continuing a conversation with his followers, but with his eyes darting to Maglor, he named Fëanor arrogant and more than half-mad. 'And he has bred sons the same. Formenos,' he enunciated through a petulant mouth, 'Is a nest of vipers.'

Maglor backhanded him without a second thought, knocking the sneer from his face and the lordling almost off his feet. The palm of his hand stung. He was a little surprised at his own uprush of rage, but rode its still hot and cresting wave.

'Well?' he challenged. 'If thou hast anything to say about my father or my brothers, say it now. And then we shall take thine accusations to the King.'

They blustered, though none of them made any move to attack, being occupied with helping the lordling to his feet. A bruise had already formed on his cheek and he looked shocked but then as abruptly, all of them froze.

A hand settled on Maglor's shoulder and a voice beside him said, 'What's this?'

Fingolfin's voice was ice; his eyes were not. Below the beautiful circlet of blue-white jewels they flamed like Telperion flashing down the edge of a steel blade. Maglor stared. There were differences between his father and Fingolfin but those were minor, never more so than when Fingolfin permitted his temper to show. He wore his power and arrogance closer to his skin than Fëanor but when he released it, like a man casting off a cloak, a living star blazed forth. He looked perilous and far more than beautiful. Maglor thought suddenly, *Valinor is too small for the both of them.*

The young men were no less affected; they scrambled with words.

'My Lord I...'

‘We were but...’

Fingolfin raised his hand and the voices ceased as if cut off.

‘Thy voice is quite penetrating, Pandion,’ he said. ‘Indeed Prince Maglor,’ (A definite stress on the title) ‘Is correct that such accusations should be taken before the King. It is not meet for a boy to speak thus of his elders. Only thy youth excuses thee. But if thou doth judge thyself the injured party and wish to take this to the Field, now is the time to speak.’

Maglor stared at the lordling unblinkingly and inclined his head, expressing his willingness. This method of settling arguments and disputes more personal than political (which was its own arena and more bloodlessly vicious) had been initiated years ago. The Noldor were by nature passionate and competitive but the inflicting of violence upon one another was prohibited by the Laws. If two people met in anger it must be at the Field of Games, presided over by two judges. By the end of the duel, the participants' hot blood had usually cooled and the onlookers had enjoyed a spectacle.

Pandion swallowed, darted a look up toward Fingolfin, another at Maglor and said sulkily, ‘No, my Lord.’

‘Very well. Go to thy homes. All of thee. I will speak to thy parents.’

They melted away, blushing fierily and bowing. Maglor had not spoken and did not move. Shivers of anger still weltered through him.

‘A pity,’ he said. ‘I would like to meet him on the Field.’

‘It would be an unfair contest,’ Fingolfin remarked, the perfect arch of his brows drawn into a faint frown. Then he said, ‘Thou art very like thy father.’ There was no censure in the words there was even, Maglor thought, a glint of something — amusement or approval — in his eyes as he walked away.

The sons of Fëanor along with Fingon and others among the Noldor had gained something of a reputation both at the Games and in duels. Fëanor and Fingolfin had never taken their quarrels there, though Maglor had seen his father sparring with Eönwë, their martial teacher and privately thought it a good thing the half-brothers had not crossed swords. Perhaps they could not; the formalities that cloaked the sons of Finwë were supposed to ensure that arguments did not escalate into physical violence.

The quarrels that ended in duels were generally between young hot-heads, small jealousies blown up but occasionally they masked something deeper, and sometimes there were injuries. Maglor would not, he realised, have been ashamed of injuring Pandion.

He heard nothing more of that altercation, though by the next morning the news had grown wings and flown. Fëanor had shrugged and embraced him, saying that such men were as yapping dogs and as ineffectual. He said nothing about Fingolfin's intervention. More and more, Maglor found his silence strange. Fëanor was not the kind of person to hide his teeth. Face-to-face with Fingolfin he most certainly bared them and snarled.

Maglor had been younger then. Now, though a scant handful of years had passed, he felt a great deal older. He knew (and suspected) much more. The climate of Tirion and even Formenos, did that — and the instinctive, burning protectiveness the sons of Fëanor felt for their father. Visits to Tirion were fraught but they were always interesting and now there was an added complication: Maedhros and his carefully hidden desire for Fingolfin's eldest son.

Such a thing could never be sanctioned. It was enshrined in the Laws. Everyone knew the rumours of people who had gone missing, men and women taken away by the Valar when they dared to

transgress. It seemed not to have happened for a long time, but the threat hung over the Elves like smoke. Fëanor said, with an expressively curling lip, that it was the reason the Eldar were pushed into marriage so young, before they could truly know if they might prefer their own sex. He himself had never so much as suggested his sons take wives and turned a deaf ear to the petitions.

Maedhros had said nothing, at least to Maglor or his brothers. He might have spoken to Fëanor, who certainly knew or guessed, though Maglor thought this lust, love, attraction, call it what one would, was a new development. Last year, Fingon had become old enough to sit on the High Council.

The leap from youth to adulthood was always sudden and pronounced, and of the mind as much as the body. No longer did Fingon linger on the edge, coltish and still half boy. He had strode decisively over the threshold and was now a young man. He was also a beautiful one, very much like his father.

Somber, Maglor bathed and dressed for the journey. His body servant, Nárendil, brought in a breakfast tray and lingered to pack a few things. Not much was needed for they all maintained chambers in the palace. Maglor joined him; he liked the man, formerly one of High Lord Nullion's people. His father was a miner but Nárendil (nicknamed thus) had not wanted to follow in his footsteps.

Maglor himself packed his lap harp. This done, he returned to the writing table to put away his journal. He gazed at the words he had written, frowning. They were incomprehensible but the tune sang itself in his mind; he began to hum it as he wrapped the leather bindings around the book. Nárendil looked up.

'An interesting tune,' he offered and cocked his head. 'Different. Strange, but lively. I like it,' he decided. 'What is it called, my Lord?'

Maglor shook his head, forced to demur. 'I have not named it yet.' Then, 'I think... something to do with the sea, and ships.'

'Ah! A Teleri mariner's song,' Nárendil exclaimed.

'Perhaps.' But that did not seem to fit the feeling of the song. The mariners certainly sang and their music drew on the waters and the winds of the Bay of Eldamar, the cry of the wheeling gulls and the whisper of the waves.

There was more than a little daredevilry in the song Maglor had dreamed, a laugh at fate. *'Sometimes,' he had said to his father. 'It feels as if I am living another life somewhere else. And more than one.'*

The mariners spoke of the pull of the sea. Maglor felt as if something similar yet far more powerful than the ocean's tides was at work within his consciousness, sometimes running strongly as a riptide, at others a gentle whisper at the back of his mind. But always present.

Nárendil returned to the packing and cast him a sidelong look. 'Will the High Prince wear the Silmarils to the feast, my Lord?'

His voice had softened on the name, brushing it with the kind of awe that the jewels had ever evoked.

The Silmarils. Nothing like them had ever been seen. Maglor recalled the moment his father walked out of his workshop wearing them on his brow as if he had always worn them; they looked so natural on him.

The Valar had proclaimed the Light of the Trees was captured in those faceted gems but in fact they blazed like Fëanor's eyes. Even in a darkened room they shone, the air about them coruscant. Dust motes were set afire where the light touched them, raindrops and dew glimmered with a thousand sparks.

Fëanor told no-one how he made them. He had created self-luminous gems before even in his younger days, and Silmarils were the crowning glory. With the arrogant flair that sat as naturally on him as his storm of hair, he had walked into the Great Hall of the palace for Fingolfin's Begetting Day feast and brought silence down upon the gathering. Fingolfin's eyes had flown wide, catching the Silmarils brilliance, and then narrowed briefly. Finwë and the rest of his court simply looked stunned.

It was not true (as rumour ran) that Fëanor hoarded the Silmarils, denying the sight of them to anyone but himself. Maglor had touched them as had they all.

'He wears them when he wishes to make a statement,' Maedhros had said once, and Maglor thought that was true. So many things said or not said with a gesture, a look, an impression given and gleaned.

Maglor glanced at Nárendil's waiting face and saw on it a kind of yearning. The Silmarils did have that effect: he had seen people stare at them as if entranced, drawn to their unmatched and unmatchable light. One of those was the Vala, Melkor.

Fëanor had never welcomed Melkor in Formenos.

He had come, anyway.

Maglor did not know what his father had said but Melkor had never been there since. Yet the rest of Valinor seemed to accept him. He could be seen in Tirion at any time when he was not with Aulë, even in the palace at feasts. The Noldor had caught his interest. Only rarely did he journey to Valmar or Alqualondë.

Maglor needed no instruction to be wary of him. The gods were all strange to the eye, not quite real, as if they had forced their *feä* into a human form and changed it in the execution so that even their movement and expressions were unnatural and eerie. Ilmarin was equally disturbing with its impossible architecture and bleaching light. But Melkor held his power in his eyes, splendid under deep-arched lids and haughty brows. Blue-black and iridescent; they sucked one into...*red-black, a storm of power, of emptiness*...like the dim and lonely shores of the East, where one felt one could walk across the still, dark water of Ekkaia and into the stars. But Melkor's eyes did not promise starlight.

Yet Melkor seemed more like the Noldor than any of the Valar and, disturbingly, he reminded Maglor of Fëanor. He was beautiful beyond dreaming, but it was a terrible, destroying beauty. Fëanor, whenever he saw him, threw back his head and his eyes ignited in pure challenge. There was no fear, only a look hurled straight as a spear.

Rúmil had said to Maglor and Maedhros, 'Thou art not afraid enough of Melkor, nor any of the Valar. They are Powers, forget it not.'

The door to Maglor's chamber opened and Maedhros stepped in, flashing his lovely smile and banishing Maglor's preoccupations. He was dressed for riding but the circlet of nobility was set on his hair. Serpentine hair, Maedhros had, as if an artist had brushed cinnamon and gold and bronze through the polished copper that spiralled to his knees. He was the tallest of all Fëanor's sons and beautifully formed, long-legged and wide-shouldered. All of them had inherited their father's features and winging black brows but Maedhros' eyes were the palest of silvers, luminous and almost distant until he fixed one with a slicing stare. His younger brothers acquiesced to him as

they did to Fëanor. Maedhros was their natural leader.

‘Father said we would leave early,’ Maedhros said with a friendly nod to Nárendil.

‘I am ready,’ Maglor smiled. They shared a private and collusive promise as they always did before leaving for Tirion. They would watch for their father and guard his back and they would observe. It had become a habit that was now deeply ingrained within Fëanor’s sons.

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Chapter End Notes

The Middle-earth/Valinor timeline in this fic does not run concurrently to the modern world timeline. (They are not even taking place on the same world; the Elves in Middle-earth in this fic are in a different reality which can be accessed through the portals).

The Middle-earth ‘history’ in the Summerland ‘verse is from the older universe. However, the characters exist across the multiverse and so can experience those memories.

The music Maglor hears and hums is from when he played the Pirate King in Narya-Flames wonderful The Ways of Paradox.

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/14638137/chapters/33832815>

Paradox inspired me to write ‘Summerland’ as a gift for Narya.

~ Watching the Watchers ~ (Modern world)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

~ Watching the Watchers ~

~ St. Andrews, Scotland ~

~ It was easy for him to pass unobserved. Sometimes he used glamour: the young man becoming older, a workman in overalls, a smartly-dressed office worker, a student passing unobtrusively through the streets of the old town just one of many. At other times it was as simple as a baseball cap, curls tucked inside or, on wet days, the golfing umbrella that had hidden his face from Vanimöré in London. A frisson thrilled coldly through his nerves when he thought back to that risky intervention.

Nael could be as patient as the movement of mountains, but when the opportunity arose he would take it and take it fast. Let the dice fall as they would.

Eru. Vanimöré. An impasse of power. Betrayal that spanned aeons. Universes that orbited one another, each waiting for the other to blink.

It was perhaps just as well that Vanimöré's attention had been fixed upon Sauron that day. He might have forced himself to play the part of unbiased Overmind on the *Outside* but it had been a near thing. He had burned into a destroying storm, crowned and winged and glorious — then hammered himself into control.

As I knew thou wouldst.

But Vanimöré in the physical world was less powerful and for that very reason, likely to be less cautious.

Vanimöré. Thou canst not understand — or will not. He smiled to himself, the temper of which only Vanimöré would have understood.

The DDE's agents in St. Andrews were exceptionally good. Nael expected no less. Sent there long before David Balfour arrived, they blended into the town, eliciting no comment whatsoever, but while he could hide from them, no-one could hide from his sight. It was not they he was concerned with, anyhow. There were other things. This sea-fretted place of stone and ruin, of wind and water, was numinous. It had been, for men, a holy place, but one that (like all holy places) had known violence. Then the students came young, vital, bringing their own energies. And energies lingered. Most were harmless, remnants of life, echoes of emotion. Some were not.

The Pends, even on bright summer days, was a discomforting place. It affected Nael not at all, but he felt and he saw the bleed-through of memory, pain, the imprint of emotion upon the stone that replayed itself over and over. His warning to David had not been idle.

The so-called Nun's Walk, haunted by the ghost of a mutilated nun seemed, even on bright summer days, peculiarly dark. Nael had seen tourists or students turn down it laughing and chatting to become more and more uneasy and silent as they progressed. Between the walls, it felt oppressive, oddly silent with a watchful heaviness. Where the Pends bounded the graveyard a wind hissed over the stones, whispering secrets. It was not a place for anyone when the dark came down, especially no one with the kind of blood that acted like a beacon.

October tinted the land. The long northern afternoons of September slowly contracted, though the air clung to warmth long after it should have yielded to chill. A golden autumn like a benison, with only a few days of wind and rain and those driven on a mild wind.

The students made the most of the kind weather as did the tourists, though the latter began to thin out as the month moved toward November. Along Lade Braes the trees burned into brightness; leaves fell slow and idly and the air was soft with autumn's gentle melancholy. Though the sun set earlier each day, the dusks stretched, reluctant to yield to night. Sometimes the evening air was so still the sea seemed hardly to breathe.

Nael spent little time in his rented room on the outskirts of town. He had not lied to David Balfour when he presented himself as a sex-worker; he was like Vanimöré in the way that he would use himself without pity or mercy if the need arose, but prostitution was not his career. He had done it to give himself an opening, to elicit sympathy and had needed to seem authentic. Harlow was a cover story lest anyone look deeper. Nael would never underestimate Vanimöré or the DDE.

Recalling, Nael grimaced a little, more a reflex action of minor distaste rather than disgust. Harlow's appetite for young men was well-known but despite his fearsome reputation as a malicious gossip, sexually he was easy enough to please and seemed to enjoy looking more than participating. His salacious talk was just that...talk. At times he wanted to watch his 'boys' self-pleasure, which was harmless enough compared to what some of Blaise's clients had demanded. The memories squatted behind the very blue eyes like a diseased old toad.

Harlow had wanted to 'book' Nael again and take him on a two week trip to Paris. Nael had politely demurred, claiming a previous commitment. He could not afford to be too closely associated with anyone, more especially with someone known to the formidable Héloïse Gauthier, and David's intention had been clear even if he had not yet admitted it: He wanted to somehow help Nael, in whom he saw himself and his old life. Hence the impulsive gift of his phone number to one he considered trapped and vulnerable. If necessary, David would ask Héloïse or Vanimöré for help in tracing Nael and the DDE would quite likely be able to do so. Héloïse, in five minutes or less, would turn Jonathon Harlow inside out, gleaning every piece of information on the young

man he had hired. Nael preferred, at the moment, to remain elusive.

Like Vanimöré, like Sauron and Maglor and others who were not human but walked this world, Nael had access to wealth and maintained homes across the world. He was a shareholder in many companies and the dividends mounted up but he lacked Sauron and Vanimöré's interest in big business. His mind was that of a Power. Vanimöré, even after his apotheosis, was a warrior and commander first and foremost. He ran Apollyon Enterprises as a commander of armies. Sauron, with his acute intelligence, was always himself, whatever names he might take. He also had the same aims.

The house in St. Andrews was only one of the many places Nael had stayed in for a long or short time. His roommate was a plumber, always in demand, and though the two shared a kitchen and bathroom they might go for days without running into each other. The owner, who lived in Dundee and called in once a week, was satisfied that they kept the house clean and the garden neat, that there were no parties or damage to the property. Windsor Gardens was a typical outer suburb of families and workers with a few student and holiday lets but removed from the center of St. Andrews and the pulse of university life. The street backed onto fields and Nael could come and go easily without remark.

Often he would leave the house before dawn in one guise or another and walk into the town for breakfast. At times, sitting in a cafe or pub he might bring out the card David had impulsively given him in the Fairmont. The time might come that he would use it, but not yet. David was watched and the agents would certainly report who he met and where and Nael was here to observe the Watchers: The design engineer who worked from his home-office on City Road, opposite David's Howard Place flat and who liked a pint or two in the Central; the poet with a rose-dyed buzz cut and blue pashminas who rented a flat while working on their first book and haunted second hand bookshops. And others.

There was less surveillance now than a year ago when Thuringwethil haunted the shadows and followed Claire James and Rosie south to Devon. Thuringwethil had watched in St. Andrews but not dared to approach or waylay Maglor. Claire had seemed the easier target and, had she been captured, Maglor would certainly have accepted the ransom demand of himself and walked into Sauron's hands.

The plan had failed spectacularly though it was a close-run thing. Thuringwethil had lived for thousands of years, trailing shadow and agonising death in her wake. Claire had done far more than save herself when she killed Sauron's servant: she had rid the world of something malignant.

Thuringwethil's death flashed through the aether leaving tremors and forcing Sauron to rethink. The past had taught him that to invest in one thing alone was dangerous. He had, as they said, many irons in the fire.

His agents in St. Andrews were almost all human, not as professional as the so-called DDE but rather those left over when Sauron had pulled out his best people to trace Maglor, Claire and the rumours of other unhuman powers. Harrison, Rosie, Theo and Luc were watched but not as closely as in those heated days of summer and early autumn. None of that group were obtuse and now they were alert and aware. People and events that did not fit the well-known parameters of the town would be mistrusted.

David Balfour might have made the perfect infiltrator of that close quartet — or perhaps not. Nael thought they would have felt something deeply amiss were he an agent of Sauron. He was living under an assumed name but there was tragedy behind that, not a darker purpose. His bloodline was unknown to him and though the power was there for those with the eyes to see, it drowsed like a cat in the sun only blinking awake at whiles in warning or fear. Similarly Vanimöré as Sauron's

son and Slave had consciously sublimated his Ainu power. Yet power forces itself to the surface as a subterranean magma chamber shows its existence by venting steam and superhot geysers. Some people were born to do one thing, and Vanimöré's talent was war. Unlike the legend of the goddess Artemis he had not sprung to life fully armoured and warlike. He had simply focused his steel-hard will at what he wished to do and ensured he became good at it. But the stamp of godblood was evident.

That blood was also apparent in David. Unsurprisingly, considering his lineage, he was intelligent. He was also physically strong, though his abuse in childhood had wounded his soul; the slender, vulnerable 'pretty boy' of the London streets who had attracted the worst of predators had not been wholly a facade. At that time, it was a mirror of his mind. The horror of his memories, of the life he plunged into had buried the confidence his public school years instilled. He was a young man in a dangerous, alien environment and the battle to keep his head above water had been as much mental as physical.

His reclamation, or rediscovery of *self* had begun in Italy; in St. Andrews it blossomed.

But it was always the eyes that showed the blood of power most strongly. They were the reason that Vanimöré, Edenel and Coldagnir wore dark glasses or contact lenses. David's eyes, while less obviously unreal, yet held that not-quite-human light and were a not-quite-natural blue. People probably dismissed it as a trick of the light.

Blood will tell. Blood always tells, no matter how far in the past it may lie. And, deep in the unconscious, it recognises the 'other'.

Sauron would know David at once, but he had lost Blaise Worth in the dark half-life of London, that shadowy world that ran alongside and beneath the city. There were ghosts in those streets and alleys, in the mist that rose off the Thames. They were old and nameless and they served no power. They had hidden Blaise as they hid everything, both the good and the bad. Callaghan and Worth had also lost him. They were gone, their investigators floundering in the gap left by their deaths. That left only Sauron...and Callaghan's son.

Nael did not think any of Sauron's lesser agents would recognise Blaise Worth or even be aware that their master was searching for him. Sauron trusted few and even they did not know everything. As for James...he, like David, did not know what and who he truly was. David was safe, so far. The spotlight shone upon James Callaghan.

Walking the mellow streets of St. Andrews, sitting in a cafe or inn, Nael watched David take to university life as if it were oxygen to a man starved of air. As the nights drew in, the big bay window of the house on Howard Place glowed softly golden as he studied late. On weekends, a barbecue might be lit in the garden, the smoke wafting up over the wall with the sound of laughter and conversation. At other times he met his friends for meals or a drink in The Central or North Point after a walk to one of the beaches. The long and lovely autumn drew students down to the sands to light fires.

The watchers, those who noticed such things, or who knew David would see the countless small tells of caution. London had left deep scars on his psyche. But there was nothing that would bring the chance eye of suspicion upon him.

Like a bird spreading its wings for the first time and knowing the air as its home, he reclaimed something of his old life: the Rifle Club, helping with the props for *Guys and Dolls*, impromptu dips in the sea. They said one could never go back, but sometimes, quite easily, one could see how it might have been. The time was different, the age, even the experience but maybe it was all the richer for that.

At times, David drove his friends further afield. They were always followed. Sometimes Nael sent a mist down to confuse Sauron's people, or a signpost was turned, a road blocked but most often the journey went unhindered. If the agents were foiled too many times or met with fatal accidents Sauron would become suspicious. Nael had no more compunction in killing them than a man would brushing away a mosquito, but it was better not to draw attention...unless there were no other choice.

Once, David glimpsed Nael on Market Street. It was unexpected for both of them; Nael was following one of Sauron's people and was not ready to meet David openly, not quite yet, and not on a street when David was in company. It had been a brief enough glance that Nael's oh-so-casual turn into The Central might go unremarked. At least he could claim later that he simply didn't see David or had not wanted to bother him. A touch of diffidence would carry the lie: the sex-worker almost coming face-to-face with a wealthy university student he had met but once and thinking that David would ignore him. Inside the pub, he walked swiftly past the central bar and toward the kitchens and toilets. From there, he emerged into a side-alley that lead onto a narrow cobbled street.

Shrugging off his jacket, he drew a cap from the pocket and set it on his head then, turning the jacket inside out so that the pale lining showed instead of the dark outer fabric, he slung over one shoulder. He knew at least as much about surveillance and disguise as Vanimöré and the simplest things were often the most effective: changing the clothes, or the shape of the head and body deceived the eye. He would have cast glamour over himself but there were pedestrians passing; two young female students who glanced at him with interest. A change might be remembered.

College Street. Maglor had lived here, in that little cottage with the mossy steps and the little stone mouse at the base. Nael's steps slowed.

Dost thou not realise, Maglor Fëanorion, how the trace of thee lingers like the smoke of incense?

Fire in the blood, grief, the unlooked-for and always unexpected gleams of happiness like the run of light down harp strings. Silver eyes that could blaze into hot white fury. All of it cloaked and hidden — until it was not.

Thuringwethil had traced him there but even Sauron had, at that time, been wary of direct approach. With reason. Maglor was still the Fëanorion prince who had slain the Balrog Lungorthin in the Dagor Bragollach. If Sauron expected to find him reduced, a mist-haunting wreck, all fire extinguished, he would not, anyhow, have been interested. Time and fate would have been a cruel enough judgement on the last son of Fëanor. Probably he had not known *what* to expect, and the reality gave him pause.

So Sauron hesitated and Thuringwethil obeyed his orders, hovering on the shadowy margins. Had she been too bold, Maglor would surely have sensed her.

Nael paused beside the cottage. There was no following call from David Balfour, no pursuing footsteps. He looked up and down the street then quickly walked down onto North Street, feet silent on the cobbles. He cut down past St. Salvator's Chapel, glaring up at the bell tower, then came out on the Scores. A wind followed him, skittering dropped leaves. The weather was changing as Samhain opened the doors. The sea, grey-green as slate, broke in foaming rollers on West Sands.

Even the most earth-bound must feel a hint of the static electricity that charged the thin places of the land. The Portals emitted an edge-of-hearing whine that deepened as dusk fell. Clouds swam across the face of the moon and the cobbles shone in the streetlights with a faint, fine drizzle of rain.

No glamour was needed that night with students donning costumes. Halloween fell on a Friday this year; the town was busy with parties and the half-shivery excitement of ghost tours but this was, under the surface froth, a liminal time when things might watch from the shadows or prowl the dark corners.

Dressed in black clothes, Nael made his way from Windsor Gardens into town. He took the way through the Pends, not empty tonight with a group on a guided ghost tour but they kept in a close huddle. Some of them were clearly aware of the atmosphere that lay even more heavily on this night.

Nael was the only solitary person passing through. The presences that watched and the ones who simply lingered gave way, drawing back. He saw one of the group turn and look after him, as if wondering how he could walk so unconcerned.

At St. Salvator's Chapel, the bell tower was floodlit and, because of that, there were pockets of blackest shadow. He went up the wall like a cat, and cat-quick; had anyone glimpsed him they would have thought it a trick of the light. At the top, he moved into the dark. The wind, strengthening, flicked misty rain into his face. He smelled smoke, old, damp stone, the sea. The voice of the town floated up: Footsteps, laughter, the muffled beat of music, the occasional crackle and pop of fireworks from the beaches.

To Nael's eyes the thin places of the town — and there were many — cast up beams like searchlights. On the horizon, too, they glowed faint and faraway: tumuli, standing stones, wells. And through them and between them non-human traces and energies ebbed and flowed: memories, thoughts, dreams from other times...other worlds. But there were darker things too that had never been human; they stood in unlit angles of walls, behind the crumbling gravestones, in cellars and empty rooms.

Nael dropped his glamour. Silver hair flowed and triple wings snapped out in silent thunder, cupping the wind. An unfurling of himself brief as a heartbeat, there and gone but enough to show that a power had glanced across the city, and proclaimed *I am here*.

The six bells of the tower responded to the slam of power and suddenly clashed and pealed out. Lightning forked white across the clouds and backlit the hills. The lights of the town flickered and went out. Nael laughed half-surprised, half from sheer exhilaration. Entering into the physical world from the Timeless Halls never became easier and while he could access some of the power easily, it was never the whole and could not be. Vanimöré, in some ways, preferred the restriction. Eru did not.

In the darkness, he slipped down from the tower. By the time he reached the Scores, the power was back on. But, for hours after, lightning still arced across the sky.

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Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much to Narya_Flame for answering my questions about St. Andrews. Google is useful, but not the same as having lived in a place and knowing all the 'local' things.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!