### Seduction to Destruction

**Summary**

Before the awakening of the elves there was the rise of the Valaraukar. As the Valar attempt to keep and contain their Maiar from succumbing to Melkor’s might, they fail to realize that it only takes one to destroy their efforts from within. The fall of Almaren will be detailed with Mairon and his relationships with others as the central plot points. Eventual Angbang because that was why I started writing this thing in the first place.
The Resonance

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Screaming to an emptiness
How we dignified ourselves
With our hands over our eyes
Claiming all of creation
What inspires in us this madness
That our existence should be defined
By a light that can’t be seen by anyone

(from Carbon by VNV Nation)

A deep thrum that was more a feeling than a sound struck the fabric of the invisible world. It pooled at points across a vast scape of vibration and grew into a clamorous ring. The sensation the sound shook from its beholders was nearly unbearable. Its raw terror and wonder reflected an Arda so new mountains were still malleable by the barest whisper of breath. To witness its power was to stare into the heart of greed, only to find an infinite hall of mirrors. This turbulent cacophony was not something all could accept as the backdrop for beauty. Even when they could see that paradise is relative, the acceptance would take time. The realization would take longer. The devotion longer still. Time was most precious, but not so much as perfection’s will.

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For the first time since Mairon’s memories began, he felt cold. The chill seeped into his being so slowly he had not noticed until it deeply pained him. Ice grew impassively to cover his spirit, and he felt his very thoughts slow until they nearly dwindled into a single tone of hollow hoarfrost.

He was beyond infuriated. No power in Eä would ever halt the progression of his thoughts, his ideas, his creations! He lashed out with all the force of fire within him but as illusions are usually found, there was nothing to hit. The white void that surrounded him gave no purchase. He was but a naked flame in infinite space.

Mairon paused long in panic. How could he create? He was too alone. He knew the Music could not be composed without his multitude of siblings, but there was no other action he could think to take in this primal form.

So, in a voice that sounded pathetically small to him, he began to sing creation. An infinitesimal note rang out raw and jagged, and the next came out even more broken. That would not do.

He started again, this time feigning the confidence of a singular creator. Threads of notes that had been his part in the Great Music spilled forth in flawless succession. It was a melody of fire and hot metal and precise geometry that represented his entire purpose in the plan of Eru. It was him. Yet
nothing happened. He apathetically noted that he was correct, as usual. His music meant nothing without all the others. Mairon despaired, for that was all he knew. Crystals of a faraway icy symphony continued to drive deeper into him, solidifying him.

In a final pragmatic desperation, he did recall another. It retched itself out from the dark cavity of his mind he had left it to brood in. The marring he shared with all of Arda was the Discord of the Dark Lord. It carried the imperfections he knew he should loathe. For the sake of his position and pride, he refused to be associated with such scars and often pretended that he knew nothing of its chaotic nature. Curse his faultless memory! The sound came as clearly to his mind as it once had; amplifying with every moment he let it stay in his thoughts. Tendrils surfaced from him like a mold and pulsed to be let out in the open. The Discord’s beginning was not a note, but a beat.

**Thu-thump.** It emerged from him effortlessly confident. There was no room for error. **Thu-thump.** The impact of distant crashing in the cosmos. **Thu-thump.** The peal of thunder on mountains. **Thu-thump.** The sound of a battering ram hitting a gate. **Thu-thump.** The feeling of a furiously beating heart. At that powerful feeling, Discord broke from him like spores and endless notes sang with no pattern. The notes did not repeat and never would again until the end of time. In the chaos was everything that could ever be. It felt like true creation, and his spirit soared with joy.

The white space fractally bloomed into slabs of ice and stone that flattened out a horizon before him. Infinitely deep pools of water filled and a cold fog rose. The primordial landscape seemed ready to be filled with life. He would not stop. The water boiled away and the stone split. Ash tumbled out of the fissures and flames burst from oil slicks.

So this power is what it is to be a Vala! His laughter turned the stone molten and the flames rose ever higher. Never again would he be a spark without tinder in the chorus of creation!

In his elation he failed to notice a force he had not intended to invoke. A rushing wall of water, roaring deep and terrible made its way towards him from all corners of the world. He gave a cry, and it was answered only as it can be in dreams. Wings as black and beautiful as the night swept around him. A magnificent creature lifted him far into the air and let out a deafening call.

**Creator!**

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Mairon woke with a gasp strong enough to manifest in the material around him. The forge roared and the torches on the walls flashed before sputtering and going out. For a moment he was an elemental wonder to behold with his face aglow in a wreath of flame and his body pure light. But it was only a moment that soon returned to exhausted frustration. The flames around his face settled down into red locks of hair that he swept away from his eyes with a thickly gloved hand.

When he dared look over from his simple stool against the stone wall to the work he had abandoned for meditative dreams, a long sigh shook from him. The forge returned his sigh in a flare of flame. An uninspired piece of work was truly the most ruinous imperfection for a Maia of Aulë, and especially for one held in such high esteem as him. He sneered at the silver glinting on his workbench, and turned away to ignore it. As much as he hated to admit it, the tiresome brooch was the least of his concerns.

Dreams in rest were common among the Maiar, but visions of such destruction were a mark of something far more devious than weariness. Rumors that echoes of the Dark One’s “music” still lived in the recesses of Arda were said by those who mined deep below. He was sure he had properly shunned that monotonous drone during the creation, but the fact that he remembered it well
said otherwise. He ran his hand down his chest, as if to keep hidden blooms in check.

Standing to pace about the empty hall, he contemplated what to do. The dreams that came when he was most tired and frustrated were filled with the devastation of wanton power. In those dreams, the flames he tended not only melded metal into useful and beautiful shapes, but razed the very ground to bare ash. Which was certainly frowned upon. But they were just dreams, he reminded himself, and even more so, imagining such power soothed the irritation he felt in stressful times. Was it not better for him to be calm and at his best? So in that dark and private moment he allowed the idea to grow, promising himself that it was just an exercise of thought. At the very least it was an exercise of venting the force of nature he contained. The force of nature he was.

Mairon entertained the thought that perhaps he spent too much time alone at the forge hall after the others left for the rest scheduled by the Valar. Remembering the clamor and prying eyes of his siblings, he snorted. No. Despite committing a small infraction of the Valar’s will, he did his best work here alone with just the light of the forge fire and his own sorcery to guide matter to its final, perfect form.

The piece of silver he initially found so uninspired now had much potential. With a wave of his hand he sent a grinding disc spinning in the air and began to sharpen the brooch's originally gentle points into a form that no other being had yet seen. The form was wings of a beast never imagined, until that fateful fever dream.

Chapter End Notes

I’m glad to see you made it this far already! This is my first time publishing a fanfic anywhere online! *throws confetti* But do tell me if I royally fucked anything up (spelling errors, Tolkienverse stuff, inconsistencies etc.). Sorry for the weird dream sequences, but I always liked that sort of thing and so it is what I like to write.

The initial chapters will be focused on showing Mairon’s interactions with people other than Melkor, and his growing discontent with a system about to fail catastrophically (see next chapter for the start of that! >:D). For now Melkor will be a mysterious force in the literal shadows (albeit an important driving force). I intend to make it to the smashing of the lamps with an epilogue and I’m not yet sure how many chapters that will take. Most will be longer than this one. Eru help me. (((Holy crow, so many brackets why)))
To Reinforce

Chapter Summary

Valar talk of strange visions that may mean the resurfacing of the might of Melkor.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is unusual in that it doesn't feature Mairon's POV, but I thought this was important to set some things up... before they get knocked down. ;) Most chapters will not be like this though. I hope you enjoy anyways!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

And when I swing blind in rage
I'm in search of the first page
And when I sing from the stage
Who will get the last word?
You're the one who creates
All to which I retaliate
(from React by Thoushaltnot)

The ever-fervid Mairon was not the only one labouring late into the long rest. Up from Aulë’s underground halls and smoking chimneys, high in the tallest pale tower of Almaren’s citadel, were two Valar in intense council. So high the white tower was from the eternally day-lit courts of Almaren that the light of the lamps, Illuin and Ormal, simply appeared to be bright stars along the horizon. Here, the light came from the Valar themselves. Emitted from the arched glassless windows was the soft, rippling glow of the resplendent figures that were their chosen forms. Echoing up into the vaulted, otherwise dim cloister were their melodic voices.

“The oscillations of that ‘song’ still ring about within the collective heart of our Maiar,” a slender, cloaked figure said with a sharp glance out the tall window, as if to curse the general direction of its source. Only the stark gradient of the ancient sky could be seen beyond, but he knew stormy unrest was worming into Almaren like an itch.

A taller figure clad in pale robes like sleek clouds in the wind, evenly replied, “Melkor has fled before Tulkas and we are no longer troubled by his belligerence at our councils. By design his Discord will eventually damp out.”

Unusual insistence came into the other figure’s voice.
“But it will never completely depart. It will \textit{settle} into dark chords in all our work. There is no total purging of his influence, no matter the physical distance he takes.”

Wise words those were. No answer followed but the sudden whipping of wind in the shimmering blue banners surrounding the cloister.

“My king Manwë,” began the slight figure again, but softly. “Our servants, they suffer.”

The wind whistled to a peak before it stopped, so that the banners and the Valar’s iridescent robes gently returned to their resting position.

Deep and sorrowful was Manwë’s answer.

“Oh Irmo, I do know.”

A current of sadness passed between Manwë and the Vala in his council, not for the first time, but one of the first of many. The future history stretched out before them was vague in its events, but strife could be felt ahead as a sharp and building tone. Irmo stood still while the tall King of Arda paced and the light of their forms diffused in slow waves throughout. He waited in silent respect for Manwë to continue.

Manwë recognised that while there were a small number of Maiar who had come to Irmo bemoaning dark visions, there had to be many more who kept it to themselves out of shame for previously participating in even a small part of Melkor’s song. That, and there had to be some that still found pleasure and purpose in its twisted tune. It was this thought that concerned Manwë the most. He let the concern he felt spill into his visage and his words.

“What do you suggest we do to resist Melkor’s manipulations?”

Irmo straightened his posture and stated his solution.

“We must identify all those with chaos crystallizing within them. The ones that sang in the Dark Lord’s tune.”

Manwë shook his head and said, “That is a more involved venture that it sounds. Not all will come forward willingly. Melkor has imparted them with the ‘gift’ of fear. As unimaginable as it is to us, there are some Maiar that now fear us.”

Irmo had anticipated this. “I have felt this as both tiny needles and an impenetrable fog. In the end both are inconsequential. With proper assistance I can restore my ability to see their individual minds and clearly identify those who chose to align themselves with Melkor.”

Although he bristled at the suggestion any Maiar would willingly join Melkor, Manwë humored Irmo’s plea for help. “If this task were sanctioned, what assistance would you require from the Valar? Your own Maiar are certainly more attuned to help your search.”

A mist had manifested around the Vala of visions, casting him in such an eerie light that he began to resemble his grave brother. His voice was airy, but his message was grim.

“You see, my King, we cannot involve any Maiar in this task, even our most trusted. It must be secret or it will be compromised.”

Manwë felt a chill in his spirit, and all winds came to a halt, leaving deathly silence. As much as the idea disturbed him, he could not deny the logic. His intense blue eyes locked on Irmo’s as he said, “And you are willing to subject even your own servants to this undisclosed examination? To keep
such burning secrets?”

“Yes. For their own good. And the good of Arda,” Irmo answered with resolve.

Manwë prodded Irmo further, “And then how do you suggest we deal with them, once we know of their affliction?”

“Affliction?” Irmo questioned and blinked. He apparently hadn’t expected his King to hold that view. Manwë hardened his look and only nodded.

“That is not my dominion to oversee,” Irmo coldly answered with narrowed eyes from over his shoulder. With a wave of his translucent cloak, he swiftly slipped away into his silver cloud of mist.

After the last drop of Irmo evaporated, Manwë let out the energy he had been holding as breath, which incited a stiff breeze that snapped the banners against the white marble of the tower.

He looked down and let his kingly posture fall.

Manwë remembered his brother fleeing until he disappeared across the land they had both shaped in their own diverging ways. The last words his brother had said to him came unbidden to his mind.

“I must be that which I am."

With a grimace, he realized his brother’s words rang true for him as well. He must oppose all Melkor is. He must not allow the wounds wrought by the Dark Lord to open any wider. At the very least, he thought with an aggrieved look out upon the realm, he must minimize the inevitable scarring.

“You do know that when you brood like that, you look so much like him?”

Manwë’s head shot up to look upon his wife standing in an arched window. Varda’s skin and dress blended perfectly with the dark part of the sky, but the smile he brought to her face shone like a crescent of a thousand diamonds. She must have felt the pulse of his distress and came to his aid.

Indeed, for a moment his melancholic mood was dispelled.

“Hmph, truly?” he questioned with a lilt of humor in his voice. “I prefer to think he looks like me when he broods.”

She softly laughed and floated down towards him on a swirling cloud of stars. “If only he had any of your traits! Your rebellious brother is likely out there as we speak, brooding upon us.”

“Oh, I do not doubt it, my love. I can imagine he is stooped over a small pile of rocks, attempting to convince them he is right. Arguing is something he can do even when he is…alone.” The smile slipped away from his face once again.

“You don’t think he would have stayed away from us if he did not want to be alone?” Varda asked with her head tilted. “He always tended towards isolated wandering.”

“Ah, then it must be I who misses him,” admitted Manwë, now sardonically grinning at himself.

Varda drifted even closer to him, her eyes offering comfort but her words austere.

“Do not worry so much for him. If we are not careful, he will not be alone for long.” She slipped her hands into his. “I know you will help me take care of our Maiar’s future. For the Children’s future.”

“Yes, that is my purpose.” Taking Varda into his arms he intoned, “All I can do is good,” like a firm chant he had said over and over. It was his song.
Even with his face in beautiful Varda’s black and voluminous hair, soaking in her light and pleasant hum, he thought of what must be done for his kingdom.

Should they expel the afflicted Maiar or attempt to restore them to their vision? If healing or even just shielding them from Melkor’s influence was not possible, the damage of wasted time could be greater. He was of the mind that his charges were being unwillingly seduced and that the Valar should help them shake the Discord, but he knew other Valar would disagree. Some felt such animosity towards Melkor that they would reject any stricken Maiar from their service once they were identified. They saw Melkor’s song not as a sickness, but as a choice. Not even he knew what was true, but he had to ensure others that he did, lest they lose their united front.

Varda moved her hands to caress the back of his head, as if to calm his rushing thoughts. In this close embrace she had to endure the burden of his worries as much as he did hers. Within her mind he saw the bravery she put on in the face of uncertainty, but behind the courage he also saw fear. Fear that manifested as a strobing image of Melkor’s laughing face becoming madder and closer with each throb of an erratic beat. He tensed his arms and closed the last gap between them. Wordlessly he reassured her that he had decided upon his action.

It was time to concentrate the Valar’s power into finding the Maiar who partook in Melkor’s song.

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Deep, deep into dark delved realms, one lonely Vala was left awake, for he did not rest but for brooding contemplations of his many plans. Melkor, the Dark One who had fled, long ago came to the same conclusion as his bright and shining brother. The other Valar would never completely understand the workings of his music, and even if they could, it was far, far too late to purge his influence. The Discord he had orchestrated was not a sickness, or a choice, or a scar on the surface of creation, but an element of Arda itself that could never be untangled from their foundations, so finely it was woven through. They had not yet realized it, but their predictable rejection of even an innocent fraction of his Discord was about to make him a mightier force than any seen before in Arda, and any that would come after. Thousands upon thousands of scorned Maiar would leave their isolated and bitter lives and form an army of rage. The anticipation of their worship set a smile into his shadowed face that caused the stone around him to groan in strain. The very foundation of Arda quaked at his dark satisfaction.

Chapter End Notes

Hope I got the lamp things right - it's such a different set-up for an environment but that makes it more fun sometimes. Sometimes.

Anyways... brothers, eh? I have two younger brother with opposing personalities but at least when they fight mountains don't crumble. Dammit Melkor. Stop yelling at them rocks.
The Cadence

Chapter Summary

Mairon tries to work while tremors rock Almaren. He talks with Aulë who offers him a mysterious task.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Never before, at the beauty of spring;
Have I noticed the scent, of so many things
Of lilies and daisies, and red pimpernel;
And the fluttering scent, of the fires from Hell

(from Never Before At The Beauty of Spring by Ordo Rosarius Equilibrio)

A rumble ran through the underground halls of Aulë’s forging area. The anvil in front of Mairon appeared to lurch and he dropped the link of chain he was trying to shape. Cursing to himself, he bent over to pick it up. The din of work from the many Maiar now filling the hall was lessened under the anvil, so he stayed there a moment to catch his wits.

Alone in the dark quiet he had worked with a feverish flourish, taking up nearly all the space with his elaborate set-ups and dynamic patterns of magic and song reaching high to the ceiling. Now that he was surrounded by other happily working Maiar, he had withdrawn.

Since his last work period he’d given his mind no rest and was beginning to feel the exhaustion loosen his senses. With the mental fatigue came a paranoid feeling that everyone in the hall knew of his destructive dreams. He knew it was not possible, so long as he held the memory deep inside him, but the mere idea sent spikes of shame through his mind.

His master Aulë was walking through the hall, expecting a report from crafters and each division of labour. Aulë was not difficult to spot in the busy hall as he towered over even the tallest Maia in his service and the deep red glow that was a solid halo around his strong body often outshone even their largest smelting furnace. Yet few were intimidated by him. His friendly stance and comforting boom of a voice belied the power he held.

Despite Aulë’s gregarious nature, there were occasions when his temper flared unexpectedly. Mairon’s panic increased when he remembered the silver brooch he had modified to suit his own whims. It was meant for Yavanna’s Maiar, and now it no longer even remotely resembled any of her creations. He cursed himself. Why had he done that?

Another tremor rocked the hall.

“Whoa! Somebody in here needs to slow down.” Aulë shouted, receiving chuckles from the Maiar
around him. Then quieter, “I’m serious. Where are these tremors coming from?” The carved beads in the thick brown braids of his hair and beard clinked as he looked over the hall, finding Mairon’s usual space. “Mairon? Have you been experimenting with volatile ores again? Hitting the anvil too hard?”

Mairon rose elegantly, clutching the chain link, and answered, “I have far more grace and beauty than that, Master.” Another strong shock hit the hall that caused him to lose his footing and he gave an angry shout as he tumbled over a pile of slag.

Aulë’s up-roaring laugh boomed through the whole forge area. He jogged over to help Mairon and the countless tools in his belt and pockets of his apron jangled in response. Aulë extended his massive, glowing-red hand, but Mairon had already managed to stand up. And somewhat get his temper in check.

Aulë let his chuckles subside and said, “You’re all grace and beauty today Mairon, I’m sure! Somewhere under all the charming grit and grim of course…” He reached out and wiped Mairon’s face with an even grimier glove. “Oh dear!” Aulë exclaimed in loud humorous tones and crossed his arms on his chest. “I’m sorry to say under all that, there was just a grumpy little Maia.”

The other Maiar nearby laughed and looked up to Aulë and Mairon in adoration. They greatly admired the rapport between the Vala and the Maia but Mairon just huffed in irritation, and wiped his face off himself. Nothing seemed to spoil Aulë’s mood, especially when he had an audience for his antics.

However, when his siblings returned their eyes to their work, he noticed a look of worry cross the immense Vala’s ruddy face. Aulë scanned the ceiling and even though he found no damage, he still looked troubled. His normally steady aura flickered at the edges. Something had to be wrong for the normally self-assured Vala to express such unease. Mairon felt a morbid curiosity. What did his master know that he didn’t?

Mairon walked languidly over to his own workbench, now careful to avoid the slag and scraps left behind the others, hoping to catch Aulë for a more private chat. As sure as a stone, Aulë followed in behind him, but he seemed to be moving on queue and was distracted by trying to find the direction of the low rumbles.

Not bothering with any decorum, Mairon spoke up.

“Master, do you know when these bothersome tremors will end?”

Aulë snapped out of his disquiet. “Oh! Mairon. No. Unfortunately not.”

Curious. “Oh? I had assumed they were from your workings elsewhere.”

“Ah… no.” responded Aulë, drawing out the ‘no’ like he wanted to dispel the very idea from his body.

“So then what is the source of…?”

Aulë held out his palm to stop him. “I can’t say anymore on the subject, Mairon.”


Sensing Aulë was eager to have the subject changed, he decided to take advantage of his distracted state. Mairon grabbed the silver brooch from under a scrap of leather on his otherwise tidy workbench. If he were to be chastised, it would at least be at a time of his own choosing.
“While you are here, would you like to see my latest completed piece?” Mairon asked.

Aulë was indeed relieved to have the subject changed. “Of course! For Yavanna’s commission I assume?” he said.

Mairon tensed to be reminded of that fact but held his composure and revealed the brooch. It now bore the design of featherless wings polished to incredible shine. The impossibly delicate filigree that was Mairon’s signature wound around it on all sides. Aulë picked it up at its pointed edges with surprising dexterity for his stout hands but said nothing immediately.

Mairon’s taut emotions were palpable enough to dim the nearby forge fires in anticipation. Even the tremors seemed to have quieted.

Finally Aulë said, “The workmanship is exquisite, as usual, and I must say I do find the design enchanting.” But then a frown showed under his thick beard. “However, Mairon I’m not sure who would make use of this. Yavanna specifically wanted designs to resemble her green-creations for her handmaidens…”

Seeing Mairon beginning to look away, he stopped and put his hand on Mairon’s shoulder.

“But we both know how she is, right? Always demanding things her way. Say, how about I keep this for myself? Maybe I’ll even wear it, if I ever get an invite to go to one of those feasts.”

Mairon snorted, but smiled none-the-less at Aulë’s attempt to appease him. “Would you even go if you were invited?”

“Why of course. I’ve always wanted to hear Námo’s rendition of the ‘Bath-Song’,” Aulë said with a wink.

They raised their eye-brows and shared a knowing look. The look could not be held for long. They both laughed. Somewhere far away from the forges, Námo sneezed.

Feeling foolish about his previous fear, Mairon smiled in smug relief. He knew Aulë was just as stubborn as he was, but for those in the Vala’s favour, that stubbornness turned into loyalty. Mairon felt he worked harder than any other Maia here and he was confident Aulë would justify his more unusual designs to the others as eccentric genius, as long as he carefully hid the less acceptable parts of his creative process.

He hoped that would not become more difficult.

Another damned tremor rocked the hall, to the protest of the working Maia. Aulë steadied Mairon and once the shock subsided he wrapped his arm further around Mairon’s shoulder to shield them from the others.

He said in a hushed tone, “Mairon, in this troubling time I have to ask something of you.”

Hmm, perhaps he would get somewhere with this mystery after all.

Aulë continued, “You are vital here, and I have something important that needs to be done. It will take up your time, but you may be better for the job than even me.”

Mairon kept his polite posture, but he shone visibly brighter with the praise. He responded with a slight bow of his head, hiding the smile that erupted on it.

“Yes Master, what is it you need done?”
Aulë beamed. “I think it’s best if he explains himself. I’ll send him over when he’s ready. Perhaps during the next work period?”

Him?

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Pondering those words Mairon walked out of the long tunnel from Aulë’s hall. He normally did not work closely with the other Maiar, save for those who mined the material he needed, or the brave few who dared to bother him while he was crafting. More so, recently his temper had been running hotter than usual, causing his irritation to froth at the slightest of inconveniences and driving him to the edges of the work space. It perturbed him, but he couldn’t let others, especially Aulë, know he was one missed hammer strike away from cracking his anvil in half. He would never allow himself to refuse such a privileged challenge as the one Aulë had offered him.

He stepped out from the geometric overhang above the stairs into the brisk air of Almaren. A fresh breeze greeted him, and he untied his hair to let it shake the dust from his long locks. After a few deep breaths, he noticed something was different. Normally the light of the lamps was blinding after being underground, so for just a second he revelled in the artificial dusk. The relief from his emotional labour was even greater than the dark offered by the abnormal, sooty twilight. Looking up to the many-coloured sky, he spied a glint of silver and blue dart from the Valar’s tower and off into the distance. It was unmistakably Eönwë. He smiled to see his friend working so hard, even after the labour period was over. He’d certainly have to bother him about it later.

However, when he looked to the North he had to stifle a gasp. He was a fool to have missed it! To revel in it! An immense storm cloud had formed of blackness billowing from beyond the horizon. Flashes of stark white light came from within its hulking mass and moments later a rumble could be felt that roared to a crash of thunder. It rang deep into his toiling mind. What it stirred in him he could not quiet. It cried, *long live the original riot.*

Chapter End Notes

Mairon appears to be in denial about his own stress levels. Relatable. Meanwhile Melkor is trying to communicate to Mairon through Morse-code earthquakes G-E-T O-U-T B-E-F-O-R-E Y-O-U L-O-S-E Y-O-U-R M-I-N-D (I kid, he’s way more direct than that).

The 'Bath Song" is apparently one of Bilbo's favourites, so I'm not sure how the Valar know it, but I found the idea amusing anyways, so there it is.

I'll be at a conference all next week so I won't be able to post a chapter at the same time. But I do have more planned out for the weeks after! (Sorry for the kind of cliff hanger?)
To Convince

Chapter Summary

A cloud of smoke appears on the horizon of Almaren. Manwê addresses the Valar. Mairon meets his new charge.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Now there's a cloud over heaven
And a pain out of paradise
In your corner of the world
Turn your back on the children
Does it feel like it's colder?
(from Lock up the Wolves by Dio)

The heady, caustic smell of smoke had reached Mairon. From the view at the great square at the convergence of the Valar's individual reserves, the churning and unnatural storm matched the height of Almaren’s central tower. Transfixed by the oddity, Maiar had gathered in growing numbers to discuss what was happening or to simply stare, awestruck.

Mairon already had his fill of gazing at the obnoxious cloud and was instead leaning against a column at the square’s edge, glaring at the lit windows of the white tower. He knew that inside the court of the Valar had assembled, and that high-ranked Maiar were in attendance as well. There was no doubt Eônwê was in there directly beside King Manwê, so great was his dedication to his master. Otherwise Eônwê would certainly be beside him, joking about the agape faces of the other Maiar. But Mairon stayed his loneliness. What he was most curious about was what messages his friend would later relay. Still he would have given up his solid mithril hammer if it meant being in that room right now. Alas, stubborn Aulê felt he did not require attendants and often went about official business alone.

With one last contemplative look upon the burgeoning monstrosity, he turned his back upon the scene and returned to his forge.

If Mairon had been among the grand beauty of the court of Almaren, he might have smiled at the irony of the thin veneer of calm its occupants held over their alarm. Carefully neutral faces filed into the circular court with unusual hush and lack of ceremony. Fountains trickled from tall marble columns decorated with jewels and tended foliage bloomed sweet scents, but no one was able to appreciate the beauty while the great looming storm to the North rumbled. Although there was silence to the ears, a whirr of nebulous vibrations could be felt within the spirit.

“How could we let this happen?” A spike of grey.
“We should have acted sooner.” A swirl of pearl.

“It was inevitable.” A stamp of charcoal.

“What actually is it?” A curious red jet.

“The Dark Lord can’t possibly be doing that on his own. It’s an illusion!” A shock of sharp petals.

“King Manwë, this is a mockery of your dominion over the air!” A russet stampede.

Each Vala could feel the intent of the others well enough to allow them to take turns speaking, but they still had not found their coherence as a group. In a gust of wind across the landscape of thought, Manwë raised his voice.

“Quiet! Order! Lest we begin to imitate what we oppose!”

That got the attention of the Valar like a whip. The full spectrum of their splendor turned to face him upon his raised stage. The vaulted ceiling of the court could barely contain their light. From the grim Námo to the colourful Yavanna and their matching attendants, he had the attention of all. He stood from his throne and with an assuring look from dazzling Varda, he began his speech.

“Valar! It appears that while we rested in idle peace, our shadow was working in his dark ways. This cloud is nothing but grand-standing and is meant to shake us into a confused frenzy. Melkor cannot match our might while he is alone. Our multitude is our strength, so long as we are united in plan and thought. What we must focus on is our own!”

The Valar hummed in agreement and the Maiar in their attendance seemed pleased as well. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught the brilliant blue eyes of his own herald Eönwë looking upon him with unabashed adoration.

“My fellow Valar, the cloud should be considered a specter of no curiosity, but I understand your feelings of unease. Please tell me your concerns and will accept their weight with you.”

A slight pause arose as the Valar soundlessly sorted who would speak first. They decided upon a voice who was allowed to speak what was on their minds.

“Maiar have gathered to watch the storm grow from afar. They are curious,” Nienna said while wistfully looking out the window through her glittering grey veil.

Concerned murmurs buzzed through the court.

“That is disconcerting.” said Yavanna.

“I greatly doubt all of them are just curious…” said Oromë.

Behind his back, Manwë wrung his hands. No action was done without discomfort from a truly invested king.

“Thank you for your words. Before we go any further I must ask that we Valar take a secret council.”

A few Valar appeared confused by this request, but others, such as Irmo and his brother had arrived with no assistants in tow.

“All Maiar shall exit and instruct their brethren to return to their assigned tasks.”
Some swiftly others reluctantly, the Valar dismissed their servants. Maiar left down the long spiral staircases, out the windows on wings, or vanished in coloured clouds. More than half the room was emptied, leaving only the luminous monoliths that were the Valar. They stared expectantly at their King, and their emotions were focused into such a high pitch that any other beings besides Ainur would have been driven out of the tower screaming.

Manwë opened his mind to speak again, but was stopped by a twinkle of movement. The flash of emotion he felt could have been embarrassment, if his statuesque face had lent any movement to express it. He had realized the light had come from a reflection on Eönwë’s platinum armor, and the Maia was still at his side, waiting just as expectantly as the Valar before him.

Although it was true that as his herald Eönwë was afforded access to councils no other Maia had, this was one time his presence could not be tolerated. Manwë’s statement was as solid as the wall of a hurricane.

“Eönwë. Leave.”

He had not meant to be harsh, but at the brusque dismissal, Eönwë couldn’t stop the shock from showing on his youthful face. His white hair spun in un-felt winds. But true to his master and without protest he quickly turned on his heel, spread his wings, and leapt out the closest window.

It was one of the changes to come.

Manwë again faced the Valar. The hurricane blew on.

“Prepare. We shall labour long. As it always is, when we are done, Arda will not be the same.”

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For a while, Mairon was perfectly alone in the forge. The novelty of having the hall to himself during the normal work period almost took the edge off the ache in his head. It was not a physical pain but a pressure upon his spirit that never-the-less caused him grief. More detailed work was difficult, even though the tremors had stopped. He found the feeling could only be dispelled by the momentary shock of a hammer strike reverberating through his body, so he was beating repeatedly upon a twisted piece of iron without much other purpose. He was very much tempted to just shove his head in the forge fire and take a nap, but the thought of being found in such a ridiculous position stopped him.

His instinct was correct. A few moments after those thoughts, he heard a clink of unsure steps from behind him. A young masculine voice called softly, but it echoed throughout the otherwise empty hall more than its source had anticipated.

“Hello~?”

As innocuous a non-question it was, Mairon bit his lower lip as his features contorted into an image of ire. He painstakingly un-gripped his hammer and ran his hands down his face to smooth the showing anger.

“Yes~?” he answered through his fingers in the same sing-song tone as he moved to face his disturber.

Evidently his efforts to hide his irritation were not fast enough, for the smaller Maia in front of him took a hesitant step back and rapidly spoke.

“I’m sorry good Maia but Master Aulë was supposed to introduce me but he’s not here and we were
told to continue with our planned tasks and he did tell me to find you.”

A good hand-length shorter the Maia was with earth-dark hair and eyes. His apron was dirtier than Mairon would have tolerated.

So he was to look after this Maia? To what purpose? Aulë did not trust him with the secrets of the tower? The disappointment rolled through Mairon but he quickly tried to cover it with flat, formal words.

“Yes. I had been told of your coming. What is your name and what do you require from me?”

The Maia needlessly brushed his hands off on his apron.

“I am called Curumo. I have been newly assigned to Aulë and I wish to become a master smith,” he said, and then added, “Like yourself.”

Curumo’s statement somehow managed to both flatter and worry Mairon. Of course the Maia would want to be like him. It just wasn’t possible.

“Like me you say…” Mairon murmured almost to himself.

Curumo tilted his head, causing some of his auburn hair to stray from its weak hold, and said, “You are The Admirable, correct?”

“Yes, yes, I am Mairon,” said Mairon, waving his hand dismissively and still trying to discern why Aulë had done this to him. The light of the fires in the hall lowered, as if consumed by the energy of Mairon’s thoughts.

“Should I come back at a more convenient time?” asked Curumo, shifting the tone of his polite question into an ever-so-vague challenge. Mairon answered it.

“No.” The fires snapped back to their normal ambience. “There’s no point in starting your work later. Come here.”

Curumo came forward, again hesitant. Mairon searched his mind for an idea of what the Maia should do for him. But there was nothing he would trust the “newly assigned” Maia to do. It was time for some improvising. Not his best skill. Damn it Aulë why couldn’t you just tell me my task before hand so I could prepare?

It felt strange to berate his master, even in the space of his own thoughts, like blocks that didn’t exactly fit together, but that was something he would have to deal with after this. He fished through his back pocket for basic implements and took one out as if he had been planning it all along.

“Can you make this?” he asked, holding up a single chain link starter. It was simple piece of metal to be later shaped together with its like.

“Yes.” Curumo quickly answered, eager to impress.

“I hope you aren’t lying to me, little apprentice.”

“No!”

“Good. Make me 124 of them.”

Curumo put on a determined face and nodded. When he raised his hand to take the link from Mairon,
it was pulled out of his reach.

“No. From memory,” Mairon emphasized, letting his voice drop into its lowest register. “And make sure they are all identical.”

Mairon smiled to portray what he hoped was a friendly challenge, but from the way Curumo swallowed hard, he may have let a little too much fire into the light of his eyes.

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From the arrhythmic hammering of Curumo, Mairon could already tell he would have some correcting to do. For now, he was trying to embellish the iron he had been beating on into something acceptable. It just seemed to be gaining more twists and hazardous peaks on its surface. Interestingly, it was also gaining incredible strength. He would certainly have to explore that further.

When he left to get more iron, he nearly bumped into Curumo, who had been waiting around the corner for the right moment to interrupt his teacher and tell him he was finished. That was much too fast, even if Mairon himself had been on the task. Curumo’s apron was covered in even more dust, but his posture was triumphant. Mairon was unimpressed as ever. No matter what he tried, Curumo could not stop his presence from being jarring, as Mairon was not used to being shadowed by any being.

Before Curumo could even say anything, Mairon said, “I want you to go through the links and pick out the unsatisfactory ones. Then I will look at them.”

Doing his best not to deflate, Curumo went stiffly back to the common workspace. Curumo felt thankful that the hall was still empty besides them. He wished he had the tremors to blame for his mistakes, but they had subsided with the appearance of the cloud.

To Curumo’s horror, Mairon watched him with hawk eyes as he half-heartedly sorted his line of link starters into two piles. In a short amount of time, Mairon was unable to just watch. From Curumo’s perspective, Mairon appeared to float closer and closer until his amber eyes blazed over his shoulder like a wayward star. Curumo did not even need to see him to feel it.

Mairon had forget that personal space was usually appreciated while working, which any other Maia from Aulë’s hall would have considered absurd, since the amount Mairon demanded was significant. The irony did not occur to him.

“Your sorting of the unsatisfactory links is unsatisfactory,” he said.

That broke Curumo’s stiff facade. He tittered like a child in a silent assembly. When Mairon made no indication this was a joke, Curumo’s face slowly dropped as if was staring into the endless void. Mairon gave no notice and continued his relentless onslaught.

“Fine. I will sort them. And then you will tell me why I sorted them the way I did.”

He glided to Curumo’s side, effortlessly pushed him aside, and quickly began sorting the links into neat piles. Curumo continued to hover beside him, his eyes roving over Mairon’s sharp hand motions. By the end, Mairon had sorted the links into several piles based on the causes of their flaws. There were few left over that were good. When he was finished he looked at Curumo expectantly, hands on his hips.

“Well. What do you see?”

Curumo blanked. He said nothing but stared at a spot on the other side of the hall. It was more likely
he was actually staring at nothing. Mairon felt a stab of impatience and snapped his fingers to produce a loud spark in front of Curumo’s face.

“Do you see nothing?!” he shouted.

Curumo returned to his body in a fluster. He hadn’t even heard Mairon’s questions, but he did have some of his own. He grabbed one of the link pieces and flapped it in front of his own face.

“What even is this?!”

Mairon stopped his next rebuttal.

“Wha-- I-- how--” he uttered uselessly. It was unusual for him to attempt to speak when he had no words. He finally found some sentences that made sense to him, and said each with a slap of his fist on his hand. “It’s a chain link. That shouldn’t matter. It’s a shape. You shape it.”

“But you never even showed me how to properly make one!” Curumo yelled, attempting to match Mairon’s volume and tone.

It was Mairon’s turn to stare blankly into the distance. Several fires in the hall went out in audible puff of smoke.

“Don’t you know?” Mairon eventually asked, more gentle.

“I have been shown how to make other…”

“No, don’t you innately know?”

Curumo shook his head. “I don’t understand.”

Mairon clutched his chest and touched his fingers to his forehead as if trying to access parts of himself that couldn’t be touched. “I was born knowing how to form patterns. They coalesce in my mind’s eye and my physical body responds in tune. When you craft, what do you see?”

“Nothing. Just what I see in front of me.”

They both stood beholding the other in awe. Though, the reasons and emotions behind their awe were incredibly different. A rush of feeling passed between them as a frayed ribbon.

Already knowing the answer to his question, Mairon asked, “Would you like to continue your work at this moment?”

“I don’t think I can,” Curumo answered. “I am quite tired.”

Mairon sighed and leaned with both his hands on the workbench, but he eventually nodded. He recognized a part of his own exhaustion in Curumo.

“Yes, go. Rest your body or whatever it is you use to craft.”

Curumo’s face was blank relief as he bowed his head again, and then ran off, wiping the sweat from his face. Mairon never let himself sweat. He watched him go while wearing an unreadable expression, his own hair in a fiery halo of disarray from the force of his previous emotions.

He had always thought he saw well into the minds of others and understood how they functioned. Perhaps it was time he learned the inner workings of things other than metal and gems. Perhaps this wasn’t a waste at all.
When Mairon walked back to his area of rest and respite, he passed through the deeper tunnels used for mining. The piece of twisted iron he had used to vent his frustrations needed to be buried, so he cast it into a dark pit. It clattered away and Mairon felt a twinge of sadness. It was actually a fine weapon, but the Valar would never accept such a cruel-looking mace. Before he was tempted to go get it, he left.

Then something else caught his attention. He was drawn by some noise. Upon reaching the pit where gold ore was drawn out, he realized why the hall was so empty. Aulë’s other workers had decided to play while their Master was away. Masses of Maiar with hair various shades of red were using mine-carts and pulleys in ways he was sure they weren’t meant to. They looked like flames dancing amongst gleaming golden veins beneath the ground. He heard a surprising amount of laughter singing up from the pit. One of the miners had lassoed the supports and was now swinging above the dark chasm and being cheered on by the others. Mid-swing, he looked up at Mairon and invited him down with a wave of his free hand, but Mairon just shook his head, and then left. He thought to himself that it was strange how some responded to a crisis. All the while he thought of his own warped creation of iron that spoke of all his vices.

Chapter End Notes

Aaaaand I’m back! Slowly some important things are forming. I promise they are important. Melkor has not shown his face yet, but he is good at waiting for the right time. Or he’s just having too much fun making obscene smoke signals directed at Manwë.

Damn, Mairon, you really give meaning to “trial by fire”. I don’t think he completely understands what teaching is yet. Curumo may be ambitious beyond his current means, but somebody should still give him a hug. And while you’re at it draw a lava bath for Mairon.

If you are curious, the Valar speaking in the first part in order are Nienna, Irmo, Námo, Aulë, Yavanna, and Oromë.
The Innocence

Chapter Summary

Mairon struggles with figuring out a way to teach Curumo and receives a surprise visit from his friend that just might fix his problem. All the while a certain force is getting closer and closer to being revealed to Mairon...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Would you believe me if I told the reasons why,

You can't rest and drink yourself to sleep at night?

Not like it matters you can't escape don't even try,

We'll speak what no one knows.

(from The Ones by Aesthetic Perfection)

The air was as still as the stone surrounding it. Not even dust danced in the clean, hexagonal room, as it had been swept away by the one who occupied it. The only light came from an open window. Neither lamp could be seen directly in the shade of the mountain side, but the influence of Illuin was strongest here. The effect was an ambiance of rest and respite, but Maiar did not sleep as the Children later would. Instead they meditated on their music, not interacting with the material world, as Mairon was doing just then.

As if attempting to be one with the walls, he sat cross-legged on a raised block of stone, his own light externally dimmed. Over time, he had carved symbols and scenes on the stone’s base that appeared to him during his restless rests. Concentric rings, soaring columns and flaming cones there were, but his mind was no longer occupied with the grandeur of immense structures or enchanted objects. Mairon found himself delving into the concept of teaching.

The task completely baffled him, but he refused to complain to Aulë that this was not within his abilities. He very much wished he could just imbue Curumo with power like he did with his crafts, but the more he thought about how to do that, the more it seemed beyond him.

He contemplated sneaking down into the forge halls yet again, but something still pulsed at the edge of his mind. It would be advantageous to use the Valar’s absence to exercise his creative freedom, but he wasn’t even sure what he would make if he went down there. The possibilities were endless in his mind, but nothing could motivate him to move from the room. Physically he was as tireless as ever, but his spirit was suffering.

He fell more into himself. Inside, his light was turned. It churned within, refracting with each new thought.

The ribbon of feeling that had passed between him and Curumo sang of misunderstanding, ambition,
and fear. It was impossible to untangle which of them those feelings belonged to. But Mairon in his
desire to get through to Curumo had nearly let him see his own fear of failure, so Mairon meditated
on burying it deeper. If he could be rid of this, perhaps he could reach into Curumo’s spirit without
any more worry.

He slipped away from his body in a nauseous blur and found himself in darkness that slowly became
a vast cavern. His spiritual form was amorphous and heavily cloaked in multiple layers of an
unknown fabric. A weight was upon him and he felt an incessant urge to shake it off, so he began to
slide along the smooth floor. The shush of his hooded robes echoed like a hiss throughout the
obsidian chamber. Clumsy stubs of mass that were now his arms held multiple stones carved with
scenes of his own fears; Aulë berating him with his words whips of fire, Yavanna burying him alive
and hoping he’ll grow better this time, Eönwë fleeing from him, yelling in disgust.

His urgency to dispose of those thoughts became stronger as they attempted to draw his spirit down
into their nightmarish scenes. He hauled himself to the wall to fumble about for a crevice to hide the
stones in forever but could find no such break. In awe and horror he realized the cavern had been
blasted using immense heat. The walls rippled and glistened like cancerous glass. Not even the far-
seeing and imaginative Mairon could envision what had made this.

As if his dreams sensed his own curiosity, he felt a now familiar rumble and lurch shake the cavern.
He stumbled so he could peer to the end of the chamber and beyond he saw straight down a tunnel.
Hoping to see a newly formed crevasse, he only saw an expanding darkness that burst into
scintillating outlines of nebulous shapes. What he comprehended as the pulse of the core of Arda
*Thu-thump.* A head.

The face he saw amid unkempt black hair confused him. *King Manwë*?

Its answer came as a rush of force down the tunnel. When it hit him he was nearly lifted into the air.
Yet it was not a wind Manwë could manifest. This was energy. This was force. This was radiation.
To Mairon it was like he was taking a constant inward breath. When he looked to his stones of
secrets, he saw that they were disintegrating into dust and being whipped away by the will of the
force. His own disguise was lifted and he once again glowed with firelight and moved with graceful
might. Freedom to be. Was it really possible for him to feel this way again?

But when he looked up again, it all left him. In a blink, the scene had vanished abruptly and he was
awake. He blinked again and was looking upon the walls of his room, unchanged and empty.

Frustrated, he broke his serene appearance, lowered his face into his hands, and dug his nails into his
sculp, massaging viciously.

Who had dared interrupt his meditation with fanciful visions of power again? Manwë? No. That
smile he gleaned just before being ejected from his own damn dream space did not belong to the
King of the Valar. It belonged to his *brother.*

Releasing himself from his own grasp, Mairon paced in the room until he found himself by the open
window, and let himself be cast in the muted blue light. He stared deep into the horizon, hoping to
find some solace from the revelation. Instead he saw an obnoxiously bright light flickering in the
distance. After the sight of the storm, he was hardly impressed by this aberration.

As he watched, the light began to take shape. *A bird?* It continued on a direct course towards his
window, and came into perspective. *A damned big bird.* There was only one wingspan that big in all
of Almaren. *Oh Eru here we go.* He squeezed his eyes shut and assumed a bracing position.
In a gust of wind, somehow all several Maia heights worth of wing shot through his window and knocked him right on his back. White and brown feathers drifted down on every surface of the room while two brown hands pinned his shoulders down. A pair of playful eyes met his. It Eönwë’s face that smiled back at him, shining in joy. Mairon gave him a look he was sure was absolutely rancorous, but Eönwë was completely impervious to it. The herald of Manwë giggled like a newly descended Maia, sending his white hair dancing above Mairon’s face. Mairon only exaggerated his frown further, driving Eönwë to fits of laughter.

“Pfftt... hahaha! Why are you looking at me like that, Mairon? You’re the one that just stood there!”

“Oh and I was just supposed to let you become a splat mark on my wall?! You’re lucky I’m willing to forsake my dignity for your well-being.”

“More like for my entertainment.” Eönwë said, poking the corner of Mairon’s deep frown.

Mairon swatted his hand away, and let a small, wry smile slip onto his face.

With a stroke of his strong wings, Eönwë lifted himself off of Mairon, leaving a loose feather to tickle his nose. Mairon stood and blew it off his face. Looking at all the other loose feathers in his room, he sighed. Eönwë gave no notice of the mess he’d made.

“I’ve been busy up until very recently and I thought you might want to hear some news,” Eönwë announced.

Giving up on the feathers and leaning forward in anticipation Mairon said, “Eru, yes. Tell me, what’s happening up in that tower, Eönwë?”

“Damned if I know.” Eönwë shrugged.

“You must be kidding me.”

“Nope. I got kicked out.” He sighed. “Not literally, but it felt like it.”

Mairon put his hand on Eönwë’s shoulder to comfort, but implored, “So what is this news then?”

“That is the news. No Maia is allowed in that council. Manwë explicitly commanded it. So unusual.” Eönwë shook his head. “But that’s not the only reason I’m come to visit you, Mairon.”

Mairon was taken aback. “What else could be more important than a council obviously concerning us Maiar?” he asked.

Eönwë looked to the side and spoke softly. “What I came here for is not important in the grand scheme of things, but it’s important to me.”

Mairon paused, but then nodded for Eönwë to continue.

“I’ve been wanting to try something with you.”

Defensively, Mairon raised his arms.

“And what would that be?” he questioned.

Grabbing Mairon’s forearms, Eönwë earnestly looked into his eyes and said, “Something wonderful! I know you can handle it. I just want to share a bit of myself with you.”

Much to Mairon’s chagrin, a slight flush rose to his face.
Eönwë smirked and said, “Not quite like that.”

Embarrassed, Mairon wrenched his arms out of Eönwë’s grasp and returned to looking out of the window.

“Mairon please,” pleaded Eönwë. “I’m sure you’ll love the idea.”

Eönwë pressed his hands into Mairon’s shoulder blades, and let his wings forth again. They faded in from mist as delicate as breath and the soft but strong feathers formed a warm curtain around Mairon and Eönwë.

When Eönwë sensed Mairon was ready, he whispered, “Mairon, I want to teach you how to fly.”

The idea that had before seemed impossible, something to be envious of, now unfolded before Mairon. To fly! Why, that amount of freedom would afford him so many thing! Far sight and travel over mountains and water… but no. The wonder he had felt slipped from him like sand.

“Eönwë. That’s impossible. Do not hurt me with anymore of your teasing.”

“Hear me out, Mairon! I can help you learn.”

Eönwë drew closer to Mairon and pressed his forehead to Mairon’s back and in a brief flash in Mairon’s mind, he glimpsed the previously invisible pattern of wind over a wing. He felt the slight tug of an updraft on his shoulders and the mild nausea of great heights.

Slowly widening his eyes, “How…?” Mairon asked, incredulous.

“Because I know you can. And I know you,” Eönwë stated.

“Vague as ever, Eönwë. Give me details,” pressed Mairon.

Eönwë hummed thoughtfully. “Maia of Aulë are so good at changing the shape of matter, but they are usually stubborn about their own shape.”

“Yes, we tend to be firm in our chosen form. So?”

“I’ve seen you preening your hair, changing its colour slightly, coaxing it to behave how you want,” Eönwë teased. He picked out a lock from Mairon’s head to play with.

Mairon ran his hands through his hair reflexively to dispel Eönwë’s touch. “Fixing my hair how I like it is a long way from growing wings.”

“But not so long as to make it impossible,” Eönwë answered, now rubbing Mairon’s shoulder blades with vigour.

Mairon considered his friend’s offer carefully, and decided it was worth the chance of embarrassing himself. He turned around and demanded,

“Tell me then.”

Eönwë chuckled. “I don’t think it works like that, but you saw what I know, right? Your crafting and grooming must work in a similar way. Draw from your eternal song. Find where the melody matches your desire. If it was meant to be, it shall be there.”

Mairon understood exactly what process Eönwë was referring to. What he feared was that it was not meant to be, but only experimentation could find out if it was.
Standing tall, he walked to his carved stone block, sat cross-legged on it, and took a deep breath as if to taste the air. They waited together as Mairon sorted his thoughts. There was much to sort, but Eönewë must have felt this was not the key, or he was just impatient.

“Don’t try so hard, you’re turning your hair blue.”

“What?!”

“Kidding.”

“You are not helping.”

“Alright then. Think feathers. Here.” Eönewë brought their foreheads together, even as Mairon grimaced.

Another flash came to him, this time a close up of the vanes and barbs of a feather through golden light. Despite the beauty and detail of the image, this did not particularly inspire Mairon. But then he remembered something else that did. The certainty of it swelled and he knew it be true. With a smirk, he addressed Eönewë.

“Stand back. I understand what you mean now.” Mairon winked. “But I believe there is more than one way to fly.”

Veins in a web of skin stretched over long and flexible fingers flew into his mind. They appeared on his back as if they were a shadow in a newfound light. His creation! It was now as real as Eönewë’s feathers.

The look of shock and excitement on Eönewë’s face was worth all his previous toil.

“Why, Mairon! I’ve never seen anything like it!” Eönewë exclaimed, causing his own wing tips to quiver.

Mairon grinned for the first time in a long while and said, “Then come see more.”

He stood tall upon his stone and unfurled his black wings as if he was now the master of flight. He leapt and swooped cleanly out the window so fast he was but a blur.

Eönewë laughed joyously to see his friend find his confidence again, and followed after just as fast. The mountain side’s many windows grew smaller in the distance and soon beneath them sped the beautiful green land lit in tones of blue and gold, its features looking to Mairon like the strokes of a painting. The slight smell of smoke and the Northern storm still rising couldn’t stop the two Maiar from enjoying the sky and the freedom it afforded. They barrel rolled in the rising current, facing each other, before Mairon dropped and sped away across the shore of Almaren. Eönewë could have sworn he heard Mairon’s laugh carrying on the wind as he chased after him. It was a beautiful but inexplicable sound that seemed to heat the sky itself.

The herald of Manwë and chief craftsman of Aulë flew together for the only time in all the history of Arda. Two forces made to be opposing would never meet in such joy and harmony again. The Council of the Valar was done.

And no one could hold the heart of Mairon forever, save for one.

Chapter End Notes
This is one of my fav chapters so far. Kind of bittersweet I guess, since we know where these two end up, but I eat Bittersweet Bits for breakfast. Hope it was entertaining for you too! And thanks for all the support and lovely comments so far. :D
Chapter Summary

Mairon makes a visit to Yavanna’s gardens in an attempt to unravel the mystery of his visions. In the deep underground, meanwhile, Melkor makes an appearance to set his plans in motion.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There's something left to save my goals
Make my spirit whole
Nothing stays the same, but I'll accept the change
Instead of placing blame, let’s reignite the flame, together
(from Reignite the Flame by Third Realm)

The high from Eönwë’s gift a long ways behind him, Mairon thought that if learning to fly had taught him anything, it was that it did not grant freedom. Not in the way he sought it. It was his confidence in his creation that raised him above. The vivid vision of the grit of all his fears ground into nothing by raw power drove him to seek it further.

During his flight, he had spied Yavanna’s gardens, exceptionally green even for Almaren, and felt an annoying twinge of nostalgia for the place. Although he had entered Arda with the absolute belief he was Aulë’s Maia, he had spent some of his first years there. Perhaps he could meditate in the far gardens and see his “figure” again. The thought thrilled him as much as it terrified him.

Keeping a watchful eye and wearing a tawny cloak, he walked a path less followed, hoping not to meet anyone. He needn’t have worried. After the Valar left their council in the tower, a hush had fallen upon Almaren. They spoke to no Maia about what had transpired there, not even to busy them with work. However, Mairon was good at finding work of his own.

The challenge was finding just the right place to settle down, and he was particular. He let his eyes trail mindlessly along the rose vines encompassing the path. Unadjusted to accessing foliage, it took him some moments to understand why the common plant was so curious to him. Obscured by the obscenely crimson rose blooms, were the protective thorns Yavanna had thought to bless her most beautiful flowers with. The further he went down the back trail, the larger and denser the thorns became. And the harder his heart beat, attempting to match a resonance in the location itself. Perfect.

At first the thorns were merely a reminder to leave the plant be, but then they became almost cruel. They pulled at Mairon’s cloak but he was determined to ignore them and reach the end. That is, until he was caught as the path narrowed to a tunnel. He cursed the thorny vines and relinquished his cover, tumbling into a clearing.
Once he got over the indignity, he brushed himself off and looked around. Here the thorns were so thick the vines were only knotted prickles without space for even the tiniest hummingbird to land its feet. Weeping fungus bloomed from discarded plant material thrown at the base of a curved wall. He frowned in disappointment at the unattractive refuse piles and now wished he had spent this quiet period in the forges doing actually useful tasks. But something had drawn him to the forsaken site, he knew.

Looking closer, Mairon felt absolutely sure the mushrooms were nothing that Yavanna would create. At least not in her right of mind. They were grey and dripped with quavering drops of red slime. Disgusting, but he found himself grinning.

A flick of his wrist summoned his cloak back to him, which he folded and placed on the ground before him. He sat to begin his meditation, but before he could even take one breath, he spied a glint that hummed behind the clotted vines in front of him. Forgoing all his previous plans, he jumped to stand again. His heart beat reached a climax in rhythm with a throbbing rumble from the invisible world around him. Excited, with a single piercing look he drew a blast of hot wind that tore a gash in the roses, and the rest retreated from the wall like a wounded animal.

When Mairon saw what he revealed, he barked laughter. There stood his “figure” in all its glory and glaring discontent. What he’d revealed was the remaining gilding of a rippling golden ring that encircled figures he recognized immediately as the Valar, with what had to be the Dark Lord Melkor at their center.

Depictions of Melkor were difficult enough to find around Almaren, and this one was stranger than the rest. The carver had apparently spent all their time adding detail to Melkor and no one else, carving his muscles in great details and giving him chips of obsidian for eyes. The other Valar were mere suggestions of form with just pinpricks for eyes. Mairon snorted at the audacity of the artist. This was the only portrayal where he felt the Dark Lord resembled something to close to handsome.

Mairon reached his hand out to touch the stone and let it fall into a groove radiating from Melkor meant to suggest his power. He ran his finger into the carved curve of Melkor’s shoulder, then down his chest, and then his waist before lifting it away, trembling slightly. Who had bothered to carve this with enough potency to call to him?

“With the times being as they are, I can see why you would search for answers, dear Mairon.”

Unusually caught unawares, he spun around, fists clenched to white knuckles, expecting the very worst.

Upon seeing who it was, he chastised himself and quickly corrected his aggressive stance. It was just Yavanna. Of course it was Yavanna, you fool, he thought.

“My lady, forgive my wandering. Without work from Aulë, I felt lost,” he lied while bowing deeply.

She had no suspicions of him. “How did you know I was looking for you?” she asked with good humor.

“I did not, Lady Yavanna.”

The Vala of growing things giggled. “’Twas not a serious question, my little flame.”

She coaxed him with her finger while wearing an enigmatic smile and whispered, “Come here.”

Mairon hesitated for a moment before coming forward. Her figure was as lush as her gardens and she was imposing in her own unique way. Her hair and skin were as brown as the richest of earth, and
ever shifting foliage covered most of her body. Flowers as wide as his head bloomed on her skirt with vigor and turned to face him as he approached.

As she took his hand and led him away, he felt so very young. The vines on the other side of the clearing split before her and he followed, stepping carefully to avoid the roots, for they did not part before him as they did for their creator.

“I certainly did not expect anyone to find that old thing,” she mused.

“Oh, that? What is it?” he asked, keeping his tone innocent.

“A gift,” she said and made a face. “I can’t seem to remove it so there it stays.”

Mairon didn’t bother asking why she wanted it removed.

Yavanna shook her head, which sounded like rustling leaves. “No matter. It works out good this way.”

They stopped at another clearing with even more plant debris and she gestured for him to sit down on an iron chair, wrought to roughly resemble tree branches, which was obviously a gift from Aulë.

When he was seated, she waved her other hand and a slender tree grew out from the ground. She then tapped it with her little finger, causing one of its branches to bloom a single flower. Within its light shone his one of his crafts. The silver wings! She plucked the familiar brooch out of the unfolding petals.

Mairon could not contain himself and exclaimed, “How did you get that?”

She smirked. “Ha! Aulë cannot keep much secret. It was meant for me anyways, yes?”

Mairon mutely nodded.

She released his hand to hold the brooch up so it caught the light filtering down from the trees, and she commented, “This design is not purely aesthetic. It is a wing that lacks feathers, and yet you gave suggestions of a compensating internal bone structure. Like long fingers stretched too thin. Still, there is a grace to it I can’t deny. And more so, I see that it could be entirely functional.”

Mairon opened his mouth to speak, but he stopped before explaining his recent foray into self-experimentation. Yavanna brushed his cheek with the back of her soft fingers, each end tinged green.

“Do not worry, my little one, I have taken on this task for you.”

He knew then that she did not know of his flight with Eönwë. More pressing things were on her mind. The gentle smile dropped from her face, and she took a deep breath.

“You may feel confused and afraid like the other Maiar after what has happened, and what will come, but I would like you to know you are appreciated by Aulë and me. I will give your design life as a gift for your service so far.”

More determined than ever to understand the Valar, he did not protest as she started to weave his hair. Yavanna was quite liable to give him more information than Eönwë ever could about the Valar’s council, so he let her speak. He only looked up at her with an expression of many questions, to search her deep green eyes. She had always loved the brown freckles that marked his face. They were his only feature that lent him any softness.
Sorrowfully she sighed and the leaves in all the trees rattled in response.

“This secrecy does not become me, does it Mairon?”

Finished with one braid, she changed to the other side and leaned in close to him. Her breath smelled of lilies and her words smelled of woe.

She whispered like a dry husk, “The Valar suspect some Maiar are turning to Melkor… We wish to nip this in the bud. Tragically, his roots run deep, and so our hand is forced.”

The flowers on her body closed their petals, sapping the garden of its magical light. Her words slowed and sounded like the creaking of wood.

“Like weeds, they are still my creations and hold a purpose, and therefore I am responsible for the problems they may cause. And I shall not allow them to run rampant. We shall pluck them from our garden and give them the best chance of rebirth.” She gestured to a nearby compost pile.

Inside were prickly greens fading to brown as their roots stretched in the air, unable to draw moisture. Some had resorted to cannibalising their brethren that had suffocated and rotted beneath them. They were rising again, more twisted than before.

Yavanna smiled at them. “They will be energy for life anew. Once the battle between them is done, they will all lose. Then they can return to us as fodder and seeds.”

Mairon straightened his posture and drained his expression of any emotion. He stared breathless at the pile, feeling like he was falling into it. He heard his own voice say,

“Of course. How efficient.”

He felt a kiss on the crown of his head, and something wedged in to hold his hair in place.

“I knew you would think so, Mairon. My dear Aulë has such faith in you and hopes you can steer some lesser Maiar he worries for away from whatever it is Irmo and Námo think they can do to ‘flood the dark recesses’ and hide our mistakes from the Children for when they arrive...”

He felt ill. He felt faint. A ringing sound filled his ears as he focused on a worm burrowing into the compost, attempting to hide from their judgement. He would have to do better. But he could find no better within himself. Just rage.

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A mountain that wades in the sea splashes in a puddle like a comet. Or at least that’s how it should have been, if Melkor didn’t have to compress his form to navigate through Arda’s damp and winding underground. Sneaking around was not his preferred line of work, but it must be done if he were to get back to doing what he was truly meant to. As it were, only his dark colour palette assisted in concealing himself. Nothing else about his being could be called subtle. Unruly hair tumbled to his shoulders and down his back, armored in harsh angles and beneath which trailed a muddy and torn tunic. Yet nothing could deny his regal bearing, or his obvious power. His eyes glowed with a gleam that could not be defined as light.

Eyeless creatures with various arrangements of teeth and claws nipped at his heels in a way only the Dark Vala could find delightful. Perhaps they had once been Yavanna’s forgotten primordial creations, but at the sight of Melkor’s insane power eviscerating the guts of their cave home their sight was lost to them. Not that they needed it anyways. Melkor chuckled at that, and kicked them aside.
The lightless underground almost reminded him of wandering through the endless Void, searching for the Flame Imperishable. He felt the top of his head brush the ceiling, knocking several stalactites down. Almost.

Still flameless he was, but this bothersome and unbecoming journey was nearly over. He reached an end to the cavern, previously scouted by himself, and without a single moment of rest he unleashed his power upon it. From his fist came fierce ice that bit its way in between the rocks and caused it to groan with strain. He sharply switched to his other hand and blasted the rock with white hot flame. In an instant, it exploded into jagged pieces, but he did not relent. He scoured the stone until there was an opening large enough for him to walk through. There would be no stooping for the Dark Lord, even during his supposed espionage.

The title of “Dark Lord” he was called by the Valar as an ironic joke. Lord of whom? He ruled over nobody. But Melkor felt he would take on the true meaning of that title soon. It burned him to imagine it was Manwë that came up with that name, even if he knew that was not likely true. Either way, a bitter curse rose within him at the thought of his brother’s laughter. A final explosion of his energy left a gaping hole in the cavern wall, the melted rock glowing in colours not even the hottest of fires could explain.

The size of the opening satisfied him so he confidently stepped through. Whatever caution he should have shown wouldn’t have helped him. He emerged in darkness at the bottom of an empty mining pit. Tools dropped and forgotten snapped under his feet. In this place where happy Maiar never went, he could taste their fear and their pain as if it were an overripe fruit about to begin rotting.

Humming a haphazard tune, he ran the broad tips of his fingers along the veins of gold, sending them into frenzied pulsations. The noise rose to a chorus of unbearable cacophony before ceasing, leaving the pit dark, dangerous, and teasing.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry the chapter title makes me think of… you know… never mind. I’m not entirely sure how I managed to make Yavanna’s gardens feel a little creepy to me, (I love gardens and trees and flowers) but maybe watching Watership Down helped paint the picture. I don’t know if there is canonical evidence Melkor tried to woo Yavanna, but he does seem like the type to “gift” people with self-portraits; hence why the image hold his essence and calls out. As for what the Valar are planning… the higher powers of Arda do have a tendency to drown whatever gets out of hand… and Mairon’s strong sense of self will not let him ever become a blank slate again. Stay tuned. The next chapter is likely what you have been waiting for.
The Menace

Chapter Summary

Returning to Aulë’s halls, Mairon finds an unwelcome surprise in Curumo’s recent success. That surprise is nothing compared to the one he faces after…

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I feel your presence amongst us
You cannot hide in the darkness
I know your soul is not tainted
Even though you’ve been told so
Can you hear the rumble?
Can you hear the rumble that’s calling?
(from Cirice by Ghost)

At the wide entrance to Aulë’s great work hall, Mairon welcomed the busy sounds of his siblings working as a sign that things were returning to some sort of normal. Clangs of hammers on metal, whooshing of billows, shouts asking for various implements, and hints of music filled the expansive, windowless chamber. Eönwë often teased him about living in various holes, but he always had a rebuke ready. He’d say that air was flighty, Eönwë would huff at the pun, and then he’d say that stone and metal were as steady as their namesakes. For Mairon, the lamps could not compare to the comforting light of the fire-lit underground.

He sighed in relief to breath in the smoky smells of the only place he called home, despite the inklings he received from Yavanna of what is to come. It gave him a sick sort of satisfaction to know what the others didn’t.

Mairon ran his hand over the ridges of scenes carved into the walls, uncreatively of Maia carving said walls, until he came to a thin crack. There was no way Aulë would have allowed it to exist for long, so it must have been from the quakes that mysteriously stopped when the Northern storm no longer grew. Mairon frowned. Whatever calm the Maiar felt now with the great storm withered to a wisp, would blow up if they knew their autonomy was in danger not from the so called Dark Lord, but from their own Masters. Or perhaps not. Thinking of how some lesser Maia merely did repetitive tasks over and over, losing themselves might not mean much to them, the poor mindless things.

The troubled thoughts of Mairon faded away when he saw something that made him wish those annoying tremors would return.

A small crowd of red-headed Maiar had gathered around a table Aulë usually used for display.
Mairon clenched his jaw when he heard the voice of who was at the center. Curumo stood, cleaner than Mairon remembered him, while holding aloft a delicate chain and speaking excitedly to his new admirers.

“You see, after many trials I have found that…”

Curumo’s boasting was of no interest to him, however shocking it may be that he completed something without him in the scant time he had. Mairon’s widening eyes were caught on what hung from Curumo’s belt. The powerful gleam of mithril could not be missed by even a complete lout.

“…But then it turned out I was using the wrong tool! I went straight to Aulë and asked him for this hammer. It’s special and entrusted to me…”

With a fierce pang of jealousy, Mairon realized the tool was almost identical to his own hammer: solid mithril, winding filigree on the grip, blunt and sharp ends exceptionally practical but also an elegant work of art. Aulë had made it for him, but Mairon had been adamant about being involved in the design process. His insistence won him his most prized procession. It was his, he thought as his hands closed into fists.

“Look everyone, my most excellent teacher is here!” Curumo announced and waved at Mairon to come over and join them.

No chance in all the eras of Eä that was going to happen. By the expressions in the crowd, everyone knew that immediately but Curumo. When it was finally evident to him that Mairon would not answer his summons, Curumo strode over, full of bluster.

“Did you not hear? I’ve made something suitable all on my own. Would you like to come and inspect it?”

“This is not the time, Curumo,” Mairon cautioned, unable to completely disguise his hurt. Mairon turned to leave before he could no longer keep his wounded pride in check. As it was, his shoulders were stiff and raised about his ears. If he was one of Oromë’s dogs, his hackles would have been on end.

Curumo said no more, but his sulking was not well hidden either. He clutched the shining chain as if to stifle its presence. His fellow Maia watched them part, some reaching out to comfort Curumo. Some watched Mairon leave, looking like they wanted to say something, but never finding the courage. It was of no matter. Mairon preferred their attention to their words.

Yet, barely a few steps into his forge area and he was stopped but one hopeful but wary looking Maia. He vaguely recalled she led a team that built mining machinery. The Maia now blocked his way to his workbench and asked what was certainly a rehearsed question.

“Mairon, would it be possible for me and some of my workers to have one of those hammers as well? It’s because we admire you so, and aspire to be as well-renowned in our service to the Valar as you are.”

A cold and terrible light rose in his eyes that was brighter than any fire but had none of the warmth, like a far-away star that suddenly became too close. His usual harsh honesty gave way to a bitter rant.

“That is apparently not for me to decide. Beg to Aulë, or to Eru himself, I don’t care. Grow your hair and gild your eyes, imitate me down to the score of my Music, but no one will ever become me.”

Deciding the hall was now much too small, Mairon pushed past the mildly insulted and confused
Maia to leave the way he came. A visible aura of his distress formed around him like a cloud of soot, but that did not deter Curumo from trying him one more time. In a rather unwise move, Curumo waved his new hammer about and pointed it towards Mairon.

“Oh, is it time now?” he prodded, either truly ignorant or insufferably clever.

“No.” They could have sworn they felt the ground shudder at Mairon's single word.

“Then where are you going? The workspace is that wa…”

Mairon silenced him with just one unforgettable look. He hoped his next words, full of falsified calm, rang true enough to make Curumo feel a fool for even asking.

“To get materials. The ones here are not suitable.”

Mairon left without waiting for an answer. He needed to find those on his own.

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Mairon half-ran half-flew through increasingly less structured tunnels that were crumbling as much as his composure. His world tumbled in a blur as he sought out a lonely place to let loose his strained emotions in relative safety.

When he was certain he was on the far side of the island, he let himself fall towards a wall, throwing out his hands for support and hanging his head. Streaks of magical flame roared and screeched their way out of him like ragged breaths, burning the walls in disordered patterns. His hair came out of its hold and whipped about as fire.

In complete contrast to the anger he was venting, he started to sing a song so sweet and desperate no one but those closest to him would have believed it was his voice at all.

_I yearn for long veins of vast Valarstone_

_that so helpfully hum their hymns_

_I hope on deep whims from wild whirlwinds_

_that my golden gears do glide_

_I wish on bright flames by fair furnace fires_

_that the kindled crafts are kind_

_I want for …_

To the dismay of the stone and air themselves, his singing waned away into enthralling echoes. He still could not let go of what made him who he was. Mairon sunk his hands into the crumbling stone and shakily moaned in grief.

This self-absorbed attitude would not do. He had to go back and make amends for his outburst, lest he draw suspicion, but he couldn’t do it in this unstable state. He had to find Eönwë, his rock from the air. The herald of Manwë was all he trusted to soothe him now.

Pulling himself up to leave, and not bothering to fix his tousled hair, Mairon fled to nearest escape from the tunnels so he could fly to his friend's nest.

He would never make it there.
Just before the final corridor to the open air, Mairon shivered, but he could not tell if it was from heat or cold. His heart pounded a warning such that he expected the sliding pieces within him to become more jagged and jarring. Instead, they were snapping into place like a perfect puzzle to the tune of a stolen song.

Where the light should have been, a materializing shadow was masking the exit. A halo making its way around the strong form was warped into ripples of gruesome colour by its song.

_I want for all atop thankless thrones_

_that shall arise aft in Eä_

_I know of dark dreams of dire destiny_

_and the bare-faced beauties that be them…_

As Mairon neared the singing figure, it became a body clothed in sleek material. The halo around him was actually untamed, coal black hair and the form was larger than Manwë or Aulë. Its menacing presence could only belong to one being in all of Arda.

**The Dark Vala, Melkor.**

His resonant voice stopped its verses and began to speak in a deep register that rattled the corridor.

“You don’t wish to join me in song? You didn’t hesitate to give your own meaning to my melody while alone. How bold… Maia Mairon.”

A heady spike of adrenaline hit. No longer in a dream, Mairon knew what to do. He moved forward as Melkor continued to simper.

“You are the Admirable, the Excellent, yes? From what I heard perhaps you are deserving of distorting what I have already distorted.”

Mairon gave no response but continuing to march forward, as if his way was not blocked by the shadow of the world.

Neither was Melkor fazed, for he uttered more honeyed words. ”Even needlessly controlled, the magic of your spirit I felt is boundless. Uncontrolled, I feel it could break the barriers of this world.”

Mairon was looking past him, still walking, unresponsive as stone. Melkor’s voice dipped into a low purr.

“I just want you to show me again. Do not be afraid… Precious.”

A brilliant burst of light momentarily flashed. Melkor felt a flurry of wind and claws scrape past his face. If he was surprised, he did not let it show. Spinning around to look up into the air, he saw a black winged creature fleeing into an updraft from the forge chimneys.

“Oh my Maia, you should not have done that,” murmured Melkor. Wearing a grin as wide as a chasm, he transformed his body into a swarm of insects with a fearsome face and shot into the sky after him.

In his haste, Mairon’s vision had consumed him and he flew as a red-furred half beast, clawed and wild. He was smaller and faster, but Melkor’s form was ever-evolving and he slipped through the turbulent air as if it parted just for him.
Here the shadows of the mountains were at their deepest, but even they did not compare to the depth of the forces streaking up their sides. Shade darted after shade erratically at first, but slowly they settled into oscillations of near and far, casting waves of light and dark upon the mountain face. They chased each other past the peaks so far and high that they were surrounded by only water and sky. And still Mairon pushed further with each wing beat, but it was all for naught, he knew that from the start.

At the top of his flight where the clouds were only wisps of ice, he halted his wings’ furious flapping and closed his eyes. Turning over, he started a dive.

Grunting in surprise, Melkor solidified into a great raven with black claws. He reached out to Mairon before he slipped by. Fully in winged-beast forms, their claws linked in a tangle of ebony. Ainur in the form of raven and bat then began to pirouette in the sacred skies of Manwë. With each pull upon the other they spun faster in a dangerous aerial dance. Each refused to yield to the other as they spiraled towards the water.

Melkor looked into Mairon’s golden eyes, expecting to see the beginning of panic but all he could see was fierce determination and what could be called bliss behind his eyelashes fluttering in the wind. This Maia would never falter, even if it meant sacrificing himself with him.

Just before they hit the frothing waves, Melkor twisted and seized the Maia, pulling them out of their steep dive. He gave a triumphant cry at the fantastic rush the Maia had given him. However, they had both underestimated the dominion of water. Just as Mairon stopped squirming in Melkor’s arms and looked back into his obsidian eyes, a rogue wave rose and swallowed them up from behind.

In one terrible moment, both Maia and Vala tumbled underwater. Furious bubbling water hissed around them but beyond was only a dark blue abyss with no discernible bottom. On ground and in air they had been powerful and graceful, but here their strengths were leched out of them like blood flowing from open wounds. They could only float helplessly in the eddies of Ulmo. Orientation was lost, and they were soon lost from each other, sinking steadily into cold oblivion.

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Melkor found himself washed up upon a gravel shore, alone. The Maia had slipped from his grasp as the wave drove them into the deep. The strong-minded fool must be thinking he got away, only to suffer a worse fate, Melkor thought.

Only Ulmo knew how far down the water truly went. The crushing depths concerned even Melkor, who knew a Maia of fire was apt to have their might crushed out of them by the uncaring water. Ainur were supposed to be immortal in Arda, but they were not unchanging. Trauma could change anything. That Melkor knew well.

Imagining the fiery Maia succumbing to the power of another Vala and losing the strength of his magic, Melkor clenched his fists around the stones they rested upon, cracking them into sharp pieces. He stood up abruptly and tossed them aside. Despite the water having weakened him, he steeled himself to enter it again. The sea would never part before him no matter how much he admonished it, so he waded into the water as if trying to kick it into submission. He grimaced at the waves that lapped at his legs and brought his arms together above his head to lean forward and dive in.

However, within the next wave he heard a sad, wet flopping sound. To his amazement, he spied the red hair of Mairon, who was dragging himself up on the beach and beginning to spit up steaming water.

Mairon groaned in disgust while wringing out his hair, sending a stream of water and curse words
back into the sea. He was an image of the beauty of defiance, nearly drowned but dripping with an allure that was alarming even to Melkor. Out of his winged beast form, he was a copper-coloured model of a Maia whose simple clothes clung to his body in wonderful ways.

Melkor stepped forward and asked, “Need any help with that?” with a smile and far too much nonchalance.

Mairon jolted and bared his teeth in a low hiss like a cornered animal.

If Melkor had any tolerance for sentiment in himself, it would have warmed his heart to see the Maia survive unaffected and spiteful. Ulmo would have been so very perplexed. Melkor himself was perplexed.

The Dark Vala threw his head back and laughed long and deep. Mairon turned his body around as if to try and stop the notes of Melkor’s laugh from reaching his ears. It was in vain for the sound pooled in his chest like molten lead, already forming its own space in his mind’s music.

“Well done, Your Excellency. There’ve been no other times I can recall where I’ve been so happy to lose a feint,” Melkor admitted. He offered Mairon his slate-gray hand.

If only Melkor had come right after he had discovered the carving in Yavanna’s garden, Mairon would have taken it. Now the stakes were too high. And he had his own plans. Infuriatingly, Mairon made no indication he had even heard what Melkor said.

“Are you going to wear out my welcome with your sullenness again?” Melkor pressed.

Mairon shivered slightly, but still made no move. Melkor spoke firmer.

“Look at me.”

Mairon refused.

Grumbling like an unamused beast, Melkor heavy form crunched the stones beneath him in his disappointment at Mairon’s disregard. Mairon remained huddled on the wet stones with his arms wrapped around himself, waiting for the moment he was to be discovered by Manwë’s patrol of Eagles or dragged away for whatever it is Melkor was planning.

His breath hitched when he saw the shadow of Melkor’s arm reach out from him. But it retreated.

“Then you are welcome to stare at rocks, as you will likely do so for the rest of your eternal life, *Maia of Aulë,*” Melkor jeered darkly.

He made a half-hearted gesture and a wave of heat hit Mairon. Soon after, the shadow surrounding Mairon dissolved and left him alone on the bright-again shores of Almaren.

After a few moments, when he had calmed enough to dare move, Mairon slowly stood and ran his hands along his sides. He found he was now pleasantly warm and dry. Even the dampness that had crept inside his spirit was gone.

“Foul oaf,” he muttered, frowning at the thought of being touched by the Dark Lord’s magic.

And yet he could not still his thunderous heartbeat. His entire body shuddered, sending stray sparks from his skin as he remembered being held so close he could hear the pace of the Discord in the Dark Vala’s heartbeat, and his strong arms feeling paradoxically of ice and heat.
Mairon’s a hot mess. A hot mess with a plan. What else is new? Oh yeah. The big dude. Took me 7 damn chapters but that’s how the words shot out of me. The bare bones of this chapter have been written basically since the very beginning, but I had to find the right place for this important event. Introduce some people, get a plot going, agitate Mairon a little bit, you know? It can only get more exciting from here hopefully. Both of them are so persistent there is no doubt they will meet again.

Again, if you find any writing mistakes you can let me know! I can miss things in my own excitement. ;]
Manwë and Eönwë discuss the plan for the future. Mairon and Aulë do the same, before Mairon seeks his own goals.

Wow I sick with a flu for a week so if this seems like a fever dream it might actually be. Could be a good thing?? Also I watched Ghost in the Shell while mildly drugged and felt really existental so watch out for weird symbolism. Not that it hasn't been a thing in this story already. Anyways, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Angel carry me
To you, to your home, to paradise
Angel I would lie for you
For you, just for you, with my yearning heart
(from Angel by :Wumpscut:)

The rustling of a thousand tiny wings on a turbulent wind disturbed Manwë from his meditation, but he rose with elegant calm. For every similar time in the ages to come, he would not be surprised.

His many-layered white robes trailed behind him as he stepped to one of the tall windows on each edge of his 15-sided room. In his view he saw the mountains that formed a curled-up spine on the island of Almaren. He felt relief that they were not being actively toppled, but what he saw rapidly descending from the clouds beyond them did not settle his disquiet.

A massive raven so black it was but a shifting, iridescent shadow and a strange creature Manwë had never seen before were interlocked and spinning so fast they seemed melded together. They pulled upon each other as if trying to escape, but neither let go as they disappeared behind the ridge. The darkness that was seeded around them did not fade entirely, leaving the clouds looking bruised.

His brother in all his outstanding unsubtlety had returned.

Manwë was still looking long into the distance when Eönwë swooped into his chamber, sending their robes fluttering in a sudden gust. His strong mottled wings spread wide and ready, Eönwë did not waste a moment before speaking.

“They’ve fallen near the Northern shore, Kind Manwë.” The ringing of an unsheathing broad sword
Eönwë declared, “I will go greet the Dark One.” Manwë raised his palm to stop him, causing a small updraft in the room. Eönwë gave him a curious look as his hair began to drift up but he lowered his weapon until it was sheathed completely. Manwë then encapsulated the wind around him to give the area an aura of tranquility again and spoke in a way he hoped Eönwë would understand.

“That is not needed, my Herald. This is not a war of swords. That will come in future ages. This is a war of secrets and corruption. Disease.”

“That will come in future ages. This is a war of secrets and corruption. Disease.”

Then I shall go watch them and see what I can…” Eönwë took a step to leap away, eager to take action.

“No. You cannot step down to their level, lest we lose ourselves as well as the war. Even so, with what we have just witnessed, I fear it is one we cannot win entirely.”

Eönwë bowed his head but pleaded, “Then why are we even trying? What are these secrets? Why can’t I be of service to you, my King?”

On his cheek, Eönwë felt a soft puff of air followed by a reassuring hand that made his sight swim with light.

Manwë bent over to meet Eönwë’s bow and whispered, “Eönwë. My most loyal herald. I should trust you with all. But all is far too much, even for me, and that is why I ask you to play your part of my Music when the tune does sound.”

Eönwë was still caught in the daze of Manwë’s intense radiance when the King’s gentle wind became a solid breeze as he straightened to his usual regal posture. His voice again became cool and unaffected.

“Melkor is attempting to gain followers, as we should have seen he would. No unwilling Maia will go with him, we Ainur alike shall see to that. Those afflicted by his Discord will have a chance at rebirth. They can rebuild themselves before the Children come.”

Eönwë breathed in and out. In his mind he saw the real coming storm for the first time, but the ardent Maia still had questions.

“What about the one that was fleeing before him? That Maia is in immediate danger.”

“That is where we cannot win.” The many silver and glass ornaments hanging from his crown chimed as Manwë shook his head.

“What do you mean? Please let me go help!” Eönwë cried in uncharacteristic impatience.

Manwë just shook his head again and asked, “In your worry, have you forgotten the language of the Eagles?”

Eönwë blushed, only partially out of embarrassment. He folded in his wings, finally understanding. Manwë gave him a rueful smile and said,

“That Maia was not unwilling.”

Mairon took a moment to revel in the material. The feeling in his hands was like liquid light. The
only thing it compared to was digging his hands into a box of polished jewels.

What Mairon held was gold silk saved for an occasion. He had not worn it since Tulkas’ wedding to Nessa. He remembered fussing with Vairë’s seamstresses over the design before they chased him away. In the end, they had come through and weaved a great many delicate shapes roughly suggesting metal-working tools into a fine pattern. It brought him many admirers at the celebration, along with the yellow topaz he had wound with wire in his hair. He’d been looking for excuses to wear the long tunic ever since, but not many were afforded to those who worked by forges.

Perhaps it was too much for just an apology, but he knew he’d feel better if he looked his best. Others tended to look favourably on him when he did as well. He slipped the garment on with a self-indulgent smile, added a white sash, and tossed his hair up in a sleek tail, forgoing the extravagant jewels. The fast pace he set out from his storage space exposed his impatience to set things the way he saw as right.

Aulë was never hard to find as he was predictable as stone. During the resting times he was in his own private workshop, just on the border between his and Yavanna’s spaces where they shared a home. Mairon found his way down the beautifully bricked path made from unconventional shapes only Aulë could fit together so cleanly. Dark green shrubs trimmed in geometric shapes that housed many small, twittering birds lined his way. They quieted as he passed.

At the end of the straight path that divided the realm of metal and craft from tree and flower was a beautifully wrought home. It was not a tower or a gallery or a fortress, but the time and effort put into its building was just as great. The wood that it was made from was still alive and crowned with leaves, and the stone and metal fitted to it were organically shaped and perfectly in balance.

Mairon stepped into the round, cozy entrance hall as if it were his own home. In many ways, it was.

From a room off the hall, he saw the light of a small fire flickering. It cast shadows on the walls of Aulë’s many projects that seemed to dance and smile at him in whimsy. As Mairon moved closer he saw Aulë hunched over, seated on a comfortable stool, and heard the scratching of carving stone. Each new etch flung colourful sparks that whistled their own note as they arced around Aulë’s silhouette. Already many of Aulë’s carvings of strange, stout beings lined the hall. Their gaze had always unsettled Mairon, but he never understood why.

Mairon broke his stare from their grey-stone eyes and placed it on Aulë’s broad back instead. He pushed on the floor with his foot to let the wood groan in protest and alert Aulë to his presence.

The stool creaked slightly as Aulë spun on it and the last of the colourful sparks fizzled away around him. When he saw Mairon standing sheepishly in the doorway his mouth formed an ‘o’ of surprise amidst his beard, and then a concerned smile that nipped at the edges of Mairon’s pride.

“Mairon! I’m so glad to see you,” Aulë said with relief.

His lips a thin nervous line, Mairon stepped forward with hands together in front of him. Aulë’s multitude of carvings and devices on shelves and cabinets dwarfed them, but the bent over Vala and Maia’s eyes were at equal height. Mairon opened his mouth and spirit to speak but only got out, “I’m sorry for…”

Waving his hands in front of him Aulë said, “Now, before you say anything more, let this Vala speak his piece,” appearing just as apologetic as Mairon.

The crease in Aulë’s brow kept Mairon silent despite him being offset by the interruption. In his palm, Aulë rolled a diminutive carving of a bearded female as he tried to find words.
“Mairon. I’m sorry for the upset over your hammer. I thought I understood your need for independence as well as my own, but I didn’t see the value you put in the design we realized together. Perhaps I have neglected you from my usual attention, but recently things have been…”

Aulë sighed.

“Well, things have been unusual. And hectic. Anyways, I just couldn’t resist giving Curumo what he asked for. He was so earnest, he reminded me of you.”

For a brief moment, Mairon was surprised by the comparison, but he quashed his immediate reaction and continued on to what he planned to say.

“Thank you for that, but I have not come here to whine, Master Aulë. I’m here to say I’m sorry for blowing up at this inopportune time.”

Aulë chuckled. “I’m surprised I haven’t yet either.”

Mairon smiled tersely, and continued.

“I’m also here because Curumo helped me realize something. Our design is greatly desired by the other Maiar, and rightly so. I should not have kept it from them.”

“That is gracious of you, Mairon,” Aulë said kindly.

“It is only appropriate,” answered Mairon, attempting to humble himself. “But it does not feel enough.”

Catching on to what Mairon was suggesting, Aulë’s visage brightened to a delighted red. He exclaimed, “Oh! Do you have an idea, Mairon?”

Mairon practically leapt to place his hand atop Aulë’s. He looked into the Vala’s amber eyes with the best glow he could possibly bring into his own golden irises.

“Yes! Master, please show me how to make your finest tools fit for even a Vala’s use, and I will assist you in bringing better technology to Almaren, for the sake of all those serving the Valar.”

Aulë nodded and placed his other hand on Mairon’s.

“Yes, Mairon. We need your talents now more than ever. You are my Master Apprentice, and I will teach you all you are capable of.”

Their connection was completed by Mairon last hand on top of Aulë’s larger one.

Appearing contented as glowing coals, Aulë murmured, "I should have never worried about you, my most Admirable.”

They both closed their eyes to feel the vigor of their spirits together. The similarities between them were there, and would always echo like hot, ricocheting sparks in those that took up their craft. In disobedience, they created.

After the moment passed, Aulë asked, “What of Curumo? He still admires you. I’m sure he would appreciate your attention.”

“Do not worry, Master. I know just what to do,” Mairon said with a tip of his head.
He slipped his hands out from Aulë’s embrace and turned on his heel. He began to slide back into Aulë’s dim hallway before his Master spoke again.

“Oh, Mairon, one final thing. Could you go and see what material is available? After the quakes we lost some tunnels and we need to be sure we have what we need if our vision is to be realized.”

“Absolutely, Master.”

As he walked into the dusty refinery, one more loose end dangled in Mairon’s mind like a broken harp string. They were walking into a war. Not a war like any Tulkas could win for them. The war was waged within himself, and no doubt countless others. He felt like a celestial body in the nearly forgotten but still grand cosmos beyond Arda he came from, and he was now falling towards a new center, invisible and unknowable until he passed the attractor’s horizon. If he wanted to continue his work despite this inescapable attraction and make his Music ring throughout the matter that made up this world he needed more, and not just more material. He needed more information. Information was how Melkor found him, knew his name. Information was how he’d win.

While trying to remember what was really beyond Arda and mindlessly scanning the bins of iron, copper, and gold ore, his ears picked up a minor nuisance. Some Maiar were making their way up from the connected transportation tunnels with more ore, and they were chatting loudly.

“He didn’t even stop to greet us! And we helped him get here!”

“But he did promise me I could be as large as he is if I showed him around. Real pleasant guy. You know, it’s nice to have someone big pay attention to you every once in a while.”

An instinct from his Music told Mairon to hide so he snuck between the bins, careful not to get dust on his fine clothes. He listened as the Maiar continued to talk and load ore into the bins. Thankfully they only had gold ore to unload and left him undisturbed.

“Only one saw the Dark Lord come, but we can’t get a straight word out of her! Crazy wench…”

“I’m sure I can find her easily in Aulë’s halls and shake a few words loose.”

“She’s not one of Aulë’s. No one knows whose she is. Not even her, we think.”

There was no way it could be this easy, Mairon thought. Yet, before the storm even surfaced, where had he heard rumors of the Dark One’s song? From those who went deeper into the stone than any others. The miners. And here they were blithely talking out loud about the Dark One. If these careless imbeciles were the only help Melkor had, he would certainly fail before Manwë could even blink. And that blink would bring a true storm greater than the over-sized chimney smoke Melkor had been wafting about in the North. The mighty Melkor needed his help in ways he didn’t even realize.

Mairon’s mouth curled into a smile unbidden as he waited for the Maiar’s conversation to dwindle. Knowing the tunnels as well as the miners, he moved to follow the most isolated Maia. Down they would go where no one would find them.

The chase lit his ambition anew. He had work to do.
I love heart to hearts. I especially love heart to hearts where one party is missing some information. I have no idea how Mairon is trying to humble himself and yet he still seems arrogant. So much fun. The plot thickens to a gravy, ready to be served on some hot beef??

Ho boy, since I've been sick and living off of crackers and Hot Tamales I just spent a lot of time "planning things out" so hopefully that works out better than what my notes say...

{Melkor gets golden tolden - baby bat interlude ^o^ - Mairon's dreams get internude?! - ANAL DISCO??!!? (then change AO3 rating, ya dingus) - boom boom lamp}

{please, ignore this}

I promise I've gotten better since and have something coherent planned.
The Prejudice

Chapter Summary

Another of Aulë’s Maia reflects on his time with the Dark Lord Melkor, but little does he know Mairon is about to confront him.

Chapter Notes

I was originally gonna have this on the end of the last chapter, but I wanted to do it more justice. Plus I got a fun idea for another perspective on Melkor and Mairon! As a warning just in case, there is some violence involving being bound with a kind of rope in this chapter. And burns. Time for the excitement...

You honor my attainments and make me pride

Crowned with success, I leased the right

I won’t regress, that’s my progress

I tread another, I’m not satisfied with less

(from A Short Moment of Love by Painbastard)

Osomon was having a most excellent time in the mines for once.

The broad-bodied Maia hummed along to a teetering tune long stuck in his head as he worked at a vein of gold ore with his pickaxe, matching each strike with a beat that echoed into the dark pit behind him. The rough tunnels that snaked away from its deep core managed to be both dusty and damp. He loved and hated them, but before the appearance of his Dark Lord such strong emotions rarely found him from work period to rest period to work period. He’d sung only a drone as he’d swung his pickaxe, deposited ore in minecarts, and moved the load to where it needed to be. He spent long periods of time talking to no one but the stone, and felt no particular loyalty to the oft absent Aulë, or any other Vala, until recently.

It started on the day the stone spoke back.

Something called his name, Osomon, in such a deep voice that it was felt more than heard. When he’d hesitantly answered, a dark mass sprouted on the surface before him, staining the stone with a writhing oily sheen. Within its inkiness were as many colours as Manwë’s rainbows in the raining skies, but in a slimed, sickly mockery that held none of its transcendence but all of its burdens.

After Osomon’s many years of toil in the dim underground he thought he had finally lost his mind, but what the voice said made more sense than the song of any Vala he had heard before. The mass
spoke to him like it was echoing the sounds inside him. It whispered and bellowed all at once. It gave him fierce praise followed by soft commands.

“Strong one, are you weary? How can that be when you are so sturdy? I hear a ballad just beginning within you. This has all been just one long note introducing your might to Arda. Let me through you, and your breve will end.”

As it had spoken to him, he felt a force worming through the ragged holes in his neglected spirit. The sensation was not unpleasant to him. It was just a strong pressure. His body was just a tool for one Vala, and it could just as easily be a tool for another. The dark mass promised him so much more.

“You, my Maia, are an important part of the power that forms a girdle around this land, but a passive marker you no longer shall be if you do good for me. Bring up the ore that sings my symphony and I promise you these loads will be your last. Beyond is only power and praise from the mouths of those that failed you.”

So he had let it see through him without a single scream of protest. The stain on the stone formed into a needle-edged figure and followed him like a falsely friendly shadow. They talked of the nature of the stone, the way of the tunnels, and the operations of Aulë. No one had bothered to ask him about his dull work before. He’d given up information like a waterfall even as the force grew more oppressive and began to scare him when it intermittently dropped its goodwill for greed. All of Arda was in its plans, and knowledge from beyond Arda was in its mind.

By the time his new companion revealed itself to be the Dark Lord Melkor, Osomon already knew so. Part of him had always known so. But he did not baulk, for the shadow seemed the truest reflection of him than any image in a mirror. His own greed had matured into a churning need he wrung from his fellow miners with boasts of his exploits with the great power in the deep. They had heard the Dark Lord’s chant as well and joined the chorus as they once had before, but Osomon felt assured he was the most special and admired among them.

Grinning toothily at the remembered astonishment of his fellow mining Maiar at his rapport with the mightiest Vala in all of Arda, he figured his time skulking in the shadows was over.

With a resounding crack, the rock loosened by his able strikes fell at his feet. Throwing his pickaxe aside, he began to load the ore into the mine cart behind him bearing Aulë’s sigil graffitied over by a crude phallic symbol. He moved with practiced precision, his expression returning to boredom until he came across a piece studded by many red gems.

The garnets glittered in the scant light provided by enchanted torches maintained by miniscule Maiar that he sometimes saw flitting to and fro. The little flames never stopped to so much as say hello unless he had something for them. They coveted such jewels, and fought over them when he teased them with his latest find. He no longer felt a need to attract their fickle attention. They were not aligned with him and the others, and would get nothing more from him.

He tossed the garnet strewn rock aside and listened to it clack down to the bottom of the pit before picking up his pickaxe and returning to his task. It brought him a small amount of pleasure to see the beauty ignored and unused forever. With his plain features and boulder-like build that blended with the dirt and stone around him, he was no jewel among stone but a common pebble; his only purpose to carry what was valuable and then be cast away.

His pickaxe swings becoming idle, Osomon fantasized about the beautiful chief Maia Ilmarë leaving Varda’s side to become his. The look on that self-righteous Eönwë’s face as she fawned over him would be better than finding Arda’s biggest diamond. Even Aulë’s greatest smith, the one named The Admirable, would sing his praise with that shapely, arrogant mouth of his. The flecks of gold in
the stone in front of him began to glint hungrily.

A shift of gravel behind him wrenched him from his unusually introspective thoughts. He jerked, startled enough to drop the pickaxe he was holding with a clatter.

There on the ledge above the pit shone Mairon, Aulë’s haughty apprentice, with such incredible red-gold light Osomon wondered how he didn’t notice him there before. Despite the uncanny timing of the Maia, he was relieved it was not the Dark Lord who caught him slacking and unawares.

“Oh Mairon, it’s just you!” Osomon sighed.

“Just me?” Mairon teased with a tilt of his head and a curious lilt to his dulcet voice. “Who else down here likes to startle you?”

Osomon huffed, hoping the Maia was just passing through on one of Aulë’s inspections. “More than you know,” he grumbled, attempting to match the condescension being sent his way.

Mairon simpered. “Is that so? Maybe I should watch myself.”

Looking at the finery Mairon was wearing and thinking it made him look like one of the Valar’s naïve court servants among the muck of the mine, Osomon thrust his chest out and said, “I would if I were you. There’s a darkness on these parts lately.”

Mairon raised his hand to his mouth and said, “How terrible,” adding an artificial quaver to his voice. “So how does one lonely miner stay safe in these times?” Behind Mairon’s poised hand, Osomon caught an unsettling smile. Did the Maia come down here just to mock him?

In foolish defense, Osomon bragged, “I’ve got an agreement with the darkness! He leaves me alone if I tell him things.”

“He does? How smart of you,” Mairon continued to mock.

Osomon shifted his feet. Although Mairon wore luxury, beneath the gold silk was a smith’s body, muscled and tense. The sorcery that swirled around him was even more of an unknown. The Maia was more dangerous and more attractive to him than he would have liked. Yet his newfound pride decided he would take none of his mockery, even if he didn’t understand its purpose.

“Thanks, Surface-Swaggerer,” he said, using the insult miners often used for their smithing siblings as he bent over and hefted some loose ore. “Why are you down here anyways? Like what you see?”

“Hmph.” Mairon shrugged. “Could be cleaner. And more polite.”

“Polite? I was talking about the ore,” Osomon cheekily answered while curling his thick arm in from of him.

“I seriously doubt that.”

When Osomon’s ugly guffaw hit him, Mairon frowned, his dancing sarcasm falling away. Osomon ambled towards him, truly believing he had the upper hand and willing to unleash the bitter bullying he had held inside for so long.

“What’s with the bad attitude? Did Aulë send you on a menial task and take you away from the party?”

Mairon ground his foot on the floor and looked away, but said nothing.
“Hey, I remember that shirt! You wore it at that wedding when you got drunk and sang a song of lament because a statue wouldn’t dance with… hrrrkk…!”

Osomon said no more because he had been thrown quite a long ways down the tunnel.

A bright flash and funnelled wind sent him careening into his own pile of supplies. The pickaxes, rope, and splinters of a remaining chest were strewn about in more of a mess than they had been before. His ears ringing, he pushed some debris off of him, making sure to grasp a length of strong cable behind his back. When he looked up, he saw Mairon was already standing above him, looking down with a sneer and another ball of hot air compressed in his clawed fingers.

“Are you truly so bold? How good of a servant can you be if you give it away all in one petty boast?” Mairon hissed, his cultured accent hitting Osomon harder than a pickaxe.

“I didn’t give it all away,” he whined.

“And not even realize it!?” Mairon finished, his voice rising to a shout. He shook his head, more to himself than Osomon, and let a slow breath out that flickered like the start of a flame. Just when Osomon thought the Maia had released all of his anger upon him and he could slip away to lick his wounds and pretend this didn't happen, Mairon snapped at him.

“Listen, Maia.”

“It’s Osomon.”

“I don’t care. You will shut your howling mouth. You are to give him no more information about me.”

Even after Mairon’s display of force, Osomon was not persuaded. Something more pressing held him in his resolve.

“Ha. I’m far more intimidated by him, and far more interested in his promises than I ever will be by you, petty, pretty, privileged Maia. Come back to me when you’re the Dark Lord himself, bearing gifts to better Arda and my arse,” Osomon seethed, tightening his grip on the cable.

When Mairon started to answer, Osomon gave him a final condescending look and the woven metal came alive behind his back. Appearing to almost have a mind of its own, the length swung at Mairon’s feet, knocking him down on his stomach. Before the other Maia could recover, Osomon lashed the cable to a ceiling support and swung out of reach. Now laughing in his harsh, gargled way, he ran back down the tunnel.

Mairon blazed in frustration, charring the ground where he fell. He pushed himself up and flung his smoking hair away from his face with a wrench of his neck and a snarl. Regarding Osomon’s back, he allowed the lesser Maia’s insults to drag through him and barb the searing rage he felt.

“Well, you did have one good idea in you, thick and muddy as your mind is,” he breathed, raising his arms to contort the fire of his aura into a strictly controlled manifestation of his aggression.

As his hands broke from their fists and his fingers flowed into slender curves, the torrent of fire around him split and braided itself into a refined whorl. When the fire was so finely controlled it was screeching under the strain, Mairon lashed the whip at his target, catching it around Osomon’s head and across his open, laughing mouth.

The heavy Maia fell with a lurch and a thud, his scream silenced by the burning bonds now coiling around his body. By the time Osomon was aware of what was happening, Mairon had reached him
and started to drag his struggling body with unsettling ease. Even with his face scraping across the rough stone and his mouth pulled into unnatural contortions, Osomon knew they were heading towards the pit. If he could have moved even a hair’s width, he would have struggled, but there was no give within Mairon’s spirit. What was coming from the incensed Maia, he did not know, but he could taste the spiraling madness in the magic that held him.

With another final lurch, Mairon brought him to the ledge atop the pit, its bottom hidden in shadow. Osomon felt a hard kick that sent him over the edge, suspending him over the darkness with just a thread of Mairon’s will keeping him from falling. Just as the vertigo began to course through him, Mairon again spoke.

“We will try this again,” he said as if he were a teacher instructing a particularly stubborn student. “You are to give him no more information about me. Pretend you don’t even know what the colour of my eyes are.” To reinforce his point, or perhaps unknown to him, Mairon’s eyes began to glow a bloody red. The torch flames shrank away to nothing, leaving only that awful un-light to darken the gold veins until they appeared to be coal. His voice lost all its melody and became a growl.

“And you will bring me truthful news of Melkor’s movements and plans, or I will encase you in stone in this very pit, and there ‘til the end of Arda you will lay.”

From those eyes, Osomon felt an intensity not even matched by his Dark Lord’s fervor. He felt compelled to nod with vigor. Suddenly, the red wash upon everything faded away, and he felt a tug upon his bonds. Slowly but gently, Mairon raised him and released him. For several moments of humiliation of a level he had never felt before, Osomon shook on his hands and knees, attempting to recover from the attack. When he was brave enough to look up again, Mairon smiled at him with such beauty it made Osomon ache.

Vowing that once he got his promised power, Mairon would be the first he used it upon, Osomon grasped the front tails of Mairon’s silk tunic and gasped, “Yes, I will do your will, please, Mairon.”

“Master Mairon.”

“Master Mairon.”

At those words leaving Osomon’s mouth, Mairon slipped out of his grasp and out of sight just as swiftly as he came. Soon all that could be heard of him was the echo of his humming in the same tune Osomon knew to be the meaning of Melkor's name.

Chapter End Notes

More complications, more complications, but Mairon is becoming more than a little curious about Melkor is up to. He's not ready to commit yet, but he's certainly invested enough to take violent action. Or maybe he always wanted to do that. ;) And up until Mairon, Melkor had been good at making "friends"... a challenge that he shall arise to in the coming chapters?? I hope so too.
Chapter Summary

Mairon returns to Aulë's Hall only to be met with a change he isn't sure of at first. He attempts an experiment to help Curumo as much as himself. The results surprise him, but not as much as they should.

Chapter Notes

Alrighty then 10th chapter, here we go! Sorry for the longer gap than usual. I wasn’t feeling 100% but now I feel at least 75%, which is passable. I hope this chapter is more than passable! See the end notes for a little present...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

All you have is your fire
And the place you need to reach
Don't you ever tame your demons
But always keep them on a leash
(from Arsonist’s Lullaby by Hozier)

Walking a line where the stone wall met the sea, Mairon felt more on edge than he thought he should allow himself. Out of his finery and back into his well-worn apron, he was preparing to return to Aulë’s hall. The tendrils of flame that had bound the Maia Osomon swayed around him, appearing content from their outburst and yet still reaching for something more. With each of his deep breaths, he curled and uncurled the flames into braided ropes. He watched their orange reflection in the waves and scoffed at how easily the water took on his image.

Yet, knowing the image was transitory, he reaffirmed his intentions to make a more permanent mark on Arda. The ease of creation he experienced through his most lucid of dreams was what he wanted more than anything. How best that was going to happen remained uncertain, and he did not appreciate uncertainty.

As his thoughts fell upon the Discord, the flames’ reflection warped into a wavering resemblance of the Dark Vala’s face.

Mairon startled. Just as he met its eyes, the reflection vanished along with his flames. It left behind nothing but the waves that lapped at the barrier. He frowned and wrapped his arms around himself, deciding the sea was not a good place for him to relax despite what Eönwë often said. Perhaps next time he would try stitching short stories with Vairë, but there was no time for that now.
If he were to return to the forge he had to be as ready as ever. This place between the stone and the sea, the Hall of Aulë and all the unknown beyond, would have to do. The plans for both paths were in his mind and Music, but only one could break through.

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It felt odd to him, walking to the hall again, like the walls themselves had shifted. Mairon couldn’t see how that could be until he looked to the thin crack he’d seen there before. Perhaps his feeling was more literal than he first thought.

Aulë and a group of his brown-clad civil engineers stood before what was no longer just a thin crack. It had grown to the width of his body at the widest, its edges crumbling as if the stone had somehow begun to rot. As Mairon swept by the group, he couldn’t tear his gaze away from the smooth darkness between its jagged edges. He almost didn’t hear Aulë call his name.

“Mairon, wait.”

Nevertheless, he obediently scuffed to a stop and faced the radiant red light of Aulë. Before either could speak, a chunk crumbled away from the crack and fell, barely missing another Maia that stepped away just in time. The group glared at the rock reproachfully. Aulë too looked away from Mairon, and his words were blunt in his worry.

“Ahh, never mind, just go to the workspace, I’ll find you next period.”

_I hope that is a promise I can not count on._ Mairon bowed his head and left without saying a word.

When he reached the main archway before the wide stairs that led down into the work hall, he placed his hand on one of the pillars and scanned the area for signs of Osomon or the other mining Maiar. As usual, they were out of sight in the tunnels deep below them. He gripped the pillar as much he hoped his grip on the situation remained strong.

However, the prickling in the air alerted him to an unwelcome presence he had forgotten in his new worries. At the base of the steps down to the hall was a Maia, his apron relatively unworn and his auburn hair in a tight bun. It was Curumo, waiting for him with his hands wringing in front of him in his characteristic polite impatience.

Not addressing him straight away, Mairon stepped down the stairs, feeling more and more of Curumo’s nearly inaudible vibrations, which were more excited than usual. When Mairon decided to acknowledged him with a glance, Curumo raised his eyebrows to ridiculous levels while trying to stop his smile doing the same. It was an expression that said, _I know something that you don’t._ This was Mairon’s least favourite expression to see on someone else’s face.

Mairon quickly noticed what could be the reason for Curumo’s behavior when he looked at the workbench he usually occupied. His tools were gone. The complete absence of his usual things was enough for him to forcible steel his emotions like a crucible door so they would not flare again. Through clenched teeth, Mairon asked,

“Curumo? You wouldn’t happen to know where my tools are, do you?”

“I, in fact, do.”

_Eru was truly cruel if his temper was being tested again so soon._

“Would you mind telling me where they are?”
Smartly, Curumo stepped back and lowered his voice.

“Don’t fret. I helped move your things.”

Mairon could not be cajoled into lowering his.

“You did what?”

Curumo jumped back but smirked and beckoned Mairon to follow him.

“Come on! It’s a surprise!”

If only to get answers, Mairon stalked after him, leaving a trail of smoke in his wake. As they weaved through the crowded work tables, forges, anvils, and smelters, his ears caught stifled giggles of other Maiar as they passed. Like cooling metal, his arms stiffened at his side.

As they passed into the next hall for finishing and inspection where the Maiar were usually so focused they would not notice if the ceiling fell in on them, there was an air of delighted secrecy. The anticipation surrounding him sent his mind spiralling into paranoia. If this was some sort of prank, or a set up to punish him, he would either jump in the sea or just straight up join Melk…

His unhappy thoughts stopped along with his feet when he saw where he was being led. Curumo jumped ahead of him to proudly hold open a heavy, crimson curtain woven with images in golden thread of Mairon’s past crafts. Beyond was a room newly carved in honey coloured stone, glowing in firelight. He caught a glint of what could be his mithril tools. Mairon held constant the frustrated confusion on his face but allowed himself to feel curious. He walked past Curumo to see more but gave the Maia the side-eye as he passed for good measure.

The warmth coming from the central forge fire washed over him as in stepped into the vaulted, hexagonal chamber. It was indeed a room for smithing, perfectly spotless and fitted with everything he used in his craft. His tools sat in a neat row atop an otherwise clean workbench. As much as he could barely hold in his initial anger, he couldn’t hold in his current awe.

Curumo piped up from behind him, “It’s for you, you know.”

“I know,” Mairon breathed. No single Maia besides him had mastered all of the manners of crafting achievable in this room from metal smithing to jewel setting, enchanting, machine design, and architecture. It couldn’t be for anyone else. Even after the warmth of Aulë’s apology, and the coldness of his recent dismissal, this spoke far greater volumes about how much he appreciated Mairon. Aulë always did express himself better with his actions than his words.

Curumo continued to speak as Mairon wandered around the room.

“Aulë wanted to show you, but he’s been busy with other Maiar and I thought you might want to see this right away. The construction team finished it just before that ugly thing you saw out there appeared.”

“Mm-hmm,” Mairon intoned, feigning interest as he ran his fingertips over the stacks of various metal bars provided.

Curumo babbled on. “You should have heard them complaining about the ‘disobedient stone’. Apparently it no longer willingly responds to their Music.”

*What I would give to get this dead coal of a Maia out of my face.*
“Oh? What did they say of this stone?” Mairon questioned as he picked up his hammer, hoping his tone was polite.

Curumo shrugged as he brought out his hammer and twirled it in his hands.

“Not much besides swearing. If any other Vala besides Aulë was there they would have been appalled at the language.”

Mairon turned away from him to inspect the forge, wondering if Curumo was going to stay here and blather until the end of Arda.

“Is this… alright?” Curumo suddenly asked.

Mairon gave him a blank look as he was unsure if he was talking about the room or his hammer. Curumo’s glance away at the obvious copy in his hands gave away what he had really wanted to tell Mairon.

“I must say I am sorry my admiration managed to wound your pride,” he began unsteadily. “I never had any of my own pride until I finally figured out how to make that chain, so I did not understand what it meant to have it trampled upon. Perhaps you are better at wielding it than me. The hammer, and your pride, that is.”

Curumo leaned on Mairon’s side beside the forge fire and continued to turn the hammer over in his hands, not looking up. He spoke so softly, Mairon had to strain to hear him.

“I feel as clumsy in success as I do in defeat. And even then I am just treading the well-worn path of those before me.” Curumo looked aside from the full light of the fire, casting his face in its dancing shadows. “I wish I had honed in on my calling as soon as you did. I mean, I flitted between Valar and could not decide where I belonged.”

Not liking this continued contact, Mairon moved to push the despondent Curumo away, but he continued to speak in quiet earnest.

“I wasn’t proud enough for Manwë or Oromë. Or wise enough for Varda. I didn’t feel at ease with Irmo, nor Námo. Not even sympathetic Nienna. So I began doing tedious forge work for Aulë. Now I feel as if I am behind everyone, but I still have my ambitions.”

Mairon’s motion was halted by this confession. Until recently he himself had been sure of his place in the halls of Aulë. The feeling of being misplaced was foreign to him, but now it was drawn in sharper and sharper relief as Curumo continued to speak to him.

“Why, if only I had one note of your song, I would be content. You shine in all you do, Master Mairon, and I hope you know that.”

To hear Master again so soon and in such a different tone hit him at his core and heated him more than the physical fire ever could. Instead of pushing Curumo away, Mairon turned his motion into drawing him closer so that Curumo’s head nodded against the side of his chest. Mairon tried to soothe as well as he was able.

“I am single minded. You are of many colours. There is no reason to mull over our obvious differences.”

Mairon looked down, trying to catch the sullen Curumo’s eyes. When he couldn’t, he placed his gloved hand under Curumo’s chin to pull his gaze up. He simply said,

“Continue on with your work, Curumo. That is all you can do. That is all I can do.”
Curumo smiled mutely and pulled away looking more content than when he arrived, but Mairon was imparted with uneasy thoughts. *It is all I can do,* he thought as picked up a gold bar. *It is all I can do.* He pictured the future of the gold as sparks flying and metal shaped by his will. *It is all I can do.* Metal was shaped by his will, for the whims of others. *It is all I can do.* This was his eternity. *Is it all I can do?*

Memories of Eönwë’s kind face as he guided him towards the part of his song that matched his own, that allowed him to fly, shot through his mind. Perhaps their experiment could be furthered, and might prove useful to other irritants in his life. There was a way to be rid of the job of scrupulously supervising this Maia after all.

“Curumo.”

At his name, his head jerked up from the stand of magnifying glasses he’d been playing with.

“This time, you follow me. Come, I believe I can help you after all.”

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They walked briskly in silence back through the hollowed mountain to where Aulë’s Maiar took their rest. Mairon could hear the whirring of Curumo’s thoughts right behind him like a moth batting against his ear. Curumo only dared speak when he realized where they were heading.

“But it’s not the rest period!” he protested. His voice echoed down the empty corridor.

“And we are not here for rest. Have patience, Little Smith.”

Silence came over them again until Mairon stopped walking close to his room. The wall by them was smooth stone, much like the rest of the corridor, but as Mairon waved his hands to activate the magic stored there, a symmetrical pattern appeared glowing in red.

“Is this your resting room?”

Mairon stopped in the middle of opening the entrance to turn his head and stare at him. His sarcasm was so blunt it was a hammer.

“No. It belongs to the pigeon that roosts under Manwë’s ass.”

“Ah, sorry,” whispered Curumo, wincing at the harsh swear.

“Yes, Curumo, this is my room. Tread lightly and I will imbue you with the sounds of talent, if you have a place in you to hold it.”

The patterned stone fell away behind him. He extended his arm as if to invite Curumo in, but his smile was less than welcoming. Curumo did not move but squinted and asked,

“Are you being serious? You can make me as skilled as you?”

“Never. But I can attempt to bring you up to standard. Now step inside.”

Curumo looked down, briefly showing his disappointment at Mairon’s answer, but he wiped it from his face when he saw those blazing golden eyes scrutinizing him as he entered.

“Stand there,” Mairon commanded and pointed to the same spot where Eönwë had taught him how to manifest wings.
Curumo moved swiftly, stirring the feathers left behind from that previous joyous time. Mairon swept the rest away with a gesture. He would take no chances on failing in front of this Maia and he knew imitating Eönwë would not be enough. Feathered wings were not in his Music, and gentle teachings were not either. The stone entrance closed itself, sealing them in together.

“Curumo, what do you think is the most important part of your being for crafting?”

“My hands,” he answered without hesitation.

“Incorrect,” Mairon said like a slap. “But we shall start there. Hold them out for me. Close your eyes. Hum a tune.”

Curumo did all three things so obediently it almost masked his greed. He held a respectful posture but leaned forward in his eagerness and distorted the air around him with high pitched vibrations from his minimal march of a tune. Mairon circled him once not unlike a predator, tasting the energized air.

When he was content that Curumo was under his control, Mairon began a ritual of his own making. He sang a wavering drone and the skin of his hands flaked away to reveal pulsating red hot coals. The waves of heat rising from them matched his own fervid frequency of thought and raised the room to his preferred temperature. Then without warning he grabbed Curumo’s hands in a vice grip.

Their immortal bodies had no use for discomfort, yet it showed on Curumo’s face as a ripple through his body and a tightening of his brow. The bond between them was not as harmonious as between him and Eönwë. Even so, Mairon strove to find their resonance, but only heard useless noise. So loud this noise was they couldn’t hear each other speak in their minds as they should with this close of contact. They were nowhere near finding where their Music matched. It wasn’t working.

Mairon was about to release him and tell him to try harder when it came.

Th-thump.

It couldn’t be, but there it was. It sounded faint and far in the distance but undeniably there.

Th-thump.

Mairon heard the beginning of the Discord within Curumo.

Th-thump.

It was the only Music between them that could be matched, and so it did.

In a rush of inward wind, the entire physical world fell away like a collapsing apparition of mist. What reformed was distorted by the same noise, but in visual form. Grainy grayscale as dense as mud reduced their perception of each other to where their hands we linked.

To alleviate their spiritual blindness, together they concentrated on the sounds of the Discord. While it did not resemble the Music of the Ainur they were accustomed to, it was not the same as the random noise either. With each beat, the grainy landscape flowed into an invisible river and fell as untouchable rain. The more they phased into the world the more the current pulled them and the more the rain stung. And the more they knew of each other.

They saw ambition and pride as abstract flows. Their primal forms showed. Mairon was bright fire and Curumo, sombre flint. Lucidly Mairon observed, but Curumo still had his mind’s eye closed and was off in his own world between concentration and bliss. Mairon almost saw something worthwhile
in him then. He saw himself, reflected in flecks in Curumo’s flint.

Just as their thoughts and the world came into focus, the rain became what could have been snow or ash. Mairon shivered, suspecting they were being watched.

Abrupt as lightening, The Dark Vala appeared.

There behind the oblivious Curumo he stood, naked in body and destruction. His muscles were ice then fire. His body was a tower. His power was laid bare. All current led to him, but he was touched by no rain. What Mairon heard next, he could never forget. He never had. The Discord broke seamlessly into a symphony of guttural screams and shadowed sighs. The sounds soothed him like a familiar touch, so he parted his lips to join but couldn’t think of what to add. Melkor raised one finger to shush what Music Mairon couldn’t even begin to form or sing.

That same finger, moving more delicately than its size suggested, drew a line from Curumo’s ear to his chin. Curumo inhaled and his eyes opened wide to show they were as white as clouds. Melkor flashed his own to show they were deep, dark pits.

The smell of smoke and roses and ocean salt assaulted Mairon, and as fast as they had fallen in, they fell out. His room snapped back into focus as if it had always been there behind the mist.

Instead of Melkor’s laughing face, Mairon was met with Curumo’s narrow forehead and its sheen of unsightly sweat. His limp hair tickled Mairon’s face so he huffed to blow it away while both trying to support Curumo and push him off. Luckily, Curumo awakened.

“I… I understand now,” Curumo gasped into his collarbone.

“Good… Good,” Mairon hushed.

He managed to right the wobbling Maia and fix his straying hair. As he tucked the last strand behind Curumo’s ear he spoke to him insistently.

“Little Smith, you have what I promised. You must rest. Go along now, and speak of this to no one.”

In a daze, Curumo agreed and shuffled away. The door pulsed red to show him out.

As soon as he was alone again, Mairon let his shoulders fall. Unlike the last time they met, he felt such a fool for not calling out Melkor as he interfered. He released his body into flames but even that did not unleash the unknown emotions inside him. He paced about his room in agitation, burning the feathers Eönwë left behind to dust. The smell of that other world still lingered on in Mairon’s mind. Smoke, roses, and ocean salt meant nothing to a Maia of Aulë, but he now felt like so much more.

When he could finally stop pacing, he admitted what he wanted. In the shadows of the room, he ran his hand from the tip of his ear to his chin. He did not know what that was supposed to do for him, but all it brought on was the heightened envy he so hated to feel. But what did he want to feel?

“Arrrrhh!” he cried, lashing out with his physical body as well as his mind.

His fist met the wall and let out a burst of white hot flame. Mairon the Admirable then kneeled dishevelled on his cold, stone floor and held his hand, lamenting his loneliness, wondering why. The scorch mark remained in the unmistakable shape of a lidless eye.

Chapter End Notes
Whew~! 10 chapters! This is officially the longest thing I’ve written that wasn’t a scientific report. Thanks for sticking around to read this far - you’re so awesome! In celebration I thought I would share the Spotify playlist of all the songs at the beginning of each chapter so far as well, as the BIG ONE I use for inspiration.

**Chapter Songs**
Basically all the songs with the weird lyrics I put at the beginning of each chapter, in order.

**Super Epic Playlist of Inspiration**
This one is massive and covers many periods of Mairon and Melkor's time together. It's sort of organized into themes: seduction, war, love, sex, more war, destruction, and rebirth. Feel free to browse! And let me know if the links don't work or if you'd like them on a different site.
Mairon awakens to a surprise honor. At Varda’s ceremony he is interrupted. He makes a deal, but it is all for plans of his own.

Stars streaked in Mairon’s vision from behind closed eyes. For a moment he remained with his back to the floor and imagined that the red flashes were fireballs raining down from the sky. He didn’t stop his mind from forming the silhouette of a naked figure he now knew well on the horizon. It took on a life of its own and looked up at the sky with its hands on its hips. After a moment of appraisal it turned its head towards him and nodded once in approval. The rush of acceptance Mairon received was like hot honey running down his chest and he brightened the falling stars ever more. He wished he could have stayed in fantasy and further cleansed his current fears, but it could only last for so long.

Something tickled his nose. When Mairon reluctantly opened his eyes he saw a tiny Maia of flame floating above him, sprinkling him with luminescent dust.

“A message for all Maiar of Aulë!” she peeped.

Mairon groaned and combed through his hair with his fingers. His breath pushed the little Maia away from his face, but she kept her fiercely pleasant expression.

“Alright. Tell me,” Mairon said in a voice gravelly from his hard rest.

“A ceremony of pious presentation is being held today! You are one of those being honored. Our Queen Varda will be present, so formal dress is required.”

Mairon sat up straight.

“Varda? Why? What is she presenting?” he asked.

“I thought you knew,” she answered. Her flames wavered in her best semblance of a shrug.
Mairon shook his head and pushed up on his knee to stand.

He sighed, “It seems I don’t know much in these times.”

Rapid-fire, she responded, “Indeed. Sorry, I’m on a schedule. No time for idle chat. I must go spread the message. Also, Aulë is looking for you in the Place of Light! Farewell!”

Before Mairon could even call “wait” the fast-talking Maia flitted away through his window, leaving behind glowing sparkles that faded into ordinary dust. Mairon contemplated flying after her, but he decided against the impulse.

Instead he removed his wrinkled work clothes. Now as naked as Melkor had been in his dream, he moved to the window to tame his hair. A calm and contemplative expression that belied the boiling thoughts inside him fell upon his face. As his hair wove itself into a spiral on the back of his head, Aulë, Eönwë, Curumo, Osomon, Yavanna, and now Varda swam in his mind as a maelstrom with a dark center.

In place of the people in his life, his personal collection of jewelry rose from its resting place in the hidden spaces in the wall and circled around him. He wanted to wear something no one had seen before. When the pieces he wanted passed in front of his face, he beckoned for them to latch onto him. Gold chains so fine only he could have made them dripping with raindrop rubies were strung from his hair to his ears. He then hummed three notes and his golden tunic glided to settle on his shoulders and clasp at his front.

Even if the jewels were unworn, this was the second instance in recent times when he wore the gold tunic. Mairon felt it was time he commissioned a new one. Red silk this time, perhaps? He might be able to wheedle his way into getting black wings sewn into the design if he charmed Vairë’s weavers.

Still, satisfied he could match the radiance of Varda’s Maiar in his own style, he leaned out the window to look towards the rest of the cliffside. He could almost watch the path of the messenger Maiar as windows became lit and shadows of bustling Maiar could be seen within them. To his relief, their rush showed they were just as unaware of the upcoming event as he.

His settling emotions aided in the formation of his dark veined wings upon his back. He gripped the ledge, breathed in once, and then shot headfirst down the cliff. He was an unseen shadow with his wings wrapped tight around him. The brisk sea air rushed up to meet him before he unfurled his wings to turn and follow the rocky coast towards some hidden place he could land.

He would find out what was going on soon enough. For now he would enjoy remembering the dreams he’d had.

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On the isle of Almaren, the light of the lamps were balanced at their highest intensity in the Place of Light. In later times, only the true light of the stars could compare. The oval dome of glass crystal was stained by minerals and magic that fractured the light into colours innumerable. Maiar of Aulë, Varda, and Manwë in finery of many forms were filing in and lighting the Place of Light from within. The spectacle was as blinding as it was beautiful.

Inside, towering benevolent statues of all the Valar, save one, formed a ring whose jeweled eyes met at the narrowed tip of the space where a raised stage lay. Though no actual Valar were yet present, Maiar of all rank filled the space with their presence, light, and music. Some chatted to one another in tones that made gossip sound like poetry, a few were busy raising banners while singing their songs,
but one was socially swamped.

Like a mountain island glinting in Ormal’s light, Mairon bore himself tall in the crowded hall as Maiar crashed around him like waves in the wind. They gave their congratulations and passed along in the babbling current of socialites.

Mairon welcomed each with a slight smile, but he would have preferred to inspect the artistry of the numerous windows. No distinct scenes were wrought in the panes, so the interpretation of the shapes and their projections onto the blank floor was up to each beholder. Since most of the floor space was taken up by bedecked Maiar, this wasn’t possible at the time. Mairon could only take amusement at the Maia in front of him who was unaware that her nose was cast in an alarming blue.

When it seemed Mairon would be drowned in attention, Aulë appeared at the foot of the stage. The crowd responded with an excited ripple and shuffled away to leave a path between them.

What an unusual sight it was to see Aulë in formal dress without any of his tools! He appeared to be compensating with a heavy bronze collar and cuffs. Mairon smiled to himself, wondering how many small tools were hidden in the mechanisms of the bulky jewelry. Although he hadn’t expected to be, Mairon was happy to see him. Aulë understood well how socializing could be a tedious and sometimes overwhelming task.

They hurried towards each other and embraced when they met. Mairon noticed the thick velvet cape Aulë wore still had creases from where it had been folded. He knew Yavanna would be mortified if she were here, but Aulë’s booming voice rattled all such idly amused thoughts out of him.

“Mairon! Those being honored were supposed to come in later. Where were you?”

Aulë’s smile was genial but his pinched eyebrows showed confusion.

Mairon responded, even toned, “I was helping Curumo, Master.”

It was as true an answer as anything. Although Mairon had seen no sign of Curumo since he’d awaken.

“Working too hard again! Not that I would ever complain. We are going to need that vigor in the coming time if the rumors Yavanna heard are true.”

With his bare arm around him, Aulë guided Mairon to the stage while he wondered out-loud if Yavanna’s hedgehogs were a reliable source for rumors. The red and gold toned pair stepped up a shallow marble staircase to the stage. However, out of the corner of Mairon’s eye he caught a blip in the crowd still moving towards them. He chose to ignore it for now.

“Anyways Mairon, we are being presented with precious metal that is to be used for a commission. What the material is precisely, I was not told, but it is strong. It has to be if they are asking for weaponry fit for Valar and their highest ranking Maiar’s use.”

“Weapons of war, Master?” Mairon asked to clarify.

“Yes. These will not be ceremonial arms, Mairon. And I want you to help me create them,” Aulë said with a proud twinkle in his eye.

A twinkle appeared in Mairon’s eye as well, but his showed hunger as deep as the earth. Aulë did not notice his apprentice’s appetite and continued his explanation.

“For now, you just have to stand here and look your usual radiant self. I will be accepting the gift
Mairon nodded but his flaring joy was cut short by a third “twinkle” he saw behind Aulë. At the base of the stage, staring at him like he lacked the basic social skills available to most creatures, was Osomon. The imbecile was hovering barely out of sight like a gnat. Mairon glared at him, hoping without much confidence that he would go away. Thankfully, the rather distracted Aulë kept talking.

“So Mairon, I must go. Just be here for the first note to call in our Queen Varda and her Maiar. I doubt you’ll need it, but good luck!”

Aulë disappeared down a spiral staircase to underneath the dome floor. As soon as the top of his head disappeared, Osomon tried to pull himself up onto the stage. He would not get any further. Mairon sneered at him and strode to the side of the stage, his steps becoming increasingly forceful.

Osomon winced at Mairon’s last stomp and sight of his golden tunic, most likely remembering clinging to its hem. However, Mairon walked down the stairs to his level and beckoned for him to follow. Osomon went after him reluctantly, appearing to reassure himself that he approached the short-tempered Maia for a reason.

“What? Not gonna make a fuss in front of the crowd?” Osomon managed to jibe when he caught up.

Mairon narrowed his eyes in warning, but he knew it was true. Osomon was clever to catch him here and now, where watching eyes felt as numerous as sand on a beach. That could be remedied. With the elegance of dancer, Mairon pretended to look up at the ceiling and hip-checked Osomon behind the massive statue of Aulë. When he was certain no one had taken notice, he slipped away behind the statue himself.

“What in Eru’s name do you want, rock slugger?” Mairon spat at Osomon, who was still on the ground and rubbing his backside.

“Alright, here it is,” Osomon began shakily. “I heard from this little shadow that…”

“Who?” Mairon jabbed the word and bent over to get so close to Osomon’s face he could see him tremble.

Whatever is was Osomon wanted from him, the Maia had braved his fear to get it.

“The Thuringwethil. Not important. I heard that you can teach Maiar skills they never had before. Like, completely change their destiny.”

Osomon’s words accelerated as he revealed what potential prize stayed his fear. His breath smelled of coal dust and his slicked back hair smelled of oil. Mairon was not impressed with his presentation.

“Even if I would waste my precious time with you, it would be a worthless venture for the both of us. There has to be existing potential as well as desire within.”

“What?”

This one’s brain needs a rock hammer to reach.

“I can’t teach you if you can’t know,” Mairon said flatly, stepping away to leave.

“That sounds like an excuse if I ever heard one. I thought you liked challenges and stuff.”

That stopped Mairon in his tracks.
“So?” hissed Mairon, letting smoke rise from between his teeth.

“So I’m a challenge! Challenge yourself.”

**The boulder is abnormally bold for a Maia still shaking in his boots.**

A lock of Mairon’s hair escaped from the rest and rose as a flame. He smoothed it down and said,

“Challenges must be worthwhile. As it stands I would love to challenge myself and see if I can turn you into a candlewick using the grease in your hair alone.”

“Whoa whoa! Alright, you don’t have to commit to anything. Just come down to the gold pit and see the potential you so want.”

“I will do no such thing until you give me what I so politely asked of you last time we met.”

Osomon gulped and conceded.

“Yes. I’ll tell you everything I know about him. Even his favourite colour.”

Mairon sighed like a collapsing fire, but relented. He had his own prize he would temporarily entertain the foolhardy for.

“It’s not his fashion choices I’m interested in. But. I will meet with you.”

Osomon sucked in his breath in excitement. His nervous glee at getting somewhere with Mairon was evident in his grin that showed his blocky teeth and his thick fingers that thrummed on his thigh.

Attempting to speak professionally, he said, “Good. When can we start?”

Mairon pinched the soft part of Osomon’s arm and said, “Soon, but not here and now, obviously. Sometime after this ceremony, at my leisure.”

He gave him a solid push.

“And I guarantee nothing. Now shoo.”

Osomon stumbled out from behind the statue and galloped off with little elegance.

Mairon placed his hand and then his forehead upon the rough stone boot of Aulë’s statue, questioning how he ever got himself in this position. In the peace of Aulë’s shadow, he waited until he knew the ceremony was about to start.

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The long, high note that called the ceremony to a start vibrated the Ainur present to their very essence.

All silenced when Varda entered with the quiet force of a stellar storm. Her gliding movements made light dance within the crystal dome as if it were aurora in pocket universes. Her beautiful smile ended the rumors that this was a mysteriously rushed event.

Behind Varda walked Ilmarë in a gown brighter than either lamp, her hair flowing like liquid silver in an unseen breeze. Eönwë was beside her with his hand held up to support hers. Her light gleamed off of his platinum armor and soft white cape but nothing was as pure as his radiant, smiling eyes. Mairon was stung by the happy look shared between his closest friend and the beautiful Maia. Any
further beauty displayed was lost on him.

To unsour his mood, the gifts had to appear. As soon as the doors opened to bring them in, lightning arced to the ceiling in wild spurts. Perched upon a wide plate that kept the lightning from striking the crowd were three irregular orbs of exotic metal. Forged in the heart of celestial fire, the three cores quaked from their own energy. Mairon’s eyes became locked on the largest in the middle, whose arcs were reaching up and across the top of the dome with violent, violet fingers.

His smith’s heart could already see the weapons they would form. A sword, an axe, and a hammer that few could ever handle. Imagining the might of their swing, he bit his bottom lip in anticipation.

His gaze was drawn to the spot where Melkor’s statue would have been. No. Now was not the time to imagine what one of his weapons could do in the Dark Vala’s hands, but he was the only one Mairon could see wielding such reckless power without damping it to oblivion. The blasphemous thoughts amidst such piety made him nearly nauseous with the sick rush.

It was already decided who the weapons were for. That was evident from each representative that moved below the display. One golden-haired Maia for Tulkas, one huntress for Oromë, and the gleaming Eönwë for Manwë stood proud. They would use his weapons for whatever war the Valar wished to wage, most likely in opposition to the Dark Vala. If they succeeded, all that power would be imprisoned and lost, never to be fully utilized.

For the first time, Mairon desired his creations to not just to be appreciated, but to be used for his purposes alone. However he felt about Melkor, the thought of his might and magic being quashed opened a gulf of emptiness within him. Arda would be lesser for it, and so would he. He shuddered fully when the crowd began to applaud, as if in agreement with his deviant thought.

Aulë raised the metal orbs high and their lightning crackled above Mairon’s head. Before him he saw everything he had ever wanted, but their applause only flattened his mood. This was not the climax of his Song nor the pinnacle of his will. He could hear the fever pitch climbing still.

Chapter End Notes

GROND GROND GROND GROND okay you get it. I can’t recall any specific canon about how the Hammer of the Underworld was made, so I’m gonna have some fun with this. So much fun. >;] My mission is on its way to completion. And Mairon’s is just beginning. *evil laugh*
To Renounce

Chapter Summary

Mairon, impatient for another audience with Melkor, takes up Osomon’s offer. He learns the Maia is more than he lets on. Meanwhile, Manwë visits the Fëanturi and learns what Curumo has done.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

You hold it high, belief so pure
We fall in line for another cage
You live in towers we built for you
We live in fear that what you say is true
Strength in numbers behind the mask
The paint of war, the drum, the lash
With the fire we walk the path
Under the banner we call the crash
(From Of The Machine by Shiv-R)

Mairon loathed to be ignored, even by what he should fear.

In his golden finery yet crammed into a crude mining shaft, Mairon lurked while his mind gnawed upon itself. To his immense frustration, no hint of the Dark Vala Melkor, no dark dreams nor sinister songs nor fruiting fungi, had materialized. In irritation, Mairon shifted his index finger into a single black talon and scorched shapes of wings into the stone around him. He’d been secretly hoping Melkor seek him out again, if only to sharpen the dullness his life had been beaten into. Osomon’s clunky political machinations were about as uninspired as the design requests of the Valar for their new weapons - a rehashing of what he’d already done. More so, Mairon very much wanted to show Melkor his superiority over Osomon and put the boulder-bastard in his place, but that wasn’t going to happen soon enough for him. He could no longer ignore his present issue.

Three hundred unpredicted problems pricked his sight. Three hundred Maiar were gathered in the pit below him. Each was a perfect model after Aulë, as tall as they were well-built, and in as many colours as there were minerals. Mairon wondered if the Valar knew these Maiar had sung the Discord and that was why they were down here, or if they simply thought this was all they were useful for. Either way, it was a shame they were rarely seen by their master, slaving away in the depths for the material their society needed for its grandeur. However, the greater shame was that they would be here to witness Osomon’s final, weeping words as he atones for inviting them all here
in the first place.

Although the idea of melding Osomon’s mouth together pleased him, he reasoned that these Maiar were likely his allies and wouldn’t easily allow it. There were simply too many of them for him to practice his sadism in peace. He could dream though, couldn’t he?

Heavy breathing and the smell of burning coal alerted him to the presence of Osomon.

When Mairon wouldn’t acknowledge him, he jabbed, “So when are you going to get off your pinnacle and join us in the pit, little Master?”

Mairon was not about to take such blatant sarcasm, but he genuinely feared the revolt of the crowd before him. He settled for a snide remark.

“It seems I must now if I want to get away from your stench.”

Without the welcome or guidance of Osomon, Mairon squared his shoulders and stepped down the craggy slope. To catch up, Osomon slid down in a cloud of dust.

“You impressed by my crew?” he dared to ask. Overconfidence did not become him, and would not bedeck him for long.

“No,” Mairon answered curtly. “Tell me, is your big Master around?”

“Naw. Probably a good thing. He’s been busy with whatever he’s doing. And moody.”

“Hmph.”

A small cloud of soot, as if from a damped fire, puffed around Mairon’s head.

Osomon coughed and said, “Well don’t look so disappointed.”

“I’m not.”

Mairon kicked Osomon’s thick ankle, causing the boulder of a Maia to slip-stumble the rest of the way down. He was just steadying himself and cursing harshly as Mairon came in beside him adorned with unmatched, spiteful elegance. Together they looked at odds as if they were a sliver of gold and a lump of coal. The divide was highlighted further by the glare they shared that stirred up flakes of grime from the floor and ignited them into embers. In that moment on the verge of violence, a tense note was strung in the air.

Pairs of eyes started falling upon them, and Mairon and Osomon stopped their escalating animosity. Their rivalry had caused them to temporarily forget everyone else, and now three-hundred Maiar had just seen them threaten each other in a way that would ban them from Manwë’s court forever.

Mairon could feel the consequences of his own arrogance crumbling his confidence into doubt. The rising bile from being exposed and vulnerable was greater than that of any sickness he felt at his disobedience of the Valar. If these Maiar threatened him, he would not hesitate to hurt them, and flee to the abyss of outer Arda.

To his great surprise, one snapped the tension by amicably calling out, “Hello, Gothmog! Who’s your friend?”

Friend? Gothmog? That is certainly not an Eru-given name. And how normalized are fights here that no one even bats an eye?
Osomon, or whoever he was, chuckled and stepped forward to speak.

“My friends! And the other couple hundred-so of you,” he began, easily getting guffaws from the crowd. “I have uncovered another one of us in the most unlikely of places. If you’re not classy enough to recognise him, this is Mairon, chief apprentice of Aulë. And he knows of the Discord!”

Murmurs rippled through the crowd like tumbling gravel. Mairon pushed past “Gothmog” to stop this libel but the Maia leaned over to hiss in his ear. His dark, limp hair tickled Mairon’s face as he told him,

“Go along with it. Besides, after that twisted shit you pulled on me, I would shove a rock up my ass if it wasn’t true.”

*Lovely.* “You might have to yet, if I don’t see what I want soon,” Mairon hissed back, pushing Gothmog’s face away from his in disgust.

“*Yeesh,* it’s when you say things like that that you sound the most like him…” Gothmog said through Mairon’s fingers.

Mairon chose to ignore that remark. The other Maiar were testing their luck and inching closer. Their murmurs burst into full-on curious speculation. Energy radiated by their excitement fluoresced the rough attire they wore with each word, turning the churning crowd into a dark kaleidoscope. Even with Mairon’s great perception, he could only catch a few comments.

“This isn’t a trick right? I don’t remember him singing the Discord in the Great Music…”

“He’s just as beautiful up close as he is far away. You owe me a gold nugget!”

“I thought it was just us dirty mining Maiar that sang the Discord!”

“This must mean we are meant for more.”

“Yeah, we’re legit now, right?”

“Can we go back to the fight? That was much more entertaining.”

Gothmog intervened before he heard anything more he didn’t like and shouted, “Alright, alright, shut-up and focus! I didn’t gather you all here to gawk at the pretty surface-slag.”

The wall of muscled Maiar stopped gossiping and glanced down at what hung from their sides. Each carried a length of woven metal usually used in the pulley and rail system to bring precious ore up to Aulë’s refinery. Mairon was alarmed but curious when he noticed many of the cables had been modified, without authorization, to incorporate metal shards. Despite the welcome he received, he made note of the exits.

Gothmog steered the crowd attention back to him when he shouted, “No more distractions! We’re here for me, remember? Remember what I did for you lot?”

Rumbles of agreement came from his friends. At that slight positive note, Gothmog started on a story he obviously enjoyed telling.

“It all started when I was clearing pigeons out of the surface coal quarry. Some gurgling idiots were getting away. I got so mad at them I lashed my rope up towards that too-blue sky. My rage was so great that fire formed along its length. Brought them winged creatures back to the ground. Then I got this idea…”
“Amazing,” Mairon said with a layer of sarcasm so thick it could have formed a new atmosphere over Arda.

Gothmog’s tongue briefly stumbled over his lie.

“Ahh... Hrmmph. I got this idea to use them as a weapon, since our new Master Melkor was looking for some to best Manwë’s Maiar and such. I thought, ‘Much better than a really long stick for getting those tricky winged ones, right?’ so I took the initiative and...”

Several Maiar at the front nodded but rolled their eyes as if they’d heard this story many times and wanted him to get on with it.

“And I told Melkor of this idea. He was so pleased that lightning arced through his hair to his fingertips as he laughed! I shuddered before his tremendous power! He then commanded me to gather all of his disciples, willing or not, and teach them of this new found weapon. So that’s how I got stuck with all of you ungrateful louts.”

Reluctant rumbles of appreciation ran through the Maiar. Satisfied, Gothmog put his hands on his hips and puffed out his chest in his best imitation of Aulë’s commanding stance. Mairon didn’t have time to snicker before Gothmog bellowed,

“Now is our time! Stand at the ready, louts!”

A collective stomp sounded. The Maiar shuffled into a loose formation that lacked the intimidation of synced obedience, but remained formidable simply because of its size.

“And... fire!”

A blast of hot air pushed Mairon’s hair away from his face. His pupils narrowed into slits as the pit became alight with three hundred whips of fire. To the best of their ability, the Maiar raised them high above their heads in spinning spirals. Certainly some were better than others, and none were as pure or well-formed as Mairon’s had been, but within the roiling chaos of fire-whips Mairon saw something that impressed him.

He saw a chance to his freedom. He saw an army with a willingness to learn, to experiment, to change, to rebel and... to obey into a new order. He finally saw the way to the future of an Arda he wanted to be a part of. The Arda he wanted to create.

However much Aulë loved him, and Mairon knew he loved him, his new workspace was a gilded cage. At the forge his sight was myopic but during flight he had seen far above the muddle. He knew Arda was his true workbench.

The organization of an army untied to the restrictions of the Valar and a weapon of his own creation had to be enough to get Melkor’s attention. Was he mad to want it? The Dark Vala who sang of order from chaos was the only danger Mairon had ever known. But little did others know, risk, and mistake, were an important part of his creative process. It was the reason he let no one see him work, and it was the only way he knew to achieve true progress.

This risk needed taking. The objects before him needed shaping.

Gothmog looked to Mairon, perhaps hoping he would be cowering or at least losing his composure in awe, but Mairon was calmed by his element. The lengths of fire flew around him, yet his body was unaffected by the blistering waves of heat. Mairon raised his chin and took several purposeful steps forward. The Maiar stepped back to avoid him, but could not control their weapons enough to do the same. The wild whips slashed and burnt his tunic, but he did not flinch. If anything, the fire
enhanced his avid appearance and he burned hotter with each lash. Eyes craned as he unclasped his now ruined tunic and let it slide down his shoulders. Soft gasps were issued, which he greatly appreciated. For a moment, he looked deep into the crowd as if staring at everyone. He then flung the tunic to fall into the deepest part of the pit.

“Maiar!” he boomed.

All whips fell, even Gothmog’s, which wilted to leave Mairon the only light in the dark pit. Mairon’s own whip of pure fire spiraled into existence from his aura and spun over the Maiar’s heads. They were enraptured by the control he showed along with his lyrical speech.

“Long have you toiled for little praise. It’s a fate I could never fathom, but one I can still rescue you from. Aulë has taught you of discipline, but Melkor has taught you of disobedience! With the correct form and application, together the two can bring about the change that Arda so needs.”

Mairon’s free hand gestured to the crowd before him.

“Look at you! I see the finest of Aulë’s servants wasted on dull labour, when they could be keeping the weaker in line; as it should be if Arda were properly ordered and Melkor was our King!”

A roar of agreement rattled dust from the ceiling. The Maia who’d first called Osomon, “Gothmog”, bowed and spread his hands out in offering. He said,

“Mairon, chief apprentice of Aulë, singer of the Discord and the Music, teach us about harnessing the power of fire and we will do anything in return.”

Mairon nodded his head once, but made a binding promise. He swore to himself he would not be cheated by anyone ever again.

“I will do so, Maiar of Aulë and now Melkor, but each lesson you learn will put you more in debt to me. If you truly master my skill with fire, you will be forever mine to command.”

Taut wires of light barely visible threaded through the Maiar, making the deal more than words. Mairon’s manipulations had manifested as subtle magic in a way even he didn’t expect. What a thrill it was to work on dark impulse!

“No!” Gothmog yelled, but he was drowned out by the crowd’s cheer.

Ecstatic celebration erupted from the Maiar under Melkor’s influence as they fell under Mairon’s as well. They sang in deep tones of acknowledgement and admiration, and their laughter rang as play-fights ensued. Hiding beneath all the Valar, the poor Maiar of the pit had their most joyous moment since their creation.

Mairon and Gothmog retreated to lean against a stone veined with gold. Apart from the celebration, they spoke as civilly as they could.

“You have to know it was by Melkor’s will that you were here, not mine. And I bet that you would be intimidated, not inspired,” Gothmog sulked, shifting his back against the rough stone.

“You are far too honest, Gothmog. I would advise against gambling with the Dark Vala again. Stick to smashing things with that thick skull of yours,” Mairon chided.

Gothmog snorted and spit on the ground.”

“Fine, but it’s you who’d better know what he’s doing from here on out,” he warned with unusual
seriousness. “Mairon, you’re being lured by Melkor as much as these Maiar are. As much as I am… down a path no one knows but him! How do you feel about that? Won’t you miss the praise of the Valar above? I won’t because I never had it. I don’t have shit to lose. You do.”

Mairon crossed his arms on his chest to hide his clenched fists.

“Still trying to scare me off? Give it up. I’ve decided this cause desperately needs my help. You can thank yourself for that.”

To face Mairon directly, Gothmog pushed himself off the rock.

“I’m trying to say that if you’re going to mess around in Melkor’s realm, you have to be ready to give up who you are. Why do you, the great and admirable, of all Maiar want to do that?” he exclaimed.

It was then Mairon paused in thought. Some thought made him smile with such brilliance, Gothmog wondered where in that beautiful body all his cruelty resided.

“No, you don’t understand. It’s everyone else who must give up what they thought they knew about me. I give up nothing in finally acting as myself,” Mairon intoned.

He let his smile drop and his eyes fill with fire.

“Enough of your questions. Now, tell me where I can find Melkor.”

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Manwë had never felt completely comfortable in enclosed spaces. He could already feel a longing for the skies building in him, but he was only just heading down the staircase. It drifted down in a loosening spiral before fanning out upon a cold floor covered in mist that wafted about his ankles. Not even his wind could clear it. He heard distant clinks and clanks, but they did not alarm him, despite the mysterious atmosphere of the place. Its creators called it the Hall of Mirrors, but only they knew why the almost claustrophobically foggy place was named so. As Manwë whistled in an attempt to summon even a small breeze, he thought it had to be an inside joke.

Amidst a space surrounded by a slowly revolving wall of fog were two of Manwë’s most mysterious Valar. Irmo and Námo sat on crystal blocks draped with their many layered robes. Their whispers and quiet laughter echoed off unseen objects far in the distance, revealing that the hall was much larger than it seemed. The other noises Manwë heard were from game pieces floating around the brothers. Some were distinct and others were blurred, but all were carved with eerily familiar faces that changed expressions whenever you weren’t looking.

Manwë took a moment of whimsy to greet the piece he knew was himself. As funny as it was to bow to his image, it was all to hide the note of longing aching in him as he watched the brothers enjoy each other’s company. He snapped out of it when he heard Irmo’s wispy voice.

“He’s been looking worried lately. Is that why you came to visit our little arcade?”

“Irmo, I thought you had asked me to come.”

As internally focused as the Vala of Dreams was, he could be oddly forgetful. Irmo looked towards the silent Námo for confirmation, which he gave without even a nod.

“My apologies, King Manwë,” Irmo began. "If you can recall with me, in our previous meeting I expressed my concerns about the growing volume of the Discord in the Maiar.”
Irmo's hood fell and his translucent curls drifted outward of their own accord, free of gravity’s pull. Námo, not interested in the conversation, reached out to tuck a lock back behind his younger brother’s ear as he continued to speak.

“Although the additional observations of your Maiar was a generous gift, it turns out we didn’t need it. We’ve had a Maia come forward. One of Aulë’s if you can believe.”

Irmo beckoned and a dark-haired Maia of Aulë, tall but slim, appeared from the wall of fog. He’d been given nacreous robes of white and was bowing his head in pittance. Manwë recognised him and took the time to honor him with his words.

“Curumo, I’m glad to see you have found your role at last. I hope you will help others do the same.”

“Many thanks, your Majesty. I will do all to assist your eternal reign,” Curumo pledged.

Manwë smiled down upon the eager Maia and the fog surrounding them became back-lit with golden light. Curumo breathed out in relief and Irmo closed his eyes in pleasure. The only being the warmth couldn’t reach was Námo. Manwë’s Doomsman was stubborn in his grim mood, and had decided that looking off into the distance was more important than pleasantry. He looked as if he was waiting for something.

When Curumo opened his mouth to offer more praise, a piece of black marble appeared fully from the fog. Its glowering visage was unmistakably Melkor. A deep shadow was cast upon them from the intense light of what trailed behind the massive marble block. The other game piece appeared and its face was covered by a lidless eye of flames. Curumo’s polite bearing broke into a defensive stance. He looked into it and was struck wordless.

“Oh Eru, where did that come from?” Irmo muttered, chastising himself.

“From Eru,” Námo answered.

The fog was whipped into dark clouds as Manwë frowned at the image of his brother bearing down on him. Melkor was near, and as much as Manwë fought it, still just as dear.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the sudden name change of Osomon but I felt it didn't make sense for a Maia to be called Gothmog from the start. I kind of struggled with what to do with him but I like to think it's the translation of the name he started calling himself (and making his friends call him). Mairon currently very much associates with his name and will not be giving it up for a fancy new goth name. :P

So Mairon has certainly accepted the philosophy of Melkor, but what of Melkor himself? Will Mairon finally get a second audience with Melkor? We’ll see in lucky number 13… who am I kidding I’ve already basically written it ;)

On another side note, I spend an absurd amount of time trying not to accidentally imply through poor wording that Manwe's wind powers are actually just magic farts. Just my problem? Okay, I can accept that.
"And so Manwe's wind passed through the realm. So potent it was, it reached even Melkor, who said: Sick, bro."
The Truce

Chapter Summary

Mairon searches for Melkor and finds him in a place he didn’t expect, guided by someone he didn’t even know existed. The conversations they have change the course of Arda forever.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Will you wash your hands in his heart, will you dwell?

Will you pay yourself with being proud as well?

He has a heart as little apt as yours

But it harbours no complaints, no remorse

Coriolan, Coriolan, Coriolan

Wouldn't flatter you for a love forlorn

For he has no equal in pride, in scorn

And what his breast forges his tongue must vent

For it's hard to walk with your knees bent

(From Coriolan by Rome)

No coal can rest, lest it die, yet Mairon tried.

The confines of his room felt like a cramped hearth that couldn’t contain the rampaging wildfire he needed to release. Concern from Aulë had forced him to take leave and it was, of course, doing him no good. Instead of focusing inward and realigning his spirit with the Music, his mind raced with outward thoughts matching the pace of the Discord.

North tunnels, mountain shadow, gold pit... North tunnels, mountain shadow, gold pit... North tunnels, mountain shadow, gold pit... Rose garden, seaside, sky...!

He knew this fervor made his old obsessions looked trivial in hindsight. Aulë had every right to be concerned, but Mairon believed he should have every right to be left alone.

He’d been hunting around the locations Osomon or Gothmog had told him of every free moment he
wasn’t crafting with Aulë or teaching the clueless Vala’s Maiar in secret. He’d become desperate enough to retrace his and Melkor’s first encounter, but again he found no sign of Melkor or his maleficent magics. Now he was left ragged, all but dragged by a kindly but insistent Aulë to his resting space and left with his own thoughts.

Mairon had just about had enough of being pushed into boxes for an entire age of Arda.

He would decompress in his own way. Aulë was far too busy to wait on him anyways. The decision to disobey alone relaxed the tension that previously permeated him. The rest of his worries softened when he stretched his long, dark wings into existence.

As he tested the reformed muscles in his back, he took the time to picture Melkor observing his form from the shadows. This fantasy was partially from vanity but mostly it was to shake the unshakable feeling he was being watched. The true source of the unsettling itch was unknown; that is, until he stepped up to the window, and happened to look down.

To his great surprise, clinging just beneath his window sill was a strange Maia he’d never seen before. Above all else, he was taken aback by her appearance. She must have been taken aback by his as well, since her mouth of jagged teeth was laid agape as her dark, glittering eyes darted over his wings.

Mairon coughed in shock. She then seemed to remember herself and looked up at him to smile awkwardly. It was like she was trying to appear friendly but had forgotten what such a face looked like. Though she was not ugly by any means, what beauty she had would not have been appreciated in the high courts. While all Maiar on Almaren were as new as the Spring of Arda, she was what could only be described as frayed. Her sallow face was long and drawn with a grief belied by her nervous glee.

“Is the Lord of Gifts busy now?” she carefully asked in a high but rasped voice.

When he did not respond immediately, she started to claw down the cliff.

“I’ll come back later then,” she said to herself.

Coming to, Mairon exclaimed, “No! Get back here and explain yourself!”

He grabbed for the back of her tattered dress, but only got a handful of black hair that slipped from his grip like liquid silk.

“What are you doing? Who are you?” he spat in frustration.

“Nothing and no one!” she quipped and leapt to the rocks below.

The intruding Maia darted away like a shadow from swinging lantern light. Mairon ground his teeth together, causing waves of heat to waver from him. She was fast, but she would never match the speed of his wings. He prepared for flight by shifting his wingtips that were now glowing like embers.

He dove and darted after her in the cool light of Illuin. He wove after her along the rocky shore, and had to admit she was better at evading him than even Eönwë. It still wasn’t enough. When she made the mistake of looking back into his fire red eyes, she shrieked and tried to flee faster. So fun this chase was for Mairon that he let up on his speed so that it would last longer.

However, he soon tired of her predictable movements. He sped up again and laughed his callous laugh. He glided over top of her, casting a shadow that would in later ages, become a symbol of fear.
The landing beat of his wings flung her to the ground, flimsy little thing she was.

Mairon picked her up by the collar of her dress before she could run again. He scoffed when he realized the garment was made of bits of fur. Fur from something that was surely now dead, and killed rather violently. He was about to ask her what kind of sanction Yavanna had given her, but as he watched her gurgle and try to swat his hands away, he figured it was moot.

He did, however, drop her when he realized where they were.

Strangely enough, she had brought him to the expansive marble court before the Place of Light. Thankfully, they were alone but the desolation was more eerie than that of the tunnels deep in the ground. The lack of other Ainur had drained the Light from the Place. It was haunting. The wind was dead and the air almost heavy.

Something moved. They both jumped and looked to the dome and its many panes of glass. A silhouette of an Ainu was walking with their hands behind their back. They showed great height and strength, but the lack of the light that would have marked them as a Vala was absent. Its place was the sensation of invisible radiation shooting through their bodies and a slight ringing in their ears. That should have been Mairon’s first clue. His second came as his intruder began to whine to herself.

“Why him? I cannot bear it! I say I am no Thuringwethil, yet I lead us here to him?”

Mairon pulled her away from hiding behind him.

“Calm yourself. It’s just Manwë, pacing in his thoughts. We should leave before he sees us.”

He turned to leave, but she grabbed his other arm and nodded towards the dome.

“No, look.”

Her hand was unbearable cold, but he did see something curious amongst the patterns in the glass. They did not move as light should, but were as turbulent as fast flowing oil. They moved as fast as flickering flames and as slow as budding ice crystals. He could have sworn he briefly saw the image of two dark-winged Ainur swirl in the glass. It was so evocative to the ache within him he knew the Ainu could only be Melkor.

But even now he was hesitant to enter his presence. He switched her grip, taking her hands in his.

“Come in with me.”

“No, no, no.”

“Why not?” Mairon barked with great impatience.

“I mustn’t, for I am not his.”

“Whose are you then?”

“No one’s,” she croaked, her eyes brimming.

Mairon’s face dropped all its usual harshness. His hand dropped hers. She backed away, her eyes moving from him to the figure in the dome behind them. Then she ran. Mercifully, he let the mysterious Maia disappear. He felt he would see her in the future again anyways.

Now he had to face Melkor alone.
For the last time in his long life, he prayed to Eru that he would get what he hoped for, and for his safety.

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The Dark Vala Melkor did not lack the light of Eru that the other Valar displayed so readily. He kept his trapped in a bright ring bent around his body so that he could possess it wholly. All other light was drawn into it, leaving the space around him permanently cast in shadows.

This environment that Melkor brought everywhere with him was perfect for Mairon’s approach. He drank in all its details whenever Melkor’s accretion disk was not blinding him.

He noted the immense Vala was wearing garb of the same design as Manwë’s, but in a state of disrepair. Dust from deep underground coloured it in shades of shadow and stone. It was not such a stretch to mistake him for Manwë from a distance, but a grave mistake to do so to his face. Melkor looked eye to eye with his brother’s statue as if trying to block him from the view of an invisible audience. All that showed of the King’s image from Mairon’s point of view was a crown, showing what Melkor lacked. Still, Mairon was entranced by the crownless King. He had to steady himself with each silent step he took towards him. What he had for a heart pounded a beat that was the only thing that gave him away.

All rehearsed greetings fell from Mairon’s mind. Instead, his voice skipped like sparks over his tongue as he said,

“For all that the Ainur associate you with shadows, you certainly refuse to lurk in them.”

Melkor did not jump or startle. He turned leisurely, as if he’d run into a friend at the market and put on a smile that could melt a mountain.

“For all that the Ainur call you Admirable, you certainly do things they wouldn’t approve of.”

Immediately ruffled, Mairon returned, “And what do you know of approval?”

Damn, already he’s goaded me into harsh remarks. Harsher than I’ve ever exchanged with Aulë.

“Nothing,” Melkor admitted, appearing unaffected by Mairon’s sour retort. It was all but a game. “I would have gotten you to teach me of it, if not for your latest actions.”

A flash of worry showed on Mairon’s face in a quirk of his brow. He hadn’t expected Melkor to have his own gripes he’d been waiting to say. The Valar he was familiar with did not show their displeasure. And Melkor did have plenty of it.

“Oh, I know all that you’ve done, Mairon. Yet, even with my knowledge I do not know why you did it. For a title? Master Mairon? Does that stir something in you that I cannot?”

Suddenly embarrassed by the epithet, Mairon looked to his side and said, “It stirs me not but to annoyance.”

Melkor frowned like only he could, etching canyons into his cheeks.

“And do you not know what annoys me?” he posed a question like it was threat.

When Mairon looked back to him, he loomed closer than ever before. He was so tall. Mairon tried not to show any reaction as Arda’s force of destruction laid before him all his atrocious actions.
“Attacking my Captain? Controlling my Maiar? Stalking my movements? Little Maia, I should be angry with you. I should strike you down.”

The magic of Melkor manifested as a fascinating fractal pattern of frost and fire upon his exposed skin. The temperature difference was so extreme, electricity flowed and arced along him, reaching even his dark eyes. Their hair stood on end in stark strands defying all other force. Without even raising his fist, Melkor had become an unabashed horror. Mairon’s fingernails dug into his palms but he stood resolute. Melkor’s face had stopped a hand’s breadth above his own.

“Yet… you looked like you enjoyed yourself so much that I cannot strike.”

The static so strong it was almost a touch dissipated. Mairon let his breath out and said,

“You saw wrong.”

The denial made Melkor’s frown deepen.

“So then why have you attached yourself to my cause? I thought you weren’t interested, as you are so beloved by the Ainur on this isle. Leave me to my devices. Become a mere spectator of my great change.” Melkor said as he retreated slightly and paced before the statues.

Mairon was surprised a Vala of such power could be so petty. Did Melkor truly think him to be a mere spectator of the world? Manwë certainly did. He was just a spectator too in Mairon’s eyes. Aulë was as well if he expected Mairon to never question his wisdom. Then what did he have left to lose? He would feel no more fear. Only fire.

“Please, you must never think of me in such light. I have drafted myself because within your system, I see room for improvement.”

Melkor spun his head to look over his shoulder at Mairon with critical eyes. He obviously had not expected to receive unsolicited advice.

“What?”

Faster than would be expected for someone his size, Melkor again moved within Mairon’s personal space. Mairon himself did not flinch, for he now knew Melkor would not hurt him. Nevertheless, Melkor’s eye twitched and stored energy bolted from him as lightning and struck the stone Aulë’s hammer. It cracked and crumbled to pieces. Mairon watched it fall with mild interest.

Imitating Melkor’s posture, he circled around Melkor and traced then the lightning’s trail, kicking the hammer’s remains out of his way. He attempted to reason with the Dark Vala like only he could.

“Do not be alarmed. I see room for improvement in all aspects of Arda, even myself. What I need to know from you is if you will be the Vala that lets me accomplish my vision for perfection? Or will you stifle the true creative force of Eru like the rest?”

“I am the true creative force of Eru.”

Seeing all the ways Melkor was not his brother, Mairon believed it. Melkor’s investment in the world around him made him dynamic and emotive like no other Vala. Mairon aspired to reach such connection to Arda.

“Then tell me the plan of Eru.”

“Oh no, I’m not that easy,” Melkor countered. "I insist you take a guess.”
Mairon frowned up at him, trying to discern if he was serious. Melkor answered his thoughts.

“I’m serious. Tell me. Only one who truly sang my Music would begin to understand my plans.”

*Do I know? After the jump is too late to doubt, Mairon.*

Stating each word clearly, Mairon said, “You wish to dismantle the courts of the Valar that have rejected you. Us.”

Melkor’s smirk returned, but his sooty storm clouds stayed. Mairon continued.

“No, you wish to destroy them.”

“Close, but you are only partially correct. It is not the courts I want to destroy, but that which makes them holy. The Valar may divide themselves and linger in their artificial realms, but they will do so in darkness while I reign over Arda.”

*The Lamps? He’s mad. Aulë himself raised them.*

Mairon could not help but spout, “Just how are you going to do that? The lamps are as indestructible as the sky!”

A dark cloud welled up from the ground and encased them in storm.

“No! Stop addressing me as if I was your enforcer! Your doubt is self-protecting lies!”

Mairon flinched to be chastised, but kept his eyes locked on Melkor as he ranted and raved.

“You do not need my permission to think what you already know! And you know what the Valar create is not all there is to be. What you can create is beyond the power of your previous master. My brother and his jury of nay-saying judges would revile you for it. But not me, never.”

Melkor’s emphatic address struck him, as did his dark eyes, which he was finding contained more colours than they did at first glance. *How did I ever avoid his gaze?*

“You don’t need to keep layers of yourself from me, Mairon. Not me.”

Moving closer so that Mairon’s ears were filled with a pleasant buzzing, Melkor raised his hands. He placed his fingers on either side of Mairon’s temple and drew them upward across his scalp to form a crown. It took all of Mairon’s power not to tremble under his electrifying touch.

“You don’t need to keep layers of yourself from yourself.”

Haughtily, Mairon answered, “I know myself.”

“Then show me.”

Melkor rubbed Mairon’s temple with his thumbs, and he did tremble then.

“And when the time comes, show everyone else.”

“I will,” Mairon confirmed, keeping the shaking out of his voice.

“Good,” Melkor rumbled, satisfied.

Mairon, however, never could properly submit to authority of any type.
“With or without you.”

“Hmm?”

“Now get your hands out of my hair.”

Melkor burst into raucous laughter and released Mairon’s head. His hands just barely missed a flash of flame.

“Are we at an impasse? Oh, you are fun,” Melkor divulged while he paced around Mairon and playing with several strands of copper hair he’d freed.

He was more touch-oriented than Mairon would have normally tolerated, but somehow being in contact with his power dispelled the usual irritation he felt at contact. Mairon huffed and reduced the strands to ash, prompting a renewal of chuckles from Melkor. Despite keeping up his mask of irritation, Mairon felt blessed to hear and feel that laugh again. It filled the hole that hearing it for the first time had created. For to know what it is to be accepted can never be replaced once found.

Melkor, now jovial, said, “You will be with me. It is inevitable. So what will you do in my service, besides try to replace me?”

It was Mairon’s turn to laugh. He’d never even contemplated such an idea, but obviously Melkor’s mind was not bound by any such social norms. It delighted him to no end.

“I have a little something in mind,” Mairon mused, mocking the humble phrase Aulë often employed.

“Well, I only want it if it’s big,” Melkor answered, playing along.

“It will be, to everyone that isn’t the largest being in Arda, my Lord.”

The title seemed to make Melkor even taller. His smile reached the beginning of a kind of affection that looked foreign on his face. It would not be so foreign for long.

“I do like how you think, Precious.”

Those words were how the Dark Vala would become crowned. He had carved his den, and in nestling in, he too was bound.

Chapter End Notes

Although Mairon did manage to surprise him, Melkor is indeed a grand seducer. He knows what he’s doing to Mairon (but does he know what Mairon is doing to him??) In my mind, Melkor represented dark knowledge as much as dark force. Beneath the brutish exterior and raw power is a library of forbidden practices- necromancy, seduction, torture, etc. That’s what originally attracted Mairon. Not that he isn’t attracted to Melkor’s body. ;)

For this story, I was thinking Thuringwethil was originally a Maia of Varda who lost herself during the falling to Arda. The name was given to her by other Maiar that sometimes caught her lurking, and she hasn't entirely accepted it yet.
To Seduce

Chapter Summary

Aulë and Yavanna argue about recent events. Mairon works away on his new project and is interrupted by a guest which he can’t decide is welcome or not.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I made my own machine

Yes, we're building steam

I hate the same routine

I never looked back, I want to never return

If I could find a fuse, those bridges would burn

But I keep this horse at a run

Keep my hand to my gun

My path the vampires have learned

So I, I can never look back, I can never return

(from Building Steam by Abney Park)

When Aulë finished a rare break from his work, he released himself from deep meditation. The sparking magic moving around him gave the impression of large but intricate machinery undocking from an invisible power source. He rose almost robotically before he opened his eyes and returned the kindliness to his expression. Responding to his presence, his work shop came alive. Forge fires roared, gears spun, and the eyes of his dwarfed statues glittered strangely in his amber light.

The gilded rotunda in the heart of Yavanna’s largest tree was indeed a truer home than any of the Valar’s halls. Aulë paced around it as he pushed his hair up into a top knot, each step creaking and groaning in a pattern he’d long since memorized. As much as he loved his shared home, Aulë felt it lacked the activity of the Maiar that warmed it in the most literal way. Specifically, he missed the presence of his Mairon, who was as busy as he in his halls. Both he and Yavanna remembered well their curious Maia rifling through their implements and putting them together in novel ways.

Aulë reached into one of his many pockets and pulled out a tiny hammer made from a seed husk and stem. It fit into the palm of his hand and was one of Mairon’s first creations at the very spring of Arda. He and Yavanna had argued over whom it belonged to, but in the end, Aulë was sure it was Mairon’s alone. It was only then that Mairon let him keep it. From that moment they had been each other’s. How they had smiled then. The fires of Almaren burned unattended for a long time after that.
The gears upon the walls nearly grinded to a halt, all because he remembered how Master and servant were now short with each other. Aulë closed his fist as he remembered closing the door on Mairon, forcing him to rest. He was certain it was for the best, but the hurt look Mairon had given him made his spirit ache. He rubbed the back of his neck as if to dispel the feeling.

Should he listen to his mind or his emotions? He’d thought they were one and the same, but he’d never experienced an internal conflict quite like this before.

Aulë made a silent prayer to Eru that the threat of Melkor would soon be over so they could craft together in peace again.

Taking extra effort to keep the weariness out of his steps, he went to pick up his hammer from its bracket on the wall. However, just before his hands closed around it, he noticed something was clinging to it. The spindly creature hung from its tiny claws upside down and was wrapped up so tightly that only its wiggling ears could be seen. Aulë was used to Yavanna’s creations crawling among his things, but this one was new.

He stuck his head out of the doorframe and yelled, “Yavanna! What is this?”

She knew what he meant, such was their connection. Her head appeared at the other, greener, end of the hall.

“Dearest, it’s called a bat and it's for Mairon. Can you please tell him his gift is ready? He’ll know what I mean.”

“Do I know what you mean?” Aulë yelled back.

Yavanna emerged fully from her greenhouse and strode over, the edges of her dress fluttering. She tutted and said, “Hmm, maybe you should be watching your Maiar more closely.”

When she made it down the hall, she cupped her hand and took her creation from Aulë’s hammer. It had been fussy and prone to fungal blooms, but she gave it the attention she needed anyways. She always did.

Its wings unfurled as Yavanna re-opened her green-tinged hands and hope shone in her rich brown eyes as she presented the bat to her husband. Aulë himself looked hesitant, and he leaned away from the creature. Pouting at him, Yavanna thrust it further under his nose. A yellow shudder passed through Aulë’s aura but he appeared to contain it. His expression turned up into a small smile at his wife.

He then sneezed with such force he very nearly created a dent in the floor. The bat flew away in alarm, but not without grabbing Mairon’s first hammer. Aulë tried to grab after it, but the bat squeaked and retreated to the top of the rotunda.

Yavanna looked upset, but contented herself and merely sighed.

“Sorry, dear. I thought maybe this one…”

That could have been it, but Aulë then gave his opinion.

“Yavanna, I know creating a creature that I can tolerate is one of your goals, but shouldn’t we be more concerned with the coming war? What of your Maiar?”
She rolled her eyes at him.

“Thanks for the support, dear.”

He tried to save himself.

“I didn’t mean…”

But he’d already failed.

“I do not war, Aulë,” she snapped. “And don’t you bring up my Maiar. Like all my creations, they are self-sufficient and content to be left to their whims. I have no concerns.”

A sore wound had been re-opened. Aulë responded,

“None? No Vala can afford to be naïve in these times.”

He regretted his words instantly. Yavanna flung her sturdy arms in the air and the wood of his door burst into life, growing into sharp vines that whipped wildly with her words.

“Your bluntness may create a great many tools, but you will not make one out of me! It’s you, my husband, who should be worried about your Maiar!”

Aulë hung his head in shame. It was a frail look on the proud Vala. Despite her harsh words, her vines did not touch him, and only their leaves brushed against him, gently encouraging him to speak his innermost thoughts.

“You don’t think I am?” he managed to murmur as his hand squeezed his forearm. “Those buffoons in the mines think they aren’t acting suspicious, but if I catch any of them, they are all going to the Fëanturi…”

“No, not them!” she cried, the fear behind her anger showing for the first time.

Aulë head shot up in surprise.

“Mairon.”

Her vines withered and died as soon as she said his name. Yavanna slouched to hide her face in her hands. He couldn’t believe what she said, and reached to her out tentatively.

“Oh Yavanna no…”

He pushed through the vines to take her in his arms. When he pressed his hand to her cheek, she spoke.

“I’m worried about him. You should be too! You know I saw him observing Melkor’s image. He appeared in awe. Awe!”

Aulë was not convinced.

“He has a fascination with problematic things because he loves fixing problems. That’s all. I once saw him doing the same with a cracked anvil. He dives deep into issues, but he will surface and be our curious little Maia again, I promise.”

“But Melkor is…”
He reassured her with a caress down her jaw.

“...Melkor is nothing.” Yavanna reaffirmed. "Mairon knows like the rest of us that the Dark Vala is just a zealot who was chased away by our might. He’s a foul loser who doesn’t belong in our vision of Arda.” She nodded slowly and said, “Sorry, I should not have doubted Mairon’s intelligence.”

She sighed to the sounds of rustling leaves and pushed his embrace away.

“Please, I would still like to give him his gift.”

Aulë relented and let her be. She swished away, appearing as a flower contained in a crystal vase. She called her frightened creation back to her. As she comforted the bat, Aulë brought back an old joke of theirs to ease their tension.

“Yavanna, it truly is a lovely gift. Are you trying to steal my most talented Maia away?”

She shrugged coyly, her face cracking into a smile.

“Oh no, you’ve found me out,” she sarcastically lamented.

They both laughed at the idea, but not without a nervous edge.

Aulë then left for his halls, more satisfied than perhaps he should have been.

Through the various division of labour he jogged, eager to check on his favoured apprentice. Aulë had given him free reign on one of their Valar-commissioned projects and he was surprised at Mairon’s progress every time he came back. When he made his last round of the gem-setters and gold polishers, he entered Mairon’s workshop, and was not disappointed by any measure.

Before him was a warhammer of unimaginable proportions. It was so massive its obsidian handle was as tall as its creator. It had no seams, but many flourished details, each more aggressive than the last. Its pommel was not yet attached, but Aulë thought the inlaid eye was a nice touch. It was creative of Mairon to add it as a symbol of Manwë’s vigilance.

From the scattered chisels and punches, it seemed Mairon was struggling with how to set its magical core, which lit the room in waves of violet light. Thankfully, Mairon had tamed the metal orb’s continuous lightning strikes. How, Aulë did not know, but Mairon appeared refreshed and full of new vigor so he let it be.

“Mairon!” he called, causing Mairon to look up from his workbench. “Yavanna wishes to see you later!”

Mairon acknowledged him with a smirk and a tip of his head.

“Thank you, Master. I look forward to seeing her.”

Not wanting to disturb his good mood, Aulë left Mairon to his work.

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The din of other Maiar filtered in from behind the curtain that separated Mairon’s room from the common space, but he was in a profound mood. He worked like Manwë’s wind upon the sky and his frustrations flowed over him like molten solder. The work upon what he’d been affectionately calling Grond was going fast, even as the magical core gifted by Varda occasionally decided to shock him. It was highly magnetic and electric he was finding, and prone to discharging at
inopportune times. Fascinating!

The times like these, when even his biggest problems seemed small before him, which he cherished. Such was the heady rush of hidden power. He knew that feeling had to come from his agreement with Melkor and his hope for the future of Arda. Cinders from his hair sparked and skittered across the floor. As he worked he floated in and out of his fiery elemental form, free from judging eyes and his own apathy.

He didn’t even realize that everyone else had finished their work and left. The rest of his worktime was spent studying the core with sprinklings of iron shaving he’d floated in a sphere around it. He observed traces of the magnetic field the iron made and as he memorized their pattern, the torches of his workspace began to flicker, their honey light turning to smoke. The forge fire grew larger but somehow colder. Shadows swallowed his workbench, and it was then he was forced to look up.

Mairon's mouth fell open to see Melkor there so casually. He appeared to have made an effort to groom his hair, as it hung in brushed waves just barely under control. His loose black robes and mail hide some parts of him but accentuated others, including his partially bare chest. Mairon lost concentration on the iron shavings and they fell and disappeared into the core.

How absolutely infuriating. He shouldn’t even be here now! Mairon had a few choice words for him.

“You don’t belong here,” he hissed under his breath.

“Neither do you.” Melkor easily responded, and surveyed the alcove Mairon was allotted for his crafting. “A little small, isn’t it?” he mused.

Mairon didn’t react to the comment and said, “If you’re caught here, I can’t defend you.”

Raising an eyebrow and leaning against the wall, Melkor said, “You won’t have to. No one works as long as you, I’ve come to find.”

Mairon hummed in agreement, but his mind was still upon Grond.

“Well if you don’t have anything for my work, I suggest you leave. You’re interrupting,”

Melkor pressed his fingers to his chest and exclaimed, “I’ve brought myself! Is that not enough inspiration for your highness?”

Mairon shot him such a withering look the forge fire appeared to arc in accusation. Melkor only grinned down upon him as if his foul frown was the world’s widest smile.

“I kid,” he laughed. “I come with gifts in thanks for your volunteer work refining my Maiar’s abilities.”

Mairon shook his head and said, “It was hardly voluntary. I felt compelled by their ineptitude. It was duty.”

Melkor snorted and his fingers twitched but he’d already figured out Mairon didn’t mean most of his comments as insults. They were only observations on a world that needed his improvements, so Melkor let it slide. Also, he knew he’d piqued Mairon’s interest from the way his eyelashes fluttered before he asked,

“So then what is this gift?”
Down the front of his open robe Melkor slid his hand, pulling the fabric down just a bit so that Mairon could catch a glimpse of his hard stomach. He then pulled out a disc of gold and presented it before Mairon’s mouth.

“Bite it. It’s real, I promise,” Melkor enunciated and bit his own lip.

Mairon decided he wouldn’t dare open his mouth in such a manner with Melkor looking at him like that. He pushed it aside.

“I know gold when I hear it. It’s song is strong.”

“But do you know my gold?”

Mairon did not dignify that with an answer, but Melkor began his explanation anyways.

He waved his arms in grand gestures and proclaimed, “So fond I am of this metal that I’ve sought to claim it as mine alone. I’ve set madness within its very pattern in space and time, and it only vibrates to my frequencies now. No other Valar could stand to wear it! Surely you can find a way to use such fine material?”

Hesitant, Mairon imagined what influence Melkor could have on an entire element. The implications were vast in scope, and he’d need to study its newfound powers to be able to use it properly. It seemed Melkor already had some ideas.

“How about on this?” he asked.

He ran a black-nailed fingertip down Grond’s handle, letting more and more of his palm touch it until he was gripping it. It truly seemed made for him. Melkor claimed the warhammer as his own in his mind.

“That thing is for Tulkas,” Mairon answered with a slip of sarcasm.

“Then why does it fit my hand so well?” Melkor teased.

Mairon shrugged dismissively, blushing more than he wished. But as much as he enjoyed the attention, he didn’t like the powerful Vala making a surprise visit for apparently no other reason than a task one of his lackeys could accomplish. Especially when they both should be working on their plan.

“Be honest, My Lord. What’s the real reason you came here personally?” he asked.

“So soon we get to business?”

Melkor, at odds with his imposing presence, playfully ran his fingertips up Mairon’s arm, obviously enjoying their closeness. He was met by the solid wall of Mairon’s stare, so he gave one in return.

“Fine. Since you are not inclined to humor a bored Vala, you may have my thoughts unhoneyed. I have come here to remind you that you cannot have both worlds. You’ve left my side twice now, and returned to the realm of Aulë to do his work.”

His fingers lightly resting on Mairon’s arm suddenly gripped and tightened. Mairon gave an indignant gasp but Melkor continued.

“I cannot let you run about with my enemies when you should be plotting their downfall with me,” he admonished, his voice dark with promise. “Come home with me.”
Mairon, breathing heavy from Melkor’s strong grip, stressed, “You have to know all the work I do in here, I do for you, just like your other Maiar in the mine. Why treat me any different? I too will pass between both worlds and provide you with information and resources, and I will do it better than any of them.”

With power came paranoia, and so Melkor’s answer was,

“You’re too close to him, that Aulë. And much smarter than any of the mining Maiar, uneducated they are. I have found you harder to predict, and harder to control. How can I trust that your wit is not deceiving me instead of Aulë? Or both of us for your own means? No Maia of mine will be an open gate, letting things pass all ways.”

“Then I shall be a river,” Mairon offered. “I will only flow to you.”

“I am not convinced by metaphors, Mairon.”

“Neither am I convinced by conjecture.”

Mairon pointed his tongs to Melkor’s chest and looked up into his accusing gaze.

“Do you know how I found you?”

“Because I wanted you to,” Melkor asserted.

“But do you know how?” Mairon emphasized, bringing the tongs up to point at his chin. When Melkor looked at him quizzically, he continued. “A Maia led me to you, apparently against her very will. She told me she was not one of yours. Did you know of that?”

“Who is she? Tell me,” Melkor demanded, slightly shaking the cool-headed Mairon.

“I could not, for she has no name. Only ‘no-one’ and ‘Thuringwethil’ did she refer to herself as.”

“Why tell me then?” he growled.

His eyes burning bright, Mairon elaborated, “As an example of why you need me here and not stolen away to your “home”. You stand tall, above all else in Arda. Let me be your eyes, peering into crevasses a Vala should never have to bother looking in.”

Melkor huffed like a beast, released Mairon, and paced to the forge, thinking. His conflict showed in the disc of light he kept close to him glinting as he contemplated the logic. A lonely mountain he was. All the while he kept Mairon on bated breath. When Melkor finally spoke, he subtly released it.

“You have convinced me for now, but I stand on what I said. Eventually, you must choose, and if you don’t come to my side, there will be consequences even you cannot fathom.”

The forge fire flashed blue, and twisted into a tortured shape. Mairon shivered, but he stood on what he said as well.

“You worry needlessly, My Lord. When the towers collapse, I will be yours, fully.”

Looking at Melkor’s tall figure proud in his strength, sharp as his mind, he knew he meant it.

“Good, my Precious,” Melkor crooned. “In the meantime, do find more information about that ‘Thuringwethil’ for me.”

Mairon bowed deeply, letting his eyes fall down Melkor’s body, so well made it was.
“It will be done,” he said as a rush of heat fell over him.

Melkor grinned like the maw of a forge and passed into a world of shadows just beyond Mairon’s sight, leaving a howling wind that blew through him like an avalanche of soot. It left his hair mussed, his clothes rumpled, and him breathless once again. He felt a new weight in his apron pocket. He reached in and pulled out the disc of gold that was Melkor’s gift. Mairon laughed in joy despite his injured vanity.

His spirit soared to be out of the realm of the mundane.

Oh, what many mysteries his Lord contained in the world of the arcane!

Chapter End Notes

All bundled up in an untrusting, lonely, Vala of chaos. Don’t worry Mairon, you’ll crack him eventually, just as soon as he cracks your hardened self.

Wow I had way too much fun with the suggestive undercurrent here. I'm sweating.
The Sacrifice

Chapter Summary

Everyone wants a piece of Mairon, but what does he want from them? Yavanna, Eönwë, Gothmog and Melkor himself all pay him a visit.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The angels are feasting on blood of the meek
In blossom with treason I play with the weak
Fading roses cover me
And semen makes my spirit free
The nectars I drink from the cleft to your soul
Shall nourish the yearnings and murder control
I see how you ache from the crown that you wear
I cut out your heart just to see if you care

(from Lucifer in Love by Ordo Rosarius Equilibrio)

It was not difficult for Mairon to find Yavanna, even deep in her gardens where vegetation invaded every available space in order to reach the light of the lamps. Her rich song carried through thick foliage and overlapping birdsong, bringing her lilting, vivacious Music to his ears and to his very spirit. He found her singing at a cave mouth covered in vines. When she saw him, she turned and sang a melody that made his hair shine just a little bit more. Mairon hummed along and each note caused a blossom to fold out and fruit. By the time their high finishing note faded away, all the flowers had become passionfruit the colour of bruises.

Yavanna began picking them as she spoke. “So nice to see you again, Mairon.”

“Likewise, Lady Yavanna,” he answered with a bow.

Feeling a crocus flower summoned by Yavanna brush his chin, he looked up.

“This is not one of Varda’s ceremonies,” she chided. “No need to be so formal, Precious.”

He flushed at the memories of that nickname being said by another Vala in much more lascivious ways. Yavanna did not see the red-tinge to his face and continued.

“I know you must feel bad for not having time to visit. I cherished the moments when you would change your form into many of my creations, but as we all began to find our place, I did not mourn
your solidification. No, I wish to celebrate the role you have found serving the Valar, even if it was not under me.”

She broke open one of the passionfruits and held it before the mouth of the cave. Mairon prepared himself for whatever was coming out of that solid darkness, but he needn’t have widened his stance.

Out fluttered a creature not much bigger than his head, and most of it being its wings. It was as white as snow and had small black eyes and big translucent ears. After a few laps around Yavanna’s head, it landed on her outstretched hand and lapped at the fruit.

“Her name is Uquesse, no-feather,” Yavanna explained as she walked over to him. “She’s suited to living in Aulë’s cave of a hall, so you should have no issue looking after her.” She plopped the squeaking creature into his hands and smiled at her with great satisfaction. “Are you pleased?”

“Yes!” Mairon answered just a little too quickly. “I am just… so baffled by this privilege, my Lady.”

He’d been expecting something fierce, something intimidating, or at least something bigger than this. He bowed again, trying to hold onto the squirming creature that was attempting to crawl up his tunic sleeve with her tiny claws. Yavanna smiled at him cheekily, perhaps enjoying that she caught him off-guard.

“I’m glad,” She said as she stroked his hair, letting some copper strands run through her fingers. “But as much as I want to talk, I should let you be on your way.”

He nodded, happy to soon be free of Yavanna’s cloying affection. His sparks were never welcome among the plant life anyways. He could hear them droning in discontent just below his feet.

As he pulled himself free of Yavanna’s touch, she had some last words for him.

“Mairon, I thought you should know that, apparently, a corrupted Maia of Manwë was seen flying with the Dark One.”

Mairon raised his eyebrows in surprise.

_Could that have been me, soaring with Melkor on our fated meeting?_

“Oh?” he exclaimed. “That must be quite a shock for our King.”

“Indeed. Please watch yourself, Mairon,” she said sternly. "I couldn’t bear to see you stolen away by a pair of dark, damned wings.”

“I shall, my Lady,” he said as he wrangled Uquesse out of his sleeve again.

He assumed the ambiguous answer was lost upon Yavanna, but if he had spared one last look behind him, he would have seen her face fade like a wilting flower, into sadness.

Some part of her knew. Even if Aulë wouldn’t listen, she knew.

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“What am I going to do with you?” Mairon asked Uquesse as they came down a path in the dense trees. “I’m busy enough as it is.”

Her dark eyes just stared up at him from her perch on his hand, giving no answer.

“You should at least be able to talk. We will work on that.”
He put the bat down his front pocket and started into a jog. If he finished his work early he might have a chance to search for Thuringwethil. That is, if Gothmog and his merry band of miners didn’t demand another demonstration. What he would give to duplicate himself…

---FWUMP

A silver flurry came down from the sky in a gust and landing directly in front of him. Mairon threw his hands in the air in alarm, then shoved them in his pockets, pretending he’d meant to, when he realized it was Eöönwë.

His friend greeted him with a happy, “Hello, Mairon!”

Mairon’s own first words were curt.

“Don’t you have Ilmarë to give your attention to?” he seethed as he crossed his arms.

“Somebody’s sour today!” Eöönwë quipped. “More sour than usual…”

“And somebody is more perceptive than he’s been recently…” Mairon shot back, tightening his arms around his chest.

Eöönwë winced, reminded of Varda’s ceremony for the presentation of the star cores. Ilmarë had agreed to walk hand in hand with him, and his heart had soared. Yet now, it was soured by his friend’s reaction.

“Alright, I’m sorry I missed you at the ceremony,” Eöönwë said with a slump of his shoulders. “I shouldn’t have to choose between my love and my best friend, but I guess I did. I’m sorry, Mairon.”

“I thought we…” Mairon trailed off, realized what he was admitting to.

*I thought we were each other’s loves.*

“You thought what?” Eöönwë asked.

The confused look on his face cemented Mairon’s silence.

“Nothing,” Mairon said firmly, his eyes growing dark. He brushed past Eöönwë, who turned to follow him.

They walked in silence for some time, watching their feet. Each step Mairon took sizzled the ground beneath him, but still little birds, squirrels, and insects zipped around them as Eöönwë wove after Mairon through Yavanna’s groves of fruit trees. The dappled light caught pieces of Eöönwë’s armor, sending reflections sparkling across the bark of tree trunks.

The finest parts of Eöönwë’s armor were Mairon’s creations. He’d made them with care, concerned about potential wars to come that others believed never would. The armor had taken Mairon so long to make, Eöönwë had gotten into the habit of stopping in and asking about Mairon’s progress. Although it irked Mairon at first, the regular chats were how they became friends. They stayed friends, partly to make fun of the clumsier smiths, but mostly to share their ambitions for the coming ages in Arda. Even now, Mairon hoped Eöönwë would join him in Melkor’s secret rising army.

He looked to Eöönwë, seeing a delicate echo of Manwë himself, every silver ornament inlaid with the King’s symbols.

*Impossible.*
Always unfazed by Mairon’s brooding, Eönwë was the first to interrupt the silence. Unfortunately, with a question Mairon had hoped no one would ever ask.

“Mairon… Were you the Maia that flew away from the Dark One into the sky? Is that why you won’t talk to me?”

Mairon’s heart dropped further than he thought it ever could. In his shock, he had no words, and so Eönwë continued outpouring.

“If it was you in those featherless wings, I am so sorry I failed you. I begged Manwë to let me pursue, but he would not release me! I thought that’s why you won’t talk to me… Manwë doesn’t want me near either! I’ve hurt him and now I’ve hurt you… Eru! I do wonder if I am cursed with the Discord!”

Eönwë pushed his shaking hands through his hair and turned to look to the trees, not wanting Mairon to see his pained face. Mairon hesitated to speak, not used to seeing his optimistic friend like this, but then he rested his hand on Eönwë’s shoulder. He said what he knew to be the truth.

“Eönwë, you could never contain the Discord.”

And you will never join me in Melkor’s army.

Calmed only slightly, Eönwë pressed into him and insisted, “Please, Mairon I trust you, but explain to me why you think so. You are always so good at explaining things.”

Mairon nodded. It was a disappointing truth he had realized, but he still couldn’t stand to see his friend, his first love, like this.

“The Discord is fear and the Discord is pain. You cannot contain it because your pain and your fear are phantoms,” Mairon started gently. “No one is avoiding you because you did anything evil. Manwë does it for your own good, and I do it for my own good. But do not fear, Eönwë, my dearest friend, for these times shall pass. We are Maiar and Manwë tells us not to fear for our safety because we are immortal in Arda. He is correct and so we shall be ardent and brave.” Mairon breathed in deep with his spirit, tasting the strength within Eönwë. “You are the bravest Maia I know. I would stand in front of any council and defend that.”

“And I the same for you,” Eönwë added, his eyes shimmering.

He pulled Mairon into an embrace that even the prickly Maia couldn’t complain about. His ego satisfied, Mairon shifted his arms around Eönwë’s shoulders, and hummed a reassuring tune. Eönwë joined with a whistle that wove in and out of Mairon’s beats. Their mood grew and the tenuous balance they kept between their worlds was held for a time more. Yet, just a brief time more.

Eönwë eventually pulled away slightly and said, “But you have to tell me… I need to know for own sake, was that Maia you? The one that Melkor pursued?”

“It was me, Eönwë,” Mairon admitted. There was no point in lying.

Eönwë’s eyes widened in what could be called awe.

“How did you ever escape him?” he asked in hushed tones.

Mairon shrugged and said, “I… fell into the ocean.” It was partially the truth.

“Yes! His weakness!” Eönwë exclaimed and hugged Mairon even harder. A wind was whipped up
by his excitement, pulling the edges of Mairon’s clothes about. “Why I wouldn’t have thought of it myself! Mairon, you are so clever and brave, you could have been a soldier too!”

“Eönwë…” Mairon calmed as he attempted to counter his friend’s wind with a thermal draft.

“‘Yes?’

“Just promise me you won’t tell anyone it was me. I’d be far too embarrassed.”

*I wish I could tell people of my allegiance, but that time will come too.*

Eönwë pushed their foreheads together, and said,

“I promise you, Mairon.”

Their embrace was held until a certain someone joined in. Uquesse, the bat, had worked her way up to Eönwë and decided she liked the handsome Maia very much. She spread her wings wide over his face and proceeded to lick his forehead thoroughly.

Eönwë snorted in amusement, and tried to talk though her wings as Mairon moved to peel her off.

“So, I’m assuming this is what Yavanna gave you?”

“Yes, she is,” Mairon sighed, giving up on the bat, who had shifted to hide at Eönwë’s neck.

“You seem disappointed by this wonder of a creature,” Eönwë mused as he pulled Uquesse off and let her wrap around his fingers.

Mairon spun around on his heel, scorching the grass. He tried not to rant, but the strength was not in him to contain it.

“I just wish Yavanna had consulted me more,” Mairon all but whined. He gestured in the air, leaving sparking outlines of a plan that he’d not gotten to implement. “See, I would have attached my wing design to a lizard-like creature, not a rat. It would have been much larger in size, since I see no point in these smaller creatures. I would have gone through the trouble of giving it the gift of speech. All this squeaking is going to very quickly drive me into insanity. Plus, it eats fruit. I wouldn’t even eat fruit.”

Eönwë laughed and said, “What would you have it eat then? Heat? Sarcastic remarks? Very small rocks?”

Mairon smacked him on the shoulder and muttered, “Prick,” without any real heat to it. Then he was genuinely thoughtful for a moment, his mind filled with the fantastic ideas of a master smith. “If anything it would eat pure gold.”

Eönwë made a face and said, “Eat gold? That seems like a waste.”

Huffy, Mairon retorted, “Alright then, it would just hoard it.”

“What will it eat then?”

“Ha! Anybody that tries to steal its gold!!”

Mairon growled playfully and pushed Eönwë over. Uquesse flew off as they tumbled into the bushes. Testing their strengths as they had many times before in the tranquil gardens, they wrestled and laughed like resounding bells at each other’s half-hearted attempts to combat the other. Eönwë exuded Air and Sea, and Mairon, Earth and Fire. All elements together they were, in mock-battle at
the beginning of everything, and only a glittering reflection of what they would become.

“I’m going to take off~!” Eönwë sang, unfolding his mottled wings.

“Don’t you dare go without me!”

Mairon greedily tugging Eönwë down, causing them both to fall upon their backs on the grass. They laughed again at each other’s antics, but then… a rustling stopped their play.

“Hang on, Eönwë. I believe we have an intruder.”

Mairon tensed and breathed deep. He’d recognize that coal-dust smell anywhere.

“Come out little coal miner! We can smell you…” Mairon said in a mock-villain voice that always made Eönwë laugh. True to form, Eönwë sputtered and giggled before he said,

“I don’t think he wants to come out, Mairon. What shall we do?”

Mairon grinned and pointed his chin in the direction of the noise. Eönwë grinned back. Quick as a gale, Eönwë thrust his wings and launched himself into the adjacent bush.

“Oof! Hey watch it, Feathers!” sounded from the foliage.

It was indeed Osomon, known by Gothmog to his friends, but Eönwë needn’t know that. Emerging from the bushes and holding him up by his apron, Eönwë seemed as unimpressed by Gothmog as Mairon was when they first met.

“A sibling of yours, Mairon?” Eönwë asked. “Does he also wish to test his strength against me?”

“I’m sure he does,” Mairon drawled as he rolled onto his stomach.

Gothmog, being shorter and less-defined than the Maia that held him, shook his head vigorously. Mairon sniggered. He was most certainly enjoying this.

“You pretty boys done your playtime?” Gothmog shouted. “Let me go! I’m here on official business!”

“Fine,” Mairon groaned. “Eönwë, I need to talk to this lout alone.”

Eönwë looked disappointed, but one pleading look from Mairon did him in.

“Alright, Mairon,” he relented with a slight pout. “See you later?”

Mairon nodded, and Eönwë smiled once again. He took off in a gust that made Gothmog’s hair fly in his face.

Before he could even breath, Mairon was upon him.

“Why are you here?” Mairon yelled, grabbing a hold of Gothmog’s front. The smug look on the other Maia’s face infuriated him.

“Our Lord and Master just wants me looking after you, is all.”

“What?!” A rivet snapped off of Gothmog’s apron, so tight was Mairon gripping it. “I don’t need your supervision!”
Gothmog continued calmly, “He sees the realm through me, and he thinks it’s efficient if we all keep an eye on each other…”

“I know that, Gothmog, I’m not an imbecile. I’m just… insulted,” Mairon spat out the word as if it were a gob of spit he’d prefer not to swallow. “Why did it have to be you?”

Gothmog, as if he caught his cue, shifted his shoulders, and looked around. In his best silky voice, which was more like silty mud, he coaxed, “I can convince Melkor to change his mind about as good as I can convince a rock to stop being hard. But… I’m sure you can convince me to stop watching you on your playdates and preening sessions.” He smirked like the whole world was in his hands. “So, how about I leave you be, and once in a while, you give me private lessons.”

Biting his lip, Mairon fantasized about an Arda where he had been born Vala, and wouldn’t have to deal with this kind of bullshit. He almost parted his lips to say yes, but then something broke his thoughtful expression. It was too easy. In a burst of fire, Mairon pushed Gothmog to the ground.

“You sneak!!” Mairon bellowed, his fingers becoming claws. “How dare you tempt me! You’ve cost me face, so I will ruin yours… physically.”

He leapt upon Gothmog like a great beast and wrapped his claws around his throat. Raising the other hand above his face, he scorned him with his blazing eyes. Mairon understood now what Melkor had tried to impress upon him. He was not his brother, the King of Piety and Purity and Rules. There was no point in hiding away from his other Maiar as he did his work, as he did under Aulë. He, Mairon the Admirable, should feel no concern about Melkor’s gaze, only pride.

Just as Mairon was about to sink his claws deep into Gothmog’s cheek, they heard a familiar laugh.

“Ha ha ha! You two really are something beautiful,” rang Melkor’s velvet voice from a shaded grove of pomegranates. “The perfect sadist and masochist you are!”

Uquesse flew down from the trees and clung to Melkor’s chest, looking like the brooch that inspired her. He flattered her with a caress to her trembling ears while his eyes bored into Mairon’s, full of devilish amusement.

Mairon breathed heavily twice before clueing into Melkor’s machinations.

“What game have you been playing at?” Mairon probed, not letting go of Gothmog’s throat.

His eyes full of his own mix of mirth and pride, Melkor answered, “A game of loyalty. And my Mairon, you have won.”

“Because he’s a flaming asshole,” Gothmog piped up from below him, rather strained. “A little help here, my Lord?”

Mairon kicked him in the groin and he grunted.

Melkor sighed and said, “Gothmog, for all your loyal work, you are still thinking like one of the Manwë’s pets. I appreciate the part you played but I won’t come to your rescue if my other Maiar decide they don’t like your methods.”

Crushing a pomegranate in one hand, Melkor impressed his will upon Gothmog and brought the fruit to his lips. Its red juice ran down his chin.

“You must look after yourself in everything you do,” he stated as Uquesse sucked juice from his neck. “All that cooperation is good for the community rhetoric that Manwë spouts that makes me
want to retch. It’s competition within our ranks that will make us better than any of Manwë’s troops.”

Melkor licked his lips and eyed Gothmog, struggling on the ground.

“Besides, I know you secretly enjoy it,” he breathed.

“I do not…” Gothmog protested, wriggling beneath Mairon.

Mairon, aghast, suddenly stood. Gothmog sighed in what Mairon hoped was relief.

“I’ve lost my appetite for violence,” Mairon said, defiant until the end.

“Disappointing,” Melkor jeered. “But I suppose entertainment is only for Kings that have won their wars. For now I am just the Dark Lord of Arda, and we have much warring to do.”

He gestured with one finger.

“Come here, Gothmog. I am satisfied with our lieutenant’s loyalty, and there are many others to test…”

Melkor threw the half-eaten pomegranate on the ground and strode over to where Mairon was fuming. The praise had lightened the black fire in Mairon’s eyes, if only slightly. He preferred games where he was the mastermind, but if this got him a higher position than Gothmog, it was worth it. A powerful current passed between he and Melkor, bringing all life to silence in Yavanna’s garden. They locked upon each other like gears fitting with a snap.

“…But I doubt any will impress me as much as our admirable Mairon,” Melkor finished.

In the background they barely registered Gothmog mouthing, “Wait… lieutenant?!”

Melkor ignored his Captain and picked a mottled feather from Mairon’s tunic. He twirled it between his fingers, looking at it as if it were a puzzle. Then something clicked. Mairon barely held back a gasp as Melkor ran the feather down his neck, an unfathomable emotion in his always moving aura.

“Perhaps you should put these feelings to better use?” he whispered so lightly, Mairon could have sworn it was only in his head.

“Into work, my Lord?” Mairon managed to tease, never short for words around his Master. “I shall labour at my forge even longer then.”

Melkor chuckled, and the feather in his hand turned black as soot. He tucked it behind Mairon’s ear, and whispered,

“Then I shall meet you there, Precious.”

He and Gothmog then disappeared into shadows that looked like dark mirrors and smoke, leaving Mairon and Uquesse in the garden alone.

Oh, how he ached for something. Something he couldn’t quite place.

Even Melkor’s smallest of touches left a burning trace.
A lot of different interactions in this one. I hope it wasn’t too dizzying! Again, do let me 
know if your catch any mistakes...

Melkor finally got his pledge of loyalty in a way that satisfied him. Mairon's satisfaction, 
meanwhile, hangs in a delicate balance between all the Ainur in his life. His life is 
turning over to the future Angband gang, and his other connections are withering. Sad, 
in some ways, but it was bound to happen. :') Things continue to heat up...

More of Thuringwethil up next...

(why so many ellipses, me... ...?)
To Entice

Chapter Summary

After a fiery dream, Mairon seeks to find Thuringwethil and bring her to side of Melkor.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Attracted back to this place

At the set time, in conditions we can face

This your choice

What will you do with the life that is given to you?

The time runs slow for those who wait

Short for those who celebrate

For those who love time is eternal

Yet they have none of it to waste

Precious soul, why do you hate?

(From For Those Who Love by Absurd Minds)

In a dark land of vapour and storm, Mairon’s bright spirit lay anchored, his body left behind. In that vast, empty space he revolved in dual orbit with an object from his past. It was the magical carving of Melkor he’d discovered in Yavanna’s garden that floated in his vision. So true were its etches and set gems to his form, yet it was only his image. Mairon had bitterly realized that was all he knew of Melkor, his new Lord and Master, so he spun and glared into the impenetrable obsidian chips set in the carving’s eyes. He knew Melkor the Mighty Power, he knew Melkor the Blighted King, and he knew Melkor the Master Seducer, but he did not know Melkor the Being. In the vacant space of shadows between Arda and Beyond he wondered, who was his Dark Lord at his deepest core?

Shadow became one with flame and right then Mairon only knew him as a might that held his heart in its grasp.

Writhing fruitlessly to find it, Mairon ran spits of his fire along its length. He revelled in its power even as it pressed into him harder and harder. It ground into him like he was a mortar and it the pestle, but he would not yet yield. He needed to know for all his life what it held for him, but it gave no relief. It only grew harder and larger, and impossible to penetrate. The frustration built in him and ate at the edges of his control. His spirit was a scream in suspension.

Just when he was about to lash out, it let him be. With it gone, he begged in the darkness for some
sort of release.

Do not leave me in your shadow! Light this world with your power, even if it strikes through me!

Lightning finally struck and he arched his back into its branching fingers. His song hit a high piercing note as he lost his grip upon himself and crashed into a boiling, ethereal sea.

And so he collapsed from the world of dreams.

In an afterglow Mairon awoke to feel the full force of the physical world. His breath was a sparking mist that slowed to pants of steam and murmurs streamed from his mouth, meaning nothing. He felt so wasted, yet so full. The sweat Aulë’s Maiar often wore as a symbol of hard work was no illusion of his this time. He attempted to dispel it with the fire of his magic, but as it wound around him he quivered and let out a moan unbidden. To cover his lurid outburst he pressed his hands to his mouth, but he found they were shaking. Mortified he moaned into his hands again as the last of the heat sparked through him. With little hesitation, they then dropped to trace his body. What else was he to do? Nothing else could calm the ache.

Looking at his sorry state, he chuckled and embarrassment briefly stabbed into him, but the finals waves of pleasure washed it away. He took one last heavy breath through parted lips. At least it wasn’t all for naught.

At last he knew where Thuringwethil was.

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The bulk of the smoke from the Northern Storm had reached Almaren, and it corrupted the light of the Lamps from tones of gold and blue to red and grey. This, Mairon did not mind. Wearing a cloak of black satin and his own shade, he wound down a familiar path in Yavanna’s inner garden. The rose bushes were thornier than at his last visit, and their blooms had become odd, swollen rosehips that dripped red pus. New fungi had also pushed out of their hiding places to spread their spores, but Mairon did not stop to examine them. In his haste, he almost missed a true curiousity.

He stopped because just below his foot was an unfamiliar sight. A rabbit lay there, but it was still and lifeless, its neck at a fatal angle. Pushing it over with his foot, he peered at its failed body, curious about this mysterious state called death. Seeing drops of fresh blood sprayed from its neck re-stirred the waves of pleasure in his body. He smiled fondly upon the dead creature before crushing it completely underfoot. It delighted him to see that the Valar’s creations could be conquered. It gave him much hope for the future.

Pushing on, he found more and more animals, all of them small, and all of them bitten to death. A plan was forming in his mind so he stopped once again and took a dead rabbit into his arms. He looked into its glassy eyes, and promised its body life beyond itself. Its form was still complete after all, why couldn’t it still be useful to him? The corpse, like all the others, was vacated of its Valar given life and the empty shell practically begged him to fill it.

Ever obliging, Mairon sang a haunting song where the sickly sweet notes skipped between a lure and a tug. It was a song that could drive the living to dive off cliffs, and the dead to return to life. Certainly it did no good for the roses, as their leaves turned charcoal black.

Letting his fingers pet the poor rabbit’s ears, he sang until they began to twitch again. Devoid of fear, devoid of joy, its now blazing blood red eyes looked into his. Mairon smiled in his dark bliss. If he was honest to himself, he wasn’t sure his cold call would work, but he was finding his darker instincts were ever so reliable. With his new pet nestled in his arm, he completed his journey to
Melkor’s stone.

What he found was a clearing torn to pieces. Branches broken and scattered littered the area, and even more small animal bodies lay dead eyed before him. It was as if someone had sought to destroy all the life within, and did so without regard to their own. Although he could not see her, Mairon was sure he knew who.

“Thuringwethil,” he called gently on the wind. “Thuringwethil…”

“That’s not my name,” she answered in his mind, still unseen.

“Then give me something else to call you.”

He felt her frown in his mind. She knew she couldn’t, and started to crawl away. The snapping branches gave her away.

“Wait,” he called out loud. “I have something for you.”

He pulled the rabbit out of his cloak. It squirmed in his hand with new life in its red-lit eyes. Thuringwethil emerged from the bushes to stop and stare at it. Although the furs she wore were shredded by the thorns, her body was pristine and not a mark of violence was upon her. Such was the ability of an Ainu. Her long, dark hair was whipped into standing strands that made her seem larger than she was, but they still held a sheen like ink. When she stood to grab the rabbit, Mairon cruelly moved it above her head.

“First, I have questions,” he demanded.

Wincing like she was in pain, she sunk to ground again. When her knees touched the dirt, she solemnly nodded.

Mairon, solemnly curious, began, “Where did you come from?”

“I don’t know…” she moaned, still staring at the rabbit.

“Where did you come from?” Mairon asked again, the sickly sweetness returning to his voice.

She shuddered, but attempted an answer. “Beyond. Where it glitters. Where it’s big. I fell here.”

“Good, that wasn’t so hard, was it?” he patronized her.

She glared at him for his condescension, but outstretched her hands for the rabbit.

“Not yet!” he chided. “First you must answer another question. You must tell me why you were at my resting space.”

Knotting her hands together as if to control some impulse, she said, “I heard others call you the Lord of Gifts. They disdain me so, call me parasite, but you seemed so kind. I hoped beyond hope that you would help me be rid of this thirst, but at the last moment, I lost the courage to speak. I failed even at that…”

She paused to absorb what she’d said and then collapsed further onto the ground, weeping. Sorrow was such an unseen emotion amongst the Ainur in their early history that Mairon was taken aback. He pursed his lips when her voice hit a pitch so empty it was haunting.

“Hush!” he exclaimed, and dropped the rabbit at his feet to shut her up.
She grabbed it immediately, sticky tears still in her eyes. A crunch resounded when she bit into the rabbit’s neck, and its life was extinguished again. Mairon watched with a neutral face, hiding his interest, his pity, and his disgust.

“Why would an Ainu consume anything?” he asked her. “It is pointless.”

She wiped the blood from her mouth, as if that could erase all evidence of what she’d done.

“The emptiness…” she sighed like air leaving a body for the last time.

As Mairon pondered what that could mean, a guest joined them in their reverie.

Always an opportunist, Uquesse spiraled down from the air to land upon Thuringwethil. She was startled frozen as the bat began to lap the remaining blood from her mouth. Tickled, she opened her mouth to titter nervously and Mairon caught a glimpse of her teeth. Needle-like and transparent, they were like no other creature’s. Perhaps the only thing they resembled were the teeth of Ulmo’s deep sea creatures that Mairon hoped he would never meet.

Due to her nature, and her shunning of Ainur society, Mairon believed this Maia had some connection to Melkor. He only needed to bring it forth and his plan was already in action. When Thuringwethil’s eyes widened and turned even blacker, he knew the song within his rabbit had done the trick.

“You tainted me!” she cried and made exaggerated retching noises as her hair spun and flew about her face. Echoes of the Discord rang in her ears.

“I did no such thing,” Mairon calmly replied. “I do not taint. Only amplify.”

“I see Him! He sings!”

“So you do have the gift of the Discord! What a blessing.”

She wailed a lament, and Uquesse joined in. Their interwoven song caused even the fungi to waste away. Mairon stood back and wondered what the fuss was. Perhaps she had dreamed of being a lovely court Maia but her twisted power could never allow it. Perhaps she believed the lies of the Valar that Manwë was their true King. Either way, there was only one path she could hope to follow now. They could never return to what they had been.

“Keep yourself to yourself, Lord of Foul Gifts!” Thuringwethil screamed, her sadness turning to anger. “Go away and leave me to rot. It is truly all I want. Go!”

His pity evident in his frown, Mairon said, “Then I shall.”

He stepped with deliberate slowness back into the tangled brush, waiting, hoping he hadn’t pressed too hard. Thuringwethil was trapped between her fear and her loneliness, and Mairon was almost certain which one would win.

It took all his strength not to smile when she softly cried,

“No.”

“No?” he replied just as softly.

“I’m sorry. I will not yell anymore,” she promised, reaching out. Part of her still not want to, but never-the-less she said, “Please come back.”
Finding his most welcoming smile, he strode to sit down beneath Melkor’s image, beneath the twisted trees, beneath the light of the Lamps. He patted the space beside him.

“Come here, Nameless One. You will have a home soon enough.”

She hesitated, searching his eyes for any hint of dishonest emotion, but finding nothing, she caved.

“Call me… Thuringwethil. It is my name now,” she said as she came forward.

Giving up out of lonely desperation, she bypassed his offer of a seat and fell right into his arms. Not displeased, Mairon propped her up on his leg and wrapped his arm around her bony ribs. Despite all she had consumed, she was so thin.

“I’m hungry,” she whimpered into his hair. “The blood I need still sleeps. There are no stars.”

“I know,” Mairon soothed.

“You do not,” she insisted. “Only she does. We do not speak of her. And she does not speak like us.”

Mairon squeezed her in the crook of his arm to silence her incoherent babbling.

“Shhh. We will soon be free. Thanks to Melkor, True King of Arda. And even you can be thankful for that.”

“Him…” she said, trailing away. She still couldn’t bear to say his name.

Feeling her unique power, Mairon hoped in time she could accept Melkor, and accept herself. Their army would be all the better for it, so in his arms she was held, until she calmed. Her breath slowed, and she hummed a little tune to Uquesse, causing the shadows around them to dance.

Just as Mairon was becoming uncomfortable from the continued contact, she surprised him by saying,

“I was a Maia of Varda.”

He looked at her again, with new eyes, and saw all he had missed. Her waif-like figure, her black hair and eyes, and her ethereal presence all gave it away. He knew it then to be true.

“I did not want to come down to Arda,” she continued, her words free-flowing as they had never been before. “But I was compelled to follow my Mistress. When we came down from the Place of Stars, I fell. And fell. And fell. I passed beyond myself and into a state of emptiness and despair, but still I could not leave this world.”

She looked him directly in the eye and said,

“I have died a Maia’s death. I am undead.”

“Undead…” Mairon tasted the word on his tongue.

“I am cursed until the end of Arda, when we may start anew. I hope I am better next time…”

Mairon shook his head and pinched her arm.

“Don’t speak that way. We are blessed to be what we are.”
Rubbing where Mairon had pinched her, she said “Monsters?” almost accusingly.

Mairon nodded. “We are blessed to be monstrosities.”

Thuringwethil laughed, delicate and high, the first signs of her strength and elegance returning.

“What a strange Maia you are, Mairon of Aulë!”

With a snap of a spark, Mairon slid out from under her, annoyed. She just laughed again at some unknown joke of hers. Suddenly satisfied, she stretched out Uqesse’s wings and gave them a little kiss. Despite the bat being as irritating a tag-along as Thuringwethil, Mairon sincerely hoped she would not eat her. He needn’t have worried.

“Are we friends?” she asked.

“No.”

“I was talking to the creature.”

Mairon wanted to grow his own teeth and bite her right then, but her laughter sounded too much like his own. She flashed her teeth at him, as if showing off. My, how she was impish when she was in a good mood. The weight off her shoulders made her shine.

“Watch your blood-stained tongue, Thuringwethil,” he warned.

“Fine then I will talk to the moody Maia Mairon instead. So are we friends?”

“I said no.”

“Are we allies?”

“Yes.”

She paused.

“Will you feed me?”

“In an Arda ruled by Melkor you will never go hungry,” Mairon promised.

She sprung up onto her feet and asked excitedly,

“Will you must introduce me to your forge ladies? Those big arms… they need kissing.”

Mairon snorted in derision and said, “There are no kissing ladies amongst the Ainur.”

She gasped in mock-shock. “Not true, Mairon! There are indeed kissing ladies!” Her eyebrows waggled in an exaggerated wave. “And kissing lords if you do fancy.”

“I have no desire for such contact,” he stated too quickly. He couldn’t even look her in the eye. Her change in mood and topic had staggered him.

“Not even… Him?” She flexed her arms and growled gutturally. “Big, bad, handsome Vala. Too big for me. Too much…” Her eyes darted briefly to Mairon’s hips. “Perhaps not too much for some…”

He swatted at her, but missed. Laughing madly, she scrambled into the bushes head first before he
could try again. Glowing red like a hot coal, Mairon shouted hoarsely after her while shaking his fist uselessly.

“Be gone! Do not let me catch you mocking me again!”

What monster had he created? Despite his supreme embarrassment, he wanted her to be right. He hoped against all hope that the mad Maia was right.

*Just excellent, Mairon.*

He fell back to press his cheek to cold stone of the carving. Melkor’s unyielding image glowered down upon him, its power holding him steady as ever.

*Are you pleased, Master?*

~~~~~~~~~

*Clang.*

“Master, why did you come to me before Mairon?”

*Clang.*

“Because you were weaker.”

*Clang.*

The sound of clashing metal echoed throughout Melkor’s underground chamber. He and Gothmog ran drills alone and gnashed their teeth in grunting conversation.

Gothmog, resigned, said, “I thought so. I was so eager that I never would have challenged you.”

*Clang.*

Melkor’s halberd caught Gothmog’s once again. The Vala’s movements were effortless, but he took his task of training Gothmog seriously. Each jab or slash was different than the last. He would push his Captain to his utmost limit.

“And so you ensured our victory!” Melkor encouraged. “I couldn’t have walked so freely in Almaren without using you as an entry point.”

*Clang.*

“Am I still useful though? Even with your new lieutenant?”

*Clang.*

“Why do you think I’m training you like this, Gothmog? For fun?” Melkor shot back, incredulous.

“No, Master…”

*Clang!*

Melkor gave a solid stab and Gothmog fell head over heels. Throwing his halberd, Melkor took to pacing about the chamber.

“My lieutenant! He has intelligence beyond you, but it is his bane. Questioning my strategies and
playing his game with that Maia of Manwë! His loyalty is unyielding, so why does he still challenge me? Does he live to challenge everything?"

“Don’t you?” asked Gothmog from the ground.

It was Melkor’s turn to sigh, and it was decidedly more forceful. The walls shook.

“I do not challenge myself, Gothmog. Only a fool would.”

“Oh... right.”

Melkor raised his hand, flames sprouting from his fingertips. The blue flames were hotter than any other, but they did not satisfy him. Something red and hot just might.

“We challenge what deserves to be challenged,” Melkor stated, watching the flames turn into dancing little mockeries of the Valar. They skipped and jumped and fell to their death at his feet. “I challenge the reign of my brother for the sake of Maiar like you. I accept no alternative for my ways, but I never thought I could do better until that Maia... To destroy them from within is not something I considered as I believed only a full frontal assault would be my retribution for their scorn. Now his way is intriguing me more and more. It gives me further ideas.”

“Will you still punish him, Master?”

“No, not in the way you’re imagining,” Melkor said with a smile. “But you will not tell him of this! We don’t need it going to that pretty head of his.”

“You think he’s pretty?” Gothmog couldn’t help but ask.

The blue flame at Melkor’s fingers burst into shooting stars, and a wall of fire flared around him. It knocked Gothmog to the ground just as he was getting up.

“Beauty is for the other Valar, Gothmog,” Melkor spat. “I see it nowhere!”

“Of course,” Gothmog coughed through a mouthful of ash.

Although he thought the little dancing figure of flame that remained on Melkor’s palm resembled the Admirable Maia, if he was so brash.

Chapter End Notes

Do we have some mutual pining here? Thuringwethil has certainly noticed some pining. She figures there is no other reason for a Maia such as Mairon to be so loyal. ;) Mairon has fallen from grace into violence and lust. His lust was there ever since he saw Melkor’s image in Yavanna’s garden, but what of love? What does it mean to love Melkor? That’s something I’ve been trying to work out myself. Hopefully it comes to fruit.

… Maiar masturbation FTW.
The Militance

Chapter Summary

Melkor watches over a training session of his army. Manwë watches over project of his own.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

These angels burn with an internal sympathy
Don't say a word until you've heard their symphony
I lie awake creating shadows in the night
I see the truth from crimson eyes
Take me home where the restless go
Reckless to the day I rest my bones
There's no use trying to save my soul
(From Take Me Home by Hollywood Undead)

Why war? Was it not a waste? For what would the immortals ever wage?

Those questions, the would-be King known as Melkor knew the answer to. Standing on a heap of iron deep below Almaren, where no Maia but his own would dare go, he pinched his brow, spun a rough dagger in his hand, and watched.

His Maiar trained below him, in the pit of gold. They laughed and played in their mockery of battle, as he once had at the beginning of all. Almost jealously he scowled at them, likely remembering the play-fights he'd had with his brother before their quarrels suddenly became real. Like he back then, his Maiar had much to learn and much to see. They would soon know pain, they would know loss, they would know death and they would know the world. They would know Eä as he knew. He sheathed his dagger to stop the agitated twitching of his hands.

With his suspicions about Thuringwethil confirmed, thanks to his productive Lieutenant Mairon, he knew some Maiar already understood the true chaotic nature of life. She did, even if she did not want to. Who would want to understand such deep travesty, but those who have seen the truth of it, or those create it? Melkor held the image of his siblings in his mind and knew he would rather create chaos than be its eternal victim. He knew the painful truth that in time death comes to all, even Arda itself, in some mysterious form or another. That meant life as one wanted it was meant to be fought for. It was meant to be fought for with all one's might. At that thought, Melkor squeezed his eyes and his fists closed, as if he was imagining grasping something he desperately wanted.
When Melkor released his eyes, he saw Mairon enter, golden and flaming. As his lieutenant strode into the pit, Melkor’s gaze was drawn to him. His face crinkled in mirth as Mairon corrected the other Maiar’s technique with slaps and sharp words. Everyone in the room stood a little straighter. Everyone did but Gothmog, who seemed to be steeling himself for the arrival of the Lieutenant in his general direction. Sure enough, when Mairon reached him, he received a harsh poke in the back. Every Ainu in the chamber knew what would happen next.

Gothmog turned and smacked Mairon’s finger out of the way. Mairon returned it with a slap to the face. Melkor chuckled at that equivalent exchange, leaning back against the chamber wall to watch the continuing fight. His other Maiar were also taking notice of the commotion as well. Slowly, but surely, Gothmog grumbled and threw a fist of hot air which Mairon deflected to the ceiling with a wave of his hand. They then broke into clashing with blasts of heat that became less air and more fire. Soon two massive lengths of flame were flying about the two rivals. Without word, they fought, but each wore a wicked smile that grew as their escalating antics attracted the cheers of his Maiar. It was then that whips of fires and words of insult blazed.

“You fight like a Maia of Nienna!” Mairon jeered.

“Tulkas’ eyelashes have more strength than you!” shot back Gothmog.

The gathered crowd howled with vicious laughter. The Valar would never allow such fun above ground! Even joking insults were frowned upon. Only Melkor encouraged that special kind of comradery. So with occasional glances up at their watching Master, they reveled in their freedom to be wild. They jumped and threw their own jabs, that is, until Mairon’s and Gothmog’s whips spun and nearly clipped them on the head.

Mairon took no notice and rose into the air, twirling his whip into a column of fire. He laughed his spiteful laugh, as he thought he had Gothmog beat. However, while Mairon had been labouring at the forge and slinking in shadows, Gothmog had been growing in strength.

With a roar, Gothmog ripped a piece of rock from the pit floor and threw it through Mairon’s wall of fire. It broke up upon hitting Mairon, but not before it knocked him to the ground spectacularly. The crowd ooh’ed at the impact.

Thrown on his ass and covered in dust, Mairon looked into the distance in horrified rage. When one Maia offered his hand to help him up, Mairon snarled and burst into tumultuous flames. The rest of the Maiar backed away immediately, except for Gothmog who looked at Mairon like he was throwing a needless tantrum. Mairon returned the look with pure poison.

Mairon’s sweeping gaze was like Eru’s searchlight, the Flame Imperishable Melkor so longed for, trapped in a conscious spirit that exuded passion and precision. Each Maia stopped stock still as it passed. Although Mairon was falling behind in combat training, he made up for it with pure intimidation. Even so, Melkor wasn’t about to allow his lieutenant to bested again.

“Mairon!” he called from above. “Come here.”

Mairon’s flames flared down, revealing the deep self-disappointment on his face. Never-the-less he rose and strode with strict efficiency to meet his Master on the plateau above. Hundreds of pairs of eyes followed him, curious to hear Melkor’s words.

“Get back to training!” Melkor shouted down at them, and they quickly obeyed.

As Mairon approached, Melkor could feel his tension like a tuned harp string. The Maia still felt discomfort around him that was different from the fear the others showed, and it baffled him. Mairon
danced heel to toe when he knew Melkor was watching him, as if trying to suppress some sort of energy, and when Melkor came closer, he seemed as if he would explode.

“How goes the training of my Maiar?” Melkor prodded, both amused and irritated by his lieutenant’s behavior.

Breathing as though he was beating himself up from the inside out, Mairon answered, “Well, my Lord. Though I ask you not tell the Maiar that. They still have a long way to go before they master fire as a weapon.” Mairon bit his lip. “And I a long ways before I master them.”

“Hmph…” Melkor rubbed his chin, eyeing the sparks that occasionally shot from Mairon’s head. “Perhaps all they lack a piece of you. And you a piece of them.” He reached for a strand of hair.

Mairon moved away from his touch, showering the ground with sparks. He asked, “Do you mean that literally?”

Melkor dropped his hand and chuckled. “No Mairon, I prefer you with all of your parts intact.”

Looking up with defiance that belied his size, Mairon demanded, “Then why summon me for punishment? Do not play with my feelings.” He dropped his head to hide his pained face. “Just do it.”

Melkor scoffed, causing Mairon to flinch. “I have not summoned you for punishment, Mairon. You do that enough to yourself, my little sadist.”

Relieved, Mairon accepted Melkor’s hand on his shoulder. It was heavy and rough, not unlike Aulë’s, but it was only Melkor’s hand that did such powerful things to his spirit, and to his body. Mairon shifted on his toes uncomfortably again. The intensity of Melkor’s next words did nothing to alieve the heated tension winding up in his body.

“Mairon, I have summoned you to offer you private lessons.”

His surprise only showing by a brief widening of his eyes, Mairon asked, “Truly?” Melkor nodded, a strange, playful light dancing around him. Mairon debated for a brief moment before saying, “Then I accept your aid.”

“Excellent! It will be an enjoyable time for you, I promise, Precious.” Melkor hit his last words with a sumptuous whisper as he worked his thumb on Mairon’s shoulder. “As for me, at this time I am only pleased by one thing.”

Mairon waited for his Master to say what pleased him, but Melkor only released Mairon’s shoulder and paced with his hands behind his back. He was not ready to divulge that just yet.

“Before our sessions begin, I must ask one more thing of you, Mairon,” he said instead. “You have brought Maiar to my side, you have trained my Maiar to use fire, and you are crafting me a grand weapon. This has served us well, but to win Arda, we need more.”

The flattery fluttering his eyelashes, Mairon answered his Master, “That is why I am here, my Lord. Let me please you.”

Melkor did indeed look pleased. A flush of excitement was upon his face.

“Then please me by finding out what the Valar have planned for my Maiar. I want to know what force they will use to subject them, and I want to know how to stop it.”
It was a tall order, but one that did not phase Mairon.

“I have been seeking those answers myself, and so I will double down on my efforts,” he confirmed.

With a nod, Melkor smiled an insidious, closed lipped smile, and pulled the dagger out from its hilt at his hip. Mairon wondered if it was rust or dried blood that covered its edge.

“And spare nothing from your dark imagination, Mairon,” he said in a husky whisper. “I will be sure to do the same.”

Melkor disappeared into his own shadow, to go and labour in his own realm that no Maia had been privileged enough to see. If they all laboured just a tad longer, his paradise would be theirs as well, and a powerful seat to rule Arda from. Mairon still waited impatiently for the time Melkor would take him with him, as he wanted to have a say in its final touches. Yet, his spirit swarmed with excitement as he descended back into the crowd of Maiar. They watched him cautiously, save for Gothmog, who rushed up to him and said,

“Are you alright? He didn’t punish you? Well, obviously he didn’t but the way he called you up there I thought…”

Mairon put up his hand to stop him, and gave a slightly smug smile.

“No Gothmog, he was merely offering to train me in combat.”

“Damn it, really?!” Gothmog spat. “Just my damned luck. Well, that’s what I get for beating you just once… You are alright though, yeah?”

“Yes, stop asking! You’re being strange.”

Gothmog sheepishly rubbed the back of his neck and said, “It’s just I hardly know what to do with my new strength. The other training session I made a new tunnel with Culcil’s body alone…”

Said ginger-haired Maia looked up and squeaked at the mention of his name.

Gothmog waved him away and said to Mairon, “I don’t know how to be the best at what I do. I’m too used to being on the bottom, so to speak…”

Mairon placed his hands on his hips and sighed, disbelieving what he was about to say.

“You should be proud, Gothmog. You have taken up a new name and new strength with more ‘grace’ than some.” He thought of Thuringwethil, shivering, surrounded by drained animals and hating herself. “And you should display that pride as much as you can, to set an example for any lost Maiar who need to come home to us.”

Gothmog took to some time to absorb his words, an unusually thoughtful look on his stone-like face, before exclaiming, “Yeah!”

He reached out and grabbed for Culcil to pull him into a rough embrace.

“I gotta be an example, right?” Gothmog asked him while mashing his hand into the distraught Maia’s hair.

Culcil the Wiry simply gulped and nodded.

Blinking at the odd scene, Mairon was about to sigh again when they were interrupted by another Maia. She ran over, dancing on her toes in high nerves.
“There’s someone here to see you, Master Mairon! She says she saw something you ought to know.”

Mairon looked past the Maia and there he saw Thuringwethil, her long, dark hair wind-blown and her large eyes brimming with alarm. He pushed past the others to see her.

“What is it?” he insisted, cupping her hands in his.

She balled her hands into delicate fists, but looked more determined than Mairon had ever seen her.

“They march,” she answered. "Eöönwë marches."

Laid in a box of glass much stronger than it looked, Tulkas slept as Ainur slept, deep in dreams of his chosen element. Although he was in peace, his face held fierce its stern lines etched into his thick eyebrows. Around his altar were laid many weapons, some of them his, others placed by warriors as tribute to their hero and Master. Many small ever-lit candle lights caused countless metallic glints upon the piled masses of war’s machinery.

Eöönwë knew well that King Manwë hoped the weapons would stay aesthetic, as a tribute, and never be picked up again. However, with smoke in the sky, animals dead in their homes, and dark whispers in dark halls, his King’s hopes were moot and his sinful brother active.

And so, Eöönwë marched a hundred of his most trusted Maiar to Tulkas’ altar to rally them in a defense effort he knew would have to come. Assured by his dearest friend Mairon that no Discord was within him, he would defend his King to the ends of Arda, even if Manwë could not tell him what was truly going on.

What he hadn’t expected was his King to already be there.

Looking up from Tulkas’ sleeping face, Manwë cast his unreadable face upon the army that had entered.

“Eöönwë…” Manwë exhaled.

Eöönwë fell to his knees, awash with guilt. The light of a hundred Maiar dimmed. All Manwë did was shake his head.

“Stand.”

He stood, but slowly, and searched his King’s eyes for some indication of his intent. Manwë gave nothing, but began, “I always knew someday that you, my valiant, my ardent, Eöönwë, that you would try to defend me against my own wishes.”

His lips a thin line, Eöönwë said nothing, but hoped to all hope the smile on Manwë’s face was not false. His King would prove to never be false.

“And for that, I thank you,” Manwë finished with infinite gentleness. “I thank all of you.”

Light came again to the chamber, relief and love outpouring from the Maiar for their King. Their King knew them, and loved them too, but he was also as fierce as the greatest of gales, and knew battle as much as diplomacy.

“Now I reiterate that this is not a war of swords, but of principles, and of visions. All the same, it is a war for Arda’s fate, and Melkor will not stay his swords.”
Growing murmurs of agreement arose.

“Almaren will need your strength to gather those who have been cursed to see through Melkor’s lens. That is why I honor you with an appointment! You will form a force to police your fellow Maiar. Take up these swords, but be filled with nothing but compassion for those who have fallen!”

With no hesitation, the Maiar lifted the weapons around them above their heads. They gave a shout that reverberated to the very ceiling. The only Maia that carried no weapon was the one that moved out from behind Manwë, wearing matching white robes and carrying his head high. Manwë raised his arms to introduced him.

“Do welcome the new commissioner of your operations! The Maia Curumo has provided us with great intelligence and will guide you to victory!”

Eönwë was struck with sudden despair just as the candle-lit hall sang with Manwë’s final statement.

“With your greatly needed help, we will bring our Maiar back to the light!”

It was time to begin the grandest fight.

Chapter End Notes

Tulkas is the Chuck Norris of Arda.

Ehehehe sorry for dragging this out so long, but I have some scenes planned that I have been setting up for a while, so hopefully they are worth it. Mairon will certainly appreciate it when I stop teasing him. The Angbang wagon continues rolling... and the plot only gets thicker... like my thighs... damnit.

Mairon's awkwardness is totally that "I just had a wet dream about you and am trying not to think about it" kind of awkwardness.
To Induce

Chapter Summary

Curumo is bad at asking for things, but Mairon obliges anyways. Afterwards, Melkor begins his lessons for Mairon, and something begins between them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When I stare into the eyes of extinction,
Where a memory's asleep,
Where it's unsalvageably deep,
Will I blend into the water or surrender
And be truly, truly gone in annihilation's splendor?
Hunt me.
I'll be running stray from the pack.
Blood and moonlight glow on my back.
Want me.
Come on and give me reason to sing.
Turn me into anything.
(from The Eyes of Extinction by Seeming)

Metal gleamed, steel and bronze, like it was still in its liquid form. In that moment, the surface of the metal was Mairon’s entire world, his perfect Arda made in alloys. Nothing shone brighter and nothing was sharper, but Mairon was not satisfied. He sharpened the war axe head ever more, sending metallic smells into the air with each pass over the whetstone.

Only when he knew it was near sharp enough to cut reality did he pick up a soft cloth. The center of his world was then a macabre smile. The grinning skull etched into the axe’s neck would be polished until it was so lifelike it could sing to him. However its true Music would not play until he set its pulsing red core into its heart. The gruesome end result might send Aulë into fits, but Mairon was beyond caring what he thought.

The image of bone, barely ever seen by the Ainur in their spring, was morbid, and he loved the unusual motif just for that. Its inspiration came from the skulls left behind by Thuringwethil’s hunts and Mairon had thoroughly enjoyed inspecting the structure of life long after said life was lost. He smirked in the middle of his polishing, but he never let his hand slip.
On the other hand, Gothmog at some point had taken the time to gather the bones, and now enjoyed tossing them around to amuse the other Maiar. Mairon preferred to use the bones for intimidation and ceremony rather than entertainment, but he supposed there was some lovely irony in using the ultimate unknown for amusement. The idiot had his moments. Even in the midst of such focused work, Mairon felt lonesome for his new allies.

Despite the inclusion of his darkest interests in his latest work, the ideas that most compelled him to create could not be made under the eyes of his siblings, more curious now than ever. Maiar of many colours and creeds came to see what he was producing, having heard rumours of immense weapons to be wielded by Valar in the fight against Melkor. He hated the interruptions, but still he graciously entertained those who came, and kept his barbed words at a minimum. They might gawk at his design for their boldness, but they would never understand or appreciate them. The warhammer still waited for his loving hand.

Oh, what he planned for that glorious weapon was beyond anything he’d ever done, but it must be done in secret. He was to be of absolutely no suspect, lest he lose himself to the cold will of the Valar. As it was, he felt a chill. Someone was approaching.

 Damn. The momentum in his Music he’d built up came crashing to a cymbal-like halt.

Soon after, into the room slid Curumo, whom he hadn’t seen since that strange time they’d attempted to harmonize their song.

“Mairon? Hello,” he greeted, giving him a slight wave.

“Hello Curumo,” Mairon said, steeped in forced neutrality.

Mairon had thought that giving Curumo the Music he wanted would get rid of him, but apparently not. However, upon seeing him, his first thought was not to the dream they’d shared, but of the ridiculously long white robes he was wearing. They swept the floor, collecting dust and metal shards, staining their ends a dark grey.

“Are you wearing that here? Those look like Manwë’s spare undergarments.” Mairon laughed caustically. By Curumo’s sudden frown, it appeared he did not appreciate the joke. Gothmog would have. Mairon cut off his laughter with a sigh and said, “Besides, Curumo, a real smith would know white is the worst colour to wear while they’re working.”

Too proud to see his folly, Curumo returned, “So a real smith doesn’t know fashion? I guess I’ll admit that I fail there.”

It was Mairon’s turn to frown.

 Where in Eru’s sweet ass did this attitude come from?

Curumo simply laughed, as if he could shake the insult away, and said, “Why Mairon, they are meant to look like Manwë’s robes. I am leading one of his most important projects, after all.”

Mairon seethed but decided such petty arguments were beyond him at the time. He gave a dismissive, hum and turned back to his work on polishing the war axe. That was enough to cajole Curumo to reveal more.

“My new friends and I will be leading the resistance to Melkor,” he said, his voice straining to be important. “I thought you would be more interested… I thought you would be proud.”

To add insult, Mairon shrugged. Although he very much wanted to know the details of Manwë’s
resistance, at the moment he was overpowered with the desire to snub Curumo. He tossed his cloth at him and challenged,

“Curumo, as your teacher, I am more interested in your progression as a smith. Have you crafted anything lately?”

Now sulking, Curumo shook his head. He dropped the cloth he’d caught and ran a finger along the beard of the axe. He left a mark that left Mairon’s eye twitching.

“How about this one? The axe? Would you mind if I attempted a similar design?” Curumo asked.

Mairon snorted like a sputtering furnace. “Ha! Aulë does not want many of these made. And I doubt he would entrust smithing such a weapon to you. So no. Tell that to your new ‘friends.’”

Satisfied for but a minute, Mairon then realized what he had done, and the shock made his face ugly. He certainly did not want any more people coming in to disturb him. His hair wild, he whipped around to point his finger close to Curumo’s face.

“And you will not let anyone else know this is being perfected in these halls.” He ground the words into Curumo.

Despite his previous pomposity, Curumo nodded repeatedly. Mairon shook his head, mostly at himself, and floated his tools to their storage places. He would get no more productive work done this period.

“If you have nothing more to say, then leave. I will soon take my rest,” he said.

“But I do have more to say.”

Of course you do, Mairon groaned internally. He did not need to hear any more of this Maia’s prattling. Still, he crossed his arms and waited for him to spit it out.

When he was sure he had Mairon’s attention, Curumo took a deep breath and began.

“I have made my way into Manwë’s highest court, I believe in part due to the help you have been giving me.” Curumo then took on the airs of a proud victim. “However, I came to the unfortunate conclusion that my Music contains the Discord and took myself to see Irmo. He was entirely sympathetic, but insisted that I give him details of what I can gleam of Melkor’s plans.”

“And what can you gleam?” Mairon jabbed in spite of himself, moving abnormally close.

Momentarily taken aback by Mairon’s intensity, Curumo said, “Nothing. All I see is laughing shadows in my dark dreams.”

Relief was a wave over Mairon, but it only showed as a shush in the coals of the forge. He was not relieved from Curumo’s speech, however. The daft Maia continued spewing his self-absorbed words.

“Although within the court I am considered plagued by the Discord, I have been praised for my bravery in standing up to the will of Melkor, and am their darling. I have been trying so hard to uphold my place and give them the information they want. That is why I have been so busy.”

“Why come here then?” Mairon curtly questioned, moving away and removing his apron and tossing it on its hook.
Curumo’s tone turned conspiratorial. His dark eyes held deep a secret that could ruin Mairon.

“My fear is not just for myself, but for you, Master Mairon.”

There came that chill again. Mairon peered over his shoulder at Curumo intently as he revealed the true reason he came to visit.

“In our shared dream, I felt the presence of Melkor. I fear the Discord has reached you as well. Perhaps I can convince you to help me out in the cause against Melkor?”

At that, Mairon’s breath hissed inward, and it took all but his last reserves of willpower to stop from backhanding Curumo. His panic was stayed by his rage. It was a cold, all-seeing rage that whipped through his heart like a gale of Manwë, but much crueler.

It was swept away in a second.

A plan formed in his mind, quick as a blade.

He faced Curumo directly and furrowed his brow in a way he supposed was sympathetic. His whispered words were poisoned honey.

“Curumo, you have to know that I stand up to Melkor in my own way.”

He took Curumo’s face in his hands, imagining crushing it viscerally as he rubbed his thumbs on Curumo’s cheeks. “And although I do not wish to impose upon your success, I do think I can help you.”

Mairon released the amazed Curumo to tap his chin with his finger in a pantomime of consideration. In a way that he’d picked up from Melkor, he paced about the chamber, looking thoughtful.

“Oh I know!” he exclaimed. “How about I give you whatever intel I receive and then you pass it along to the Valar? That way, I can continue my smithing work and remain anonymous, and you gain status with the Valar.”

Curumo’s eyes shone. Mairon knew he could not resist. Of course, Curumo would never receive any real information, but only what Mairon wanted to manipulate him with.

“What a fantastic idea! I knew you could help me,” Curumo extoled.

He shook his hands free from the wide sleeves of the robes to grasp Mairon’s. Unawares to Curumo, the Discord in them met and distorted the fires of Mairon’s room into smoky, slithering flames. As Curumo raved on, Mairon’s closed lip smile blazed, all heat and no warmth.

“No one will know of your deeds.”

_I will make sure they will._

“Yet, you still do good.”

_I do the good of my Master, Melkor._

“You truly are the most admirable Maia.”

_I am the pinnacle of the beauty of corruption._

“Some days I wish to be you.”
You will never be more than my shadow puppet.

“You fear no evil.”

I am the evil.

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Walking from Aule’s halls, Mairon took the path less travelled, humming his Music’s tune. Underground, he journeyed into the tunnels outward towards to the border of Almaren, hoping someone would find him. Therefore, he hummed a little louder, letting some Discord dance in his Music.

Then it did not take long.

The heavy footfalls gave him away. Mairon heard something large slide in behind him. He smiled to himself, but ignored it and continued walking.

“Mairon…” came the whisper at his back.

Mairon spun on his heels to face his stalker, who was but a shifting shadow.

“You are too large to be sneaky, Master, but I did try to amuse you.”

Melkor formed completely, revealing his physical form in its enormity.

“Now is not the time for your snark, Mairon. I’m here to bring you to your lessons,” Melkor rumbled down at him.

Now is always the time for snark. Don’t you know?

“The lessons that should have happened sooner,” Mairon returned.

Melkor gripped Mairon’s chin, making it narrower than it already was. “I gave Gothmog combat lessons first because I thought you did not need them. Congratulations on proving me wrong.” He released Mairon’s chin roughly.

Mairon knew the true reason he’d been distracted enough to let Gothmog get the better of him. The reason stood before him in all his glory, just like when he’d been then, leaning against the pit wall and watching him hungrily. Mairon returned the look now.

“Perhaps I just wanted to get you alone, Master. Your attention is so valuable.”

Melkor huffed at the compliment, but basked in it as well. He squared his shoulders, towering over Mairon. His body language said scowl, but he seemed to be unable to keep a smirk creeping into his face.

“Well, you are going to get more of me than you could ever hope for, Precious.”

Taking that statement seriously, Mairon reflected the smirk and shifted into a fighting stance. He was ready to prove himself again, but as Melkor came towards him, all he did was open his arms and close them around Mairon.

“But we won’t be taking our lesson here,” Melkor said, enjoying the bewilderment on Mairon’s face. “No, I have a place I need to show you.”
In one swift movement, Melkor threw Mairon over his shoulder. A thrill surged to the end of Mairon’s toes, but he still had to protest.

“There’s no need to kidnap me, Master. I would have come with, had you asked!” he admonished.

“That’s not the point, Mairon,” Melkor said, tightening his arms around him.

Mairon kept his mouth closed after that, and breathed deep of Melkor’s smoky scent, trying not to show any of the heat his body felt.

Then, in the pitch of a scream, shadows closed around them like doors being dragged into the distance. Space folded in upon them, fractally shattering in a kind of chaotic beauty from order Mairon had never seen. He watched the world warp before him in awe, until it snapped. It returned as it had been, albeit a dark mockery of itself, shifting just slightly out of the corner of one’s eye. The end result of such wonder would have been anticlimactic if Mairon had not seen its genius. This shadow realm was laid perfectly in tune with Arda, and accepted their spirits wonderfully while hiding them from all others. This was how Melkor had been getting around!

“Clever. Master, you must teach me how to access this space sometime.”

“Of course, Mairon.” With a surprising gentleness, Melkor set him down. “There are many realms parallel to Arda, unoccupied and usually inaccessible, but my travels have taught me much,” he explained. “But we are not here for lessons on astral travel. Follow me.”

They walked and the world wove itself around them, warped as if through a fish eye lens. Melkor moved fast, reality falling past him, and Mairon kept pace, staring at his Master’s back. Where were they going? They were certainly beyond the boundary of Almaren now.

Not long after, they found themselves before a set of doors. In the twisting underground, no one could find it but those who had already been there. Or those who had created it. Melkor pushed open the doors.

Inside, the chamber was larger than any natural cave, and its walls of dripping obsidian triggered Mairon’s memory. He gasped. It was the chamber he had seen in his dreams. Disguised and trying to hide his shame, it was here Melkor had set him free. And he would do so now, and time and again.

“Familiar?” Melkor asked, a cheeky grin on his face.

“Yes, Master. I remember. It’s just as beautiful as it was then.”

“Try to still your smith’s mind. Only once you have proven to me you can defend yourself, will I allow you to work on what will be our new base of operations.”

Giving him but a moment to admire the architecture, Melkor strode to the wall to pick up a sword and threw it at Mairon, who caught it with ease.

“Give it a swing.”

Mairon did, but he found he didn’t like its balance of mass.

“This weapon is not suitable for you,” Melkor mused, seeing the scowl on Mairon’s face.

“Of course it isn’t, I didn’t make it,” Mairon snapped back. He tossed it behind him like the junk it was.
His ire rolled over Melkor like a slight breeze, who gave no reaction but turned back to the weapons lying against the wall. They were all crudely made, but of many different types. Mairon already itched to replace them with finer versions, but now was not the time.

Melkor brandished a war axe. “Perhaps this is more to your taste?”

“Axes are for trees,” Mairon stated, picking at his nails in disinterest. He honestly preferred his magic to any weapon, but Melkor seemed insistent he try one.

They tried many, but Mairon rejected them all, or as he saw it, the weapons rejected him. Most were too feeble to stand his touch. Who had made them anyways?

Melkor was not curtailed by Mairon’s pickiness, but seemed to have anticipated it. He was building up to a point that Mairon did not yet see. Finally, after every blade, spear, and blunt weapon in his size was thrown except one, Melkor ran his fingertips over its dark, spiky surface. He picked up the particularly weighty looking weapon and threw it at Mairon. It was like a hammer with no head, a club with many edges.

“Try this. It’s not a common weapon among Manwë’s troops, or mine, but I think you can handle it better than most.”

“A mace? Really?” Mairon questioned as he caught it, its heft catching him by surprise. But then he realized something. Its edges appeared random, but in fact they were carefully chosen. No one but the best smith could have made it. “Master, this is mine. Or was. Where did you get it?”

Melkor raised his eyebrows, flashing the whites of his eyes. “All these weapons were thrown into the trash pit, Mairon. So you tell me.”

Mairon closed his eyes and bit his lip. He had thrown it away. He knew the Valar would reject the harsh design, and so he rejected it first. The stiff spikes came to him in his work when his first frustrations with his life appeared, and Curumo was assigned to be his apprentice. Those fiery flashes of frustration returned when he realized how much control the Valar had over him then, and how much they did still.

The thought ignited his rage, and his body began to smoulder. Melkor looked pleased.

“I need you to shed every last philosophy the other Valar have instilled in you. From aesthetics to ethics, you will be theirs no more,” he said, clenching his fist and shaking it at Mairon.

“I was never theirs to begin with,” Mairon insisted, but he understood Melkor’s point. He lived with their laws for so long it would take more than his pledge to Melkor to shake them. It would take a crucible.

He raised the mace above his shoulder, loving the way the weight made his muscles tense.

“Yes!” Melkor said with enthusiasm. “Swing it and use its momentum like you would with a smith’s hammer. Follow through and you will smash your enemies out of your way, as I know you wish you could do with everyone that gets in your way. When they are down, rain your rage upon them.”

Melkor licked his lips, awaiting what Mairon would do with the weapon. Mairon breathed out and gave a solid swing, creating a swift sounding whoosh in the air. He then raised it over his shoulder and swung it at the ground, at some imaginary adversary.

After the boom from the strike finished echoing about the chamber, Melkor said, “Good,” in a voice as deep as bedrock.
He picked up the largest weapon left leaning against the wall. The warhammer was paltry compared to the one Mairon was creating for him, but in his hands, it was still intimidating as all damnation.

“Parry, Mairon! Do you know what that means?”

“Yes.”

“Then show me! Block the swings of Manwë’s might and all they stand for!”

Clang!

Mairon barely warded off Melkor’s blow, but Melkor seemed impressed.

“Again, Mairon! Block the Music that is not mine!”

The next blow was even more brutal, sending shockwaves all down his arms. Mairon gritted his teeth, and tried to get his own swing to connect, but Melkor simply pushed it down.

“They will not let you be what you are. What does that do to you, Mairon?”

Mairon screamed a war cry and tried again, but to no avail. Melkor blocked the blow like a dust mote in the wind.

“It slowly kills you. That’s what it does!” Melkor roared at him.

Melkor’s next strike connected with his shoulder and it tore into his body, sending sparks skittering all over the floor. Growling with frustration, Mairon repaired his body and stared up at the insurmountable might that loomed overhead. How could he ever defeat Manwë’s entire army if couldn’t defeat a single person that was obviously going easy on him? Even with Melkor pulling his strikes, Mairon knew there was no way he could get a swing in, as Melkor’s reach was too great. He needed a different strategy.

During Melkor’s next strike, Mairon rolled out of the way, towards Melkor’s feet. Counter-intuitively, he pushed himself as close to Melkor as possible, to inside his weapon’s range and right up against his body. Melkor’s electricity coursed through him, colder than ice and hotter than fire, but Mairon held firm.

However, even with his weapon rendered useless, Melkor was far, far from helpless.

Before Mairon could react, Melkor threw his warhammer away and closed his arm around his throat. Mairon struggled but he was lifted up off the floor. Soon his feet were dangling in the air.

“You thought you could use your trickery?” Melkor breathed into his ear. “Always too clever for your own good, Precious.”

Mairon did not answer because he could not breathe, couldn’t even think enough to project his words into Melkor’s head. His mind was filled with nothing but the sensation of writhing against Melkor’s body, muscle sliding past muscle, soul scintillating upon soul. Mairon’s eyes rolled back in his sockets from the intensity of it all. The lack of breath did him no harm, but Melkor’s overwhelming aura was swallowing him whole. Just when he thought their energy would slip into one whole being, Melkor let him go.

“You were supposed to struggle away from my grip, not lean into it, Mairon,” Melkor said, giving him a genuinely curious look.
Mairon coughed, but then managed to say, full of heat and impish spite, “Then why do you make it so hard?”

“It was part of the game, Mairon,” he said, but he did not seem convinced himself.

“Which game?” Mairon asked. “You play many with me, Master.”

They watched each other then, wondering what the other would do next. Their light flickered, tentative but lively, lighting the room in red and violet glimmers. Teasing, dancing, they paced around each other in circles, tracing the path they had made in the air upon their first meeting. This time it was Mairon who reached out for Melkor. He grasped his hand, and dared to pull himself closer. Like a quavering note on a lute, the moment shook.

Mairon bowed down and kissed the top of Melkor’s hand, letting his lips linger and his breath warm Melkor’s icy grey fingers.

When he looked up, he expected to see smugness on Melkor’s face, but all he saw was furrowed brows, as if Melkor was bemused by the gentle praise. For all the Vala’s pride, he was so unused to affection that it broke through him and made him ache. The earth between them quaked.

A soft sigh scattered their strain. When they broke their eye contact, they were startled to see a lithe shadow was watching them. How much had she seen?

“How did you get here, little one?” Melkor questioned, out of breath even though he had not been exerting himself.

“My lord, if I may say, that is unimportant right now,” Thuringwethil answered with haste, not meeting his eyes. “I have come here with grave news.”

“Then tell us, Thuringwethil,” Mairon cut in, hesitantly letting go of Melkor’s hand.

She looked him directly in the eye, her usually sadness, and occasional glee, gone. Deadly serious was her mien, and fatal were her words.

“Gothmog has been imprisoned.”

It was as none of them had envisioned.

Chapter End Notes

So softly it starts.

Whew, what a long chapter. I have feeling not many will complain though. ;)

I would say this is about the halfway point of the story. The first part was building up Melkor, then having him appear and convince Mairon to join him and his army. The characters have been set up, and now all sorts of things will come tumbling down... even Melkor’s guard perhaps?
Mairon listens in on Irmo and Námo’s visit to Gothmog in his special prison. Afterwards, Mairon is upset but gets some help from Melkor that brings a powerful weapon to life.

“What a debacle!”

“Well, I’m not surprised. Have you seen him?”

“They should have known.”

“He’s a brute.”

Voices echoed around Mairon, the bat Uquesse on his shoulder his only comfort in the roiling sea of judgement and outcry. Maiar and the many flocks of birds that roosted on this precipice made much noise, but he did his best to remain focused. He stroked the fine fur of Uquesse’s body, but she was distracted as well, her large ears swiveling about like leaves in the wind.

While her ears caught the continuing commentary, Mairon only had eyes for the starry mist now forming at the head of the crowd. From that mist, Irmo and Námo appeared and parted the Maiar with bright beams of light, bringing a hush to the upheaval. Without a word, they walked to the heavy set of doors belonging to the building where Gothmog was being kept.

Mairon found it discomfoting that this building had been here for some time, seemingly serving no purpose until now. Had the Valar known they would eventually take their own Maiar prisoner? It
would not surprise him, but the thought still gave him a chill. His muscles clenched as the Fëanturi
surveyed the crowd once over with their pale eyes, searching, judging, but not seeing his intent,
before they turned to disappear inside the prison.

The Maiar around him erupted in more tumultuous talk than before.

Most accounts agreed that Osomon, known as Gothmog to Mairon, had been caught consorting with
a monster. Deep in Yavanna’s forest some gallivanting Maiar had come across Gothmog and what
appeared to be another Maia, but she was like no Maia seen in the light of the Valar. Though terrified
they were of her gaping mouth of blood-stained teeth, they still noticed their third and less-fortunate
companion. A tiny messenger Maia was laid out on the dewy grass, unconscious, unlit, and gray as
stone. The witnesses had called for help in high screams, sending soldiers descending from the sky
on their feathered wings, but by the time they made it, the she-Maia had been sent away by the other.
He did not come with them easily. The most embellished recounts had him screaming streams of fire
when he was held down, but this was not confirmed.

Hearing this, Mairon hummed in discontent, needing more than rumors for the ears of his Master.
After Melkor had seethed at the news and cracked the earth beneath him with his cold rage, he told
Mairon and Thuringwethil through breaths of steam to learn all they could of what the Valar will do
to Gothmog. It was the pain in Melkor’s expression that pushed Mairon onward. He decided then he
did not like to see Melkor distressed, and that he would do anything to ease his burden.

So, being more presentable to the public than Thuringwethil, Mairon had gone to the center of the
calamity. Now he knew Thuringwethil may not have told them the entire truth, and feared the wrath
of his Master upon her. That would have to be dealt with later. Now, Mairon needed to hear what the
Valar were saying. He could use his influence to get inside, but he had a subtler way.

Under the folds of his cloak he ushered Uquesse. His nails turned into claws, he pressed his thump to
his palm. Dark as stone and hot as boiling water, a droplet of his blood ran down his palm to his
wrist. With his urging, Uquesse took some of his blood, convulsing once as she did. He attempted to
comfort her, giving her a small kiss on her forehead as she surfaced from his cloak at his neck. She
squeaked softly back, but looked as though she was already exhausted. After all, for the next while
she would hold a power greater than herself inside.

With a slight motion of his finger, Uquesse shot off his shoulder to soar to the oculus of the dome
that topped the building. She was not noticed amongst the birds and so he was able to carry out his
plan without suspicion. Retreating to the back of the crowd, now humming to himself a steady tune,
he firmly held his vision of Uquesse in his mind. The shape of her body, the sound of her wings,
even the smell of her fur, he held in such vivid quality that he could transform himself into a copy of
her form at this very moment if he pleased, but he did not. Instead he held himself on the very edge
of becoming her, dominating her, and so their Music was matched, each note of her being echoing
through him like her heartbeat. Her felt her movement, saw through her eyes and heard through her
ears.

Slipping into Uquesse’s mind was as easy as using his hammer. He saw both as extensions of
himself, as he thought all objects in Arda should be. Such uses of Yavanna’s creatures were
forbidden since it was sacrilegious to project oneself into a lesser being, but Mairon had no qualms.
In his very first years in Arda, he’d spent more time with Yavanna’s animals than with Maiar.
Yavanna had been concerned about his increasingly animalistic behavior and encouraged him to
spend more time with Aulë, and the rest was history. That had been so long ago, when Arda was
barely formed and the animals were nothing more than wisps of shape, that he’d almost forgotten his
connection with them. Ironically it was Yavanna’s gift of this bat that had re-awakened his older
instincts.
Down the oculus, he saw darkness, but smelled what could only be Gothmog. He pressed his will into Uquesse a slight bit more and she moved exactly where he wanted, swooping in through the top of dome. He perched her on the top of a column, to stay still, and wait for the entrance of the Valar.

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A web of silvery filament shimmered in every direction around Gothmog. It looked innocent, beautiful even in its gentle waving motions. However, he seemed to be avoiding it as much as possible. On the floor with his arms wrapped around his knees, he hid his expression in his legs, reliving the moment he was captured, wondering how something could happen so fast.

He was happy for once, helping Thuringwethil fill the emptiness she carried inside. She had been complaining that animals were not satisfying her, and he suggested she play pest control to the next level of being. The light that coursed through the tiny messenger Maiar like blood made easy meals, for a while. Then came the scream. There was no hiding, Thuringwethil hunched over her prey, light still dripping from her lips, him holding another in his grip.

“Go.” he urged her. “Go!”

And she fled, giving him a sorry look that pierced his chest with emotion. He had no regrets.

“What happened here?” the soldiers shouted, but from the scowls on their faces, they had already judged him as guilty.

He said nothing, releasing the Maia in his grip, who screamed and flitted away. That did not placate the soldiers, some of whom looked warily at the drained victim on the grass.

“You are Osomon, are you not? Stop in the name of our King Manwë, and answer us!”

He stood, readied himself, and said his true name,

“I am Gothmog!”

and then his true mission,

“I do not serve Manwë any longer.”

He summoned his fire.

Twelve eagles and twelve soldiers it took to restrain him, but restrain him they did. It was not the epic battle he’d envisioned, but a fast take-down with little pomp. He was dragged on the ground and through the air, still kicking, still flaming, into a dark building. Taking the fall, he had not called for help, but the selfish part of him wished he had.

Now, laying in the dark alone, he felt not even Melkor would accept him, the imbecile he was for getting captured. He mourned what could have been, but as he squeezed his arms around his legs, he knew he was not ready to give up yet. Nobody would take his new found identity away from him, not any soldiers, nor Manwë, or even Melkor himself.

The room then dropped in temperature, and his head perked up. A sparkling fog rounded the corner, giving the grey light of the chamber a dream-like haze. Two willowy figures in long billowing robes stepped in eerie unison towards him. They were only distinguishable by their crowns and expressions. One wore a crown of glass bulbs filled with clouds, and a smile. The other wore a stem band of etched steel and an expression to match. The brothers Irmo and Námo had entered, all in shades of grey.
“Are you comfortable?” Irmo asked, all smile.

The inanity of the question floored Gothmog, so he didn’t answer. Irmo stepped forward, leaving his brother in the fog, and caressed the barrier between them. It rippled, almost shuddered, in response.

“Do you like it?” Irmo asked again. “It’s my magic in that first layer. The second is my brother’s.”

Námo stepped forward and wrapped himself around Irmo, locking eyes with Gothmog. He said nothing. His face gave nothing. Gothmog felt pins and needles at the depth of his eyes, but still found it in him to respond.

“I’d like it a lot better if it wasn’t containing me,” he grumbled.

“What an ungrateful guest we have, Námo!” Irmo said to his brother, who was still as silent as stone. Gothmog, still confused by Irmo’s politeness, yelled back. “I’m not your guest, I’m your prisoner!”

Irmo shook his head, still wearing his closed smile, and said, “Oh no, you are free to leave at any time, Osomon. Just pass through the barrier.”

Gothmog, in turn, shook his head in disbelief.

“Ha! Just pass through the barrier you say!”

He stood to give a demonstration. Grimacing, he pushed his hand at the barrier, but as it had all the times he tried before, his fingers dissolved into mist. His physical form would not hold if he passed through. As he pulled back his hand and it slowly reformed, he eyed the Valar suspiciously.

“If you want to destroy me, then do it already,” he challenged. He hated being confronted by cowards.

Irmo tutted and played with the edge of Námo’s sleeve. “Of course not! We don’t need to destroy you,” he said, but he looked nervous. The other Vala appeared to comfort him with a tilt of his head.

“What do you mean?” Gothmog asked. “If you don't want anything with me then just let me go!”

Irmo sighed as if it were so simple. He reached out to pluck a song on the filaments of the cage, and said his words in tune. “We are letting you go, little one. Soon you will make the choice to pass through this barrier, and return to us.”

Breaking Irmo’s melody, Gothmog shouted over him, “This is no choice! I want to make my own choices!”

Irmo laughed, a strained, delicate tinkling behind his gloved hand. “A Maia? Choose what choices they get to make? We Valar are the choosers of all choices. It’s absurd to think otherwise!”

“Absurd!” Námo echoed, only his mouth moving. His eyes remained unblinking chips of stone.

Gothmog looked away from his gaze, and up at the oculus of the dome. The light of the Lamps filtered through, just as it had in the cracks in the mines. This cage was no different than the one he’d been in his whole life. He knew in his Music, that he was not an absurdity to be corrected. He was capable of making his choices, damned as they may be.

Clenching his sweating hands, he declared, “While I toiled for your splendor, you decided my fate? From towers and gardens, you see not into the depths of your foundation. It is crumbling. Crumbling because you care nothing for who I really am -- who we are! You’re fiends!”
Irmo gasped and Námo then stepped in front of his brother, his eyes wide and showing their whites. The mist turned dark and turbulent, roiling around Námo like a cloak.

“Do not dare spout your Discordant words upon my brother. You are the fiend, rending the light from your fellow Maiar. There are those who would see the same happen to you. Feel blessed that there are some that still see hope within you.”

Irmo, glassy eyed and seeming to still be recovering from the insult, said, “Yes, you are still one of Eru’s creations, and we Valar shall guide you for the rest of your life. We shall free you from the stress of choice that is the chaos of Melkor’s Discord. Only then can you be your best again.”

Gothmog pounding his chest with one fist and proudly proclaimed, “All I am is sung in the Discord!”

Námo shrugged, now looking amused, and said, “Then you will be completely reformed.”

The eyes of the brothers glittered from within their swirling cloud of mist. This was what they wanted. For him to be cleansed of all his previous self, so he could serve them and all the other Valar once more. Gothmog’s expression turned from defiance to panic. The horror was beginning to sink in.

“We’re immortal… You can’t kill us.” Gothmog reasoned, but he did not seem convinced himself.

“This is not death,” Námo calmly returned.

“It may as well be!” Gothmog shouted back, his voice cracking in fear.

A smile curled upon Námo’s thin lips, the first that Gothmog had ever seen on him. It was not a comforting smile, but one of secrets. Now it was Irmo who looked solemn. Gothmog opened his mouth to demand more, but he would get no more answers. The brothers embraced and disappeared into the mist, leaving behind only dew on the stone. Shaking in despair, Gothmog fell to his knees once again.

Outside, Mairon gasped out of Uquesse’s vision. Then he ran. He tore through the crowd before him, but did not care. The others had to know.

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It was in his workroom in Aule’s halls that Melkor found Mairon. Unusually, he was not working but sitting with his hammer in lap. The fires were down, and all the other Maiar gone, so his face was lit only by the light of the magic lightning core. It was suspended in the air by its own force, occasionally crackling with lightning the colour of a stormy sea. Beneath it was the massive war hammer that Mairon was crafting, secretly for him. Despite Melkor’s great desire for it to be done, it was not his focus on the visit.

“Mairon. I have heard the news,” he said, his voice echoing.

He got no greeting.

Melkor scoffed, but then offered, “Thank you for briefing my other Maiar. They are safe, thanks to you.”

Usually praise made his Mairon smile, but he only huffed and put his hammer back up on his workbench.
“Master, I wish to be alone,” he practically mumbled.

Melkor would not accept that. He would not leave until he saw fire again. Walking over, he took up a lock of Mairon’s hair and ran it through his fingers. Mairon’s shoulders stiffened momentarily, but he allowed it.

“Truly? Is there nothing I can do to help your mood?” Melkor insisted. “Our army needs its lieutenant.”

Mairon batted his hand away, and shifted away from Melkor. Seduction techniques would not help him here.

His face turning serious, Melkor folded his arms. “Precious,” he sighed. “What plagues you?”

Suddenly, Mairon jumped up from his seat, throwing his arms in the air.

“Failure!” he shouted, the word echoing to the ceiling.

It was then Melkor saw the distress in his lieutenant’s eyes. Wide and wild, his fire was turned inward upon himself, ravaging his thoughts, and leaving Mairon looking limp and damped.

“This doesn’t sound like you, Mairon,” Melkor said, frowning and trying to move towards Mairon.

“I know,” Mairon breathed. “But I may never get to be myself if I stay here any longer, and Gothmog will essentially die because I failed!”

Mairon kicked his workbench, jolting all the tools upon it.

“I couldn’t gather intel on what the Valar had planned, I couldn’t save Gothmog, and now I can’t even craft!”

He kicked the table the warhammer rested on, sending the orb floating above into fits. It sputtered sparks and violet flame, but stubbornly remained suspended.

“Even this thing evades me! Its completion should be my comfort, but instead it’s my bane.”

Mairon swung his leg away and sunk further into himself, turning grey as ash. His hair hung in dark strands as if it was wet and he was standing under an invisible waterfall. All the fires in the room, and indeed in Aule’s halls, were dying. Melkor closed in on Mairon, and wrapped his arms around him. He felt so cold.

“We will prevail,” Melkor tried to stamp into him.

“But I failed,” Mairon droned, his eyes going black as dead coals. “I failed! I failed! You can’t know how I hear that insult pounding in my spirit like drums of hate. Over and over forever.”

He pounded on Melkor’s chest, as if to mock the thoughts that haunted his mind. His strikes left rose-shaped scorch marks but Melkor did not flinch. Melkor had no words for this. He was never as good with them as he wanted to be. All he had now was his actions.

Releasing the distressed Mairon, he grabbed at the magical core. It gave a screech and shocked him with many strikes of lightning, but he was made of its magic and it only strengthened him. He wrenched it right from the air and it shook even his mighty arms.

“Quick Mairon, your hammer!”
Determined to master it for Mairon’s sake, Melkor managed to lower the core to its cage. Mairon had built it perfectly and this time, it slid in with satisfying accuracy. Mairon came alive, his hair flaring into flame, and he summoned his hammer in one hand, and a stream of fire in the other.

Together, Mairon and Melkor sang, setting the core in the head of the hammer. The cage closed in, fusing it in place. It looked just like a deep purple heart, beating in unison with their Music, and the iron around it like its veins.

At their final note,

~GROOOOOOND~

a deep dirge that rattled the torch sconces on the wall, the hammer flashed one last rogue lightning strike that went shooting down their spines. Every fire in the room was re-lit, including Mairon himself.

They were left breathless, panting as the last of their song echoed away. Still without words, Melkor reached and bent down to press a kiss to the top of Mairon’s hand, where upon the Maia dropped his smithing hammer with a clank.

“You are capable,” Melkor murmured, running his lips along Mairon’s knuckles.

This time, Mairon nodded, nearly purring, with the fire back in his eyes.

“We will prevail,” Mairon murmured back.

Their soldiers would survive, and burn Almaren black.

Chapter End Notes

Irmo and Námo play good cop and bad cop. I’ve had that idea in my head for a while, so I'm glad I got to use it. I don't want to put the Valar in the "super villain" position, but I want to show that perhaps they have trouble seeing things from other points of view, and that can be destructive and arrogant.

Meawhile, Mairon and Melkor have developed a kind of back-and-forth with their subtle showings of affection. They inch towards each other, but we all know the fire will flare soon, consuming them. :) Unfortunately, they have some Big Problems to contend with right now... but I love people trying to deal with things together, and sometimes seeing each other at their worst. I dunno, bonding and shit. <3

In other news, GROND is alive! He sings his note of creation ever more. GROND GROND GROND...
The Valar host a party in celebration of their slight against Melkor. Mairon attends but causes a stir. Afterwards, he meets with the two most important people in his life.

It's been a year since I started this fanfic, wow! Thanks for sticking around this long, and hello if you are new. :] Every comment means the world to me, no matter its form, and I can't thank you enough if you've taken the time to talk to me!

Now as for this chapter, I'd like to mention a few warnings: mild blood, some drunkenness, and hair pulling. Hope that covers it!

In Almaren, thunder rumbled sullenly from the North, but was stifled by a single note. Bunches of bright blue flowers began to bloom like they were dying. They bedecked the hall that grew from the mountain side like a great quartz crystal, hollowed out by a rushing waterfall. Influenced by the Valar, it vibrated in its entirety, calling out in a clear drone. It was gathering a party.

| Praise Manwë. Praise his council. Of the Discord always be doubtful. |
Maiar arrived like a storm of stars and a shower of song. In gold and silver and crystal and mithril they spiraled down from the sky and floated up from the gardens to reach the great hall between the two districts of Almaren. They thirsted for revelry and gladly accepted the summons to sing.

*Praise Eru. Praise his children. All but the one who is our villain.*

In the crystal hall were drinks of potent liquor, made mostly of magic, to aid the easing of worries. Notes in a saccharine timbre rang from even more crystal growths upon the ceiling. The Maiar became swept up in dance and song, chanting along to the Music that emanated from the gem encrusted walls.

*Praise Light. Praise what it touches. Avoid the Dark One that it judges.*

Premature though it was, this was a celebration for a victory against Melkor. The Valar in their tower hoped to raise their servant’s moral, and most took to the merriment well. However, to some the songs sung were like scrapings against their ears, and indeed their spirit. Mairon, deep in his head, sang his own praises.

*Praise Power. Praise it wielders. Kneel for your Dark Lord when he whispers.*

He entered, innocently enough, but he sought to undo the jovial mood as subtly as he could. Wearing sweeping robes of black, red, and gold that fit tightly around his neck, arms, and chest, he stood out like a raven among doves, as Gothmog’s only mourner. His face was forged into a frown, not unusual for him, but it sent a message all the same: This is no reason to celebrate.

Bold he was being, but who could damn him for his dress or his mien? If anyone asked, he would simply say that he grieved for his sibling and Nienna would do no different. And so, drifting like a fallen leaf on a stream, Mairon swept across the floor and took no interest in the activity about him, but looked beautiful and sad to all who saw. When he flashed his gaze about, it was shame he saw on some of the others as they realized how they had failed to give the situation gravitas. Although Mairon kept his solemn visage, their reaction satisfied him so. Only one detail stunted his success. Eönwë wasn’t here to see him.

Amidst the glitter and the glee he saw no sign of his friend. He saw Curumo, again clad in white, leading a hymn for the most devout Maiar. Mairon avoided that crowd as much as possible. There was no reaching them. He saw Ilmarë, attempting to escape her crowd of admirers, but none of her now lover. Mairon refused to even look her in the eye. He saw some of his own Maiar, already turned, looking at him in admiration. Although he dare not let himself smile, his body smouldered from the praise. However, he saw nothing of Eönwë. Had the Valar condemned Eönwë to guard duty on such an occasion? He would not put it past them.

Determined for Eönwë to see him, Mairon bypassed admirers of his own. They pressed flowers to his arms, sang sweet songs, or just watched him from afar, but he did not even give them a glance. He was analyzing. By his appraisal, the defensible position for Manwë’s air warriors would be on the roof so he made for the wide hole the waterfall came through.

In the pool at the waterfall’s bottom Ulmo’s Maiar played. Their splashes caught his skin and made it sizzle. They looked up to see who interrupted their game, and their skin dried at the very sight of him. He glowered and he glowed and oh how he wished to show all the Maiar his wings. He feared too much that someone would recognize him as the Maia that had flown with the Dark Lord, so he succumbed to the indignity of climbing to reach the apex of the giant quartz point.

He started by grappling statue of Nessa, wrapping his arms around her neck to pull himself up. Some
titters rose up from the crowd and even one wolf whistle, but Mairon was singularly focused on his task.

The water roared this close, and little droplets turned to steam when they came to close to his body. The very sound of splashing irritated him, and he vowed that when he and Melkor and all their followers absconded to their underground palace, he would have a cascade of lava falling that was twice as large. The thought of an entire region of his own gave him the strength he needed to pull himself up, carved limb by limb, crystal by crystal. His robes flapped in the breeze from the rushing water, and his hair curled into the beginning of flame. He climbed with his forge-strong arms until he was close enough to swing himself up over the lip.

He left the party without so much as a speech, but his impression upon the psyche of some Maiar was lasting nonetheless. He’d seeded doubt in those on the edge, bringing them ever more in tune with the Discord. Discussion of Gothmog, his fate, and whether he deserved it, erupted in Mairon’s wake.

Meanwhile, free in open air, Mairon was greeted by the familiar figure of his friend. Eönwë’s strong back was to him, and thankfully, he was alone and lost in thought. Mairon rose to a matching noble pose and whistled a little bird song. Eönwë’s wrenched his head around, looking nervous, but as soon as he saw who it was, he sighed in relief.

“Oh, Mairon, it’s good to see you. I got such a tingling down my back that I thought doom was coming. How did you sneak up on me?”

Mairon laughed for the first time since the party started.

“Easily! And I am only the doom of your boredom!” he responded. He stepped closer and outstretched his arms. “Why are you up here all alone, Eönwë?”

Eönwë shrugged, looking a little sheepish. “I wanted to give my fellow soldiers a little break. Besides, I am not in the mood to entertain.”

Perhaps there is hope for you in my world yet, Eönwë.

“Can you entertain me?” Mairon asked coyly, already knowing the answer.

Eönwë laughed as well. “Of course! I didn’t mean you, Mairon. I meant them.” Eönwë pointed his thumb down to the party, and then proceeded to make the most ridiculous face Mairon had ever seen, crossed eyes, stuck out tongue and all. Indeed, below them some Maiar were becoming raucous in their praise or wailing in their lament.

Mairon and Eönwë looked down, hearing a song rise up about how all the dirt on Gothmog would be scrubbed away. A song about the purity of dirt answered. Eönwë was the first to look away from the scene.

He fiddled with the feathers decorating his ceremonial spear before he asked, “Do you think Manwë gets this way? Anxious, pessimistic, inconsolable even by Varda, his love?”

With his frown reset on his face, Mairon reassured him, “I’m sure he does. The Valar are not as far above us as we think.”

“But they are literally above us, right now.” Eönwë said, pointing to the tower where they were taking council.

Mairon shrugged. “Physically, perhaps.” He looked to the horizon. “But they do not see all.”
Eönwë tilted his head, not unlike a bird. “You sound different, Mairon. You're saying strange things.”

Mairon, still as stone, said, “This is a strange time, and I intend to meet it.”

Eönwë came to Mairon’s front and placed one hand on his shoulder. He shook his head with a small smile and said, “Mairon, you always get like this when you want to say something. What do you want to ask me? Be not afraid.”

They stayed in that moment, appearing peaceful, but Mairon was waiting for his courage to appear on baited breath. He so wanted his friend to understand this situation, to understand everything. He knew another piece of him would die if Eönwë didn’t come with him to Melkor’s side, but he was preparing to let that piece die.

“Does it not burn you to see one of us imprisoned?” Mairon finally asked, all of his fire coming through.

Wary of Mairon’s emotional state, Eönwë gave his answer cautiously, “We have been told to not consider him one of us.”

“But he is,” Mairon returned, insistent. He grabbed Eönwë’s robe front and implored, “We are all Maiar. What they will do to one, they can do to the rest of us. And what if petty feuds are solved by accusations of the Discord? What if innocent Maiar are sent to be ‘cleansed’? What if I have to go through with it and forget who you are?”

Eönwë grimaced and released Mairon to clutch his spear for support. “Mairon…”

Mairon must have pleaded with eyes as much as his words, as Eönwë broke and his upright posture fell into a depressed slouch.

“I forget that the Maia in that strange prison just as easily could have been me, potent as the Discord is” he said, ever so quietly. “Forgetting you and all whom I hold dear would be the death of me. Truly… This makes me as uneasy as you.”

Eönwë’s admittance calmed Mairon, who sighed like a fire. He came to Eönwë’s side, so they both could look out onto the lake, and rested his head on Eönwë’s shoulder. He said into his neck, “No, Eönwë you were just doing your assigned duty. But wouldn’t Manwë want you to go above and beyond?”

Letting his head tilt to rest on Mairon’s, Eönwë contemplated what could be done.

“Always he asks me to think, but I fear of doing,” he mused, fluttering the loose strands of Mairon’s coifed hair. “I know what must be done, but I have been afraid to do it. Damn me! So brave I am with a weapon, but not with my words!”

“Eönwë. You know you can at least tell me. Let me make you brave.” Mairon assured, giving Eönwë’s arm a squeeze.

Eönwë breathed and the air turned still.

“He deserves a trial,” he said clearly, but Mairon could feel him shaking. “I must convince the Valar to give him a trial.”

Although a trial was not what Mairon had initially hoped for, he decided he could use it to his advantage.
“Yes!” Mairon exclaimed. “Eönwë, you are kinder and more brilliant than Manwë could ever hope for. I bet you could even forgive the Dark Vala.”

“Mairon! You jest!”

“No! You are just that empathetic.”

They laughed, but Mairon always had his hopes. He knew he shouldn’t count on Eönwë to ever understand his love for Melkor’s ways, but damn him if he didn’t strive to have everything he ever wanted. He tapped Eönwë’s clothes, staining them dark like his.

“Wear the colours of mourning with me, Eönwë,” he urged, popping Eönwë’s stiff collar. “Just until the trial is over.”

Eönwë nodded, just happy to see Mairon appeased.

“With us all alone like this, I hope the Dark Vala isn’t nearby, plotting to disrupt this party with his loud Discord,” Eönwë joked, but his knotted brow said some part of him was worried it would happen.

Mairon smiled his signature closed lip smile.

“I’m sure he is far away, Eönwë.”

Below them came a crash of tinkling glass. A fight had broken out, apparently over which Valar Gothmog would serve once he was habilitated.

“Calm yourselves!” Eönwë shouted down at them. He shared an exasperated look with Mairon before he swooped down into the hall on his wings. “Do not dishonour your Vala with this brawl!”

Mairon was left on the roof alone, looking down upon the hubris. He did not bother to do so for long.

His Master was near.

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On the side of the mountain covered in brush and endless blue flowers, Mairon walked past old architecture. The new crystalline hall covered most of it, but there was still some of the dark stonework left behind. Mairon recognized the designs carved into the heat-blasted stone as his Master’s. Massive lizard-like creatures amidst erupting mountains in fields of ice decorated every column in fractal lines. This was Melkor’s vision for Arda, and here it lay in ruin. Had this been a temple for Melkor before being repurposed? If so, it was an even lower blow to hold the celebration of his loss here. Mairon walked faster, needing to find his Master.

It was on half-buried, flowering vine covered columns that Mairon found Melkor, perched on the pediment. He watched the party below, one leg dangling dangerously low. Like when he was a wanderer in his early years, he wore nothing but black leather and cloth so torn it was like chaotic lace. In his palm, he held a goblet that was frothing over, spilling rust-coloured bubbles over his fingers. The liquor was fermenting further with each moment, becoming more potent as Melkor himself stewed. When a large bubble on its surface popped, he took a deep drink and then sighed, wafting vapours upward and causing the branches above him to shrivel away.

Mairon approached and gave a low bow.
"Master…"

"Master?" Melkor asked to the skies. "I am no Master, but a Creator still." He laughed like the word choked him and took another drink.

"Master, there will be a trial for Gothmog," Mairon pressed on, proud of his accomplishment.

"Oh is there?" Melkor asked, positively incredulous. "Naivety does not become you, Mairon."

Mairon made a pained expression. His Master was so wounded by the party in celebration against him that his words were becoming malicious. Mairon moved closer, wishing he could do something, but Melkor was no metal to be hammered or Maia to be manipulated. All he could do was place an imploring hand on Melkor’s knee. Melkor eyed the touch, and took another long drink.

Mairon, his thumb pressing into the top of Melkor’s knee, said, "Drunkenness does not become you."

"No?" Melkor looked to his drink, now spilling onto his lap. "Why is it that you always have some comeback to burn me with? Do you think I am useless and ugly now too?"

Seeing Melkor’s strong jaw locked behind his wild hair, blackest of blacks, and feeling the deep resonance of his aura, Mairon knew he could never see Melkor as ugly. Seeing his magic spill forth like an oily mold to animate the ancient carvings around him, Mairon knew he was endlessly creative. Seeing the blue flowers around them grow fangs and begin to growl, Mairon knew he was immensely powerful. Seeing all this, it truly disturbed him to see his Master miring in self-doubt.

"Melkor…" Mairon appealed, allowing himself to taste his Master's true name.

In Melkor’s stupor he reached out and pulled roughly on Mairon’s hair. Mairon gave an indignant, irk, but he was trapped.

"There it is! My true name for my true self. Melkor. Eru given, Eru cursed. Perhaps he does wish he never made me," Melkor lamented most uncharacteristically.

"No!" Mairon gasped and gripped Melkor's knee even harder. "Do not let the Valar drag you down!"

"The pain you must be in, seeing this wretched truth," Melkor taunted on. "The truth of my love and hate for myself."

Mairon felt a surge of emotion. For all he'd learned of Melkor, he had never expected to relate so much to his woes.

"What pains you pains me, my Lord," Mairon said, with as much devotion as he could.

Melkor paused, a gaunt grin growing on his face, and then breathed into his ear, "Is it sweet?"

"Pain is sweet?" Mairon questioned as Melkor knotted his fingers further into his hair.

"It can be. It has sustained me," Melkor whispered, and then gestured to the revelry with his goblet. The liquid poured out, but endlessly refilled. The blue flowers rose to catch the liquor between their teeth. "Tell me, is it anything like the pain they have caused? Is it even close in magnitude?" He gave another tug. "Tell me this is like making love compared to their torture."

Mairon’s face blossomed red, partially from Melkor’s power, partially from some other unknown he
could not yet admit to himself.

“I wouldn’t know,” he admitted through gritted teeth. “I have experienced neither love nor torture.”

Melkor chuckled and brought his face so close to Mairon’s that their foreheads knocked together from Melkor’s graceless wavering. Vertigo hit Mairon as he looked into the dark pits that were Melkor’s eyes. To steady himself he held his Master’s shoulders and tried to avoid the drippings of the frothing liquor in his cup that was now black and thick as tar. Melkor now had all of Mairon’s hair in his fist.

“If you did, you would know there is no difference,” Melkor sneered, with as much anger as sadness.

“As I now see,” Mairon murmured. “But it will not stop me. If we carry our plans through, I will ensure you will reign over both. Love and torture will be yours.”

The flowers around them burst into flame from Mairon’s intensity. Seeing them twist and shriek, Melkor now had all of Mairon’s hair in his fist.

“Even when you test me, your fire amuses me, Precious,” he slurred.

His grip then slipped away and Melkor the mighty slumped against the wall, undoing all of Mairon’s hair. It tumbled over his shoulders like waves of copper and gold. Mairon took no notice and reached out tentatively, but his Master had fallen into an unusual slumber. Melkor was lost to the world, in bliss as much as pain, as his party played on.

Already missing the contact he had with Melkor, Mairon drew close again. Above his slightly parted lips he was suspended in a moment. He could not help but recall the sharing of affection between Aulë and Yavanna. Little closed mouth kisses, arms wrapped their waists, and half-lidded looks he’d caught. Never before had he thought he’d ever have such a partner, although thinking back on how closely he held his friends, he’d wanted one all along.

He’d bitten his lip so hard he’d drawn blood.

The glowing essence dripped and fell, thick as mud.

At that sacrifice, the terrifying, beautiful face of Melkor awoke and rose to meet his, like he was breaking the surface of still water. Mairon’s own face was terrified and beautiful in his surprise. The moment burst and Mairon gave a gasp that soon was smothered. Even hotter than his, Melkor’s lips were. Even stronger was his desire. Its force pressed his mouth open, and send sparks skittering down his spine. ‘Twas only a moment that heat was his and afterwards the world would be ever colder without. Melkor fell back into his seat and back into his void of frozen depression, but not before saying a simple,

“Thank you.”

Enthused but solemn, mollified but unsatisfied, Mairon drew a curtain of shadows to hide them in their own dark mirror-world. As much as he wanted to, he was in no way capable of picking up Melkor in his arms. His Master was anchored to Arda more than any other, so there he and his Master stayed.

It took the rest of the party for Mairon’s bursts of fire to fade.

Chapter End Notes
*softly screams * Melkor… Mairon… aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa
I hope this affects you as much as it does me. aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa
A little bit of naughty and nice just in time for the holidays.
I'll be working on my Tolkien Secret Santa gift for the next little while, so this shall be
continued in the New Year.
(Does that make you feel like Mairon... inflamed but still unsatisfied? eheheheheh...)

I see Melkor as the most "human" of the Valar, emotions included. Terrifying in that
someone so volatile has so much power, but relateable in some way. And he can
definitely feel love. ;) (As well as jealousy, doubt, uncertainty... and all that fun stuff.)

In other news, Mairon causes a rift at the party, just like the Ring likes to divide people!
The Absence

Chapter Summary

Thuringwethil comes to visit Gothmog, sealing her own fate. Meanwhile, Mairon stresses over Melkor being missing at this key time in their plan. Never-the-less, he accepts new recruits with grace. Manwë also thinks on his brother.

Chapter Notes

Time for another perspective! This one I’ve wanted to do for a while.
Warning: Violence towards animals, Blood

A momentary kiss
You leave me with your poison
How will I exist
All the fluids have left me
Should I compromise
This artful act of seduction
...
Precious is flight
I need to surrender
(from Another Void by Android Lust)

A shadow slipped along, never waiting to be caught. She moved in silence and in grace, not unlike a wary snake. Thuringwethil prowled, having no true master but her hunger and her loneliness. After getting Gothmog caught, she vowed to never let darkness or light find her again. She lived in between the cracks of life, within and without. Whereas long ago she had dreamed of slaking her loneliness with love, all now she dreamed of was slaking her thirst with blood.

She dreamed of Ilmarë in her bed, crystal white skin cracking under her teeth. She dreamed of Gothmog, tied up but complacent and pliable to her fingers as she drained him of his iron-rich blood. She even dreamed of Mairon, and drinking a drop of gold falling from his finger, to give her a taste of his glory. However, only in her nightmares did she dream of drinking the blood of Melkor, if it could be called blood. When she dreamt of it, she shuddered as it snaked inside her, filling her to
burst but never satisfying her.

Why do I lust so? Don’t any of the other Maiar have an emptiness inside?

The way Mairon looked at Melkor made her wonder if he did. Perhaps it was just his lust for power, but she knew that would be a simplification. That time she’d caught them practicing combat they were dancing around each other as if they’d been doing so since the beginning of Arda. The beauty made her breathless, and so very envious. Alas, her true desire was for neither of them. The luscious voice in outer called to her instead…

Falling out of her thoughts and memories, she shook her head violently and returned to the task at hand. She pulled herself up into the canopy of Yavanna’s life tree, and licked its sap. The taste was foul to her where it had once been so sweet and she sighed in resignation. Nothing was the same after tasting the blood of another Maia. She nearly fell into fantasies of biting Eönwë’s outstretched neck again when something else caught her attention.

Yavanna and Aulë were arguing below, louder than normal this time. In the high branches she could just make out their words.

“He needs our guidance!” insisted Yavanna, her voice reverberating through the wood of the tree.

“He’s fine! He just finished Oromë’s warhammer,” came Aule’s booming.

A pause.

“You are hopeless.”

“No, I’m hopeful.”

A sigh sounded that shook the tree branch Thuringwethil clung to. Chittering in irritation, a squirrel skittered by her, too slow. She grabbed it and pressed its neck to her open mouth. Crack. A good snack was always needed when observing drama.

“…He’s just upset one of his workers has been discovered to have the Discord. Once he sees him all better, he’ll feel better too…” said Aulë, trying to lower the volume on the conversation.

“What of the supposed trial that’s been called for? From other Maiar? Manwë did not say who, but I suspect…”

“Enough of your suspicions, Yavanna!”

Evidently Aulë could not contain himself for long. The ground shook and the sweet scent of the leaves soured. Thuringwethil was nearly thrown from her roost. The Valar pair had no trouble being heard.

“Enough of your denial!”

She’d heard enough. Thuringwethil tossed the body of the rather unsatisfying squirrel and leapt down, landing with nothing but a soft pap. With a little effort, she squeezed herself between the tree roots and ran crouched through the many underground tunnels beneath Almaren, tattered silks trailing behind her. She was going to where her guilt lied. She’d been avoiding it, in her thoughts and in her steps, for long enough.

“Enough of your denial!”

She found the prison easily enough. Although no tunnels led directly into it, she slipped inside from beneath by dissolving her form into black mist. Upon the stone slabs of the floor, she reformed.
When she saw him, she would have wept, had she any energy for emotional displays. He looked as though he’d been turned to stone. Kneeling, mournful and mute, his skin had turned grey in his gloom. Seeing Gothmog looking that way, she gingerly came forward. He didn’t move, even as she sat crossed legged directly in front of him, as close to the barrier as she could.

“Gothmog?”

No response. Only the wind whistled into the hall.

“Done fighting already? Are you Osomon now and forever?”

His old name echoed, like an ethereal taunt. He awoke in bitterness, his knuckles cracking.

“Never.”

“So you do have some fire left in you!” she exclaimed.

He grumbled, but the intensity remained in his eyes. He was willing to fight, once he could.

“I’m being de-commissioned, remember? No hope? Remember that?”

“Mairon would disagree.”

Gothmog gave a sharp bark of laughter.

“Mairon?! He hates me. He’s probably happy to see me in here…”

Thuringwethil clucked her tongue and said, “While he certainly doesn’t consider you his best friend, I assure you his feelings are more complicated than they seem… He has orchestrated that a trial will be held for you, by the Valar themselves.”

“Pfft.” Gothmog stuck out his tongue. “Fat lot that’ll do me.”

Thuringwethil returned the expression.

“Perhaps not, but it gives us the chance to sway other Maiar to Mair-- I mean Melkor’s side,” she explained.

Gothmog nodded, understanding. Perhaps being a Martyr wasn’t the worst fate, he thought. Silence grew, but a comfortable one, filled with accepted fates. Thuringwethil with her exile, Gothmog with his imprisonment. Birds swooped by the dome above them, casting their shadows upon the walls.

Gothmog’s next words were an attempt at idle conversation, but in truth he’d been wanting to say something about Melkor’s lieutenant for a while.

“You like him too much. Mairon. He’s scary. He’ll do something insane one day,” he said, remembering his and Mairon’s fiery first meeting.

Thuringwethil scoffed. “And you don’t think Melkor is scary? The raw destructive power that exudes from him makes my bones quake. The light he traps in his very aura… The way he knows the world is his… The stare he gives Mairon…”

She wrapped her arms around herself as she spoke. She still held fear for the Dark Vala, as many other Maiar on the isle did, on his side or not.

Gothmog shrugged. “I dunno… he’s just been so accepting of me, no matter my mistakes. That’s all
I want. Maybe it’s a low bar, but you know, he’s what I got. Mairon on the other hand, I thought he was everything I hated. A perfect Maia. Beloved, skilled, articulate, admirable, Mairon.”

Thuringwethil sighed, almost dreamily. “Those two. They sing a song so similar,” she said, a phrase often used to describe bonded Ainur.

“No way, Thuringwethil!” Gothmog protested. “Melkor wouldn’t fall for someone so haughty. He’s too real.”

Thuringwethil tapped her chin, thoughtful. “True. But you misjudge Mairon just as he misjudges you. It is Mairon’s fire that Melkor desires. And Mairon is all fire, no matter the proper, orderly visage he shows.”

“Whatever. I don’t get it. If anything, I could see Melkor falling for you and your beauty, wild and dark…”

Thuringwethil’s eyes flashed a delighted light. Her smile was a simper.

Gothmog retracted. “No what I meant is… I… uh.” He gulped.

Thuringwethil giggled her eerie, high-pitched giggle. She loved to see anybody stumble around her.

“Don’t fall in love with me now,” she jeered while preening.

To dispel the embarrassment, Gothmog laughed. In his relaxed joy at the simple comfort of friendly banter he almost forgot the barrier between them.

“Don’t worry, I’m not the loving sort!” he responded, throwing Thuringwethil a rather rude gesture.

She blew him back a kiss, but they were soon to be interrupted. Careful steps that they had not heard until now whisked across the stone floor. A guard approached, bow nocked and ready.

“What are you doing here?”

Thuringwethil turned to see a Maia of Oromë, her straw blond hair in a tight bun and freckles like stars covering her skin. She looked like she tasted of warm grass and mead. A quizzical look was plastered upon her face as she tried to figure something out.

With genuine confusion the guard asked, “Who are you?”

Thuringwethil glided upward to stand. “Someone you will one day know to fear.”

The guard’s expression turned into a grimace. She pulled back the string of her bow further, but shuffled backwards.

“I’ve already called for help. They will be here soon,” she tried to reason.

“I’ll have to be quick then.”

Thuringwethil darted forward, avoiding the arrow loosed in panic by shrinking into a small orb of grey light; a little trick she had picked up from the tiny flame Maia she’d drank from. When she reformed full-sized and just a hand width away, the guard gasped and dropped her bow. The rest was over quickly.

She didn’t taste of warm grass or mead. She tasted of fear and despair. It was taste Thuringwethil knew she would learn to love. When she had her fill, or as much she could take, she gave Gothmog
a bloody, toothy smile, which he returned. It was then the soldiers entered.

Trumpets sounded and steel sang from sheaths. Each in their own swath of light entered winged Maia of Manwë bearing swords. Thuringwethil would have nothing of this battle. In a blast of wretched wind, her form burst into a hundred small animals. Rats, rabbits, and frogs scattered, all ghosts of her previous victims. However, even her darkest trick was confounded by what bounded her.

One solider, painfully beautiful in her own blinding light, held aloft a talisman. It bore the sigil of Varda, Thuringwethil’s once Vala. Beams of light shot from it like a pulsar and in an inward rush of cosmic wind, Thuringwethil was thrown back together into her solid form before she could escape. She screamed in frustration as they took her in, but some part of her felt she deserved it.

The only change was that it was not from the part of her that hated herself, but from the part that hated seeing her friend in prison alone. He was alone no longer.

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Deep underground, Maiar trickled in, not drawn by any actual call, but with what now resided within them. Their bitterness, their bile, their dissatisfaction drew them towards others of the same ilk like a siren call. The Discord pulled them, gripping onto their anger and their despair. It promised better, if only they would bear their teeth and fight. However, the Vala that would be their new King, was missing.

And so it was, the smell of smoke and metal sparks unsettled Mairon when it should have comforted him. He walked amongst the gathered Maia of Melkor, supervising as they prepared weapons and occasionally directing work, but his mind was elsewhere.

In his realm of dark echoes, Melkor had awoken from his drunken sleep soon after he’d fallen into it, recovering quickly. Mairon suspected it was more his outrage at the celebration of his misery that caused him to sleep than the drink. When Melkor had looked up to see Mairon, his face was content at first, but then almost… afraid. He then vanished into smoke, leaving Mairon alone in his fancy dress and confusion.

Why?

The stress of the sudden uncertainty of his relationship with Melkor as well as his closest ally being captured made Mairon grind his teeth. In the hidden dungeon forge beneath Aulë’s workshop, he thought continually of Melkor, concentrating to find him. Even when he moralized their new troops and workers, or smithed in Aulë's workshop, Melkor’s face flashed before him as it had in the ruins, turning his face red as hot coals. Melkor, who started their cause, who should have been giving the speech and greeting the new recruits, was still strangely absent.

Mairon tapped his foot impatiently, causing the other Maiar around him to look up from their grinding wheels and their leather tanners warily. His stress always outpoured into anger, which was unfortunate for the two Maiar approaching him.

“Master Mairon!” called the Maia Naranto, his brother beside him. Both had spiky hair that was covered in dust.

Mairon spun to meet them, exuding heat and malice.

“What are you doing away from your work stations?” he asked pointedly.

“Sorry, Master Mairon!” said the other twin, Moranto. “But we were in the deepest tunnels…”
Full of fire, Mairon couldn’t stop himself cutting them off. “Why were you there? You know we need everyone working!”

The twins hesitated as Mairon loomed, but Naranto said with a straight face, “We were fuckin’ off…”

Mairon sucked in air with snarl, preparing to yell, when Naranto finished his sentence.

“When we found this poor wretch…”

From behind them appeared a Maia, neck bloodied and tear tracks on her cheeks. Mairon instantly collected himself. It was not good to scare new recruits, although this one looked like she’d been given a great bout of terror.

She spoke up, stronger than she looked.

“I didn’t want to be brought here!” She looked down, her voice weakening. “I came here to disappear.”

“Now why would you do such a thing?” Mairon asked, his voice softer than any kind words.

When she gave no reply, Mairon waved his hand. “Fine. I am no jailer. You are free to go. We do not keep Maiar prisoners, unlike the Valar above.”

He started to walk past them, but she made a small sound to call him back.

“Mairon you are, yes?” she asked weakly.

He nodded, giving her his attention. She looked at him with wide eyes, half in wonder, half in mystery, as if she was trying to figure out why a Maia such as him was here. When she couldn’t discern his motives, she gave a little shake of her head.

“Then perhaps this fate of mine is not as bleak as I thought,” she said.

The brothers smiled at each other, excited to see hope in her.

Letting out a single sigh before relaying her tale, she began, “I was guarding the prisoner when a Maia showed up from nowhere. She appeared as smoke with dark eyes.”

*Thuringwethil.*

Mairon encouraged her, “Please continue. You are safe here.”

“She took me and made me hers… I can still feel her inside me.” She shuddered, but not entirely from fear it seemed. “But she was captured and I was taken to be healed and…”

She choked. The surrounding Maiar were now watching, sympathy in their eyes. They knew how the story would end.

“Oromë, my Vala, came in to see me, but his face was so grave. It was always full of joy but then it was so dark! I felt my spirit shake. He bade me leave… dismissed me from his service to never return.”

The hall was silent, until she cried with great emotion, “He didn’t want my tainted self anymore! So why would I want it?!”
At that, Maiar stood from their work stations. Stolid, Mairon let them do so. They raised their hands and conjured a small flame in each. It was a show of solidarity in the light of hundreds of flames. Together they sang a deep dirge that dug into the saddest part of any soul. They knew rejection. They knew what it was like to hide. She swung her head about, baffled by the acceptance of her grief.

Reaching out to take her hand, Mairon intoned, “You don’t have to disappear.” He gave his best comforting smile as he warmed her hand with his own flame. His eyes were liquid gold, and she was entranced. “And you never should have even considered it, with a spirit like yours.”

Even though he felt nothing towards her, she beamed with tears in her eyes like she was beneath the light again. Her now fellow Maiar came forward to greet her, and Mairon stepped back, his job done.

Simple things these gestures were to Mairon, but they moved him still. These Maiar, they only needed to hear that someone treasured them again, and they were Melkor’s, but Mairon knew he was just the same. Indeed she would be treasured and accepted, when she began making weapons for their coming war. Mairon swept out of the hall, hiding how much the display meant to him beneath his practicality.

Her story was like many others. The Valar were hemorrhaging Maiar to Melkor because of their overvaluing of purity. Not that their foolishness bothered Mairon. He was more than happy to see Maiar realize how much more Melkor could do for them. Mairon brought his fingers to his lips, deeply wishing Melkor was here to see all the Maiar he now had.

The air rumbled. He thought he’d found Melkor, but alas, he’d only picked up the signal of his brother. The air even deep underground vibrated with discontent. It seemed Manwë was having a bad time of things. At least, Mairon thought, I can take solace in that.

The wind whipped the sky, and thrashed the ground. It shrieked between cliffs and howled on the sea. The hair of their King was as wild as the weather. Manwë knew it was pointless to storm, but where else was the wind within him to go?

He looked down from his tower to see the unrest was swarming beneath him. Maiar gathered in the courtyard to debate the ongoing events. To keep the peace, a trial would be held for the prisoner, but there was no way the Valar could lose Osomon, lest they lose them all. Or so was the logic the Valar in their council had come to. Although Manwë was glad they had come to an agreement, he wasn’t so sure they had come to the right one.

Clouds gathered, obscuring the light of the lamps.

Even as the Valar solidified their plans to keep their servants, reports of missing Maiar were becoming common place. Their path was blocked by shadow. Manwë suspected some were sent away by their Masters, but he was not about to rain his paranoia down. Not when the peace between the Valar was as shaky as it was.

Another gust wracked the tower, shaking it in a disconcerting way.

Was this evil inevitable? Manwë could not even believe that true evil existed, not even in his brother. But still. Arda was trying him.

Over the water raged a tornado, drawing up the sea into a torrent over the last place he’d seen Melkor, spiralling down from the sky with that wild Maia. He wondered if he should have stopped
them. He wondered if could have.

Chapter End Notes

Damnit MElkOR, where are you? Pining is so hard when your object of admiration is missing, as Mairon now knows.

I dunno, I kinda wanted to show how their army is being formed. First the foundation is made by Melkor's original Maiar, but more come as they are rejected for being "tainted". Mairon is charismatic, but intense, even under pressure.

Sorry it took almost 2 months for this, but I re-wrote and/or re-arranged this and the next two chapters like four times... but now I have some juicy material to keep this posting streak going... :) I am very pleased with what I've got to show next...
Chapter Summary

While preparing for the trial of Gothmog, Eönwë reminisces on a memory of Melkor that brings him to a realization. Curumo brings news of the trial to Mairon just in time, where he joins gathered Maiar to decide the fate of Gothmog.

Chapter Notes

50,000 Valarian years later, she posts an update... Sorry if I worried anyone with the gap, but here is the next chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Are you a man of peace
Or man of holy war
Too many sides to you
Don't know which any more

…
Destruction or defense
A mind that's vain corruption
Bad or good intent
A wolf in a sheep's clothing
Or saintly or sinner
Or someone that would believe
A holy war winner

(From For the Greater Good of God by Iron Maiden)

Set in glittering chips of stone, the image of Melkor fleeing before Tulkas absorbed Eönwë’s vision. The massive mosaic cast his lovely Ilmarë out of focus. She wound around him in a silver blur, tending to fastening his armor while he stared at the impression of Melkor’s back. Eönwë was proud of the armoury and of his Love, the latter decorated with many murals of great triumph, and the former by silver and white gems. Surrounded by beauty, he still managed to feel unease. Beauty won’t save them.
Ilmarë’s silver gown sleeves swished by him again and the old mural faded away in his mind. It became what it was before the great revision. Instead of Melkor fleeing, his image was facing forward and at the side of Manwë, shown equal in size and respect. Eönwë and Ilmarë had discussed their King’s brother and his actions of rebellion then, not knowing it was only the beginning.

“So proud and handsome our King is.” Ilmarë’s voice echoed like birdsong in the cross-vaulted ceiling. As she always had, she was attending to his costume as he stood still upon a pedestal.

“Aren’t you glad we came to Arda with him?” she asked idly.

Eönwë hummed in agreement. “Taking on this form for him and Eru’s future children is the second best thing that’s ever happened to me.”

“Oh? What’s the first?” Ilmarë asked. Her eyelashes fluttered and glittered in curiosity.

“Having you assigned to attend me,” Eönwë said, giving a wink.

She let out her decidedly non-demure snort that Eönwë loved, and shook her head at him. She had the most radiant smile. Beams of light lit her head like a crown.

“I wonder if Melkor is proud too,” she said, looking to the image of the Vala beside his brother. “I have never met him.”

“I have.” Eönwë bent down to face her. “He is indeed proud, but only handsome when he feels the need. He sometimes grows claws.” Eönwë curled his fingers pretended to grab at Ilmarë. She gasped. “He sometimes wears horns.” He pointed his fingers out of the side of his head. She snorted again. “He sometimes dons hooves.” He stomped around with comical force and Ilmarë threw her head back in laughter.

“He truly is a unique Vala!” she exclaimed, pushing Eönwë back into position.

Ilmarë walked around him, giving him a once over. Satisfied, she pulled him down onto a stool that rose from a pattern in the floor where the pedestal shrank down, and began to braid his hair. Both had locks in shades of silver unique to the Maiar of the King and Queen. A truly beautiful pair they made in their moments of peace.

They did not know they were being watched.

Ilmarë frowned slightly, and shifted her shoulders as if something had touched them, but continued, “Although I do wish that Melkor had left that lovely mountain lake alone. I had planned to show the reflection of the stars in it to the Children once they came. Instead of a smooth bowl, it’s now a watery pit of broken stone! I’d be ashamed to show them such disorganization!”

Eönwë nodded. The Vala’s anger as he’d tore into the stone with claws of iron, as if the soil of Arda has wronged him, was still in his mind. The perfect pyramids that were their mountains became jagged messes at his touch. Ilmarë spoke again, taking on a tone of frustration.

“He always has his own ideas. And he executes them in total isolation. I just know it would be much easier on him and us if he just followed in tune… I don’t understand why he must…”

“Be who he is?” came the end of the question like a sudden boulder crack.

From each minuscule shadow in the room, the collective being of Melkor was formed. As tall as the ceiling would permit, he towered in his non-benign beguilement, but kept his form free of what he would call his “adornment”. He appeared dark haired and grey skinned, but true to the design of the Children, just like in his Valar-sanctioned images. He passed before his mosaic, making it grin.
Had he always been there, just invisible? Eönwë tensed at the thought.

The way Melkor paced around them did nothing to ease his tension. The Vala looked him up and down, just as Ilmarë had moments earlier, but Melkor was looking much deeper. Deeper into his spirit than Eönwë thought existed. Shifting on his feet, he realized he was being assessed.

Ilmarë’s braiding slowed as she noticed as well, with a dark blush on her cheeks. She was usually never caught in gossip, to her embarrassment. Or perhaps she was blushing for another reason? Melkor had an unsettling and powerful beauty about him, wreathed in rings of captured light and the darkest of smoke. Neither could contain their awe, awaiting his next action.

“Eönwë…” Melkor tasted the name on his tongue. “The Herald of Manwë?”

“Yes,” he answered.

“Are you sure?”

Eönwë looked up, finally facing the black eyes of the most powerful Vala upon Arda. The tone of the room rang high, those eyes nearly devouring him, until Melkor jerked away with a huff.

He hadn’t found what he was looking for.

His smile turned to hard mischief. He wasn’t done with the pair.

“You two appear to be close,” he began deceptively casually, picking at the mosaic with long nails. “What is it that has brought you together? A shared interest? A love of Arda?”

“We are destined,” Ilmarë chirped, proud of the fact.

“For some, that is certainly enough,” Melkor mused, dismissively. He tossed a plucked gem to the floor. Tulkas was now missing an eye.

As with many of Melkor’s words, these were layered with another meaning Eönwë could not grasp. Never-the-less, it bothered him. Ilmarë noticed not, for she gave Eönwë’s arm a stroke with the back of her fingers.

Melkor’s eyes watched the entire movement, his face shifting from amusement to something less confident. Eönwë’s younger self would have never recognized it, but he knew now that look was longing. A longing like a hunger.

“Well, aren’t you lucky, little ones,” Melkor said, hitting each word with stilted praise. Attempted sarcasm that only rang of envy permeated his words. He vanished abruptly.

Eönwë was stunned to hear such emotion from one of the greater Valar. It filled him with a sense of pity even to this day.

He snapped back to the present.

“But it’s no excuse,” he said out-loud, startling Ilmarë.

“What is, Love?” she asked, leaning to face him from setting her starlight in his long cape.

“Nothing, just getting lost in memory.” He chuckled, sheepish, at himself. “I already have so many, and Arda is so new.”

She wrapped her arms around him from behind, sending sparkles streaming from where they
touched.

“We shall make many great, happy ones, my love Eönwë. And share them with the Children.”

“We shall, my lovely Ilmarë.”

It was built into his Music to sing her praises, he was certain. This close, the gold freckles upon her midnight skin sent flutters into his heart. Still, he was thankful to not have to look her in the eye. Her eyes were the same gold as Mairon’s, as he knew the troubled Maia much hated. He looked back to the mosaic of Melkor.

Eönwë now knew what Melkor had been looking for. He’d found it, but not in him.

Black wings danced in the sky, falling down, down. Two pairs entangled in their thorned bramble of love. Mairon on his wings of black leather and Melkor on his dark wind.

Eönwë had known it was them the moment he saw the pair together in their monstrous forms, perfectly in sync in their turmoil. He’d convinced himself that it wasn’t true, that the Maia wasn’t Mairon, but it was time for him to stop fooling himself. Only Mairon had those dark-veined wings, gifted to him by Eönwë himself.

He’d once thought that only Mairon was hot-blooded enough to oppose the Dark Vala with him. He now understood that Mairon was hot-blooded enough to dare to love him too.

Oh, how he wanted to save his friend from that cursed love.

The trial he’d called at Mairon’s urging was set to begin.

What had he done?

Grond was gone.

Lit like candle flame Mairon sulked over the space where it should have been, but he allowed himself only a moment of aching grief. With a sigh full of sparks he let his long legs carry him to the next display table holding the second weapon he’d created. The skull adorned war-axe was complete in all its deathly glory, despite the alarmed looks Aulë had given it. It had no owner, but Mairon was sure a certain someone would appreciate it. He moved on again, setting his eyes upon his forge space.

What lay on his workbench was the final weapon, a magnificent great-sword. To appease the Valar and keep them off his case, he’d overdone it in their aesthetic. It hurt his eyes to look upon. The metal looked windswept, the blade and loop guard forming an elegant curve carved with all things pleasant. Stars, birds, and flowers flowed forth from the guard like the fountain of Eru’s creation. In the pommel its starry core was set, calm as a mirror pool of water.

The blue-silver sheen of was lost in the gold glow of Mairon’s eyes. The sword looked dead in comparison to its creator’s passion, but it was not the satisfaction of the craft that stoked his fire this time. It was the relief of finality. The great-sword was the final weapon of the three commissioned by the Valar, and the final one Mairon would make for them. Melkor missing or not, Mairon was making plans to leave Almaren with their gathered army. They would find Melkor.

Although his resolve was firmer than any metal, he clenched his hands for the dozenth time this work session. He made nothing easy for himself.
Nor did Curumo. The Maia slid through the curtain to Mairon’s personal forge. Mairon watched him stride in, hoping his aura of solitude would send Curumo away, but it was not so. Curumo came before him, wearing his ridiculously voluminous white silks and seeking Mairon’s attention like a flower following the sun.

“Lovely work, Mairon,” he said as touched lightly upon the sword’s feather-shaped quillons. “Almost as lovely as y…”

Mairon slapped his hand away.

“I have not called for you. Do your bright clothes so blind you that you cannot see I am busy?” he snapped and made motions to shoo the Maia out of his workspace.

Curumo responded with an insufferable smirk. “Does your work make you so blind, that you cannot see I am here as a messenger? I have news of the Valar’s actions.”

Mairon groaned, billowing Curumo’s robes about his knees so that they nearly swallowed him. “You could’ve fooled me with the needless small-talk,” he griped. His pride demanded he get in one more jab. “In these desperate times, are all the Maiar of the exalted court now reduced to the role of messengers?”

Curumo coughed but managed to answer.

“This is not official. I come here for my duty to you.” He gave a slight bow. “Either way, there are none of Vána’s little messenger Maiar, as you may have noticed. They have either fled or found a worse fate.”

“A shame. They were usually so succinct,” Mairon teased, his voice edging into a falsetto.

“Yes. It is a tragedy that the ravenous she-Maia fell upon them like a wolf and…”

“Succinct,” he repeated with a crack of the forge fire.

Curumo’s façade of importance fell, and he was the untrained apprentice all over again.

“Ah. Sorry, Master Mairon,” he apologized with a start. “I forget the Maia of Aulë prefer to forgo formality, and… ” He brought his hands together as if pleading for Mairon not to be mad with him. “But the trial of Osomon is about to begin.”

Mairon’s haughty expression transformed into panic. He blew past Curumo, his apron still on and his hammer still at his hip. The fires of the hall were snuffed out one by one as he ran past. As he ascended the wide stairs from Aulë’s halls he could hear Curumo’s steps behind him, but his thoughts were beyond him.

“It’s at the Place of Light! Mairon, wait!” Curumo called after him.

“Curumo!” Mairon shouted back.

“Yes?”

“Tell the miners.”

He knew it was imperative that his Maiar made it to the trial, and not just the elite.

“The miners?” Curumo questioned.
“Just do it!”

Curumo turned on his heel and ran back underground. Mairon hoped to all that was Melkor’s that Curumo made it. He began to berate himself for not keeping track of time, but then switched his tune.

*If not for Curumo I could have missed it! How could I be so foolish? Lost in my work again.*

Melkor’s words echoed in him. **Naivety does not become you, Mairon.**

**No. I should not have trusted the Valar to give us Maiar fair warning for this.**

To his surprise, the ground rumbled. Was Melkor back at his own work, transforming Arda? The thought gave Mairon a boost of speed, like oxygen to fire. As he reached the surface and was bombarded with fresh air, he smiled into the wind that pushed against him, defying it.

Melkor was with them still.

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In the Place of Light, Maiar poured in, divided by their thoughts as well as the conspicuous arena that had appeared in the hall. No one dared to enter the oval area, roped-off with a lustrous, floating cord. Instead they crowded around it, filled with apprehension. Many had abandoned work for this event, surprised by its sudden announcement. Only the inner court had known before hand, and they were gathered on the stage.

Outside, the light of the Lamps was muted by storm clouds of both smoke and water of Melkor and Manwë. Mairon loved how the darkness made his light stand out all the more, and he would use that to his every advantage. He stopped running before the gaping entrance, straightened his apron, and walked inside. He kept his hands behind his back to give an air of confidence but he was far from aloof. His eyes roved the crowd, looking for his kind. Their discordant hum resonated with him, calming him like only Melkor’s Music could. They were like a blot clot that had reached the heart of their society, halting its simple rhythm.

Mairon was honoured to see that it was not only the miners of Aulë that supported Gothmog. Spinners of Vairë, tanners of Oromë, gardeners of Yavanna and many more felt that he did not deserve a forced rebirthing despite what he and Thuringwethil had done. The mourning of the admirable Mairon at the Valar’s celebration had indeed inspired them, as he hoped it would. Their eyes begged for reassurance. Reassurance that they too would not be imprisoned and “cleansed” for the slightest of sin.

Mairon intended to quash their fears, no matter the method. All others would shrink before his power and beauty. False pity danced on his face towards those that bickered, and they stopped if only because they felt petty beneath the apparently self-assured Mairon.

The mask of Mairon was as thick as a castle wall. His own fears were not stilled until he saw the familiar throng of red-headed Maiar enter, dusty but proud. They were Melkor’s first Valaraukar. Mairon came up behind two of the Maiar, Naranto and Culcil. They startled, flaring their red hair like disturbed coals, but then sighed in relief.

“Mairon, how did you…” Culcil began.

“Know?” Mairon finished, wrapping his arm around the other Maia’s smaller shoulders. “Do not doubt me, Culcil. I have my ways.”
The wiry Maia grinned conspiratorially. His glee at receiving attention from Mairon didn’t last though. Upon the stage, three Maiar stepped forward. They were high-ranking Maiar of Manwë and Varda. Mairon bristled when I recognized the one in the center being Ilmarë.

“Greetings, Maiar of many creeds! We are gathered to decide the fate of Osomon the Maia.” she announced evenly, like a cool breeze. “Us three are here to represent the neutral party in this conflict.”

*If you’re neutral then I’m Nienna’s dildo,* Mairon thought, borrowing the crass phrase from Gothmog.

It was no mistake that she was chosen though. She was an excellent orator as well as being well-loved enough to have Maiar fans from every Vala, just like himself. It made no difference to the bitterness Mairon felt towards her. Some part of him knew she did not entirely deserve his hatred, but he made no effort to stop himself. At least he kept it in his mind though. Naranto the Impulsive could not.

“Where is Gothmog?” Naranto tested, his tone accusatory.

“Who?” Ilmarë questioned, her polite tone clashing with Naranto’s, like silk dragged over pumice.

“That’s his true name! His chosen name! Where is he?” he jabbed.

“He is still in his prison,” she answered, a touch of hesitation in her voice. “He cannot be loosed but for his choice. And he has not yet passed through the veil of deconstruction.”

Murmuring arose from the crowd, some concerned, others relieved. The Maiar around Mairon shifted on their feet, looking to each other for how to react. Ilmarë’s companions, two warriors, squinted down at them.

“This trial will decide his fate,” she continued. “If the dissenters should prevail, he will be allowed freedom.”

Her choice of wording worried Mairon, causing his muscles to clench. *Dissenters.* The Valar very obviously were biased towards going through with their plan, instead of listening to those they placed beneath them, their lesser Maiar. He felt more powerless then than when he was in the literal grasp of Arda’s most powerful Vala. Ironically Melkor always empowered him to change his world while the Valar made him feel like he could do nothing in the face of fate. They had not even bothered to show up to the trial, so set they thought the outcome was.

*Melkor was right. I am naïve to think I could change their mind.*

The murmurings around him became increasingly anger and nervous, making rounds around the hall like a flock of trapped birds. The images in the stained glass panels swirled like hurricanes, sweeping across the crowd like sinister search lights, never settling.

It was then that Eönwë descended from the heavens through the center of the dome, his mottled wings and silvered armour spreading both light and shadow upon them all. Mairon closed his eyes against the glare, a solemn expression on his face. For the first time ever, he was filled with misery upon seeing his friend arrive.

Ilmarë spoke up, confidence in her voice again. “We are the essence of Arda. Let the strongest of us win its fate.”

Eönwë unsheathed his sword, the sharp sound ringing upon the dome of glass along with Ilmarë’s
high voice.

“The fate of Osomon will be decided by trial by combat.”

Silent stares followed Eönwë as he flew to one end of the arena and landed with a gust of wind. Mairon grimaced to see his friend look so somber and intimidating.

“Our champion is Eönwë, Herald of Manwë!”

No one dared to challenge him, save for one.

“I will champion for the prisoner’s freedom,” said Mairon, his voice slow and soft, but as powerful as magma. He stepped over the rope and into the arena, his brown work clothes turned black as if they had been doused with ink. “And set the precedent of forgiveness.”

Carrying nothing but his hammer, he stood on the opposite end of the area from the armour clad Eönwë. Silver gleamed and flame glowed. To the other Maiar who emoted with all their elements, they were an awe-inspiring sight to look upon.

From the pinched look on Eönwë’s face, Mairon knew he’d already won.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry again for the delay, but I do hope it is worth it! I was taking an intensive grad class on space mission analysis that took up most of my time. More so, it shook up my confidence in my ability to write, so I was carefully looking this chapter over and over before I felt I could publish it. I will not let it get me despondent though! Thanks for all the encouragement, as it very much helps me keep going. I have the next dozen chapters planned, including the next phase of the story (which I am incredibly excited about) and I am not the type to just let it go!
The Violence

Chapter Summary

Mairon is the champion for Gothmog’s defense, but he has an opponent he knows will take immense strategy and manipulation to win - his closest friend Eönwë. After the outcome is reached, Mairon falls into a dream state, where he finds again what he seeks. Some issues are worked out, with sparking results.

Chapter Notes

The opening song I chose for this one is actually one of the main inspirations for this fic, and was gonna name it from the lyrics - Anathema. Seduction to Destruction had a better ring though. I thought I should bring it back for this important chapter, which I have planned since the beginning. I always knew this battle would happen and how it would be won. The circumstances have changed somewhat, but this is still where the tides change.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I asked myself was I content
With the world that I once cherished?
Did it bring me to this darkened place?
To contemplate my perfect future?
… I have become the anathema of my soul
… But I must be that which I am
(from Epicenter by VNV Nation)

Outside, wind rattled the thousands of window panes on the dome that was the Place of Light. Birds hunkered down, anticipating a storm as clouds gathered, full of rain but not giving up their gift. They clashed with the smoke clouds to the north, swirling blue-grey and red-black together but the colours never mixed, only created ever more complex patterns. A low rumble ran across the water. Inside the glittering dome, it was silent.

Surrounded first by the glass of many colours, then by their brethren of just as many hues, Mairon and Eönwë faced each other. In gleaming silver, mithril, and platinum Eönwë stood, his eyes pleading. Fiery haloed and clad in smith’s clothes, Mairon avoided Eönwë’s gaze and looked to the Maiar on the stage. He broke the silence.

“Let me fight. My brethren and I feel some responsibility, as the prisoner is our sibling under Aulë. I
say he should be returned to us, where we shall watch over him. We will also gladly accept the other prisoner…”

One of Ilmarë’s guards interrupted with, “This trial is for the fate of the Maia Osomon alone.”

Mairon bowed, but kept eye contact with Ilmarë. “Then it shall be. What of his champion then?”

“You are not a warrior,” Ilmarë protested.

Eönwë gave an ever so slight nod. Their concern made Mairon sick.

“I shall still fight,” Mairon said in return, his voice firm.

“You have no armour,” Ilmarë continued.

“I shall still fight.”

“You have no weapon!”

Mairon’s expression grew indignant as he answered, “I am a weapon. Or have you forgotten who we Maiar are?”

He blazed, his form becoming one with fire.

One of Ilmarë’s warrior companions was quick to say, “Forged weapons only.”

The guard received a dour frown, but Mairon’s fire faded to a light in his eyes. “So be it,” he said and pulled his smith’s hammer from his belt. The mithril gleamed like a star, catching the eyes of the crowd. “Let this tool of creation be my weapon, for what is creation without destruction?”

Despite the wisdom Mairon felt in his words, still there was hesitation. He needed to push more.

“If it is not me who shall fight, then who else?” he asked to the Maiar on the floor around him in a raised voice.

There was shuffling in the crowd, but no one responded. Mairon’s eyes roved, a smile slipping onto his face.

“Who believes me best for this task?” he asked even louder.

An enthusiastic response erupted from his supporters. All others who did not cheer, clapped, albeit with expressions of concern or confusion. Emotions of every kind emanated, staining the glass around them into deeper, more saturated inks. There was excitement to see the match, there was worry for Mairon from his admirers who wished him well in their secret songs, and there was bewilderment from those who only knew him as the isolated but masterful smith. Mairon would take it, the attention stimulating and dizzying him at the same time.

On the stage, there was whispering. Mairon caught the pleas of a high-ranked Maia of Nienna to let him fight, if only to let him express his torment of having his brother become a betrayer. An agreement was reached, even if the reasons did not entirely please Mairon. They did not believe he had a chance of winning.

Ilmarë waved her hand, her wide silver sleeve reflecting her light, and said, “The champions are decided. Mairon, Maia of Aulë, you may fight as well as your spirit allows.”

Mairon bowed again, his pleasure filling his words with honey. “Thank you, gracious Ilmarë.”
Eönwë swallowed hard, and gave Mairon a look with a tilt of his head that said, *are you crazy?* Finally meeting his eyes, Mairon shook his head, dead serious. Steeling himself for his duty, Eönwë’s brow knit and stayed that way. His wings retreated and his sword came out from its scabbard, but slowly, its ringing more like a grinding. It floated before him, waiting to be used. Mairon pointed his hammer towards it.

On a dust-filled wind and rust-coloured wings, Ilmarë’s gruff guard flew down from the stage to the center of the arena. “The first strike upon either’s physical form wins.” He was hardly noticed by either opponent, who only saw his hand being raised and heard his voice call out, “Begin!”

Like quicksilver, Eönwë grabbed his sword and thrust forward, forcing Mairon to retreat at once. He spun out of the way just as quickly, but Eönwë did not relent. The next strike came as a swing and Mairon was again forced to roll out of the way. His hammer was too small to properly parry.

That didn’t stop him from trying. He tumbled onto his back dodging Eönwë’s latest blow and raised his hammer to protect his chest. The sword connected and glanced off, never having been aimed at his body in the first place.

Was Eönwë pulling his swings? It was possible, but perhaps the sword itself couldn't bear to strike him. It didn’t matter. He’d known from the beginning how he would win. He rose as Eönwë drew his sword above his head.

“If you were as hard as your armour, you’d have already won,” Mairon remarked as he back stepped another swift strike.

“Talking during battle? That was always was your weakness,” Eönwë said without missing a movement.

“Answering me was always yours!”

Mairon made his first swing. The point on the back of his hammer head did not connect, but their rhythm did change. They circled around each other, testing their defenses. Their reflexes were matched, but Eönwë always came closer to hitting first.

“I never wished to fight you, and so I shall not,” Mairon said between breaths. “It is your armor I battle against.”

They both grunted as their weapons connected, causing reverberations. “Then you have an even greater battle, friend, for I wear the finest armor,” Eönwë managed to say.

Mairon laughed out-loud, startling Eönwë, but not enough to stay his blows. They came ever swift and Mairon laughed on. He left himself wide open, seemingly gone mad. Eönwë clenched his jaw, make a silent prayer to Eru for forgiveness, and launched himself into his final attack to end this folly once and for all. He aimed for Mairon’s chest, but even then his sword and his soul wavered from its point.

His target slipped by him like a leaf in the breeze. Against all logic, Mairon had leapt forward, turning out of the way just as it was too late for Eönwë to correct his motion. He was now too close to be reached by the sword.

“It is truly the finest armor, for I made it myself!” Mairon proclaimed, his hammer connecting with Eönwë’s gauntlet.

The gauntlet sparked and flew off, landing with a clang just before the crowd smoking but intact. Eönwë quickly left Mairon’s radius, but the damage had been done. He looked back at the
smouldering thing, impressed, but his physical form had not been touched. Yet.

Confident as stone, Mairon swung again and Eönwë instinctively blocked, but Mairon slid past his disobedient blade and cleaved his pauldron as clean as a surgeon. The shoulder piece was flung across the arena, hitting the stage and eliciting shrieks from the Maiar atop it.

Mairon knew how the armor was put together as well as his own form. He knew their weak points, as Eönwë knew his. Eönwë swung wide horizontally and Mairon rolled out of the way. Eönwë was no longer pulling his swings. It was time to finish, and quick. Eönwë’s armor was already beginning to smoulder, but Mairon needed another strike before it would come apart enough for a final strike.

*Rip.*

More gasps came from the crowd, and Mairon gave a shout. Eönwë’s sword had torn through his apron but not his flesh as he’d thought about his next move. His surprise gave way to a singularly driven anger and he smiled terribly with the heat of a thousand forges. Taken aback, Eönwë leaned away. He’d never seen his friend look so terrible and broken. Was this what fighting would do to them? Mairon took advantage of this slight back-step and lunged with feral ferocity.

*Sch-ting!*

A clean strike loosened his breastplate. It didn’t last for much longer. The hammer left a heat only felt inside Arda itself that had been spreading since Mairon’s first hit. It fell from his collar, exposing the fine chain mail underneath. It may as well have been glass to Mairon’s hammer.

He did not hesitate. Their souls were undying. What was a little pain?

His hammer smashed into Eönwë’s chest. It sent him skidding back, ushering whoops and cries from the intently watching Maiar.

Mairon had won.

Bent over, Eönwë clutched at his heart. Despite Mairon’s feeling of accomplishment, he did the same.

The guard, unnervingly unfazed, raised his hand.

“Osomon’s champion is the winner,” he announced, clear and hard.

Mairon didn’t hear as he reached out to Eönwë, who was being picked up by two other Maiar of Manwë. His silver hair loose and trailing, Eönwë reached back for Mairon, but their hands never met. He was flown away out of the hall.

Closing his hand into a fist, Mairon promised Eönwë that he would come and find him later. Now it was time to reclaim Gothmog. With a deep breath Mairon came forward. He walked up to the stage with heavy steps to meet Ilmarë eye to eye.

He said, “It is done. Please. Bring the prisoner to us so we can rehabilitate him in a humane way.”

Ilmarë paused for several whole seconds, her eyes just a tad too wide. Finally, so quiet yet so loud, she said, “I’m afraid that’s not what we agreed upon.”

The collective cry of outrage caused Ilmarë to step back. Her guards pointed their spears towards the crowd. She had the bravery to keep speaking, but her muddled voice showed her fear.
“This trial was to decide if he would have freedom after he passes through the veil of deconstruction. And so he shall. When he chooses to pass through, he will be free to choose which Valar he serves.”

“NO! You liars!” screamed several Maiar from behind Mairon. They were answered by others from the crowd with, “How dare you question the Valar? Heathens!”

Mairon said nothing but seethed, and it showed in cracks in his skin that revealed his fire. The veil would take away most of Gothmog’s memories, which Mairon saw as nothing less than his soul. Any remnants of how his life so far in Arda shaped him would be scrubbed away, leaving a shell to be re-filled, to re-suffer. Would the cycle repeat for all of Arda’s eternity? If only to keep the Maiar from their rightful Master?

Violent thoughts carried Mairon. He wanted to take the elite Maiar from the stage and take their Music apart chord by chord, and watch them unravel, dissolve, eviscerate. For denying what he had won, and for allowing his mission to go unaccomplished, they would suffer in ways only he and his Master could imagine.

**But not now.** He needed their trust, but his rage was building. Like another spirit inside of him, he could not control it and he had to stop it the only way he could. As painful as he had imagined, he undid his own Music, halting it like a crashing symphony. To all others, it looked as though he had fainted.

Crashes of broken glass sounded around him. Pieces of the images of Ainur in their many colours fell to the floor and shattered into even smaller shards. Someone had started to riot, carrying others with them in droves.

Hands pressed to her mouth in distress, Ilmarë sent up shooting stars from her halo. The bright Maia Arien wrapped her arms around Ilmarë, soothing her with song. They dashed forward to lift up Mairon between the two of them, Arien carrying the bulk of his muscled weight. In a flash of star-fire, they too exited the hall.

~~~~~~~~

Aware but lost, Mairon found himself formless in a dream-state of blackened mist. For how long, he didn’t know. His spirit’s own light and heat cleared the mist, revealing the shore of Almaren where he’d first conversed with Melkor. His form came to him and his feet touched the familiar wet stones, but something had changed. The ever-present glow of the Lamps was gone, replaced by a darkness only broken by a thousand bleeding stars.

The water before him was rushing, creating a whirlpool. It whispered to him like the void.

*Mairon… do not come…*

It was the voice of Melkor. There was no hesitation. He dove.

Fading out like dreams often did, he was now standing in one of Melkor’s many tunnels. It branched off in a dozen different ways, up, down, and at all sides. As in true life, his instinct gave no indication of where to seek Melkor. He tore rock from around him and threw it down one tunnel, exclaiming his frustration. Only after his display of anger, so similar to Melkor’s, did a sign come to him.

Small squeaks called out, but not from any bird. Upon his head did Uquesse fall, flitting for a moment on his cheek before fleeing into one of the tunnels. She had been missing just as Melkor was. The possibility of a connection inflamed Mairon, his spirit form becoming more stable. The bat
flapped her wings and Mairon followed, his feet pounding.

The tunnel before him was unnaturally dark, but he lit it with his fire and his fervor. The shrieking shades that plastered the walls peeled away before him. His eyes ahead, his spirit searching, Mairon ignored every last warning, including hoar frost, scorch marks, and dead cave animals that appeared the further he went towards the growing howling. The tunnel wound down in a spiral growing tighter and tighter until it dropped down in a pit. Mairon only stopped for a moment to access the jump before plunging into the fog as thick as oil.

Mairon blazed beautifully as he dropped, his back-lit wings spread like a halo to guide his fall. In the vast blackness, he looked like a meteor descending from the heavens. When he landed on the silty ground, he left a crater, but the sound was drowned out by the howling of what may or may not have been wind. Slower than light should spread, the shadows retreated, revealing what was making the Discordant noise.

In the place of his Master he saw a torrent of black flame. It formed a column the entire substantial height of the cavern, and appeared impenetrable. The only thing Mairon had ever seen like it was a tornado Manwë had created, but this was more than just wind. Everything it touched turned to dust. And Melkor was at its center. No, he was its center.

Mairon had never been close to such power and it almost paralyzed him. His spirit shook with wonder as well as terror, but still he did not hesitate. He remembered the kiss Melkor had given him as well as his own preferred face. His lips had coveted him so fiercely that Mairon was instilled with bravery from its memory even now in the face of pure destruction. He walked forward unafraid.

As soon as he hit the wall of the torrent he felt the rush of its conflicting emotions so palpable they pulled at him like a physical force. The power nearly severed him from his mind. Anger and elation. Despair and hope. Confusion and clarity. Ice formed, melted on his face, and reformed. Plants grew and were destroyed before they could bloom. The very ground beneath him was being torn away.

It wanted inside his very atoms.

“Stop, damn you!” yelled Mairon from his core so that flames flew from his spirit, though small they were compared to storm.

Instantaneously, all the forces stopped. When the black flames cleared, the destruction surrounding him was apparent and astounding. The cavern had grown to twice its size, and there was not even loose rock, as they had been all vaporized. A river of lava cut through it and sharp crystal needles dangled far above. In the center of it all was Melkor, wilder than Mairon had ever seen him. His eyes were wide and down-turned as he breathed heavily, his chest heaving.

“Mairon!” he exclaimed, angry and distraught. “Take your spirit from here!”

“Master!” Mairon called, waving smoke away from his face. “Not until you tell me what is going on!”

Melkor huffed a cloud of ash and turned his back to Mairon. Mairon grumbled in return and sprinted to reach Melkor’s side.

As Mairon reached him, Melkor said, “Come here to mock me before you leave? You certainly are bold, Mairon,” sounding tired but dangerously on the edge of violence.

Mairon was barely contained himself.

“Arrrh! What do you mean?” he shouted to the ceiling, rattling the crystals.
Surrounded by a halo of heat, Mairon levitated in the air to match Melkor height. He thrust his face before Melkor’s. Their angry breath mingled. “I’m not here to mock you! I came here because we need you! Gothmog is being held behind the veil of deconstruction despite the trial, and Thuringwethil is too! I need you.”

Melkor’s face crossed from a grimace to shock. He took a step back, reeling in thought. He turned his back to Mairon again, but this time Mairon let him have a moment. Melkor ground his foot, kicking up dust that glittered like shards of metal in Mairon’s light. Still with his back turned, Melkor spoke, his words clipped and graceless, so full of emotion they were.

“I was certain you would try and leave our cause, betray me, once you saw me in weakness.”

Mairon softly shook his head, but Melkor continued, his voice growing in strength and Discord.

“I was preparing to fight you. To destroy your form and scatter your spirit if I had to. But I ended up just fighting with myself. I took myself away.” Melkor looked up and turned around, his face full of a pained resolution. “Do you hate me? That I would even consider it? That I would destroy… you?”

Mairon wrapped his arms around himself and sunk to the ground, pausing to give genuine consideration. Beneath Melkor’s immense height and mass he looked so small, but in that moment, Melkor’s mental state was in his power.

In a short span of time for an immortal Maia, he had seen his image of Melkor transform from an elusive, destructive force, to the symbol of his freedom, to his leader, and now, to someone closer to him than even Aulë. He now saw through the bravado he’d so admired. Melkor had vulnerabilities, he had flaws, but he had strength that no other Ainur had, that Mairon had not even seen until now. He’d lived with the deepest rejection time and again. The rejection of his very self. It had shaped him to be paranoid and possessive, as well as proud and passionate.

His chest burned with kinship for this complex Vala as he answered him, “No, I don’t hate you. I couldn’t. Not when I would do the same as you if was betrayed.”

The familiar rumbling chuckle Mairon had waited to hear finally came. With a smile, Melkor shook his head.

“I have no doubt you would try,” he said, his voice full of a kind of dark affection that they shared. Slightly more relaxed, Melkor asked, “So then why do you defect to follow me, the forsaken Vala, Precious One? To protect the Maia you relate to, or for your own power?”

Mairon’s eyes were hard fire. He raked his gaze up Melkor’s form as if to scrape off a portion of it with just his sight. His eyes reached deep into Melkor’s own for several heated seconds. Until he smiled so fervidly the air around him became distorted with waves of heat.

“Neither.”

He drew closer, his body language begging for him be touched. He knew naught of desire and what it leads to, but he wanted it all the same.

“You couldn’t bear to destroy me anyways, could you?” Mairon taunted with half-lidded eyes.

Melkor echoed his body language, but before Mairon could reach him, he pulled away, correcting himself. There was something still on his mind. His aura swirled with dangerous emotions, dark and turbulent. Only now did Mairon understand what Melkor had said in his drunken state.

*Love is torture.*
Melkor dissolved into shadows and Mairon caught the look on his torturer’s face. He saw him as all other Ainur did then. He saw destruction of the world and self.

And he saw that he, Mairon, had been the torturer.

“What will you do with your feelings for the Maia Eönwë?” Melkor asked darkly, jealously, as a mere shade with black eyes.

“I will use them to bring him to our side,” Mairon stated, all ambitious fire. Still he moved closer, pulsating heat.

Melkor’s mind voice became a whispered challenge. “Will I lose your attention to him? Will it destroy me?”

Echoing Melkor’s earlier dark affection, Mairon smiled and shook his head. He reached out into the shadow yet again, and it accepted him without pettiness this time.

“No. We shall both love you, my King. Worship you. Together in a kingdom of our creation we shall reign, ever expanding until Arda is ours and order and chaos are in perfect balance. Not until every Maia and Child of Eru is turned shall I rest. Not until you are avenged and sitting satisfied in a crown will I lay down my tools. I will not stop until I have you in my arms again and…”

Before he could speak another word of his dream, Mairon felt a burst of energy upon him. Melkor had kissed him without response, reforming into his usual muscled shape, but with horns and claws and fanged teeth. Even though it was only in spirit, Mairon was stunned by the impulse, and loved the adornments of aggression his Master wore. He tested their connection, giving a bit of his desire back, tasting his own lust on another’s lips, relishing in its freedom.

Melkor was a maestro with the Music his spirit sang, winding his power around him, but giving him just enough to tease. Their pace increased. Half in his spirit of fire, half in the image of his form, he wrapped his arms around Melkor’s neck and his legs around his waist, held up by Melkor’s exploring hands that were just as full of fire as he. There was no true physical contact, but a coming together of spirit and Song.

How did Melkor know so much of the ways of desire? Mairon did not have much mind left to contemplate this. Sensations spun down his spine in waves as it entered through his mouth, now pushed open and moaning in ravenous tones. Mairon felt intoxicated in a way that nothing in his life had given him before. No project has engrossed him as much, no finished craft gave satisfaction as much, and no Ainur had inflamed him as much. Oh how he wanted to touch the real Melkor and feel his roughness and heat and not just this taste his spirit-dream gave!

Melkor broke the kiss and their spirit bond, eliciting groans from Mairon.

“You must go back,” Melkor crooned, although he wished it not. “You are needed. Almaren is a disaster and I wish I could be there to see it. Smash a statue of Manwë for me, will you?”

Mairon nodded, and moved in closer for another kiss, but before he could demand any more of Melkor, he was thrust back into reality, protesting all the way.

Melkor was left alone amidst dust, laughing at the greedy, impudent look on Mairon’s face as he was sent away, but he was not alone. Uquesse landed on his shoulder and chirped.

“Thank you,” he whispered to the bat, letting her lick dust from his cheek. “I guess you are as useful as you said. Better than yelling at rocks.”
She bit him at that, perhaps on behalf of Mairon, but he paid no heed. He was still in the throes of amorous feelings he thought he’d never experience. They were only tainted by what he predicted of Mairon’s lovely, ambitious plan. An eternal cynic, Melkor was.

When you return to me, Precious, then we shall both know heartbreak.

But I will give what he will take.

Until then, all I will be is lust, malice, and heartache.

Chapter End Notes

The second phase of the story is beginning. It’s been a bit of a burn heh heh (had one friend jokingly yell at me about it) but ultimately this is story about Mairon and all of his relationships, including the ones he loses. The web I saw was complex and tangled at times, eventually leading to Melkor. That being said, this chapter ushers in the ‘angbanginess’. I am EXCITE.

I do love the Valar and all their beauty and light, but as I’ve seen in Governing system, corruption can occur even in a system made up of well-meaning people. They believe that what they are doing is for the best, but some of them may be too far removed from the lower rungs of their hierarchy to meet their needs properly. Miscommunications never help either, heh.

Melkor and Mairon working on their issues always makes me happy, especially when it goes down like,

"I am jealous of your relationship with another."

"Polyamory?"

"Holy shit that is such a great idea I’ve lost all impulse control."
To Slice

Chapter Summary

Almaren faces the consequences of the trial, and both Maiar and Valar feel it. Irmo expresses regret over doing something that Mairon later discovers, cementing his future with Melkor.

Chapter Notes

Thanks so much for your patience in waiting for this next chapter. :) Your support really does help me continue this, no matter what else is going on in my life. Although at this point, I'm sure writing fanfic is a hobby that will last a lifetime for me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Twins of faces, plus one other

Shocked and helpless call out, "No!

You cannot do this!" there in flames,

They smolder as the hemlock wood

As bones and sinews melt, I tell them

"It's all for the greater good."

And now a deity I stand

Before my judged and blackened kin

(From The Greater Good by Thoushaltnot)


The adolescence of Maiar has begun.

Each Maia upon Arda got a taste of Melkor’s Music during their riot and he was exultant for it. Underground, he sang in a way, laughing and destructive without shame. Gold melted in its very veins. Victory he did not accept graciously.

“Arda!” Melkor called, his voice searing with scorn. “Are you not in love with me now?”

The ground shook, trembled even, which was what he sought.
Mairon, Melkor thought. See what our labour of love has brought.

He stopped rampaging about his cavern and reached out with his spirit. Rings of anti-light unfurled around him, whirling in an un-wind. Above him, past the ceiling, the riot showed as a constellation of violence, beautiful as any of the cosmos, but he could not find Mairon. There was no bleeding star bright enough to be him. While he was disappointed to see not the magic of Mairon amidst the riot, he also knew that it was for the best.

For now, he thought. For now, my Precious.

Up on the surface in that brutal nebula, even if every Maia did not have the Discord as his lovely Mairon did, they all danced to its tune. In the ways of verbal, physical, and magical combat the Maiar fought and the land was torn up around them. They learned. Understanding hurt, knowing rage, feeling violence on their self, more than ever they empathized with their Dark King. Like him, they now knew suffering. What each would do with that knowledge was on the mind of all of the Valar.

Higher still, in the tower of silver and stone, Manwë swept forces of wind and words alike. As if he was the eye of a storm he remained still and deceptively calm. On the King’s mind was the pleading of Eönwë to make the trial happen. Manwë too loved his Maiar, and Eönwë he especially trusted, so he’d let it happen, as there was no fear that it would not go their way. However, he learned that Melkor’s might was not just in force, but in rot. His brother had somehow penetrated the Maiar’s minds in ways unseen.

“I should have been there with them, my Maiar…” his Varda, always so dignified, lamented with unusual emotion. “They were not ready for the trial.”

The starlight in her hair became tempestuous, brightening and then flashing into clouds of their own dust. Next to her, Aulë’s skin had hardened to metal, reflecting her expressive light as well as the explosive light of the battle below.

“I still say us being there would have made it worse.” Aulë countered calmly, but his face was sad and his clenched hands angry.

His Mairon had been so brave, so hopeful, so ambitious, and so true to his Master for requesting that Osomon be returned to them, but Aulë could never should his support. He was angry with Osomon and what he’d done to other Maiar, but he opposed the Valar’s decision to imprison his Maia in a contraption of the Fëanturi’s. After being overruled, he had steeled himself to the situation. His skin hardened further, to steel, to titanium.

“The trial never should have been,” Oromë added, watching the riot with his far-seeing eyes. He saw each blow, heard each taunt. “We made our final decision on the matter of Osomon and his strange companion before it ever happened. Why did we agree to let it happen then?” He plucked an arrow from his quiver as smoothly as a river runs and made to nock it. “It’s not too late to intervene…”

Manwë stepped forward then, rustling Oromë’s golden braids. The hunter of the Valar lowered his bow beneath the gaze of his King. The gaze was not stern, but it was solid in its will.

“Oromë, I know you wish to take direct action, and I’m sure you would be able to bring a stop to the fray with your bow,” Manwë said with a gentle smile that was dropped suddenly with his next words. “But our power would bring nothing but more distress to those with less if we used it upon them in such a way. We cannot, under any circumstance under Arda, fight them directly. We will let it runs its course.”

Yavanna covered her mouth as if to stop any protest, closing all the flowers in the chamber. Moving
to her side, Varda carefully touched her shoulder.

“Please,” Manwë continued, the command gone from his voice. He was pleading. “A solution to the scarring of suffering has already been perfected and tested by the brothers Irmo and Námo. As you helped me create Arda, help me soothe this turmoil in a peaceful way. The way of the mind.”

Indeed the Fëanturi brothers were gone from this meeting. Their wives, Estë and Vairë, sat beside each other, hand in hand. Estë the gentle healer, looked up to her King, her eyes shining with admiration. Her purpose was clearer to her than ever. Manwë felt stronger for it as well.

“It is in the Music,” he finished.

“It is in the Music,” every Vala present murmured back, their eyes lit with white light from Manwë’s crystal crown. They were resolved to be as one. Lest they be one with Melkor, or so their philosophy went. The dichotomy drove deeper.

Yet, each turned away from the other to look out their own window.

On a bench before the balcony, Nienna sat. No magic was around her. Blanketed in simple gray cloth, her form was still and dull in comparison to the other Valar. The only motions that showed she was not a statue were the tears that ran down her cheeks. Below, her own Maiar stood apart from the battle but were unable to come to their Mistress. She missed their comfort. Her first children.

She did not stir when a chill came over the tower chamber.

Dark cloaked as a crow, Námo appeared in wash of cold mist, alone. The Valar turned to look at him, feeling his plea. In as much distress as he could show, Námo beckoned to the Valar. The tips of his long sleeves trembled, spewing more mist that cast a black dew on the surrounding columns.

“Irmo is… come to him,” he managed with a grimace greater than his usual.

The Valar rose, composed. The issues of those on their power level they knew they could fix without fear. Save for Melkor. But the memories of trying to fix him were far buried in their minds.

As the Valar spiraled down the delicate stairs in a parade of light towards the Fëanturi’s domain, Námo stayed for a moment more, watching his sister.

He said to her in his deep, disused voice, “I understand.”

Nienna did not move.

“Nienna, do not hate me for being so callous,” he continued, his voice rattling from effort, sounding as if filled with phlegm. “But much more is to come. Your brother and I need to prepare for greater dooms.”

A moment of silence followed, but Námo knew to wait. His sister drew her breath, rattled as his own, but hers with grief.

“I do not hate doom,” she said, her voice a whisper in the mind. It was clear and calming, unlike her breath. “Your time will come, little brother, but thankfully it is not now. Go, be with Irmo. Give him my love.”

Nienna still did not move. He let her be.

After respectfully backing out of the tower chamber, he dashed down the stairs. He phased through
the Valar and took to leading them through the mist of his realm. Much unlike his slow drifting walk, Námo ran to his brother as his heavy, black cloak billowed around him.

They found him sitting cross-legged, a serene smile on his face, but there were tears in his eyes. Moths fluttered about and perched in his loose, silver hair. His crown lay before him on the ground. Before they came to a stop before him, he began to speak.

“What place do dreams and memories have in a world like this? One that cannot be controlled precisely enough to conjure them to completeness?” He looked to his hands where mist was falling from his eyes to slip through his fingers. “If I cannot bring my own visions to light then how can the Children ever be?” The mist danced with violence, forming vague shapes of a struggle. “How do we know if they should be?”

Manwë stepped forward, sweeping away much of the fog around them, but it quickly reformed. As he gestured, it clung to him.

“Irmo, you have been so important in our fight against Melkor’s machinations. We still have so much more to do. I urge you not to give up on Arda. Not so early in the Spring.” He clasped his hands together, producing a clap of thunder. “We will win.”

Irmo did not look at him, but instead responded in a strange way. It was an echo of Manwë’s own voice around them that said Irmo’s words.

“We will win when it is all said and done. When Arda is in dying breathe…”

It could have just have easily been Melkor’s voice, and the prospect froze them, save for Oromë.

“That does not mean we do nothing,” the hunter of all urged.

“That doesn’t mean we are always right,” Oromë heard his own voice respond, the illusion of Irmo amplifying.

The fog formed waves that briefly solidified into mirrors, reflecting all of the Valar’s light back at them.

“That doesn’t mean we need to stop trying,” Varda said, shielding herself with her midnight cloak from a flash of her own light.

The mirrors whirled faster.

“That doesn’t mean we aren’t capable of mistakes,” her voice echoed back.

“Stop this, Irmo!” cried Estë, falling to her knees in front of him.

The mirrors vanished as if they had never been.

She cupped his face, setting it aglow with her penetrating light. “Please, my love, speak clearly to us. Tell us what you plan to do now.”

Her soft touch appeared to awaken him. Colour returned to his face and he finally stood, all the mist clearing and leaving a blank grey room. Námo reached out and let his brother fall into his embrace. Their eyes shone as opal and onyx at each other. Námo knew his thoughts and went to speak for him, but Irmo spoke first.

“Manwë… I am sorry, but I will no longer erase memories,” Irmo stated.
Manwë looked pained, but he refused to let his sudden hopelessness show. “Why, Irmo?” he asked, his words as gentle as a wind could be. “We have one success.”

“Seeing what it has done to one is enough. It is both pointed and pointless.” He closed his eyes and the image of a Maia appeared, made of mirrors. “If I could erase my own memories of it, I would.” The mirror cracked into shards and then into dust, but reformed in exactly the same way it was before. “But the burden of a mistake’s memory I carry, and so you must let me retreat into dreams, if only for a time.”

Manwë’s eyes squeezed close, but he did not say a word more. He only gave a slight nod before ushering all of the other Valar away. The Spring was dark.

Námo, distressed brother in his arm, made a motion of his hands to send them to their secret realm, but Irmo stopped him before he could finish. His pale hand tightened around his brother’s dark one.

“No, Námo,” Irmo said, quietly but firmly. “This is not a journey of mine you will join.”

A sweet and sad smile countless beings of Eru would come to know as they slept in the hours of night yet to be lit Irmo’s face.

“Only for a time, Námo,” he said, before disappearing into mist. “Come back when my garden is full.”

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A hot haze hung on Mairon as he floated in harmonized air. As if in anti-gravity, his hair and the white robe put upon him drifted in slow waves. His surroundings were not yet apparent to him, but the fire concentrated on his lower self was.

Damn him. Damn Melkor and his impulses instigating mine. He thought this with little sting, save for the twinges he still felt upon his lips. He’d been lead to believe that the Ainur were above such needs, and that they were only necessary for the Children, who must reproduce. The Ainur were to know it, but not respond to it. Feeling how embracing sexuality powered his spirit like stoking a fire, he doubted.

Another small wave of pleasure ran through him, burning him so he smelled of incense. If it was basely, but then why did it feel so sublime? His Lust.

With a salacious sigh Mairon let himself fall down onto soft bedding, which he sank into like a stone. He scowled. It was far too soft for his liking. Nevertheless he cast his awareness about, hoping to be alone enough to find relief between his legs, to perfect it before any actual physical being is ever born, but it wasn’t so. Someone was here. His scowl twitched dangerously and he scorched the bedding around him.

There was just one other Maia, and he was in the bed right next to him. Mairon thought he recognized the Music of the Maia, but it wasn’t quite... right. A wash of fear hit his stomach, turning his body from a hot coal back to cold skin clothed in linen. He attempted to quell his fear, not sure where the response came from. After all he’d seen and done, what could ever disturb him?

“Curumo?” Mairon called out, brushing a curtain hair from his face as he rose to a seated position.

The other Maia jolted up, wide eyed. He looked the same as always, dark hair framing his pointed face, but nothing about his expression was familiar. He watched the movement of Mairon’s hand through his copper-gold hair, and Curumo’s eyes filled with awe.
“Who are you? You’re beautiful,” Curumo breathed.

There was no taste of irony in his words, causing Mairon to stop taming his hair. The unease came to him again.

“How can you not remem…” Mairon trailed off into a mutter, then a horrified demand. “You… who are you?”

“I’m Curumo! You called me so, like the others.” Curumo answered, frustrated as if the answer was so simple. “Who are you?”

On all fours, Curumo leapt onto Mairon’s bed, scattered the ashes of the burnt bedding. Despite Mairon’s stiffening body language, Curumo tumbled into his lap. He immediately grasped at Mairon’s hair with no hesitation. Mairon flinched at the touch, but there was such a purity to Curumo’s actions that he let him be, for now at least.

“Curumo…” Mairon murmured again, as the Maia’s slim fingers tugged on his hair. Mairon called not to the Curumo in front of him. He called to the unreachable past. “Who did this to you?”

“I did, I was told. But I don’t remember why,” Curumo answered, but distantly, as he was fixated on something else. “Your hair is so heavy and smooth! Is it metal? Is it gold?”

Freed of the ego of his past, Curumo was pleasant, but all of Mairon’s hard-fought shapings of Curumo’s spirit were gone. He was a raw piece of metal, unrefined and utterly stupid. As much as Mairon had difficulties with Curumo’s previous self, this complacent one disgusted him ten-fold more. The fool felt none of his glare of fire as he gracelessly fingered through his hair.

Mairon grabbed Curumo’s wrist, causing him to gasp. Realizing he was grasping too hard, Mairon loosened his grip and managed a smile. As Curumo became transfixed by his glowing aura, Mairon pulled Curumo’s hand away from his hair, holding his stiff smile.

“Let me,” Mairon insisted, as he began to braid Curumo’s hair. “I’m sorry I confused you, Curumo. It’s just that I believe your past has been taken from you, perhaps at your will, but I was a part of that past.” He gave Curumo’s cheek a gentle rub with his knuckles. “I will miss you,” he said, his own voice sounding overtly saccharine to him. Still, there was some part of him that greatly pitied Curumo, mourned him even.

“Oh, I hadn’t thought about that,” mumbled Curumo. “I’m sorry.”

“No worries, Curumo,” said Mairon, bright as polished copper. “We can start again, can’t we?”

Mairon felt Curumo’s head nod as he braided across his scalp.

“Alright then,” he began, speaking as simply as possible, almost condescendingly so. “I am Mairon, chief of the Maiar of Aulë. I am a master smith, and you are my apprentice.”

“Are you sure?” Curumo asked, spinning his head around to look at Mairon. “That sounds amazing!”

Mairon righted Curumo’s head and continued braiding.

“Our progress will have to be re-started. How do you feel about this memory-erasing procedure then, my Curumo?”

Curumo considered this, humming and biting his lip.
“I feel… at peace,” he said with a strange kind of sigh that stuttered.

Mairon was disappointed, but he pressed further, in his braiding and in his words.

“Tell me, what do you remember?”

Increasingly struggling with himself, Curumo made a noise of frustration.

“All I remember of my life before is turmoil. Anxiety, insecurity, envy, longing… I had the Discord of Melkor inside my Music, so I sought to be rid of it." He shrugged. "I don't know why, but either way, I am so grateful to the Valar that made it possible. Now my light is *White.*”

Mairon stopped braiding Curumo’s hair. The pattern he’d left was a lidless eye on the back of Curumo’s head.

“And who were they?” Mairon asked tersely.

“There were so many. I had never received so much attention before. Irmo and Námo, and Este. Even King Manwë was there!”

Weakness hit Mairon, and his head fell into his hands. He hadn’t known how close he was to losing everything. Melkor was right about his naivety. He couldn’t change this system from within it. The trial proved that. They had to destroy it from without.

“Are you alright?” Curumo asked, his genuine concern sending a wave of indignant rage through Mairon.

“I’m fine,” he answered with a snapping spark.

He was formulating a plan, rapid fire. He had to leave, and the prospect had him grimly laughing. His future with Melkor looked ever-more exciting. Due to the confusion on Curumo’s face, Mairon chose his next words carefully. He stood, and pulled Curumo up with him.

“I’ve decided to go confront Melkor myself. We may only be free of him if we fight him directly. Only then can your apprenticeship continue,” he said, letting his lies sound noble and foolish. Though, the last part he said was as true as Arda. “I choose to keep my memories, as turbulent as they are, as troublesome as they make my rest. *Nothing will make me forget me.*”

A glimmer of what could be that lost longing shone in Curumo’s eyes as he looked upon Mairon’s full of fire. The admiration and inadequacy that came with it was creeping back into his spirit, freed of the Discord or not. Feeling its deep, thrusting throb return to Curumo’s aura, he knew he was not. Mairon embraced him fully then, happy he was still his. Still Melkor’s, to the end.

“Try to keep it a secret, won’t you?” Mairon spoke into his hair, knowing Curumo would not.

Without waiting for Curumo’s gulping nod, he released him suddenly and made for the nearest open arched window. He cast off the healing robe of Este in a column of flame and replaced it with an outfit of leather he’d long ago used for hunting. He’d trash it for something less humble once he found his Master’s lair.

“I am off to wander,” he proclaimed with a theater’s gusto. “Until I find that fiend!”

"Farewell, brave Mairon!” Curumo called. "My admiration is with you always!"

Mairon grinned with satisfied greed at that, his teeth nearly fangs. Kicking his legs, he cast off into
the air upon his wings, leaving Curumo in dust. He accelerated upward, but he didn’t exit Almare just yet. Hiding in smoke, he circled around the writhing center of riot. There were some he very much intended to take with him, but first he had to find them.

_Eönwë. You’ll come with me, won’t you? I can’t let your future be dim._

_Gothmog. Thuringwethil. I hope that I reach you in time, so that yours is not grim._

Chapter End Notes

Another update! Huzzah!

Poor Irmo, but at least he has learned because he understands minds. It reminds me of a lesson I had to learn myself as a child - that my dreams were not literal! And the ongoing lesson that perfection is only a guide, not a goal. They will not have complete control over Arda because Melkor’s grip will not end until Arda does. Does that mean to stop fighting though? Always a good question.

Mairon has made up his mind to completely join Melkor, not just in spirit, but physically as well (in both physical ways, lol ; ) ). As usual, he has a plan to twist that to his advantage, so that he is still trusted by the Valar until the very last moment. Without him having to focus on Valar related projects, the end will come soon!
The Patience

Chapter Summary

Thuringwethil and Gothmog receive an otherworldly visitor that takes one, but leaves the other in fear. Mairon attempts to free Gothmog but finds he can't do it alone.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your patience! The chapter title is as much a reference to my readers as much as it is to Mairon. <3

Warning: This chapter contains some violence in the form of blood, biting, being physical restrained and thrown about.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

If I were you I'd crawl out from the shelter
And dance a dizzy samba through the ash
If I were you I'd spin into a smoke ring
Till each festering bandage is a festival sash

If I were you I'd script a better future
Recite the words aloud till they were true
I'd sing until I'm someone else—'cause stoic or seducer
Someone else is gonna sing until she's you

And if I were you I'd start the transformation
While the bodies of the heavens are aligned
If I were you then I'd be losing patience
Yes, if I were you I'd leave myself behind

(From If I Were You by Seeming)

In the hollow of the prison chamber, winds brought the sounds of unrest to Gothmog and Thuringwethil, but it was too far-off to stir them. They sat in silence upon a cold, stone floor as the barrier of the Fëanturi wavered around them, whispering of betterment and other dubious pleasantries. It distorted the distant battle Songs into wailing, but perhaps they were already so. Gothmog and Thuringwethil had no way to know.

Only when the wailing reached such a high pitch and closeness that the barrier itself seemed to recoil did they look up, and then at each other. The space around them was screaming, sending Gothmog into a near panic. Thuringwethil just grinned at him, eyes glittering, fangs glistening. Had her teeth grown in number? What had the undead darling of Varda known all this time? She was never as terrifying to him as she was then.
Something was entering Arda by wrenching it open. And Thuringwethil was welcoming it.

With marvel, she exclaimed, “Finally! The Discord must be thick enough in Almaren for her weaving.”

The panicked inquiry in Gothmog’s expression she sympathized with, but that did not stop her from laughing. Her humour was not entirely at his ignorance though. While Thuringwethil had never fallen for Melkor’s seductive power, she’d made exception after exception for another. She let her in for the same reasons she feared Melkor. Thuringwethil accepted this with some amount of irony.

The barrier rippled, but did not rip. Upon it a tumor of sorcery grew rapidly, weakening its light and transforming it into unorganized ooze. Bubbles popped, producing a hole in the Fëanturi’s creation that spiraled down into countless others infinitesimally. Gothmog’s confusion lifted for but a moment. The black, oily mass of magic convinced him that Melkor had finally returned for them.

“Master!” he called, but he soon wished he had held his tongue.

Instead, what pushed through was no form thought of by Eru, even in His darkest moments. Limbs and claws and wriggling hairs erupted from the broken patch of barrier, overtaking it in size in seemingly impossibly ways. Fractal flesh of chiral chitin encased countless eyes of many a size.

“Hello, sweetness,” came a voice as rich an otherworldly as the cosmos from which they came.

Some instinct of Gothmog’s lost since the Spring was triggered and he froze all his muscles. He felt as prey felt. No longer were Ainur the power that be.

“Ungoliant,” Thuringwethil lavished, snaking her arms around the part of the giant being’s thorax that protruded grotesquely from her portal. “You are truly my savior.”

Gothmog then felt the strength of hundreds of eyes upon him, within him. *Eru, why would any being need that many eyes?* Gothmog thought, dredging up the name of his long forsaken creator in this moment of profound fear.

Thuringwethil asked a question Gothmog could never agree to. “Is she your savior, Gothmog?”

“I don’t know this she.” He gulped to keep the tremble from his voice. “And I don’t want to.”

Thuringwethil squeezed the being tighter as if this massive monster was a source of comfort, and tried to explain to the terrified Gothmog, “She is the Queen of those who refused the journey into Arda. Of those who rejected its creation altogether.” A tinge of pride entered her voice. “Her rebellion is older than even Melkor. Her anarchy, ancient. Her disdain, deeper.”

Ungoliant clicked her jaw in what could have been pleasure.

In unison, the dark women said, “Come with us, and be free. Reject the original sin of Arda’s bounds, pushing into the void. See the entirety of existence as it should be.”

“No…” Gothmog protested, hypnotized to dizziness, but still cognizant. “I fight for Arda, never against it.”

Thuringwethil pursed her lips and muttered, “You sorry fool…”

She made to march forward and drag him with her, but one of the creature’s legs unfurled from her black mass to cross Thuringwethil’s chest. It was as long as the Maia’s entire body.
“Now Thuringwethil, we must be on our best behavior,” Ungoliant clucked as if her voice plucked the fabric of space. Her jaws clicked, louder. “We all have our own path through the mire that is Arda after all.”

“Take me from this swamp then. I feel muddy with attachment,” Thuringwethil scoffed, the bite of her words hardly hiding her disappointment.

She let herself be lifted and enfolded within the many limbs. With a squelch and scuttle, Ungoliant retreated into her cancerous cave-in of air, dragging a withdrawn Thuringwethil with her. She left a trail of stringy grey pus that Gothmog couldn’t stop himself retching at. The last he saw of the creature was all her eyes squeezing in mirth at his discomfort. The last he saw of Thuringwethil was her drooping head, nuzzled into the body of the great being of beyond.

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Spiraling up through the thick smoke of many a Maia’s magical fire, Mairon breathed deep. He loved the smell. The screaming was a nuisance, but the burning was pleasant enough for him. Observing the fray on unfolded wings, he saw through the smoke like few could. At first he only saw magic and might splayed across a mass of what was once the earth and sky. Now it was a dissociation of the Valar’s order. The Maiar turned to Discord distorted Arda itself, sending all its newly laid physical laws into disarray. From this height the court appeared only like frothing waves of elements swallowing each other over and over, but inside philosophies were debated with words material and weapons immaterial.

Citizens cried for whatever version of justice they sought. Soldiers attempted to retain order and remain neutral, but a fair few could not, and added to the roiling chaos. Bystanders prayed to Eru himself. All others had fled, and were hiding in the holes of Almaren, save for one distinct group.

Bold as the brass they produced, the original Maiar of Melkor were concentrated by the prison of Gothmog and Thuringwethil. Given away by their whips of fires, they tore at any matter between them, including the feathers of the winged soldiers that were singed and swept up into a whirlwind of their own making. Also caught up in the great wind of wings were the prison and its courtyard. The stone structures were floating, detached from the earth as the Maiar’s conflict unraveled all their carefully set physics.

A small smile lighting his face, Mairon was thankful and almost proud that the former labourers were holding off Manwë’s soldiers despite being grounded. The whip strategy had worked. He yearned to be with them, to lead them into more efficient success, but he couldn’t out himself as Melkor’s yet.

What Mairon’s deepest hope was, beyond Melkor himself appearing in the sky before them, was to see Eönwë’s massive mottled wings beating towards him. Alas, he was not there, still being held somewhere unknown. And Mairon had work to do, his loves missing or not. Further games were to be played.

Mairon turned tail and dove down through the unnatural smoke in a delicate twirl of wing and limb. Before emerging from the smoke, he took on the form of the winged monster as he had when he first flown with Melkor. The form came to him with ease, the memory of their first encounter slipping through him pleasant and warming as wine.

As a red-furred clawed beast, he swept across the front line, causing raucous cheers from his soldiers. Despite his disguise, he would not risk staying longer and having an enemy recognize his Music. That, he had not yet learned to mask. But he could not resist a dramatic display of power. To the dismay of their enemies, he burst into a shower of sparks that coalesced as a bat small enough to slip
inside the prison.

Reforming and landing inside with a great wind, he then made haste down the dim hall as his wings dissipated behind him. The cheers were only echoes on hard stone. From the quietness inside, he thought the hall empty, but then he heard a scuffle. Someone was waiting for him. With impatience, he cast the torches on the walls alight.

A small but solid figure emerged from the shadows, and she was as earthy golden as wheat. It was the Maia of Oromë who’d come into their fold not long ago. At first he was annoyed to see her avoiding the battle, but then he saw the antagonism in her body language. A grimace and a fighting stance was not the way to greet one’s superior.

Quick to act, he forced his body language to be the opposite of hers. He opened his arms wide.

“I’m glad to see you are safe in all this turmoil. Why don’t you join the others, your comrades in battle?” Mairon called out to her, cordial.

Her eyes became slitted like those of a cornered cat. “I’ve seen enough to know now, I’m not one of you,” she hissed through gritted teeth.

Mairon tilted his head but kept his pleasant airs as his anger grew.

“Are you not?” he asked, his pitch turning a bit too high at the end. “I recall greeting you, and welcoming you into Melkor’s army after you were cast out by Oromë.”

“Yes. I was certainly welcomed. By the others.” she said, her sarcasm apparent, her bitterness bared.

“You didn’t even ask for my name.”

Mairon took her bait, but he did so on purpose. “What is your name then?” he asked calmly, cheerfully, in contrast to her near shouting.

“It’s too late to ask!” She shook her head, stray strands of blond hair whipping her face. “I was fooled by you once…”

“Now, Luvawen,” Mairon interrupted her rant, his tone darker. She startled, and Mairon smirked at that. “You see, I’ve always known it.”

The shock of her raised brow fell back into its angry press.

“I find that more creepy than reassuring,” she said, not standing down despite her growing fear.

Not acknowledging her insult, Mairon slid towards her.

“Why the change of heart?” he asked, like a concerned teacher, but his outline was beginning to glow red hot.

Sweat beaded behind her bangs. “You sided with monsters. The monsters that hurt me.”

For the first time since they came face to face, Mairon bristled. The tender moment he’d shared with Thuringwethil came to his mind. Only they could call themselves monsters, for only they knew what it truly meant to be one.

“You become an outcast as them and still you do not understand?” he said, his voice enveloping the hall with hot steam. “This world is so much more complex than your single moment of pain. We are immortal Ainur. Do not whine about such simple hurts. Have you not become stronger and more
knowledgeable for it?”

She hesitated, frozen to the spot. It was true, she had gained strength and sharper reflexes since the strange she-Maia had bit her but failed to drain her completely. And joining Melkor had given her greater knowledge of the hidden workings of Arda. But something about it didn’t sit right with her.

“There is no improvement without pain,” Mairon asserted, rolling the last word off his tongue as if it were a decadence.

There it was. She could see it in his eyes. He believed it, reverently. He knew nothing but pain since the Spring, so much of it self-inflicted because of his own ambition of creation. The physical and mental stress of transforming himself so far from Eru’s vision meant nothing to him. He felt it, but moved past it like wildfire through forest, like magma through stone. And he thought everyone else was capable of the same.

“Rise above it and join us in eliminating true pain, the waste of Arda on a system that does not allow for change, growth, improvement,” he raved as he stood before her, combusting with his own words.

He breathing down upon her so that his fire caressed her face, and she heard Music from its licks that sang, there was no one like him. It was like he was meant for another world, and she knew then he would destroy all other’s work in Arda to get to it.

Blinking ash from her eyes, she spoke her mind.

“There is truth to what you say, but not all change is cast in fire. Your crucible would destroy all but yourself.”

Mairon couldn’t believe that, lest he feel more alone in Arda than he already did. He left philosophy and stooped to simply rhetoric.

As an inferno, he fumed. “So you’d side with the other monsters? The Valar who cast you out?”

“And be a fool who sides with those that caused me to be cast out? Ha! I pick no side!” she jabbed, long past knowing her bold mouth would lead her to nowhere but ruin.

The flames rushed back into Mairon’s body, leaving him with an unblinking expression on a beautiful face she could not read. This was more terrifying than any display of his power. He had given up on her.

“Then you are no one,” he intoned, devoid of emotion.

Her voice shook terribly, but she replied, “No. I’ll do what I must, for the greater good, even if means facing the Valar again as an exile. I’ll out you as Melkor’s lieutenant... his monster... his lov...”

She didn’t finish, as Mairon had dug his claws into her shoulders. The black sickle-like talons paralyzed Luvawen as Mairon began to drag her down the hall. Her upper body was strong from bow hunting, but Mairon was chief among Aule’s Maiar, and now among Melkor’s. It wasn’t just his body that was a vice, but the force of his mind too. He didn’t need to use his claws to subdue her, but he did anyways.

Still her voice resounded. “Injure me as much as you want! I will never die, and I will always remember! I am an Ainu too!” she shouted.

“So sure of yourself!” Mairon snarled, his handsome features contorted into madness. “But you must
know that we don’t follow the rules of the Arda you recognize.”

They made it to the main chamber, whereupon he flung her towards the Fëanturi’s baleful barrier. She blanched. Surely its memory purge didn’t work from this side? Before she could rise to her knees, he was on top of her, holding her down with his knee in her middle and the other at her neck. His hands held down her arms above her head. They were as hot as white iron. She spat at him, but it evaporated before touching him.

However, her voice did not and she shouted, “You wouldn’t take my memories! You wouldn’t imprison me! That would make you no better than your enemies!”

Mairon’s grip tightened, as did the curve of his smile.

“You’re right. That’s why I’m taking something else.”

White crescents flashed. He had fangs. As they came closer, she caught her own distraught reflection in them. All her impressions of him could have never predicted this violence. Refined, reclusive, polite, perfect, articulate, admired Mairon had fangs.

_Eru_, they stung as they entered her old throat wound. But he was right, this pain was nothing compared to the one of knowing that she’d made a mistake. A mistake that was bleeding her power, her gambit, her very voice, away.

Her wooziness gave her whimsy in place of her defiance. Or perhaps it was the hypnosis of this beautiful monster whose copper hair tickled her face as his was buried in her throat. What she thought were stars dancing for her amusement were sparks from Mairon’s fervor. The liquid that was slicked down her chest from the front of her opened throat was less like blood, and more like molten light. _My insides are beautiful_, she thought.

And Mairon thought so too. He drew her in deep, into the dark pit inside him, storing her energy away for later use. Its power burned in his core like no alcohol could. So dangerous this pleasure is, he knew. But he had not a single thought of turning back. Only of what more dark wonders lay ahead in the world he and Melkor would create.

He was pulled from his fantasies of he and Melkor feeding together by her cough spattering blood across his body. It beaded on his cheekbones and jaw like iridescent dew. The last words she said before her voice left her were not spiteful, but curious. Her previous anger and pride had been swallowed by Mairon, and she said what she had wanted to warn him of all along.

“You didn’t see the monster in there, did you?” Luvawen rasped. “She who is not of Arda... I implore you not to further ally with her. Or use her draining magic again...”

Mairon, face suddenly blank, said nothing but lowered her to the ground. Luvawen, Maiden of the Bow, fell into a Maiar’s sleep just as he recently had. She would wake. But she would never use her voice again.

She tasted like warm grass and mead.

…

“…You sick bastard,” Gothmog finally said, after waiting a few solid moments.

Having almost forgotten Gothmog’s presence, Mairon looked up at him in some sort of blood haze. Gothmog could have been shocked that Mairon would bother learning the basely skills of a Maia such as Thuri, but he was beyond being surprised at this point.
Mairon, wild eyed, sarcastically inquired, “Oh? And why are you in here again…?”

Gothmog shrugged and said, “I don’t know.”

Not catching Gothmog’s reciprocating sarcasm, Mairon’s disposition snapped.

“Have you…? I can’t be too late already. No! What have you forgotten? Where is Thuringwethil?” Mairon gasped his words out, his wreath of flames sputtering like fire under rain.

“Forgotten what? I still remember every shitty thing this world has ever done to me. Including having to watch Thuri escape without me.”

Mairon’s flames leapt back into their steady position. Embarrassed at his outburst, he straightened his posture and his voice.

“Good,” he simply answered, wiping the blood from his lips.

Gothmog giggled, sounding like grinding gravel. “You’re happy I’m intact?”

“Is that so strange?” Mairon shot at him. “You’re valuable. Though I’ll have you know that I’m much happier that Thuringwethil escaped than anything else.”

“I’m valuable?” Gothmog repeated with a crooked smile, fluttering his eyelashes.

Mairon gave him a deadpan look. “Yes, that is what I said.”

Gothmog wanted to milk the praise further, but Mairon was ignoring him, instead focused on what contained him. His fingers ghosted the barrier, feeling its power. When its reverse-engineered image didn’t appear in his mind, his brow pinched. Its construction was foreign to him, having been made by the mystical Féanturi.

“How did Thuringwethil escape? This barrier is… being difficult,” he grumbled.

“I don’t know, I didn’t see,” Gothmog lied. “But it’s nice to finally see something you can’t figure out.”

Mairon visibly tightened, but then all at once threw his power at the barrier. Gothmog flinched, but the torrent of fire only splayed itself over the barrier. Its tendrils searched, its heat made the air crackle, but nothing happened. The pearlescent dome stayed in place.

Gothmog looked away and said, “Sorry. I guess you’re trying to help my ass.”

Mairon too, looked away. “Yet it seems I’m no help,” he admitted, pinching his forehead with his fingers. “Why didn’t Thuringwethil tell me she could escape? And how? More secrets are kept from me than I fathomed.”

This was the first moment of humbleness Gothmog had ever seen from Mairon. Unfortunately, it was at the time of his most need, but still it softened his expression. To have the admirable Mairon, chief of Aulë’s Maiar, fight for his sake was as much validation as he ever wanted from his brethren. The flame of a Maia looked so small in the vast dark space with his clasped hands worrying together.

“Mairon,” Gothmog said, daring to use his name instead of ‘Master’. “Don’t worry about it.”

“Don’t worry about it?” Mairon’s breath rushed out in a whoosh of flame. “Do you not see where you are? Do you not recognize that your destiny is oblivion? I’ve seen what memory loss does to an Ainu.”
Gothmog rolled his eyes. Mairon sure could be dramatic when he was panicked. “I don’t mean not do anything!” Gothmog shouted back in an exasperated tone.

“And then what should I do, oh wise one?”

“Just keep going, keep being you, and Melkor will come. He will come for you, and he will come for me.”

Mairon gave an aggravated sigh. “Your simple logic is only blind faith. I’ve been doing all I can, and Melkor still lies underground, brooding over things he does not let me know. You are still in here. And Curumo is gone,” he said to the domed ceiling, hearing the doomed echo. All that was left in the blackness was the burning glow of his eyes. “I’m beginning to understand your level of failure,” Mairon lamented with disgust.

Gothmog merely threw up his hands and said, “Don’t let that stop you.”


The rims of those fiery eyes narrowed. “Melkor is not like you at all,” Mairon said.

“You’re wrong,” Gothmog shot back. “As much as I am in awe of his power, which is immense, he’s been depressed by his place in Arda. About as much as I was. Have patience.”

Mairon scoffed, sending dust in a wave to Gothmog, but he gave no worded response. For the first time in a good while, Gothmog stood, his stone-like skin nearly cracking. He brought his face as close as he would dare to the barrier.

“Have patience in your own influence on him. You’re his passion. You’re his flame,” Gothmog pressed upon him, feeling poetry on his lips that he hadn’t felt since the singing of the first Music. “Inspiration or some kind of shit like that.”

“Poetic,” Mairon droned, incredulous.

“Shut up. I don’t get it, and I hate to say it, but Melkor is crazy about you.”

Mairon felt heat rise to his cheeks, but he was able to admit, “I am aware of that…”

“Yeah and so what, right? The most powerful Ainu in Arda believes in you like no else? No big deal. One failed attempt and let’s all give up, eh?”

“I wasn’t…” Mairon began, softly this time. “I wasn’t giving up on him, or any of you. I… I was merely complaining.”

“So finish complaining and get Melkor to smash this barrier with that weird magic hammer you made together!”

“Thanks, Aulë,” Mairon muttered, remembering his previous master’s attempts at pep talk, yet his lips had curled into a cautious smile. “But Grond doesn’t work like tha…”

CRASH

The ground appeared to lurch up, sending both of them to their knees. The prison had fallen back to the ground, but the disturbance was not over. A tremor shook the structure from its ceiling to the
bones of its inhabitants. Mairon in particular felt the frequency of the quake to his very soul. It was familiar.

His mouth fell open in a soft gasp.

“Go,” Gothmog said. “I’ll still be here to say ‘I told you so’ later.”

“I’m going to hit you upside the head for this when you get out, you know,” Mairon said with his wry smile.

“I look forward to it,” Gothmog replied, the same fighting smile on his face.

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The damned danced as the darkness rolled. A thunderous footstep dropped for all rebels to behold. Black and light as the cosmos he roamed, Melkor came forth to the Ainur he owned. In armor old and dusty worn, he with dark eyes between dark locks surveyed his brother’s soldiers with scorn. Then Arda was still, but not for a moment more.

Another rumble rolled, and Melkor gave a yell.

“The time is now that fairness fell!”

Chapter End Notes

I hope this all makes sense, and not too much has been forgotten since my last update!

"She tasted of warm grass and mead." is a reference to when Thuringwethil drank from the same Maia. She thought she would taste of those things, but she only tasted of despair. Mairon apparently does not have taste buds for other's despair...

I've got almost enough for another chapter written because this chapter was going to be a lot longer, but then it just GREW. Even cut in half this one is rather long. Next time we tackle a reunion, and then... Eonwe.
To Influence

Chapter Summary

Melkor shows his might against all, and also attempts to use his more subtle skills - reason and seduction - in a last-ditch effort to save Mairon's friend Eönwë from a lifetime of servitude to their enemy, King Manwë.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

And he came to me on a Northern wind
And he flooded my mind in a river of light
And he wrapped my body in a breath of fire
Then he hid my soul in a cloak of night
Like a devil's plaything

And he spoke to me in a language lost
And he turned my head with sweet seduction
And he filled my body with flames of ice
Then he touched my soul and then he gave it back
Like a devil's plaything
(From The Devil's Plaything by Backworld)

“The time is now that fairness fell!”

A deep thrum that was more a feeling than a sound struck the fabric of the invisible world. It pooled at points across a vast scape of vibration and grew into a clamorous ring. The sensation the sound shook from its beholders was nearly unbearable. Its raw terror and wonder reflected an Arda so new mountains were still malleable by the barest whisper of breath. To witness its power was to stare into the heart of greed, only to find an infinite hall of mirrors.

With a single swing of Grond, they shattered.

Soldiers saw what none should have to. A foe insurmountable, a force irrevocable, and a fate unmovable stood before them clad in black iron and a halo of constricted light. Still, their loyalty to their kind King Manwë was stronger than fear, and perhaps stronger than logic. They feared being struck with the spiked head of Grond and used their numbers against it, but the hammer carried
magic unknown to them. Their ignorance would be their downfall.

They dove through whips of fire with swords raised to reach him, only to see a smile in the eyes of the Dark Vala. Swirling madness, lurid delight they saw. With a growl at the Maiar flitting about him, Melkor raised Grond and smashed it into the ground in front of him. A conjuration of un-light erupted, and the air itself shuddered. Manwë’s guard and anything else in the air was driven aground by invisible arrows. Sundered from air by this gravity and flung to their knees, they all appeared to bow before their enemy. What were they to this power but its subjects?

From the narrow windowed prison, Mairon watched, agape. No mere subject was he, but his Master’s power made his knees quake.

Mairon’s eyes far-seeing saw past the subjugated soldiers, past the rubble of the once floating earth where Oromë’s archers appeared in a leather-clad line. They prepared a barrage as fast as they had arrived. Their arrows were loosed and their mithril tips gleamed in the Lamps’ light, making Melkor’s Maiar shriek. Mairon felt for them, reaching out with a clawed hand in frustration. As if answering him, Melkor raised Grond above his head.

A shockwave of black lightning burst, disintegrating the arrows into glittering dust. A gust of wind, almost sentient, whipped the dust away but no trite offer of Manwë’s could stop Melkor. The archers thought they were past his range, but no, they too were subjugated with a blast from Grond that rippled like snakes through the air to them.

Melkor laughed with a glee he thought he’d forgotten in his exile. Thousands of Maiar bent the knee before him. Forced or no, he did not care. They would worship him in pleasure or in pain. The choice was theirs.

As the echoes of Melkor’s laughter reached the prison, the throbbing from within Mairon reached his groin. Overcome, he spun away from the narrow window to press his back upon the cool stone. The rush went through him quickly, and it was oh so sweet, but he knew he needed to stay his impulses.

His position as a spy was too valuable to dispose of now, but his desire to be out and at Melkor’s side, and to protect the soldiers he’d grown to care for was too strong to ignore. For the incredibly self-controlled Mairon this was a new conflict, but one that was swiftly solved by the entrance of an important piece in his game.

A trumpet blast called, cutting clear through the smoke that had formed over the battleground. Wings wide but graceful, it was Eönwë who appeared high in the sky above them. Mairon, who had many plans in his head that took into account multiple situations, began narrowing down his options.

Eönwë spoke grimly, his voice carrying a great distance.

“Melkor, King of None. Your seduction to destruction ends here.”

The frown that formed on Melkor’s face chilled the air. Water, nitrogen and then oxygen froze in deadly cold crystals around him, causing his Maiar to leap out of his vicinity to avoid their sting. Those forced to kneel were not so lucky.

Tipping his chin up against the dread he felt, Eönwë continued. “Leave. And leave alone. Or be shamed by the chosen of Eru into fleeing once again,” he was so bold to say, yet he did not say it with any pride or joy. His affect was flat, and his tone resigned.

Melkor saw his chance. “Eönwë, Herald of my battle-absent brother. Such a shame to see you here. I’ve seen your prowess grow since the earliest of Spring. Your love for Arda is unbounded. And
now your opportunity to save it is drawing to a close,” Melkor said, in an almost fatherly way that struck Eönwë as much too like Manwë for his comfort. “It’s not too late. Join us in saving Arda. Join us now, and you will be spared from a pain greater than any weapon can provide.”

Eönwë recoiled, and spat, “Never, Seducer! Release those you have enslaved to your madness or face your fate as a failure.”

It was then Melkor grew stern and ground his teeth together so that his next words came out as a growling threat. “Your King cannot command me, our Creator cannot, and neither shall you, sad young fool.”

Mairon need see nor hear no more. He disappeared from the prison to make his way into the enemy lines. No sooner did he step away did the boom of the battle of Melkor and Eönwë begin to ricochet across Almaren.

Magic struck magic more than weapon upon weapon as outpourings of their Music sought to subdue the other. Air crackled and earth heaved. Water hissed and fire burst. Eönwë shone with all the colours of the rainbow as one, such was Manwë’s white raiment, but Melkor shone with radiation beyond. No mortal eyes could have watched this battle and lived.

Two weapons of cosmic cores, crafted by Mairon, clashed and spewed spools of sorcery. But they would not touch. The weapons were brothers, and could not stand to harm each other. That did little to stop the clash of the Ainur themselves. Their forms unraveled in pieces to attack the other with pure power.

Eönwë could see now why Manwë so hesitated to send them to combat against each other. Their fight was destroying all their work upon Arda. Carefully carved mountains had fallen. The balance of the air’s elements was distraught. Water flailed and did not know which of its forms to take. None of Yavanna’s plants had survived their magic, and all her animals had fled, traumatized.

The blame could not be placed all on Melkor. This Eönwë knew. In his effort to stay intact against Melkor’s might, he could not help but whip up harsh winds and needling crystals, so tied to his emotions they were. And his emotions he could not control.

Overwhelmed against all the elements Melkor commanded, and his own growing desperation, Eönwë still proclaimed, “I fight against your evil!”

“Do you?” Melkor jeered, swiping with a hand clawed with blue fire for Eönwë’s hair and cape. “Or do you create it?”

Melkor’s Maiar hooted their agreement.

Eönwë evaded him, slippery as silk. He expected to soon be forced to the ground like the others, but instead Melkor deformed into a swarm of dark and iridescent beetles that took to the skies to meet him. And so they climbed, high up into the air turned roiling plasma.

As Eönwë beat his wings against the thinned air, he thought. Why had Melkor not subjugated him as he had the others? Why did he bother reasoning with him? The answer was obvious, and it made Eönwë sick. Melkor wanted him as he wanted Mairon. Or perhaps Mairon, his own friend, had convinced Melkor to do this. Either way, the cognitive dissonance made his head spin and he refused to resolve it.

He halted and allowed the swarm that was the Dark Vala to overtake him, surrounding him a bubble of a million glittering insects.
His mottled wings keeping Melkor’s mass at a distance, Eönwë hovered, and called out, “Is this how you convinced the others? Confusing and pointless questions?”

“Is this how you convince yourself?” Melkor said with a million hissing voices. “Your willful ignorance cannot last forever, Eönwë. The conflict is destroying you.”

It was. But Eönwë was nothing if not a martyr. A devil’s plaything, so that others would not have to be so. He’d give up his own sanity to do what he thought was right. Just as Mairon would.

“How is this what you did to him?” Eönwë nearly pleaded. “Wore him down with your logic? Presenting your entropy as inevitable? Your rule inescapable and therefore just?”

Melkor’s answer struck through him like only the truth could.

“No. It was how he convinced me.”

The desperation on Eönwë’s face morphed into anger.

“Tell me what you’ve done to him!” he demanded, launching himself towards the swarm in a steel whirlwind.

It was pointless. What was done to Mairon could not be undone. The swarm swallowed him and reformed into the body of the Dark Vala binding him and his wings, forcing them face to face. They plummeted, not in the passionate twirl that Mairon had embraced, but a meteoric blaze. When they hit what remained of the stone prison, it collapsed into a crater.

Gothmog, looked up at the intact Fëanturi’s cage covered in debris in annoyance. Still trapped. He shrugged. At least the conflict unfolding before him was entertaining.

Sword shining, Eönwë struck at Melkor with a ferocity unseen from him before. The still kneeling soldiers of Manwë trembled at the thought of facing such a flurry of blows. However, Melkor was unfazed and deflected them with Grond’s aura alone. When Eönwë was done, the sword stopped a good length before Melkor’s face, trapped in the gravity of Grond. The weapon crafted from Mairon’s joy was stronger than the one he’d made in duty.

“Tell me what you’ve done to him,” Eönwë repeated, full of a frustration that lit him like white starfire.

Behind the haft of the hammer, Melkor chuckled darkly.

A smile revealing his blocky teeth broke onto Melkor’s face, and he said, “What did I do? Well, I…”

Then with the might of his name and long-awaited satisfaction, Melkor delivered a kick to Eönwë’s stomach that sent him flying backwards, folded in half. As a platinum arrow he shot towards the cliffside behind the prison. The cliffside Eönwë hit crumbled on top of him.

Cheers arose from the Maiar of Melkor as they danced around the frozen soldiers still stuck kneeling on the ground. Some hopped on top of them and leaped about. Melkor joined in their laughter, feeling the comradery he’d so often been excluded from and then abstained from out of spite. How strange it was to have his actions applauded. By his Discord, he loved it.

But there was one more Maia he had to face.

At the peak of the crumbled cliff, a radiance emerged as powerful as the sunrise Arda had yet to see. Mairon’s firelight aura beamed at him like a spotlight, stopping his laughter. Caught in the fierce
beauty of Mairon before him, Melkor froze. For once in his spiteful stint upon Arda, Melkor was worried he’d gone too far.


In Melkor’s mind churned all Mairon could hate him for: the weaknesses he’d let no one else see, the shame that nearly drove him to destroy Mairon for seeing them, and his unwillingness to share his plans with him, even after all he’d supposedly forgiven him for. And now his failing indoctrination of Eönwë. The one thing Melkor knew Mairon wanted but he could not give.

For once in his time upon Arda, Melkor reflected upon himself. Had he judged Eönwë incorrectly and engineered his failed seduction out of jealousy? Had he ruined himself to a life without his eternal flame?

As he always had, Melkor prepared for the worst. Rejection.

For once in his time upon Arda, it did not come. What came was a whisper. A whisper hidden from all else across the shadow realm he’d shared with Mairon in their first encounters.

I want to come with you.

Mairon spoke to him in a soothing, wanton voice so unlike the wrathful sternness he was presenting, Melkor forgave his doubt of his lovely Lord of Lies.

Let me convince Eönwë, my Lord Melkor. Then you can pretend to take us captive, deep into your lair, where we will plan. We will return masked as escaped prisoners but be agents of destruction. We will dismantle this place from the inside out.

Melkor’s only answer was a caress across the void. Mairon answered it in kind, the longing straining across dimensions. Random rage found its order and together they made deterministic chaos, without which the world would not be the same. For better or worse.

I will follow you.

For Melkor, this was nothing less than a confession of love.

Just let me do this.

And in love he would relent.

Do what you must and know that I will always accept you when you return. My Precious.

With those words as liberation, Mairon knew his fate was sealed. That he could do with his will and his skill what he wanted without fear of being rejected was all he’d wanted, and so he was bound by what gave him his freedom. The irony of this thing called love fascinated Mairon and he couldn’t wait to explore it further.

Not wasting a moment more, Mairon commanded the rocks to move aside and so they did. They revealed a weakened but awake Eönwë that looked up at him in a sad shock. Mairon dropped to pull Eönwë into his lap, each motion like an apology for each blow in their previous battle at the trial. Melkor watched with interest, but he was mollified by Mairon’s promise. The Dark Lords worked in tandem now, demonstrated when Mairon lifted Eönwë’s head so he could hear Melkor’s final appeal to him.

“Eönwë. As well trained as I will admit you are, you will never be my match. Join us and spare
yourself and your soldiers from this pointless fight and their pointless service to a King who does not understand the realm he claims to command,” Melkor reasoned as he used gravity to press the kneeling Maiar further down, grinding their noses in the dirt.

As Melkor said this, Mairon stroked Eönwë’s hair, as if to subtly encourage him to agree. As rare this genuinely gentle and warm gesture from Mairon was, it was for naught. Eönwë was unmoved.

“No,” he said weakly with a cough, but the word was as strong as any blow. “I always knew I had no hope of defeating you, Dark One. My assigned mission was to stall your rampage.”

“To what end?” Melkor and Mairon asked together. Eerie as the void, their voices sounded as one to Eönwë.

A laugh rang. Its richness and vigor was almost enough to stir the ruined grass to stand again. All too familiar to Melkor, this laughter was. Eönwë’s boldness to challenge a Vala much more powerful than himself suddenly made sense. Tulkas was being awoken. If Eönwë was not cradled by Mairon at this moment, Melkor would have crushed him into dust and let him be reformed over a thousand years. Tulkas’ strength was so similar to his own they could have been fast allies, but the Vala was so turned against him by propaganda in place by the time he’d come to Arda, that path was long lost. They would fight to the bitter end.

However, with the weapon he and his lieutenant, his love, had created, Melkor was certain this re-match would go his way.

It was Eönwë he wondered if anyone could sway.

Yet Melkor was assured, once and for all, that his cause Mairon would not betray.

No matter the fray, together they would stay.

Chapter End Notes

They were drawn to each other from the beginning, but trust has been long coming. And with it comes revolution. Damn, this has been fun to write even if some moments I was looking forward to took me over a year to get to. It'll only get more fun!

This is only the first assault on Almaren. Melkor, Mairon, and their allies will retreat to plan their final blow - and ~insert metal music~ SMASH DOWN THE LIGHT

And just smash... you know?
Chapter Summary

Melkor fights Tulkas, holding nothing back. Mairon holds nothing back in convincing Eönnë, with different results.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When truth comes down like a hammer
All there is, is this
I have returned from thy kingdom come and all beyond that burned
I've come from an age immersed in a mighty force of mortal rage
…
I must try to flood this fire
To stop the pain and start to heal
To be the one you most admire
…
Now we have returned to thy kingdom come and all that's ours is learned
Now we come to an age where truth and love are drowning out the rage

(From Your Voice by Les Friction)

The ice split the skull of a soldier of Manwë but forgivingly, his conscious soul existed in other planes. Yet he was forced to watch himself and his battalion disintegrate into entropic matter as Melkor summoned more of his dark power. A black hole pulsed in place of his heart beat, irradiating all present to their core. Soon the Maia’s eyes could no longer sustain their function. The last he saw before Melkor faced Tulkas was a burst of cobalt fire.

Into the cosmos his first body fell for so briefly that the stars streaked across his vision. He awoke in another. The inside of the ivory tower of the Valar showed no signs of the strife he’d come from but glistened with an eternal newness, a perfection untouched by Melkor’s erosion.

Blinded the soldier was for a moment by the light of the Lamps sparkling on the garb of his King Manwë. It was an armourg of sorts, so glassy it was almost translucent, but he did not doubt it was stronger than steel. In this battle-attire, Manwë hovered above him, as if a healer and not a fighter. A gentle smile graced him.
The soldier said in voice proud but weak, “I will return to the battlefield at your command, my King.”

Manwë’s expression did not change, but his eyes became wet with tears. Like some thought only Nienna could, tears flowed from Manwë’s eyes and splashed the Maia. Somehow, the heavy tears hurt him more than Melkor’s magic. They pricked his newly formed skin like long needles.

“Is that what you wish?” Manwë asked, voice deep but broken. “Then answer me this, little one. Are you my friend or are you my weapon? Is that question a question? Because as King I know you are one and same in this sordid way…”

They breathed a shared breath, a wind of souls.

“…I’d hate to use you. As Eru hates to use me.”

~~~~~~~~~

The aftermath of Melkor’s explosion of energy was a wasteland of disordered matter. His ice simultaneously grew into columns and melted into steaming puddles, trapped at a triple point. It was a microcosm of the state he sought Arda to return to. What beauty there was in a blank slate! In the asymmetry and fractal fractures there were infinite possibilities that he and his Mairon would perfect over and over until Arda’s truest state was found. The thought of exploring such endless iterations exhilarated him.

“Hark! Where is the laughing loon?” Melkor called, causing Grond to start and spark. “Perhaps he has choked on his own spittle and spared us?”

His Maiar laughed, but a mere star blast could not stop Tulkas the Steadfast, the Strong. From a pile of rubble he burst forth as if it were a haystack. Looking as lion does, he shook the dust from his voluminous golden hair.

Tulkas declared, “Melkor, Befouled One! Prepare for another defeat at my hands!”

He pointed to Melkor with a thick finger before clenching his fists and releasing golden rays from between his knuckles. The light was ornamental. All of Tulkas’ power was contained in his sturdy physical form that he left barely clothed with a leather loin-cloth.

After the threads of light were done dispersing through his smoky aura, Melkor rolled his eyes and hefted Grond onto his shoulder. In a lazy swing, he ran the oversized warhammer through the empty husks of the kneeling soldiers’ bodies. What remained of them were shattered into crystals and picked up by a sudden wind.

“The longer you posture, the more I wreak havoc,” Melkor said with a sneer, black hair whipping across his hardened features. “But perhaps you don’t care for actually saving anyone or anything. Only your glory.”

Tulkas roared and leapt directly at Melkor, who blocked his slamming fists with the shaft of Grond. A hard clang rang about upon the broken court, and the Maiar scattered for fear of being caught between two Valar.

“Dismiss this weapon and your wheedling words and fight as a Vala should!” Tulkas demanded.

Melkor did not. He huffed his misbehaving hair from his mouth and growled, “Then prepare to have Grond dismissed straight up your ass.”
Tulkas’ mouth made an ‘o’ of surprise, but then his booming laugh of gold erupted, spraying sunshine. It was mud in Melkor’s ears.

“Still as depraved as ever, eh Melkor?” Tulkas japed.

Melkor’s eyes narrowed to dark slits and his grip on Grond became a vice. That word, that insult, depraved, had long since become a part of his identity, but still an insult it was. No longer was he beholden to disprove it, so instead he would embolden it. Every last Vala would regret ever calling him hyperbolic names, for he vowed to become them.

“Oh absolutely,” Melkor lavished. “But only you devise such strange rituals as this to touch my flesh.”

Tulkas’ face appeared to implode with fury.

This time it was Melkor who laughed, but theirs were as different as day and night. The peals that echoed were as baleful as Tulkas’ were joyful. With each laugh his chest shook, broad and deep with muscles that matched Tulkas, but containing an unnatural strength that was gathering like a storm. Veins of oil manifested and wove over his body, webbing the grey with iridescent black. In shadow and smoulder Melkor’s outline expanded amorphously, becoming an inverted mountain of might and monstrosity.

Above Tulkas, snarling teeth snapped on a scaled snout where smoke streamed over horns unhallowed. More terrifying than the ugliness was the beauty of that face, dark and different, but alluring in its contradictions all the same. Black eyes with blacker sclera blinked down at him with an awful, acerbic affection. The nightmare vision did indeed put Grond down, but in its place were claws, or tentacles, or ferrofluid. It was whatever it settled on in any moment, whatever Tulkas’ mind could rationalize before it changed again. The Dark Vala had warped into something Tulkas could only comprehend as a demon. His righteous rage melted away into a horror that did not suit his bright face, but left it lined and ashen.

“I can see why you have never shown this form before.” Tulkas took a step back from him enemy. “One look in a mirror and you’d run away all over again,” he joked, but thinly so.

The monster spoke with Melkor’s voice multiplied by a million.

“Hussssh, child Vala. No more. This round, it is not I who is afraid of me. It is you.”

It was true.

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In the distance, a dark tension tightened in the observers, but in one it did not bring dread. Mairon marveled at his might, Melkor’s shade a blight in his golden eyes. He wanted to watch him fight in that form for an age more and fantasized about holding him after his victory, exploring him in every form. Since the beginning, such dreams were all that ever managed to distract him from his ambition, and madly so. Still, there was one last goal, a remnant of his time in Almaren, that he held onto.

Mairon’s arms were looped under his oldest friend’s Eönwë’s, dragging him through the broken land. Maiar were not supposed to feel pain, but there was something about the damage Melkor caused that brought his enemies closer to a mortal state. His legs and wings were shattered by the force of Melkor’s last blow. Despite his sympathy for Eönwë’s injury, Mairon hoped Melkor had shattered Eönwë’s resistance to him as well.

“Don’t bother,” Eönwë wheezed up at him, white hair clinging to his forehead and lips. His blood
was a bright silver that dripped from his scalp. “Manwë will see that I get a new body anyways.”

“Why not give yourself a new body?” Mairon asked astutely.

“I can’t. I shouldn’t. I…” he burbled, silver droplets falling from his bronze lips.

“Not true. Let me help you,” Mairon tried to soothe, but his clipped words were showing his frustration.

Why didn’t Eönwë see his way was easier, better? More efficient, more creative, more free?! He was usually so intelligent, his Eönwë. Doubting his friend’s state of mind, Mairon settled Eönwë on a patch of upturned grass still wet with dew. The tree upon it had been turned upside-down so that its roots gave them shade instead of its leaves.

Eönwë coughed a strange laugh and said, “Don’t fuss over me, Mairon. You know I don’t like it when you fuss.”

“Sometimes you just have to let me fuss,” Mairon shot back. “You know this.”

“I know.”

A question fell out of Mairon’s mouth frictioned by fear.

“What else do you know?”

Eönwë winced.

He said, “You. I know you.”

His eyes held the truth of it all. Blue as the sky they blazed and soft as feathers they quivered. Mairon’s brow, normally pressed near his eyes in concentration, rose slow with realization. His lips parted briefly, but he closed them. He turned his head towards where Melkor fought in a growing cloud of debris for a moment before returned his gaze to Eönwë. The question he asked with this was do you know of me and him?

After a moment of crystalline silence, Eönwë nodded with a careful smile like the one Manwë so often wore, but his was tinged with a worry. Mairon matched that worry.

“Let me fix you, and then we can talk,” he insisted, his words a stone in the howling wind.

Eönwë was too drained to protest so he let Mairon press their foreheads together. Mairon spiraled deep into Eönwë’s spirit and found it as strong as ever, being everlasting, but its shape had seemingly changed since he’d last looked into it. As if it were a freshly grown hedge maze, he found navigating it more difficult than he’d anticipated. He pushed harder. Eönwë groaned and arched his back in discomfort.

“Yield, Eönwë,” Mairon whispered harshly.

Unbeknownst to Mairon, his tone was unlike the one he’d always used with his friend, but the one that he grown used to using to manipulate others. Too long among subordinates and jealous enemies he’d been. Eönwë noticed the difference and instinctively resisted. This escalated Mairon’s frustration until it burst into sparks and flames.

“Let me help you!” Mairon screamed, cradling Eönwë’s head in clawed hands full of heat.

Cinders swirled around them, blazing sorcerer scripts in the wind.
“For once, let it be, MAiron…” Eönwë sighed, nearly at his last breath. “Let me leave and return to Manwë…”

But MAiron would have his way.

The cinders stopped their dancing and hung suspended and straining. A single blink of MAiron’s wildfire eyes sent them driving deep into Eönwë. His broken body was set ablaze with a fire that focused from red flame into rays of white light. With force, MAiron pulled the plans of Eönwë’s physical from his own spirit’s memory and forged them to reality. Matter twisted around them and was channelled into Eönwë through geometric guides of light.

Herald of Manwë, the angelic Eönwë, was woven clean from dirt. His handsome features were remade as precisely as any Vala could. Still, MAiron cursed creation for he lacked the Eru-given energy source of a Vala. The process left him exhausted, but the energy of the Maia’s blood he’d absorbed in the prison helped compensate some. An alarming discovery, but one he would remember for another emergency. Setting aside all technical observations, MAiron looked back into Eönwë’s eyes. Their renewed vigor told MAiron he was still there, astonished at MAiron’s accomplishment to the point of petrification, but there.

Breathing heavily, MAiron said with satisfaction, “Now do you see? Come with me, Eönwë. Even if you do not wish to seal your joining right away, just come and see us. See what we really are, and what we can do for Arda.”

“What… what can we do?” Eönwë asked, clear-voiced but filled with tentative awe.

One hand pressed to his back and the other grasping his, MAiron helped him upright. The flames that licked his chest were gone now that his frustration had waned. Relief washed over Eönwë, but he wished it hadn’t been so. He didn’t want to be afraid of MAiron, but some part of him was. His hand held MAiron’s delicately to avoid being burned by his passion that was building up like magma.

A wave to the ground beneath them sent MAiron’s sparks skittering into a vision of his plan. Images of industry spread around them. The natural world was remade in gears and pipes, with organic life relegated to distinct uses and districts. There was both austerity and accomplishment in measured amounts. The landscape had plainness in practicality where necessary for efficiency but had beauty in its intricacy and shows of grandeur. Art showed the glory of the Ainur unapologetically. The Children lived in neat, numbered towers and filtered down towards factories where magnificent machines were made.

The imagination of MAiron reached heights Eönwë had never before seen. Hair raised in red-glowing ripples, he was gripped in a fever that sent waves of heat, heady and enveloping, over them. There was type of pleasure in it that had Eönwë weak in the knees despite them being recently renewed. Remembering his vows to Manwë and to Ilmarë, he resisted the impulse to fall into MAiron’s smith-toned arms and fall for MAiron’s majesty, which was rapidly becoming madness to him.

In the vision, they reached the sky on metal wings, and then the stars with colossal columns of fire. Rare minerals made even more machinations possible, until life became them in metal mockery of Eru’s design. Technology pushed them back to the cosmos of birth beyond Arda, becoming unbound to it and Eru, erasing the structures of class so familiar to them, and reaching an immortality unconditional.

When MAiron’s trembling body unclenched and the embers scattered, all Eönwë could see was the Dark Vala viciously fighting the Golden Vala in a desert of their own creation. MAiron and his open-mouthed smile stepped into his vision. A jewel-like eye had opened upon his brow, terrible, unblinking and forever dilating.
Eönwë covered his own mouth with his hands and said hushed into them, “Is this the true terror of Melkor laid before me?”

“No! Melkor is more than terror.” Mairon maintained, wrapping himself around Eönwë’s shoulders as if he were his wings. “He is more than chaos. More than destruction. That I have learned and I want to share that knowledge with you, Eönwë. With you I first learned of friendship, fondness, love. He taught me that depth those feelings can run and the joy that is the fulfillment of their expression. All together, we will share the freedom of true love.”

Reverently, he traced down Eönwë’s arm and brought his hand up to leave a lingering kiss and his warm breath on the top of Eönwë’s fingers.

His hopeful smile drained when he saw Eönwë’s face. The expressions were nothing like he had imagined. Confusion? Fear? Pity? No!

“Oh Mairon, you speak from your heart. You did do me a service, but not a kindness. I begged to be let go, and you refused as if you had the authority of a Vala. But like your fantasy, it is an illusion,” Eönwë said, his voice was nearing a falsetto in its unease.

Illusion? The disappointment coiled, crushing Mairon’s breath away.

Slipping away from Mairon’s touch, Eönwë walked off the grass into the wreckage. Mairon trailed him, barraged by his distancing words.

“The sanctity of my role set by my Vala, our King, is important to me. It is me. As it is you, yes?”

Sanctity? The iron roots of disenchantment cooled into a cage.

“It feels wrong to mock Manwë’s love, and the love meant for spouses, even with my dearest friend… Don’t you agree?” Eönwë practically begged.

Agree? For the first time in his life, Mairon understood the purpose of cold. He was ice.

“You’re right Eönwë, my dear friend,” he answered, barely hearing himself speak. “Deepest apologies for being immature.”

Eönwë smiled, closed lips, closed eyes. “Don’t apologize. Come with me where Melkor cannot hurt you anymore with fantastical falsehoods. The danger and this dalliance have come to a close and you can come home.” Eönwë reassured him. “You’re free.”

I am, Mairon thought but did not say. His confidante’s honesty was silenced by a loss of trust.

Both Maiar wondered, amidst ruins and ice and fire and death, what had become of their once closest friend. Their wings unfolded, side by side, but their hearts were not so. Up they cast themselves into the dust of Almaren. The clouds and the silence were thick and dark.

Sight was nearly impossible on any wavelength, but Eönwë knew the way to the ivory tower by heart. Remembering the fate of Curumo, Mairon knew he would never reach it. A kick into Eönwë’s back sent him tumbling. Regret and a sick, childish satisfaction rolled through Mairon. The instant Eönwë was out of sight, he fled.

He flew to the darkest quadrant of Almaren in the mountain shade, and with his seething countenance made it darker. He had no thoughts but an indescribable emotion that he loosed upon the barren stone faces of the far Northern shore. The ground below him responded with shrieks of vapour, as if in pain from his massage. A sickly red glow grew from the cracks, and with a final
surge, molten rock erupted all around him. It ran over his body as he burst into his primal flaming form. The lava hissed as it hit the water and shrouded the shore in acrid clouds.

What a turbulent set of emotions it was to reveal what one has wanted all along and then have it dashed away in the same heartbeat. It was freedom, but only as much as being naked and vulnerable without a rock left to stand on left in the world is being free. He was as naked as he had been when he came to Arda, existing as a collection of glowing coals and gold rivulets with a core of the purest fire. There he stood with the structures of himself he could never detonate, his hatred oscillating between self and state.

Chapter End Notes

If you need something lighthearted after that, please see [THIS VIDEO](#) for a full visual-audio of Mairon's breakdown.

Sorry, Mairon.

I don't really want to go full early 2000's fanfic-dot-net and have author dialogue with the characters, but I would like you to imagine that Mairon is currently choking me while crying lava tears. And not in a sexy way.

At least Melkor is having the time of his life. For once.
To Suffice

Chapter Summary

Melkor finishes off Tulkas in the cruelest way he could think of so that he can find Mairon and soothe his pain.

Chapter Notes

Warning/Spoiler: (but not for main pairing, don't worry) manipulated consent for romantic affection through impersonation

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I will never be hijacked by the fairytale
We can always just fuck away our sorrows
Mouth to mouth we thrive
We've got everything we need to survive
And the magic light that appears to shine
Is not the light of benevolent design
No maker made me
(From No Maker Made Me by IAMX)

A halo, distorted, hummed with hunger. Ringed with brilliant sheets of light, it bowed and broke to adorn its master as a thin set of horns. Its black core sang unfathomable depths of the darkest Song. The Discord.

Such was the crown of Melkor comprehended by Tulkas. All he could see between stray strands of his blowing blond hair was this abomination that both overshadowed and oversaturated the substantial body it adorned. The mutated body of Melkor. The more Tulkas stared, the more it felt like the hole was growing inside him. His breath choked, his hands shook, and his mind raced with an emotion new and terrible.

The dark voice of Melkor burned and burbled as if from the tar pit inside him.

“I have gifted you with fear, child. Rejoice.”

Wit frozen not by Melkor’s physical ice but by this now named fiend called fear, Tulkas made no mouthed response. Instead he raised rugged hands to knead long locks between his knuckles into
knots. The flowers of his wedding crown that he wore while he slept fell to the ground and turned to grey. This would become a rare sign of Tulkas’ distress in the future. Still, he did not scream nor collapse. Bravery came to him more than most.

He was also a fool. As much a fool as Melkor was in his own youth. With the sudden gusto of an overwhelmed victim coming across a single, feeble solution, Tulkas began to wrap his hair around his eyes to make a blindfold from the mess of clumps.

He declared, “If I must fight you blind to be rid of this enchantment, I shall.”

Soft laughter rumbled and echoed off of space itself. It was undeniably condescending.

“The deepest fear comes not from sight. The only way to master it is to forever be mine.”

Swinging wild fists at the voice that felt like it was all around him, Tulkas shouted, “You must think me a fool! I will never join your choir!”

More laughter refracted into an overlapping overture of musical mocking. In a flash it focused into deadly anger.

“I will never ask you to.”

Lightning struck. It came not from the air, but from the cracks in the shifting earth below. The ground Tulkas stood on lurched as thunder rolled, hitting him with a nausea half magical from smells of rot and an incessant copper twang. The earth gaped open, splitting Melkor’s legs obscenely wide. His smile matched his stance, broad and shining black with oil. The Maiar howled in a Song so vile it made the air wavering. Blessed by his buffoonery, Tulkas could not see the abhorrent scene. Unfortunate for him, he could still feel its malice.

Tulkas stumbled once, thinking he had righted himself, but the ground completely crumbled beneath his feet. All tumbled into the smoking crevice. Tulkas’ body was smashed about upside-down by the rocks as Melkor’s hollering Maiar mocked him with their graceful fall from grace. They spun about as Melkor himself drifted down right side up, more in control in the chaos than he had ever been in the order of the Valar’s council.

Momentarily, Melkor’s expression of wicked pleasure broke. Something seized deep underground, like a stutter in the heart of the Earth. Not from him, but from another. The connection pulled on Melkor’s heart, deeper than dirt it was.

Mairon, his thoughts surged forth. Pain.

Suddenly, this play at revenge didn’t appeal to him as much as finding Mairon and righting his spirit. He wanted him, not this petty shit like personally torturing Tulkas for an eternity. In an ideal world he would do both and all and so much more, but time was linear here as he once painfully learned. And Arda was not eternal he also learned from his lonesome wanderings. Like many of the Children still to come, he’d need to choose.

They struck bedrock. Between streams of lava Melkor’s Maiar danced and tossed stones at Tulkas as he rose to his two feet again, face still covered.

Ignoring the jeers of the Maiar, Tulkas shouted about, “Melkor! Fight me honourably! One on one! Vala against Vala!”

“You and your peers have made it clear that I can never be honourable,” Melkor said with a
light smile, sarcastic. “So why try?”

“Because I give you no choice!”

Tulkas slammed his fists together with the might of a Vala. Melkor’s Maiar were blasted away into the pits of lava as Melkor’s hair simply whipped about in the concussive force. Swift as a river, Tulkas came at the source of Melkor’s voice, blind but battle-ready.

Distracted by how the lava keened for him like a lost lover, Melkor blocked Tulkas’ strikes at first, but soon the bulky Vala was inside his range and preparing to grapple him, pummel him. In this pre-draconic form Melkor would win in a physical fight, but he had a faster solution that wouldn’t require his Maiar. One that would give hurt new meaning.

From Tulkas the punches came. Undercuts and hooks so powerful mountains would crumble from a glancing blow hit Melkor. Elbows and knees struck as fast as the lightning flashing around them. Wet cracks of a breaking body were heard as much as thunder. Despite being blinded, Tulkas could feel and find Melkor’s body by its rampant radiation and sheer size.

But soon even Tulkas was disgusted by the violence. There was no resistance, no sport. He grunted in frustration and pushed harder, hoping to spur his partner into sparring, but instead the body he’d so easily felt and found shrunk away. His jabs met nothing but air. And his breath met nothing but silence.

One sound could be heard then. The sound of a woman crying.

“Tulkas, how could you hurt me so?” came a voice so dear.

Tulkas panicked. Without a thought but the wordless pit in his stomach, he pulled away his self-made blindfold. What he saw was his wife, Nessa, painted in bruises and blood. She was crying as he had never seen her do so before.

“Melkor has fooled you!” she sobbed, burbling blood from her split lip.

He fell to his knees.

“No, no, how could I have been fooled so? My love!”

He crawled towards her and outstretched his arms in a comforting cradle. She fell into them and formed a cage around his torso with her lithe limbs. He could barely bring himself to touch her, for that would mean touching his bruises.

“He is gone for the moment, as are his minions,” she murmured into his skin, nuzzling her nose on his young beard that was just barely past stubble.

He struggled to say, “How? How is this happeni…”

“Manwë has finally come!” she exclaimed in exaltation.

Tulkas looked to the sky, but Nessa dragged his face back to hers.

“Will you destroy him? Humiliate him?” she begged with fervor.

“Yes! Again and again!” he proclaimed.

Tulkas turned to kiss her and she grabbed his face, scratching at his cheeks. This Nessa kissed him so hard their teeth clacked together. Unaffected, Tulkas pressed into the desperate kiss. He closed his
eyes, blinding himself once more.

Slowly and with each wet release of their lips, his relief was stolen. Her torn dress became half-broken armour. Her hair became sweat-tangled instead of silken strands. Her weight grew in his lap, becoming hard muscle instead of soft skin. Their kiss ended but Tulkas could not bring himself to open his eyes.

“What’s the matter, love?” came Nessa’s high and lilting voice again.

Tulkas opened his eyes. Tulkas screamed.

The haloed horns with the core of black were closer than any being, mortal or immortal could endure. And Tulkas had passed the event horizon. His strength was sapped by shock and by hurt and by dark magic all together as one. It would return as it did for all Ainur, but for now Melkor enjoyed holding down Tulkas and staring unblinking upon the well of emotion that was Tulkas face. The disgusted despair was richer than any feast. No broken bones, just a broken spirit. Melkor picked the limp Tulkas up from beneath him, much unlike a lover and tossed him aside. He’d taken all he wanted.

“Villain! Cur! Bastard! Coward, Coward!” Tulkas called after him, as he was dragged into the lava by Melkor’s giddy Maiar.

This time Melkor knew the last part was not true. He fled to find his better.

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Hidden by stone, hidden by shadow, hidden by smoke, immolation occurred by each of Mairon’s erratic outbursts. Fraught he was over each moment in the past he could done something different, something better. Sparks flew brilliant but unguided because he too, magnificent as he was in his power, was trapped by time. He spun swathed in fire, his fine body danced stiff and fitful, a clock chronicling nothing.

From within the floating ash and noxious gas, a bat flitted by. Her wings were small, but they were appearing to clear the air with each swoop. Uquesse it was, his once unappreciated gift, but she was different, spiked along her spine. Perhaps her time in Melkor’s lair had mutated her? Mairon watched with half-clouded eyes, vacant until he realized what her presence meant. Still he spiraled in his disturbing dance of fire.

“Why do you always appear in my moments of greatest catastrophe?” Mairon lamented, his voice hoarse to the point where it was unrecognizable from its usual deep melodious self. It was rough, monstrous.

A voice of the same ilk answered, “Because they are moments of your greatest power. Because I am called to you in them.”

Rising up through the molten lake, Melkor appeared before Mairon. The last of the smoke streaming in tendrils clung to his broad body. He pushed through them, revealing chipped armour that haphazardly covered his sweat and soot covered muscles. Mairon stood still.

“Because I choose to care,” Melkor finished.

Mairon huffed and looked away from him, lest Melkor’s post-battle beauty ruin this foul mood he needed to release.

“Your jests are beyond me, Master,” Mairon said with a sneer. “I am torn open of my own doing, as
you knew I would be. A mess unsuited to be your lieutenant.”

With a clawed but hesitant hand, Melkor reached out to hold Mairon’s shoulder. In self-fury, Mairon shrank away, stepping with light feet upon liquefied iron. Melkor pursued, freezing the lava as he did.

“Mairon, I have always told you that you are stronger without your attachments to this place. It will be as painful for you as it was for me, but listen to me. Give up on them before you learn to hate yourself.”

A moment of silence wrapped them. Lava gurgled and popped before either spoke again.

“It’s too late,” Mairon whispered, only loud enough for Eru himself to hear.

When there was no answer, he let himself loose.

“It’s too late!” he screamed at Melkor.

His eyes echoed the hollow firelight he held inside. Before his hair was merely dishevelled, but now it took on a magic of its own, floating and twisting into vivid strands and globules of molten brass. Melkor’s face withheld him with an expression that was at first unrecognizable on his un-gentle face. It was awe, threatening to be overtaken by an even less familiar emotion to him, compassion. A tinge of sadness barely made it into the lines of his brow, but it was there. Blackened eyes shining, he shook his head.

“You don’t,” Melkor insisted, as quietly as his great voice allowed him.

“And yet I do,” Mairon spat and sent molten drops spraying from his hair. “I am a paradox of a Maia. I am a cacophony. I see the in love and ravish in rage. I would knot my heart for a better blood gauge.”

In a roar the ground around them burst, surrounding them in a ring of molten metal. It cooled and crashed around them, and more fountained forth carrying deep gems. Within the glittering shower, Mairon stood in a raw and broken beauty. His tears of stone pushed themselves shrieking into the ocean and formed new land.

“Listen to me, my Master, my King! It is as unbelievable to me as it is to you. That he, Eönwë, herald of our hateful false-king, cannot see my world, myself, as I do. And that is not the perfection I…” Mairon choked. “That is not the perfection I promised.”

The iron tears ceased and rocks crashed around them, full of embedded diamonds. The fire of Mairon’s spirit faded and left him as a beautiful long-haired man in wretched garb and in pain. The lava field cooled into an alien landscape.

Mairon said so quietly, “And so, I hate him, even though I do not want to.” Quieter. “Did I ever love him?” A bare whisper. “Can I love?”

Melkor’s baneful regalia too faded, leaving just him. He was almost human looking with his sad frown and unkempt armour. He reached down and picked up a diamond studded rock, thinking of the right words for the feelings he’d felt once too.

“Love?” Melkor questioned with humour. “Hate?” He tossed the rock from hand to hand. “Such words are made dull by Manwë’s many sermons. Extremes applied over and over as an anti-thesis to my sibling’s steady nature. As if he and his council’s un-change makes them suited to rule a perfect forever, when forever and perfection do not exist. Ha! The last fact being mostly my fault.” He
shrugged. “Blame me for that if you want.”

Mairon did not, but dipped his head down and wryly admitted, “What purpose would I have if Arda was already perfect?”

With a sigh, Melkor teased, “You’re a strange Maia, Mairon the Admirable. You feel that true pain of existence as well as I do. That we must work to be better, and that work will never end. That work is change.”

Melkor crushed the kimberlite and producing a fistful of gems.

Through limp strands of copper-gold hair, Mairon murmured, “Yes. I hate it as much as I love it.”

Mairon allowed Melkor to come close, who took his handful of gems and brushed them across Mairon’s face.

“Until you, my Mairon, I thought I was alone in my changing extremes, my so-called monstrosity.” Melkor said with the warmest smile that ever gracing his face, in spite of his pointed teeth. “No more. Together, we can both love and hate Arda. Love and hate ourselves. Love and hate the blessed pain of change.”

Despite the abrasiveness, Mairon turned his face towards Melkor’s almost-touch, hoping to catch the tips of Melkor’s fingers on his jaw. “But what of my failure with Eönwë?” he asked tensely, his lips a breath away from Melkor’s fingers.

Melkor placed his other hand on Mairon’s back and caressed his thumb down his spine. “I do not ask perfection of you, my Precious. I only ask that you change with me, as Arda changes with us.”

His relief a wave, Mairon closed his eyes and settled his cheek into Melkor’s palm with a secret smile. “Yes,” he said, the velvet back in his voice. “I will. But for now, can you take this damn pointless pain from me? Even for just a while?”

It was a sardonic challenge Mairon never though would be answered. But it was.

“There is nothing I would take from you. Especially your delightful paradoxes,” Melkor said with a soft chuckle that Mairon joined as he straightened himself. “But what I can do is give. I have little patience and even less modesty. But for what little there is, you may have it all. For you, I will fall.”

The light of the diamonds in Melkor’s grey palm was exceptional but it could not compare to the crown of white fire that flared on Mairon as he spoke.

“Then fall.”

Quick as a meteor Melkor dropped to his knees, arms spread as if before an immaculate scene.

Mairon felt like he stood toe-edged to a cliff as he leaned towards Melkor. In a moment that would remain clear and pure in his memory for the ages to come, Mairon pressed his lips to Melkor’s forehead. The Dark Lord of Arda let his eyes close. Bliss and arrogance in equal measures were upon his face as he received his gift.

Currents of static passed between them along with their electrifying emotions. Pulled close to each other in a magnetic embrace, they opened their spirits. The physical world slipped away and all that was left was the essence of them. More than the sum of their parts it was. Their plan unfolded like a corpse flower, all the industry, all the innovation, all the never-ending destruction and reconstruction rappelling the depths of morality, pushing the definition of living and ascending all to slavery and
When they resurfaced from their inner world Melkor had wrapped his arms around Mairon’s tapered waist which always tempted him so, and Mairon’s palms were flat on Melkor’s back feeling the muscles he’d wanted to for so long. Their foreheads touched but they ached to be even closer. Tilting their chins, they brought their lips together. Slowly and with reverence, they kissed.

At the first touch of their tongues, Melkor moaned so deep in his chest that Mairon felt it through his body. Mairon softly sighed into Melkor’s mouth. He could feel Melkor’s lips curve into a smile, and it only made the pleasure grow ever more. Soon, each could feel the other begin to shake with their restraint. Their greed overgrew their dignity, and they began grabbing at each other and gasping for breath.

They wound around each other and made the elements around them into landscape of fractal geometry that was dynamic, ever-wondrous, terrifying in its language. Bursts like fireworks with each press of their lips brought back their godly raiment. Their desires dragged the shadow world into black aurora around them. For all the enchantment that surrounded them, Mairon was sure Melkor’s hand squeezing the spot just above his hips was the highest form of magic. Very little could ever make Mairon forget his thoughts and his plots, but this basely but bright piece of affection did. For a blessed moment his world was the bodily warmth of someone he shared himself with.

When their kiss broke, Melkor gave a satisfied sigh and the Light of the Lamps themselves appeared to dim for a magical moment. How Arda responded to their connection brought Mairon the slight satisfaction that would push them through to victory. His deeper satisfaction sat in the red blush of his face. Tiny freckles Melkor had never noticed before danced on the inflamed cheeks and nose of his love. There was so much more to do, but for now they stood chest to chest, ready for anything.

As it was, a great wave rose. The waterline retreated out and up, threatening to overtake them. But it stopped, suspended. The froth formed a face long and bearded with seaweed for hair. A Vala had finally come for them. It was not the one they’d expected, and not for the reason they expected either. Although not always directly involved in the present struggle, Ulmo was aware of Melkor’s return and had come to grumble at the new land formed without a permit at such an inopportune time. He’d been inspecting the results of Mairon’s eruption with his Maia Ossë, but was now transfixed on the couple embracing on the beach.

Easily, Ulmo could have surprised them, rendered their powers inert, and brought them before the other Valar in prisons of water. Mairon pressed himself to Melkor, but he kept his face towards Ulmo and his teeth bared in an expression so fierce that steam emanated from him. Silently Mairon and Melkor derided Ulmo for not attacking while they were distracted, and prepared an attack of their own.

However, the opportunity of their vulnerability was wasting away and Ulmo did not attack. Splashes spoke a warning against violence but inquisitively, carefully, and with one bushy eyebrow raised, he watched them with eyes the colour of sunlight through the ocean. On the wave’s crest perched Ossë who was looking at them with shock, and strangely, a bit of delight. Despite all their differences driving their distrust, the couples saw something in each other that they saw in themselves.

The Lord of the Waters and his partner said nothing, did nothing, but slip down into the sea. It was perhaps the only mercy from Ulmo Melkor and Mairon would ever receive.
Melkor gets some fun in with his shapeshifting powers, before he is wholly lost to the physical realm later in Arda's history. After that, it's Mairon's job to impersonate people's wives! Haha haaaa.... oh no.

As for the physical realm, Mairon gets the real-life kiss he'd been hoping for. Thuringwethil was right, kissing Lords do exist (and kissing Ladies too ;])! He is satisfied. For now. 'Cause Mairon is never satisfied with anything for long.

At this point we are just going to have to assume that Nessa is morosexual… Tulkas: comes home to his wife crying, “I kissed Melkor ‘cause I thought he was you!” Nessa: *already taking off her clothes* “Oh Eru Tulkas you are so fucking stupid…”

Ulmo cannot accept the presence of crimes in his realm, but Gay Crimes? You get a one time pass. But don't tell nobody 'bout that.

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