

Snakes and Lovehearts

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/15885795) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/15885795>.

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Rating: | Mature |
| Archive Warning: | No Archive Warnings Apply |
| Category: | Gen , M/M , Other |
| Fandom: | The Silmarillion and other histories of Middle-Earth - J. R. R. Tolkien TOLKIEN J. R. R. - Works & Related Fandoms |
| Relationship: | Eönwë/Sauron Mairon , Morgoth Bauglir Melkor/Sauron Mairon , Fingon Findekáno/Maedhros Maitimo , Daeron/Maglor Makalaurë , Daeron/Lúthien Tinúviel (Past) , Maedhros Maitimo & Maglor Makalaurë |
| Character: | Eönwë (Tolkien) , Sauron Mairon , Maedhros Maitimo , Fingon Findekáno , Maglor Makalaurë , Daeron (Tolkien) , Manwë Súlimo , Elbereth Gilthoniel Varda Elentári |
| Additional Tags: | Alternate Universe - Modern Setting , Crimes & Criminals , Implied/Referenced Drug Use , Alternate Universe - Police , Drama , Family Drama , Family Fluff , Drama & Romance , Alternate Universe - Law Enforcement , Friends With Benefits , Implied/Referenced Cheating , Medical Trauma , Russington , daemags , angbang , Past Child Abuse , Established Relationship , Developing Relationship , Angst and Hurt/Comfort , Hurt/Comfort , Fluff and Angst , Recreational Drug Use |
| Language: | English |
| Series: | Part 1 of Lovehearts |
| Stats: | Published: 2018-09-03 Completed: 2019-02-01 Words: 40,633 Chapters: 24/24 |

Snakes and Lovehearts

by [elvntari](#)

Summary

A tale of love and betrayal and frankly ridiculous amounts of law-breaking and general questionable activities which include (but aren't limited to): investigating the criminal gang that your ex-boyfriend now seems to help head, shameless flirting with your own step-cousin, making out with coworkers in the back rooms of your work place, and the terrible decision to liken a crime drama to a game of Snakes and Ladders.

The non-coffee shop themed rewrite of Six Shots of Espresso and a Packet of Lovehearts, now with 100% more Riverdale-scale self-indulgent drama. Featuring:

- Eonwe, a cop with a bone to pick and a lot of pretentious prose to spout.
- Sauron, a criminal with a penchant for mind games and bad romantic decisions.
- Fingon, a university dropout just trying to keep his lifeguarding career afloat.
- Maedhros, an exhausted lawyer hiding his growing anxiety problem behind false smiles and firm handshakes.
- Maglor, a musician with a title to defend.
- Daeron, a foreign vocalist with a dark past.

Notes

A big thank you to ravenditefairylights and mischianza for being such wonderful beta readers! They both have some really amazing fic, that I cannot recommend enough - go check them out!

Chapter 1

- Eönwë -

There's a story in this, I think--standing out here in a night so dark I feel as if the sky is a pool of black ink, any light from the stars hidden beneath the cloud cover. It's late--well past midnight--and I'm here in an empty street, hiding in the even deeper dark of the shadows cast by trees from the local park hanging over the fence that keeps them from truly capturing the street. Of course, there must be a story.

Where does it start? I guess it starts wherever I want it to; with the first time we met; the first kiss, date, time--maybe it starts with betrayal. Maybe it starts with the first moment I realised something was off--something wasn't right because *he doesn't act like this*. Maybe it starts with guilt--or some, twisted version of it where the only victim is myself and it's also my own fault--because I liked it, almost. If I could pinpoint the exact beginning of this, maybe I'd be able to find a way to at least take the edge off it, tackle it at the root. But some things are set in stone. There's no going back.

It's so dark, and the rustling of the leaves behind me has me on edge. I'd've worn headphones, but I need to have all of my senses to my advantage. Except sight, apparently -- but I can't flip my torch on, not when it would so easily give everything away.

My parents didn't want me to do this job: *Eönwë, it's dangerous, unskilled work--you have so much more potential than that, Eönwë*. And then, of course, *he* didn't want me to do this job: *you're going to join the pigs? Really?* With a raised brow and a look of disgust--or maybe it was disdain--painted across his perfect face. I thought it was just one of his things, at the time--something he'd mature out of, but then he ran off with a criminal, so I suppose that explains it.

The signs were there from the beginning and only now, in glorious hindsight, do I see them; like the tail of the viper caught in the torchlight as it slithers away into the brush, leaving you alone with two clean puncture marks and your regrets.

I wanted to do this to help people. Now I do this because I want to hurt him back.

Or maybe I want to get hurt--like my father mused one evening when it was just the two of us, and he caught me crying at my desk. He was never good at comforting crying children, but he tried then, told me he could see the warning signs as he stroked my hair.

My warning signs.

My warning signs.

I asked him if I worried him.

Only most of the time, he said.

If I had to hazard a guess, I'd say right now I'm populating the area of *most of the time*, out so late like this. My breath forms gentle clouds of vapour in front of me. My hands shake; I should've worn gloves. It's too late to go back and get any now, though--no, that window of opportunity has long passed.

If I didn't know any better, I'd have referred to this case as some sort of *organised crime*, but the patterns--well, there aren't any patterns. The first month one of their guys gets caught in a gang

fight, the next there's a robbery attributed to them, then the third they're dealing fake drugs in alleyways behind public buildings. They call it *venom*, and I have a hunch I know the exact snake that it came from--he always was good at chemistry.

Oh, what a truly divine double agent, with those bright eyes and that sly smile. Tells me not to train to become a detective then, when I do it anyway, uses me to his own cruel end. Maybe there was some psychological trick to keep me complacent--I'd quote *Romeo and Juliet* at him and he'd quote *Othello* back at me. He was priming me, and now I'm bearing Hamlet's fatal flaw--whether that's taking justice into my own hand, or hesitating to enact it is anyone's guess. But I suppose I'm a fool either way, because I miss the warmth of his lips against mine, the taste to his tongue--the *everything*.

But I don't miss *him*.

So, I wait, leaning back against the chain link fence, trying not to make eye contact with the dark, empty field that lies next to the abandoned hair salon. I could swear I saw a flash of light between the boarded windows just a minute ago. What do I expect to find? Do I expect some concealed suite of black velvet with gentle curtains of red silk and gauze, candlelit and dim, so that the flecks of blood on that lie on the walls and floor aren't *too* obvious?

The flashes of light are bright white, though, so logically it's simply the skeleton of a building, a blue plastic crate like the one we found round back of the old sandwich shop. It probably stinks of chemicals and that cologne he always wears.

I could get closer, listen for voices, but I'm fairly sure that sound will travel in this street; I heard a woman hissing a curse three storefronts down. Besides, if I get closer they might see me. I don't want them to see me. I don't want *him* to see me. Moreover, I don't need to bust them now--all I need is more information for their file. We've tried to nab them three times already--we need our case to be airtight. Oh, how he would hate knowing that he's on a file, and what information is already stored within it--he likes to think of himself as *careful*. His hubris has led him to believe that he'll never be caught--never face any kind of consequences. His hubris is a liar, but what about him isn't?

A sharp ringing cuts through the silence, and I swear I hear some noise I wasn't even aware of cease to listen. *Shit. Shit, shit, shit*; I forgot to silence my phone. I turn on my heel so that no one could see my face if they were to peek out, and slip it out of my jacket pocket.

"Hello?"

"Eönwë, dear, it's two am. Where are you?" Mother's voice is quiet and rough, but I can still hear the edge of fear in it. She's probably been waiting up to hear from me.

"Out, sorry."

"*Out? Out where? It's two am.*"

"For a walk?" I wince.

She sighs. "We both know that's not true, darling."

"Look," I lower my voice, "I found some place promising--it looks abandoned, but I can tell there's some shady business--"

"Just come home."

“Right--yep, doing that.” I hang up. There’s no use in arguing with her.

It takes me a good minute of scrambling with my frozen fingertips and my phone to find out which buses I need to hop on to get home, and another minute to realise that the reason there’s a twenty-minute wait time for all of the buses is because it’s *two am*. It’s alright, though, it’s only a forty-minute brisk walk home in the dark. What could go wrong?

I silently curse the acute class-divide that plagues this city, leaving me lost on the wrong side of the center to try and make my own way through the maze of skyscrapers until I reach the rich townhouses embedded between, like carved pearls in a necklace of dark steel. It’s not a walk that I’m afraid of--after all, I used to walk it with him, and he’d tease me every time I flinched at sudden movement, or froze when I caught the reflection of light in the corner of my eye-- *us poor folk don’t bite. Usually, at least*. Even back then did he know what he had planned? Where he would end up? Where I would? Every memory becomes evidence to be dissected and run through with a fine-tooth comb, looking for clues.

Yet I’d still trade everything to walk here with his hand in mine again.

I try to slip in quietly--I made sure to bring my keys with me for that exact reason, but it turns out that a pair of gloves would indeed have been the better choice: both of my dear parents have stayed up to wait for me. I can see my mother, with her feet up on the sofa, leafing through an old copy of *Vogue* --if I had to place a bet, it’s the one she was interviewed for back when she was young and a model with an astronomy degree, full of potential. They asked her why she was swapping such a glamorous lifestyle to have a baby. She wilfully misinterpreted the question: *well, as a scientist, my hours are flexible*.

She’d always planned to have it all, but now the only telescope in our house is several decades old and covered in dust. She used to say that she blinked and suddenly she was forty-seven, then she’d add that she wouldn’t change it for the world. But she would, I know she would--she’d trade this life over, and over again to have all that promise back.

Maybe I feel guilty, because she had to make do with sitting me out in the back garden and trying to teach me the constellations through the light-pollution.

“Nice of you to finally show up.” My father is tired.

“Sorry.”

“Where were you?” He watches me with narrowed eyes as I heave my coat off.

“Just--just down by the--yeah.”

He shakes his head. He knows what I mean. “You’ve got to stop going back there--don’t give me that look--it’s a *habit*, and it’s one you really ought to break.”

“I don’t go there much,” I mumble.

“You find some way to link every case back there--”

“This one is actually linked, look--I have the file and--”

“The file that *you* made,” mother interjects from the living room, without looking up.

“That doesn’t mean anything--it’s my job!”

“If you say so.” She gets up. “Anyway, now that you’re home safe, I’m going to bed.”

“Are you not more concerned with the fact that he has the file on hand if he needs it?” My father was always such a nitpicker.

“Goodnight!” Mother calls from the bottom of the stairs.

He shakes his head at me, which is fine, I guess, I never expected him to get it. They both think it’s because I’m still upset over the breakup, but the truth is it’s because I *know* him, and I *know* that he’s involved, and how he thinks, and why he would see fit to take his business back to the same place that we met. This has his name written all over it. Quite literally, too, because as soon as I’m in the privacy of my room, I slip the battered manila folder out of it’s draw. In the upper right hand corner, in neat black print that reads simply: *Mairon Kuznetsov*. Then, below it, in my own messy scrawl, the names that listening to the chatter on the streets gave us.

Gorthaur.

Sauron.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Fingon reconnects with an old friend via a lawsuit. Eonwe does some investigating.

Chapter Notes

Every time I write Eonwe, I look at what I've written and I ask myself: have I made this as pretentious and "high cultured" as I possibly can? And if the answer is no, I rewrite it.

- Fingon -

There's a woman talking to me -- something about... what was it, again? I tune back into her voice -- something about the gates, and the dates -- actually, those sound similar, I think she only mentioned one of those and, well, we don't *have* any real gates.

The front desk isn't really at the front at all: it's got its back to the huge floor-to-ceiling windows, and it faces the glass sliding doors, which sit below their own set of giant windows. If you squint hard enough, you can make out the birds in the bird's nest in the ring of trees that encircle the centre through them. If you sit there long enough on a sunny day, you begin to overheat from the intensity of it. It's so bloody hot. I reach to take my shirt off -- *wait, there's a woman standing in front of me. She looks mad.*

"I'm sorry, could you repeat that?" I tap the lobe of my ear, hoping she'll (wrongly) interpret that as meaning that I'm hard of hearing, and not just awful at listening to people.

"My membership hasn't been renewed."

"Right," I try to contain my relief -- I can paint this as not my problem, "I'm sorry; I'm not responsible for finance, so if you could speak to my colleague over there --" I wave a *Blue Seas Leisure Center* (stupid name, really -- we're nowhere near the sea) branded pen in Molly's direction -- "she should sort you out."

The woman huffs, but does as I say. Okay, *technically*, I'm Molly's superior, so *technically*, I'm at least a little responsible for that, but I can barely count, and Molly's the kind of person that would rather do things right herself the first time than have to go through and correct someone else's mistakes. And honestly? I'd rather just sit here and keep watching the birds. The architects really did a good job on those windows, but they did an even better job choosing to use misted glass on the ones overlooking the pool, because if *birds* can draw my attention, imagine what a pool full of people can do.

It's still too hot in here, though. I reach for the back of my shirt -- *wait*. I've been here before. No stripping at the reception desk.

I bite my lip. *That lawyer should've been here ten minutes ago*. I'm only waiting at the front desk so they can find me easily.

I can just about make out the rough figures of the elderly swimming class through the glass, Uinen standing at the poolside, a group of heads bobbing in the pool beneath her. And there's Ossë, of course (when are they ever separated?) slipping through the door at the side.

My gaze drifts up to the clock above. *Ah*. I was misreading it. It's not ten minutes since the lawyer should've shown up; it's ten minutes *until* they show up.

Then the view of the clock is blocked by Ossë looming above me in full lifeguard get-up (which isn't very full at all).

"Fingon!"

"Oh, hi."

"You -- you didn't hear me the last two times?" The woman from earlier is staring at me.

"I did not."

"Are you free this weekend?"

"Are you asking me out?" I grin. He punches me in the shoulder. Gently, of course.

"The police need someone to interview, and I don't want to do it for, uh, reasons."

I sigh -- I'd almost forgotten about that *other* problem. And of course Ossë wouldn't want to hang around the police, not when he's a notorious stoner. We used to get high and makeout in our dorm, back when he was a physiology student and I was training to be a doctor.

"Fine," I take a deep breath, mourning the loss of my Saturday, "I'll do it."

"Thank you so much." He gives me a lazy wave as he jogs back over to the changing rooms, and just as he slips through the door, the sliding front doors open, and a smart young man in a suit steps through. He's young for a lawyer -- and I'm pretty sure that's what he is, because no one ever comes to a leisure center dressed like that. He has a light tan and neatly styled copper curls. And his face -- his face is something else entirely, like out of a magazine, but also strangely familiar. I feel the corners of my mouth twitch.

"Maedhros?" I chance when he gets within earshot.

"You remember me?"

"Of course." I stand up. I wonder -- should I shake his hand? Is that too formal?

This is the guy I used to sit on the beach of the lido and make sandcastles with; who would dress up with me in his grandmother's old clothes; who'd I'd follow around at those huge fancy parties because he said he didn't like to look like the only people he had to talk to were his brothers. Who I haven't spoken to since I was sixteen.

I shake his hand, then nod at the people around us. "Maybe we should go somewhere private."

We move to sit in a side room and talk legal, but talking legal takes a surprisingly short amount of time, and I get distracted trying to guess what all those big professional words mean anyway. I try to remember the last time I saw him as an adult -- probably at one of those parties, all dressed up in rust and gold. Probably let his parents pick out what he wore because his teenage self never saw the value in all that 'frivolity'.

I would approach him, and we'd talk about our parents and how stupid big parties like that were. He told me about how his brothers would probably be looking for him, and how none of them were really allowed to slink off unsupervised into the crowd like that.

I asked him why, and he shrugged.

"Fingon?"

"Hm?"

"You still with me?"

"Yes! Sorry!" I sit up in my chair.

"Basically this is extremely clear-cut: there was no misconduct on the part of the centre and --"

"Are you free after this?" I ask.

"I'm sorry?"

"Wait -- no -- I didn't mean that as in *are you free after this?* I meant it just, generally, are you --"

He cuts me off with a laugh. "I have some paperwork to catch up on, but after that? Sure."

"Sweet!"

"It's been a while, hasn't it?" He smiles a little and a little wearily. Can't be an easy job, he has. Actually, now that I'm noticing it, he looks really tired; dark under eye circles, dull skin, the way he squints a little in the light. Somehow he *still* wears it well. Stupidly well.

I wonder if that almost-kiss we shared back at that party was real, or just another case of my wishful thinking bleeding into my memories. It must've been real, though, right? I can still remember how I could almost taste his lips -- isn't that too detailed to be fake? Is that too detailed to be *real*? I'm not even sure if that moment is something to be ashamed of or not -- maybe it's easier on my dignity if it is a fabrication.

"So I'll see you back here in a bit?" I ask.

"Sure."

It's too hot in here, but this time I manage to keep my hands away from my shirt.

Training at the leisure centre is always an experience. It always seems like something happens -- not necessarily goes wrong -- but definitely *happens*. This time it seems serious. Some official business, by the look of the guy bobbing his head in goodbye to the assistant manager, but if I look closely enough at their body language, neither of them look tense at all.

I don't really consider the assistant manager a *friend*, but I do know his name, and I can list at least three of his family members from memory -- he really likes to talk, and to talk about his family, which is usually sweet enough to make me smile. But, God, does he like to *talk*. Father used to ramble on about making connections over dinner, and how I should talk to everyone I meet, but all I ever got from that was an affirmation that making friends was a good thing -- except I don't tend to make them in high places, like he intended. Mairon once told me I was too nice to people -- that I was naive, which was probably another warning sign, looking back.

Mairon, I call him, but I know full well that calling him those unflattering nicknames would piss him off, and doesn't he deserve to be at least a little pissed off?

Sauron never seemed to see any sort of optimism as a virtue -- only ever a weakness. I hate that he ended up being right.

Fingon catches my eye and waves. I might as well ask him what's going on.

"Someone slipped." He sighs as his eyes follow the man in the suit leaving. "You how we have all these signs telling people not to run on wet tiles? Apparently that's not enough, and we're being sued."

"The centre is being sued?" I ask.

"Seems like it. Luckily, my cousin --" he freezes, frowning, "well, that's not right -- he's more my *friend* -- I mean -- we aren't actually related, except by marriage."

I hold up a hand. He always gets distracted so easily. "You were saying?"

"He's a lawyer," he says avoiding my eyes. *Friends*. From the way he says it, I suspect there's a little more to it than that. There's a pointed silence for a moment, as if there are words trapped behind the wall of his teeth that he isn't too sure he wants to let out. He turns to me anyway, meeting my blue eyes with his turquoise -- both of us are strange like that, with light eyes against dark skin or, well, dark enough skin that it could hide the darkness under our eyes, but not so much to conceal the contours of any imperfections. Maybe I trust him because he feels familiar. Another fallacy for which Sauron would've chastised me. My father probably would, too. I smile at the thought that they actually used to get on.

"And some of your guys came around earlier."

"What for?"

"Someone left some 'suspicious packages' lying around." He shrugged. "They're pretty sure it isn't one of us, but apparently we're all persons of interest until further notice."

"I'm *certain* it isn't one of you."

"Hm?"

"I think I have a lead on that already -- just need to figure out how it links back to here, or *why*."

"Well --" he pats me on the shoulder -- "good luck with that. Hope you catch 'em."

“Thanks,” I say, as he turns on his heel and heads for the pool door, yawning. I recall that I’ve never seen him here this early. There must’ve been some reason for him to show up (probably had to do with his *friend*).

There’s some hint of a memory tugging at the back of my mind, telling me that that isn’t all I can learn from this place -- some malformed hunch.

As I leave, I circle the building, just to see, and one of the guys inside catches my eye and, despite the frosting over the glass, I can feel his eyes upon me. I scan through all of the names of the people I know, trying to find one that clicks into place, and one that clicks into place *here* . I come up blank on that front, but I *do* recall Sauron having a friend that frequented the leisure center.

Would it be inappropriate to slip back inside and ask about him? Almost certainly, but from the way I can tell he’s sizing me up, I don’t think I’ll have to.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Cut to that same day -- Maglor has just finished a performance and is home for the afternoon. Maedhros and Fingon are the kind of idiots who decide to hang, but don't plan where they're going. There is an obvious solution.

Chapter Notes

Thanks again to ravenditefairylights and mischianza for being such wonderful beta readers -- please go and check out some of their work (it's all top-tier, I promise.)

This chapter may seem like a change of pace, but it's the final shot of pre-story exposition, so please bear with!

- Maglor -

Sweet notes cut through the heavy air like a freshly sharpened knife, glimmering in the afternoon sun, through a sheet of silk. I can feel it in the bones of my hips, the curve of my shoulder-blades, the pounding of my heart -- I've always wanted to set something to that rhythm. Some song about life. Or sustenance. Or, perhaps, if I'm feeling conventional, love.

Violin and acoustic guitar -- with me on vocals -- it's a strange combination, but it's a beautiful composition. Not to mention one I couldn't wait to show off. I think it was clear. I felt it myself in my own sharp gasp, the way I drummed my fingers against my thigh, how I bit my lips. It burns through my veins from top to bottom, and it doesn't stop until I do.

The silence as the final notes ring out around the theatre is torturous. I want to lean back toward the mic, to say something, ease the emptiness, but experience taught me that you have to give the sound time to resonate. Eventually an audience member begins to clap, then the rest, and then I take my bow to the closest I can get to thunderous applause in an establishment as small as this.

"Thank you!" I call out, voice slightly hoarse from the strain. My range still isn't as good as it could be -- if we were looking for range we'd have Daeron sing -- but there's a fullness there that suits places like this so well. I sense him take his bow next to me, and our eyes meet as he straightens out. I focus in on the flecks of amber and brown amongst the green. *Like moss against a fallen tree*, I once told him, when I was feeling particularly poetic. Or drunk. One of the two. Was that the night I first kissed him, pressing him back against the bare brick wall of the backroom of the club? I don't quite recall. His lips tasted like amaretto and sugar. I was tripping on absinthe.

As we turn to leave the stage I leave a whisper in his ear: "Just wait until we're alone." I catch the twitch at the corner of his lips.

- Maedhros -

“Maglor?” He picks up fast enough, but doesn’t say anything.

“Sorry,” he sounds breathless, “I just got home.” Ah, of course.

“Is it alright if I come over to check on you?”

“I’m twenty-two, Maedhros, I’ve long since left the helplessness of childhood behind.”

“Mags, we both know that’s a lie.”

He sighs, “fine -- sure, just for a bit.” I picture him as he usually talks; gesturing, one hand scrunched into his mop of curls, winding his fingers around them.

“Also, I’m bringing Fingon.” I look over to where he stands, leaning back against the faux-metal plating of the leisure centre wall, watching the clouds.

“Do you want me dead?” He snorts, then, after a pause, “just give me thirty minutes to shower. I have to look presentable, after all.”

“Since when did you care about being presentable?”

“Since you mentioned that you’re bringing our estranged step-cousin to see me, for whatever reason -- actually, speaking of that...”

“We’re reconnecting.”

“Should I raise my eyebrows, or is that inappropriate?”

“A little bit.”

“Got it.” He hangs up, and I turn to Fingon, who seems to have gotten bored of cloud watching, and is now scrolling through his phone. He looks up.

“So?”

“Apparently we aren’t allowed to show up for thirty minutes.”

He nods, then hesitates. “Why Maglor?”

“I just think it would be nice to reconnect, it was always the three of us -- the three eldest -- after all.” There I am using that word again: *reconnect*. Like it’s the word of the day, and my teacher will give me a shiny, gold achievement point if I use it enough in the right context. I can’t blame my high school for trying, but law school did a much better job of expanding my vocabulary than they ever did.

Fingon grins. “Well, we’ve got thirty minutes to kill; how about we buy some snacks and make a thing of this?”

“Sounds like a plan.”

Fingon sits neatly in between the two of us; a year younger than me, and a year older than Maglor - we were born in a rapid succession of three which, at the time, seemed perfectly reasonable, but in hindsight, my parents were *young*. I can't image having two kids by the time I'm twenty, and *definitely* can't imagine planning a third.

We walk into the nearest Tesco express while he babbles on about nothing in particular and I occasionally contribute an anecdote or two about that one time Celegorm tried to capture a fox, or Curufin's first experience with nuclear physics in the form of sneaking into dad's lab when he was five and pushing all the buttons he wasn't supposed to. If dad wasn't his own boss, he would've been fired.

The more I think about it, the less it makes sense for Maglor to be showering after the show. He's never so energetic that he would break a sweat, and thirty minutes is way longer than he takes in the shower anyway -- back home it was always ten minutes *maximum* unless if he was washing his hair, and hair wash day is Saturday, not Tuesday.

"He's hiding something," I murmur, before I realise I'm thinking out loud.

Fingon gently places the pack of Oreos he was holding back on the shelf, "Maedhros, why are you accusing the Custard Creams of lying to you?" He grins at me. I feel my cheeks grow hot. He peers over my shoulder, "actually, that 'zero sugar' label is pretty suspicious."

I elbow him.

He's quiet for a moment, then, because I forgot that one of his defining traits was, as Maglor would call it, 'jest', asks, "has it been thirty minutes yet? I'm tired of interrogating the biscuit aisle."

Maglor opens the door in a baggy shirt (worn inside-out) and a pair of camo cargo shorts clearly stolen from Celegorm. His apartment is a mess: the sofa is strewn with sheet music, the new rug is still rolled up and rested against the wall, there are assorted items of clothing strewn about the space. He steps aside to let us in.

"Sorry about the sofa, the floor isn't too uncomfortable though, if you wanna sit down." He gently lowers himself to the ground, as if to prove the point, leaning back against the armrest. "I really wasn't expecting to have guests today, but what do you know?"

Fingon sits across from him, leaning against the wall. "You look so different."

Maglor shrugs. "It's been a while."

I, like always, because I *know* my brother, head straight for the kitchen, separated from the rest of the flat by a single half-wall. The kitchen, too, is pretty barebones; a sink, an oven and fridge, with a small countertop, half of which is filled by the secondhand microwave that sits on it, balancing over the edge, threatening to fall into the waste bin below.

I open the fridge door: it's empty except for a bottle of ketchup and a half-eaten chinese take-away. Then the fridge: also empty, but this time the exception is a bag of ice cubes (I can't believe he buys bagged ice cubes). Then there are the four cupboards, two attached to the wall and two under the counter, all also empty, save the one that houses the alcohol (a few bottles of wine,

Kopparbergs, some brand of what seems to be whisky, and an empty bottle of absinthe), and the cupboard of canned food. Most of it is stuff that should go with meals, but there's some canned tomato soup right at the back.

"Maglor?" I ask, and I hear the gentle background lull of his conversation with Fingon die down.

"Yes?"

"Have you been eating? Like, at all?"

He laughs. "Delivery food." He nods at his phone, lying face down on the coffee table (he has a coffee table and no kitchen knives-- I don't understand his priorities.)

"New question."

"Mhm?"

"How are you alive?"

He bursts out laughing, or rather, cackling, and I sigh. "I'll heat up the soup."

It doesn't take long to make three bowls, and we sit on the living room floor in a triangle as we eat, each with a glass of red because Maglor said he would be a bad host if he didn't at least offer. He seems to sink further back into the armrest with each sip, reacting to it as the sleeping elixir it is, but he keeps shifting in his seat -- or, well, his patch on the floor.

"I'm so uncomfortable, I'm sorry," He sits himself up straight. "Is it okay if I take off my binder?"

"I don't mind," says Fingon. I nod. He puts his empty bowl down on the ground and heads off into the bedroom.

"It's dark out now," I say.

"I guess you'll have to be a gentleman and walk me home." Fingon grins at me.

"I suppose I shall." I smile back at him. "Do you want a kiss goodbye, as well?"

If I didn't know better, I'd think he flushed slightly at that. I wonder if he forgot how nearly we kissed back then, and all the flirting that lead up to it. He takes a second to respond. I fucked up. This wouldn't make sense if he doesn't remember. This is probably far too inappropriate --

"Maybe you should buy me dinner, and we'll talk."

"I just made dinner!" I laugh, hoping that it hides the waver in my voice. Truthfully, I just wanted to see if this is still on the table and, if it is? *Well* .

He starts, but then Maglor clears his throat from the doorway. He's all raised eyebrows and mum's 'really?' face. I take another sip of my wine. He shakes his head at me, before turning his attention to Fingon.

"How's Fingolfin? Haven't seen him in ages," he asks.

"He's fine. Should be getting back from -- *shit* ." Fingon freezes.

"What?" I ask.

“I was meant to go and meet him at the airport. *Shit*. I have to go, I’m so sorry.” He grabs his things and bids us goodbye. We listen in silence as his footsteps fade away into the night. I try to avoid making eye contact with my younger brother. It doesn’t help.

“Maedhros, in the most crass way possible: are you fucking kidding me right now? I could not think of a *worse* person to flirt with.”

“It was just joking, Maggie.”

He walks over and kicks me in the thigh. “Don’t let dad find out -- if you do do anything, I mean.”

“I won’t,” I say, and I mean it, because to do anything with Fingon would be like *Romeo and Juliet*, but ten times gayer, and with pseudo-incest because granddad *had* to marry the grandmother of the childhood best friend I’d always had a bit of a thing for. Dad doesn’t see the nuance of the situation at all, only the fact that one day his mother was gone and there was someone else in her place. “It won’t too far, I promise.”

“Swear.” Maglor sits back down across from me, pouring out more wine. This must be, what, his third glass? Sometimes I forget he isn’t as much of a lightweight as me.

“I swear.” But superstition has me crossing my fingers behind my back.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Eonwe takes it upon himself, yet again, to investigate the case he's looking into without backup. Meanwhile the infamous Sauron takes it upon himself, yet again, to cause some mischief.

Chapter Notes

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

- Eönwë -

Not as dark as last time I was out doing this, but I can feel the impending night like a jet blue tidal wave about to bleed into the cool pinks and oranges of the sunset.

Sure enough, the guy from the leisure centre met me outside (I'd had enough practice of reading criminals by that point to know that waiting around in the car park was the right call). I didn't ask for his name, and he didn't give it to me. He told me exactly what I'd expected to hear: they're keeping the stuff hidden in abandoned buildings that are about to be sold on- that way it's less suspicious. *This week it's the old hair salon, next week the petrol station and, beyond that, I don't know.* Then he added: *He'll kill me if he knows I told you any of this .*

Then why are you telling me? I asked.

Because he needs someone to stop him before he hurts himself.

So here I am again, but the area around the building feels different, like there's now nothing where there once was something: an absence. There are no lights inside the abandoned hairdresser. No hints of a sound heard faint upon the breeze (amplified by the narrowness of the streets).

Instead, there's a figure wearing a dark hoodie low enough to cover their eyes, standing in front of the door, and staring at me. As I cross the street to greet them, I recognise that signature scent of roses and musk- of course I would; wasn't that cologne a gift from myself? It was everything I thought he was: feminine yet masculine- a contradiction kept concealed in layers of bone, and flesh, and skin that I could never stop obsessing over.

"They call you Sauron, now," I chance, and the figure tightens.

"Don't call me that."

"Why not?"

"I don't like it."

I can't help but laugh a little. "Cruel nickname a bit too much for a hardened criminal like yourself?" But I finish before he can stop me: "I don't owe you shit."

He pulls the hood away from his face, so I can see his smirk clearly- full lips spread thin as he eyes me up like some tasty morsel he's preparing to snack on. "Not at all."

I bite back a gentle gasp- because he's still as gorgeous as ever with his long, cool blond hair; his amber eyes (such a strange colour); and the perfect contours of his high cheekbones and straight nose. You'd think *he* was the son of a model. God, he's just as breathtaking as when I first met him, except now his skin his brighter, his lips are fuller, and the stress lines that had been beginning to form around his brows are gone entirely- but the bags under his eyes are darker and heavier than they ever were before. No doubt as soon as this next sale is made, he'll find some way to cosmetically correct that, too.

Except I don't think he's here on his way to make a sale. His hands are empty, and he's clearly not trying to hide from me and, by extension, the law. He's playing innocent and he's doing it perfectly- I can't arrest him, and there would be no clear enough evidence anyway. Of course, there's no way he doesn't know that.

Then what is he doing here? Could this be a --

"This isn't a trap, by the way," he says, voice softened just enough that I know he's telling the truth, because that's his 'sincere' voice. Though, after everything, I wonder how sincere the voice he used to tell me he loved me in can really be- "but I didn't come here to meet you at all."

"Then why?"

"I'm saying goodbye to this place -- I've been working around here since -- well -- since I left you." He doesn't care how his words sting. "Suppose I've always been sentimental."

"That's a lie."

"Is it?"

Is it?

- *Sauron* -

I'll get him to chase me through the streets before this shit is over -- what a complete, lovestruck fool. He's my loyal little puppy dog, even when he claims to want me dead. Maybe I'd feel worse about it if I wasn't having so much more fun now that I've left his prissy and posh little uptown family of Oxbridge graduates and stay-at-home mothers.

"Anyway, now that we've had such a good talk -- I should be going. I have prior arrangements."

"Prior arrangements?" He scrunches up his face as he asks- he's cute, I'll give him that. Far too cute for me to take seriously, of course.

"Let's call it a 'date' of sorts."

"I hope you enjoy yourself," he says, but he doesn't turn away. I know he won't turn away until he's got what he wants from this. Hopefully what he wants from me will be enough to override his typical British 'politeness' and tail me. All I have to do is lead him far enough astray, then lose him. It shouldn't be hard.

"Will you be my chaperone?" I watch him squirm. He knows I'm toying with him -- god, he loves

it. He always did; always loved being my own personal plaything.

He *really* shouldn't have trusted me.

Sometimes I ask myself why I did it- excitement was my first guess. An older man with dark hair and piercing eyes rolls up to you while you're waiting on a street corner for a guy that's twenty minutes late, says to you: *you're Eönwë's boyfriend, right?*

Right.

Then, with a grin: *you could do so much better.*

Maybe it's the fact that it was a challenge, and I love to prove people wrong.

Then I wondered if it was because I was mad at him that evening for making me wait -- so why not sleep with his uncle, just to screw with him a little. Unequal retribution, I know, but anger isn't distributed out in equal parts, or this world would be a hell of a lot fairer. How was I supposed to know I'd fall in love with the bastard?

Or did I?

Sometimes I can't tell the difference between my obsessions with people, and genuine love. Back when I was dating this sweet little copper, I was expected to actually work on that, but working on things is hard, and I much prefer the thrill of not knowing.

Or maybe I didn't have a reason. Maybe I did it because it was easy, and I'm impulsive, and I wondered how heartbreak would look on Eönwë's face. Maybe I wanted to know if it would even be there.

Oh boy, it's there.

He doesn't realise it, but it's in the crack of his voice when he speaks, the way he's always frowning at least a little bit when he's talking to me, how he looks at me, with wide, dark eyes begging for reason why. His eyes were always so easy to get lost in.

"Sure, I'll chaperone you."

The way he looks at me -- he's working through it-- trying to figure out which part of this is part of my game. It's all part of my game -- it's all, always part of my game. Well, almost always, because when I offer him my hand to take and he (inevitably) ignores me, I don't expect to feel hurt.

"You're a sick bastard, I hope you know that," he sighs, but he walks beside me anyway.

"I don't --"

"No, I mean- you're like a literal evil asshole. What's wrong with you?"

"I'm perfectly fine, thank you." I try to keep the edge from my voice. It's been so long since we last talked -- now he's so callous. He was never this callous before.

This should be fine -- I expected this. I did it anyway. I deserve it.

So many things I deserve -- none of them good. Like some fucked-up self-harm where I get exactly what I want both in the form of a life of luxury and to be completely shunned by the only man that ever showed me any sort of compassion. Like being hurt without actually being hurt -- because I'm a pussy.

We travel in silence for the most part after that, standing quiet and together waiting for a complicated series of trains. Back then, I would've rested my head against his shoulder, and he'd have put his arm around me, because I knew he hated being so far underground, and I knew how he hated feeling afraid; I'd do it to turn his anxiety outward: *hey, protect me*. While he was playing protector, he didn't have room to be scared.

He's nervous now- I can tell from the way he clenches his fists. I catch myself almost reaching out to him instinctively.

Whoops.

He doesn't say another word until we're above ground (always too nervous to speak).

"Please tell me you aren't really involved." Ah! He wants me to be the perfect and pure first love that never made any sin other than to wreck his heart, so that he can pine over me well into oblivion. No such luck for him. Every part of my existence has been permeated with crime, ever since I began sleeping with Melkor and he told me that *you have ideas, Mairon, scarily good ones*. And the way he purred my name would make the hairs on my body prick up. Our pillow talk was always of the utmost practicality.

"Even if I was, I wouldn't tell you," I smile with narrow eyes, "and you wouldn't do anything about it, anyway, would you?"

"I could do something." Like the brave, yet naïve protagonist, he balls his fists -- all I need to do now is tempt him into losing his edge.

"Oh?"

- Eönwë -

"I already know where you're moving your operation." I pull it like a trump card, but he grins as he turns back to face me, which is how I know that I fucked up -- let something slip that I shouldn't have, did something that he wanted me to do.

"You really think Ossë was telling you the truth? How naïve," he coos. "What is it that you want from me? To follow instructions from him -- you never trusted him."

Ossë. There's the name I was missing.

I wonder why I didn't take him in for questioning. I wonder why I came back here on his tip. I wonder why I'm *still* standing here- why I haven't arrested him yet, when he's right there in front of me, as guilty as he ever needed to be. Really all I'm missing is, "a confession."

"Alright then," he says, and he takes three steps towards me.

"What?" I ask, but the power in my voice is only half there, because he's so painfully close that I can almost count his eyelashes.

Then he steps even closer, and his lips are almost touching my ear as he speaks: "I confess."

Then when I look around, all I can see is the crowd of commuters leaving the station.

That slippery bastard.

Chapter End Notes

I probably won't be able to keep updating as often as I have, sorry! I just started back at school and my schedule is packed, but I am still working to keep this fic going!

Please leave comments and kudos if you enjoyed this chapter, I'm gonna need 'em :')

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Fingolfin is injured. Ish. Aredhel is sober. Ish. Fingon is having one hell of an evening.

- Fingon -

Change of plan. Change of plan, change of plan, change of plan.

I don't know what I expected to play out -- one stressful bus ride later and still ten minutes from the hospital because for some reason I misread the timetable and took the only bus that doesn't go right up to the door, because I wasn't paying attention to my phone screen, because the messages blowing up at the top of it were so much more important -- it was as if the screen itself was a hazy mess of colours and other languages.

There's a chill in the air. I should've brought a spare shirt.

My phone's buzzing -- it's Maedhros --

God, what if they don't even let me in? Yes, I *am* his son, but mum tends to be a little loose on the details when she's worried about something, meaning that all she sent me was "your dad's in the hospital" with absolutely no explanation. To be fair, I'm the same.

My phone stops buzzing -- Maedhros -- whoops.

I should've warned him that I'm a bad replier -- that if he wants to get hold of me he's going to have to try a damn lot harder --

My phone's buzzing again -- Maedhros? Maedhros --

"Hi -- sorry I'm breathless, I'm running right now --"

"I just heard what happened -- I wanted to check if everything was okay."

"I don't know! I don't know if it's okay!"

"Has no one told you what's going on?"

"I know he's in hospital- "

"Shit -- ah --"

"Do you know what happened? Is it serious?"

"I saw on the news and, well, he's not going to be in intensive care, if that's what you're asking? But I couldn't make out anything beyond that -- "

I realise I've stopped walking to talk to him -- "I'm going to have to call you back."

"Right! Right, don't worry about it!" He hangs up first.

I get back to moving.

I meet Aredhel in the car park, and she runs up to greet me. She doesn't say anything. I don't say anything back -- we exist in a mutual state of not saying anything and understanding.

Hopefully. *Hopefully* understanding.

Turns out neither of us have any idea where we're going. Turns out neither of us bothered to check. Neither of us want to bother mum.

Thankfully Ari has the sense to spam Turgon with twelve question marks in quick succession, so we get the details we need fast enough. They don't stop us from going to visit. (Why did I think they'd stop us?) They point us in the right direction -- the hospital cafe. All that's wrong is shock, apparently. Still, they have enough sense to warn us not to run.

We almost run anyway. Turgon walks back to meet us --

"You both took ages," he calls down from one end of the corridor.

"Nice of you to say hi," I call back. He shakes his head. "I got on the wrong bus, by the way."

"And what about Aredhel?"

"I was busy!" She punches him in the arm a little less than softly.

"Busy? Are you kidding?"

"It doesn't matter --" I interject, because after all, aren't I technically the eldest and most responsible for keeping them in check? I have never been able to keep them in check in my life.

Turgon huffs again, then leads us the rest of the way to the "cafe" (not the ICU, just as Maedhros promised). It's really not so much of a cafe, as an especially depressing school canteen. Mum and dad are sitting at one of the round tables -- those ones made of that material that looks like toothpaste with green and blue crumbs in it -- with cups of coffee -- although it's probably tea in mum's case, because she always used to complain that caffeine made her shaky and uncomfortable, even if it did help her get shit done. Ten years later and I'm exactly the same.

Dad's arm is in a sling.

"Dad?"

He smiles, he looks slightly out of it, but he waves with his good arm.

I'm not used to hospitals- the last time I was here was because I broke two fingers gesturing too hard and flailing my hand against the side of the lifeguard's chair at work, and I had to spend a good three hours in A&E waiting for someone to set them all back in place. It looks like they sorted dad out a lot faster -- maybe it's because they recognised him.

"Hiya, son."

I take a seat and Aredhel pulls a chair up next to me. "What happened?"

“Oh lord, please don’t tell me you’re going to interrogate me as well, Ari.”

“Interrogate?” I ask.

“Because it was an *attack*,” Mum interjects, making a face that suggested she clearly didn’t believe what she was saying, “the police had to come around to ask a few questions --”

“I wasn’t allowed any painkillers until they did- I’m pretty sure that violates the Hippocratic oath somehow, right, dear?”

“I’m a food critic, honey, do I look like I’d know?”

He laughs. Then he turns to Ari, “it was a road collision. Barely anything serious, hit in the back by another car and swerved into a lamppost.” He lifts up the arm in the sling a little for us to see: “dislocated my elbow, but that’s all.”

“Oh.”

“I’ll be fine.” Dad ruffles my hair gently.

“I think they’re making too much of a fuss about it -- just because the other car drove away --”

“Your father and I are firmly convinced it was an accident.”

“Seeing the worst in people only leads to fighting.” Dad nods, and I can tell by the way he looks at me that he’s talking about Feanor.

Maedhros, why am I thinking about *Maedhros* again?

We’re back outside in the car park in the rain watching Turgon get in his car and drive off. How did he manage to get a car before me? Aredhel turns to me.

“I need to tell you something.”

“Oh, God -- are you pregnant?”

“No -- what?”

“You said you needed to tell me something!”

“I shouldn’t have sounded so grave,” she says, “I just -- you know how we haven’t seen any of our step-family in roughly ten years?”

“Okay, look, the thing with *Maedhros* is -- “

“What?”

“What?” Oh right, she wasn’t asking me a question.

“What thing with *Maedhros*?” She demands.

“No, no -- it’s nothing! Please share your confession first.”

“Wait -- asshole! No! You can’t just begin your own, parallel confession and then refuse to complete it.”

“It’s just that we’re friends, Ari.”

“Seriously?” She raises her eyebrows at me, “you build up my suspense just to tell me that you’re *friends*?”

“Oh, then what’s yours?”

“I’m friends with Celegorm.”

“How the hell is that more scandalous?”

“He’s worse.” We stare at each other for a moment. “And also, I was late because I was getting high with him at the park.”

“Aredhel!”

“Oh man, I am *so* stoned right now -- do you know how hard it is to hide how high you are in a *hospital*?”

“No, because I never go to hospital while high.”

“You never go to hospital. Or get high.” She shakes her head. “Mum was giving me weird looks, though; I think she could tell. You might need to cover for me.”

“How did you even get hold of any weed? We live in the middle of one of the best protected cities in the country.”

“The police round here are cool?” She suggests, “I don’t know. No one ever calls the cops -- probably because no one’s actually sure what’s legal or not -- are *you* sure?”

“No,” I admit, “and I know a police officer personally, too.”

“See?”

“Once you’re in your third year you’ll quit,” I promise her.

“Oh, says you, the *dropout*. ”

“I prefer the term *transfer* , personally.”

“You could’ve been a doctor, Finno,” she sighs, “imagine it.”

“Or I could’ve been happy.”

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Another detour--this time to Maglor Callaghan, composer and local music hall employee, just trying to do his job. And do some...other things.

Chapter Notes

I gave them all surnames! I chose not to go for Feanorion/Nolofinwion/etc in this au because it felt like it didn't make sense in the setting. Of course, characters that have canon surnames will keep their canon surnames, but I'll drop a list at the end anyway.

Thanks to ravenditefairylights and mischianza for beta reading!

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

- Maglor -

There are some days in life where everything seems determined to change, and one is powerless to resist--all there is to be done is to sit and let the new wash away the old, and wash over you. There is risk to just 'letting things happen', but there is reward, too (which is something Maedhros could probably do with learning), and the reward is a new kind of existence.

Yesterday felt like one of those days--what with all the risk, and the rekindling of old friendships (and the risk), then the drunk texts from exes (and to exes, admittedly--I don't hold my alcohol as well as I pretend), and then the whole deal with Fingolfin--oh, and of course I can't forget being forced to go grocery shopping with my brother at the weekend. Really, though, when I say *can't forget* what I really mean is *absolutely will 'forget' because I don't want to do it*, but that doesn't fit as well grammatically.

Today, however, seems entirely normal.

"Dubois," I say.

"Callaghan." Daeron doesn't look up from his position in the centre of the back-room, hunched over a box of what look like extremely old, brass kazoos. Why do we even have those?

"Care to explain what you're doing?"

"Why do you sound like my old tutor?"

"Because I, like your tutor, am wise to the fact that you're an idiot hack?"

He huffs. I shrug my coat off and look for some clear space on the rack--there's almost too much. I feel bad for the hall; it hasn't had any new employees in months (excluding Daeron, of course),

mostly because it can't afford them. Aside from Daeron, there's me, Jennifer, Tobias, and the cleaner. Not a very impressive range of staff, I must say. It's especially depressing when the place is as big and once-grand as this; an old Victorian music hall, with fancy carved picture rails in all the back rooms that show Aphrodite and Eros toying with poor old Psyche; a reference to the flagship performance in 1868--I'm sure there's much fancier woodwork in the main hall, but it's too high up for me to see, and it's not as if I'm looking at the ceiling while I'm out on stage.

"Come and look at this."

I sigh, but I can't say I'm not at least a little intrigued by the contents of the box (for all my virtuosity, I never did see the point in the kazoo--other than to annoy Maedhros, of course). I peer in. The contents are *not* kazoos, like I first thought, but some kind of metallic prop or costume piece for a performance. I can't say I'm not a little disappointed.

"What are they?"

"They look like...whistles? Of some sort?" Daeron shakes his head. "But not functional." He holds one up to the light for me to look at. It's simple--one brass tube with four holes: two on the top and one at each end.

"We'll see about that." I take it from his hand and press one end to my lips. The sound it makes is barely more than a breath, but it's low and haunting, like it's meant to be some small component of an entire ensemble of spooky. It doesn't take me long, however, to realise my mistake: I get a mouthful of dust for my efforts. Daeron just watches me with raised eyebrows as I wipe off my tongue.

"Mystery solved," he says at last, before taking the tube from me and placing it gently back into the box, closing the lid.

"Those!" We both jump a little at the sound of Jennifer calling out from the doorway. She's not particularly threatening, but she is tall and loud, and she has an enthusiasm to her words that's frankly intimidating. "Those are from--what--twenty-five years ago? My first year working here. I was wondering where they went." She sidles over to us and lifts the box off of the floor, placing a hand underneath to stop the contents falling out from the bottom.

"How did they sound?" I find myself asking. Jen has some of the better stories about this place, having worked here so long, and she remembers things no one else does.

"Beautiful," she sighs wistfully, "like a choir of ghosts."

"Maybe we could clean them out and see if they still sound like that," I say.

"If I help it'll only take an afternoon." Daeron nods, and Jen gives me some strange smile.

"Nice to see you two getting along."

Oh, *oh*; that--I'd almost forgotten our 'rivalry'. It was mostly show in the first place and even then it didn't last long with any sincerity, but apparently the impression was enough. I don't like the look that she has in her eyes. Daeron catches my eye; I don't say anything, but hum in agreement with Jen. Whatever plan she's brewing up it will be easiest to just comply. I can only hope that it'll be something simple.

"It's going to be a slow day," she sighs, "you two might as well get on with that."

I try not to make my relief too obvious. I've kept our little *thing* private--which wouldn't be an

issue, except that historically Jen and I have told each other everything; she's like some cool aunt, or an eccentric family friend, that you can trust with all the more salacious secrets, and ask for more risqué advice. She's the kind of person who can help where it would be inappropriate for teachers or parents to. And I feel bad keeping something from her, of course, and it's one of those things where you aren't even sure *why* it seems so important to hide, but you have to anyway because something deep in the fibre of your being is telling you that saying something isn't right. Also, it's probably against the workplace policy I've never looked at to be hooking up with a colleague. Or maybe it's only dating that's the issue? It's something that I would need to ask her about, but, you see, that's where this ordeal runs back in its loop.

Jennifer hands the box back over to Daeron, guiding his hands to hold it properly ("wouldn't want anything getting broken!") and he nods for me to follow him back into the maintenance room. It's far from the prettiest room on the building, but there's something charming about it--with its chipped ceramic sinks, and the hum of the water pipes that run through the walls around it, to the boiler room next door--that feels comforting. Daeron rests the box down against the counter, and starts rummaging around in one of the cupboards, probably looking for gloves. I figure that if there's any risk of germs I've already caught them, so I don't bother.

I pluck the first tube from the box, and twist the tap--it screams out like some very small banshee as it turns, and you can hear the water as it moves through the pipes to get to it, but it works nonetheless. Water spills out, ice cold, running over my hands, and through one end of the tube, cooling a metal beneath my fingers that I didn't even know was warm. It'll be impossible to warm up my hands again later, but I suppose that's the price I pay for not paying enough attention to cardio. (It's not my fault that I always end up running during the golden hour, and then get distracted watching the sunlight filter through the leaves of the trees at the park, illuminating everything in shades of precious metal. The world seems fuller, almost.)

Daeron (now with gloves) joins me at the sink--there is another one, but it doesn't work as well, and the idea that we can't stand each other is pure fiction by this point. There isn't really enough space, and our shoulders brush together; we're roughly the same height--I was always tall. Of course, not as tall as Maedhros (his six feet and four inches are nowhere near attainable), but I was still usually the tallest of any given group of people.

We work in silence for a while; strange for me, not for him--most I know about his life is that he only ever makes any sort of noise for a purpose, and I learnt that through rather unusual means, too. He doesn't talk about himself a lot. I know he's French, and that's pretty much the extent to which that goes.

Of course, that doesn't mean we never talk--we talk plenty, just all of our subject matter seems to lie in the philosophy, the now, and in the philosophy of the now.

The sound of the water--through the instruments, over my hands, down the drain-- is enough to keep my ears occupied at first, but I get antsy when it's quiet. It's all I can do not to go and grab the radio from the other room. I begin to start planning what sort of conversation I'll strike up, when he talks first.

"I used to do this at the conservatoire," he says, "when I'd made a mistake in class."

Ah, the conservatoire .

I know about that, if only from the fact that his time there is listed on his CV. He was a prodigy--an unusually young high school graduate, and an even more unusually young college graduate. The sheet of paper boasts that he was out of school before he was twenty. Impressive, and yet all he's amounted to is a couple of years' freelancing and now working here with me in a place that's

almost destined to be closed down soon. I was a prodigy, too, but I also knew that it didn't make any sort of difference once you were an adult, so I didn't bother to mention it. The fact that we're standing here together now only proves my point. Most things in life are beautiful; the London job market is not.

"I heard about that from my great uncle--his daughter went there."

"I thought Finwë--"

I wave the question away. "My grandmother's side." Sometimes I forget that people outside of my family know who my grandfather is, and know things about him, too. It's strange knowing people in your family have a Wikipedia page.

"Your grandmother?"

"*She* was the interesting one," I say, and I'm not sure why. Maybe I inherited my father's need to always be defending her memory.

"Perhaps you can tell me all about her over dinner?"

"Are you asking me on a date?" I laugh, and Daeron grins at me.

"Are you saying yes?"

"Since when were you formal about this?" I say, putting down my work.

"Okay, how about drinks and then..." he doesn't finish the sentence. He doesn't have to.

"Sure--but I'm paying."

"Naturally."

Someone clears their throat from the door, and I jump.

"I knew something was going on between you two." *Jennifer. Shit.* At least she doesn't look upset, or even surprised. Maybe that's worse.

"It's not--I--"

"We aren't--"

"I'm not stupid." Jen leans against the door frame. "You can drop that look; I don't care, just so long as you don't get distracted." She turns and wanders off again.

"Jen?"

"Hm? Are you done with your washing?" She looks up from her work.

"Yes, and can I sit down?"

"Sure." She nods towards the chair in front of her desk.

“I didn’t want to say anything in front of him but--ah--could you make sure Maedhros doesn’t know?”

“Maedhros? Your older brother? Why?”

“He’s--” I pause as I search hopelessly for an accurate word--something that encompasses all of *protective*, *naive*, and *intense*, but I don’t think one like that exists, so instead I settle for the first.

“All brothers are.” She laughs. “Back when I started working here mine insisted on picking me up to walk me home.”

“Seriously?”

“It *was* the nineties.”

“You don’t look old enough to have worked in the nineties.”

“Oi, I know what game you’re playing, Callaghan,” she says, but she brightens up a little nonetheless. “The nineties were a strange time--” she leans forward-- “that was when the last hall owner went missing.”

“Missing?” I act like I haven’t heard this story before--partially because she likes to tell it, and partially because I like to hear it.

“We--me and the other new girl--found his body hidden in a bin bag behind the boiler. It’d been making strange noises.”

“Did you ever find out who did it?”

“Oh, there were plenty of theories but personally? I think it was his son. They’d been on rocky terms, and he didn’t seem like the nicest of guys--used to bother the girls as they left. Never over the line, but there was something about him.”

“His son?” This part is new--I was expecting her to go into all of the gory details about the body, and how she helped the police with their investigation afterwards, and then give me the backstory on the guy (she said talking casually about it helped ease the trauma)--she never told me they had a suspect before. I only asked to see how she’d avoid it this time.

She nods solemnly. “Of course, we can’t ask now--whole family changed their names to get away. I think one of the kids left the country, but I can’t remember which.”

“What were their names originally?”

“Something *Ilúvatar*, I think.”

Chapter End Notes

Please leave Kudos/comments if you enjoyed! Here are the surnames as promised:

Feanorians: All have the hyphenated 'Callaghan-Choifeu' EXCEPT Maglor and Maedhros, who were born before their parents were married, and so have their mother's maiden name (Callaghan). Feanor got the surname Choifeu from Finwe and

Mirië's hyphenated surnames 'Choi-Feu'.

Nolofinweans: All have the surname Kaur.

Arafinweans: All Choi-Kaur. Finrod eventually changes his surname to 'Felagund' because it's less clunky to pronounce, but that's not relevant to this fic, because in this one he's seven.

Daeron: Dubois, because it means 'of the woods', so I legally had to.

Mairon/Sauron: Kuznetsov. It means 'blacksmith'.

Eonwe: Hyphenated from his parents surnames into 'Elentari-Sulimo'.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Daeron makes a day trip back to his home city to meet up with a friend, who is conspicuously absent.

Chapter Notes

Sorry, it must seem like the plot has gone on a complete detour :) I promise the story will get back into motion next week, but this week is a character set-up because I can't resist a little character-building.

Thanks to ravenditefairylights and HerAwesomeShininess for beta-ing!!

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

- Daeron -

The way from West London to Paris is a series of train journeys; the Central Line, to the Victoria Line, and then the two hours to get the Eurostar from King's Cross, and a two hour walk to Beleg's place, only to find him absent with a note left on the door in his impossible scrawl--or, at least, what I *thought* was his impossible scrawl, but is actually just badly Google-translated Mandarin Chinese, because I briefly mentioned to him that I was learning two months ago and he 'wanted to help'.

He did not help.

The train lines are London's arteries but, even after so long, no one has seemed to be able to tell me where its heart lies. Maglor, of course, says it's the Royal Albert Hall, but he would say that. I didn't press or argue, of course, because Maglor is impossible to argue with: he knows too many words, and my English is barely fluent.

I walk back into the city, making my way down to the side of the Seine--the Seine, the Thames; what is the difference? Out this far east the place is just as poor, and the water just as murky, but there is something about being home that seems to fill me up, to seal closed some invisible hole through which I was losing my spirit.

When did you fall in love with this city?

Long ago, I sigh, when I fell in love with a girl who embodied it.

The love for Luthien faded, but I never stopped thinking about Paris, and yet, now that I'm here, I long for London's warm embrace. The concept of home is strange when put in practice--I don't believe it is a place, but I don't believe it is a person, either. Home is a desire, a rush of feeling; it

is love, the kind of love that makes you feel too big for your body--that makes you swell with pride.

If Paris fills one emptiness, the absence of London opens another.

London's heart is its people. That is what Jen said, and I followed her gaze to watch as Maglor untangled guitar strings--fingers quick and nimble, as if that tedious task, too, was something for which he had learned skill. Jen is wise, I think, in a way that I don't understand and probably never will--but I understood that.

I don't dare move from my place watching the river; west is Thingol's house; west is the conservatoir; west is my mother. I do not want to go west. I feel a twinge of pain across my left palm as I think about it--the scar there is ugly, and raised, and somehow manages to be invisible enough to others that no one ever asks about it. Or that no one ever wants to. A scar like that has to be from some sort of terrible fight, or perhaps sabotage from a rival musician. Only two people have ever asked about it; the first I told it was from an accident when I was still a child; the second I told I didn't want to talk about it. It felt more honest. Or, as honest as I could be.

I listen to the water and let the memory of a conversation overheard play on a reel in my head--*"Oh, there were plenty of theories but personally? I think it was his son. They'd been on rocky terms, and he didn't seem like the nicest of guys--used to bother the girls as they left. Never over the line, but there was something about him."* Never brought in, which was suspicious enough in itself, but the the fleeing to another country and changing of the names, too? It all adds up to something I probably shouldn't worry myself with, but that I have a feeling will intrigue me for a while to come.

I check my phone; I have three hours before I have to catch the train back to London--I did not get up at five in the morning to be abandoned to wander around by myself and become an amateur detective. Beleg hasn't been online in four hours, so instead I text Mablung.

He is rather more reliable.

"Daeron--what are you doing just moping around?"

"I was stood up."

Mablung snorts--he's dressed for work in a sleek black shirt and grey fitted slacks, (fake) expensive watch around his wrist (none of us make enough money to afford to spend that much getting a real Rolex). He works at a tailor's, but the store branding is so bad that he looks like he could've just come back from his high-power business job, or from greeting people at the front of a restaurant, in fact, if he ever wanted a career change, he probably wouldn't even have to buy new clothes.

"You look great," I scowl, and he greets me--a quick kiss on each cheek.

"I always look great--we should get coffee," he says, nudging me in the arm.

"Sure."

The coffee-shop is old, and barely staying in business, but back before Luthien ran off to America with her new boyfriend, and when Beleg was still a good friend we would all come here after school to chat and mess around and pretend that we weren't all unbelievably stressed and afraid for the future. We liked the place because it was far away from home, and I liked it especially, because it was where Luthien first kissed me from across the little patio table out back, and I forgot

everything else in the world outside of the sensation of her lips on mine. Sometimes I think the ghost of that kiss is still there, haunting me, reminding me of how it all went wrong.

The two of us sit at the big table in the middle--the one we all used to sit around, now noticeably shabby and scuffed, and our party even more noticeably missing its other half. What I wouldn't give for Beleg to show up--for Luthien to take her seat next to mine as if nothing had ever happened. I imagine it: the four of us sitting there, all older and quieter, and all forgiven. Longing for it tugs at my chest.

"I've been finishing my course," Mablung says, after he orders. I look up from the sheet of paper with all of my options--I used to pick something new every time I came here, but there are only so many ways you can make coffee.

"Forensic psychology, right?"

"Right." He takes the menu away from me and picks something at random on my behalf. "And then, practicing my English, *the world is my oyster*."

"Good for you," I say, "but I despise that phrase; I never could get into oysters."

He laughs, "is that the 'London charm' you've picked up?"

I stare at him for a moment, realising that what I've said is indeed rather Maglor-ish. "Sorry, I sound like my coworker--"

He raises his eyebrows at me.

"The cynicism grows on you," I sigh. It's a poor justification, I know, but I don't want to psychoanalyse myself at the moment. Not when I can still clearly remember the sensation of Maglor's lips at my throat, and the rough beginnings of stubble tickling my collarbone. He likes to whisper things into my ear; at first just dirty talk, but one time he got distracted and went on a rant about the old Mayor of London because something he'd said had reminded him of something he'd done, and then he'd made me a plain black coffee and apologised--which is, naturally, the same thing Mablung has ordered for me (probably because it's cheap, I note). It was one of the few times I've ever seen Maglor *angry* --most of the time he keeps his cool perfectly well, as if he always has zen meditation music playing on loop in the back of his mind.

If any music is playing in *my* mind it's the operatic version of *La Damnation de Faust*, which does me about as much good as you'd expect.

"Maglor?" He asks, and I hesitate for a moment, trying to figure out when I told him about Maglor, and *what*.

"Tolerable," I say, pushing my features into some poor imitation of annoyance.

Mablung leans forward, and I instinctively lean back. "Not *just* tolerable, surely?" He smirks.

I sigh, there's really no point in dishonesty: "We may...have slept together--once or twice."

Mablung leans back in his chair, smiling. "Does this mean I can finally talk about Luthien without you glaring at me?"

"Don't get your hopes up," I say, and I glare at him to illustrate the point.

He gives me a look, and I sip at my coffee--still way too hot, but adequate enough reason to avoid

elaborating. The truth is: I don't think the sting that comes with thinking about Luthien will ever be gone, regardless of how much time passes or how many new lovers I may take. And the other truth is: even if I were to fall for Maglor, the chance that he'd fall for me back is close to none; we're just friends, and barely even that. He made that clear when he refused to go out to eat--not explicitly, but *explicit* is rarely an artist's game.

"And Beleg's high profile security guard job is going well," Mablung adds after a long silence.

"Good for him."

"Indeed." We sit in silence for another few minutes, then a thought occurs to me. "Do you study cold cases?"

"Hm?"

"Do you study cold cases on your course?"

"Sometimes. Why?"

I shrug, realising that it won't paint me in the best light to admit that I eavesdropped on Maglor's conversation with Ms Adley and that UK mysteries probably aren't the focus of the syllabus anyway. "Just curious."

"You're never *just* curious."

"There's this British case," I say, choosing my words carefully, "and it just seemed strange. The person who--the person who I heard it from talked about it like there was one, obvious suspect, and yet no arrest."

"It's Britain, Daeron, what do you expect?"

I slump back in my seat. "True." But I can't shake the feeling that there's something else--of course, I'm no detective, but I do tend to have an eye for a good story.

"What?"

"It just seems odd."

"Odd that a case that seems clear-cut go unsolved? It happens all the time--hidden depths. Always something else at play, just most of the time no one knows what it is."

We don't talk about it again, and I leave with another thought playing on my mind: *what hidden depths lie there?*

Chapter End Notes

Please leave a comment if you enjoyed! I've been having some mental health trouble recently, so this might not be up to standard, in which case: concrit always welcome!! Improvement is my game

Also!! The next thing I post is going to be completely different series to what I usually write--its a piece on Celebrimbor and his less-dubious-than-Ereinion-but-still-dubious

paternity, followed possibly by the parentage of Ereinion himself. I hope you all like it!!

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Things are heating up (again)! Getting close to the end of his tether sitting around and doing nothing, Eonwe arranges to deal with his situation head-on, only to find that this particular situation isn't one he's quite equipped to handle. On an emotional level.

Chapter Notes

Finally cranked out *something* to update you guys with. Also, with an admission: I genuinely had only planned the bare skeleton of this fic until yesterday, but chapter 8 was *hard* and forced me to actually properly plan the rest of the fic. This will either mean updates are faster or better. Maybe both.

Anyway, enough rambling: please enjoy!

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

- Eönwë -

This time *he* meets *me* outside of the hairdresser- well, it's a corner shop now. I told Ossë to take the message for me: *tell Sauron I need to speak to him. Same place as last time.* And then I made preparations. This time I have handcuffs and a hidden microphone, and a neat little bag stolen from evidence lockup that I can toss at him when I say, "look familiar?"

Oh, just look at me breaking all the rules--if he knew the first thing about police work, I'm sure he'd love it.

"What makes you so desperate to see me?" He says, and I'm stuck all over again- my plan to get him to inadvertently confess goes out the window because his voice in that tone has got to be some sort of torture. He's brainwashing me, and I'm powerless to react. He seems to notice whatever expression I've inadvertently laid on my face, because his own softens as he says, "Hey?"

I wonder how long it's been since he's spoken that tenderly to me, genuine or not.

"I just--I just wanted to know why," I say, and I hope that the mic won't pick up the weakness in my voice, even if I'm still following the script.

"Why?"

"Why are you doing this?" I hold up the bag, but my hand shakes, and he doesn't look impressed.

"That's not the question you want to ask."

"Why are you doing this?" I ask again, and he reaches out--I think he's going for the bag, but he takes my hand instead. Of course, he does. I'm right where he wants me, aren't I? We've been playing this game for months, and it's not as if the rules have changed, *but what if he still cares*

about me? What do I do then? I carry on--I grit my teeth and carry on. "A straight answer, please," I'm surprised by how my voice steadies, "No riddles."

He raises an eyebrow. "Do you think I'd tell you that?" And he's right--this is a stupid plan. A stupid plan where even if I did get what I wanted, I wouldn't be able to do anything without it without risking my own suspension, or even dismissal. When I was training I wrote whole essays on ethical considerations, yet this all but ethical.

"Is it for the money?" I ask and then, because my resolve is as fleeting as the wind, apparently, "You know, you never would've had to worry about that."

A low blow. He pulls his hand away, and I clench my fist to keep myself from reaching out.

"Maybe I did it for love," he spits. Even lower.

I take a few moments to breathe--try and keep myself from recoiling from the wound--try not to break eye contact, even if it's as painful as looking into twin suns at midday, burning through my skin. I feel like I've been gutted. Maybe this isn't anger. I let my gaze slip to the ground.

"I know you're taping me." He tries for a gentler tone.

"I know you know," I sigh, "I was hoping I could trip you up, but you know me too well, don't you?"

"You never hid anything--that's what's remarkable. Everyone has a secret, Eönwë, everyone except you. I know everything about you." He says it like he's trying to find the right fit for a crossword, with complete confusion and astonishment. Maybe even with affection, to some degree. I'd protest, but my darkest secret was that I'd never kissed anyone before him and, well, it wasn't like he *didn't* know that. If this situation was any different, I might've smiled.

"Can you just tell me everything? You do owe me."

He huffs, "I love this very legal methodical approach that you're taking here."

"Please."

"No." He doesn't look beaten up about it in the slightest.

I wonder how he manages this mess. Does he think he isn't being suspicious? Does he know how tempted I am to throw him under the bus with no regard for who the true criminal mastermind is? Does he know that I only *tell* myself I'm tempted because knowing that I could never do anything to harm him, even after all this shit, is what keeps me up at night?

Does he know how much I despise him?

Does he know how my forensics degree isn't kept exclusively to my job?

"You--you told me that I didn't have to fear you--nor anyone like you--" I say because all of the accusations are swirling around in my mind.

Does he know?

Well, I *want* him to know. I want him to know exactly what he's done--the pain he's caused--every single detail of the case that I wouldn't even tell my sister for fear that she'd throw up. Just fraud. A simple case for a new guy. But 'just fraud' doesn't seemingly connect with all the petty crime

across the city, and doesn't cover the lengths someone would go to for sugar pills.

"How long did that shit go on--the things you said when I told you I wanted to be a cop--what did that mean?"

"I--"

"Why would you tease me like that? Do you *like* to see other people in pain because of you--wait--no--I know the answer to that. You see your life as some stupid sick game where the only way to win is to use what power you have over other people's emotions to cause them torment."

"Eönwë--"

"You set it up like some perfect narrative trick with foreshadowing and backstory and every single word you say is perfectly placed and thought about because you've never--never in your *life* — ever considered that being *sincere* was the right course of action. You know how to hurt people, and instead of using that knowledge to keep them from harm, you use it to cause them more pain. Why?" I stare at him. He's completely unreadable--I'd say angry if I didn't know that the furrow in his brow was simply muscle memory--that it was a pre-programmed look of disgust at any sort of display of emotion. "Why?" I demand again, all of the power slipping from my voice.

"If you hate me this much, then why--"

"Because you can!" I've used up whatever strength I had and my voice doesn't hold steady; I can't stop the tears already slipping down my cheeks once they've already been let loose. "You hurt people because you can."

"That's not true."

"Tell me why! You can't--you can't because it *is* true and--Jesus--can you at least *look* like this bothers you in any way?" I choke, "I loved you. I *loved* you."

"Do you always have to be so overdramatic?"

"Did you love me?"

He bites his lip, then, carefully--in what I imagine as the same tone of voice you would use to talk to a wounded animal before you killed it, "No."

I don't bother staying. I don't care if I haven't got what I wanted. I leave him standing alone on the street corner with a bag of stolen evidence and my anger, and I hope that it makes him think, even if I know it won't.

I listen to the sound of my keys jangling as I drop them into the pot with the rest--some fancy glass work that we picked up when I was twelve, after my parents insisted that we stay in the sweltering hot glass-blowing studio at the back of the glass museum (why does that museum even exist?) to watch the man work. Just starting puberty, I sweat like nobody's business, but I can't say I wasn't enthralled at the sight of the glass filling with air like some particularly expensive balloon. I watched it swell to five times its original size, then harden. Then I watched as he took some heavy looking metal instrument and split it clean in two to create this bowl. Split in two--its imperfect shape like one half of a human heart--I had wondered, as I watched, what would happen if his fingers slipped, and he was to drop one of the bowls on the floor. Would it shatter, or was it still molten enough that it would flatten?

“Why are *you* here?” I hear Ilmarë call from the kitchen--what day is it? Friday--she must’ve gotten out of class early and decided to come home for the weekend; I can see her bag at the bottom of the stairs.

“I could ask the same of you,” I say, but I must’ve come off a little too harsh because she makes the effort to bring her doughnut with her from the kitchen to come over and give me half a hug.

“What’s up?”

“Stars,” I sigh.

“That’s a dumb joke and I regret telling you to make it when I was ten.” She smiles.

“I’m just home from work early--sick leave.”

“And you let me hug you?” She draws back. “You *monster*.”

“I’m sure you can handle it.” I don’t tell her my illness is faked--mostly because being sick is a very convenient excuse to lock yourself away in your room and mope for three hours straight. Still, I haven’t seen my little sister in weeks, so I might as well talk to her a little. “How’s uni?”

“I regret transferring to Oxford for my degree,” she whines, “there’s so much *work* to do.”

“What exactly were you expecting?”

“Not this.” She gestures back into the kitchen, where I can see her laptop out on the counter, surrounded by stacks of paper at a height I had previously only thought a high school English teacher’s (or a newbie detective investigating his ex’s) could reach.

“Yikes?”

“Yikes.” She affirms. “How’s your case going?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Cool--okay, well, I have to get back to mass and trajectory calculations, so if you’ll excuse me...”

“Have fun with your calculator.”

“Will do.”

I slip upstairs without another word, still with that one word ringing around my head.

No.

Chapter End Notes

If you had fun reading this, please leave me a comment! I'm not too proud to admit that I'm a slave to validation--it's the energy that feeds this dumb lil' hobby I have here, and I really don't want to abandon this fic a second time.

Also if you have any suggestions for better chapter titles, *please*. I'm suffering trying to think of 'em, lads, and I give full credit for other people's ideas. Speaking of credit: thanks to the wonderful HerAwesomeShyness, mischianza and legitopal for beta-reading this chapter!

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Snippets of a different kind of life, lived by a different kind of people.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to ravenditefairylights for beta reading!

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

- Mairon -

"Hey, you don't look so good, he said, *is something bothering you?*"

"Nothing important," I told him.

"It's important if it's bothering you."

I'm fairly certain that was the last time someone asked me what was wrong unsarcastically. I shook my head and told him to drop it because what was I supposed to say? *I'm fucking your uncle and I feel bad about it?* I don't even feel bad about it that often, but when I do, *I do*.

I do.

There was something satisfying about seeing the pain on his face; some proof of the fact that I really did break his heart--shatter it, even, into a million tiny pieces. I can take pride in how pathetic I've made him on my account. This twisted pride fails to make me feel any better. I got my proof--I know with complete certainty that he really did love me.

And now I can't have that love back.

According to Yavanna, it's been a theme since I was a child: I break things just to see what's inside, and I can never figure out how to put them back together. How inefficient. It's almost a shame, but I'm someone else's prize now.

"Did you get what you wanted from him?"

"Show of emotion? Yes," I croon, "God, he's a mess."

"Good. He should be easy to manipulate."

"I have one question, though--"

"Wait." He doesn't even look away from his desk when he speaks to me. Eyes narrow--he's

focussed on a tablet screen; news stories. Met police updates. I used to get upset about it, but the work he does has been involved with paying for half of the things good about my life right now. That first time--I'd never seen that much cash in my life--enough to fix every single insecurity I'd ever had and, oh boy, I *did*.

"Fine," I say, but impatience must show in my voice because he turns to face me.

"Go on, then."

"Do you not feel any remorse toying with your family like this?"

He just laughs, "Do you?"

"Not my family."

"The way he looked at you...you would've been--given time."

"Good thing I left, then." I lean down and brush my lips against his cheekbone and he wraps an arm around my waist. "Why, though?" I ask because I'm feeling lucky.

"Because I took the fall for them, and it turned out that life was hard to live with two broken legs. Anyway--" I pretend not to register how obviously he's changing the subject-- "You say Eönwë is a mess: I think you could make good use of that."

"I'm sorry?"

"He'd probably do anything you asked him to. You could completely mislead him--keep on doing it, too." He talks slowly, like the idea is still coming to him, the plan is still forming as he's putting it into words. "You could lie to him and keep him out of our way indefinitely. Fabricate some false cooperation, maybe pretend you miss him. And it would screw him over so much."

"That won't work."

"Why not?"

"I told him to his face that I never loved him."

"And is it true?" He raises his eyebrows, and even though there are no risks to my answer (we're too blunt with each other for anything to be a risk) I find myself lying.

"It's true."

He nods, then turns back to the tablet. "Then you'll have to pretend."

It's not to say that I love him now, but there's no doubting that I did once love Eönwë just as much--the way he smiled, how he got so defensive of his decisions to be a good person, and then how he would sigh and apologise out of the blue--making lists of all the things he regretted saying. How often he'd tell me he loved me. How he was so nervous about saying it the first time that he slurred his words into incomprehensibility, and I had to ask him to repeat himself.

Sometimes he'd call me out of the blue at three A.M. (he knew I would be awake anyway) because he was up late studying, and he was asking himself why he even tried so hard, but then he remembered that it was because he wanted to make me eat my fifteen-year-old self's words. *And also, I love you.*

All the while I didn't tell him I was failing my apprenticeship because I hadn't shown up to work in

two weeks.

Love, love, love; and none of it would ever be enough. Sometimes I'd stare into a mirror and ask myself what I really wanted, why none of that feeling ever seemed to leave. The feeling of being out-of-place, as if something was ever-so-slightly off about the image that looked back at me. I used to think I was afraid I was unlovable, but even being loved didn't take the feeling away.

I still left my apartment, it wasn't depression that kept me from work, rather pent-up nervous energy in my core that had me wandering the streets aimlessly, searching for something I wasn't sure I would recognise. Searching for danger. Things to fix. To set right. Maybe I should've become a politician, pitting myself against the likes of Kaur and his brother, but I've always hated their kind, who claim passion but are forever slaves to inaction.

Melkor was danger; he was something to fix and to set right. Maybe there's madness in this household, but there's a method here, too, and I'm the one who devised it.

I sidle up behind him again, wrapping my arms around his shoulders, kissing his neck, trying not to think too much about how difficult it's going to be to feign dissatisfaction. He sighs. Enough business for today: there's fun to be had elsewhere.

"You didn't tell me the full truth," I say, staring at a spider making its way across the ceiling at a leisurely pace. "Just metaphors."

"About what?" He murmurs.

"Why you're screwing with your own family."

"Maybe someday I'll tell you, but not yet," he says simply, and then I feel the shift in his weight as he rolls over and wraps his arms around me. I can't relax.

Chapter End Notes

As someone who doesn't ship angbang, trying to write sweet scenes with them was pretty difficult, so if it fell short I majorly apologise! Please leave a comment if you liked this chapter! And, if you want regular updates on this and all my other fic, you can follow my tumblr (also nerdvnel)

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Maglor decides to bite the bullet and ask Daeron about his past--little does he know that his is the one that will be laid bare in the open for all to see.

Chapter Notes

I know this is dumb and overdramatic but!! In my defence so are they

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

- *Maglor* -

It's been a long day; the kind that seems to stretch the hours into days, and makes you want to curl up somewhere warm and shut your eyes until everything passes by. Of course, that's the nature of time; it will never stop--sometimes it staggers, sometimes it rushes, but it will never stop. At least, that's the theory.

"Are you going to start playing any time soon, or are we just going to stand here like idiots?"

"Maybe if you had a little patience--" I bite my tongue. He's been pissing me off all day. Mostly because I've been in a bad mood all day, but still. It's uncomfortably warm for the season; relentless, unceasing, 'not-hot-enough-to-justify-putting-on-a-fan-but-it's-making-you-clammy' heat that rolls over in waves. I take a deep breath. It doesn't help much.

"Sorry."

"It's fine." And it is--possibly too much so; I'm bored and my mind wanders. I clear my throat and tighten my grip on the bow so that the smooth wood almost hurts against the pressure of my hand.

"Actually, no--can't you play?"

His eyes flit away for a second, but he says "Sure."

He takes the violin from me gently, as if reaching out to take an infant or some priceless artefact that he should, under no circumstances, ever let slip. No, it's more like he's reaching out to touch a thorn bush, knowing full well he's about to have his hands sliced into shreds, already bracing himself for the sting of antiseptic. I notice the scar on his hand--how it runs straight from the tips of his forefingers to the opposite base of his palm. That kind of wound would keep someone from playing an instrument that required the hands, hell, any instrument that required even the movement of fingers.

I take his hand without thinking, turning it over to look at his palm; it's not like I haven't seen this scar before--I asked about it the first time I got a good look--but something feels different this time

like there won't be any casual dismissal. He sits unmoving as I run my fingers across the raised skin, following its passage, imagining the cut of a thorn tearing it open again. I can feel the tension in his muscles, but he doesn't flinch. Still, I stop, I push his fingers closed. "You know, you could always see someone."

He shakes his head. "It's not--you wouldn't understand."

"How did you get this?" I ask again.

Our eyes meet, and in his I can see the deep winding paths of a forest, meandering into the darkness at the centre.

"It was my mother's fault," he says, and I can tell that this isn't one of those things that he wants to spin for poetry, or perhaps even explain in the slightest. Which is fair; it's not like I've ever given him the story behind *my* scar. It's not something I want to relive, and it's not like we're soulmates, destined to be together forever and heal each other's pain with the power of love and devotion. We're barely even friends. I ignore the tug in my chest-- *misbehaving heart* .

"Right." I let the issue slide, and go back to thinking about how uncomfortably warm I am. It's easier than trying to navigate old emotional wounds, at the very least. I also take back the violin, because trying to remember the notes I'm supposed to be playing is a better occupation for my mind than recording them.

I also ask him if he's free after work because I know neither shame nor self-control.

- Daeron -

Maglor sits across from me, shirtless (for the most part), just out of reach, his eyes trained on mine, and mine on his. Perhaps it's meant to be a competition or some weird English kind of foreplay, but I get lost in the warm dark brown of his irises, like soft earth after a rainstorm. Still, I want to ask him what he's doing--why we just sit here, unmoving. The closer I look at him, the more I begin to think he's not really looking at me; instead, he is lost inside of his own mind, searching for something elusive, something that flits away from him every time he tries to grasp it. Then he takes a deep breath and shuffles closer, onto his knees, and takes my hand--the unblemished one.

He guides my fingers over the mark that runs horizontal between his hips. It's--rough--ugly--I want to pull away. I almost do. The scar must run deep. I force myself to focus on the way it feels beneath my skin, a mark of pain, or a mark of liberation; I can't tell which. It feels worse than it looks. "*It looks worse than it feels,*" hadn't he said when he first caught me staring? "*And it felt better than before, anyway.*" He lets my hand go, and sits back down.

"It's a hysterectomy scar."

"Oh."

"I was eighteen, visiting my mum's side of the family in Ireland--which was shitty enough as it was--" his eyes are fixed on his legs, crossed in front of him. The way he looks--as if he would kill someone with his bare hands--makes me shiver. "I was in enough pain that I couldn't get out of bed. Mum took me to a local doctor. They refused to do any more investigation--claimed it was

ovulation pain, which was ridiculous.”

“Obviously.” He meets my eyes again and smiles--just barely.

“I was sent back to London anyway, collapsed at the airport, and I don’t remember much after that. Apparently, I was on a *lot* of painkillers.”

“What was wrong with you?”

“I never asked. I don’t want to know, and it’s not like it matters anyway--whether it’s genetic or not, I mean.” He smirks. It’s a bitter expression to wear.

“Why are you telling me this?”

He looks away again, and I immediately regret asking, but I also want to know; what does he expect will happen? Is this some trade of trauma, where we sit in a makeshift circle half-naked and tell each other stories about the worst experiences we’ve ever had, the things that make up our nightmares. Would he like me to tell him about the day Luthien told me she didn’t want me? That night alone on the streets of Paris, jumping at every sign of movement, the survival instinct of *stick close to the Seine* fighting with the survival instinct of *hide as deep into the city as you can* ? What about the knife, or the night my father--

“This isn’t some exchange,” he says, “this isn’t about you.”

He’s looking at me again. Maybe all of this eye-contact is a game, after all. Back and forth--at me, and then at something else, and sometimes at nothing.

“Look, I felt guilty for pressing earlier, and this seemed like apt penitence at the time.” He sighs. “Besides, you’re my friend, and my friends all know this stuff already. You deserve to as well.”

Oh, of course. We’re friends.

I hold up my palm, almost as if I’m taking an oath. “I cut my own hand. It was to get out of music practice.” Quite a reductive explanation, really, but the case of *why* I wanted out of music practice requires talking about my mother. I don’t talk about my mother.

“Bit extreme, isn’t it?”

“A little,” I admit, “I was only thirteen.”

“Ah, of course. Perfectly reasonable.” He’s holding back a grin and, to my surprise, so am I.

We go back to sitting in silence and staring at each other, but the air is different--something feels lighter. He reaches out a hand and cups my chin, drawing me close.

“Now that that’s done with,” he says, “I can think of something way more fun.”

And then I kiss him, and for a little while, I can pretend that we’re in love. Isn’t this what love should be?

Water runs over my skin as I sit with the realisation that I've caught feelings. Warm feelings. Warm as the steady beating of the shower on full power against my back. I grin, I almost laugh; there's something about the knowledge that a place is not made to last that's cause for elation. So, this is a crush: something innocent and sweet and fun; something that I can indulge myself in. A guilty pleasure, perhaps. I like the way I wear it.

No, this won't be alright, and no, this won't work out: there are a million and more ways for it to go terribly, terribly wrong. There are so many different reasons to hold back, but there's always been a power in defying sense. If I was the kind of person who stayed away from things because they could hurt, would I even be here? Would I have even signed myself up for this mess?

the shower off, and lean back, head against the wall. The night is mercifully quiet. I can hear my breathing, my pulse; a soothing reminder that mine is a spirit that still occupies its form. If I were alone--really alone--I'd find myself collapsing into some existential anguish about the day when it won't, but I'm not alone. At least, not tonight.

- Daeron -

We drink coffee in the kitchen--he tells me it's stupidly fancy and overly complicated, and that having a coffee decanter is just pretentious, but I don't really care. I tell him it only cost twenty euros, and he rolls his eyes, but he smiles. I consider elaborating on the scar. I don't, of course, but I think about it. If there was anyone I'd tell, it would be him--of course, that's only *if* there was anyone I'd tell.

I told Luthien. Back when I first showed up at her doorstep, asking if I could stay the night because I was drenched, and it was almost certainly going to get below zero *and because my mother might find me*. I told her everything, and that I was sorry, and that I knew that we'd only really talked during our lunch breaks at school and that if she couldn't put me up for the night it would be okay, I swore. She interrupted me-- *'there's no way in hell I'm letting you sleep rough.'*

"Hey," I look up, and Maglor kisses me--softly, gently, as if he has all of the time in the world. For a moment I wonder if the only thing that exists is his lips against mine. Then he breaks away slowly, and I register how this isn't normal, how he's never kissed me like *that* before, and a million other thoughts rush--

"I love you--" Those words have a mind of their own--out of my mouth before I can even think to stop them, slipping away while I'm distracted-- "Sorry."

The silence is strange. Not heavy--no--quite the opposite. It's breathless, it's floating away on the wind, it's the white walls of an art museum, paintings yet to be hung upon them. I begin to form another apology, when he kisses me again, harder, a *'don't you dare say anything else'*.

I don't.

I won't.

I can't.

This is what love should be.

Chapter End Notes

Please leave a comment and kudos if you enjoyed!!

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Eonwe receives a call from someone willing to help him.

Mairon gets caught unawares by his own bad decision-making skills.

Chapter Notes

This chapter will allude to nsfw, but will not explicitly feature any. If that's not your jam, there will be a summary of the plot-relevant details in the endnotes.

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

- Eönwë -

There are a number of things you're taught to expect as a police cadet: a lot of people won't trust you, a lot of people will fear you, you will see things a human being should never have to see, or you will cause them; you will come face-to-face with the failure of humanity and watch it as it stares back at you, asking you why you think you're so much better. And you will get phone calls from private numbers during after hours if you leave your phone number *and* your profession on your social media.

"Eönwë Elentari-Sulimo, how can I help you?"

"*I'm* going to help *you*." The signal is weak--unusual for London, unless if this person tried to call me while on the underground. It conveniently masks the voice of the caller, though, and it's easier to hide your shady dealing in amongst the bustle of hundreds of other commuters (all too polite to say a word)--this person is smart.

"Who *is* this?"

"You know who I am--please." *Play along*, they're telling me. It's best to do as you're told.

"Okay--" I sit up and pray that my voice isn't too hoarse to break through the chatter-- "is this some sort of call to meet or?"

"A little, and--" there's a pause and an exchange of voices before I hear the tell-tale beep of the card barrier-- "I'll be in the open soon."

A meeting.

That means preparation--part of which includes letting a colleague know what's going on, but there's something stopping me from sending that text--maybe it's the hubris in the back of my mind saying it, but I don't think I'll need backup.

There are only the sounds of the city on the other end of the line for a good minute or two, which gives me enough time to get dressed and at least some level of prepared.

“Still there?” The voice is a lot clearer now. Clear enough for me to recognise it.

“Sauron, why--”

“Please stop calling me that--also I decided to help you with your case.”

“Oh.”

“The information Ossë passed on to you was completely fictitious--I made it up to tempt you into coming out, as well as to keep you diverted from what’s *really* happening--”

“And why should I trust you--”

“--obviously these kinds of dealings don’t take place in the city centre, so you don’t need to worry about patrolling those streets--or well--patrolling those streets for us.”

“Sau--”

“By the way, I’m coming to your house. Who’s home?”

“Ilmarë left to get kebabs a minute ago, so no one.”

“Perfect.”

“Use the back gate just in case--”

“Naturally--anyway, as I was saying: you have a fundamental misunderstanding of the way that Melkor operates. First, you think that there’s no rhyme or reason to what’s happening. Second, you believe that if you can just incarcerate one person, then your case will be solved and you’ll be able to go home and curl up to sleep with no worries--”

“Why are you telling me--”

“I’m nearly there--” I scramble to finish grabbing all the things I’m not entirely sure I’ll need anymore-- “Now, I know that *you* specifically are the number one conspiracy theorist about this whole thing, so you probably have some idea of what is and isn’t connected, but I’ve written out a list just in case. Honestly, though? This is pretty juvenile stuff and, as a note, *damn*, some of you cops are unprofessional.”

I rush along the hallway, then take care to go slowly down the stairs--it’d be no use breaking my neck now, and I’m in my socks. “So essentially what I’m telling you to do is to get your colleagues to do a better job of checking stuff, but also you can use this information and test it to see that I’m telling the truth, alright? Then from there, I can help you a *lot*. ”

I see him as he slips through the back gate, and I’m there to meet him on the wooden deck, ever-so-slightly damp against my socks from the earlier shower. I lower the phone.

“Why would you help me?”

He looks at me for a moment, eyes wide and brow furrowed--genuine conflict (or performative--how should I know? It’s not like he has a record for being honest with me.)

“Why?”

“Because I lied,” he says, then he moves in to kiss me, and I let him because I never learn--not when he’s involved.

His lips aren’t as soft as the last time, but he presses just as hard, just as deep, as passionate, and all I care about is kissing him again--preserving this moment for as long as I possibly can. So I do. I kiss him back as hard as I can, and I feel his mouth move to accommodate mine-- “Wait--” he pulls back, chest heaving. “We should--we should go inside.”

I nod, and he slips past me into the house, making his way straight towards the stairs--my room. I didn’t expect him to remember the layout--why didn’t I expect him to remember the layout?

The second the door’s closed behind us, he pushes me back up against it. He lets his kiss linger for a second before he slips his tongue between my teeth, and I’m gone. Completely hopeless. I cave to his touch like some horny teenager straight out of a school dance--or more accurately, some horny teenager with his boyfriend hiding away in the gym showers. He tips my jaw up, and leaves a trail of gentle kisses down from there, letting his teeth brush against my skin for just long enough to prick up the hairs on the back of my neck.

He moves back to place one more kiss on my lips, biting down ever so gently, then takes me by the waist and swings me around and down onto my bed--did I change my sheets recently? I can’t remember, but he doesn’t seem to care while he’s straddling me like this. He never cared--I asked him once if he did--he never cared--he never cared. He leaves another kiss on my lips, and I kiss back. I don’t think there will ever be a time when I don’t kiss back for him.

I forgot how completely I’m *his*.

- *Mairon* -

This wasn’t part of the plan.

It’s like some terrible dream world where I made the worst mistake of my life--an awful mistake that could, theoretically, get me killed if it went too far. This is already too far. I wasn’t supposed to *sleep* with him. I wasn’t even supposed to *touch* him.

But standing there in the drizzle, seeing the way he looked at me--the way he was hanging on to my every word—I couldn’t think of anything else that felt more *right*. There’s really no way I can blame this on anyone else. That’s what makes me most angry, I think, that all of the power was in my hands and now I’ve completely fucked it up, and it’s painfully real while we’re lying side by side.

He felt like home, but like a home I had lived in once as a child and abandoned only to return years later and find everything the same, and yet so changed.

There’s a knock at the door. He said Ilmarë was out. How long has it been?

“Go away,” he groans.

“No,” the door swings open. I don’t bother trying to hide. “Oh, shit-- *shit*.”

He sits up. “How much do you want?”

“*What the fuck?*” I prop myself up to look at her as she speaks. “You said you were sick!”

“I was.”

“Oh, really? With what--blue balls?”

I snort and lie back down. Ilmarë always had the better sense of humour. I’m still grateful that at least she isn’t talking to me. I know she isn’t talking to me because she sent me a message before she blocked me saying *if I ever say a word to you ever again, I want you to stab me*. It’s easier to hear someone’s anger at you when they’re talking to another person about it. There’s something satisfying about watching some poor fucker get yelled at on your behalf.

“How much do you want?”

“Oh no--there is no way you’re buying my silence. Someone needs to do something about this because you’re clearly not over him!”

“I thought that was obvious--twenty quid?”

“No! You’re an officer of the law!”

“Thirty? Wait--no, your groceries for the next three weeks.”

“Fuck.” She bites her lip. “I really could do with that.”

“How much is that, then?”

“Ninety, roughly--”

“I’ll give you one hundred.”

“Done deal, but don’t do this again.”

She’s avoided making eye contact with me, but as she leaves I catch eyes for a second, and she looks so *hurt*. How many people have I seen give me that look before? Once the door closes, Eönwë opens his mouth to speak, but I cut him off-- “Kaur’s case is related.” I reach for the slip of paper--the list of distractions on the bedside table.

“What?”

“You told the press you were investigating if the attack on Fingolfin Kaur was intentional. It is--was.”

“How can you--”

“I did it--it was me and an accomplice after I lost you at the train station I went back.”

“And you’re telling me this because you’ve decided to help--”

“No. I hadn’t. I was lying to you again and somehow you were still stupid enough to believe me. Don’t bother investigating this--” I tear the list in two-- “You’ll just waste your time.” I stare at him. He doesn’t look angry, but I wish he did. All his passivity means is that I’ve worn him down to the point where he isn’t even surprised when I betray him. What does that say about me? “I have to go--”

“Mairon, wait--” but I’m already sorting myself out.

“I really have to go.”

Chapter End Notes

For those who skipped: Sauron/Mairon admits to Eonwe that he was involved in the 'accident' that Fingolfin was involved in.

Next chapter will take place after a timeskip....in both the story and in real life. I have mock exams coming up and a whole lotta studying to do, so I probably won't be updating as frequently. If you feel like it, feel free to leave me some sweet comments to tide me over this very stressful period.

As always, love you all, but especially HerAwesomeShinyness for beta-ing this chapter for me <33

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Maglor has the bright idea to introduce his boyfriend of (now) two months to his brother. He did not think this through well enough.

Also featuring: a chance meeting, growing suspicions, and the author's own first-hand experience of Soho (which is a weird flex but okay)

- Maglor -

There's the scab to a cut I didn't know I had right beneath the base of my palm and I pick at it, because no matter how many times mum warned me not to, I never listened. There are small white patches all up my arms and legs where I used to pick at scabs so much that they scarred, and then dad bought me a recorder and my hands were occupied, and those marks faded. It was a nervous habit--still is a nervous habit.

There are messages on my phone--I can tell because I can hear it buzzing through the wood of the drawer I've locked it in. It doesn't *really* help but it was worth a try. I keep staring at the wood grain. Staring at the woodgrain and letting my mind wander farther than I should really be allowing it to. It's Jen's story again, and, naturally (guiltily), the tune that seems to have developed in the back of my head whenever I think about it. Cool and sharp (ending on the dominant, of course) and very, *very* annoying. Just one stave. My fingers itch. I find myself drumming at my desk.

Bills will have to wait, it seems.

But it doesn't sit right--I always used to find it infuriating that some distant, disconnected composer would make beauty out of someone else's pain. I was mad when I found out there was a song about my grandmother's suicide. *The Artist's Lament*, it was called, and it seemed obsessed with the concept of throwing oneself into the Thames. To this day, I still avoid the Southbank.

I clench my fists, I breathe, and I unlock the drawer.

Two messages.

One from Daeron. Mundane. Asking about this weekend--I reply quickly. The other from Maedhros. Also mundane (checking I have groceries), but I consider him for a moment. I also consider that his firm (I can never remember the name--something long and complicated) is barely a ten-minute journey if I take the tube.

I consider the chill (minus three, was it?), and then my gloves, and my boots, and then I consider the sound of my key in the lock, and pretty soon after that I'm considering the slight slip under my feet as I cross icy ground.

The term 'black ice' always seemed to imply something more beautiful than the reality. Sheets of a pure jet over water and ground alike. But there's something beautiful in a danger unseen, too. It just took me longer to appreciate that not all beauty is visual. Sometimes things are a surprise--good

things, too. Daeron surprised me. Or I surprised him. Months blur memories, leaving a warm, sweet haze.

- *Maedhros* -

“Maglor, what are you doing here?”

He leans back against the wall, next to the door, and shrugs, eyes skimming his surroundings. “Felt like visiting.”

“Do you have an appointment?”

“It should be listed under ‘the most talented and creatively gifted member of my family and my most favourite brother’. It’s not like you’re going to be fired for ‘family business’, Maedhros.”

I sigh. There’re the makings of a headache all down the right side of my head, from temple to neck. I unclench my jaw. “What do you want?”

“Can’t I come and visit my dear older brother without suspicion?”

“Maglor.” No matter how much he pretends he’s better than all our other brothers, he shares more than a few annoying tendencies with them.

“What’s the statute of limitations on murder?”

“I’m sorry?”

“Come on, Mae, I know that you know.”

“There isn’t one.”

“Nice.” Maglor grins. I toy with the idea of being concerned about whatever scheme he’s got brewing in that head of his. I can only pray that it’s just for a particularly moody song. I sincerely hope he’s not planning anything illegal because there’s no way I could be bribed into getting him out of it in good conscience. Brother or not.

“Dare I ask why?”

“Just curious--hey,” he starts, and I prepare myself, “how’s your ‘friendship’ with our step-cousin going?”

I wonder about how to answer. It would be an outright (and blatant) lie to tell him that we don’t flirt a little, but there’s a difference between joking about flirting and actually, seriously flirting which isn’t exactly easy to define.

“It’s...good.”

He raises his eyebrows. “Good enough for ‘I can’t afford to eat out anywhere nice so could you pay for my date this weekend under the pretence of it being a group thing since we all know you’re loaded’?”

I stare at him. He shrugs.

“It’s been two months. I want to go somewhere nice for once.”

“Couldn’t you just have saved up?”

“I could’ve, but there’s also this new piano in the Wardour street Yamaha store--”

I sigh, “fine, fine.” Even if I refuse, he’ll find a way. Maglor is clever in ways that our parents don’t fully understand (or don’t want to understand, because it would mean admitting that they were manipulated into fuelling his musical career). My eyes flit to the clock on the wall, just above his right shoulder. “It’s actually my lunch break now, so if this meeting is done--”

“Cheers, big brother.” He bows as he pulls the door open for me and I roll my eyes.

I almost crash into a man standing in the corridor, reading through something on a tablet, frowning.

“Sorry,” I say, skirting around him. He looks up, and his eyes widen.

“Are you Maedhros?”

“Sorry?”

“Yes!” Maglor answers for me. The man’s eyes flicker over to him, briefly registering his presence, then he looks back at me.

He opens his mouth but doesn’t say anything, then he shakes my hand--”pleased to meet you”--and turns and leaves.

Maglor and I watch. He looks at me, seemingly trying to decide whether to laugh or to say something.

“So, this weekend,” I say.

- Maglor -

The man from earlier-- the one with the curls like a honey-golden cloud--is standing outside, and I have a decision to make. I consider him for a moment--he seemed...off.

“Hey, are you ok?”

He jumps, turning at the sound of my voice. “No--no, I’m fine.”

He looks uncomfortable, but I don’t think I could just leave him like that without asking. “Are you sure?”

“No--ah--I just forgot that your brother and I have never spoken in person.”

Oh? “What do you mean?”

“I mean, I’m acquainted with your--with Fingon--and he talks a lot so I know a lot. Actually,” he says, seeming to relax a little, “what’s up with that? You guys seem to have some really weird baggage.”

“It’s complicated,” I say, “but it’s a good story and it’d be a shame to keep it all hidden away.” Better men than me would know when it’s inappropriate to share your messy family drama, but I’m a very firm believer in the power of the public domain. Besides, better men than me tend to have fewer friends. “It all started in 1976,” I begin, but trail off as I catch his look. “My grandfather remarried a single mother after my grandma committed suicide. Our dad took it personally. Fingon is his step-brother’s eldest son. Simple, really.”

He shakes his head. “That sounds...tough. I can’t say I understand; all of the mess in my family is between my father and my uncle.”

“Do you mind if I pry?” I say, then, “I’m Maglor, by the way.” I feel like he should at least know who I am if I’m going to try and get him to confide his tragic backstory in me.

“I guessed as much.” He smiles at me. “I’m Eönwë. And it’s really not a big deal: my uncle ran off overseas when they were still teenagers and never came back. I think my father was hurt, as far as I can tell; he was left alone.” He breaks eye-contact. “But that’s really it.”

Sounds familiar.

The human brain is a pattern-recognising machine; it makes connections where there aren’t any. I push the thought to the back of my mind.

“Anyway,” he says, gaze snapping back to me, “I think we’re about even in the department of knowing obscure things about each other’s personal lives now, don’t you.”

I nod. “Pleased to meet you and your family’s emotional hang-ups.”

“Likewise.” He turns and walks away across the car park. Slipping slightly on the ice, then continuing, slower this time. He has a nice physique but absolutely no grace, at least, not in these conditions. I smile to myself.

Saturday rolls around fast enough and I wonder if there’s any point in dressing nicely. The only smart clothes I own are an eighteenth-birthday gift; a tailored, red, gold-embroidered suit that’s just a little too tight around the shoulders and that I can’t wear without a belt. Funnily enough, I don’t fancy that look for the independent French artisan place Maedhros has inevitably picked out because it’s the first thing that comes up when you google ‘nice places to eat in central London’.

At least the lights in Soho are impressive (and only half of them are still red).

So, what else is there? Grey turtleneck, cream turtleneck, steel-blue turtleneck--I need to buy clothes that aren’t turtlenecks--no shirts, either; I donated all of mine once I realised I was never going to get round to buying an ironing board. Or even an iron, for that matter. Life is too short for ironing. There are those heeled boots that put me roughly eye-level with Maedhros, which, in my opinion, makes them a very good pair of boots, and a pair of battered converse that Caranthir got me when he forced me to let him buy me a new wardrobe because he was sick of my constant visage of slippers, slacks and hoodies. He just doesn’t understand comfort.

In the end, I don’t change; if I need to dress smarter I’m pretty sure I can probably get away with stealing a jacket off of one of my companions. A jacket always makes things look posher.

The sun set three hours ago, but the city is never dark and never quiet, so I don't feel afraid walking to pick up Daeron--or, rather--to meet him a street away from his actual address, because he's weird about people meeting him at his apartment.

"You look awful," he says when he sees me, and I wink.

"As do you, my dear." And I'm right, I think--he needs a haircut or something; it keeps falling across his face when he moves in thin, wispy strands that float in a way that seems almost incomprehensible--almost intangible. Light filters through his hair, glowing gold in the lamplight, instead of getting swallowed up by the darkness of it.

We walk side-by-side, *not* hand-in-hand; like colleagues or friends from work, not lovers. I half-debate with myself, wondering how much of it is my own visceral distaste for PDA, and how much is the fact that he always freezes slightly when someone touches that scar on his hand.

There are memories there that he doesn't want to relive--at least not in full. He doesn't owe me them, I know, but I get curious sometimes about how much of his story was true, and how much was simplified down into something not-horrifying.

I was right, of course, the restaurant Maedhros picked *was* the first one that came up with a Google search--the sweet little French place tucked away off the side of Carnaby street. I haven't been there before (restaurants in Soho are far too expensive for my taste) but I've been to the bar next door (drinks in Soho are also expensive, but I can be convinced) and flirted with the bartender. I elect not to suggest to get drinks after, present company considered.

Fingon gives us a wave.

"Who's this?" He says, grinning.

"My chief consort, Daeron," I say, slipping an arm around his shoulders.

"Great to meet you!" He says, then turns back to me, "Maedhros is already inside--he was ranting about you."

"He loves me, really."

"Wait," Daeron hesitates, "I don't remember meeting him before."

I laugh, then I realise that he's right, and stop laughing. There's a pause. I realise that I didn't think this through enough.

"Let's just go inside."

Maedhros and Fingon carry most of the conversation which means, rather, Fingon carries most of the conversation while Maedhros interjects every once in a while, sparking him off on another train of thought. I have a suspicion that Daeron is hiding behind his menu on purpose.

I nudge him with my foot, and he looks up, meeting my eyes for a second before closing his menu and setting it down gently on the table.

"None of this is authentic."

I snort.

Maedhros looks up. "The wine list should be okay, though--"

“How can you tell?” Fingon asks.

“They misspelt the name here.” He leans over and points out one of the items. “And the ingredients are wrong.”

Fingon nods, and then there’s a pause again that lasts so painfully long the waiter shows up, takes our order, and leaves before it’s over. I begin to think that perhaps getting a little tipsy isn’t a bad idea, so I order a bottle of red wine and pour myself two glasses before our food arrives.

Maedhros must notice because he speaks up: “So how did you guys meet?”

I freeze. The first thing I said to Maedhros about Daeron contained a detailed description of how much I hated everything about my new ‘nightmare colleague’ and how he was a pretentious asshole who I was inevitably going to end up killing. I’m not sure if it would bode well for our relationship for Maedhros to know that they’re the same person, particularly if, down the line, he’d find it ‘funny’ to let Daeron know about that. Of course, he knew that I didn’t like him at first, he does *not* know the extent to which I didn’t like him.

There has to be a clever way to word my answer so that he never has to know that, immediately after I ranted about him, I went to a gig and hooked up with him in his dressing room. He certainly doesn’t *need* to know that. Daeron starts to open his mouth and I kick him hard in the shin.

“Mutual friend,” I say, which is *technically* true as long as I count Jen as a friend rather than a boss (and as long as Daeron does, too). Daeron raises his eyebrows--near imperceptibly--at me, questioning. I avoid his gaze.

“What about you?” He says, probably taking note to ask me later if I know him.

Fingon winces and Maedhros takes a sip of his wine.

“It’s complicated,” he says, folding his hands together over the desk the way he always used to when he was practising client meetings with me when he was at uni. “Our parents are step-brothers--”

“And his father hates all of us,” Fingon says, “so naturally, we started hanging out to spite him.”

Daeron frowns, “are you dating, or are you just friends?”

“We--” Maedhros starts, but he’s cut off by the sound of Fingon’s ringtone (a beautiful kazoo rendition of Rick Astley’s *Never Gonna Give You Up*, that the three of us thought was hilarious when we were fourteen, so I recorded especially.)

“Saved by the recently outdated meme, I see,” I say as he gets up, nearly tripping over his chair as he moves to step outside. “I hope it’s not serious.”

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

The continuation of the previous events.

Featuring: A couple of revelations, bad decisions involving liquor, and some sort of a resolution.

Chapter Notes

This chapter's kinda just pure dumb fun: the conclusion. Dont say I didnt warn you.

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

- Fingon -

“Eönwë? I’d tell you that I’m busy but you just saved me from an awkward conversation--”

“I saw your--Maedhros earlier and it reminded me of something I needed to speak to you about,” he says, he sounds out-of-breath. “Sorry, I just got back to the station.”

“Go on.”

“You know how your father was injured a couple of months ago, and he was convinced it was an accident?”

“Yes?” I lean against the wall of the restaurant, drumming against my thigh with my fingers. *Is someone after him? Is someone going to try and hurt dad again?*

“It was on purpose and I--we know exactly who the culprit is, so you can pursue legal action now.”

“Oh. Is dad--is my dad safe?”

“It seems like it was a random attack; we’re familiar with the group and they’re mostly just a nuisance, so there’s no serious threat--”

Then, uninvited, a memory of my conversation with Aredhel outside of the hospital flickers back to me. “Is it legal to smoke weed?”

“What--what are you talking about?”

“I was arguing with my sister--”

“Aredhel?”

“Yes--about it, and she said no one seems to be really sure--like, yeah, obviously it’s illegal to sell, but what about smoking--”

“No, no, that’s definitely illegal, too.” His tone is less urgent, I can hear typing. I think he just Googled it. “Yeah, one-hundred-percent. Don’t do drugs.”

“Got it, Sergeant.”

“I’m not a--”

“Can I get back to my date, now?”

“You’re on a date? With who--” he stops, “if you don’t mind me asking, of course.”

“Maedhros,” I sigh, knowing exactly how it sounds and definitely not wanting to think about it too hard, “my lawyer, step-cousin, and childhood friend.”

“Fingon.”

“Yes?” There’s a roulette wheel of things that he could choose to bring me up on and call me out for at this point.

“He’s a lawyer, he knows the law, you could’ve asked him your weed questions without letting a member of literal law enforcement know you were wondering.”

“Ah.”

He laughs. “It’s ok. I wouldn’t arrest you for asking--shows you’re a nice citizen who cares about knowing wrong from right, *right?*”

I take the warning. “Right.”

“Stay safe.” It’s a strange way to end a conversation, but, then again, considering his investigation, it makes sense. He sounded strange though; there was an edge like something was off--or rather--no--not *off*; amiss? Would amiss be right? I’d have to ask Maglor--

Ah, yes, of course, *that*.

I reckon I’ve got about five more minutes before they start to get concerned (or suspicious) about how long I’ve been absent, which means five minutes to think of a better way out or--there’s a liquor store tucked down a side street with a bright green sign glowing against the December-darkness--way out, or way forward? I pat down my back pocket: I’ve got my wallet on me, and I could do with a shot right now.

Plus, it’ll give me time to think of something good and fun to say.

“I can’t believe you told him everything.” Maedhros elbows me in the shoulder as soon as the others are out of earshot.

“He just needed to now the basics, handsome,” I try the word out. I decide that I like the way

Maedhros flushes. He could look like one of those models--the ones on the electronic advertisement boards that flash in the front of stores--with soft lips and rosy cheeks and striking eyes and who all look like they've been sent straight from a fantasy movie to save the world--where was I? Right, defending myself. "He was going to find out eventually."

Maedhros raises his eyebrows. For a second my heart lurches at the realisation that I might've fucked up enough for him to actually be mad at me.

I stare at my shoes. "I may or may not have had a couple of shots."

He sighs, leaning back against the wall next to me. "I wish I had, too. I think I might've been the only fully sober person there."

"You're the only sober person in *life*," I say, and I feel very smart for a moment before taking a second to actually remember what came out of my mouth. He frowns for a moment and my stomach twists. "Not that, y'know, that's a *bad* thing."

He just sighs, then slips his phone out of his pocket. "I don't have a bus for another twenty--"

"Well, there's a perfectly expensive liquor shop over there--" I nod, trying not to think too hard about what I'm saying, it never helps-- "very accommodating. They don't kick you out if you ramble about your life story--although, in hindsight, I think they just thought they could get me to buy another bottle."

Maedhros laughs and I think my heart does a somersault, as long as he isn't angry, "Yeah, I think we ought to avoid there. What was that call about, for you to immediately go and get tipsy?"

"Correlation," I say, "does not equal causation. I was just avoiding the question."

"Still."

"Right, it was about my dad's car accident." I make a face.

"Insurance?"

"No, police," I go on to explain, and he frowns.

"If there's a threat you shouldn't be out alone at night--"

"Ah, finally! You gonna make up for not walking me home the other night?" I grin. He stares; I can almost see him retrieving the memory from the back of his mind. I really am trying my luck.

"You say that like that wasn't two months ago--wait--you remember?"

"How could I forget anything to do with you and, besides, so do you," I say, and his lips quirk. He really *is* pretty. Painfully so. I almost want to punch him for it. Or kiss him--God, that *would* be nice. "So, are you?"

"I am," he says, offering me his arm. I take it, resisting the urge to comment on how skinny he is and how, if we *were* attacked, I'd probably have to defend him, rather than the other way around. Besides, if I said something, he'd probably leave, and, while there's a lot I don't know, I know for sure that I *don't* want that.

We joke for a while, playing at being some old married couple, but the alcohol must've gotten to my head (more than it already has, of course) because I feel strangely quiet--something almost

adjacent to sadness, but not quite in line. Sadness, but missing some of the components.

It's stupid--a stupid thought--but I really like this fantasy that we've built up. I don't want it to end.

I think about what Daeron asked. Maybe I really didn't need to go into so much detail; I'm not very good when put on the spot.

"If you really want the full, gory, detailed--I'm out of words, but! If you really want to know, we're technically related because when our grandparents were our age they were engaged in some three-way romance--"

"That's not true--"

"You haven't spoken to naanee in what? Ten years? How would you know, Russo?"

Maedhros shut up.

"Point is, kids ended up involved, you know all that roughly; there was a time when Maedhros and I were allowed to be friends, then there was a time when we weren't and we didn't care, then there was a weird period as teenagers where no one knew exactly what was going on--"

"I knew what was going on." Maglor raised an eyebrow.

"You were twelve--"

"--fourteen--"

"--anyway, we lost contact because university and family troubles and the long and short of it is we're step-cousins, and, because that doesn't answer your question: I don't know. I don't fucking know." I stared at the table. There was silence.

"I should've warned you not to ask, babe." Maglor sighed, then, because he actually knew how to read a room, "wanna go and hit the bars?"

I wonder if Maedhros is going to bring any of that up. If he did, maybe I could say something dramatic about being in love with him since we were sixteen and then we could make out in the middle of the street. He doesn't bring it up.

We talk about stupid things. I vaguely recall saying something about Christmas, then making sure to properly acknowledge that neither of us have ever really celebrated it, but I don't recall where that thought went because there's a cat just at the end of the road (when did we get into a residential area?) trying to walk along a fence and flailing back and forth. I watch it as it gets closer to the fence-post, swaying, losing sight of its destination. It slips, I rush forward and grab it.

Maybe the cat is a metaphor--trying to get to its goal, but losing confidence and stumbling away. I smile at it; Maglor would be proud of that. Maybe I should go into poetry.

"Fingon?" Maedhros stares at me--the cat squirms in my arms--us .

Fuck, maybe I'm that cat.

I open my mouth and say, "Is he right? Are we dating?" I regret opening my mouth. The cat yowls, threatening to dig its claws into my hand; I let it go. The cat, not the thought, although I'm beginning to wish I could let that go, too.

We stare at each other for a minute. I register that he's stopped outside my house (how did that

time go so fast?) A grin cracks on his face-- "I didn't know you could speak to cats."

"Oh, fuck off. I meant Daeron--you *know* I meant Daeron."

"Right. You know, I wasn't going to--"

"I really like you, Maedhros Callaghan, so I want to know." The words I say surprise me, but that's nothing new.

"I've never had anything with anyone before," he admits, almost too quiet for me to hear.

"You haven't? But you're--you look like *that*."

"I don't get out much."

We watch each other for a moment--he really is gorgeous--I wonder for perhaps the billionth time if he remembers that night at the party. I walk over, making for the door, he stops me.

"I'm just not sure if I'm allowed to count the same person twice," he says, and I grin.

"You know, know that I know you remember that, I'm allowed to say that you owe me a kiss. And it *better* be magical." We look at each other. "I'm just kidding," I say, then I kiss him--on the cheek--because, midway through moving in, I remember we're right outside my house.

"You're kidding," he groans.

"Buy me dinner first." *Play it cool, Finno.*

He sighs, "next Sunday?"

"Sounds good. I'll pick you up at eight." I wink. He rolls his eyes, but he's smiling. I'm smiling. I'm also breathing a heavy sigh of relief.

I slip inside, shuddering as warmth covers my body. Somebody whistles. *Right.* I groan. "How much did you see?"

"Enough." Aredhel grins. I suppose, of all my family, at least it was her. "*Dude.*"

"I know, I know--ah--" I feel my phone vibrate. Probably a text from Maedhros--right, the person that I'm going out with. For real. Not just some weird teenage disaster of an almost-relationship.

"Pretty magical timing too," she says, "look."

I follow her gaze to the window; it's started to snow.

"You know, if I wasn't a sensible and grown-up young woman who is *not* going to enable this, I'd say it must be fate."

"Shut up and let me bask in this."

She shrugs and wanders off, presumably to go and bother someone else. I sink down onto the couch, still in my coat-- *right*, I need to check that message. I open my phone.

One new message:

- Maglor Callaghan: I'm just going to warn you in advance of my request (wow, that sounds formal) that this is going to sound REALLY weird and might be illegal (I don't know, I didn't ask Mae) but, with all of that in mind, could I get the number (or otherwise legal contact details) of your police officer friend? Thanks.

Chapter End Notes

Please leave a comment if you enjoyed!! I've been super blocked on this story for ages but I think I'm finally through it!!

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Finally some mystery action

Chapter Notes

I'm mostly just writing this for fun so no more accents (they took much effort to paste into g docs) and no more effort. im sorry if the quality drops but im going through a really bad depressive episode and this is what it's gonna take for me to finish this

Thanks to shine for beta reading!

edit: after posting this i immediately wrote the best and most philosophical 1000 words ive ever written so if youre having trouble enduring the slog that is this chapter let the promise of that motivate you

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

- Eönwë -

“Hi, we’ve met.” I start and meet eyes with the guy from yesterday--Maedhros’ brother (Maglor, was it?). He’s offering me his hand; I shake it. “Apparently this is the most legal way I could pop in.”

“Do you do this a lot? Visit people at their place of work?”

“Very funny. I’m a man of context, Eönwë.” He takes a seat in front of my desk, elbows resting atop a stack of papers that I’ve been putting off sorting through. Beneath the stack of papers is a crisp packet - I mean, of course there is - underneath *that* is a manila file for a case that was closed six months ago.

“Context? Is there anything I can help you with?” I take a minute to observe him properly. He’s good-looking; nice jawline, full lips, intense gaze--way too intense. It’s hard to look at him. I don’t think he means it to be, but it is.

“Actually, I think there’s something I can help *you* with.”

I run through the list of things that he could be referring to. Perhaps my workout routine? That’s all Fingon actually knows about me to tell him--or, no, it can’t be about Mairon, can it? No--no, that’s ridiculous, he doesn’t know about that. He can’t know about that. “Can you, perhaps, tell me?”

“Okay, but probably not here, because it’s not exactly--well--I don’t know. Do you want to get coffee?”

I give him the best stern look I can muster. He shifts in his seat, eyes drifting away, thank God. “Are you reporting a crime, offering evidence, or wasting police time?”

“Can I answer yes to all?”

- Maglor -

The conversation went something like this:

“Hello, my love, what would you do if you had a really strong suspicion that you knew how to solve a decades-old cold case and you were one hundred percent certain that you were right but you didn’t have any interest in breaking the law?”

Daeron hesitated, lowering the free Met newspaper that he said he always made sure to pick up because it helped him practice his English (and because it was the best way to wrap compost). I prodded him in the shoulder with my foot.

“Vigil--vigilantism is illegal.”

“That’s my problem, you see--that, and I’m far too lazy to go and solve any crimes myself.”

“Speak to a police officer?”

I pause--I could. “How, though? I also think wasting police time is a crime--I should probably check with Maedhros.”

“Probably,” Daeron sighed, “I’m not sure why you’re asking me this.”

“You’re the only person available.”

“I love you too. I’m going to bed.” He yawned.

“Hey!”

I drum my fingers against the side of my coffee cup (reusable because I may be a disorganised mess, but the earth is too beautiful to go to waste--what would I have left to write about, if not the specific feeling one gets standing atop a cliff overlooking a raging sea?)

“Not to be an amateur sleuth, but I work at the music hall down the street from here,” I say, “and my boss told me about this one murder that took place there.”

“I think I’ve heard of that case,” he responds, “but never in any detail. I haven’t seen the file.”

“Well, that’s suspicious,” I mumble, half to myself.

“Is it? There are thousands of unsolved crimes amongst our files.”

“Anyway, the owner of the hall was the victim and I was bored one evening, so I went through the hall’s records and I found something.” I hand him a single framed photograph. I’d found it hidden away in one of the half-rotted cardboard boxes in the storeroom, there amongst various lists of shows, and budget books. He takes it and looks at it, frowning.

The difficult thing about having a parent in the public image, I think, is that other people are liable to recognise them.

Manwë Sulimo is one such person.

“I know it was the 80s, but I thought maybe witness protection missed this, so I should hand it over.”

“Thank you. This is my father, you know that, right?”

“Yeah, I know.”

“You can’t tell anyone about this.”

“I know. Don’t worry.”

“Thank you,” he murmurs again. Then he pats me on the shoulder and leaves. I feel bad for him. At least none of the deaths in my family are mysteries.

- Eonwe -

I don't come home. My parents worry, they leave twenty missed calls on my phone and send me enough texts that I'd be able to write a novel out of the leftover words, but I don't come home. Case files are always time-consuming to read through--getting transferred to someone else's case is the last thing you want--and this one is particularly hefty. It seems my grandfather had a lot of enemies. I can only pray animosity isn't inherited.

I read through each of the papers properly, making sure not to miss a single detail, as I lay them into two piles: ' *suspicious* ', and ' *probably a dead-end* .' The latter is already three inches high and contains most of what was in the file, but the suspicious pile contains the more interesting details. Details like, let's say, that the weapon used to kill him was his own kitchen knife, and appeared to be halfway through being washed at the time of the crime, or that the murderer clearly was familiar enough with the hall to know that the best place to hide a body was the boiler room - and familiar enough that the security guards wouldn't stop them on their way in.

The evidence points towards a domestic crime of passion, but Eru's family was small; there are only two domestic options.

I bite my lip. No more playing games, no, this is serious now; this is the real deal.

"How the fuck was this a cold case?" I murmur.

"Mm?" Serena, the actual Sargeant, looks up. I barely registered that she stayed late, too.

"Sorry, just talking to myself."

She gets up from her desk and walks over, leaning down to look at the file in front of me, dark hair piled so loosely into its bun that it falls out over her shoulder like a curtain of night, or--or something, I can't be bothered to think in similes and metaphors anymore. That was Mairon's thing. I just liked literature, I never wrote it.

"I'm guessing you're smart enough to know you shouldn't be looking at this case?" She nudges me in the shoulder.

"I know," I sigh, "you're right, but--"

"But what? Eönwë? This is twenty different shades of a bad idea--"

"I'm estranged from most of my family, I'm already investigating my uncle, and it's not exactly illegal, is it? I can be objective."

"Can you?" She looks straight at me, tired eyes still enough to make me squirm. She has that kind of vibe (help) to her, like anything that she could say while giving you *that* look would make you feel like a scolded child. She reminds me scarily of my year seven form tutor; the one who once called me to the front of the class to have a quiet conversation about some minor transgression that I can't remember anymore--but I can remember the way she looked at me (jaw set, brow stern, all too heavy eye-contact), as if she was an angel judging me before Heaven. And I remember what I said when she asked me if I really thought that I could do better.

"Let me prove it."

She stands back. The look on her face is stern, but she's thinking about it. She doesn't like it, but she's considering.

"Fine." She folds her arms. "But if I ever have reason to doubt your methods--"

"I know, I know."

"Good: don't disappoint me."

I won't. I can't.

Chapter End Notes

if you want me to make it to the end of this fic please comment i need all the help i can get

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Maglor forces Daeron to come with him to family dinner.

Chapter Notes

two updates in one day? you'd better believe it

(thanks shine for beta-ing)

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

- *Maglor* -

The dreams that I wake from are deep and uncomfortable and they fade the moment I open my eyes. All I'm left with is a dawning sense of unease; like the sea captain who looks overboard only to catch a glimpse of something that shouldn't be there--that shouldn't, by all accounts, even exist--swimming underneath the bow of the ship. My memory is good, but I think there are some things that whatever internal wall in my head doesn't want me to see.

"Mags?" Daeron. Arms wrapped around me, he can probably feel my muscles tense.

"Sorry, just woke up." I close my eyes again--try to relax. "I have to go soon."

"Your family dinner," he smiles. I can feel his lips move against my shoulder blade. His breath is so warm against my skin; I must feel like a corpse, always cold, always tense. No, no, not always. We don't think in all or nothings anymore.

I'm not sure how much I want to face my family, whom I love dearly, this weekend. Or, perhaps, I don't know how much I want to face them alone.

"Daeron?"

"Mhm?"

"Come with me."

"From what I've heard, your father will kill me."

"I'm a dramatist, Daeron, he isn't that bad in real life." That sense of unease flows over me again and a clammy wave that makes me want to squirm until I shed my skin. *An immortal soul trapped in a mortal body*. That was how I'd had the concept of miasma described to me by my ex-girlfriend. *An immortal soul that wants to get free*. Perhaps I dreamed that I got free, whichever part of this system 'I' am. "I'm going to make coffee, do you want any?"

He sits up. "Sure."

Perhaps the idea of an immortal soul would be more comfortable if I could tell how much of me it was, and how much of me was my brain (stupid thing.) I think I dreamt that I died.

I use his stupid-fancy coffee strainer thingy; it's soothing to watch it. I try not to think too hard. If I think too hard, I'll get that wave of unease rolling over me again, the sea monster under the boat, the cold sweat on the back of my neck. A consequence of almost-dying is being plagued by feelings of doom, I think, running a finger over the delicately raised scar across my abdomen. The time that I had before that scar was minuscule, now the length of it stretches out over a horizon that I can't even see yet. The future is almost too big to comprehend; the concept of being anywhere but here feels almost cursed. In fifteen years, I can't even imagine still existing--at least, not in the way that I do now. Maybe that's because I won't; the cells all change, regenerate, and the body grows, thoughts shift. Will I still be here, in fifteen years time?

"How much of a person is their soul?" I whisper into the dark liquid.

"All of them," says Daeron, frowning.

"Then how much is the brain?"

"The soul is what spurs the brain into motion, isn't it?" He puts his hands on my shoulders, easing out the tension. "There is no reason for our heart to beat, for lungs to breathe, and for our brain to think, otherwise."

"Your body may be a temple in which a loving God resides," I say, "but mine is a rotting shack in the depths of some forest, where nothing but the birds nest."

"And birds sing beautifully." He kisses my cheekbone. I lean back against his chest, letting myself bask in the warmth for just a few moments, and then just a few more. People who stay in love for their entire lives--they either change in unison, or their souls fall in love. My parents once told me that you've found The One when you feel like *one entity*. My ex told me that soulmates weren't people you were perfectly compatible with; they were people who made you feel whole--who made you feel real. Really real. Like you existed, and like you always could exist. They spoke to you in a language only souls can understand. So many people all saying the same thing that, for a second, I wonder if it can be true.

Do I feel complete?

Do I feel real?

"Will you, though?" I pull his arms around me. "Will you come with me? I can't go alone--not today; it'll be torture."

"Of course."

How will I know if I feel real?

Daeron, do you feel real around me?

"Thank you." I force myself to smile and get up. I need to get dressed; it's nearly mid-day, thanks to my shitty sleeping habits.

"What about coffee?" he calls after me.

"It can wait."

There's an area of his wardrobe, sectioned off by one of those hanging shoe storage things, that is entirely my clothes. It started because I got sick of having to wear the same clothes two days in a row every time I stayed over, and then, slowly, more and more of my things were moved into his apartment. A gradual, almost undetectable assimilation; the kind that you only notice after a couple of months, when you realise you haven't been home in a week and a half and you own the spare set of keys.

Perhaps, you don't have a soulmate in the same way that you don't start off sharing a home with someone. Perhaps, you become one through a slow and gentle melding. I smile at the way our--my language is built. Become One. Maybe there's a reason I don't know yet.

I pull on a pair of jeans and a sweater, then take a look out of the window at the heavy-falling snow (sleet, if I felt any desire to be realistic) and pull off the sweater for a moment so I can slip a vest on underneath. Usually, the binder can generate enough heat to keep me warm, but this weather is particularly nasty. I can almost feel the way the slush will inevitably slip through the soles of my shoes. My eyes flit to the clock. The coffee can't wait any longer.

I nudge Daeron with my knee, pouring my coffee into a carry-cup. "Get dressed, you need to meet the dragon that is my father."

- Daeron -

I'm not sure whether to be embarrassed or grateful that it's Maedhros who answers the door. On the one hand, I know him, on the other, I know a little more than is perhaps necessary. He starts.

"Hi." I shake his hand before he can say anything.

I slip inside after Maglor, then pause, taking an internal head-count of everyone I can see. Of course, I knew Maglor had a big family, but somehow I never fully registered how big *big* was.

I thought, when I met him, that he and Maedhros barely looked related; Maedhros was all cream-coloured skin and blue eyes that seemed to catch the dark instead of the light, while Maglor has the kind of skin that gets illuminated when the sun comes out on a cloudy day, almost seeming to glow a bronzed gold in the light, and the kind of eyes that melt into pools of coffee; when you spend long enough looking into them, you drown. But here, surrounded by the rest of the brood, they make sense.

They're spotted around the sitting room like they're part of an old tableau. *The House of Feanor*.

"That--" Maglor gestures towards a young man with platinum silver hair and enough piercings that he'd be pulled aside while passing through airport security checks, half-buried underneath an unrealistically huge mass of fur that I can only safely determine to be a dog when it moves-- "is Celegorm. He's my first baby brother. He's an asshole."

"Is that pretty twink your boyfriend?" I shudder. Celegorm grins. I'm not so sure about using the word 'baby' to describe him; he looks like he could actually pick that dog up.

"Yes, be nice to him," Maglor says, ruffling his hair threateningly (if that were something a person could do).

The man next to him, I'm told, is Caranthir. He's darker than Maglor, with the same thick, black hair--only his is braided back and away from his face. I'm told he studies finance. Then there's Curufin, who looks like a sterner--sharper version of Maglor; I feel like his gaze alone could slice open my finger, so I thank God silently that he doesn't seem to care enough to look at me. "He's fifteen and he's terrible," says Maglor, "don't mind him."

The other two are kids--identical twins with identical ginger curls and bronzed freckles, and identical grins.

The household is run by a woman with gentle ocean waves of copper hair and the beginnings of crow's feet; she gives me a nod and tells Maglor that, though there is certainly plenty of food to go around, he should probably warn her before bringing guests over. He apologises and follows her off into the kitchen. I find myself drifting into the corner of the room, trying not to look too much at anyone lest they turn their attention in my direction.

"They won't bite you." I look up and meet eyes with Maedhros. "Probably. Actually, no, I can't promise that."

"You're really filling me with confidence."

"It's ok; as long as you aren't related to someone Dad has a grudge against, you should be fine." He makes a face. I'm reminded uncomfortably that meeting this legendary Feanor is unavoidable.

He's not how I imagined. For one, he speaks French. Well.

"You're Maglor's Parisian lover, no?"

In a panic, I answered him in jumbled English.

He also smiles. For some reason I never imagined him to be the type of person who smiled. But he does, and he smiles bright and wide, like a child playing with a chemistry set which, I'm told by Nerdanel, isn't that far off from the truth.

"That's nonsense, Nell, I'm a geophysicist; I don't study vinegar volcanoes, I study real ones."

She rolls her eyes.

"I was always obsessed with Pompeii as a child," he says, "I wanted to see if the volcano really was the home of a forge god. I'm not so sure it isn't. Would you like gravy? I know you probably weren't expecting a Sunday roast, but it's terrible out and heavy carbs are necessary."

He also has a degree in nutrition, clinical psychology, and astrophysics. Maglor says he can speak four 'second' languages fluently (Mandarin Chinese, French, Korean and Hebrew) and apparently developed a working theory on how to decipher Linear A after teaching himself Linear B in three weeks while off work watching the twins. He's the kind of person you read biographies about and convince yourself that at least ninety percent of these claims must be exaggerated because there's no way one single person can contain so much energy and knowledge. I eye Maglor, wondering if he's smarter than he lets on.

"That reminds me," he says, "I need to go to a conference across the channel soon--when was it? Next week?"

"Next month," Curufin supplies through a mouthful of roast potatoes, briefly looking up from his phone. Knowing what I do, I suspect he's typing in what Mags tells me is Python.

"Right, right. I should probably go and give whatsername a visit." He squints. "El-something. Your gran's great-niece." He hesitates a second. "My first cousin once removed?"

"Eloise?" Maedhros suggests.

"No, that doesn't sound right..." He frowns. For everything else, Feanor seems to have paid the price of being bad with names. "Ella? Elizabeth? Well, whatever her name is, she's pregnant and God forbid her closest relative be *Thingol* ." He makes a face.

"Thingol?"

"He's my uncle and I despise him," he says. "Mother's younger brother; didn't like her all that much, *hated* me."

"What for?" I ask, stupidly-- *stupidly* , ask.

"Existing." His expression darkens. "He blames me for the fact that he didn't get to reconcile with her before she died."

There are two Feanors. The smiling family man with a brain like a computer, and the dragon that the media simply referred to as Choifeu. When the world only knows you by your surname, you're either a terror or a legend. Sometimes you're both.

"Do you keep up with University Challenge, Daeron?" Nerdanel asks, laying a gentle hand on Feanor's forearm.

"Can't say that I do," I say, taking the escape that she's so graciously offered me.

"Our Caranthir was on last week's episode."

Afterwards, I stand outside in the rain, letting the cold seep through my coat. I don't smoke, but I wish I had a cigarette, just to have something to put in my mouth and look moody with. Instead, I curl my fingers against the jagged scar on my palm.

"You stayed with Thingol, didn't you? Luthien's father, fuck, I didn't realise." Maglor slips his hand into mine and his soft skin replaces the rough.

"Your father is my ex's cousin," I say, testing the words. They don't make any more sense out loud than in my head.

"Your ex is my father's cousin," he says. "Small world-- *fuck* , I'm so, so sorry."

"Thingol isn't--he doesn't--"

"Let's just pretend we completely missed the connection. The Thingol that you know is a different Thingol."

"Right."

"Right, let's go home."

Thingol was kind to me; he let me in out of the rain. I probably would've frozen to death on the streets that night if he hadn't. I would've died. Or my mother would've found me. I'm not sure which eventuality was worse. Luthien and I were barely friends; she was just a pretty classmate that sometimes I played for and who sometimes played (badly--she was always a vocalist at heart) for me, she had no reason to ask him to let me stay. They had no reason to take me in, to not call my mother or the Conservatoire; they saw me, soaked to the bone, shaking the ice from my skin, and they took pity on me and when I cried and told them everything, they promised they'd look after me. They were kind.

For a second, I wonder if Maglor's family would've done the same. It's a terrible thing to think about--a terrible way to test people, or to test a person--but, for a moment, there's nothing I want to know more desperately, with every fibre of my being, than that.

I want to know that Maglor is just as good.

I pull my hand away and he pauses, looking at me, searching. I try to avoid meeting his eyes--to avoid getting lost in them. "Just needed to get my gloves out."

He nods and we continue walking. He doesn't seem to notice that I don't reach for his hand again.

- Mairon -

Champagne, whiskey, vodka, water, vodka again; I line up the glasses on the granite counter-top. I've devised a perfect system for getting drunk enough to forget this mess, but not so drunk that I wake up with a hangover remembering. Perhaps if I managed to get blackout drunk, I might genuinely forget, but that would cost me a lot of money, and it's a roulette wheel that I'm not prepared to spin.

Things are bad.

I can hear my phone buzzing from the room next door--there's a pattern to their calls; first is Aule--awkward--asking me how I am and if I'm coming home for whichever holiday or birthday is nearest, then Yavanna, telling me Aiwendil misses me, then Aule again, telling me I'm upsetting my 'mother'. We both know that I'm not.

I pour the champagne, staring at the bubbles as they rise.

My phone stops ringing. Yavanna's attempt is due next. In roughly an hour to a week. It isn't an exact science but--I tip the glass back and down it in one-- *this* is.

How much longer is left? Eventually, something has to give. Either I'll fuck up and tell Melkor everything, or I'll go to the police station and turn myself in, or I'll go to the police station and fuck Eonwe again and then someone will find out and, regardless, it'll all fall apart.

"Shit," I say aloud to no one in particular. I pour out another glass.

Chapter End Notes

comment please and thank you i am very tired and want to ride this tide of motivation as long as possible

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Maedhros and Fingon go on a date.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is mildly nsfw, so if you aren't comfortable with that just skip the first half of Maedhros' pov

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

- Fingon -

Maedhros is hot and I am stupid. Those are two facts that I'm reminded of a lot.

He's tall--well, he's always tall, but I'm really noticing it now--and he's dressed nicely--not too nicely, but nicely enough that I have to take a minute to breathe before I grin and welcome him into my abode. I would say 'humble', but I think hubris suits me quite well. Right, right, dressed all smart casual with a shirt and a nice jumper (grey, it looks good on him) and that specific kind of trousers that are almost casual enough to have the same effect as a pair of jeans, but not quite? Hot, he's hot.

I'm stupid.

I walk into a wall. Dumb mistake. I turn in the wrong direction in my own place of work.

He asks me if I'm okay.

"It's alright, I'm just stupid." Yeah, stupidly in love, says a part of me that's a bit more smooth and a lot more obnoxious than the rest. "I do know my way around."

He laughs. I promise myself I'm going to find some way to, should he let me, kiss him so hard he forgets his name.

We're having one of the pools cleaned out--or--well, we had one of the pools cleaned out and now it's empty and if you switch the lights on, it looks pretty cool. At least, I think so. Plus, the speakers here aren't that bad.

I thought it'd be the closest to a fancy party that I could get.

"Beautiful, right?"

"Beautiful," he agrees. He squeezes my hand and I'm fifteen and gayer and stupider than ever, and he's hotter than ever, of course. Fifteen-year-old me would be hyperventilating right now. I'm not

entirely sure that twenty-four-year-old me isn't.

"Come on down," I say, and I lead him down the ramp into the centre of the pool and bow. "Care for a dance, my lord?"

He snorts, "sure, why not?"

I take his hand and lead him in time to some dumb eighties song that neither of us were alive to listen to when it played on the radio. It's a gentle waltz that we aren't experienced enough to dance properly, so it's more just swaying about while my hand is on his waist. Somewhere in-between songs I crack open a can of beer and we sit on the side of the pool to 'catch our breath for a minute.

"I have a question," he says, pulling the tab on a second can.

"Go on."

"I'm a lawyer--"

"I know, it's very sexy of you--"

"Shut up--I'm a lawyer, okay, I know that; that's what my degree is in and there's no changing it." He stares at the can for a second, appearing to search for his words in the ingredients list. "Am I happy? Do I seem happy to you?"

"You seem functional, which is all most of us can ask."

"You seem happy, though, Finno. Genuinely happy. It's like this magnetising energy."

"Thanks, I stopped caring about things and my skin cleared up within the week. I recommend it." I nudge him in the side. "What's bothering you?"

"I don't know why I'm a lawyer--perhaps for the money, but I don't need money. Our family never needed money. So, why? For the prestige?"

"Does the prestige make you feel good?"

"It was a difficult degree."

"How about we get back to dancing, and you can forget about all this philosophy for a while. Sound good?"

"Sounds great," He breathes, grinning. He's hot when he smiles like that. If I knew how to dance the Tango, that's what I'd want to do next.

We get back to this thing we call 'dancing' for a while, getting caught up in a particular song that's name escapes me as I'm moving. He's so close. Has he always been this close? Has it always been possible to get this close? I feel like the opposite end of a magnet to him; I just want to get closer, deeper. The world is silent aside from the sound of his breathing as we look at each other. Did the music stop? I can't tell.

Now or never, says a voice in the back of my head.

And I pull him by the waist and kiss him. Properly.

Taxi cabs are extortionate, I know, and I know that there's a long list of risks that go with getting into a stranger's car with someone you can't keep your hands off of. There's something intoxicating--other than the alcohol, I mean, although that certainly is a factor in this haze as well. I called him magnetic. Does he know how much I mean it?

Maglor would tell me that calling something 'indescribable' is just lazy, but that's how it feels to kiss him. Indescribably, like there aren't words that exist which can describe the exact sensation. There's a physicality, sure, but there's something deeper, or higher. Inside and above and watching myself all at the same time.

So, for now, I'll stick with magnetic.

It's dark and cold out, but that's fine. Inside is warm.

"I'm sorry, it's so--"

"Tidy." He gives me a look. "I'm beginning to think you don't actually live here."

I shrug and he pushes me back into the couch, sliding his hands under my shirt. I gasp at the cold.

"To be honest," he says, leaning over so that his lips are barely an inch from my neck, "this is just an excuse to warm up my hands."

"It's a good one," I manage to breathe as he starts to kiss my neck. I get lost in the sensation, so much more than I could ever imagine it would be.

He pulls back, removing fingertips hovering torturously above my skin. "Have you shaved?"

"What?"

"Wait, wait; I'm getting ahead of myself--if we're doing this, I mean."

We are, aren't we? Isn't *this* this? "Sure," I say, unsurely.

"Oh, God, this is going to sound so forced--right--okay--do you want to, y'know, or shall I?"

I run through a list of the things I know about sexual intercourse in my head. For all the ways my parents were great people who did their best to raise me right, and for all of the ways that school biology lessons were able to fill in the gaps, that list still only consists of one item: use a condom. There are also the snippets of things that come from being a person living in the internet age, with access to late night television, but all I know about this kind of this is-- "please," I say.

"Right, then, have you shaved?"

"I didn't anticipate this well enough." I'm beginning to see the downsides to such spontaneity.

"Fair, okay, so let's make a list of things to do--"

"Shave, evidently--"

"--then wash up, then locate some lube--" he's counting out every step on his fingers. This feels ridiculous.

"I feel like I'm living in a safe sex leaflet."

He snorts-- "What would that even be called? Anal sex 101?"

"Sounds far too formal. Not mortifying enough: how about Buggery for Dummies?"

"You should have a sense of humour more often," his lips brush the base of my jaw, "it's kinda sexy."

Then I kiss him and manage to forget about the checklist for at least a good five minutes.

"I know this is a bad time," I murmur into his collarbone, "but I still have a question."

He grunts, turning to squint at me.

"How do you know that you like what you do?" I ask as I roll onto my back, staring at the ceiling. I think there might be a spider up there, but I can't tell from this distance.

"I'm not stressed all the time." He buries his head in the crook of my neck

I laugh bitterly. "Fuck."

"Figured it out?"

I sigh. I might as well tell him; it's not like it's not his business, and I doubt that he'd mean to tell. "I got sent off to be the prosecution for a fraud case--your friend's one--because I'm still young and all that, but, and you can't tell anyone this, it's turned into a murder case almost overnight."

"Well, shit." He props himself up on his elbows, biting his lip. "I assume they have the guy?"

"Actually, no. They had some of the suspects for the fraud part of it, but the murderer--"

"That's the kingpin?"

"Exactly."

"And these are the same people who crashed into my dad?"

"Yes."

He leans back against the headboard, grimacing. I'm not sure if there really is a way to say 'I don't think they want to kill your father, though,' that doesn't outright admit that that's exactly what we're both worried about right now.

"Is there anything we can do about it?" He says at last.

"No." I shake my head. "I'm going to see Eonwe next week though. To discuss this mess."

"Then there's no use worrying," he sighs and slumps back against the pillows. He reaches out and runs a hand through my hair. "Your hair is really soft; you should grow it out."

It's a completely mundane comment, but it makes me smile. The fact that it's possible to think such mundane things even when nothing else around makes sense. "Maybe I will."

Chapter End Notes

Please leave a comment if you enjoyed!!

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Eonwe and Maedhros meet to discuss the case. It doesn't go exactly to plan.

Chapter Notes

Again, thank you Shine for beta-reading!

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

- Eonwe -

There are some nights when you can almost feel that something is about to go terribly, irreversibly wrong, and that your whole life is about to come crashing down like a poorly built jumbo Jenga tower on an uneven lawn in the July breeze. The worst part is that you weren't even touching it, but it was your turn, and you were the one to set it up, and it fell on your head while your sister laughed in the background.

Father says it's my anxiety. That I should ignore it because it only tells lies and exaggerates. But he's not the only one I talk to. Mother says that there's a difference between anxiety and premonition--she tells me that she didn't believe in it until she experienced it herself--she tells me that we, as living creatures, are not living within the universe, but are part of it, and we can sense its designs in the same way we can sense a looming wall above us with our eyes closed.

My mother, the scientist and the spiritualist.

She said that her studies made her much more spiritual than any preacher: this--everything is just so big and beautiful--too much so to be random.

Like her, though, my spiritualism is based in science--my premonition in the facts. Or rather: one single, painfully clear fact: I have betrayed Sauron's trust.

And then, a neat little hypothesis: and he probably knows it.

It was easy enough to round up two of the other men in their little group, even if Sauron himself is good at staying hidden when need be. Completely untraceable. He's been learning.

"Eönwë?"

"Yeah--sorry--I feel off--" Maybe it was a mistake getting a lawyer involved so soon, or maybe it was a stroke of brilliance. I didn't, however, expect to get Maedhros. (It's not a major crime; it's not important enough to hire someone more senior. I shouldn't have listened to that.)

"It's likely just nerves," Maedhros says--clearly an attempt to get me to focus, "you'd be weird if

you didn't get 'em when faced with a case like--well--" he waves his pen at the case file-- "this."

"You're probably right," I lie.

"So, to review," he lowers his voice, "you got a verbal confession, as well as physical evidence, and he doesn't have an alibi?"

"Yep." I let myself slump back in my chair, because I can already feel the teeth of when this comes back to bite me sinking right in.

"Are there any cracks?"

"Yes."

"And what are they?"

"Well, first off, he definitely had an accomplice, and second, I can't prove he was there--"

"But you got a verbal confession--"

"Well, no and yes. I have one related to Kaur, but not to the murder. And the one I do have is from pretty exceptional circumstances."

"Did you drug him?"

"No!" I sit straight back up again-- "I'm a police officer."

"Look, I'm pretty sure you've already broken three laws to get what solid evidence you have, so I need you to know that I'm not certain you don't think you're above the law. How did you get that confession?"

"We," I take a breath, "we slept together--Sauron and I, I mean, and--"

"That's probably a fourth law you broke--right there--in under a sentence." He raises his eyebrows. "I'm almost impressed."

"Look--it's not my fault he's my ex--"

"You really shouldn't be working this case."

"No one else was available."

He just shakes his head. I hear the pub door swing open, and somewhat of a hush falls over the room. Either the local bad guy has walked in, or someone with a very clear bone to pick. Maybe it's both.

I look around.

It's both.

Oh shit, it's both.

"I'm going to fucking kill you," Sauron shouts, and even from this distance I can see the way his lip is swollen, and the barely-dried blood on his fist (that I'm not sure is his own). He looks like he got into a fight then came straight here.

“Who did that to--“

“The accomplice from the Kaur case, I’ll bet,” I nod at Maedhros. He just stares at him, as if watching the clouds part for the sun, interrupting a welcome rainfall.

He strides straight up to our table and leans down so close to my face that I’d close my eyes, if I couldn’t see the anger smouldering in his. “If you don’t come outside with me right now, then I’ll hand your arse to you right here,” he snarls.

“Hey--“ Maedhros starts.

“Don’t get involved,” I tell him.

“He’s threatening a police officer.”

“And what about it,” Sauron snaps, then turns his attention back to me, “Outside, or in here?”

“Outside,” I say, ignoring Maedhros’ protests. “I don’t want anyone else to get hurt.”

He smirks as I stand up. “Always so polite.”

I try to shoot Maedhros a look of apology, as he mouths ‘you have jurisdiction’, and I ignore him, because he’s right: I really shouldn’t be working this case, because there’s no way in hell that I can arrest Sauron, and he knows it.

Thankfully pubs on the corners of residential streets often have empty car parks, so he leads me round there, and I can see the sunset reflected in the glare of his eyes. “I suppose you’re the snake now.”

“I suppose I am.”

He lets out a single, clear laugh, before pointing to his lip, “this is your fault. They know about us—they know everything about us. I can’t go back there— I can’t go back to my foster parents, either—not after this.” He grins—he grins like a maniac. “Did you plan for this to happen?”

“No--”

“It sure feels like it,” the twisted smile slips back into a snarl, and I barely have time to relax before he throws the first punch. I duck, but it isn’t three seconds before he attacks again, digging his nails into my wrist as he takes my forearm and forces me to the ground.

I can hear the sounds of people, but I don’t look.

I manage to slap his hand away and I push him back across the open space, but he’s quick to regain his footing—I’ve never seen him trip. I used to joke he must have the soul of a cat. He lunges at me, and slip out of the way, but when I turn to look back at him, he’s holding an empty beer bottle in his hand, grabbed from the lid of one of the bins.

He smashes it against the wall, and I close my eyes like the damned on the executioner’s block, but the impact never comes--instead I hear the sounds of a struggle, and then footsteps, and then I open my eyes to pools of red on the floor, and my first thought: “Mairon?”

“He’s gone--” Maedhros is standing next to me, panting, and the bottle lies smashed on the floor.

“Did you hurt him.”

He swallows and shakes his head. Looking at him, I'm reminded of how imposing he looks--he's fairly tall, and even if he's no bodybuilder, he's no wimp either. "Then--the blood?"

"It doesn't matter--it's not his."

I scan the crowd of people that have gathered to watch, one standing, mouth agape holding a phone to his ear--he probably called the police. Something about that makes the corners of my mouth twitch.

"Maedhros--" I choke, then I'm crying, and I didn't even realise that what he had said hurt me. I didn't want to betray him--oh God, I never wanted to betray him. I didn't want him hurt because of me, regardless of how many times I told myself that.

Because I love him. After everything, I still love him.

"What is it?"

"I can't do this--I don't want this case anymore." I meet his eyes, and he gives me his best 'sympathetic older brother' look.

"You never should've been given it in the first place, it's okay."

"I can't hurt him--not me--I can't do it."

He squeezes my arm, "I know."

I don't say anything else: I'll only repeat myself again. Really, what else is there to say?

Chapter End Notes

I know I'm churning these out way too fast, but if you're enjoying these updates id still love to see a comment!! I'm spending all the saved up energy I have to finish this damn thing so if no one cares it's a little disheartening

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Post-fight, Maedhros deals with the mess that's left behind.

Chapter Notes

I'm tryna make it to chapter 20 by the end of this weekend wish me luck!!

- *Maedhros* -

I tear off a strip of fabric from my shirt (it's already bloodied beyond hope) and wrap a quick, messy bandage around the slit down the centre of my thumb. It's a nasty cut--deep, long enough that it just brushes the artery in my wrist--but the bleeding isn't too bad. I must look like I've just gotten back from a murder scene, though. Or perhaps that's poor taste, considering.

My phone rings.

"Maedhros Callaghan speaking, how can I help?"

"Callaghan," my supervisor's voice crackles at the other end of the line, "how did that go?"

"The officer I spoke with isn't working the case anymore; do I still have to play prosecution?"

She hmms. "I think unless you have something else on the go--well, let's just say: we can't have you just lying about in your office doing a fat load of nothing."

"Actually," I say, watching Eonwe cross the road further down the street, "if we aren't paying any attention to specialisations anymore, I'd like to have a go at some kind of mediation."

"I see what you're on about; you want to help out some friends and get paid for it, hm? Cheeky."

"Well, not exactly 'friends', but--"

"Don't worry about it. We're at our wit's end trying to find things for people to do; it's been a slow month. But, you do still need to be qualified--"

"I am."

I can hear the sound of typing as she searches for my CV. There's a moment of silence, before--
"bored in uni a lot, were you?"

It wasn't necessary to get that diploma but, considering the family I grew up in, I felt like it would come in handy someday. Although, perhaps not in this way.

A few clicks, "right, now just fill out the form, and that's what we'll pay you for. You know, most people would just be happy to slack off, instead."

"I go above and beyond," I say, quoting the third line of my CV. She chuckles.

"So you do. You have a good afternoon, Callaghan."

"Thanks." I hang up, then lean back against the wall. None of this follows protocol, not the protocol that they taught us in school. Lawyers only know the law, they don't necessarily follow it. For a second I feel the adrenaline as it registers how stupidly powerful someone who knows the rules as well as we do could be, but it passes, and I just want to go home.

Which means that I end up outside Fingon's house. I knock at the door. Aredhel opens it.

She stares at me, arm caked in half-dried blood, shirt torn, hair a mess, then sighs and invites me in.

"Finno's still at work. Do you want coffee?"

"Yes, please."

"Do you want a clean shirt? Your brother left--"

"Which one?" I sigh, knowing exactly who.

"Celegorm."

I consider the offer for a moment, but I do look awful like this. "Fine." As she leaves to go and retrieve it, I slip off my shirt. Their house is nice, fashionable; all colour coordinated in shades of blue and cream and yellow which would make sense, considering Anaire made her money as a lifestyle blogger, last time I checked. I try to imagine what it would be like to grow up in a place like this, where everything is bright and neat and tidy and has its place. Probably a lot easier, for a start.

"Should I ask?" Aredhel throws me a bundled up t-shirt. It's reasonably clean, which, considering my brother, is saying quite a lot.

"I was breaking up a fight."

She nods. "Yeah, that sounds like you. I've heard a lot." I try to remember what she was like as a kid. The best I can come up with is some half-baked image of a little girl in bright yellow wellington boots, ruining her white summer dress by using the side of a muddy hill as a slide, and the comment that her mother had made to mine, sighing at the prospect of having to buy a new one: "The white's her thing. I've tried and tried to get her into darker colours, but she knows who she is."

The tank top she's wearing now, nearly twenty years later, is white, too.

"Should I ask about why Celegorm hangs around here?"

"We're friends." She shrugs, grabbing a bottle of thick, brown-liquid from the fridge. "Work-out buddies, if you want to be formal about it."

"Right."

"You know, in the same way that you and Finno 'don't even know each other', except less uptight."

"Right."

The front door opens. It dawns on me that this might actually have been a terrible idea, considering that there is absolutely no guarantee that the person to walk through that door will be Fingon and not, say, his father. who'd probably be pretty interested in why I'm sitting in his kitchen covered in blood.

Well, it's not Fingolfin, but it's not much better either.

"Who is that and why is he covered in blood?"

"Argon, this is Maedhros, he's our cousin--"

"Step-cousin."

"Finno's friend."

Argon lowers his bag down to the floor. "And the blood?"

"I accidentally cut my hand," I smile. He narrows his eyes.

"Okay, nice to meet you, Maedhros." He slips upstairs, never fully taking his eyes off me. I can't blame him; if I came home to find a complete stranger in my house who looked like they'd just walked off the set of a crime drama, I'd be cautious, too.

"Don't mind him, he's a baby." She hands me a glass of water that I didn't ask for. I thank her anyway: I probably need it.

"He was a baby last time I saw him."

"Times change."

"Times change," I raise my glass.

It took us another twenty minutes to figure out that it would probably be better if I waited somewhere where I wasn't as likely to get walked in on by people who weren't 'in the know', per se. Aredhel showed me upstairs to Fingon's bedroom, and here I sit. It's easily the messiest room in the house--bed unmade, clothes draped across his desk chair, a half-eaten bowl of cereal on the floor next to one of his bedposts--but there's a charm to it, he's right. Someone lives here.

The door swings open.

"Hi."

"Ari told me you'd be here. You look terrible."

"Thanks, but I feel fine if it's any consolation."

"Do you want me to look at it?" He nods towards my hand, still wrapped in its makeshift bandage.

"No, no, I came here by accident, actually," I admit. "I just started walking and then I looked up and I saw your door."

He eases. "I can't decide if that's creepy or sweet."

"I'd prefer if you thought it was sweet," I chuckle. I feel a jolt as he sits down next to me. I rest my head on his shoulder, and he wraps an arm around me. He's warm and comfortable and I'm tired, so I don't risk shutting my eyes. Not yet, at least; but I don't know how long I can keep myself awake now that the adrenaline has worn off.

"It's getting dark out," he says, mock concern seeping into his words, "would you like to spend the night?"

"Fingon, I have absolutely no energy to do anything fun, just so you're aware."

"Do you have enough energy to binge-watch Parks and Recreation?"

"I think I could make an exception for that, yes."

I wake up with a headache. Not the slow pulse of a migraine--thank God--but a normal, standard, shitty headache. At least it's comfortable here, curled up with Fingon. Shit--right, shit. I'm not supposed to be here. The sun still hasn't risen, although, considering that it's the middle of winter, that doesn't mean much. I slip out of bed as carefully as I can, trying not to wake Fingon.

"Sorry about this," I whisper, then hesitate a moment before placing a kiss on his temple. I make it all the way to the top of the staircase before anyone stops me.

"Not staying for breakfast?"

I wince. "Sorry."

"Don't be." Fingolfin smiles, unfolding his arms. "The look on your face was priceless."

"Thanks."

"Your father is going to give you grief over this, so I might as well be easy on you."

"I don't intend for my father to find out."

"Ever?" He frowns, and I realise the weight of what I've implied. "If this is just a fling--"

"It's not."

"Then you have to figure something out. You're a smart kid, Maedhros, you know that."

"I know."

Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Maedhros decides that things need to come together sometime soon and that he's the best person to take care of all of the wrangling. Also: he realises that Fingolfin is right.

Chapter Notes

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

- *Maedhros* -

"Mum, can I speak to you about something?"

She starts and looks up from where she's sitting at the kitchen counter, sketching. "Ay, Mae, I thought you were your father coming in. What brings you here?"

"Well, first off, I'm out of paracetamol and I have a terrible headache and second, I have a..." I try to think of a good way to pose this. There doesn't seem to be a good way. "I have a question," is what I settle for.

"Paracetamol is in the medicine cabinet--you know all that--now come sit down and ask me your question."

I take the painkillers and then a seat. "If, say, I happened to have a--a thing with someone I really shouldn't--"

"Maedhros. Cut to the point."

I stare at my hands. "I've been seeing Fingon."

She takes a deep breath. "Continue."

"And I don't intend to stop--not now that I've started, anyhow, and dad's going to have to find out eventually, and I really, really don't want to have to tell him, but I also really don't want him to find out any other way and--"

"Breathe."

I do as I'm told.

"Let's take this one thing at a time; first, you're seeing Fingon--romantically, I assume--who is, perhaps, the only person in the entire world with whom having a relationship could cause this many problems, but, what's done is done, okay?" She takes my hand. I nod. "And you're aware that he is both your cousin--"

"Step-cousin."

She closes her eyes and takes another deep breath. "Your step-cousin and the son of one of the two

men in this world your father actively despises," she continues, "which is bad, clearly. And you also know that your father needs to know about it. Maedhros, you know what to do."

"I don't want to," I whisper.

"I know--" she pulls me into a one-armed embrace. "But there's nothing else you can do."

- *Mairon* -

Those shitty towns that surround the outsides of cities--part of the mass, but not really--they have hotels. Cheap ones. A fiver a night, if you're willing to go find our own food and clean your own room. Hostels in all but name. This is the third one this week in the fifth town I've stayed in this fortnight, paying the boarding fees with stolen money, because when I know something's about to blow up in my face, I prepare for the fallout. I can't say moving around like this is unpleasant, though; I always liked being in motion more than staying in one place. It's the fantasy of not having anyone know who you are. New name for each new place.

Same damp, peeling paintwork on the ceiling, though, wherever you go.

There's a knock at the door. I reach for the Swiss army knife tucked under the corner of my mattress. I don't want to kill anyone; it's just a good deterrent for anyone wanting to start a fight with just their bare hands as a weapon. It's an advantage I like to have.

"Young man here to see you, Zigur."

I consider asking who, but, if it's someone dangerous, all they'd need to do to decide what was going to happen to me next would be to hear my voice. I open the door a crack. Might as well face them head on, if I have to face them either way. Also, better to get into a fight near an exit route than backed into a corner.

The man on the other side of the door is the man I struck outside the pub. I don't know his name. I consider telling him to 'fuck off', but, at this point, it might be easier to get sent to jail. There's no fight left in me.

I open the door. "Come in."

"Hi, I'm Maedhros Callaghan," he shakes my hand. His skin is cool to the touch but, then again, it is cold outside this time of year.

"What do you want?"

"I have a feeling that you don't want to go to prison, Sauron--"

"Mairon."

"Mairon. So, I'm certain that you'll be pleased to hear that you don't have to, as long as you agree to some terms. You see, I think you know more than you're letting on, and I think you know that what you know is important."

I narrow my eyes. "What do you want?"

"I want you to agree to give testimony against your," he pauses, searching for the word,

"employer." A strange one to settle on, but I don't correct him; he's not entirely wrong.

"And I stay out of prison?"

"You get immunity and if you think you need it, witness protection."

I bite my lip. It sounds tempting--fuck, no, it is tempting. That fantasy of running away and starting anew somewhere else, somewhere better, somewhere where nobody knows me and nobody knows what I've done. A real fresh start. He smiles. The charismatic, diplomatic, empty smile that only someone of his profession can have.

"Of course, there is one little bump to work through."

"What?"

"You'll have to work with, ah, let's see--" he makes a show of pulling out a notebook and flipping through the notes as if we both don't already know exactly what the caveat is to all of this. "A police officer," he says.

"Eonwe?" I ask.

He nods. He drops the smile. "Listen, I know that this isn't ideal and, if I had a say, I'd want you locked up just as much as anyone else, but this is one of those situations where there are bigger fish to fry, understand?"

"And I can't refuse, can I?"

"You can refuse, and I won't give up your whereabouts, but, if you do, this isn't my problem anymore, and I'm not interested in helping you otherwise."

"Why do I want your help?"

"Because, Mairon," he says, taking a step closer, "I'm the best way out you're gonna get."

And something about the way he carries himself, the notebook with all of the detailed pages that are all almost certainly only formality, the way he can speak like that, and the way that he stepped in back in the car park, tell me that he's right.

- *Maedhros* -

My father is sitting in the centre of the living room, behind a suitcase and a stack of books and various magazines and journals. I remember the conference that he's going to. By the looks of the second, third, fourth and fifth piles of clothes on the sofa and the armchair, mum and the kids are going with him. If I had to hazard a guess as to why, I'd say mum's going because she wants a holiday, Curufin's going for 'work experience' and the twins are going because they're too young to be left at home by themselves, grandad is too busy to watch them and dad claims not to trust our aunts enough to leave them with them.

"Dad?" I set my satchel down by the door; it's basically empty, aside from my laptop, but carrying it around all day has left a dull ache in my shoulder. I feel sick, but I wouldn't exactly expect myself to feel perfectly dandy, given the situation.

"Mhm?" He looks up at me over the rim of his glasses.

"I have something to tell you."

He stares at me. I wonder if he already knows-- "I thought you were gay."

"What? I am."

"Sorry, jumped to the worst conclusion, continue." He chuckles.

There's this horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach because I'm fairly certain the 'worst conclusion' would still be better than this. "You and Fingolfin--"

"Ah, the ugly step-brother," he scoffs, "what about him?"

"Yes, well, you know how he has kids?" I grab the back of a chair to steady myself as a wave of dizziness rushes through me. Not that bad, though, no. Dad doesn't notice.

"I am aware of that fact, yes."

"I--" I ease myself down into the chair.

"Are you okay?"

"I feel sick."

He stands up, "let me take your temperature--"

"No, please don't, I'm fine, really."

He furrows his brow, looking at me, "I really think I should--"

"Fingon and I are dating." So much for carefully planned out and pre-scripted admissions, I guess. There's a moment of silence, where he takes a few breaths. I can almost see him running processing and then counting to ten, then re-processing because there's no way that I just said what I did. "I'm sorry. I thought it would be best to tell you sooner."

"Well," he says, "you told me." He rubs the bridge of his nose. "I'm sorry, son, I need to pack."

I nod. "I ought to head home anyway," I lie.

He squeezes my shoulder--just a little too tight, "well, then, you'd better be on your way--tell me, does your mother know?"

I nod again.

"Right, yes, of course." He shakes his head. "Well, it was good seeing you."

"Good, yeah."

- Eonwe -

I'm at the station when the phone rings--Callaghan--I was told he had been transferred--I was told I

had been transferred (a pickpocketing case, something simple), but it's probably best to find out what he wants.

"Hello, is this Officer Elentari-Sulimo?"

"That, I am."

"Great--wasn't sure I'd dialled the number right." His voice sounds hoarse and weak.

"Are you alright?"

"Hm? Oh, yes, just have a bit of a cold." He carries on, "I've managed to persuade Mairon to testify against your uncle in court."

"You managed to do what?" My grip on the receiver slips. I catch it just before it falls into my coffee. "How?" Then, after a moment, "why?"

"How? Practice. Why? Because he'd make a really good witness, considering that he's someone the suspect trusted--"

"No--why are you telling me?"

"Because, Eonwe, you are also a witness and will also have to be present at this trial--they got him, didn't they?"

"Last night, yeah." I neglect to mention that I asked to be moved to the opposite side of the building for that exact reason. I don't think I could look my uncle in the eyes without punching him. "What are you getting at?"

"It would probably look better for the prosecution if you and Mairon weren't trying to kill each other, and I have a diploma of conflict mediation so, should you accept--"

"You're offering us couples therapy?"

"No, I'm offering you mediation. Please don't get the two confused."

I find myself reaching for my pen, flipping it around my fingers. "This isn't exactly by the book, is it?"

"'By the book' and 'conventional' are two different things. Of course, usually parties seek out mediators, rather than the other way round but, in actuality, I did speak to your boss, and, well, he thought it would be a good idea. I also spoke to Tobias, and he looked like he was going to cry tears of joy--said he couldn't stand working with both of you when you were, well, the way you are."

I'll admit, I don't envy Tobias. Handing over the case to him was hard, but my life's been easier every day since. "Fine, for Tobias' sake."

"Good, seemed like he'd been finding it hard picking up all the pieces by himse--" Maedhros stops-- "by himself."

"Are you sure you're okay?"

"Just a cold, like I said. Flu at worst. I have an opening on Thursday."

"Sounds good."

"I'll email you the address. See you then."

- *Maedhros* -

I lie back in bed, head pounding. I've resisted taking another dose of paracetamol for a day; I won't give in yet, but I'm pretty sure that sunlight is starting to hurt. It's probably the stress. I changed the dressing on my hand an hour ago; didn't look like the wound had closed up properly, but I didn't want to look too closely lest I lose what little of my appetite I have left. Besides, it looks better with a clean bandage on, even if I'm not one-hundred percent sure I can feel my fingertips.

"So, I told my dad that we're dating," I have my phone on speaker lying next to me on the pillow.

"Oh no--also, you sound terrible."

"I think I've caught the flu."

"Oh no," Fingon gasps, "those are possibly the worst two things to happen in quick succession. What did he say?"

"Not much. He just seemed--I don't know--confused, perhaps? Like he couldn't quite understand. Or maybe betrayed."

"Well, on the bright side, at least he knows now?"

"Yeah, and he doesn't seem to have any plans to kill you, yet."

"Yet. I feel so lucky and accepted."

I smile. Maybe I will take some more paracetamol. There's no point in trying to tough it out, really, and I'll probably only develop an immunity to it if I take it every day for months, so it's not like it's going to be completely ineffective by the time Thursday rolls around.

"I have to go, but I'll speak to you later," he says, "please get better. I love you." He hangs up.

I shut my eyes, preparing to sink back into sleep when my phone rings again. Fingon. I register it a couple of seconds after he did, evidently. I pick up.

"I said that I loved you."

"I know."

A pause. "I meant it."

"I love you, too."

almost there now

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

"The first mediation session does not go well" would be an understatement.

Chapter Notes

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

- *Maedhros* -

They don't look happy. I didn't expect them to look happy, but the combined force of both of their glares is still enough to make me shudder--internally, of course. Externally, professionalism is key.

"Think of it this--this way," I say, "if you can get--get along for just a bit, th-then you won't have to see each other ever a-gain."

They both stare at me. I'm well aware that I look and sound awful, but I thought that contributing to putting a decades-old case to rest was far more important than a little bout of a common illness. It's humiliating enough that Fingon insisted on accompanying me to work in case I collapsed without even Mairon worrying about my health. Yes, I'm colder than I've ever been in my life, but it's fine. I'm fine.

Granted, I can't feel my hand at all anymore. I brush the thought away. "Just flu," I say.

Eonwe and Mairon share a look. If this is what it takes to get them to get along, then so be it.

"So, where did all of this start?" I ask.

Eonwe starts, "He fucked my--"

"I fucked his uncle," Mairon interjects, sitting back. "To be blunt."

"I think you missed a key detail there." Eonwe folds his arms.

"Oh?"

"You fucked my uncle while you were dating me."

This feels like it's going to be a long meeting.

The first meeting went well if by well, you mean 'about as successful as the Brexit negotiations'. Neither party all too happy, both refusing to listen to one another, coming to an agreement and then

somehow throwing it all out to start again, and the mediator essentially non-existent because half-way through the ibuprofen-paracetamol painkiller cocktail wore off and my head started to hurt again. And my teeth were chattering too much to talk--of course, until I started feeling too hot again. So I excused myself to go and stand in the hallway with Fingon.

"Are you sure you don't want me to take you to a clinic?" He nods towards my hand, the bandages are damp again. "You should get that looked at. Just in case."

"It'll pass. It's just a badly timed bout of the flu." I say. I'm not entirely sure I believe that anymore.

"Russo, I really--"

"I'm feeling better now, anyway; I think I'm going to go back--whoah, okay." I feel a wave of vertigo as I try to stand up straight.

"Oh no, I'm taking you to the clinic."

I take a look at Fingon, but I can't seem to get my eyes to focus on his face. There are words. Somewhere. Somewhere here there are words. Shit. Fuck. Those are the words. Those are the words that are here.

"Yeah, that's probably for the best," I say, then my legs give.

- Fingon -

"Shit!" I stumble back as I try to carry his weight--oh God, he's burning up, I can feel it. I lower him to the floor-- there's no way I can keep carrying him--and mentally run through the list of things you're supposed to do when you find someone collapsed.

One: Check for dangers.

The hallways are clear, no flickering lights, no open sockets or broken electrical appliances, and the only thing sharp is the pen in his breast pocket; I remove it and throw it behind me. I don't know why. It felt like the right thing to do.

Other dangers would probably include Sauron, infamous (fake) drug dealer, known for literally attacking and injuring people.

"Did you poison him?"

He shakes his head. He looks just as shocked as the rest of us. Which makes sense; I've had a sinking suspicion about his 'flu'.

Two: Try to get a response.

"Maedhros, can you hear me?" He nods. The movement is jerking and unnatural. I bite my lip. "Can you tell me where we are right now?"

He seems to be trying to talk, but his words are so slurred that I can't understand a single one. I watch as he slips in and out of consciousness.

"Hey, just look at me, okay?" I say, "just keep looking at me."

He nods, then lifts up his right hand so that I can see his bandaged palm. They're still bloody. Why are they still bloody? It's been days. He keeps staring at me. He wants me to look.

I don't want to look, I'm sorry.

All I can think about are the medical textbooks that used to make me throw up.

I reach out and close his hand into a fist, gently so as not to agitate the wound that he told me he had under control. The wound that I could've looked at and taken care of. That I knew there was something off about.

"Someone call an ambulance," I say. My old Biology teacher once told me he didn't trust ambulances, that he didn't think that they would get you there faster than taking your own car so, if you were still able to drive, you shouldn't call one.

I'm not taking that risk--not with Maedhros' life. Oh God, he could die, he could really die, if I'm right--I don't want to be right. Recovery position my arse, I gently rest his head in my lap instead--he can breathe fine, there's no need to keep him on the floor like that. I don't want him to die.

Is that a strange thing to think? Sure, passively I don't really want anyone to die, but with him, right now, it's an active thing. I just--I don't know what I'd do without him. Of course, I'd just go about my life, after all, what choice would I have? But it would feel incomplete, like something was missing; like something happened that was so wrong and perverse and--how would I ever be able to feel okay again?

Maybe it's a little fucked up that I know exactly who I'd ask--for a moment, I understand Fearor's anger completely. Or maybe some people just love differently and others 'don't have all the facts', as dad once said. He never explained what he meant by that. I never asked. I'd forgotten he said it. It feels like a memory of something that happened to someone else from a different world.

"Finno--" he reaches his good hand, still shaking, to wipe a tear off my cheek. His speech still isn't great, but I can pick out my own name easily enough. I catch his hand.

"Don't talk," I hush him. *Don't think*, I tell myself, *breathe--* "Breathe."

God, I have no fucking clue if that's actually supposed to work. Probably best not to tell him that, even if he probably wouldn't be surprised. I keep watching--looking for the slightest change in his breathing, or the focus of his eyes, making sure I keep at least one hand wrapped around the wrist of his left hand--God, his pulse is so fast--why is it so fast? I know why it's so fast. I know why, I know why. *Breathe*.

Does the body do this to try and save itself, or does it do it to shut down? I never asked any of my professors that--I should've, but I didn't. I should've asked if anyone ever survived this without care. I know what answer they would've given me. Sometimes things go wrong with our bodies. It's Karma--no, it's only Karma when you survive it. They drilled into us that sometimes bodies don't make sense, and neither does the world, and bad things happen to good people.

I hated that place so much.

No, I didn't. I hated that I was never good enough to be one of those people who got to save good people's lives.

Someone taps me on the shoulder--a paramedic--and I realise that Eonwe has been on the phone speaking to them this entire time. I let them lift Maedhros away into a stretcher--

“Wait--” I stand up, “can I come? I don’t want him to think I abandoned him, and it’s not like I’d be able to do anything else,” I say.

Two of them exchange a glance. I think they can tell that I've been crying. "Sure, just don't--"

"Don't touch anything, got it."

Chapter End Notes

So, unless if I also manage to finish 21 today, I'm going to have to leave you guys on that cliffhanger. I can guarantee that I also feel terrible about it (though at least I know what comes next.) On the upside, chapter 21 won't take very long! I've already pre-written half of it months in advance (Fingon's pov) so I just need to fill in the other bits and edit before it's ready to go up.

Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Things are falling apart.

Chapter Notes

So in advance: yes, I had that plot point planned the entire time but also, yes, I completely forgot that you're meant to actually, y'know, set up plot points?

Oh boy I'm gonna have to go back and rewrite some of the earlier chapters at some point aren't I

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

- *Fingon* -

“You look like a mess.”

“You came!” I pull him into a hug.

“Well, yeah, of course.” He pats me on the back. “It’s not like I was busy with anything. Just lying about at home making terrible life decisions, plus, you know, he's my brother. Is he...okay?”

I pull back. I don’t know what to say.

“Stupid question, sorry.” he squeezes my shoulder, then takes a seat next to the window--there’s a tree outside that window, too, like it’s some sort of looming monster--and why do they make us sit out here? Logically, he’s in a room somewhere, so why can’t we go with him. It’s probably just me that can’t; I’m not related to him. Maglor is. I still don’t know where Maglor’s allowed to go. But they let me come in the ambulance, and they told me that they’d keep me updated.

“I didn’t have your parents’ numbers, sorry.”

“It’s okay,” he sighs, “probably fate; when I ended up in hospital he was the only one available to show up.”

“You’ve been in hospital?”

“Most people have.” He gives me a look.

“No, it’s just that--that I--uh--”

“You think I don’t go out enough to need to go to hospital?”

“A little, yeah.”

He snorts, “you’d be right, but sometimes you don’t need to--” his phone buzzes in his pocket. “Shit, I need to silence that.” He pauses as he stares at the screen: “Shit.”

“Maglor?”

- Maglor -

Fucking--

No.

I text back-- *that's not possible. How?* The last time I saw El, she was small. I was small. I remember thinking that she looked like a little bird; messy hair a plume of dark feathers-- unimarginably soft. In my head, she's still a little girl. She doesn't--didn't have any children, no high school sweetheart gone away to war never to return. None of that. She was a child. Innocent.

Haemorrhage .

Mum's response is one word long, and I hate it. I hate everything about it. There are probably better words to use than 'hate' (such a strong term, Maglor, you don't mean that), but that's the thing: when I merely dislike something, I have the capacity to think of other words with which to describe something. But true emotion--real, raw, personal and present emotion--hits in such a way that you're reduced to--reduced to just. Words. Single words. Single-syllable words.

But you said things were going great. She felt fine.

Perhaps her life had been spotted with tragedy, with only her father's distant relatives to cling to for comfort. Perhaps she had been suffering and in pain in ways that she never thought were reasonable enough to express. I've exchanged maybe three words with her since I turned eighteen, I wouldn't know. And now she's dead.

There will be a funeral shortly, take care x

"I'm just--I'm just going to step outside." I stand up. I don't want for Fingon's response.

Dad's entire side of the family's been plagued with tragedy, hasn't it? Maybe I was cursed at birth, being a part of it. Maybe that's why what happened to me did. Maybe that's why what happened to El has. Maybe that's why Maedhros--I didn't tell her about Maedhros. I can't, can I? Not right now. That would be too much. But, I can't say *nothing*, because if something does happen then they won't even be ready for it and I'm not the kind of person who likes to spring tragedy onto people unexpectedly with no regard for whether they're prepared for it or not.

I dial mum's number anyway. She picks up quickly enough.

"Maedhros is in the ICU."

"Hey, d--what?"

"He's sick," I say, "really sick."

"Maglor--"

"But he's going to be okay, right? The doctors here are g--good." My voice cracks.

Her voice is soft when she replies, "Darling, that's what I was going to ask you."

"He'll be fine," I say. Because if there's a toll that needs paying in blood, I don't want to think how big it could be. It takes me a minute, but the logistics of whatever universe we've found ourselves up in land in my head and plant seeds that grow into questions. "But the baby--"

"They're twins and, Mags, don't worry about that right now, please. It's taken care of."

"No, who's--"

"We are."

Somehow we keep talking. Not for long--we both have our own emergencies to get back to--but entire exchanges of completely mundane dialogue flit across without fully registering in my mind. I think she asks me how the weather is. I have to look at the window to check and, even then, I'm not sure I give a proper answer.

There are too many things to think about.

There are too many tethers tugging at my sides, pulling me in different directions, entertaining different thoughts--stupid thoughts, too. *If Maedhros dies, how will we schedule the funerals properly? Would I have to wear something different for each? Dad's too busy--he's doing research--mum got a commission three days ago; they can't take care of another set of twins.*

But who else will?

Thingol? Daeron said that he was good to him, but Daeron wasn't the child of a dead relative.

And there's that one spark, just an idea. Just a thought, mum, I'm an adult. I'm self-sufficient. Just because I don't cook or clean doesn't mean I can't. Plus, I've been around little kids my entire life; I'm the default babysitter.

And it's not like it'd be any trouble if I had to quit my job. I joke about being broke, but it's mostly just some pig-headed refusal to let any one of my vastly wealthy patent-owner family members give me any money--money which, mind you, I don't need, because the only things I buy are musical instruments and wine, and I'd probably give up on both if I had children, anyway.

And I need something to do. God, if Maedhros died and all I had to take up my time were empty pages of sheet music, I'd probably go insane. No, no, that's not it. I'd probably move back in with my parents and end up taking care of these kids most of the time regardless.

Give me three weeks to get my shit together, I could probably do anything. Three weeks is all I'd need. Quit my job, find something freelance, take a couple of classes, an online course or two. Clear out all of those instruments I don't use. Buy a set of kitchen knives and some proper furniture from IKEA. Plus, it wouldn't have to be instant anyway. I could just help out at first, like a nanny, or something.

Right, this doesn't have to be an impulse decision. Just an impulse idea.

I dial again. "Mum?"

"Yes?"

"Hear me out."

I get off the phone with mum (later joined by dad) after about twelve minutes of rapid-fire explaining myself and explaining that, yes, I am old enough to make serious decisions, please stop talking about me as if I'm fifteen. At least I can do something. I'm vaguely aware of two people walking down the corridor, but--and I realise--I've forgotten Daeron.

The fact makes me uncomfortable, like when you toss a coin to decide something for yourself, and it lands on the side that some, secret, subconscious part of you was hoping that it wouldn't, and now you have to face the fact that you knew the answer all along.

I'm at the edge of a cliff, overlooking the ocean lapping, hungry, against the base of the clay. It's not high enough up to guarantee that I will die, should I throw myself over the edge, but it's high enough that it sets off vertigo I didn't know that I had. It's the fall that I'm afraid of, not what's at the bottom.

I send a text--phrased as a hypothetical--and pray I don't know the answer. I click to turn my screen off. I don't want to know the answer. Not yet, anyway. There's time. There will be time.

"Mister Callaghan?"

Those people--they were the doctor and Fingon--or, rather, a man who I presume is the doctor. He looks like a doctor, but, then again, the last time I was in a hospital I was so souped up on painkillers that I could barely see.

"That's me," I say.

"Your brother will likely be okay, but there is one thing that needs to be discussed."

- *Fingon* -

I look at him--he looks scared--genuinely terrified, all bad eye-contact and fidgety hands and I don't really see him. I see my own baby brother--small and cute and anxious and afraid, hiding behind me in the playground, dragging me away from the fast rides at the theme park, begging me to walk the three metres to the bathroom door with him because what if he trips up and falls on his face--and I just missed every word the doctor said.

Well.

"Can I call my parents quickly?" Maglor says, after a long few seconds of heavy silence.

"Quickly." The doctor nods.

Maglor bites his lip. "How quickly?"

“Within the next couple of minutes, preferably.”

He takes a shaking breath, and I want to wrap my arm around him (and ask him what’s going on, but that’s beside the point).

“You know what, I don’t need to call them. He’ll be okay. He can take it.”

“Take what?” I ask because the fear of not knowing what’s going on is more powerful than the shame of having to admit I didn’t hear.

“Losing his hand.”

“Oh.”

Chapter End Notes

You can't say I didn't warn you. Also, it's all (kinda) going to come together soon. Plus!! I realised I didn't actually have 25 chapters planned (I can't count bc I'm gay) so only three chapters to go, lads, whew! Next two are gonna be pretty long, so those updates probably won't be as fast, but hopefully, they'll retroactively pick up the plot point pieces I completely forgot about. In my defence, when I'm writing my actual novel I'll have a chance to write a second draft.

Leave a comment if you enjoyed or if you just want to scream at me for mashing all that angst into one place. Also, I don't know if El is Elwing or not. It's a mystery even to me. She's only related to them because how else is Maglor (22) going to end up with two kids that aren't his. Also, Miriel being Olwe and Elwe's sister has been my hc for ages anyway so if you squint it makes sense.

Love you all, thanks for reading!

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Sorry about this one lads

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

- *Maedhros* -

I'm sick of the hospital ceiling and the constant chastising of my overly-concerned family members. They come in and they tell me--they say 'Maedhros, I can't believe you didn't tell us something was wrong sooner', or 'how did you let yourself get so sick' and, in Celegorm's case 'I'm an idiot and even I know how to tell when something's infected'. I don't think his was a fair comparison, though, considering that infected wounds are a much bigger risk for someone who spends all of their time crawling around in mud than a person whose only occupational hazard is a papercut.

Still, there's a lurch in my stomach every time someone tells me how close I came to death.

"*How do you feel?*" Fingon had said after I opened my eyes.

"*Painfully mortal.*" I sounded like Maglor.

I have no memory of what happened in the lead-up to waking up in a hospital bed short of one limb, but when the moody brother in question brings me my laptop, I have enough unread emails to put together a general picture.

He'd grinned and asked me how it felt to be on the brink of death. I glared at him until he carried on telling me what I'd missed. A lot, apparently, but, according to him, I was out cold for two days and spent an hour under anaesthesia on top of that, so I really can't be blamed.

You aren't supposed to dream while you're under general anaesthetic, I know, but the lines between simply being asleep and being 'switched off' are fuzzy. I dreamt about a woman and a snake--she said it would bite me. Then it did. That dream lasted the whole of the two days; I don't think time passes in the same way when you're asleep.

Fingon refused to leave, which was unfortunate because he technically wasn't allowed to stay. Somehow he managed to charm his way around that. I think he could probably get a thousand men to march off the edge of a cliff if he just smiled at them and told enough jokes.

"Most of those say some variation of 'get well soon', which is sweet," he says, peering over my shoulder. "I still can't believe your first instinct is 'oh no, I've got to get back to work', though. You *need* a break."

"Yeah, maybe." I scan the list. Lots of stuff from colleagues, a couple of emails from more distant relatives who definitely figured out how to contact me by Googling my name and finding the profile on the 'meet the crew' page of my firm's website. I looked it up out of boredom; for the first time, the long list of qualifications and achievements made me feel almost sad. "I've missed

so much.”

“I’m being serious. You aren’t going to be allowed to work for a good while, Russo.”

“I can’t take too long off: we live in a world--” I pause. I’m not sure how that sentence is supposed to end.

“Insightful.” He nudges me in the shoulder. Very gently. I think he’s afraid that I’ll shatter.

“Maybe you should quit law and go be a philosopher. Like all those old Greek guys, you’d fit right in.”

“Ah, there’s one from my supervisor-- *not* a ‘get well soon’, in case you were wondering.” I click on it, ignoring his comment. “Okay, well, it is, but she’s weird about it. ‘I heard that you can suffer cognitive difficulties after stuff like that; you’d better not forget your training.’ Charming.” I smile.

“There’s more.” He rests his head against me.

I read on: “Says that my all of my cases have been transferred and, to be honest, that’s probably for the best.”

“I like her.” He grins.

“She’s got a sense of humour.” I look around. “Where’d Maglor go, anyway?”

“No clue. Says it’s related to the family emergency--the one that isn’t you, anyway.”

“I feel bad--”

“Nope--we aren’t doing this. Despite you being an idiot, it isn’t your fault that you almost died and missed--”

“I should’ve--”

“Nope.”

“Okay, then.” I concede defeat and relax against the pillows. It’s not the most comfortable bed I’ve slept in, but I like being here with him. He’s got a warmth that’s comforting; like the whole world could turn out to be a cruel joke, but I wouldn’t care, as long as we didn’t have to move. That, and not having any obligation to get up.

There’s a knock at the door. A kind-looking nurse ushers in my father, who nods at Fingon, then sits down on my other side. He takes my hand--well, forearm. “How are you doing?”

“I feel better than I did before I was sick.”

“I don’t believe that.”

There’s a moment of silence. I look down at the keyboard, counting the keys.

Fingon sits back. “I’ll go and get some coffee--”

“Wait. I spoke to your father he--we think that it would be best if we--” he clenches his teeth-- “put our differences aside. Since neither of you seems particularly inclined to end whatever you have going on.”

“Dad--”

“And, you know, it’d be nice to speak to some people who actually remember my mother again.”

I nod. He nods. Then he squeezes my shoulder and leaves.

I can’t help but smile a little.

Maybe the world is falling apart, and nothing is really real anymore, but I *like* this new reality, bittersweet as it is.

- *Maglor* -

There are so few apartments in London with a good balcony that don’t cost you an--excuse the expression--arm and a leg. I sit there on the balcony, with my legs crossed and eyes shut. The chill is awful. I’m going to catch hypothermia like this. I love it. I lean back against the wall; the place has an energy, almost, it tugs at me, asks me to pay it attention. It’s like a dog, or a toddler, or something. It’ll break my heart to leave this place, but this heart never really seemed to work right in the first place.

“Maglor, can--”

“I don’t think this was going to last either way.” It hurts to say, but it hurts in the same way that pulling out a splinter hurts, or applying an antiseptic wipe to a fresh wound (again, pardon the metaphor.) It hurts the same way that things which have to be done hurt. “You know that, right?”

He doesn’t reply--just stares at the stone pseudo-ground. He’s beautiful, still. All perfect forms and soft hair.

“We have different paths to walk. I think there was always going to come a time when we met the fork in the road.”

“If I could go with you, Maglor, I would.”

“But you can’t.” I don’t mean to be harsh. I think he knows that I don’t mean to be harsh in the same way that I know that he doesn’t mean to sound like he wants me to change my mind. He wouldn’t ask that of me, so I won’t ask that of him. “I can recommend you a good therapist if you want.”

“No, not yet. They’d make me try to reconcile with her or write a letter or something. I don’t even want to think about her. You understand that, don’t you?”

“I know.” I think for a second, debating whether I should say more. I can’t just leave him sitting here like this. “Your mother was a bad woman--” I put a hand on his arm-- “You aren’t a bad man, Daeron.”

“I don’t know about that.”

I leave him there. Almost do--at least--because, when I reach the front door and lay the keys on the counter, I turn back for a moment and murmur into the distance between us, “you really aren’t.”

Later, when I collapse onto my bed, I cry. I cry for the first time in months. I cry about El, I cry about Maedhros, I cry about Daeron and I cry for a million reasons that I could never pinpoint or explain in words that already exist, but the tears come like a tsunami and they rush through, wrecking everything until my mind is clean again, and can sit, cross-legged in some twisted meditation and say aloud, for the first time, that “I am not afraid.”

Not of not the future, not of changing, not of being alone. The future has happened, I have changed, and I am alone; I’m not scared. Not anymore.

- *Maedhros* -

“That’s not legal.”

Maglor stirs his coffee. “I thought you’d say that--also, I’m resigning.”

“You need to be twenty-five at least.”

“Only three years off.”

“That’s a lot!”

He shrugs. We sit together in some imitation of what Costa should look like. I was finally allowed the decency of a change of clothes, and Maglor insisted on eating ‘out’ to celebrate. Of course, presently, all that means is ‘leaving my hospital room’. The place isn’t particularly nice, but it’s got more life than my room has and the smell of sweet food makes my mouth water after a week of the blandest delights culinary science has to offer.

When he was in hospital, I bought him porridge here when he said he was sick of the usual breakfasts. He says he’s returning the favour.

“As I said, I’m just giving mum and dad a hand. It’s not like they’re *my* kids.” Except that we both know very well that that’s exactly what it’s like.

“This feels very dubious.”

He keeps stirring his drink. “Maybe.”

“Are you sure you’re offering for the right reasons.”

“Maedhros, I’ve wanted this since Celegorm was born--”

“‘I liked my brother Celegorm when he was a baby’ is a terrible reason, *Maglor*. ”

“No, you see, my reasoning is that if I could manage to find infant *Celegorm* endearing, of all people, then clearly I am meant to be a father--” He stops. “I haven’t said that out loud before.”

“Change your mind?”

“No.”

I sigh. Maglor isn't stupid.

“Look,” he says, finally putting down the wooden stirrer, “if you don't think I can, then I'll listen to you.”

I lean forwards against the table. I've seen Maglor as a scared child and I've seen Maglor as a scared adult. I've seen him do the stupidest shit imaginable for all the wrong reasons, and I've seen him act wiser than a hundred-year-old priest.

His eyes are ancient when he looks at me, patient, waiting for my response.

“Mags, I don't know,” I say. “We both know how crazy you sound; we know how naive you seem.”

“Three years--” he rests his forearms against the table-- “of ‘helping out’. And I'll do better than our parents did on us because, Maedhros, I'm still young and free enough that I can choose to devote every moment to them, which should at least half make up for all of the tragedy. And I'll do what's best, I promise; if I don't, then you know what to do.”

“You're resigning,” I say.

“I'm not meant to be there anymore.”

I nod. “Three years,” I murmur. Maybe this safety net is big enough that he won't ever need it.

- Maglor -

I walk past the storeroom as I leave; I can't help but look in. Our eyes meet for just a moment before he turns back to his work. I don't make any attempt to say goodbye--we've already been through all of that.

“Maglor?” Jen calls after me. “You'll stay in contact, won't you. We might need you back for a night someday.”

I nod. “Someday,” I say, then I smile at her, and press my hand against the polished wood of the door, really feeling it for what seems like the first time in my life. I'll miss this place. Well, if I have the time.

I step out into the cold.

Chapter End Notes

a/n: costa is a uk coffee shop chain. it does better food than starbucks and the toasties are Top Notch. if you disagree youre wrong

Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Court case

Chapter Notes

this is shorter than i planned because i was having trouble with squeezing a second pov in there so here's a note: maedhros quit his job and moved back home. its not relevant its just a detail.

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

- Eönwë -

Watching Tobias take the case was hard if nothing else, but it had to be done.

I complain too much.

I was still allowed such a say, as the person who did most of the work, that I might as well have not dropped it--or rather--been dropped from it. Maedhros was kind enough to not give away any details as to why I shouldn't continue on the case beyond *his uncle is involved*, so at least it seemed noble. After that, it was over within a matter of days. They told me they already had all the evidence that they needed, thanks to my work. Well, my work and a little *help*.

It was surreal to see those photographs in the case file--to be able to see every detail of those injuries in glossy HD print, half-healed but doubly-ugly, swollen and purple. Maedhros told me it was lucky I hadn't hit him--over the phone, of course; he was still confined to bed-rest, but wanted to help.

Lot's of things were lucky: first, that the crescent moons from when his nails dug into my wrist have faded completely, that the accomplice had left visible marks on Mairon's face, that he had been so high up within that gang of theirs, that Maedhros had agreed to help him, despite everything.

So now he sits--not next to me, but near--cleaned up, with the stitches on his face so painfully obvious, going to bite his lip in almost-performative anxiety every so often, then immediately reversing the gesture the moment he tastes the sting of blood again. And of course, even beaten up like that, he's still gorgeous. He's gorgeous and, more importantly, no criminal. I wish I was next to him so that I could reach out and squeeze his hand (though he'd probably pull it away). Just doing *something* would be so much better than this; being barred from him by a wall three people long.

He hasn't made eye-contact with anyone since his testimony, and even then the defence grilled

him for every detail, thinking he was lying--he came across too calm--too straightforward. I wanted to stand up and tell them that he was always like that under pressure--he thrived with stress. I knew that I couldn't.

Does his life depend on this verdict? That was the claim we made--I wonder if that's enough.

As the spokesperson stands, Mairon peers round to meet my eyes, and I can see the panic hidden beneath his features for just a split second before she clears her throat, and we both turn to look at her.

And, for a moment, everything is silent, and I can see Mairon bite his lip-- *really* bite his lip, with no care of how much it compromises his stitches.

“Guilty.”

Guilty.

I can't even bring myself to feel good. Not when the moment I stepped out into the lobby, my father clapped me on the shoulder with a guarded “good work”, before promptly leaving. Not when I'm standing here alone, watching everyone file out--nodding when people greet me, being the perfect poster child for the metropolitan police department. Why not just leave with my father? Who am I waiting for?

“Eönwë?” *Him.* “I should--”

“Stay--” I grab his sleeve, like some child begging their parent not to leave for work. I let go. “Please, just stay with me. I forgive you.”

He sighs, “Eönwë--”

“I love you.”

“I can't stay.” He takes me by the hands and looks dead into my eyes. “There are a million reasons why but, you know, I'd find some way to forget them if it wasn't that you--you really don't want me around.”

“Please.”

“I don't even know if I *like* you, let alone love you. I don't know which of my feelings are real--please don't cry.”

“Sorry.” I don't make any effort to stop. The bastard can handle a few consequences now and then.

“I need to be away from all of this--to try and figure out why.” He cups my cheek and kisses me so gently--so much more gently than ever before, and I know he's serious, and I can feel the dread that this might be the last kiss I ever get from him, so I press back, and for once I'm the passionate one.

No--I was always the passionate one. Isn't everything that's happened evidence of that?

I can taste the blood from his lips in my mouth as our lips part, but I don't move away. Not yet. I don't want him to leave yet. But he has to move away. He has to leave.

"I did love you--back then," he says, as he takes a step back, "I never lied about that. Of course, it doesn't mean much now--"

"It means everything."

Then he pulls me into one last hug and leaves.

Chapter End Notes

oh, but im not quite done

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

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

- *Varda* -

I pull over. I'm not sure why, but being cooped up in the car with him when he's like this is like standing in front of an open oven, and I need to get out--to *breathe*. I'm not exactly unfamiliar with the intensity, but familiarity and immunity are far from the same thing.

"He shouldn't--I shouldn't--" he starts.

"Shouldn't *what*, dear?"

"He isn't guilty. He didn't kill our father."

I sigh, "Look, I know he's your brother, but you can't keep defending him--"

"No--you don't understand." He bites his lip. "He didn't kill him because *I* did."

Chapter End Notes

now we're done

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!