

IT was nice for Edgar, Locke reasoned. His twin had returned, quite unexpectedly, at what seemed admittedly to be a crucial time in everyone's lives. Yes – it was nice. A nice thing.

He and Terra were walking behind – she had already seemed a little slower than Edgar and Locke's natural pace, and now that the king was reunited with his even taller brother, the two of them were striding off at a speed hitherto unmatched. Locke was happy enough, though, to hang back with her. It was what he'd been doing since the beginning, anyway. She seemed to need constant explanations of almost everything they encountered, and he was willing to provide them. And better that than having Edgar all over her, although he'd started treating her a bit differently since first seeing her use her fire – one could never be too careful with him, though.

He had got somehow into a rather long-winded description of fishing. "It's all about the bait," he informed Terra. "Choose the right bait, you get the right fish. And if you choose the wrong bait, you'll get a nautiloid coming up and waving its tentacles at you."

"That sounds bad," she said doubtfully.

"It is," he assured her. "Happened to me once and I had to fight it off totally unprepared." He left out the information that he'd been travelling with a group at the time, and that they'd all banded together to fight the creature, and even with that it had still been a struggle. He'd been no good at fighting back then, anyway.

“Oh dear,” said Terra tonelessly – Locke was never quite sure if she was being sarcastic when she said things like that, but he’d begun to suspect she wouldn’t even recognise sarcasm if it clobbered her around the head. “So a nautiloid is a monster then, not an ordinary beast?” she added. “I haven’t managed to work out the difference.”

“Ah,” said Locke sagely. “That’s right, monsters are the things that attack you – beasts are calmer. Usually.” He thought back to the assassin and his dog in South Figaro, and shuddered.

“Right,” she said. “But what about moogles?”

“Oh, moogles are friends!” Locke assured her. “Can’t understand a word they say, but they’re good guys, definitely. They’ve helped me out of a tight spot once or twice.”

“They’re so soft,” said Terra dreamily.

Locke chuckled. “Yeah, that too.”

Edgar and Sabin had stopped to let them catch up – Locke was greeted by the somewhat disconcerting sight of two near-identical faces looking back at him. It was odd to think that one was the face of a good friend and the other belonged to a total stranger.

“Come on,” said Edgar good-naturedly. “We haven’t got all day.”

Locke responded with what he hoped was a withering look. “She’s tired,” he added. “Maybe we should rest for a moment.”

“I suppose so,” said Edgar. He turned to his brother, and said, “What do you think, bro?”

Locke couldn't help rolling his eyes; fortunately nobody saw. The king of Figaro did not use the word *bro*. He had never used it in the eight years Locke had known him, and he certainly wasn't going to start using it now – even if his actual, flesh-and-blood *bro* had miraculously come back to him.

He sat down on a large stone, looking back towards the mountain. He'd gone on long expeditions with Edgar like this before; Edgar had insisted on sneaking out of the castle in the most convoluted way possible, even though, being the king, there was nobody with the authority to punish him. He had always brought some ludicrous mechanical weapon and used it to absolutely obliterate several unsuspecting belmodars. Perhaps those times were over now, Locke thought.

“Hey,” said a familiar voice behind him.

He turned around; the voice was much more familiar than the person it belonged to. It was Sabin, in all his great bulk, leaning towards Locke with an outstretched hand.

“I don't think we've met properly,” he said. “I'm Sabin.”

Locke looked down towards the hand, and then said, “Did you leave him alone with her?” He stood in mild panic, looked around, and located Terra, who was staring into the distance, humming an unplaceable tune and winding her fingers through her long green curls. There were no rogue philanderers in sight.

“He’s gone looking for food,” Sabin said.

“Oh,” said Locke. “Right.” He sat down again, looking away.

There was a brief silence, and then he heard the sound of a nervously cleared throat. Reluctantly, he looked up again.

“I kinda get the impression you don’t like me much,” said Sabin.

Locke frowned, wrestled with his conscience for a few seconds, and won the fight most decisively. “Why do you talk like that?” he complained.

“Like what?” said Sabin.

“You’re a prince,” said Locke. “You should sound like he does.” The unwelcome image of Edgar uttering the word *bro swam* unbidden into his head. “You know, at least three syllables in every word, that kind of thing.”

Sabin shrugged. “Dunno, guess I’ve been away long enough. I probably did talk like him when I was a kid.”

“Yeah,” said Locke. Then he looked up, and added, “You shouldn’t have gone off like that.”

“Dude,” said Sabin. He sat down heavily beside Locke, hoisted his feet onto the stone so he was sitting cross-legged, and then said, “It was ten years ago.”

“And eight years ago,” said Locke, “he met me, and he was still fucking miserable about it. Do you realise that? You just ran off and forced him to be king on his own? And he hates being king, by the way –”

“He hates it,” said Sabin, “but he’s good at it. If it’d been me – I dunno, I’d have let the Empire invade years ago, probably. We’d all be walking around in those Magitek suits.”

“You had a duty,” Locke persisted, “and you just abandoned it! That’s – that’s not a good thing to do! Good people don’t break promises.” That, at least, he was sure of.

“We couldn’t both be king,” said Sabin resolutely.

“That’s what the old king wanted,” Locke countered. “Edgar told me.”

“Dad,” said Sabin, “had some stupid romantic idea that was never gonna work. I may not know much about ruling a kingdom, but I know that. All that stuff is meant for one person. We had to learn about the statutes when we were kids, and it was the most bored I’ve ever been in my life, but I remember there was only room for one person in all those rules. It was clear enough.” He looked away. “We had a fight about it. Edgar won – he was bigger than me then. Broke my nose.”

“You fought over who was gonna be king?” said Locke.

Sabin looked back at him. “No,” he said as if explaining to a particularly small and stupid child, “about who wasn’t.”

“Oh,” said Locke. “Yeah.”

“Look,” said Sabin. “I haven’t been a good brother over the last few years. I can admit that.”

“You haven’t been a brother at all,” Locke argued.

Sabin raised an eyebrow, and then slowly nodded. “Yeah,” he said. “I guess you could put it that way. But you know

what –” He disentangled his crossed legs in a single fluid motion and sprang up. “This is where it matters most, right? Now that the alliance is broken, and we’ve got her.” He nodded towards Terra. “And all this stuff is going on with the Returners. This is the time when we have to stick together, isn’t it? So I’m gonna make up for those ten years. I’m gonna be the best brother in the whole world, I promise.”

Locke was too preoccupied with rolling his eyes to notice Edgar joining them, a few large, speared fish flung casually over his shoulder. “Don’t make any promises to him,” he said, “he’s got a long memory.” He looked between them. “What were you promising, anyway?”

“To be the best brother in the whole world,” said Sabin again, proudly, and Locke wondered how much more it would take before his eyes worked themselves out of their sockets and fell unceremoniously to the ground.

“Hey,” said Edgar, reaching out to ruffle Sabin’s hair, “you’re already the best brother in the whole world! And Locke, you’re the best friend in the whole world. And *you*, my lady –” He reached out to take hold of Terra, who had started to approach.

“Stop that,” said Sabin, launching at Edgar, and the two of them tussled for a moment, leaving Terra to step away from Edgar with a somewhat bemused expression.

“I don’t really understand what’s happening,” said Terra shyly.

“You don’t need to,” Locke assured her. “They’re just being idiots.”

“Yes, they are rather, aren’t they?” she said, watching Edgar mime slapping Sabin around the head with one of the dead fish. “They do look like they’re having fun, though.”

“Yeah,” said Locke. Terra was right, he thought: Edgar really was having a good time. He’d barely stopped grinning since his brother had joined them, hours ago now. That had to count for something, he decided, no matter how Sabin had behaved.

“What are you looking so smug about?” Edgar called out to him, evading Sabin’s repeated attempts to grab him by the hem of his robe.

“Nothing,” said Locke, and then, to the sound of a surprised cheer from Sabin, he launched himself into the fray, leaving Terra to look on in continued bewilderment.