

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Battling Selene.

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Both Thaddeus and Emma go still for a moment... but in the end, neither of them was going to freeze up forever. One way or another, playtime is over. With that in mind, he wastes no time in pulling out of Lorna and Emma swings her legs over the tuckered out green haired mutant's head.

They rise up off of the bed together in unison, coming to a unanimous decision in half a second. Thaddeus reaches out and clothes them while Emma starts to reach out to their allies, seeking reinforcements. Between them and everyone in the building, as well as everyone else, Selene wouldn't-

Only, just as they've chosen that course of action, the entire skyrise begins to... *tilt*. Thaddeus' eyes widen as he feels a huge chunk of the lower part of the building simply cease to exist. The upper half starts to fall, prompting him to reach out and latch onto it both with telekinesis and what he'd just gained from Lorna, holding it all together.

Only, he can feel something fighting him. Or rather... *someone*.

Thaddeus exchanges a look with Emma and they both realize in that moment that this isn't going to work. Reaching out, it's not so simply as simply grabbing ahold of Selene with their combined might and locking her down. If it was, they would be done with this immediately. But no, she's radiating far too much power for this. This is going to be a fight, no matter what.

Here's the problem... a fight between him, Emma, and anyone capable of fighting them will almost certainly reduce most of their allies to smears on the ground at this point. Even Apocalypse would be nothing more than a road bump for him and Emma by now, even if a day ago he was something of a challenge.

No... they couldn't bring anyone else into this fight. Doing so was just going to get people killed.

With that understanding, they immediately reverse course. Emma's mental reaching out turns towards getting any would-be reinforcements focused on cordoning off the area and evacuating civilians. Thaddeus, meanwhile, evacuates the not-civilians. Luckily, they still have a fully operational moon base so he sends Lorna, Rachel, and everyone else in the tower important to him up there in the blink of an eye before any of them can react.

They won't be happy with him later, Thaddeus imagines. People like Laura and Cessily in particular will be incensed that he didn't let them fight. And yet, he knows he made the right call because even as they disappear into Limbo and reappear on the Moon, Thaddeus can feel it in the air... Selene's invisible claws reaching out to grab at them, either to make examples of them or to turn them into hostages.

All of this takes place over the span of about ten seconds at most. From Thaddeus and Emma realizing Selene was outside, to trying to gather reinforcements, to being forced to abandon that plan. Everything is happening very, very fast. But for the likes of them, it might as well have been hours. They can easily live in this sort of sped up time, can perceive and process and plan together.

As such, by the time Emma's building finally begins to fully tear itself apart under Selene's power, Thaddeus and Emma are both done securing as many people as they possibly can. In fact, the entire building is devoid of life, even as it implodes on itself, detonating inward and seemingly erasing itself from existence.

Thaddeus and Emma hover above it, clothed again, staring down at Selene. It's the first time either of them lay proper eyes on her, even as she pushes off the ground and floats up to meet them in the air.

“You...”

Selene Gallio... has definitely seen better days. Truth be told, Thaddeus isn't sure what he was expecting... but it wasn't this. Oh, she's more powerful than ever before, that's a given. Hell, she's probably the most powerful entity they've faced together, barring the initial confrontation with the Phoenix.

Even Apocalypse, for all that he must have been stronger than Selene at their base levels... would not hold a candle to Selene as she is now. She's hunted down the other Externals and consumed them. Just as Apocalypse warned of. Just as Selene herself had all but spoiled the details of. It's not just Saul that she's killed and taken the power of; it's everybody except for Thaddeus and Apocalypse... because Thaddeus had gotten to Apocalypse first.

And yet... it's wearing on her, clearly. For all the power Selene now wields, it doesn't seem like she's managing it very well. Her pale skin is lined with glowing cracks, her flesh seeming to almost be constantly tearing itself apart and rebuilding itself. Her eyes are glowing bright with energy, but not just because of how powerful she's become... the energy seems barely contained, almost like it's constantly burning out her skull, only for it to be reconstituted, moment to moment.

Her attention focuses on Emma first, her teeth gritting.

“All you had to do... was play your role. Fatten this one up for slaughter. Keep him ignorant and weak.”

Her glowing gaze moves to him.

“And you... you were never supposed to be anything more than the appetizer. The first to fall. You were not meant for this.”

Thaddeus tilts his head to the side, feeling a strange form of pity for Selene for just a moment.

“I suppose you miscalculated. Because from where I'm standing... this is exactly what I was meant for.”

A low growl reverberates from the twitching sorceress' lips.

“NO! No, you were mine! My discovery, my find! My meal! And even now... you remain mine. Mine to consume. Once I have you... I will be whole. I will ascend.”

Thaddeus clenches his jaw, his hands curling into fists at his sides.

“You’d have to have me first, Selene. And you will *never* have me.”

Even as he speaks with bravado, he feels a problem brewing in the distance. Those allies that Emma had initially attempted to call in, their would-be reinforcements... weren’t listening to Emma’s orders. Oh sure, some among them were doing their best to evacuate the area, which was good because it wasn’t just Emma’s building that had been destroyed at this point.

Indeed, even as he, Emma, and Selene were talking, their surroundings were being erased, seemingly by Selene’s out of control power. But that was okay because the civilians were being rescued before anyone could be hurt. The problem became certain individuals thinking they should step in... that they could help by throwing themselves into this particular meat grinder.

None of them could. Informing them of this at all had been a mistake. He and Emma should have confronted Selene without telling anyone else, Thaddeus can’t help but think. And now... if any of the would-be heroes gets too close, they’re most certainly going to die.

A slow smile spreads across Selene’s face at that.

“We shall see. How many are you willing to sacrifice in order to save yourself, I wonder? How many of your little friends shall I have to hold in my hands before you bow your head and bare your neck for me to close my jaws upon?”

And there it was. Because of course. Thaddeus grimaces... and makes a decision then and there.

“None.”

With that, he moves. Leaping forward through the air, faster than most eyes would have been able to track, he lunges at Selene with everything he has. She meets him with her hands up like claws, trying to grab onto him... but Thaddeus somehow dodges those hands and closes his arms around her midriff instead, knocking the air from her lungs for just half a moment.

That's all he needs... to drop them into Limbo. Putting Selene herself in Limbo without physical contact was all but impossible, but once he had ahold of her, it was different. The only issue was, he had to use every drop of power to drag her along with him... and couldn't spare anything to bring Emma too.

The blonde is left behind on Earth, the portal snapping shut behind him and Selene as both of them start to do the same exact thing at the same exact time. Namely... *drain*.

This was Selene's signature move after all, the way she consumed others. It was what she'd wanted to do to him all along and why she'd ordered Emma to keep him little more than a dumb brute who never developed anything beyond physical powers.

That had been the plan from start to finish, beefing him up and then consuming him. And from the sound of things, Selene had somehow known he was an External before he'd ever 'awakened'. And so she saw in him an opportunity to start her feast of her fellow Externals, a path to this 'ascension' she spoke of.

The problem for Selene was, Thaddeus hadn't stayed the simple, dumb brute she was wanting. He'd grown beyond the confines of her dinner plate. He'd become what he was today in spite of her plans and in direct defiance of her directives to Emma.

He drains Selene right back... and he hears her gasp of outrage, knowing that she's incensed by this.

“It’s not FAIR!”

Even then, her whining takes him somewhat aback. Even as he holds onto her and gives as good as he’s getting, draining her tit for tat, he’s not anticipating her being so... petulant about things.

“Just... give in already! Stop fighting me! You insignificant little whelp!”

Thaddeus pulls back his head from her midriff, until they’re facing each other even as they cling to one another, fingers digging into each other’s flesh all the while. He stares into Selene’s eyes and scoffs.

“You’re not used to being told ‘no’, are you? Has anyone ever denied you anything in your entire life and survived to tell the tale?”

Selene half-sneers, half-grins at that.

“No. And they aren’t about to start now!”

Damn, she’d basically cut him off before he could say something pithy like ‘I guess I’ll be the first!’. Now it would sound dumb. Still, even as Selene redoubles her efforts, trying to drain him for all she’s worth, Thaddeus continues to hold on and return the favor. They’re evenly matched on this front... locked in a metaphysical tug of war that neither can win.

Both of them probably have more tricks up their sleeves, mind you. Thaddeus definitely does. However, he fears that if he breaks his concentration for even moment to try something like Reality Warping or what not, then Selene will gain the upper hand on him. The same is true for her too though... if she tries to cast any magic, if she tries to go for some underhanded spell or trick, then she’s almost certainly going to falter and he’ll drain HER in the process.

Limbo... is not doing well around them, but Thaddeus simply doesn’t have the time to care about Illyana’s subjects or domain. Better a bunch of demons than half of the Earth, he figures.

Still, at this rate the whole dimension will be barren in no time, destroyed by their struggle and the out of control elements of Selene's power. They'll be here, continuing to fight, continuing what might just be an eternal struggle... amidst the desolation and destruction they've caused together.

Of course, just as that thought is crossing his mind... a fresh portal opens and Emma comes through, their connection reforged in an instant as they find themselves in the same dimension again.

“NO!”

Selene, of course, recognizes what this means. If he and she were evenly matched in their tug of war, with her having consumed every other External but him having the power of Apocalypse and every woman he'd fucked... well, who better to imbalance that than the Phoenix's current host, Emma Frost herself?

The blonde doesn't even bother with words. She doesn't need to. Taking one look at their conflict both through his eyes and her own, Emma simply reaches out and does what she does best... she applies pressure. And given how evenly matched Thaddeus and Selene were until this moment, that pressure can only mean one thing... Selene breaks.

“NOOOOOOOOOO!!!”

Thaddeus won't pretend like he doesn't hesitate, just for a fraction of a second. He's fought and killed before, but only ever men. Women, even women who have started as his enemies... he tends to be gentler with. Call it chivalry, call it chauvinism, call it whatever you want.

However, in this particular case... Thaddeus stares into Selene's glowing eyes and sees nothing redeemable. There's nothing worth being gentle with here. If she had her way, he and Emma would both be dead and so would everyone he cares about. And that... that was unacceptable.

And so Thaddeus drains her. With Emma providing the distraction, it becomes less of an even match and more of a slaughter. Selene thrashes in his arms,

trying to break free, trying to cast any sort of spell that might help her escape and perhaps go into hiding again.

Only, anytime she does so, Thaddeus consumes that too. Before any of her magic can fully coalesce, he warps reality to break it apart and then steals the energy, draining it from her right there on the spot. He continues to do this the entire time, even as she shrieks and struggles and screams at the top of her lungs.

Until... much like Apocalypse, Selene Gallio is reduced to nothing but a shriveled husk. He turns her into a corpse, draining her until there's nothing left and she's completely gone.

Unlike Apocalypse however, draining Selene is... more power than Thaddeus knows what to do with. More power than fucking Ms. Marvel or Rachel has given him. More power than he and Emma had combined before now.

This is the power of every External in one body. He'd had himself and Apocalypse, Selene had herself and everyone else... but now it was all contained within one form.

However, unlike Selene... Thaddeus can feel the power starting to settle into place without complaint. He can handle it, whether that's because his foundation is as strong as it is or because he's managed what she didn't and has the energy of every External flowing through him. This... this is ascension.

And now Thaddeus has a decision to make. Selene is gone. Apocalypse is gone. The Externals, that mysterious group he barely knows anything about... are gone.

If he keeps this power, if he lets it settle, none of them will ever return. And he will become a god... perhaps more than a god really, given his continued capacity for growth.

And yet, if he does so... it will be impossible to go back to the way things were before. The only one he'll even remotely be able to relate to anymore... will be Emma. Hopefully.

But of course, if he lets this power go, Thaddeus can feel that the other Externals will come back. Eventually, they will all be reborn if he stops the ascension and goes back to simply being an incredibly overpowered mutant man and nothing more. That includes Selene. That includes Apocalypse.

Jaw clenching, Thaddeus looks to Emma, hoping for some form of advice. In turn, she smiles at him, moving to his side and placing a hand on his cheek... and he knows she'll support him, no matter what choice he makes.

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A/N: Alright guys, this is definitely the climax of this story, which means we're officially coming to the end.

I don't think I'll be doing quite as many epilogue chapters for this fic as previous stories have gotten truth be told, maybe just 4-5 at most (and possibly less than that), so consider this your opportunity to weigh in on what those 4-5 should include above all else.

Also I have no idea what I want to replace this story with yet once it is done, so feel free to hop over to the Discord to give me your two cents about that as well!

Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!