

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

A/N: Thomas arrives in Last Hope!

-x-X-x-

By the time Thomas arrives in Last Hope, the small town has already begun its transformation. The bones of the fortress that it will become have been laid and there's more stone being delivered right alongside the arrival of him and the first part of the Kingdom's army.

To be fair, he knows he looks quite different as well. Sat upon an armored stallion, wearing armor of his own and a crown upon his brow, Thomas cuts quite the striking figure, or so he's been told. Neither him nor the town have survived contact with destiny, it would seem.

It still feels a little strange to have gone from the leather armor he'd gotten so used to, to metal armor. However, in this case... well, the armor is made of Magic Steel, same as the greatest weapons in the Kingdom. A truly astronomical expense, not something that even the greatest knights of Camilla's Order can afford, but... certainly something that the King can justify, especially when his predecessor was assassinated in his own throne room.

Even then, Thomas had initially balked at the idea of using so much of the previous resource for armor. He hadn't even thought Magic Steel could be turned into armor, assuming it to be the kind of metal dedicated solely to weapons. But that had been his own ignorance talking. There were indeed Master Blacksmiths in the Capital capable of creating such masterworks.

Anna had insisted Thomas be 'properly armored' and so it had happened and now here he sat upon his steed, wearing armor that glows slightly in the midday sun and makes him look all the more ostentatious and grandiose for it.

It was a symbol; his wife and Queen had assured him. He was a symbol now... so he had to act like it.

And thankfully he was mostly just a symbol. That and the commander of the army. But beyond that, Anna took care of most of the stateside stuff. They could make him King and put a crown upon his head, but he still wasn't inclined to manage a kingdom anymore than he'd been inclined to manage a town! Let others handle that side of things... he had more important things to worry about.

Like the defense of said Kingdom. That was something Thomas was more than happy to focus on and with Camilla's help and her knightly order backing his initiative, Thomas had soon had thousands of men all willing to see what he could turn them into.

He'd proceeded to turn them into a proper fighting force. Not just levies and knights, but an actual fucking army. Frankly, Thomas still didn't quite know how he'd done it... aside from that his Gift had helped out a LOT along the way. Even with all of the training he'd previously done in teaching groups of people, Thomas had still struggled at first.

But that was his biggest secret... struggling was where he found the most improvement. The harder and more impossible a task, the more that Thomas found himself rising to meet it. So long as he refused to give up, so long as he refused to give in... his Gift would propel him forward, helping to fill in the gaps.

By the end of the first week, they were already seeing results. Thomas had even been able to pinpoint those among the men who were best suited for assisting him. Some were knights from Camilla's order; others were royal guards and still more were just men who nevertheless had a skill that was only now being nurtured.

With those 'lieutenants' to help him out, Thomas had been able to expand things rapidly, until his teachings were being spread to the thousands of men who had assembled to protect the Kingdom from the encroaching Dark Elf threat. And still thousands more had answered the call week after week, arriving late from all corners of the Kingdom... but arriving all the same.

It had been months now since the massacre in the throne room and his wedding and coronation. Months of hard work and training and not resting for even a moment. Thomas barely felt it though... he simply didn't need to sleep that much anymore, maybe once every three days. The extra time allowed him to do so much more than just training men in how to fight the oncoming enemy.

And now... they were here. Last Hope stands before him, already unrecognizable from the quaint town it once was. For a moment, Thomas feels a pang of regret that they couldn't let it stay the way it was before. Sure there were threats, but the people were happy even if they weren't particularly rich.

Now though... well, if everything went to plan, Last Hope would be the new seat for House Harper going forward. Eloise and her father would continue to rule it into the future as the Kingdom's newest noble house. But first... they had to make sure Synestra and her army didn't wipe it off the map as the opening move in their inevitable attack.

Speaking of...

"Sevvi."

The sound of her name summons Sevvi to his side in an instant. Thomas had known she was nearby to be fair, and that she would immediately come when called. As she arrives in the shadow of his stallion, Thomas smiles down at her.

"Have Qyvern send out the scouts immediately. We need to know sooner rather than later if the Dark Elves are out there yet, massing on the edge of the Darkwoods."

Sevvi inclines her head and disappears again without a word to relay his orders. Thomas watches her go with a low sigh.

Truth be told, part of him could still scarcely believe they'd had as much time as they'd had to prepare. Months? He'd almost expected Synestra to arrive within weeks using the Gift of Shadow. But Sevvi had explained otherwise.

Not every member of Synestra's army would be as capable as the elite soldiers they'd seen in the throne room that day. More than that, those troops had definitely been stationed nearby, likely on the edge of Human Lands much like Sevv's little hideout from back in the day.

They'd been ready to be summoned at a moment's notice as part of Synestra's deal with Solomon Godman. Though Sevv speculated that it was more likely they were there to watch Graelo's back than anything else, considering how her sister had reacted to each man's demise. Solomon had barely even registered to the First Princess. But Graelo... Graelo meant something to her.

It was almost enough to make Thomas pity the First Princess... until he remembered everything she'd done. The creation of the Rotlands, the plaguing of the Kingdom, the affliction Anna had suffered from... all of it had been little more than a game to Synestra.

Regardless, the long and short of it was that mobilizing her forces would take the First Princess time. She would need to bring together all of the soldiers within the Dark Elf lands that answered to her personally, she would need to gather supplies for them, and she would need to transport most of them slowly across the length of the Darkwoods.

It would be a lot easier for her to come for them than it would have been for them to get to her and the rest of the Dark Elves, but that didn't mean it wouldn't still be difficult.

The silver lining of that was Sevv deemed it unlikely that any of the other Dark Elves NOT under Synestra's command would take part in the fighting. Which was good, because not only did the Dark Elves significantly out-skill the humans, they also significantly outnumbered them as well.

That was still something Thomas had to wrap his head around a bit, because he was so used to media from his world where humans tended to be treated as the most populous species in fantasy settings because they bred like rabbits and other races tended to be longer lived.

Not so here. Mostly because, as Sevvī had finally confessed to Thomas... the Dark Elves used magic to create more children whenever they wanted without having to go through the usual biological processes. Sevvī herself might be called the Fourth Princess, but she was actually her mother's thirty-first daughter. And her mother was nearing her hundredth daughter at this point, to say nothing of the hundreds of males she'd made with her blood.

... Yeah, that had been a bit of a mind fuck for Thomas. But what it meant in more concrete terms was simple... Synestra had a big army, the biggest of all the Dark Elf Princesses, but they would be facing her and that army alone for numerous reasons.

Synestra wouldn't have the patience to wait for her sisters to get their own armies together, nor the desire to share the conquest with any of them. Meanwhile, Synestra and Sevvī's sisters were unlikely to want to waste any of their energy or strength on such things. In fact, they were more likely to use Synestra's absence from the Dark Elf Capital as a chance to go behind her back and weaken the First Princess' position.

According to Sevvī, there was a very real chance Synestra would lose her position of First Princess even if she succeeded at wiping humanity off of the face of this world and rotting all of the remaining human lands. Mostly because such an accomplishment wouldn't mean anything to the Dark Elf Queen or the rest of them back home.

When Synestra called this 'pest control', she hadn't been joking. She-

"Your Majesty."

Pulled out of his own thoughts, Thomas blinks as he realizes he'd been caught doing a bit of woolgathering. He looks to the side to find the one who caught him was Camilla herself, the Knight riding her own steed up alongside him.

All around them, men and women stream forward into the burgeoning fortress town that Last Hope is becoming, carrying various supplies and getting to work.

Someone else must have given the order while Thomas was caught up in his own thoughts.

Focusing back on the matter at hand, Thomas smiles at Camilla.

“Dame Ackinworth. All is well, I hope?”

Camilla nods slowly.

“It is with me. Is it with you?”

Her concern is obvious. Rather than brush her off, Thomas just sighs and shakes his head.

“I merely let myself get caught up in the same logic trap I’ve found myself in a dozen times over the past months. Our enemy is coming at us with everything she’s got, fully intending to wage a war of obliteration against us. In turn, she stands to lose everything she has back in her homeland whether she succeeds or fails against us.”

Thomas grimaces as he looks out into the distance of the Darkwoods. If Synestra and her army haven’t arrived already and begin setting up out there, they will soon.

“... How do you possibly combat someone like that? Someone who has nothing left to lose? Someone who has no rhyme or reason to their decision making?”

Camilla hums for a moment, looking out in the same direction as him.

“... Isn’t it really the other way around, my King?”

Blinking in confusion, Thomas looks over at the female knight, not quite sure what she means. Shrugging, Camilla adopts a crooked smile.

“We are a people up against the edge of oblivion? As you said, this is to be a war of total annihilation. We fight, not for honor or anything like that, but for our very survival. She comes to wipe us out... but we refuse to lie down and die.”

Building up a full head of steam, Camilla straightens up and smiles brightly.

“How will she possibly win against those who will not give up and who will fight to our last breath? She has nothing left to lose... but I don’t think that makes her strong, I think it makes her weak. We have everything to lose... and that makes us all the stronger. Because we won’t stop fighting until the threat is dealt with.”

That... was a fair point. Hah, to think Thomas would let himself doubt for even a second. Camilla is right though... she’s completely right.

“Damn straight we won’t. Come Camilla. Let’s go.”

Raising a brow, Camilla nevertheless follows Thomas as he leads her off to the side of the mad rush of people.

“Where are we going, Your Majesty?”

Grinning, he winks at her even as he leads her to a small place near the entrance of Last Hope. Fortunately it’s far enough from the road into town to be untouched so far. And so, their old training grounds, where Camilla had kicked his ass for weeks before he’d gotten better at fighting, is actually completely untouched for the time being.

“Up for a spar?”

Camilla blinks as she realizes where they’ve gone. As he dismounts, she does the same with a smile along with a twinkle in her eye.

“Always, my King.”

-x-X-x-

A/N: War is coming...

Please let me know what you think either on Patreon or Discord! Your feedback, suggestions, and ideas for this story are keeping the inspiration flowing in a big way!