

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

A/N: Plan B it is!

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Frustration was the name of the game, but the silver lining was progress. Not progress towards finding the Spider-Queen unfortunately, but progress in every other way, nevertheless. Sure, they were running out of time and Thomas hadn't seen a single sign of the Spider-Queen in the past three weeks... but hey, at least he was still getting stronger, faster, and tougher.

Doing any sort of menial labor around town at this point didn't really cut it anymore, but racing through the Darkwoods and fighting anything that got in his way certainly did. Training those in Last Hope who still wanted to learn to fight and defend their town was also pretty fulfilling because even setting aside an hour each day, he was seeing visible progress in all of them. Last Hope would have its own protectors in the future, regardless of what might happen to him or Camilla.

He had also begun learning all sorts of interesting skills where he could. Thomas knew how to wield multiple weapons at this point, though none as well as his halberd. And he could honestly brew half of the potions Arnold had taught him in the middle of the woods with just a basic fire, a small cauldron and the appropriate sourced supplies from his surroundings.

He was very... self-sufficient at this point. So much so in fact that for the past seven days, Thomas and Camilla had begun splitting up in their trips into the Darkwoods because for the first time since his arrival in this world, Thomas was outright outpacing the female knight in speed. Put simply, he could cover more ground by himself without her dragging him down.

Now obviously that didn't sit well with Camilla, though not because she was jealous of his abilities or disturbed by his progress. No, in spite of Thomas

continually expecting Camilla to finally demand answers as to just how he was doing all of this, the interrogation had never come.

Instead, she was upset because she was afraid he might get ambushed while they were split up. She was supposed to be his knight after all, sworn to carry his burdens and protect him from his enemies. Leaving him to go off on his own ran rather counter to those things and made her feel useless.

Of course, that hadn't stopped Thomas from putting his foot down. Camilla might have had a point, but at the end of the day, he wasn't just some nobleman. He was a warrior in his own right... and he was stronger and faster than her by now. More than that, she was his knight, not his bodyguard. If she truly meant the oath she'd sworn to him, then she owed him her obedience, not just protection.

Yes, he'd had to be that strict about it. No, it hadn't felt good to lay down the law and force them to split up to cover more ground. In the end though, Thomas hadn't felt like they'd had much choice. Ultimately with the rapidly approaching deadline, they needed to be able to range further faster to try and find the Spider-Queen before the month was up.

... Not even that had been good enough though. Thomas had ventured further into the Darkwoods by himself than he ever had with other people. He'd reached the point where the trees were at least a hundred feet tall and the local fauna was starting to grow to match. Nothing as big as the King of the Forest had been, and the trees were far from 'skyscraper' sized like he knew they could become... but still, it was as deep as he could get.

And still there was no sign of this blasted Spider-Queen. The biggest giant spiders Thomas found, even that deep in, were about as big as a horse and he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that that wasn't big enough.

Of course, the evidence that the deeper he went, the bigger such creatures would get... it did make Thomas wish he had more time. Or rather, it made him wish he'd made a beeline for the deepest parts of the Darkwoods from the very beginning.

If he'd spent two weeks on a solo venture as deep into the forest as he could possibly get, he might have found giant spiders as big as the King of the Forest had been. From there, killing one and retrieving their mandibles could have seen him getting back to Last Hope in time before the deadline that Sevinarya had posed.

... But obviously, that wasn't how things had worked out. Thomas hadn't known to push himself to go that deep into the forest. He hadn't known to leave Camilla behind so he could move unfettered and freely deeper into the Darkwoods. And most of all... he hadn't known that Sevinarya was a lying bitch who would make up the existence of a creature like the Spider-Queen to string him along for her own twisted amusement.

Sure, maybe he should have been able to guess at that last bit. The Dark Elf had clearly been toying with him from the start. The only question was... why? Why send him on a wild goose chase for a month like this? She had the cure; she'd been curing Eloise's father in small doses for months before Thomas found out about all of it. All he'd wanted was the chance to earn said cure.

Was she just a sadist or something? Was she just a vile monster who got her rocks off on causing other people pain and anguish?

He remembered that was how Dark Elves were often portrayed back on Earth. Fictionally speaking, it was always the Dark Elves who were the evil of the bunch. Given how goblins had turned out to be here on this world, maybe he should have guessed that he couldn't trust a Dark Elf either.

But that felt... well, it felt bad. Because why in the world had Sevinarya saved him from the King of the Forest in the first place? Just so she could watch him squirm?

... In the end, it didn't matter. Because now that they were three weeks into the month long deadline and only a week away from failing to bring Sevinarya what she asked for, they had no choice but to implement Plan B.

Waiting another week was a bad idea, because that's when she would be most expecting them to try to capture her. And as much as Thomas might have wanted to spend another week diving further into the Darkwoods, he knew that he needed to be realistic and face facts... there was no Spider-Queen to be found.

Fortunately, they'd been working on Plan B alongside trying to hunt down the Spider-Queen all this time. In a way, that was his one saving grace after being so utterly bamboozled. Sure, he'd wanted to believe Sevinarya was telling the truth... but he'd also planned for if she turned out to be a lying scumbag stringing them along. He might not have wanted to believe it, but he'd still planned for it.

And so here they were. Him, Camilla, and Eloise. The three of them were all in Mayor Harper's office in his house, waiting for the guest of the hour to arrive. It was just about time for Sevinarya to make a weekly visit and check in on their progress, after all. And once she did... well, that was when they'd strike.

To say the situation was tense would be an understatement. Not a single one of them says a word as they wait in silence, each of them strung taut like a damn bow. They have to get this right, after all. Because if they don't... then any hope of saving Eloise's father is out the window.

And sure, maybe Mayor Harper had been a goner back when Thomas first arrived in Last Hope, but he wasn't now. In fact, Thomas had even gotten to exchange greetings with the older man the other day during one of the Mayor's very rare lucid moments.

But really, Thomas knew he was doing this more for Eloise than her father. Especially given the... relationship that the two of them and Camilla had at this point. If someone had told him back on Earth that he would wind up in a strange threeway sexual relationship with two beautiful women, he would have laughed in their face. But here they were all the same.

They-

It happens between one instant and the next. As much as Thomas is letting his thoughts run wild, one of the more understated skills he's trained in extensively since arriving in this world... is multitasking. As such, he's not actually too caught up in his own thoughts to miss the shadows swelling in a corner of the office, followed by Sevinarya Vairath stumbling forward out of them.

He doesn't bother waiting for her to straighten up or say anything. They can't risk her realizing something is wrong so Plan B has always been to act immediately the moment her presence is confirmed. Thomas yanks on the cord in his hands at the same time Eloise yanks on another cord and Camilla draws her sword.

The end result? The Mayor's Office is suddenly awash in faint glowing blue light, as multiple magical lanterns positioned strategically throughout the room flick on at the exact same time that the normal lanterns are flicked off. As such, the lighting in the room changes dramatically, removing every shadow from view and leaving it all the same, strange light from corner to corner.

It was a particularly inspired idea; Thomas had to admit. Rather than make the room as bright as possible, they'd changed the composition of the lighting so that there simply were no more shadows to jump into.

Immediately, Thomas steps forward alongside Camilla, both of them angling themselves so that Eloise can get behind them as quickly as possible while also protecting as many of the lanterns from any retaliation from Sevinarya.

At the same time, Thomas is calling out.

"Surrender, Sevinarya. We have you outnumbered and you're not going to escape using your Gift. Don't fight us and we won't have to-!"

The words 'hurt you' are on the tip of his tongue when Sevinarya... suddenly pitches forward. Only belatedly does Thomas realize she'd never actually fully managed to escape her initial stumble, leaving her in a hunched over position with a hand clutching at her side.

Now, with a low groan, the Dark Elf collapses to the floor of the office in front of him and Camilla, falling flat on her face. Thomas immediately glances to the red head to his left, frowning in confusion and concern. This had to be some sort of trick or trap, right?

Camilla nods back at him, either to show she agrees that its probably a trap or to signal that she'll follow his lead. Either way, Thomas takes a step forward, frown intensifying.

“Sevinarya? We’re not going to fall for another trick you know...”

Only, he can’t just leave her groaning in a heap on the floor. His own morals won’t let him if something is actually wrong. Moving carefully, half-expecting to receive a dagger to the gut for his troubles at any moment, Thomas reaches down and grabs Sevinarya by the shoulder. And yet, still no attack comes, so he pushes her firmly onto her back.

A cry leaves the Dark Elf’s lips as she lands on her back. Her hand is still clutching at her side... until it’s not. As her arm flops backwards, Thomas stares down at the literal chunk that’s been taken out of the Dark Elf’s side, armor and flesh and all. Something looks to have taken a bite out of Sevinarya, and from the way she’s acting... that something might have been venomous as well.

Thomas looks from Sevinarya to Camilla and then to Eloise. Suffice to say, this was not what he was expecting. Maybe it was still a trap... somehow? But on the off chance it wasn’t, they kind of needed the Dark Elf alive still. If she died on them now, then Mayor Harper was doomed to die with her, albeit far more slowly.

Plan B had always been to capture Sevinarya Vairath alive. Letting her die wasn’t an option. So in the end... Thomas takes a deep breath and moves to begin doing everything he can to save the dying elven woman’s life.

He just hopes he doesn’t have cause to regret this down the line...

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A/N: Dun dun DUUUUN! What do you guys think? Is Sevinarya actually hurt or is this all part of her master plan?

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!