

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

A/N: Sevv Time!

Also fair warning: Spiders.

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Sevvi had screwed up. She knew she'd screwed up. Having a chunk taken out of your side by the biggest fucking spider you've ever seen is liable to open your eyes quite quickly. At least, it'd opened hers. Pushing Liselle like she had, forcing the other woman onto such a short timeline... it could only have ever ended in disaster or disappointment. Suffice to say, Sevvi would have preferred disappointment.

Now she stands there as the knight and the mousy brunette shout about her latest revelation, waiting for the Lordling to shut her down. And he'll be right to as well. Obviously she knew how hard of a sell this was...

"I'm still going."

She couldn't even really blame him for- wait, what? Sevvi's eyes snap to Thomas Marlow's determined face, widening in shock as Camilla and Eloise both do the same. But he doesn't waver, not even slightly. Instead, he gestures to Eloise's father, the man she'd just got done curing of Rot Lung.

"The Mayor is healed. Completely and utterly healed. He sits there at the table right now with us because of her. That has to be worth something. So yes, I'll go with her. We'll try and help save her people and kill the monstrosity they accidentally spawned. And then I'll come back. No matter what, I swear that I'll come back."

A shiver runs down Sevvi's spine at the conviction in the human's voice. Judging by the reaction of the other two women in the kitchen, it has a similar effect on

him. Thomas looks to her at that point, his gaze intensely sharp and his eyes practically burrowing into the depths of her soul.

“No more games, Sevinarya. No more tricks, no more lies, no more scams. You get just this one more chance from me and that’s it.”

Sevvi slowly nods. Then, hesitantly...

“... My friends call me Sevvi.”

Thomas blinks at her. Then, he lets out a derisive snort.

“We’re not friends.”

You know what... fair. Swallowing the sense of disappointment she knows she has no right to be feeling, Sevvi glances down at her bound hands instead.

“... I’ll need to be untied. And I’ll need my blades back.”

Camilla growls at that, but Thomas just nods.

“She’s right. The plan hasn’t changed. We still prepare to leave within the hour.”

And just like that, his word is law. Sevvi is freed and her dagger and throwing knives are returned to her. Thomas even gives her back the curved dagger she’d thrown into the King of the Forest’s eye all those weeks ago, not taking no for an answer when she initially refuses it.

On top of that, Eloise runs to get them potions from the Town’s Apothecary, seeing as they’d used quite a few of their own supply on saving her life. And just as Thomas had said, they’re ready to go within the hour, armored up and loaded down with weapons and all of the tools that the human had developed for clearing out spider nests quickly in the past three weeks while trying to complete her impossible task.

After which, they make for the edge of the Darkwoods, because if Seevi is going to bring someone with her she'll need a particularly deep shadow to make it happen. She wasn't lying about that part, after all. Nor was she lying about her own limitations. Even trying to do multiple trips, first one with Thomas and then the other with Camilla, would almost certainly be beyond her. Especially since she needed the strength to do another shorter jump with Thomas to get down to the hideout...

Sure, someone with a few more centuries under their belt might be able to use the Gift of Shadow to transport more than one extra person. Hell, there were stories of entire platoons of elven soldiers being transported through shadows behind enemy lines.

But Seevi wasn't *that* skilled with her Gift. So in the end... it was just going to have to be her and Thomas. She could only hope it would be enough.

"You come back, alright? You promised."

She watches as Thomas says his goodbyes to the two women who have come to see them off. The Mayor she'd healed has stayed behind at his home, still recovering as things stand. Perhaps that's what gives Eloise the courage to do what she does. No sooner have those words come out of her lips than she steps forward and grabs Thomas by the front of his armor, dragging him into a deep, passionate kiss.

Seevi tries not to feel jealous. After all, she has no right to be. And yet... she can't help but shift from foot to foot as the kiss continues... and continues... and continues.

Just when she's starting to wonder if humans have some greater capacity for holding air in their bodies than elves do, the two finally pull away. Thomas gives Eloise a fond smile and a nod.

"I promise, Eloise."

Hmph, did he forget that Eloise had betrayed him to her for months? Tch...

He nods to Camilla as well, who nods back, her hand on the hilt of her sword. The knight directs one last scowl to Sevv... who resists the urge to nettle her yet again. It's very, very tempting... but maybe that just makes Sevv a bad person because she *knows* this isn't the time for it.

Still, she holds her tongue and waits for Thomas to approach her and the deepest shadow she's found. Then, because she apparently can't help herself, she latches onto him tightly, wrapping her arms around him as she pulls him close to her.

"Hold on tight, Lordling. Wouldn't want you to get lost in the shadow."

Alarm flashes through Thomas' eyes at that.

"Is that even poss-?"

But she's already pulling them both through, cutting him off mid-sentence and dragging him in with her ability. Of course, as always, shadowstep is instantaneous. One second they're on the outskirts of Last Hope, the next they're deep within the Darkwood.

"-ible? Whoa!"

She lets go of him for a second, stumbling briefly before catching her balance. The exertion of transporting two people instead of just herself... it's not nothing. Still, she quickly finds her bearings and finds herself staring at the husk of a tree stump in front of her that will lead them down to the hideout.

A hideout that at this point has almost certainly been fully taken over. As far as she knows, she was the only one to escape. But there's still a chance there are survivors down there being kept alive for... later consumption. Right?

"Alright. Where are we going from here?"

Wordlessly, Sevvī points into the darkness of the stump. Thomas peers in for a moment before grunting.

“I’m not seeing anything.”

“That’s the point, human. Wouldn’t be much of a hideout if any non-elf could just... walk in now would it?”

Thomas grunts at that.

“Right. So another trip like that and then we’ll be in the belly of the beast?”

The belly of the beast... he had a strange way of talking sometimes, but the comparison was apt all the same.

“... That’s correct, yes.”

Nodding sharply, Thomas unslings his halberd from his back, checking it over as he gets ready for the upcoming fight. At the same time, he takes potions from the satchel he’s brought with him and starts quaffing them one by one.

Having watched him do similar before his fight with the King of the Forest, Sevvī follows suit. She’s surprised at the quality of the potions brewed in that small human backwater, admittedly. But then, if she’s right about Thomas, it all makes sense doesn’t it? He excels at everything he does, no matter what it is. Potion making would not be the exception.

Soon enough, they’re ready. This time, with her daggers out and in her hands and Thomas wielding her halberd, she settles for simply hooking one of her arms through his as they both walk forward into the shadowy darkness of the hollowed out tree stump. With another shadowstep, they arrive down in the depths of the hideout.

Immediately, Sevvī runs into a face full of cobwebs, the blasted things hitting her before she can even finish fully taking the step out of the darkness and back into the real world. Sputtering, she slices with her daggers, grateful that the elven

blades are made with a magical sharpness that cuts right through even the stickiest of webs.

Meanwhile, Thomas holds his halberd in one hand and pulls out a vial of acid with the other, tossing it forward into the webbing blocking their way and clearing a path as the acid sizzles and destroys the webs in no time at all. Soon enough, they're able to advance forward.

"Your 'Spider-Queen' sure worked fast..."

Sevvi grimaces, memories of drooling mandibles and massive skittering legs flashing through her mind.

"Yes... yes she did. Careful with the acid. If anyone still lives, they'll be bound up tight and kept for later."

Thomas grunts, acknowledging the point. With that, they continue onward down the hall. They don't find anyone within the liberal masses of webbing barring their path, however, just more and more of the sticky white substance. Too much, in Sevvi's opinion. It's like the Spider-Queen was trying to make a barrier with the stuff. Or maybe that's exactly what the creature Liselle had made was doing.

Still, they eventually make enough progress to reach the hideout's main chamber. The large carved out room is a more open space and thus not filled to the brim with webbing... however, the walls, ceiling, and even floor are still covered in the stuff. And on the walls... Sevvi jolts when she sees lumps that can only be her people, covered from head to toe.

Her heart leaps in her throat but when she takes a step forward, Thomas' hand is suddenly on her arm, holding her back. He shakes his head when she looks to him, eyeing the room carefully for a moment before speaking in a quiet tone.

"Where is it? Where is the Spider-Queen?"

That... was a good question. This was the biggest room in the hideout by far so it wasn't surprising that this was where Liselle's creation had made her nest. However... where was the damn thing now? It had been huge, albeit capable of squeezing into the tight corridors due to its multiple limbs and dexterous body. Still...

Sevvi's red eyes dart too and fro but she can't make out any movement... except from a couple of the lumps on the walls. Those are moving and when she sees that, she can't help but want to run to them... its proof, after all, that at least some of her people are still alive and can be saved.

Sevvi lets out a shuddering breath and comes to a decision.

"... I'll go ahead. I'll act as bait to draw it out so you can strike."

Thomas immediately gives her a sharp look at that.

"What?"

But Sevvi has already made up her mind.

"If... if I can cut some of my people free, then we'll have more to fight the monster spider that Liselle created. And we can't fight what we can't see, so one of us might as well be the bait. All I need is for you to watch my back and strike whenever the 'Spider-Queen' shows itself. You can probably kill it with one well-placed strike from your halberd if you get the opportunity to ambush it."

Frowning, Thomas glances down to Sevvi's side.

"That thing already got the drop on you once... you sure about this?"

In the end, all she can do is nod.

"I am. I have to. This is all my fault."

And truly... it was. She'd been acting just like her mother, acting the part of a tyrant. Liselle had tried to tell her that she needed more time. Gruda had tried to counsel her to stop pushing. And what had she'd done? She'd ignored all of their warnings. And now they were here. So yes... it fell to her.

Finally, Thomas nods back, stepping backwards into the hallway just out of sight to hide himself more effectively. Meanwhile, Sevvī steps forward, her curved daggers in her hands as she moves carefully into the main chamber tiptoeing amidst the webbing covering the floor.

Even as she's offering herself as bait for wherever Liselle's mutant giant spider is hiding, Sevvī does at least try to stay stealthy. She moves as quietly and carefully as possible, keeping her eyes on the ceiling and the walls in case the giant spider is lurking in a hidden corner of the nest somewhere.

Ultimately though, she manages to make it to one of the moving lumps without issue. As soon as she's there, she doesn't hesitate to begin cutting into it, slicing away at the webbing in order to break the squirming body free.

She exposes the face first... and slumps in relief when she sees who it is.

"Gruda... don't worry, I'll get you out of this."

Though, she can't quite bring herself to look Gruda in the eyes at the moment. Maybe later, when she has the chance to apologize properly. For all their disagreements, for all Gruda's seeming betrayal, Sevvī had never wished this sort of thing on the other Dark Elf. She would make it up to her though. Starting with cutting Gruda free.

She manages to get one half of the other Dark Elf's body out of the lump of webbing, freeing an arm and leg, but neither are moving very much. It seems like Gruda is fighting a form of paralysis... at least until Sevvī hears a sound from the other Dark Elf.

Finally forced to look up at Gruda's face again, she smiles apologetically.

“Sorry, I have some potions here. One of them might be able to free you, Gruda. Gruda...?”

Only now, as she meets the other Dark Elf’s eyes... does Sevi realize something is wrong. Very, very wrong. The blank look in Gruda’s gaze is entirely unfocused and doesn’t seem to even acknowledge Sevi’s presence. And the movement... she’d thought it was Gruda struggling against her bindings. But even with her arm and leg free, she’s not moving them at all. Instead, all of the movement is coming from center mass.

The horrible truth is dawning on Sevi just as Gruda’s mouth drops open, albeit, not of the dead Dark Elf’s own volition. Rather, it’s the swarm of baby spiders exploding forth up out of the corpse of her best friend and second in command that force the mouth open.

Sevi does the only thing she can do in the face of this. She screams.

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A/N: *whistles innocently*

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!