

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

A/N: A teensy bit more Camilla angst lol

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Sitting on the wagon outside of the Royal Bank, Camilla has never felt more... disconnected from the world around her. On the one hand, she's back in the Capital after many long months. On the other hand, everything she's known in her adult life, which has been spent entirely in service to House Marlow until this point, has been reduced to ash.

At least she doesn't have to wonder what to do now. She'll simply do whatever Lord Thomas wants to do. That's barely a comfort though at this point. Sure, she at least still has her Lord... but what does he have? And what's going to happen next?

"Hey."

Blinking, Camilla is pulled out of her spiraling thoughts by Sevinarya's voice. She looks over to see the Dark Elf staring at her, head tilted to the side. For a moment, Camilla bristles, half-expecting some sort of caustic comment about how weak she is again.

Ever since 'Sevvi' had managed to worm her way into Thomas' bed, she's been a bit more insufferably smug about things, especially when they're training. She's still stronger than Camilla... and now she also warms their lord's bed, just as Camilla and Eloise do. The saving grace to that all is that Lord Thomas still treats the Dark Elf like she's nothing in comparison to Eloise and Camilla. Their pecking order hasn't changed regardless and Sevvi is still expected to follow Camilla and Eloise's orders.

She does so without question, though she still finds the time to make comments about how Camilla needs to 'catch up' still.

That's what Camilla is anticipating now, but instead Sevi just stares at her blankly, her ears twitching ever so slightly. Until finally, Camilla growls.

"Yes? What is it?"

Sevi stares for a moment longer... before averting her gaze.

"... I don't know."

What? Was this a new way for the Dark Elf to mess with her? Camilla is honestly baffled... so she can't say it isn't working. But before she can demand Sevi explain herself further, another voice calls out.

"Dame Ackinworth? Is that you?"

Turning towards the sound, Camilla startles upon seeing a familiar face. Straightening up, she gives the approaching armored figure a nod.

"Sir Ferdinand. Well met."

Sir Alonses Ferdinand, Knight Bachelor of the Order of Saints and former fellow squire, smiling curiously as he eyes first her and then the wagon she's sat upon the front of. When his eyes slide past to Sevinarya in the back of the wagon however, his brow raises in disbelief.

"Is that a Dark Elf?"

Camilla huffs. It wasn't her place to question her lord's decisions of course, but this was precisely the type of situation that made her wonder if keeping his Dark Elf pet hidden and in the shadows would have been better than dressing her up as a maid and presenting her as an exotic servant. To be fair, it might have been difficult for her to remain completely hidden once they made it to the city... but at least Camilla wouldn't be stuck dealing with this.

"She is, yes. She is also a servant of my lord."

Sir Alonses' nose wrinkles and his brow furrows.

"Your lord... Camilla, surely you've heard the news by now if you're back in the Capital. Lord Marlow is dead... Lady Marlow and their heir with them. House Marlow is done."

Camilla's jaw clenches at the way he says it. To his credit, Alonses isn't being... too carefree or jubilant or anything like that. No, his tone is the proper amount of serious for the information he's relaying. However, the finality with which he speaks... her hackles can't help but raise. Yes, they're dead. Yes, Camilla had already chosen a new master months ago anyways. But even still... to say House Marlow was done when her lord still lived...

"I have been to the estate. I have seen the ruins. However, House Marlow is not done. Lord Thomas still lives."

Alonses looks incredibly surprised by that... before letting out a bark of laughter.

"Oh my! Is that why you're out here? Oath's sake Camilla... tell me you're not going to swear yourself to *him* now that the rest are gone."

Camilla knows exactly why Alonses is in a state of disbelief. He was one of the people she'd spoken with before she left, carefully feeling him out for advice on the subject of her latest... assignment. So he knew exactly what she'd thought of Lord Thomas before departing with him for Last Hope.

Of course, the answer is... she already has sworn herself to Thomas Marlow. But she doesn't say that. Instead, she changes the subject.

"Tell me, do you know who is responsible for this most heinous crime committed against House Marlow?"

The Knight blinks and tilts his head to the side, looking at her consideringly.

"... The Royal Investigators are said to have ruled it a terrible accident, Camilla."

What?

Camilla can't help but feel a sense of righteous outrage at that. An *accident*? That destruction was no accident!

"How could anyone take one look at the state of the Marlow Estate and call that an accident?!"

Quickly, the other Knight moves to her side, his eyes darting around them.

"Keep your voice down. Questioning the Royal Investigators? Do you want to be brought in and interrogated?"

Camilla works her jaw. On the one hand, Alonses has a point. On the other hand... she's just so angry. Her loyalty is to Lord Thomas now. Her oath ties her to him rather than all of House Marlow. But even still... all those people who died on the Marlow Estate deserve better. They deserve justice...

"Everyone is just... okay with this being the way things are then? One of the oldest Houses in the Kingdom is destroyed and nobody questions how it happened?"

Alonses sighs, though doesn't reprimand her again. She has lowered her voice, after all. Still, he gives her a distinct sort of *look*.

"Times change, Camilla. The balance of power changes with it. Those who were ascendant can fall from their pedestals at any time, while those at the bottom are incentivized to reach up and tear the former down to make way for their ambitions. It is not the place of us knights to get involved in... politics."

Again, Alonses has a point. Again, Camilla still doesn't like it. Her displeasure must show strongly on her face because Alonses takes one look at her and lets out a chuckle.

"Look at you so full of righteous anger. But ask yourself this... what are *you* going to do about it?"

Camilla stiffens, but the Knight Bachelor isn't done.

"I'll tell you what... you'll do nothing. Because there's nothing you can do. You're simply not strong enough."

Ah. That... hurt more than Alonses probably intended it to, likely because Camilla had already been made well aware of her own inadequacy, frequently and at length by the Dark Elf sitting behind her.

... Which is why it's so shocking when said Dark Elf breaks her silence to come to her defense.

"Who are you to say whether she is strong enough or not? You are weaker than her."

Sevvi's words cut through the air like one of her curved blades, bringing silence as both Camilla and Alonses turn to stare at her. The Dark Elf doesn't cower back at the sudden attention though, nor does she try to apologize for her blunt words. She just sits there calmly, staring at them both like she hasn't just said something utterly ridiculous.

Camilla, meanwhile, has her mouth agape... that has to be the first nice thing that Sevvi has ever said about her. Where had it even come from? How was she suddenly upgraded from 'the weakest fighter of the group' to 'stronger than Alonses'? Especially since...

"Haha! This one is adorable, Camilla! Her faith in you is so cute! Does she not know that you've never managed to beat me in a spar?"

... Yeah. Camilla grimaces as Alonses reminds her of their previous record with one another. They'd squired at the same time, albeit to different people, and they'd crossed paths more than a dozen times, sparring each meeting. Even after they were both knighted, the two of them continued to meet for regular spars... and Alonses had won every single one. She'd never defeated him, not even once.

“Ah, but to be fair... I wasn't trying to discount Camilla's skill, Elf. I was simply pointing out the obvious... any one person would be hard pressed to do anything about this situation. It would simply lead to a pointless death, cold and alone.”

Ah, Alonses is hiding his anger behind a friendly veneer. This, Camilla is familiar with. Whenever the man felt slighted, he tended to continue to act cordial... but he still got colder and meaner. He might be pretending like Sevv's words meant nothing to him, but he's still annoyed and adding on things like 'cold and alone' is his way of showing it.

“But she isn't alone. And simply because you are too weak to affect change does not mean that those stronger than you are not capable of doing it.”

And Sevv was doubling down! Camilla starts to get a little alarmed at this point... she really doesn't need Sevv picking a fight with Alonses out here in the open like this! Fortunately, while her fellow knight's smile does finally drop and he lets his irritation begin to shine through... he also seems to resolve to ignore Sevv, turning his gaze back to Camilla.

Stepping closer, he leans in and lowers his voice to a mere whisper, clearly intending for only Camilla to hear his next words. But just from the way she sees Sevv's ears twitch out of the corner of her eye, Camilla suspects Alonses isn't getting what he wants.

“... You're not seriously planning to remain a retainer to Thomas Marlow after all this, are you Camilla? You have to know that you're heading for a dead end if you do. House Marlow is all but defunct... and Thomas Marlow isn't the sort of man worthy of a knight's loyalty anyways. You told me that, remember.”

When Camilla stays quiet, Alonses grimaces.

“I would hate to see you hurt by forces you aren't even capable of being able to fight. Come back with me to the Citadel. You'll be fine, nobody is expecting to see you stick with House Marlow at a time like *this*.”

The Citadel. The Order of Saints' headquarters within the Capital. Camilla could indeed go there and likely expect them to back her up if she chose to cut ties with Lord Thomas. While it was expected that knights would swear their oaths to their chosen lords and follow them through most events, there were some situations where it was perfectly reasonable for a knight to... cut their losses.

This may or may not have been one of them, but in the end it didn't actually matter. Camilla shakes her head, meeting Alonses' baffled gaze with an even one of her own.

"It is precisely at times like this that I must stand by my lord, Alonses."

He stares at her in disbelief for a long moment... before scoffing.

"On your head be it, I suppose."

He flicks one last gaze back to Seevi before huffing and stepping back.

"Good luck, Camilla... you're going to need it."

The way he says that makes it clear he's not just speaking to speak. Camilla stiffens, briefly wondering if she should demand he elaborate and tell what he knows... but her hesitation means that the moment passes her by as he slips away, leaving them behind.

Silence reigns for a long few seconds before Camilla whips her head towards Seevi with a scowl.

"What in the world was that just now?"

Seevi blinks, tilting her head to the side.

"What was what?"

“All of that! Why in the world were you antagonizing Sir Alonses like that? Why were you standing up for me, even? You who have repeatedly called me different variations of weak and dead weight for weeks now!”

There’s a pause before Sevvu hums in the back of her throat.

“You *are* weak...”

This bitch...

“... but he was weaker. Couldn’t you tell?”

... What? Camilla furrows her brow, trying to figure out what Sevvu was talking about. Alonses seemed to be perfectly fine to her... the same as always, really. And always before, he had handed her ass to her in spars, time and time again. So...

“He wasn’t lying, I’ve quite literally never beaten him in a fight. We’ve known each other for decades too.”

Sevvu just scoffs at that.

“You would defeat him easily now. He doesn’t hold a candle to you.”

There it is again. More random praise out of nowhere. Camilla just stares at Sevvu like she’s grown a second head, unsure of how to even respond to the Dark Elf. Meanwhile, Sevvu just sits there placidly, supremely unbothered like she isn’t just randomly turning Camilla’s world on its head with her words.

Before the conversation can continue though, the doors of the Royal Bank open and Lord Thomas steps out with Eloise close on his heels. Camilla immediately focuses up, even as her lord strides back to the wagon with a clinking coin purse on his waist.

“Lord Thomas. How did it go?”

He grimaces as he glances back the way he came.

“... I'll tell you about it once we're not in the open. It went... not as bad as it could have, I suppose. Regardless, we have a recommendation from the bank on where to stay tonight. So let's get going.”

Camilla nods, wordlessly taking up the reins and letting Lord Thomas' instructions towards the night's accommodations hit her ears as she begins to follow his orders.

... Alonses didn't know what he was talking about. How could he? Sure, it might look like the situation was hopeless, but Sevvie was right... Camilla wasn't alone. Both the Dark Elf and Lord Thomas were strong fighters each in their own right... in fact the only one who might drag them down was her.

But she wouldn't let that happen. She'd get stronger, faster, and tougher. She wouldn't be her lord's dead weight for long...

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A/N: Sevvie continues to be a teensy bit tsundere...

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!