

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

**A/N: Something new finally happens~**

**-x-X-x-**

It wasn't perfect, but it was good. And that probably should have been a sign to Thomas that it couldn't last forever, this idyllic life in Last Hope. But truth be told, he'd always thought he would be the one to decide that.

Sure, he knew from Camilla that his family wanted him dead and sure, someone had tried to poison him... but somehow he'd managed to convince himself that they would give up and just leave him to 'rot' at the ass end of nowhere if he kept his head down and didn't make waves.

After all, it wasn't like he was doing any of the things that the 'main characters' in these stories normally did. He wasn't coming up with amazing new inventions or revolutionizing the way things were done. He wasn't looking for some miracle product to pull out of the Darkwoods and try to trade on to the next nearest town in order to establish a merchant network. He hadn't attempted to make Last Hope into any kind of city or anything like that.

The fact that, Thomas wouldn't have known where to begin with most of that. And while his Gift seemed to let him achieve just about anything he put his mind to, he also had other people to take into consideration as well. The denizens of Last Hope just wanted to be left alone. They didn't want to be turned into a city or become the heart of a new Empire trying to rival their surroundings. They were perfectly content as they were.

So yes, Thomas expected to eventually outgrow the place and move on. He certainly wasn't going to spend the rest of his second life in a brand new fantasy world in a small town. But at the same time, there were things he wanted to do before he left. Things like ensuring that he could help Arnold pass on the Gift of Alchemy to the next child who wasn't born with one and supporting more and more groups going into the Darkwoods now that they were far less dangerous.

In his own way, he wanted to ensure Last Hope's future before going anywhere, to make sure that he left the town better than he found it. That sort of thing.

... But in his hubris he'd clearly gotten much too comfortable, because one day as he, Camilla, and Sevinarya were coming back into town from the Darkwoods, it became quite clear that those from the original Thomas Marlow's past had NOT forgotten about him after all.

"Stop."

They're on the edge of town... but Last Hope has a large main 'road' going through it, albeit more of a dirt street. And the Mayor's House is one of the biggest buildings on that street.

Thanks to his enhanced eyesight, Thomas is able to see much further than he otherwise would be able to... but even if he couldn't, he would be hard pressed not to notice the strangers outside of the Mayor's House, especially when they were surrounding the most ostentatious carriage that he'd ever seen. Certainly more ostentatious than the one that had brought him and Camilla to Last Hope in the first place.

"... We have company."

Sevinarya tilts her head to the side while Camilla stiffens up. Thomas considers for a moment before glancing to the Dark Elf.

"Hide yourself but stay close by."

She bows her head and vanishes into the nearest shadow in a moment, leaving him and Camilla alone. Thomas looks down at himself next, lips pressing into a thin line as he considers his current appearance. Leather Armor made out of the King of the Forest's hide and a Magic Steel Halberd on his back.

He looks much too much like a warrior for his liking. Especially if they're being visited by someone from the original Thomas' past. However, two things keep

him from trying to change. One, all of his 'noble' clothes are in the Mayor's House anyways so he would just be asking for one of the other townsfolk to let him borrow their clothing for a moment.

But more importantly, two... Eloise and her father were in that house currently and the longer he took to get there, the greater the chance of something happening to them.

"... Come on, let's go."

Camilla nods, following him as he begins moving forward again albeit at a slow pace. As they get closer, she makes a noise in the back of her throat and speaks in a low tone.

"I recognize the sigil, my lord. Its not House Marlow... that carriage belongs to House Godman."

Thomas files that away, even as he keeps an eye on the armed and armored men surrounding said carriage. He doesn't like what he sees. They looked more like thugs than guardsmen, but maybe he just didn't know the difference? Either way...

"Tell me more."

"House Godman are a... newer Noble House. They gained their titles through their wealth rather than any great deed. They were merchants before they become a Noble House. You were said to be close with their heir... before everything that happened."

What? Thomas' brow furrows as he casts his mind back to the original's journal. He didn't recall any mention of a 'House Godman' in the original Thomas Marlow's writing. Or of a friendship with a Noble Heir. But then... there is one name that stands out all the same.

"This heir wouldn't happen to be named Sol, would he?"

Camilla nods, confirming his theory.

“Yes my lord. Lord Sol Godman, Heir to House Godman. The rumors said that you... well, that you very nearly got him into as much trouble as you got yourself into, but that everyone understood he had just been led astray, in the end.”

Thomas blinks and then snorts derisively.

“You’ve read the same journal I have, Camilla. Do you not recall what Sol was to my... previous self?”

That brings the red head to an almost full stop for a moment as her eyes widen and her mouth drops open. Yes... according to Thomas Marlow’s journal, Sol was the one who had been doing the leading astray. He’d been the one to pull the original into no end of mischief and mayhem... and crime.

Sol hadn’t been the leader of the gang Thomas ran with back in the Capital, but he had been the one to introduce Thomas to them and he’d been involved in just as many nefarious activities if not more than the original Thomas Marlow had been.

However, not once in the journal had the original named Sol fully as ‘Sol Godman’ or implied that he was a noble in any way.

“I did not... I can’t believe I didn’t realize. Forgive me my lord, I continue to fail you...”

Thomas just shakes his head at that because by this point they’re getting close enough to be noticed by the thugs watching the carriage outside of the Mayor’s House. So as much as he wants to comfort Camilla and forgive her for this latest lapse on her part, he instead focuses on the matter at hand, especially as the biggest of the thugs steps forward and holds up a hand.

“Halt. Who are you and where do you think you’re going armed and armored like that?”

Thomas arches a brow before deciding he might as well lean into things just this once. After all, he's not going to get many opportunities like this, now is he? Pulling himself up, he sniffs haughtily and then sneers at the brute.

"Excuse me? I am Thomas Marlow of House Marlow, Lord of Last Hope. This is Dame Camilla Ackinworth, Knight Bachelorette of the Order of the Saints. And the residence you've parked in front of is mine. Now who are you to question me?"

Thomas had been hoping that the more he spoke, the paler the big guy's face would get as he 'laid down the law' so to speak. However, that's not what happens. Instead, the brute's eyes narrow with every word out of Thomas' mouth and he seems to consider him and Camilla with a somewhat sour expression for a long moment before grunting.

"Right. Lord Godman's inside. He's come to speak with you."

Not an ounce of respect or deference. Thomas wonders if he should push the issue or not... but the same reasoning as to why he didn't bother to change still applies. Better to get in there and make sure Eloise and her father are alright before anything else like raising a stink.

"Then move aside."

There's a pause at that... before finally the big brute steps aside. The other thugs surrounding the carriage all pull away as well, leaving a proper path for him and Camilla to make to the door. Thomas walks it while feeling eyes burning holes into him from every angle. This, he could feel, was not good... not good at all.

Was it possible that it hadn't been his family who tried to poison him all those months ago after all? The message with the cookies had mentioned his favorites... and who would know that better than someone like Sol, the original Thomas' only friend who seemed intent on leading him into a life of villainy and crime.

He's honestly not sure what to expect when he finally pushes his way into the Mayor's House. Part of him fears he'll find Eloise and her father tied up, bound and gagged in the kitchen, while Sol Godman looms over them both like some stereotypical baron smiling evilly and talking about how they'd been 'waiting together' for him.

... But no. That's not what he and Camilla find. Eloise and Mayor Harper ARE entertaining guests to be fair... Mayor Harper is sat in the living room along with a man who Thomas has never met before but has to be the Heir of House Godman if only because of how he's dressed. Meanwhile, Eloise is serving them both with a tray of snacks and tea.

There's also one more goon of the same kind as outside standing in the house and it's clear that his presence is making Eloise and her father nervous, though they're doing a good job of hiding it. Thomas eyes the goon for a long moment before stepping forward and clearing his throat, drawing Sol's attention.

Far from being sinister or villainous like Thomas is expecting, the other nobleman hops to his feet in an instant, eyes lighting up with delight and excitement as a wide grin spreads across his face.

"Thomas! There are you! Look at you! I struggled to believe it when they said you were out in the Darkwoods on a hunt, but I suppose I can't deny the evidence of my own eyes now can I?! Bahaha!"

Thomas stands, nonplused, as Sol looks him up and down. Beneath that smile of his, he sees a bit of an assessing glint in the nobleman's eyes. Finally, Sol whistles low.

"You aren't just playing dress up either, are you? You've gone full native on me!"

In that moment, Thomas doesn't quite know how to play this. The other man isn't openly hostile yet and as far as he can tell, Eloise and her father are both fine. So he should at least try to keep things that way, right?

Forcing a smile on his face, Thomas lets out as sheepish a laugh as he can manage.

“Well... I saw this all as a new opportunity, one could say. I could either wallow or I could embrace it... so I did, with both hands.”

Then, because he’s already decided to hide his ‘amnesia’ from the other man, Thomas continues on in a genial tone.

“It’s good to see you Sol, don’t get me wrong... but why are you here in Last Hope of all places? This is one of the last places I’d expect to see someone of your stature.”

That last part is definitely more of a gamble than he maybe should have taken. But going off of what he now knew of Sol from the original’s journal entries, it was a pretty educated guess. Sol wasn’t afraid to get his hands dirty... but he also wasn’t the kind of man who slumped it out in the boonies like this. He wouldn’t be here without a very good reason.

The problem was, Thomas could only think of very bad ‘good reasons’ for Sol to come out here with what appeared to be over a dozen mean-looking thugs. And every single one of those reasons involved very bad things for Thomas and those he cared about.

Which is why he’s both paradoxically on edge and completely caught off guard when Sol just laughs again.

“Why am I here? Don’t be silly Thomas, you and I both know there’s only reason I’d come all the way out here to the edge of the damn world!”

Stepping forward, the nobleman suddenly wraps his arms around him, pulling him into a hug of all things!

“I’m here for you, of course! I’m here to bring you home!”

... What? Thomas blinks, more than a little off-balance.

“I... I can't. My family sent me here; you must know that...”

Pulling back, Sol scoffs.

“And? Remember what I told you before you left?”

No, because he hadn't been in this world yet and the original Thomas never got the chance to write down any last conversations with Sol before his departure. Thomas still tries not to look too blank faced now, even as he hopes that the other man will fill in the blanks.

Huffing at him after a long awkward silence, Sol rolls his eyes and leans in close, lowering his voice to a whisper.

“I told you, Thomas... House Marlow wasn't going to be on top forever. They were due for a fall sooner rather than later. And now that time has come. They can't stop you from coming home anymore. They can't stop *me* from bringing you home. We're finally going to get everything we deserve, you and I.”

... Well then.

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**A/N: Hmm, what do you all think? Surely Sol can't actually be on the up and up right?**

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