

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

A/N: Talking to mom again.

NOTICE: I don't usually do this, but I decided to do a bit of a rewrite of last chapter's fight scenes after receiving critique on how much of a chump Thomas was. So if you haven't yet, feel free to go read the new Chapter 84 before reading this!

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Thomas watches Sevvie wrestle with the prospect of calling her mother for a moment longer before coming to a decision and stepping forward. He catches the Dark Elf Commander by surprise and snatches the Communication Orb from her grasp before she can pull it back.

“Human! You can't-!”

Thomas levels a glare in her direction and makes sure to put every ounce of what he's feeling at the moment into it.

“I don't care.”

That silences the female Dark Elf, though it's a toss up whether she's actually intimidated or merely so outraged and bewildered that she's rendered speechless.

Either way, Thomas steps back, bringing the orb with him. As he returns to Sevvie's side, the army of Dark Elves surrounding them seem to paradoxically tense up and relax at the same time. He doesn't know how else to describe it, it's like they're relieved that things are proceeding... but also girding themselves for what's about to take place.

Sevvie reaches for the orb but Thomas doesn't let her have it. Instead, he gives her a look as he holds onto it with both hands.

“Place the call, Sevvī.”

She stares at him with wide eyes for a long moment before swallowing thickly and nodding. A moment later and she’s activated the communication orb for him, placing the call that will connect them to her mother. Or rather... him to her mother. Because even as Queen Klynirra of the Royal House of Vairath swims into view, Thomas steps away from Sevvī so she’s not in the older Dark Elf’s line of sight.

The Queen of the Dark Elves looks minutely surprised for a moment at his visage greeting her.

“Well now. This is unexpected. Am I to assume you’ve killed my eldest?”

Thomas doesn’t hesitate. He nods decisively, even as he stares at Klynirra.

“I did.”

The lie comes easily. He couldn’t spare Sevvī the act of fratricide itself. She’d been forced to kill her sister in order to end the stalemate between him and Synestra and as much as the First Princess was a genocidal, rabid bitch who needed to be put down, that would still stick with Sevvī for quite some time.

... But if he could spare her this conversation with her mother, then he would.

Only, after a moment of silence, Klynirra just laughs.

“Don’t lie to me, Otherworlder. Synestra wouldn’t have fallen to you. Where is my other daughter? Where is Sevinarya?”

Thomas opens his mouth to lie some more, even surrounded by an army of Dark Elves who might try to call him out on it. However... out of all of them, it’s the one he least expects that interrupts.

“I’m right here.”

Thomas gives Seevi a look, but she steps up beside him anyways, seeming to have found an internal well of strength that puts her at his side. She looks back at him steadily for a long moment before turning her gaze to the orb and meeting her mother's eyes.

"... And here I thought you had no daughter by the name Sevinarya. Here I thought I was no longer part of the Royal House of Vairath. What was it you said? Sevinarya No Name?"

Her mother, treacherous cunt that she is, lets out another little laugh, this one exceedingly insincere, and waves Seevi's words off.

"Oh dear, you should know by now that that was merely... pageantry. I was only testing you, darling. I wanted to see what you might get up to out from under the weight of our House, since you seemed so inclined to escape your responsibilities."

Seevi purses her lips and Thomas narrows his eyes. That was rather rich given how many sisters Seevi had. What Seevi really wanted was to escape her mother... and for a time they thought she had. But no, of course not. Even now, her mother was involved with all of this.

"Did you know, mother? Did you know about the Rotlands and what Synestra was doing?"

Thomas is a little surprised to hear Seevi interrogating her mother about this... but he won't pretend like he isn't interested in hearing the answer as well. The Queen scoffs and waves a hand through the air again.

"Of course I did, darling. Synestra's little game with the humans was... well it was beneath my notice, but I still had an eye on things, like I always do. It got so much more interesting when you unraveled her machinations and forced her to take the field personally though."

Of course she knew. And of course it didn't even register to her. Thomas' jaw clenches, his desire to have Queen Klynirra's head on a pike rising. Out of everyone... after Synestra, she was the one who deserved to die the most, he felt.

"... By killing Graelo. You don't even care though, do you? That he's dead?"

Klynirra tilts her head to the side owlshly.

"Should I? I'm given to understand that he raised arms against you. Ordering his execution was well within your rights, daughter."

"He did it by accident. He didn't know who I was when he first attacked. I took advantage of the laws... *your laws.*"

Looking decidedly unimpressed, Klynirra arches a brow.

"And?"

Sevvi bristles and growls.

"And he was Synestra's father! He was the father of your only natural born daughter!"

That sends a ripple through the army of Dark Elves. Had none of them known? Was it some kind of secret that Sevvi had just revealed in a fit of pique? But... the Dark Elf Queen barely reacts. If she's upset that her 'indiscretion' has been exposed, she doesn't show it.

"Mm, so Synestra told you. No doubt she let her emotions get the better of her. Tell me Sevinarya, do you know why I ended my little experiment after only one daughter? Why Synestra was the only one born of my womb?"

Thomas knows what Sevvi is going to say even before she says it. She's in a spiteful mood, after all... so of course she's going to throw Synestra's words in their mother's face.

“You were lazy. It was too hard, took too much time, and ultimately you just didn’t want to do it. Even though the results showed that Synestra was the best of all of us, you couldn’t be bothered to repeat the effort.”

Thomas tenses up, expecting outrage from the Queen now. Only... she just laughs again.

“Ah, your sister’s words are on your tongue, daughter of mine. No, that wasn’t it at all. The reason was far simpler than all of that. Synestra was the only one... because I realized early on that she was far too emotional. Unfortunately, she discovered that Graelo was her progenitor much too early in her development, at only fifty years of age. And then she let herself get attached.”

The Queen sighs and shakes her head ruefully.

“Admittedly, I do assume some fault for that. I should have nipped it in the bud as soon as I noticed... but I let it play out. However, I knew as soon as Synestra used up her favor with me to pull Graelo away from all of you and into her personal service... that the experiment was a complete failure.”

A thin smile spreads across Klynirra’s lips as she stares at Sevv through the communication orb.

“And now, here is the final bit of proof. In the end, you triumphed over your natural born sister, Sevinarya. You proved once and for all that her emotion was her greatest weakness. And now you stand where she has fallen... as First Princess. Congratulations, my dear.”

Sevv chokes on her own spit at that.

“Wha- no! I can’t be First Princess... there are two more ahead of me...”

Klynirra just chuckles.

“And? Synestra neutered those two decades ago. They won’t even lift a hand in protest once you return to the Capital. If they do, feel free to kill them... they’ve long been little more than disappointments, both of them.”

Thomas has gone stiff at the Dark Elf Queen’s words. Sevvj jerks back as if struck.

“Return... what are you talking about? I’m not returning... I’m not going anywhere!”

Now Klynirra finally starts to look unimpressed. The Dark Elf Queen lets out a sigh.

“Oh daughter... don’t be ridiculous. You’ve had your fun and played your little games... you’ve even won against your sister. But you and I both know where you belong. You’ve proven yourself to be the most interesting of all my daughters... so yes, I expect you to return with your sister’s army... now your army of course. I expect you to come back and take your place at my side as First Princess. And I expect you to finally cease this silly little childish rebellion of yours.”

Thomas has heard enough. As Sevvj stands there, mouth open but no words coming out, he speaks up.

“That’s not going to happen. Sevinarya still owes me a life debt.”

There’s a far greater ripple from the army surrounding them at those words than previously. Some of the Dark Elf soldiers even start to turn and murmur to one another, their wide red eyes focused more on him now than they’d been previously. Before, they’d only had eyes for Sevvj... now, he’s suddenly a person, suddenly on their radar.

An inkling of an idea begins to form in Thomas’ mind, even as Klynirra scoffs.

“And? Such things are meaningless to me. Though if you must, you may bring along your human as a pet, Sevinarya.”

The words 'such things are meaningless to me' provokes an even greater reaction from the army of Dark Elves listening in on this conversation. An army that Klynirra... doesn't know is there. The communication orb only lets her see his and Sevv's faces, after all.

"He... he's not my p-pet, mother! I am his servant and he is my Master! Furthermore, he is the KING now! I can't just... *take* him!"

That causes a slight start from Klynirra, before she settles into amused bemusement.

"The King are you? How delightfully foolish of your species. Putting an Otherworlder in charge never ends well. It's why I handled Graelo the way I did."

Wait, what?

"Graelo... mother, what are you talking about?"

Laughing idly, Klynirra waves her hand again.

"Graelo was an Otherworlder, dear daughter, just like your little friend here. Fortunately, I caught him relatively early on. I trained and tamed him to my satisfaction, to ensure his loyalty was absolute... regardless of his previous life and any potential he might have had. You and the rest of your sisters benefited greatly from this in the form of his tutelage, at least before Synestra let her emotions get the better of her."

... Graelo had been an Otherworlder. What had Sevv said? He was over half a millennia old? Centuries of life... all of it curtailed and curated by this woman sitting smugly on her throne both in front of them and half the world away. It leaves an awful taste in his mouth, to say the least.

"Bring your Otherworlder back to the Capital, Sevinarya. I'll even share my techniques for taming their kind with you."

“I’m not... I can’t... I owe him a *life debt*, mother! I swore myself to him and his family line, in perpetuity! Why do you continue to spit on one of our people’s most ancient traditions?!”

If Thomas saying that Sevvu owed him a life debt was one thing... Sevvu saying it is something else entirely. The army doesn’t just ripple, it fully shudders. Everyone is watching now, most with bated breath as they seem to be waiting to hear their Queen’s response.

“Because darling, such rules don’t apply to people like us. They never have. You are of the Royal House of Vairath and you are above such... ‘ancient traditions’, even if the rest of our foolish race insists on following them. We take advantage of such shackles for our own ends... *we do not let them shackle us.*”

The sneer in the Queen’s voice is audible... and Thomas decides then and there he knows exactly what he’s going to do.

“Sevinarya isn’t going anywhere. Nor am I. We’re right where we belong.”

Klynirra’s eyes narrow into slits and he can tell he’s finally properly angered her.

“You stupid little human. What makes you think you have a choice? My daughter can return as the triumphant First Princess... or she can return in chains.”

It’s a fair threat to make, considering they’re currently surrounded by thousands of enemy soldiers. Only, looking out at the sea of Dark Elf faces around them, Thomas doesn’t see as much certainty and devotion as he would normally expect. No, instead he sees quite a lot of *uncertainty*, as a point of fact. Looking back to the oblivious Klynirra, he smiles.

“Yeah? And what army is going to make that happen, exactly? What army is going to go against the sacred and ancient tenets of debt that bind your people at their most basic level?”

Understanding begins to dawn on Klynirra’s face as he speaks. She’s not a complete idiot after all. As he puts a specific sort of emphasis in his tone, she

realizes that he's not speaking to her in this moment... no, he's grandstanding. And he wouldn't be grandstanding if he didn't have a substantial audience.

“... Return the communication orb to the commander who gave it to you. *Immediately.*”

Looking at said commander and the way she's visibly blanching in horror, Thomas just smiles and tosses it underhanded over to the Dark Elf. To her credit, she does manage to catch it, quickly righting it and giving her Queen a short bow.

“M-My Queen!”

“What is the state of the army, Commander?”

“P-Practically untouched so far, my Queen. Only two casualties, including the First Princess.”

“I see. And where is the army at this moment?”

“A-Ah... all around us, Your Majesty. We thought it best that they... that they observe the new First Princess' ascension.”

Silence. Absolute silence. And yet, Thomas likes to think he can feel Klynirra's rage reverberating through the communication orb all the way from the depths of the Darkwoods. After all, one look around shows soldiers looking between each other and then back to him and Sevv.

The likes of Queen Klynirra and Princess Synestra might not have cared about the concept of life debts or anything like that. The Dark Elf Queen clearly only barely paid lip service to the whole thing. However, it's clear that the Dark Elf people are a lot more tied up in the concept of debt than the Royal House is.

Put simply... thousands of Dark Elves just heard their Queen commit a massive faux pas, saying the sort of thing that she would really only ever say in private or not at all.

Thomas, seeing an opportunity, calls out.

“Let’s make a deal, Queen Klynirra.”

There’s a pause as everyone looks at him like he’s gone mad; Thomas just smiles and extends a hand... prompting the commander to toss the communication orb back to him like it’s a live grenade she wants nothing to do with. When he looks down at it again, Klynirra looks apoplectic with rage. He’s not sure why... after all, he’s about to solve all her problems.

“It seems to me that we have a bit of a situation on our hands. See, all of these soldiers of yours... owe a massive debt to humanity for the part they played in our attempted genocide.”

That gets a LOT of stiff spines from those around him... but Thomas just continues on.

“And of course, you may have said some things you would prefer not to have said in front of all of them. Things that might force you to take drastic measures to keep quiet... *if* they were to return to your lands.”

There’s a pregnant pause at that as understanding ripples over the thousands of Dark Elves currently listening in. Their Queen had basically just admitted to the Dark Elf equivalent of eating babies, as far as Thomas can tell. Or at least, that’s what he was trying to conflate it into right now.

And indeed, while he’s not sure he convinces every Dark Elf of his words, he can definitely see that quite a lot of them suddenly believe their lives are forfeit if they ever go back to the Capital. Put simply, ‘they know too much’.

He sees understanding in Klynirra’s eyes... and perhaps just the barest hint of respect as she gazes back at him through the communication orb.

“What are you suggesting, human?”

Thomas smiles thinly.

“That’s King Thomas Ashwood-Marlow to you, Queen Klynirra.”

Her nostrils flare and she looks... displeased to put it mildly. And yet...

“What are you suggesting, King Thomas?”

That gets *yet another* reaction from the crowd of watching elves. Sevv in particular is just staring at him like he grew a second head... but to be fair, she’s been doing that for a bit now.

“A treaty between our two peoples. Shall we say... a century? One hundred years in which not a single Dark Elf that is not already within human lands approaches our border. One hundred years in which First Princess Sevinarya... and her new army can serve here in my Kingdom, working to make up for all the harm and damage they’ve caused. They’ll stay here, out of your hair, their lips far from any... vulnerable ears. And they’ll help us fix what your eldest daughter damaged.”

Thomas shrugs as if he couldn’t really care either way.

“We can revisit things at the end of that century. Barely a blink of the eye for your kind, from what I’m told.”

Of course, what was a blink of the eye for them... was a hell of a long time for him. Thomas had gone from a pasty, out of shape disgraced noble to an expert fighter and King of an entire Kingdom in less than one year. With a hundred more... who could say what he would become?

He doesn’t doubt that Klynirra knows this... but he also know she has her over something of a barrel. Killing eight thousand Dark Elves to silence them and keep rumors from spreading about her back home... would be a lot harder than just exiling them to human lands for a century. Given what he’d seen of Klynirra so far, she definitely seemed like the type to kick the can down the road if given half the chance.

“... Very well, I accept.”

Yep, there it is. And then the call ends. Thomas blinks at the rather abrupt signoff, staring down at the communication orb for a moment and wondering if it had technical difficulties or something. *Could* it have technical difficulties? But no, as the moment drags on longer... he realizes that she'd basically just agreed and then hung up on him.

Lowering the orb, Thomas looks to Seevi to see her staring at him in awe. Then, she finally fully processes what happened and lunges forward, wrapping her arms around his neck and kissing him deeply. Thomas lets the communication orb drop negligently to the ground and wraps his arms around her in turn as it rolls away.

They'd done it. Somehow, against all odds... they'd fucking done it.

Their kiss only ends when the sound of quite a lot of thumping reaches their ears. Blinking, Thomas pulls away from Seevi, who looks just as baffled as he does for a moment. Then, they both turn to stare at the sight of thousands of Dark Elves... all having dropped to one knee with heads bowed in their direction.

Well. That was... something.

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A/N: Hurray! Peace (temporarily) in our time!

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!