

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

A/N: Heading to the inn to wind down for the night... right?

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To the credit of Weatherby and the Royal Bank, their recommendation is a good one. Expensive certainly, but frankly, Thomas is willing to eat the cost at this point. Especially given that the percentage of House Marlow's wealth he already has access to without swearing an oath of fealty to the King is... absolutely ridiculous.

He's never been particularly rich before and even now it feels a bit surreal, but he's certainly not some sort of monk aiming to live an austere lifestyle or anything like that. No, Thomas is more than happy to make use of the money he had access to, especially since it allows him to spoil Camilla, Eloise, and Sevi a fair bit too.

In fact, the establishment that the Royal Bank directs them to is so upscale that Eloise and Sevi have no servant's work to take care of. All of that is handled by the Inn's own staff, and they even have dedicated rooms with large porcelain bathtubs for people to take baths in.

All in all, Thomas lets himself enjoy the luxuries for what they are... a distraction from the chaotic turns his life has taken now that he left the relatively simple town of Last Hope behind. And yes, he knows 'relatively' is doing a lot of work there.

There hadn't really been anything simple about his time in Last Hope, whether one was talking about the time he was poisoned, Sevi's machinations, or even Thomas' own efforts to grow ever stronger using the Gift of Relentless Potential.

However, he could already tell from less than a day in the Capital that this place was going to be infinitely more complex than all of the trouble he'd had to deal

with in that small quaint town. Thomas already missed it a bit... but at the same time, he felt driven to get to the bottom of things in this city.

Alas, he was currently in 'hurry up and wait' mode. While he'd been assured back at the Royal Bank that they would be able to get him an audience with the King sooner rather than later, that still might take days. And in the meantime, Thomas could only stew in his own thoughts, contemplating his enemies.

House Godman was a no brainer, but from what he'd seen today, it was much worse than just House Godman... their allies were clearly numerous and Thomas had no idea just how many knives were lurking in the dark.

It was almost enough to make him want to speak ill of the dead... what the fuck had the late Lord Marlow been doing all this time? Had he not even had a clue that House Godman was working against his House? Had he been completely blindsided and caught with his pants down? Or was he simply not up to the task, doing all he could to stop it but failing in the end anyways?

Thomas wasn't sure he would ever know, and that thought honestly rankled a bit more than the deaths of this body's parents did.

Still, after a warm bath and good food, Thomas is just about ready to turn in for the night. The long day and the danger surrounding them on all sides keeps him from partaking in any of his female companions however, even if he knows they would almost certainly be up for it. Until he's sure that they're safe here, he doesn't want to risk anything.

... Which turns out to be a rather prudent measure because Thomas hasn't even nodded off before there's a knock on his door. Frowning, he climbs out of bed as his girls all get up and makes his way over, palming a dagger just in case its needed before pulling open the door to find one of the Inn's workers is standing there looking quite... nervous.

"Ah... milord, apologies for disturbing your rest but... you are Lord Marlow, y-yes?"

Thomas arches a brow but slowly nods.

“I am he.”

“There are men down in the foyer asking for you, I’m a-afraid...”

... Of course there are. Behind him, Thomas hears Camilla, Eloise, and Sevi all shift at that. Thomas, meanwhile, feels a certain sense of resignation.

Heh, couldn’t even give him a day, huh? To be fair, it wasn’t as though Thomas hadn’t expected it. Frankly, he’s surprised that they didn’t just come barging into his room directly. The perks of choosing to stay at a high end establishment like this, Thomas supposed.

“Have they made their intentions clear?”

The servant hesitates and bites her lower lip for a moment before responding.

“They say they just wish to speak to you... but they are armed, m-milord.”

There’s a tremble in the poor girl’s voice that has Thomas sighing. Grabbing at her skirts nervously, her eyes dart to the side.

“There are... o-other ways out of the building if you need to use one, milord.”

Thomas hums and nods along.

“Right. And if I say I’m not to be disturbed and go back to bed... will your establishment’s guards not tell these men to leave?”

That had been one of the selling points of this upscale inn. The security was robust, the reputation supposedly unimpeachable, and by and large, it was supposed to be safe. But Thomas still isn’t that surprised when the servant girl hesitates again and then shakes her head.

“Not... not against *these* men, I f-fear.”

Of course. From that alone, Thomas assumes these are men known to be of House Godman. The only other option would be Royal Guards come to escort him to the King, but if they were from the Palace, he would assume the girl would have already said as much. That she hasn't makes it clear exactly who he's dealing with... and adds another tally to the score for just how deep House Godman's power in this city seems to go.

"Very well. You may let them know I will be down in a moment."

Behind him, Camilla, Eloise, and Sevi all start to move with more urgency. Meanwhile in front of him, the servant girl looks surprised by this.

"You... you will not flee, milord?"

Thomas tilts his head to the side and gives her an amused look.

"If I was going to flee, would I tell you that my dear?"

Blushing, she ducks her head and shakes it, apologizing softly and quickly backing away. As soon as she's gone, Thomas turns and begins getting ready.

To be fair, he's not going to run away. But he's also not going to confront a bunch of armed men in bedclothes either, Gift or no Gift. No, if they're going to be so kind as to announce themselves to him... then Thomas will meet them as they've come to meet him.

In short order, he wears his armor and has his halberd placed on his back. Camilla is similarly prepared, while Sevi remains in her maid attire... but with a dozen hidden blades beneath her skirts. Eloise is the only one who isn't ready for a fight, but Thomas isn't going to risk some brigand coming around from behind and kidnapping her while he's downstairs, so she comes too with Sevi plastered to her side and ordered to protect her.

They certainly make for an interesting sight as Thomas leads the way down the stairs until they reach the Inn's ground floor. There, they find quite a lot of people

waiting for them. At this time of night, most of the Inn's patrons are already in bed... however, there are still three groups down in the foyer. There are the Inn's staff, there are the Inn's guards... and there are the armed and armored men wearing the livery of House Godman.

As soon as their eyes land upon him, they tense up, the sight of his armor and weapon making mouths thin out, eyes narrow, and hands fall to pommels. The Inn's guards, meanwhile, look more nervous than ever before. They were already outnumbered by the Godman men, but now it looks like they're about to have a fight break out in front of them and none look happy about it.

"Thomas Marlow?"

The leader of the House Godman group steps forward, a bald man with an intense, assessing look in his eyes. Thomas assesses right back, appraising the man and finding him... wanting.

"Lord Thomas Marlow, actually. But yes, that's me."

The bald man grunts.

"You ain't a lord yet, are ya? Haven't sworn to the King yet, after all."

Yes, that was apparently how it worked. Though Thomas was still born nobility, which was why folks like Weatherby paid lip service to the fact that he was technically born a lord and would be Lord of House Marlow as soon as he swore his oath to the King.

Thomas recognizes blatant provocation when he sees it so rather than belabor the point, he just smiles thinly at the other man.

"I'm told you gentlemen wanted to speak with me."

The bald man's narrowed eyes narrow even further.

“Lord Godman demands your presence. You and your... retainers will come with us. Immediately.”

Thomas doesn't like the way that some of the men behind the speaker are leering at Camilla, Eloise, and Sevv. He's ready to crack some skulls for that and that alone. But the audacity to *demand* his presence... Thomas lets out a huff of laughter.

“Will we? No, I don't think we will.”

The bald man bristles, but interestingly enough it's not him who responds. Instead, one of the other men suddenly speaks up in a jeering tone.

“Oh come off it Tommy! Why the fuck are you suddenly acting all high and mighty you sniveling little bitch? Wearing armor and putting on a polearm doesn't make you a warrior!”

There's scattered laughter from elsewhere in the group of House Godman men at that, though not everyone seems to be in on the joke. The bald man in particular whips his head around, pinning the one who just spoke up with a glare that causes his crooked smile to drop off his face and him to shrink back in response.

As for Thomas... he looks around at the men filling the inn's foyer again and comes to a realization... at least some of them think they know him. It's that gang that the original Thomas ran with back in the day, isn't it? The same gang that Sol Godman had almost certainly started and used to corrupt the original Thomas.

Until eventually, Thomas was cut off by his parents and all but placed on house arrest, leading to his only 'friends' abandoning him. And that in turn led to Martin Marlow's poisoning, which finally brought them to Thomas' exile to Last Hope.

The point was, some of these men had gone from being in that thuggish gang of miscreants... to being thugs with the livery of House Godman. It's curious that

Sol didn't bring any of them with him to Last Hope... but then again, maybe he did and they just didn't get the chance to mock Thomas thanks to Sevvi.

Either way, staring at the group... Thomas doesn't feel very threatened or afraid. Maybe he should be. Maybe he should be quaking in his boots. But...

"Sorry."

His sudden apology causes a ripple of confusion, especially since its paired with a big grin stretching from ear to ear across his face.

"I see now I was speaking with a bit too much class for you lot. Allow me to speak in a language you'll all understand."

Thomas steps forward... and amusingly, a couple of House Godman's men actually step back as he leers at them.

"Fuck. Off."

The smart ones start to realize that maybe something isn't right here. But the bald man in charge isn't one of the smart ones. He growls and steps forward himself, stomping right up to Thomas.

"You little brat. Lord Godman-!"

Whatever he might have said about Lord Godman, he doesn't get a chance to say it. His hand comes down on Thomas' shoulder... and Thomas moves. He doesn't hold back all that much and he knows that turns his following movements into a blur as he proceeds to grab the other man by the wrist, squeeze until the bones shatter, and deliver a knee to his solar plexus at the same time.

S-SNAP!

It happens so quickly nobody has time to react. Even the bald man takes a moment to register the agony he's suddenly in, before collapsing to his knees and choking for air while cradling his broken wrist.

Thomas looks down at him disdainfully before staring at the rest of the now silent men. Then, he glances around at the Inn's guards and staff, all of whom are watching with wide eyes.

"... You lot should probably clear out now. Any damages... I'll go ahead and pay for after we're done."

Nobody moves initially, forcing Thomas to role his eyes and shoo them away with his hands.

"Go on. Get."

That finally gets them to depart, the Inn's guards included. All of them scurry away into the back, leaving it just Thomas and his girls facing off against House Godman's men in the foyer. Except...

Thomas smiles as he pulls his halberd from his back. The bladed part is currently covered in a leather sheathe that he doesn't bother removing... he's not looking to kill anyone just yet. Standing away from the women, Thomas calls back over his shoulder.

"Camilla... watch over the girls for me."

"... As my lord commands."

Twirling his halberd in his hands, Thomas raises a brow at the gathered men in front of him.

"Well? You're here to take me to Lord Godman aren't you? He's not going to be very happy if you return empty handed."

The smart thing to do would probably be to give them all a chance to leave now, rather than provoking them into staying and fighting. But Thomas isn't feeling very smart at the moment. After the day he's had... he really just needs an outlet. And wouldn't you know it? About a dozen outlets just showed up, right in front of him.

"You... won't-urk!"

The bald man finally finds his voice, still kneeling in front of Thomas. But Thomas isn't interested in hearing it. Without even looking down, he snaps out his knee again, this time driving it into the fucker's nose. The satisfying crunch as he falls back unconscious is like a signal that sends the rest of the men forward with a war cry.

Thomas... grins.

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A/N: Time for things to get heated~

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!