

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

**A/N: Facing off against the King of the Forest.**

**-x-X-x-**

Camilla knew that this was going to be the most important fight of her life. It wasn't something that her training had prepared her for, of course. The Kingdom didn't have monsters as big as the King of the Forest prowling in its darker corners, thankfully. Most of her training as a Squire had consisted of hunting down bandits more than anything else.

But this... this bigger than any mere bandit gang. It was bigger than the goblin tribe that she and the Young Lord had exterminated just the other week. The King of the Forest represented an existential threat to the people of Last Hope and if she and Thomas failed, then every last person in town was dead.

... So they simply wouldn't fail. Easy enough, really. Hell, with Lord Thomas armed with Magic Steel just as she was, they actually had a greater chance than Camilla had previously thought. Especially with his rate of improvement.

Indeed, their spars together had reached the point where Camilla was feeling legitimately pressured fighting against Thomas. Before, she'd been the whetstone that he was sharpening himself against... now, it felt like she was being sharpened right back, truth be told. Each of them was improving at this point... and Camilla held hope in her heart that it would be enough improvement for them to come out on top.

They come across their first Dire Wolves about an hour into their journey. Tracking down the King of the Forest and his den isn't particularly hard... a

monster that size on the edge of the Darkwoods isn't going to be able to hide... nor is it going to really try to.

As such, once they kill the first group of Dire Wolves, she and Thomas stop for a moment to take out some of the potions that the Apothecary had made for them with the Young Lord's help. Potions of Fortification, of Strength, of Speed and Stamina... each and every one of them goes down their throats, one after another.

Camilla knows some back home who would consider the use of potions like this to be... dishonorable. If you cannot defeat a challenge without such supplements, then are you really a true Knight? She, of course, does not agree with such mentality. But even if she did... some things are more important than her honor.

With potion-granted power coursing through their veins, Camilla and Thomas continue on, making their approach without obfuscation or subtlety. It's no surprise that more Dire Wolves attack them as a result, though the one they're hunting never shows his face. He doesn't need to, in the end... no doubt a monster of that size realizes they'll come to him in the end.

By the time they finally reach the clearing where the King of the Forest holds court, they've left a couple dozen Dire Wolves in their wake. And yet, there are still more to be found, all of them rising to their feet the moment that Camilla and Thomas push out of the trees and into the open area.

Sword already drawn and bloodied, Camilla shares a look with Thomas, the two of them nodding to one another wordlessly. In the end, it was already a long shot that they would take down the King of the Forest together... but with this many Dire Wolves, their chances were next to none. It doesn't mean they're about to give up... but there is a sense of finality as Camilla sets her stance, perhaps for the last time.

And then... a familiar rumbling growl echoes across the clearing and every other Dire Wolf stops in their tracks. Camilla is proud to stay she doesn't freeze up this time as that same oppressive aura from before settles over her like a shroud. That's at least partially because of the potion effects bolstering her, but it's also because of the rapid growth she and the Young Lord have undergone recently.

What she had initially mistaken for a black hill suddenly shifts and rises, revealing himself to be the King of the Forest. He stands to his full height, Camilla's mouth going a little dry as she has to crane her neck back to see him. All of the other Dire Wolves pull back at hearing his growl, moving to the edge of the clearing, their eyes fixed on her and Thomas but not actually interfering.

"... I think we're going to get our fight, one way or another."

Camilla hums at Thomas' words. It's strange, because Dire Wolves don't normally act like this. They're extremely pack-oriented and the idea of the 'leader' fighting a threat to the pack while all of the others stood back shouldn't have been something they were even capable of processing.

... But the King of the Forest was an unexpected fly in the ointment, wasn't he? If the stories about the Darkwoods were to be believed, then the King of the Forest came from much deeper in. He wasn't supposed to be here... he wasn't part of the pack so much as he was so much greater that they *had* to bow down to him.

That changed the dynamic from the look of things. And maybe it even changed it in her and Thomas' favor.

The King of the Forest pads closer to them, until he's so close that a single bound would have him right on top of them. He bares his fangs as he continues to growl, staring them both down with those massive red eyes of

his. At her side, Thomas raises his own Magic Steel weapon. Camilla, meanwhile, sets her stance and prepares for battle.

“You take left, I’ll take right.”

“Understood.”

With that, they split up... and not a moment too soon either, because the King of the Forest suddenly *moves* and it takes all of Camilla’s potion-enhanced speed to dodge the rest of the way and escape his huge claws.

Splitting up from Thomas, she takes the left as he takes the right... but from there, their tactics become more complex. He immediately begins to lunge at the King of the Forest, his halberd slicing through the air as it aims to pierce the hulking beast’s side.

At the same time, he lets out a shout, clearly aiming to get the monstrous Dire Wolf’s attention, jabbing him again and again as fast as he possibly can. Camilla, meanwhile... holds back. Just for a second, just long enough for their plan to work... and work it does.

The King of the Forest turns to Thomas, provoked by the Young Lord’s aggression. He snarls and lashes out, attempting to close his massive jaws around Thomas’ torso right then and there. Thomas darts backwards, a maneuver he’d told Camilla was called ‘kiting’, forcing the King of the Forest to follow him.

Camilla... waits for her opening. Luckily she doesn’t have to wait long because every second she’s forced to watch Thomas risk his life is a second too far. But after just a moment... she sees it and goes for it.

Darting in on the creature’s flank, Camilla takes a dive, literally. She drops to her knees and into a slide to avoid the King of the Forest’s massive

whipping tail... and to bring her Magic Steel Blade right across the back of one of the huge Dire Wolf's exposed, vulnerable tendons.

The moment she feels her sword biting through fur and skin and deep into flesh, a triumphant grin splits her face. She cuts hard and she cuts deep, a maiming blow that takes the King of the Forest from four working legs to just three in a single instant.

The agonized *howl* that splits the air as she does her damage is like music to Camilla's ears. Turning her slide into a roll, she dodges the first swipe and comes back to her feet, feeling a surge of adrenaline and excitement. They could do this. They could-!

She never sees the second swipe that gets her. Or rather she does, but she doesn't register what the massive black paw in her face means until it's too late. And then it slams into her and Camilla's entire world goes dark in an instant.

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"CAMILLA!"

Thomas curses as Camilla is flung to the side by the attack she didn't see coming. She'd dodged so many other blows from the King of the Forest and landed a truly spectacular hit in the process... but in the end, the bastard of an over-sized Dire Wolf only had to hit her once. As evidenced by the sickening crunch when she hits the tree and the way she falls to the ground, completely unmoving.

He would have loved to rush to her side... but obviously that would just result in the exact same thing happening to him. Thomas still keeps an eye on the other wolves though, making sure none of them are angling to try and make a snack of the downed Knight Bachelorette... even as he has to keep the majority of his attention on the King of the Forest.

He's stabbed the monstrous wolf a couple of times with the pointy end of his halberd at this point, poking holes in his side all the while, but nothing that seems to have done much damage. Certainly nothing that has done as much damage as Camilla herself just did, given the way the King of the Forest is now visibly limping.

Their plan, which effectively boiled down to Thomas drawing the King's attention while Camilla looked for an opportunity to hobble and hinder the massive Dire Wolf's movement, had gone incredibly well... but the cost might have been too high. Because now... well, now he was facing the King of the Forest all alone.

And yet... somehow, he doesn't feel it's nearly as hopeless as it should be. Even as the hulking Dire Wolf lunges forward, Thomas darts back, dodging his snapping jaws and slicing with his halberd across the huge snout in front of him, sending the King yelping backwards.

Then, he returns the favor, going on the attack in what quickly starts a back and forth that seems to go on for eternity. Magic Steel works. That part is nice. And Thomas, as much as he feels like he's an under leveled character in a fucking Souls game, is still managing to hold his own against the King of the Forest.

Their fight continues on unabated for minutes, the rest of the King's pack watching on from the edges of the clearing while Camilla, who might be dead at this point, remains unmoving at Thomas' back.

The problem, of course... is that only one of them is relying upon potions to enhanced their attributes. As much as Thomas has improved since arriving in this world, as much as he's done his level best to push his Gift of Relentless Potential to its limits... it's the potions that he and Arnold brewed together that are truly letting him put on this amazing performance,

fighting something like the King of the Forest mano-a-mano in a one on one duel.

And unfortunately, this isn't a video game. There is no convenient timer in the top corner of his 'HUD' to inform him of when the potions are beginning to wear off. Nor is it a 'there one second and gone the next' sort of thing either. Instead, as time wears on... the potion effects start to wind down.

Thomas can feel himself getting slower, even as he continues to strive to dodge the King of the Forest's massive jaws and paw swipes. He can feel himself getting weaker, even as his halberd bites into the hulking Dire Wolf's flesh again and again.

It's simply not enough. Camilla's one single blow had hobbled the King just enough for Thomas to go toe to toe, but not enough for him to be able to overcome. He's losing bit by bit, inch by inch.

The first proper hit that lands on him nearly takes Thomas out of the fight just as surely as Camilla. He barely manages to dodge and reduce the damage to half of what it would have been otherwise, but he's still flung through the air rather painfully, a chunk of flesh removed from his side.

And yet... still he rises to his feet again. Even as blood pours from a head wound down into his eyes, he lifts his halberd and grits his teeth, pushing forward.

Another few exchanges... and another claw swipe that lands. He's slammed into the ground by it, the air rattling from his lungs, his ribs feeling like that might have just been crushed by the King of the Forest's weight. And yet... still Thomas gets back up, still he rises back to his feet ready to keep fighting.

He's dying. He can feel it. It's sort of like the poisoning, really. He can continue to keep pushing forward, to push through the pain and agony and

shutting down of his internal organs, some of which have probably burst. The Gift of Relentless Potential sings in his veins, promising that so long as he continues to get back up, he won't die easily.

... But he'll still die. Because unlike the poison, there's no outlasting the threat this time. There's no purging it from his system, because there's nothing to purge. This goes around; the enemy isn't inside of him... it's in front of him. And the King of the Forest, while definitely pretty bad off, isn't worse off than Thomas himself.

He still continues to try, of course. He still pushes forward, swinging his halberd, stabbing and slicing, piercing and cutting. The King of the Forest snarls at this, playing more defensively. Thomas likes to think he might have put the fear of humans into the great big beast... but when he looks at those intelligent red eyes, all he sees is the calculating gaze of a creature who knows his opponent isn't long for this world and that it'll be easier to just let Thomas fall than to keep fighting and risking his own health.

... Or maybe he's just reading too much into the damn beast's gaze. Fuck if he knows. In the end, it doesn't really matter... because eventually, Thomas' own body does start to give out on him, completely irrespective of his Gift.

The moment he collapses to a knee with a gasp, the King of the Forest is there to capitalize on his moment of weakness. Lunging forward, the great big beast's jaws open wide, ready to swallow Thomas whole. Only... just as Thomas is preparing to push himself forward into that certain death, hoping to drive his halberd up through the roof of the King's mouth into his brain so he could take the damn thing with him... something else happens.

There's a whistling sound and then the King of the Forest rears back, letting out the same agonized sort of yelping as when Camilla cut his tendon back near the start. Thomas blinks up, eyes barely able to make

out what caused the King of the Forest to abort his charge... a handle of some sort of bladed weapon is sticking out of one of the Dire Wolf's eyes, buried all the way to the hilt in his head.

In that instant, it's now Thomas who sees the opening... and he takes it. His original intention remains true and he lunges off of his knees, propelling himself forward with a shout. His halberd goes up, but instead of aiming for the roof of the King of the Forest's mouth... he instead aims for the underside of his throat, now exposed by the massive Dire Wolf closing his jaw.

The Magic Steel halberd bites deep, cutting through the King of the Forest's throat until the entire head of the weapon is buried in his neck. Then, with a roar of pure righteous fury, Thomas grips the haft of the polearm with both hands and tears it to the side, ripping the Magic Steel straight out of the King's neck.

The oversized Dire Wolf dies in an instant, Thomas' last strike finding purchase in his spine and the Magic Steel cutting through it just as easily as flesh and pelt. The King of the Forest drops with a massive, loud thud, falling before him as Thomas pants heavily. The thing's head hangs half off of his neck, partially decapitated but not fully.

Repositioning himself, Thomas lifts his halberd up... and brings it down as an executioner's act, hewing through the rest of the titanic-sized Dire Wolf's neck to fully remove his huge head from his body.

Only once he's done that, only once he's made sure that the King of the Forest is dead, does Thomas take stock of his surroundings. To his surprise (and immense relief) the rest of the Dire Wolves, upon seeing their 'leader' killed... turn and begin to disappear back into the Darkwoods, leaving in droves without any further hostility.

It feels too good to be true, but then so does the last second save. Thomas reaches down to the King of the Forest's head and grasps the handle of the blade that had blinded his enemy and given him the opening he needed to end the fight. Yanking it out, he stares at what might have been either a dagger or a short sword, depending on who was asking.

But most importantly of all... he doubted it was of human make. It was curved and the metal was like nothing he'd seen yet, not even Magic Steel. And the handle was... well, weird didn't quite cut it.

Looking around for his savior, Thomas doesn't see anyone at first... but then he catches sight of someone in one of the trees, a figure dressed all in black staring at him silently. For a brief moment, he expects them to ask for their weapon back... but instead, with a twitch of some very long, very dark ears... they vanish into the shadows like they were never there at all.

Thomas stares at the empty tree branch for a brief moment before finally rushing over to Camilla's side. He should have gone to her sooner, probably... but better late than never. And even if she's dead, well, he'll need her supplies.

To his pleased shock however, Camilla is still breathing. Not missing a beat, Thomas pulls open the satchel of potions they brought with them and drags out every last rejuvenation potion they still have. He pours one down Camilla's throat, massaging her neck to make the unconscious woman swallow... and then he drinks one himself.

Alternating back and forth like this, he splits the potions between the two of them, giving her one and then himself one until there are none left. And then, even though his body is still screaming at him to lie down and rest... Thomas gets back to his feet.

He can't stop moving now. If he does, he might die anyways. And that would just be a travesty, wouldn't it? No... so long as he keeps going, the Gift of Relentless Potential will make sure he keeps breathing.

For a moment, he does find himself longing for more of a trophy. Being able to bring back the King of the Forest's head, for instance, would have been great. Unfortunately, the thing is massive and he's already got his hands full with Camilla. So, placing the strange, curved dagger on his belt, Thomas reaches down and picks Camilla up, getting her on her back and her limbs draped over him after some trial and error.

Then, his insides grinding against one another and (hopefully) slowly healing... Thomas puts one foot in front of the other and begins making his way back to Last Hope.

They were victorious. They'd won. Thomas clings to that faint feeling of triumph to keep him moving despite all of the pain as he begins the long crawl back home.

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**A/N: Victory! And also... 'mysterious' elf lady?! Heh.**

**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!**