

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

A/N: Sevvi is saved!

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Fortunately, Last Hope is actually over-equipped to deal with the grievous wound in Sevinarya's side. After all, the numerous expeditions that Thomas has gone on these past three weeks have resulted in a glut of certain supplies that have then been stockpiled and transformed by the townsfolk.

In this case, Arnold the Apothecary has been making quite a lot of antivenom recently, on top of having much higher ingredients than he's used to because of how much deeper Thomas has been venturing in the Darkwoods. Things don't just get bigger the further you get into that magical forest, they get *better*.

As a result, Arnold has, for the first time in a long time, seen some pretty dramatic improvement to his Gift of Alchemy in recent weeks, even months. Just the sheer number of potions he's been able to make since Thomas arrived in Last Hope and began his trips into the Darkwood was enough to see his period of stagnation end.

Or at least, that's what Thomas is assuming anyways, because it ultimately takes just about six hours for Sevinarya's condition to improve and the Dark Elf to wake up from her unconscious state. It's touch and go at the start, but once they get the antivenom into her body and the venom out of her, Arnold's Restorative Potions do the rest.

In the process of helping her, the mask does come off though, giving Thomas his first real view of the Dark Elf's face. To his surprise... she looks young. Now admittedly, what little he knows about elves tells him that this shouldn't be too surprising. Elves were supposed to be long lived species anyways.

But Sevinarya had always come across as this mysterious, worldly femme fatale. Dangerous and worth being wary around, she had always felt like a threat

wrapped up in a nice little ribbon. Trying to come across as helpful or good-natured, but in truth... a predator lurking to strike.

Except... without her mask and with her unconscious, the softness and youth of her features reminds him more of Eloise than anything. It's simply not what he's expecting, not even in the slightest.

Still... Thomas isn't an idiot about things. Even as he makes sure Sevinarya doesn't die on them, he also takes the appropriate precautions. This involves things like keeping Sevinarya in a room full of the magical blue lanterns to prevent any shadows deep enough for her to disappear into them.

They also go a step further and disarm the Dark Elf before binding her arms at the wrists and her legs at the ankles. A search of her body reveals a second curved dagger that appears to be sibling to the one he'd been 'gifted' all those weeks ago, as well as multiple braces of throwing knives.

All of them are confiscated, obviously, and Sevinarya is laid out on a bed with her wrists bound before her. Admittedly, Thomas half wonders if they should have bound them behind her back instead... but no. Better to have her hands right where he could see them, he figured. And to be fair... he's not left her side for even a single moment since she arrived.

When the six hour 'nap' does finally come to an end and Sevinarya wakes up with a gasp, Thomas is there by the side of the bed waiting for her. He stiffens up as she comes alive again, those glowing red eyes of hers snapping open even if their vibrant coloring is washed away by the faint blue light that suffuses every corner of the bedroom.

Her head twists too and fro before she lays eyes on him and goes still. Thomas stares back at her, wondering even now if this is some sort of trap. The injury she'd suffered was very real though, as was the envenoming. Something had taken a chunk out of her. Something big... bigger than any giant spider should have been.

There was no way though, right? Even if all the signs pointed to that being the answer, it just sounded ridiculous at this point.

“Welcome back, Sevinarya.”

Glancing down at her bindings, feeling the absence of her mask, Sevinarya’s youthful visage twists into a grimace.

“... How long was I out?”

He considers lying to her for a moment. There’s an argument to be made that she’d be easier to manage if she was kept off-balanced. There’s also an argument to be made that she’s earned not an ounce of honesty from him, given all the lies he’s certain she’s peddled by now.

And yet... in the end, he sees no true point. Just because she’s lied to him doesn’t mean he has to return the favor.

“Six hours, give or take a bit.”

Amusingly enough, his honesty is met with open suspicion and derision. Her eyes narrow and her nose wrinkles in rather cute incredulity as she stares at him.

“What? That’s not possible, there’s no way that a small human town like this would have the resources to heal me that fast.”

Thomas just shrugs, not really caring if she believes him or not. He’s told her the truth, that’s all he can do.

“Our Town Apothecary is skilled. That’s all there is to it.”

Sevinarya stares at him for a moment longer before looking down at her side where her flesh has already knitted back together. Then, she looks to the covered window, where she might be able to tell the time better if it wasn’t

completely sealed shut and the blue light wasn't keeping the room awash in an ambient glow that made time have no meaning altogether.

Finally though, she peers at him again and then grunts.

"I wonder, did you have a hand in crafting the potions that healed me?"

Furrowing his brow, Thomas thinks about it for a moment before shrugging.

"Maybe. Couldn't say for sure."

That's true too. While he's certainly helped Arnold a LOT with a ton of potion brewing every chance he's gotten these past couple of months, learning at the Apothecary's feet all the while, he hasn't been there for every batch that Arnold has made.

And yet, that answer... seems good enough for Sevinarya? She nods sharply, as though his noncommittal answer explains everything for her. Then, she looks around the room again before sighing.

"... Six hours. Not too late then. The others might still be alive, though they probably wish they were dead."

Thomas arches a brow at that. Eloise had told him that Sevinarya had a gang of course. He knew the Dark Elf wasn't supposed to be the only one of her kind in the woods. However, he had never actually seen another Dark Elf yet... and when he'd pressed Eloise to see if she had, the answer had been a hesitant, concerned 'no'.

So he had to admit, part of him had wondered if that was just another lie on Sevinarya's part and it was just her out here, all on her own.

"I need your help, human. The situation is dire and I am exceptionally desperate. You human males like that sort of thing right, a damsel in distress to take advantage of?"

She's not teasing him, or at least not in a toying manner anyways. Thomas arches a brow as she speaks in a matter of fact tone, like every word out of her mouth is the gospel truth. He should probably be insulted... but instead, he just glances to her side.

"What attacked you, exactly?"

Sevinarya's eyes follow his gaze down where she goes quiet for a moment before letting out a raspy, weak laugh.

"The 'Spider-Queen' if you would believe it."

Thomas' eyes narrow. See, this was where he was hung up. Because the bite that had been taken out of Sevinarya WAS from a pretty damn big spider. Bigger than anything he'd fought yet. And yet... he'd become convinced there was no Spider-Queen.

Was there one all along? But then, why the fuck had Sevinarya gone to fight it herself instead of just giving him proper directions before now?!

Seeing his mounting confusion, Sevinarya huffs and tosses herself back on the bed, staring up at the ceiling for a long moment before filling the silence.

"... I made it up, human. The 'Spider-Queen'. It never existed. Given the way you were ready to ambush me, I imagine you figured that out though."

Thomas just grunts, even more confused than before.

"I didn't have a proper challenge for you when you demanded one from me, so I invented one and then had one of my subordinates working on creating something to give truth to my lie. Only, I didn't give her enough time. A month, it turns out, is not long enough to create a giant mutant spider on par with the King of the Forest."

At this point, he's just staring at her. But she's still staring at the ceiling so, not seeing the look on his face, Sevinarya continues on.

“It backfired, obviously. The mutated spider and her brood got out of control. Our underground hideout is a bunch of webs at this point, I imagine. I escaped... but I doubt anyone else did.”

Finally, she stops staring straight up and turns her head to look at him.

“I need you to come help me save my girls and kill the monster I’ve unleashed. In exchange, I’ll heal the old man. Sound good?”

He believes her, don’t get him wrong. And sure, he fell for her lies before... but this time, Thomas thinks he can honestly tell the difference. Not to mention, without her mask her face is almost like an open book for him. Her eyes are too inhuman for him to read properly given they’re literally just glowing red orbs, but the rest of her features are human adjacent and the expressions she makes as she talks give away a lot.

So much in fact that he can’t help himself. The question just comes out.

“How old are you, Sevinarya?”

The Dark Elf’s face immediately scrunches up in offense.

“I’m ninety-six years old, human! What kind of question is that?!”

Ninety-six... almost a full century of life. And yet, looking at her... Thomas wouldn’t be surprised if he were told that ninety-six years in elf ears was the equivalent of eighteen in human years or something. She just felt so... young now. Hearing her explain herself, watching her face twist and twitch... the façade has been ripped away with the mask. The veneer is gone. This is the real Sevinarya Vairath, isn’t it?

Still, Thomas holds his tongue, keeping his revelations and observations to himself. Instead, he focuses on the matter at hand.

“So let me see if I understand this correctly. Three weeks ago, you told me that all I had to do was fight and kill the so-called ‘Spider-Queen’ and retrieve her mandibles for you. And in exchange you would heal Eloise’s father. Except that was all a lie because the Spider-Queen didn’t exist. It still doesn’t exist outside of some freakshow experiment that’s taken over your hideout and nearly killed you.”

Sevinarya looks like she’s sucked on a particularly sour lemon but reluctantly nods all the same.

“... Yes, that’s correct.”

Thomas huffs in disbelief.

“And now you want my help in exchange for the cure that was already promised to me based on a fucking lie in the first place.”

Her face twists up again, her bound hands twitching. For a moment Thomas thinks she’s going to try and attack him. But then... she slumps.

“It’s all my fault. I brought those girls out here to try and save them from their fates and now they’re all going to die anyways and it’ll be all my fault. Please... I can’t be the reason they die. I need to save them... and I won’t be able to do it without someone of your strength.”

That was all well and good but as far as Thomas was concerned, he held all the cards right now. And frankly... he saw no reason not to go for broke.

“Then you’ll heal Mayor Harper first, fully. You’ll hold up your end of the original deal and cure his Rot Lung completely. And once that’s done, once he’s properly awake again... then and only then will I help you, Sevinarya.”

It’s the best time for an ultimatum, it feels like. Either the cure was always a lie and she proves it right now by refusing... or Thomas gets everything he wants out of this duplicitous Dark Elf. Either way, he’s definitely not going to let her

throw him into yet another dangerous situation with nothing to show for it. Fool him once, shame on her. Fool him twice, shame on him.

Sevinarya stares at him unblinking for a long moment before her face scrunches in frustration.

“... How do I know you'll hold to your end of this bargain, exactly? You could just slit my throat the moment I've saved the old human.”

Thomas doesn't bother saying anything like 'he wouldn't do that' or what have you. He just stares back at Sevinarya, unflinching.

“You're right, I could do that. But I won't. I'm not you, Sevinarya.”

He notices a look of real hurt flash across the Dark Elf's face at that, but it's gone as quickly as it appears. Sevinarya seems to contemplate her options for a moment before finally, slowly nodding.

“... Alright. I'll do it.”

Thomas can hardly believe his ears. Was this seriously going to work? In the end... did he have any choice but to believe at this point? If she was telling the truth, she needed him as much as they needed her now... so there's no point worrying about her fleeing anymore.

Reaching out, he grabs Sevinarya by her legs and proceeds to cut her ankle bindings, granting her the ability to walk. Then, he somewhat roughly grabs Sevinarya by her still-bound wrists and yanks her up off of the bed and onto her feet in one fell swoop.

Sevinarya yelps... but to her credit, she quickly finds her footing in spite of the grievous injury she'd just got done healing from. From the way she winces, her side is no doubt still tender, but she's able to walk on her own two feet, even as Thomas helps her to the door.

“Let’s go see what you can do for Mayor Harper then. And after that, we’ll discuss saving your people.”

Did he really believe in the cure at this point? Thomas honestly couldn’t say. But they’d all come too far to not at least give Sevinarya a chance to prove them wrong...

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A/N: Next time, we find out once and for all if the cure for Rot Lung is really real!

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!