

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

A/N: Healin' Mayor Harper~

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Camilla stiffens as they step out of the bedroom together, Sevinarya in front of him. The female knight hadn't been pleased when Thomas had made her stand outside. After all, the Dark Elf was one of the most dangerous foes they'd ever had.

But Thomas had been certain that even if he wasn't a 'friendly face', he was the one that Sevinarya was most obsessed with. He'd hoped that her waking up to just him in the room might help to soften her a bit and make her more talkative. And wouldn't you know it; it seemed to have worked.

Of course, that doesn't stop Sevinarya from snorting derisively after taking one look at Camilla's tense posture and the hand on the hilt of her sword.

"What are you going to do that he couldn't have already done if he wanted to? He's stronger than you now, you know that. Your only use to him is as a woman."

Thomas has to resist the urge to facepalm, even as Camilla bristles. Before things can devolve into a catfight, he grabs Sevinarya by the shoulder and forcefully turns her in the direction of the Mayor's bedroom.

"Quiet. Don't talk to her like that. Don't talk to anyone like that when you want something from me, got it?"

Sevinarya falls quiet, not actually answering him but also not running her mouth any further. As they begin to make their way down the hall, Thomas gestures with his head for Camilla to follow. The swordswoman does, albeit quite stiffly. Hopefully she wasn't taking Sevinarya's words to heart or anything like that...

Regardless, they soon arrive outside of Mayor Harper's room. Thomas makes sure to knock first, not wanting to just barge in. He's not surprised when Eloise answers it a moment later. Her eyes widen in shock at the sight of Sevinarya already up and awake.

Before Sevinarya can say anything, Thomas reaches up and puts a hand on the back of the Dark Elf's neck, guiding her forward.

"Inside. Now."

Eloise quickly steps out of the way, biting her lower lip and watching warily as Thomas all but frog marches Sevinarya over to the bed. With the Dark Elf thoroughly disarmed and her hands still bound in front of her, he's not too worried about her trying something at this point. After all, on top of all of that, she still wants his help. And if she wants his help, she's going to have to earn it.

"Cure him."

She shoots him a look at his brusque tone, but Thomas just stares back unyielding. Maybe if she didn't want him to be terse with her, she should have thought before she spoke like that to Camilla. Regardless, he's not playing games... not at this point.

Part of him is still convinced she's been lying to them all this time after all. That the cure for Rot Lung is some sort of trick, scam, or illusion designed to give Eloise false hope. Sure, Thomas wants to believe he's wrong... but he needs to see it with his own two eyes. He needs proof that Sevinarya isn't just talking out her ass.

It's a good sign when she only hesitates long enough to shoot him that look at least. After realizing he wasn't about to back down or apologize, Sevinarya turns back to the bed where Mayor Harper lays. The old man definitely looks younger than the first time Thomas saw him all those months ago, a feat in and of itself. And according to Eloise, she'd held full conversations with him once or twice in his most lucid moments in recent weeks.

Now though, it was the moment of truth. Was Sevinarya's 'cure' only temporary... or could she do something more permanent?

Reaching out with her bound hands, the Dark Elf gets to work. Much like Thomas saw when he spied on her and Eloise all those weeks ago, she waves her hands across the Mayor. Unlike before however, she doesn't do this just once. She keeps moving her hands back and forth across him, up and down his body.

The age almost seems to slog off of Eloise's father in real time. His decrepit appearance changes right before Thomas' eyes, wrinkles and liver spots and all the landmarks of the elderly vanishing as skin smooths out. Not entirely, of course. Mayor Harper had already been in his forties when he'd caught Rot Lung. It had given him the appearance of someone in his eighties before the start of Sevinarya's treatments, but forties was still rather old, especially when much of those forty-something years of life had been lived in a frontier town like this.

Still, the difference is night and day and by the time Sevinarya is done, it's like looking at a completely new man. Mayor Harper looks so much more peaceful, so much healthier. But that's just it... he looks those things... is he? That's the real question. Is he really-

Thomas is cut off mid-thought as the Mayor's sleeping visage suddenly contorts in distress. The unconscious man's eyes suddenly snap open as he rather abruptly wakes up and proceeds to turn over onto his side before violently projectile vomiting black gunk all over the floor... and Sevinarya's front.

The Dark Elf tries to flinch back and likely would have moved away but Thomas still had a grip on the back of her neck holding her in place. Fortunately Sevinarya is wearing her armor, but it's still rather gross and there's quite a lot of the black stuff on her and on the floor before Mayor Harper is done.

He's left panting and heaving for air once he's finished and as Thomas stares down at the purging the older man's body has just done... he has to finally admit that the cure was real. From the look of things, whatever magic Sevinarya had

just cast had a similar effect to the purging potions, but far more all-encompassing. The purging potions couldn't help someone who was too far gone... but Sevinarya could.

The Dark Elf, who had been frozen in place, finally comes out of her stupor to make a noise of vitriolic disgust in the back of her throat. She jerks, attempting to tear herself out of Thomas' grip, but he pulls her away because he can feel her trying to go for the Mayor. He'll let her have her visceral reaction, but he's not about to let her attack the man she just got done saving.

"Father!"

As soon as Thomas has stepped back out of the way and pulled Sevinarya with him, Eloise darts forward. She dodges around the black gunk staining the bedroom floor and all but throws herself onto the bed and on top of her father, covering the older man with her body and hugging him with all her might.

Gasping for air all over again, Mayor Harper lets out a wheezing laugh as he hugs Eloise right back, holding her close.

"Eloise... what... what's going on?"

Its funny, the man has effectively been a piece of the background of Thomas' new life the entire time he's been in this world. It's been so many months that seeing him up and awake and talking now... feels utterly surreal. Like having a loved one in a coma, only to have them wake up one day and just... *exist* again.

Eloise pulls back after a moment to answer her father's question, smiling a big smile even as her eyes water with unshed tears.

"I don't know if you r-remember our conversations, papa... but we found a way to cure you of the Rot Lung. You're back. You're all better now."

The Mayor looks like he doesn't remember a thing despite Eloise being sure she'd had proper conversations with the man in recent weeks. Then again,

something as debilitating as Rot Lung seemed to be... Thomas couldn't be surprised that it was as rough on the mind as it was on the body.

"This... these are Lord Thomas Marlow and Dame Camilla Ackinworth. And that's... that's Sevinarya. She's the one who was able to heal you."

Eloise's father takes them all in as she introduces them to him. He bows his head as best he's able to in Thomas' direction, clearly trying to make sure he doesn't upset the noble in their midst.

"I suppose you were sent to take over after I wound up in bed. I'm sorry for any trouble I've caused you, milord."

Thomas tilts his head to the side, somewhat uncomfortable with the exchange. Mostly because of his relationship with the man's daughter... it wasn't like he and Eloise were dating or anything, but that sort of just made it worse didn't it?

"... Don't worry about it. You've been no trouble. And your daughter had been the exact opposite all this time. She's been invaluable to keeping Last Hope afloat."

Eloise looks like she doesn't fully agree... probably thinking of the way she'd betrayed him and the town by keeping Sevinarya a secret for so long. But Thomas isn't about to tell the recently healed Mayor that her daughter was a traitor or anything like that... let the man get his bearings first. More than that, he'd probably let Eloise tell Mayor Harper in her own time.

The Mayor's eyes finally slide to Sevinarya... his face becoming drawn as he stares at the Dark Elf woman for a long moment. Sevinarya stares back, still held in Thomas' grasp, still dripping with black gunk.

"... Apologies for the mess."

The Mayor's words are met with a derisive scoff from Sevinarya.

"You should be sorry, human. I heal you and this is the thanks I get..."

Something sharpens in the Mayor's gaze and in that moment Thomas finally gets his very first taste of what someone who actually has the Gift of Leadership is capable of. Still in bed, albeit sitting up now, and still with his daughter hanging off of him like a limpet, Mayor Harper nevertheless suddenly has this... presence to him. In that moment, he truly feels like a Mayor for the first time. It's not just a title... it's a description.

"What will your healing cost me and my town, Elf?"

Sevinarya stiffens in Thomas' grasp for a moment before going slack again and scoffing.

"There is nothing you or your town can give me. The only one who can repay me now... is this one, who is currently holding me prisoner."

A ripple of confusion spreads through the room at that, both Eloise and Camilla looking to him for an explanation. Thomas just sighs.

"Let's just get Sevinarya a towel so she can wipe herself clean and I can explain, alright?"

He had a feeling this wasn't likely to go over well with them...

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"Absolutely not!"

"You can't!"

They all reconvene in the kitchen, where Sevinarya is given three different rags to begin cleaning the black gunk from her front. With her hands still bound in front of her, it's not easy but she's making do. In the meanwhile, Thomas has explained what he and Sevinarya had talked about and what she needed him for.

Both Camilla and Eloise vehemently object to the idea of helping the Dark Elf, while Mayor Harper sits at his dining table for the first time in months nursing a glass of water with slow, small sips.

Thomas crosses his arms over his chest and huffs.

“I can... and I probably will.”

Sevinarya pauses at that before returning to her cleaning. Thomas holds up a hand to hold off any further objections before he can explain.

“As much as Sevinarya has been yanking us around for months now... she’s also held up her end of the bargain. Mayor Harper is cured, the Rot Lung no more. She’s also owned up to her mistakes and acknowledges that the situation she’s put her people in is her fault. She came here today, not to try and extort us further, but because she was injured... *and we were the only option she had left.*”

That last bit gives them both pause. It even gives Sevinarya pause but again the Dark Elf stays silent, not trying to argue or debate the point with him. Glancing over at her, Thomas sighs.

“I’m not about to let her people die just because she’s fucked with me a few times. I’m not that kind of person... and if I were, I wouldn’t be the kind of person that you both respect and like, now would I?”

Eloise blushes and quickly glances at her father before biting her lower lip. Camilla, meanwhile, scowls and crosses her arms over her chest. Not because she disagrees with him, but rather because she knows he’s right and she just doesn’t like it.

Seeing that neither are protesting any more, Thomas nods decisively.

“Alright then, it’s settled. It sounds like time is of the essence so let’s start getting ready. We’ll need to bring as much as we can possibly carry on our persons.

Camilla, I, and Sevinarya will depart within the hour once preparations are done.”

“No.”

Sevinarya’s sudden interjection causes him to whirl on her and narrow his eyes.

“No? What do you mean no?”

The Dark Elf grimaces.

“I mean... that it has to just be the two of us. The hideout is several days of travel into the Darkwoods on foot. But with my Gift of Shadow, I can get back there in a split second. I... can only take one other person with me when I shadowstep though. The knight can’t come with us.”

Thomas stares at Sevinarya, even as Camilla and Eloise both begin to protest again, each of them pointing out that this just sounded like another trap. Rightfully so, perhaps, because yeah... now he was wondering if Sevinarya had healed Mayor Harper solely to lull him into a false sense of security where she could separate him from the others for some nefarious purposes.

... But the wound caused by the ‘Spider-Queen’ had been very real! Sevinarya had definitely been dying before they’d spent all that time and effort saving her life. She wouldn’t have gone that far just to try and trick him into a trap... right?

For fuck’s sake... the Dark Elf really, really made it hard to trust her sometimes.

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A/N: Goddamnit Sevvv v.v

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!

