

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

A/N: Clean up time and then back to Last Hope! I'm sure Camilla and Eloise will be understanding...

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Making sure none of the Spider-Queen's children escape is time consuming but not particularly difficult. Getting everything set up properly ahead of time, letting Sevinarya grab whatever she needed to grab, and then setting everything ablaze at once so that they could make sure it would all burn even after she pulled them back to the surface.

As they come stumbling out of the hollow of the old tree stump together, Thomas... isn't sure how to feel, truth be told. On the one hand, it's nice to look up and see the sky again after being down there amidst all that webbing. Fighting that mutated spider was no joke.

... And yet, the 'Spider-Queen' had nothing on the actual Queen he'd found himself confronting. Sevinarya's mother was a Bitch with a capital B. Seeing the two of them interact had certainly explained a lot about who Sevinarya was the way she was, truth be told.

At the same time, he questioned his decision making even now. Stepping in like that, putting himself in the Dark Elf Queen's crosshairs... things could have gone a lot worse than they had given he'd decided to outright claim ownership of her daughter to her face.

Speaking of which...

"So... Princess huh?"

He hadn't asked back in the hideout for a multitude of reasons, but now that they were out, well, it felt like fair game. Besides, he could tell Sevinarya needed

a moment to regain her strength before shadowstepping them both back to Last Hope.

She flinches at his question, nonetheless, looking down at the ground instead of meeting his eyes. She looks so much younger without her confidence.

“... Not anymore. You heard her. I’m just... Sevinarya now. I belong to no house; I have no home. At this point... you are my only purpose for living, Master.”

Thomas grimaces. Ugh, he really didn’t want her to go around calling him ‘Master’. But there was no denying that he’d taken responsibility for her at this point, hadn’t he? First to her royal mother’s face and then afterwards when she’d offered herself up on a silver platter.

It was either ordering her to go and get herself killed fighting something big and nasty or keep her around... and after seeing all those dead Dark Elves hanging out of burst spider egg sacs down there in the dark, Thomas had decided he didn’t want to add one more to their number at the moment.

Besides, even if one might argue that Sevinarya could make up for her mistakes with her death... Thomas couldn’t quite bring himself to believe that. Rather, he wanted to believe that she could do a better job of making things right by staying alive. Even if some things could never be fixed... such as all of her people, burnt to a crisp alongside the Spider-Queen’s corpse and all of her children.

Still...

“Don’t call me Master. You can call me sir, my lord, or Lord Thomas. But not Master.”

Sevinarya arches a brow but nevertheless inclines her head in acknowledgment.

“Very well, Lord Thomas.”

She’s been shattered by what happened down there. Thomas can tell as much at this point. There’s no way it’s an act... all of her confidence, her cock-sure

nature, and her femme fatale persona... that was the act. This is Sevinarya laid bare. This is her with her skin metaphorically peeled away, her very essence raw and exposed.

Thomas has many things he wants to say to her, but his tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth whenever he tries to say them. None feel quite right in this moment, if he's being quite honest. So instead, he goes ahead and focuses on the future.

"Let's get back. Are you ready?"

Sevinarya wordlessly nods, shouldering the extra pack that she'd stuffed full of things while they were preparing to burn the entire hideout to cinder. He doesn't think everything in the pack is for utility purposes... some of the items, he's pretty sure, were purely keepsakes, sentimental reminders of those she lost.

But Thomas doesn't begrudge her them, simply stepping up to her side and letting her hook her arm in his own. A moment later and they step into another dark shadow... and out onto the edge of the Darkwood, arriving back mere hundreds of feet from Last Hope.

It's late at this point. Deep in the night in fact, but with stars and a brightly shining moon overhead that provide a surprising amount of light to see by. Or maybe his eyes are just that good at this point. Regardless, he starts forward without a word, letting Sevinarya follow him silently to the town's edge... where as expected, Camilla waits for them.

The red head jolts when she finally lays eyes on them from afar, her entire body straightening up. She starts forward, meeting them halfway and looking relieved when she sweeps her gaze over his person and finds no visible injuries.

"You're alright."

It's clearly directed at just him but Thomas glances to Sevinarya anyways before smiling and nodding.

“We’re unharmed, yes. The Spider-Queen is dead.”

Camilla adopts a satisfied look at that.

“Of course. I didn’t doubt you for a second.”

Thomas holds back the urge to derisively snort. Camilla saying something like that... it really just went to show how far the two of them had come from how they’d started out. Maybe Sevinarya would prove to be the same given a little bit of time to process everything. Or maybe she’d turn out to be nothing more than a particularly useful tool going forward...

Camilla’s eyes drift over to the Dark Elf in question after a moment... and narrow when they see Sevinarya’s large, bulging pack on her back.

“... Why hasn’t she left yet my lord?”

It was a fair question. Obviously, Sevinarya had to bring Thomas back... but the fact that she hadn’t departed immediately afterwards combined with the pack, well, it painted a clear picture didn’t it?

Sevinarya gets a bit of life back into her, bristling slightly as she meets Camilla’s gaze.

“Because I owe your lord a life debt. And I will see it repaid... no matter how long it takes. He is my lord too now. I serve him just as you do. Only... better, seeing as I’m more competent than you in every way.”

Camilla’s eyes bulge out of her head. Thomas resists the urge to groan or cover his face with his palm, instead immediately calling out to the offending party.

“Sevinarya!”

The Dark Elf flinches at his sharp tone, looking over like she doesn’t know what she’s done.

“You will not speak down to the Dame that way. Do you understand me?”

Frowning a little, Sevinarya shifts her weight from foot to foot.

“I have not spoken a single lie... if you were to have us fight, I would win every time Lord Thomas. I’m stronger, faster, and just plain better than her. All she’s ever done is rely on her Gift, specializing in the sword. She’s trapped herself in a hole that she cannot hope to escape.”

Camilla looks outraged, her hand having fallen to her sword hilt. Thomas doesn’t blame her, though he has to give her credit for restraining herself.

“Fine then! Let’s go right now. You and me!”

... He might have ‘spoke’ too soon. Again Thomas has to resist the urge to facepalm. No weakness at a time like this, not with these two.

“Enough! Both of you! Camilla, do not let her rile you up. And Sevinarya, you *will* obey me if you want to stay, do you understand?”

Camilla looks a mixture of admonished and confused. Sevinarya looks chagrined, but does back down, lowering her gaze again.

“... Yes sir.”

“Apologize for your words.”

“... I am sorry.”

Like pulling teeth, but at least she obeyed. Still, Thomas decides even that isn’t enough.

“Just so we’re clear, Camilla is your superior if you truly mean the words of your oath. You will follow her orders when I am not around. Understood?”

Sevinarya doesn’t look happy at that. But she eventually nods.

“I understand.”

At this point, Camilla is more baffled than outraged. Thomas knows why of course, given the situation. He'd left with Sevinarya hours ago to save her people. Now he returned with just the Dark Elf in tow and her submitting to his every demand and command.

Sighing, Thomas meets Camilla's eyes.

“... There were no survivors by the time we arrived.”

In his periphery, he sees Sevinarya flinch. At the same time, Camilla's eyes go wide and something like pity appears in her gaze as she looks over at the Dark Elf. Sevinarya scowls in response but holds her tongue. Thomas has to hold in a sigh himself, already wondering if this can possibly work or not.

He almost tells Camilla the entire story then and there... but then he realizes he's just going to have to tell the same story to Eloise as well and he might as well leverage Camilla's own subservience so he only has to tell it once.

“Come on. Let's get back to the house and see if Eloise and her father are still awake. We can talk more there.”

As hoped, Camilla doesn't protest. She shoots Sevinarya one last conflicted look but ultimately falls in line as Thomas leads the way into the quiet, sleepy town. This late at night, no one is still awake... except there is a light on in the window of the Mayor's House when they finally arrive.

Stepping inside... Eloise is indeed still awake, her eyes widening as she leaps to her feet and rushes to him the moment he steps in through the door. Her father is nowhere to be seen, leading Thomas to believe that the Mayor probably had to turn in early. Even if he's been cured of Rot Lung, Thomas doubts that the man will be back to one hundred percent strength any time soon... if ever.

He becomes even more certain that Mayor Harper isn't going to just randomly show up when Eloise wraps her arms around his neck and lays another kiss upon her lips. Much like the kiss she'd given him before he and Sevinarya had been departed, this kiss is also passionate, long, and filled with tongue.

His hands fall to the mousy brunette's waist as they kiss, her feet nearly leaving the ground. She definitely goes up on her tiptoes at the very least, until finally they pull apart for air a good half a minute later.

"You're okay... I guess deep down I knew you would be... but I'm so glad you're back."

"I told you I'd come back. But... yeah, I'm glad too."

Eloise smiles bashfully... only to freeze when she finally registers the presence of not just Camilla, but also Sevinarya standing behind him. Moving out of the doorway, Thomas makes room for them to enter, even as Eloise stares at Sevinarya. The brunette doesn't look like she knows whether she wants to glare fiercely at the Dark Elf, or whether she wants to stand frozen like a prey animal under the gaze of a predator.

Of course, Sevinarya doesn't exactly stare at her like a predator... in fact, as opposed to the antagonism she'd thrown in Camilla's direction, she looks like she's afraid to interact with Eloise, looking anywhere but the other woman's eyes.

Now that he has both Eloise and Camilla in the same place though, Thomas explains what happened when he and Sevinarya made it to the hideout. He keeps things as clinical as possible, but Sevinarya still flinches and both Camilla and Eloise grimace as they learn the fate of the other Dark Elves. Nobody truly deserved to die like that...

"... and so, Sevinarya has sworn an oath to serve me for saving her life. I chose to accept her oath and put her in my service. To start with, I intend to put her to work here in town, helping out wherever we might need her. So that she can

make up for her actions at least a little bit. Speaking of which... Sevinarya, I think you have something to say to Eloise.”

The Dark Elf looks honestly baffled by his words, staring at him blankly. After letting the silence stretch on for a moment, Thomas sighs.

“Admit that you were behind the King of the Forest and apologize, *please*.”

Sevinarya jolts at that.

“Oh! I... yes. Yes, I am the one who had the King of the Forest brought to the edge of the Darkwoods. I am sorry for endangering your people.”

You know... she almost sounded like she meant that one. Eloise doesn't look convinced but Thomas decides that it's progress if nothing else. Besides...

“Also, Eloise here is above you as well. Any order from her, you should treat as an order from me. You will respect her authority, understood?”

That gets an incredulous look from Sevinarya, but Thomas holds up a hand before she can protest.

“Given what I've seen, I imagine you come from a society built on strength, don't you? Your people... they fight over who gets to be on top constantly and only the strongest get to not only survive but also thrive. Power is all that matters, full stop.”

Sevinarya fidgets under his gaze for a moment before finally hesitantly nodding.

“I... yes. That's... largely correct. Though even the powerful can be brought low by those with more cunning and ambition.”

Thomas just grunts.

“Well that's not how it works around here. Not in this town anyways.”

Obviously, he didn't have a clue how it worked back in the Capital or the rest of the Human Kingdom that Last Hope was technically part of. But it also didn't matter at the moment.

"Here, we help each other, irrespective of strength. And we listen to those worth listening to, irrespective of power. You want to serve me. I want to help Last Hope. And Eloise here has been keeping Last Hope going all this time now, on top of dealing with your antics. And so, we are going to put all of our personal strength and power into listening to her and helping her improve this town."

Funnily enough, Sevinarya slowly nods as though he's managed to put it in a way she can comprehend. Or maybe she knows she needs to obey if he's going to keep her around so she's just going along with it.

"Understood."

Thomas turns to Eloise, only to find the mousy brunette looking wide eyed as she glances back and forth between him and the cowed Dark Elf. Smiling apologetically, he chuckles.

"Although... it's pretty late, isn't it? So maybe we go to sleep and listen to what Eloise has to say in the morning. It's been a long fucking day."

That gets agreement from everyone at least. And so to bed they go. But of course, that just presents another problem.

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A/N: NSFW chapter next time, but Sevinarya will not be joining the fun just yet to be clear. Or for a while, really.

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!