

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

A/N: The court drama continues~

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Silence reigns as nobody in court seems to quite know what to say or do. The King is standing up to Lord Godman, something Thomas is given to understand has become vanishing rare in recent years. More than that, he's standing *against* Lord Godman... an altogether unheard of turn of events.

Even Solomon Godman himself, Patriarch of House Godman, doesn't seem to know how to react initially. He's been caught off guard, first by the Princess revealing herself to be healed and healthy and now by the King's questioning of his version of events.

Moving quickly was clearly turning out to be the right call, because the more this performance goes on, the clearer it becomes that Lord Godman hadn't checked his safe before coming here today. Nor had he had long enough to ponder Graelo's disappearance... if he'd even noticed it yet to begin with.

That said... a man like Solomon doesn't fall apart in the face of one simple line of questioning, even if that line of questioning is from the King himself. Well aware of the audience they have, Lord Godman straightens up and narrows his eyes, his momentary lapse vanishing swiftly as he sneers, mostly at Thomas.

"More scheming from the boy in front of us, no doubt! He was seen extracting what coin he could from the Royal Bank within hours of arriving in the city. He must have paid those gate guards to lie, all in a bid to slander my son's good name!"

Murmurs start up from the crowd at this, everyone wanting to know what their neighbor thinks of Lord Godman's latest accusation. Interestingly enough however, those who had been quick to jump on Thomas before... are not so quick to do so now.

Lord Godman's allies, either sensing which way the wind is blowing or merely disconcerted enough to take a step back and stay quiet, refrain from their previous angry shouting and pointing at Thomas. There's no demands for retribution and justice from the peanut gallery this time around.

Amusing to say the least, given what Thomas is about to do. Clearing his throat, he draws everyone's attention his way... even as he stares Solomon directly in the eye, holding the older man's gaze.

"Your son's good name... is that it? The same son who lured me into my long, storied history of misdeeds in the first place? The son who recruited me into a gang of hoodlums, and then hired those same hoodlums to YOUR House Guard?"

Lord Godman stiffens and then snarls.

"Lies! Slander! All of it!"

But Thomas just smirks.

"I'll tell you what's not a lie, Lord Godman. I'll tell you what happened to your son... you wanted to know, did you not?"

Another hush falls over the crowd at that and even Solomon Godman looks as intrigued as he is suspicious. His voice, when he answers, is quiet.

"... Tell me."

Once upon a time, Thomas had plans to claim Sol Godman died on the road to bandits. That he'd never made it to Last Hope, that he'd never actually set eyes on Thomas in the first place. Those plans have been set aside at this point, obviously. And in the end... well, they always did say the truth would set you free.

“Your son came to Last Hope. He brought your Captain, Renault the Viper, and over a dozen men. He came with murder in his heart, aggravated that I didn’t have the decency to die earlier. He came to kill me... and intended to let his men raze Last Hope to the ground!”

His words cause a bit of an uproar in the court. Some of Lord Godman’s allies find their spines again, calling Thomas’ accusations outrageous and decrying them as the obvious lies of a black sheep. Meanwhile, Lord Godman himself stands frozen... because he alone seems to understand what Thomas’ words truly mean. Especially in conjunction with the fact that Thomas is here... and his son is not.

“My son... what did you do to my son?”

Reaching into his pocket, Thomas withdraws Sol Godman’s signet ring and holds it up. Then, he tosses it onto the ground before them, a hundred sets of eyes following the ring as it skids across the floor.

Thomas has used every bit of his skill in the throw, meaning that the light shines perfectly upon the small needle inset on outer edge of the ring, currently protruding like it had been that day when Sol had paralyzed him with poison.

“He died attempting to kill me after using his ring to poison me. As did all of his men when they tried to harm the innocents in Last Hope.”

Lord Godman stares down at his son’s ring, face pale. The court, meanwhile, gets even more rambunctious. But Thomas speaks over them, raising his voice in volume to be heard.

“I was never anything more than Sol Godman’s patsy! I was his pawn... his tool in helping you, his father, further your plans! To annihilate House Marlow! To destroy my family down to the very foundations. I was a loose end... or so he thought. But he failed to kill me. And now here we stand!”

Thomas is the one who points now, his finger unwavering as it aims directly at Lord Godman.

“I name you the architect of my family’s tragedy, Lord Godman! And I name your son as your accomplice! There was nothing natural about the burning of the Marlow Estate and the death of my parents and brother!”

Funnily enough, that’s enough to cause the court to settle down again. A fresh hush falls over the crowd as half of the assembled nobility looks to Lord Godman for his response... and the other half looks to the King upon his throne. After all, Thomas has just had the audacity to question the Royal Investigators. They were the ones who had declared the destruction of the Marlow Estate to be a tragic accident. And they were, by all accounts, the King’s men above all else.

Lord Godman even rallies, forcing himself to stand strong in the face of his son’s death. Putting aside what he’s just learned, the older man sneers at Thomas.

“You make up these lies... you admit to murdering my heir... you would even call into question the Crown itself, boy. You foolish brat. Do you really think this will go well for you?”

Thomas just smiles... but stays quiet. After all, his piece has been said. Now it’s time for the King to step back in. Which he does, shattering the silence a moment later as his regal voice rings out through the hall.

“The Crown does not feel questioned. Rather, the Crown finds itself with more questions than ever before.”

Dead silence. Half the room forgets how to breathe. Lord Godman looks an entertaining mix of outraged and bewildered. His hands curl into fists at his sides as he stares at the King, wide-eyed.

“... What? You would question your own investigators? You would believe this boy’s inane ramblings over your own men?”

But King Ashwood remains entirely composed, his eyes narrowed as he stares right back at Lord Godman from across the hall.

“My men? Or yours, Solomon?”

Before the Godman Patriarch can respond, Spymaster Qyvern appears in a burst of shadow beside the King’s throne. His sudden arrival causes a faint stir among the crowd of courtiers, but most of them remain silent and still. Perhaps the smartest among them are finally realizing what’s happening here today. This is no normal court session. This is a performance and a reckoning, all wrapped up in one.

The Spymaster holds out a sheaf of parchments to the King who takes them and looks them over for a moment, pretending to peruse them. Finally, he looks to Lord Godman again and waves the documents.

“Tell me why my men found letters written in the language of Dark Elves in your estate, Lord Godman. Tell me why these letters, when translated, speak of treason against not just this Crown, but the entire Kingdom and all of humanity. Tell me why evidence of every single crime that Thomas Marlow would lay at your feet is right here in these documents.”

All eyes in the hall go to Solomon Godman now. The attention of the entire court is on the man as he stands there, ashen faced and shaking. Though he’s not shaking with fear... not entirely. Rather, there’s a fury there, an anger that builds and builds.

“You... forgeries... all of those are mere forgeries. I do not even speak Dark Elf, let alone have the capacity to read or write in it.”

The King tilts his head to the side curiously.

“Oh? Is that so? And yet, your so-called Specialist, the one who you’ve been sending to keep my daughter bedridden and on the brink of death all this time... is a Dark Elf, is he not?”

Lord Godman shakes with fury, grinding his teeth together audibly.

“That Specialist was helping your daughter survive, Vincent! You would spit on all of the aid House Godman has given to your family, nay to this Kingdom over the years?! All to side with this boy?!”

“Aid? Assistance? These letters *do* go on you know. They detail your plans from start to finish. Or do you really think you can stand there acting like you and House Godman aren’t responsible for the Rotlands? For my daughter’s illness? For *everything*?!”

“Slander! All of it! You have been taken in by this boy and his Dark Elf Servant! No... more than that... you’re using them, aren’t you?!”

Ah and here it was. Thomas watches on as Lord Godman decides in that moment to change tracks. The moment where he realizes that there’s no convincing the King to back down... and so he goes from trying to convince the King... to trying to convince the audience.

“The Crown is afraid of House Godman’s power! Afraid of our influence! Have you fabricated all of this, merely to see us torn down?!”

Everyone watches on as spittle flies from Solomon Godman’s lips, his face a dark red now in rage. He snarls at the King... but King Ashwood does not take the bait. He does not bark back; he does not grow angry. He simply sits upon his throne and watches Lord Godman make a fool of himself.

With Princess Anna sat next to him, both of them staring down at Solomon Godman with pitiless gazes, it makes for quite the impressive sight. Until finally, the Godman Patriarch whirls on the crowd.

“And you! All of you! Will you just watch as this farce is carried out and called justice?! House Godman has given everything to this Kingdom! We were the ones who discovered a way to hold back the Rotlands! We were the ones who supplied a method for the Princess to survive her disease... a disease her own bleeding heart gave her! And now we are being accused of perpetrating all of it! Does that sound right to any of you?! Does that sound just?!”

Some uncomfortable shifting from the crowd. Thomas watches them carefully, keeping a close eye on those who had revealed themselves to be obvious allies of House Godman earlier. None seem to quite know what to do... though some might have spoken up if this were the end of it.

Fortunately... the King is not done.

“And what of this?”

All eyes swivel back to the King upon his throne as he holds aloft the communication orb taken from Lord Godman’s safe. As soon as he sees it, the Godman Patriarch freezes up again, his eyes widening and then narrowing in disbelief.

“... I don’t know what that is.”

Smiling thinly, the King shakes his head.

“Your lies have caught up with you, Solomon. You and I both know what this is... it is one of the Dark Elves’ communication orbs. A magical device capable of connecting individuals across great distances. Much like our Master Tomes... but even more advanced. I wonder... if I were to place a call, who would pick up? And what would they have to say about you?”

Shrugging dismissively, Lord Godman sneers.

“How should I know? I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

But King Ashwood is undeterred. He simply smiles and holds the communication orb aloft.

“Very well then. I suppose we’ll have to find out.”

Sevvi had taught the King how to place a call mere hours before of course. Perhaps that’s why Lord Godman was willing to continue his boldfaced lies for

so long... because he didn't think the King would know how to activate the artifact.

But as the King's hands move into the proper positions and he prepares to call whoever is on the other end, Thomas watches Solomon Godman's eyes widen in disbelief and shock... before finally, the Noble Lord takes a step forward, crying out.

“ENOUGH!”

The King pauses and looks up from the orb as everyone else once again turns their attention to Lord Godman. The older man seethes.

“You want the truth?! You can't handle the truth! None of you can! This entire Kingdom was a decrepit, over bloated FOSSIL before I and my allies came along! The old nobility were nothing but wastes of space, draining our resources, making nothing of note while we merchants provided the commerce and promoted all of the *real* growth in this Kingdom!”

He has the undivided attention of everyone in the hall now, even as he unravels right before their eyes.

“The Dark Elves provided a way by which we could trim this Kingdom down! We used Rot to cleanse the rot within the nobility, to remove those who had long stopped being anything but drains on our society! You think I'm ashamed of the things I've done? No, I'm not ashamed! I'm proud! Everything I've done has been for the betterment of this Kingdom! Everything has happened for a *reason!*”

Sitting back in his throne, King Ashwood lets out a low sigh, his tone tinged with disbelief.

“... You truly believe that you mad fool.”

A feral grin spreads across Lord Godman's face.

“I do! And you... you and your family have ruled this Kingdom long enough! All of the excesses, all of the bloat... it was seen on YOUR watch. Out with the old, in with the new!”

The only problem is... Thomas doesn't think Lord Godman is nearly as defeated as he should be. The man... the man doesn't look as finished as he should. And indeed, as he says the word 'new!', he reaches under his shirt and yanks out a necklace that ends in a strange bauble.

“You wish to meet the one on the other end of that connection, Your Majesty?! ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE YOU!”

Belatedly, Thomas tries to burst forward and stop him. He closes the distance between himself and Lord Godman in the blink of an eye, moving so fast that the older man actually takes a step back in instinctive fright. Unfortunately, Solomon Godman already has his hands on the bauble... and is twisting it open even before he takes that step backwards.

Thomas arrives just in time for everything to go to shit and the curved blade of a Dark Elf to suddenly be mere centimeters from his throat, bringing him to a stop mere feet away from Lord Godman... even as dozens of fully armored, fully armed Dark Elves shadow step into the throne room as one unit.

Shit.

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A/N: Dun dun duuuuuun.

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!