

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

A/N: Sevvie throws her weight around some more.

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“Then for the crime of raising arms against a member of the Royal House of Vairath, I sentence you to death.”

Thomas tenses up as that particularly inflammatory statement leaves Sevvie’s lips. His entire body thrums as he anticipates an immediate turn to violence. Except... no. Sevvie speaks the words but she does not follow them up with action. Nor does Graelo lunge forward or make another attempt on their lives either.

Instead, the Dark Elf male’s red eyes widen and his jaw clenches, his entire body stiffening up like a board.

“... Is this truly the route you wish to go down, Fourth Princess? First Princess will not be happy with you.”

First Princess? Not the Queen? Thomas’ confusion takes a backseat to Sevvie letting out another haughty sniff.

“What takes place between my sister and I is not for the likes of you to speculate on. You made an attempt on my life Graelo. The life of a Princess of House Vairath. For that, there can be only one punishment.”

Thomas watches on, fascinated, as Graelo slowly nods and draws a fresh blade into his hand.

“Indeed. Death. Good luck, Fourth Princess.”

Just when Thomas is thinking that now is the time when their fight will finally begin... Graelo brings the blade up and slams it into his chest, piercing his own

armor and impaling himself in the heart right there on the spot. A trickle of blood leaves his lips... before he starts to fall.

Thomas' eyes bulge out of his skull even as Sevv shadow steps across the room and catches the falling corpse before it can fully collapse to the floor and make too much noise. She leaves the communication orb on Lord Godman's desk in the process, prompting Thomas to reach forward and steady it with one hand before it can roll off.

He's still in a state of shock though even as he does that, staring in disbelief at the Dark Elf that had just killed himself in front of them after threatening them mere moments before. That was... he didn't even really know what that was. He'd been expecting a fight for their lives truth be told, one that would probably draw in more of House Godman's men and blow their cover. He'd been expecting the toughest battle he'd had since arriving in the Capital.

Instead... he gets Sevv sniffing as she holds Graelo's body aloft and gently closes his eyelids with her fingers.

"I'm sorry..."

Holding the communication orb, Thomas slowly approaches and crouches down. Sevv looks distraught... but this isn't the time or place for them to talk about this.

"Take the communication orb. I'll carry his body. We have to go, Sevv."

It takes a moment for the female Dark Elf to respond... but when she does, she simply nods and does as she's told, taking the orb from his hands and leaving him to wrap his arms around Graelo's body. The armor is currently collecting the blood from his chest, so they aren't leaving any evidence of the death as they slip out of Lord Godman's office once more and back the way they came.

Making it back onto the roof while carrying a dead body isn't easy, necessarily... but Thomas gets it done. Once they're up there, they trade 'objects' again. Fortunately a corpse is a lot easier for Sevv to take through shadow than

another living being. She drags Graelo with her to the original rooftop they'd scaled their way up to first and then comes back to do the shadow step with Thomas.

As Sevvī takes a moment to recover from the latter trip, Thomas looks down at Graelo's face, the Dark Elf male looking almost peaceful in death after Sevvī had closed his eyes.

Glancing over to her, Thomas frowns.

"How do you want to deal with the body, Sevvī?"

Sevvī flinches, not able to so much as look at Graelo's corpse at this point.

"... It doesn't matter."

But Thomas isn't buying it. He reaches over and grabs her by the shoulder, forcing her to look at him at the very least. Once he has eye contact, he slowly shakes his head.

"It does matter. It matters to you. Somehow, some way, it matters to you. So tell me what we should do with the body... and we'll do it. No matter what it takes."

Sevvī's mouth opens and closes as she stares at him in shock for a long moment, her red eyes glistening with unshed tears. Finally, she looks down at Graelo's face... and then out across the city's rooftops, towards the distance where a forest lies.

"... T-The forest... he should be buried... in the forest."

Thomas nods and lets go of Sevvī's shoulder, handing her the communication orb and swapping burdens once more as he lifts Graelo onto his shoulders.

"Then the forest is where we will go."

It's not exactly easy, sneaking out of the city with a body. But... it's not impossibly difficult either. Meanwhile, behind them there is no sounding of alarms from the Godman Estate. By all rights, they've managed to get away clean. They definitely shouldn't have been able to... the moment that Graelo caught them, it should have been a fighting retreat that would have drawn in others and left Thomas and Sevvī incredibly outnumbered.

That it hadn't been... well, Thomas wasn't going to demand answers from Sevvī right now. Not when she was clearly feeling a certain sort of way about what had just happened.

As soon as they reach the forest, a far cry from the Darkwoods Sevvī had come from but a collection of trees all the same, Sevvī drags them in just past the canopy and drops to the ground. She gestures for Thomas to set Graelo down and once he's laid out the Dark Elf male's body, she places her hands on it.

Those hands become wreathed in the same shadow that she'd used to pilfer the Godman Safe without them actually having to break into it and that shadow soon covers every inch of Graelo... after which, his body slowly sinks into the forest floor with Sevvī's hands following after him.

"From shadow we come... to shadow we return."

The disowned Princess' voice is exceedingly bitter as she buries Graelo without them having to dig a single inch of dirt up. Thomas watches quietly, still not entirely sure what to say even once Sevvī is done. She sinks her arms all the way up to the shoulder before withdrawing them from the ground. At which point, she just sits back on her heels, kneeling there and staring at where Graelo had been in silence.

That silence drags on for minutes before Sevvī finally breaks it.

"He was over six hundred years old."

Thomas straightens, listening carefully as Sevvī continues on.

“He was tasked with teaching me and my sisters how to fight. He had done so for generations at our mother’s behest. But when my eldest living sister, Synestra rose to the position of First Princess, she was given a single boon from our mother. Anything she could possibly want. She chose Graelo.”

Sevvi lets out a laugh that has no humor in it.

“We were all so furious. Graelo was all of ours... a communal toy that could never break and could never lose, that we could throw ourselves at and sharpen our skills against whenever we wanted. Synestra had clearly taken him in order to prevent any from growing as strong as her... or at least, that’s what we whispered to one another, bitter and angry at her choice.”

After a moment, Sevvi offers a half shrug.

“I wonder now, after everything, if she had other motives. Maybe she just liked him. Maybe she just wanted to give him a chance to stop having to deal with us foolish brats day after day.”

Staring down at her hands, open with the palms facing upwards, Sevvi slowly curls them into fists.

“... It is a crime punishable by death to try to kill a member of House Vairath. Even by accident, even if you do not know who you are attacking. Graelo’s loyalty to my family has never been in doubt... and he knew that his life was in my hands from the moment he threw that blade and realized who I was. Only... it wasn’t.”

Thomas grimaces, understanding dawning on him.

“It was all a lie. He didn’t know you’d been disowned by your mother.”

Nodding, Sevvi’s lips curl into a mirthless smile.

“He did not. I used that ignorance against him. I made him kill himself for his trespass when by all rights I should have let him live and taken the issue up with

my sister instead. Under normal circumstances, I would have gotten some serious concessions from Synestra over her retainer making a failed attempt on my life.”

But these weren't normal circumstances because Sevvī wasn't a member of House Vairath anymore. As her mother had said, she was Sevinarya No Name now... so the authority she'd exercised over Graelo just then... it hadn't existed.

“If I hadn't done it, he would have killed you and captured me. I'm certain of that.”

Thomas grimaces harder at that. He likes to think he could have maybe come out on top if it really came down to it. Relentless Potential and all that. But an over six hundred year old warrior who had spent centuries training Dark Elf Princesses like Sevvī up to her current skill level?

... Yeah, probably not. And even if he had been able to overcome Graelo like everything else, it still would have caused a mess. Everything would have gotten very loud when the whole point of sending him and Sevvī in tonight was to try and keep things quiet.

Reaching out, Thomas places a hand atop Sevvī's head. Her long elven ears perk up for a moment before drooping again, not even this much enough to bring her out of her dark mood.

“You did well tonight, Sevvī. You did what you had to. Thank you.”

She shifts for a moment before slowly nodding. Then, she looks down at the communication orb with a frown. For a moment, Thomas fears she's going to try to call whoever is on the other end of it... but instead she sets it down on the ground and looks to him.

“The letters... please allow me to read them more closely before return to the Palace, my lord.”

They have time. The King is expecting them back of course, but the sun isn't rising for a while yet. Hours, really. Thomas slowly nods and gives the letters to Sevvī, who takes them and unfolds them so she can begin reading through them.

Before, back in Lord Godman's office, she'd simply skimmed. Thomas imagined she'd been looking for key words back there, hunting for the proof of Dark Elf involvement that they'd been looking for. Now though, she reads every word. Thomas sits quietly with her as she does so, waiting patiently for her to tell him what she learns.

Finally, Sevvī lets out a shuddering, rattling breath.

"It... it is all here. These letters are spread across decades. Everything Solomon Godman did... was at the behest of the sender. From creating the Rotlands to developing the countermeasures... and even giving the human princess a concentrated dose of Rot to cause her to succumb to Rot Lung faster than normal."

Thomas' jaw clenches at that. He'd sort of already known by this point, but it's another thing to be told it outright by Sevvī. Only, she's not done.

"It wasn't my mother though. The Queen is nowhere in these letters. I don't know if she even knows what's been going on here. This was all... my sister."

This too Thomas had already come to suspect. When Graelo had mentioned the First Princess, when Sevvī had told that story just a little while ago. It was rather obvious given the context clues he had available to him.

"Synestra? The 'First Princess'?"

Sevvī nods solemnly.

"She's behind it all. The Rotlands, the destabilization of this Kingdom, all of it. Reading between the lines, she sent Graelo both to help Solomon Godman put a leash on your King... as well as to keep an eye on Solomon Godman himself.

He thinks he'll be King when all is said and done... but knowing my sister, I doubt she'll let any human wear a crown once she has this kingdom under her control."

Thomas narrows his eyes thoughtfully at that. He's not surprised by the idea that Lord Godman is just a patsy who doesn't know it. That the man could be blinded to his own status as a pawn wasn't all that shocking. However, there's something about the words Sevvie is using...

"You're talking like it's a foregone conclusion, Sevvie. Like her victory is already carved in stone."

Sevvie grimaces and shakes her head.

"... There is a reason Synestra rose to the position of First Princess. She does not fail. She has never lost in her entire life. I... we would have a better shot at winning if it really were my mother behind this, because then we might be able to drag things out long enough for her to get bored and move on to something else. Synestra is different though. Synestra doesn't stop. Not until she's finished."

Well, that was certainly a terrifying thing to hear. For now though... Thomas just sighs.

"We can discuss this more later. For now, we need to get back to the Palace and present this evidence to the King. He and his Spymaster can decide what they want to do with it next. As far as I'm concerned, we've done our part."

Sevvie nods and rises to her feet, still looking a little lost and listless. Before they start moving, Thomas reaches over and grabs her, pulling her into a crushing hug that shocks her. She stiffens initially, before collapsing into his arms and letting out a single sob.

"I'm sorry for your loss, Sevvie. Thank you for everything you've done for me."

They're hardly good enough words to make up for it all, but Sevvie does seem to draw strength from them at least, holding her head a little higher as they head back to the city and sneak back in before making their way to the Palace.

Thomas is serious about what he said too. They'll tell the King everything they learned of course... but this is going to be King Ashwood and Spymaster Qyvern's mess to clean up from here on out. Hopefully they're up to the task.

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A/N: Heavy chapter...

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!