

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

**A/N: Lord Godman is having a bad couple of days...**

**-x-X-x-**

A pen scratches at parchment upon a well-appointed desk made of a dark black wood. Until...

“My Lord, there is... news.”

The servant's tone makes it clear he's not sure whether it's good news or bad news. Which inevitably means it can only be bad, more than anything. The scratching stops and Lord Solomon Godman lifts his head from his work, his gaze piercing right through the man at the door to his office.

“Tell me.”

Sweating slightly, the servant swallows nervously.

“We have... acquired the cooperation of those working at Thomas Marlow's Inn last night. Their... testimony has been arranged. They are ready to tell the Royal Investigators that he slaughtered his way through our men, leaving behind a bloody massacre in the foyer of the lobby. Those who refused to do so were properly silenced as well.”

There's a pause as the servant fidgets and squirms. Lord Godman's eyes narrow, his tone becoming dangerous.

“And?”

“... We've hit a bit of a snag coming from the other direction, Lord Godman. By the time we were able to make the proper arrangements... Thomas Marlow's rooms had already been cleaned out. His belongings were transferred elsewhere. Searching for where took longer than I would have hoped, but I was

finally able to uncover what happened. The Royal Guard came to bring the Marlow Heir's things to the Palace... by orders of the King. As such, our allies among the Royal Investigators are now leery of making any sort of move at this time!"

S-SNAP!

The pen breaks in two in Lord Godman's hand, even as his jaw clenches so hard that a vein stands out on his neck. The servant cuts himself off and goes absolutely still, standing there like a wide eyed prey animal as the House Godman Patriarch stews in his fury, trembling with anger.

Eventually, Lord Godman seems to calm. He sets the remains of the pen down on the desk and grabs a handkerchief to begin cleaning the ink from his hand. As he does so, he sits back in his chair and lets out a heavy sigh.

"So the King tugs at his leash. How infuriatingly expected of him."

"A-Ahem... there is more, my Lord."

"... Go on."

"It's been fully confirmed at this point. Thomas Marlow does travel with a female Dark Elf in maid's clothing. She was seen being escorted alongside him and the rest of his retinue to the Palace earlier today."

Lord Godman's nostrils flare, though he does not grow as angry as he did before. Instead, his rage becomes cold, his tone icy and sharp.

"Bring me our... guest. Immediately."

The servant bows deeply and retreats hastily, clearly all too happy to flee and do as he's been bidden. By the time he returns, Lord Godman has finished cleaning himself up and is sitting still, one hand on the edge of the desk and the other fiddling with an ornament draped around his neck.

“Here he is, Your Lordship.”

The servant bows again as he guides the other man into the room. Deep within House Godman’s estate as they currently are, the man does not wear his usual disguise... and so his pitch black skin and long dark ears are on complete display, as are his glowing red eyes.

The Dark Elf male steps into the office with none of the fear that the servant shows, moving with a casual languidness. He crosses the room and comes to a stop in front of Lord Godman’s desk, still entirely at ease. Looking down at the seated man, his red eyes bore into Lord Solomon Godman’s without an ounce of worry.

“Yes?”

His drawled tone makes the Godman Lord’s jaw tick, but he remains calm all the same, even as the servant who escorted the Dark Elf to the office takes that moment to retreat.

“... One of your kin has been sighted in the city. A female Dark Elf, here in the Capital.”

The Dark Elf tilts his head to the side.

“And?”

Grinding his teeth, Solomon Godman slams his hands down on the desk as he rises to his feet, a snarl in his voice.

“You and I both know that the Ashwood’s lapdog has uncovered your true nature! They know that you’re a Dark Elf at this point! This newcomer has been brought to the Palace... if the King can use her to treat his daughter’s illness rather than being forced to rely on us, then our greatest leverage over the throne will be gone!”

Far from being rendered speechless by Lord Godman's anger or rearing back in fear... the Dark Elf sneers.

"Your lack of faith in our Mistress disturbs me."

The hand Lord Godman has fiddling with his necklace goes still at that, his eyes narrowing into slits.

"Your Mistress. Not mine. We are partners, her and I. Do not forget that, *elf*."

The male Dark Elf sniffs haughtily but does not comment, seeming to judge that unworthy of dignifying with a response. After a short stare down, Solomon Godman is first to 'blink' so to speak, sitting back down in his chair with a heavy sigh.

"You aren't even slightly worried by this development? We needed more time, did we not? If the King judges that your services are no longer needed, then he and his forces could move against my House within days."

The Dark Elf just scoffs.

"You fret over nothing. Tell me of this female Dark Elf. Where did she come from? Why is she here?"

Grimacing, Lord Godman shifts in his chair.

"... She arrived alongside the Heir to House Marlow just yesterday."

"Ah. Another of your failures."

That almost brings Solomon Godman back out of his chair. His nostrils flare like an angry bull as his face reddens.

"Do not start with that. My son is still missing and that boy is the only one who might know where he is. He should already be in my custody, but skilled men are hard to come by these days. In no small part due to the actions your

Mistress has had me taking. Actions that have left the masses to fear my House, but those with true power to treat us all the more derisively.”

Again, the Dark Elf doesn't bother dignifying Lord Godman's complaints with a response. Instead, he focuses them back on the previous topic of conversation.

“So this female arrived with the boy. What else? What was her description?”

“... She was reportedly clad in servant's attire. No more than an exotic maid, that was the description given.”

The male Dark Elf's brow furrows for a moment... before he lets out a laugh.

“Hah! You truly are fretting over nothing then!”

Lord Godman bristles, but his curiosity overrides his pride.

“What do you mean?”

“Do you think every one of my kind is capable of curing Rot Lung? Do you think the vast majority of Dark Elves know a single thing about the Rotlands? Of course not. For this female to be a threat to my Mistress' plans, she would have to be Royalty... and not Princess would ever lower themselves to serve a human as their maid.”

Solomon Godman's face begins to smooth out as understanding dawns.

“So then...”

Smirking now, the Dark Elf standing on the other side of the desk nods.

“Yes. Whoever this female is, she won't be able to help your King anyways. If nothing, it is likely once he discovers this, he will be even less inclined to protect the boy from you as well. We need only wait and see what form his disappointment takes. You may then take advantage of the results at your leisure.”

Slowly relaxing now, Lord Godman lets out a relieved sigh.

“Well then. That *is* good news. Perhaps things aren’t as bad as I initially believed them to be. Your next visit to the Palace is at the end of this week, yes?”

“Mm, indeed.”

“Good. It will be interesting to see if the King has found a new level of despair to fall into by the time you arrive once more.”

The Dark Elf chuckles rather sadistically in response to that, prompting a vicious grin from Lord Godman. It would seem everything was still going to plan...

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Anna Ashwood, Princess of the Kingdom, slowly flutters her eyes open. She’s groggy as she wakes up, feeling like she’s been asleep for a long, long time. Definitely longer than normal. A groan leaves the blonde’s lips, only to hear her father call her name and his familiar hand in her own, gripping tightly.

“Anna! Anna, can you hear me?”

It takes a moment for her to focus, but eventually Anna manages it, looking over to see her father, his eyes shining bright with worry and hope alike as he sits by her bedside.

“F-Father? I...”

That’s as far as she gets before she feels it... her entire body suddenly spasms as she retches. Before she can even begin to vomit however, there’s a hand suddenly in her hair, firmly guiding her head to a waiting bucket. Black sludge explodes out of her mouth a moment later, coming in truly massive amounts.

It feels momentarily as if she might die vomiting, that's how bad it is. Her entire body rebels against its existence, tears streaming down her cheeks as her throat is rend asunder.

And then... it's over. Finally, it's over. It abates suddenly, though the pain remains as she heaves for breath, scarcely able to believe what she'd just experienced. Was that... Rot Lung?

She'd witnessed it more than enough in her work. A Princess of the Kingdom should forever be looking to help her people... and those afflicted by Rot Lung were some of the most sorry, downtrodden in the entire Kingdom. Doing her part to assist them had made her feel better about the sheer amount of opulence her life consisted of.

But seeing those who had Rot Lung was far different from having it herself. And as she looks back to her last memories before waking up like this, she realizes... that's what must have happened. She'd fallen so ill, so fast that she'd barely been able to have a conversation with her father before she was just... gone.

The bucket is pulled away by the person who had held her hair, a self-satisfied Dark Elf in a maid uniform that has Anna staring in disbelief as she smugly sets the bucket full of corrupted black gunk aside.

"Please Anna, drink this."

Only her father's voice sees the Princess finally dragging her attention away from the Dark Elf to see him holding a rejuvenation potion. Taking it from his hands, she downs the healing draught and shivers as she feels its warmth feeling her person. After that, her father hands her a clean cup of water, which she also guzzles down.

"That was the final session. She is cured of the disease and should recover normally now."

The Dark Elf's voice causes Anna's head to swing back around as she stares some more at the other woman. Then, the words properly process and her eyes widen in disbelief.

"Wha- we can cure Rot Lung now?!"

Rather than answer her, the Dark Elf merely looks at her for a moment before leaving her side and moving to the end of the bed... where a young man is standing, arms crossed over his chest. Anna stares at the two of them until her father once again pulls her attention back to him.

"Oh my dear daughter... my darling baby girl..."

Anna flushes as her father suddenly wraps her in his arms, dragging her into a big hug. She can't help but feel a little embarrassed given they have an audience... but at the same time, she understands. Her mother died giving birth to her and her father never bothered to remarry. She isn't just the Princess, she's his Heir. But more than that... Anna knows that her father loves her as a daughter most of all. He always has.

Still, she's never much appreciated being smothered, as he should well know. After a bit, she lightly smacks her father's back and pulls herself away until he finally lets her go.

Before she can ask what's going on though, her father turns away from her, wiping his eyes clean as he gives the two at the end of the bed his attention.

"Thank you, Thomas Marlow. You have given my daughter back to me... I will repay you for this, I swear it."

Anna blinks in confusion, wondering what the man had done. Thomas Marlow though... that name was familiar. Wasn't that the name of House Marlow's black sheep? That was the second son who everyone said would never amount to anything, right? He was surprisingly handsome... nobody had ever mentioned that in the stories she'd heard...

“I’ll hold you to that, Your Majesty. Now that your daughter is awake, I assume you have no more objections to Sevv and I making a move on the Godman Estate?”

What? Anna looks on bewildered, even as her father’s gaze sharpens and he goes from concerned father to regal King in a second.

“No... go with my leave. Find whatever evidence you can of House Godman’s crimes. Bring it to me and we shall see them and their conspirators brought to justice at long last.”

Anna watches on bewildered as Thomas Marlow merely nods his head rather than bowing or anything else more respectful to his King. But then, just as she’s wondering about that, her father continues.

“I will accept your oath of fealty once House Godman is properly dealt with. You will be given complete control over all of House Marlow’s assets as it’s new Lord. At which point, I expect you will prioritize production regarding the replacements of their white lanterns above all else.”

Thomas Marlow just nods.

“With the Crown’s assistance, I will of course be happy to make that a priority. We’ll take our leave for now, Your Majesty.”

“Go with my blessing.”

Just like that, the handsome man and his Dark Elf maid are gone. Anna stares after them, slack jawed and in utter disbelief. It had all happened so fast, with much of what they’d talked about going right over her head.

But enough hadn’t that Anna’s curiosity was more than piqued... something her father notices when he finally turns back to look at her, only to flinch at the blazing intensity of her eyes. Smiling sweetly, Anna grips her father’s hand so he can’t run away.

“Father. It sounds like you have a *lot* to tell me about what happened while I was asleep.”

“Ah... yes my daughter. Yes, I do.”

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**A/N: Poor Anna really needs to be caught up. Meanwhile, Thomas and Sevvie are finally allowed to Solid Snake this shit. King didn't want to risk Sevvie until his daughter was awake again and fully cured~**

**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!**