

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

A/N: Convincing everyone to go along with The Plan™.

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“You can’t possibly be serious. You want us to overturn centuries of tradition?!”

Camilla sighs, shaking her head and wishing not for the first time that she could have had this meeting with Lord Commander Carlile *alone*. But alas, that was apparently a step too far even for the loyal knight of their new King. In the end, she’d found herself sharing the Lord Commander’s office with not just him... but also Sir Alonses.

And of course Alonses was proving to be something of an obstacle to her Master’s plans. But in the end, she didn’t have to convince him of anything. She just had to convince the Lord Commander. So far though, the Grand Master of their Order had been rather silent, even as Alonses had done the protesting and arguing for him.

Staring directly at Lord Commander Carlile, Camilla continues to make her appeal directly to the older knight.

“I want us to survive, Grand Master. And so does the King. King Ashwood-Marlow is a martial king, a warrior in his own right. He has every intention of seeing us through the upcoming war with the Dark Elves intact... but he can’t do it if we’re too busy bickering amongst ourselves to prepare properly.”

Alonses scoffs, shaking his head.

“You doubt our zeal, Camilla? We are preparing properly. The Order will stand with the Kingdom’s army when the time comes, just as we always have. We’ll fight the Dark Elves back with every fiber of our being. And we’ll do it by relying on our own traditions and training... not some untested idea from an equally untested King.”

Camilla bristles. That's the most insulting Alonses has gotten so far. And while it might still not be too far over the line, she can't find it in herself to abide by his words any longer. Finally turning to face him directly, she lets her nostrils flare, showing her displeasure.

"Your King is by no means 'untested'. He has proven himself in battle time and time again. First in Last Hope and then in the throne room. Our Queen only still lives because of his valor that day. In fact, everyone in the throne room owes their lives to him. I saw with my own two eyes the effect his presence had on the battle. Without him, we would all have died."

Of course, neither Alonses nor the Grand Master were actually in the hall that day to see for themselves. If they were, or at the very least if Lord Commander Carlile had been there, she doubts this conversation would even be necessary. But no, the man was busy... too busy to attend a seemingly unimportant swearing of a new Lord's oath. Meanwhile, Alonses' reasons for not attending were his own.

Regardless, Camilla isn't that surprised when Alonses huffs.

"I respect your loyalty to your Master, Camilla. You certainly backed the right Lord as you can now call yourself a Royal Knight. But please, here in this office... there's no reason to embellish the truth. Our King is just that... a King. He is no knight. He might know how to wield a weapon, but he knows nothing of our ways."

Alright, that's it.

"Your King has already bested you in the training yard once, Sir Alonses. Lest you forget."

The overly proud man stiffens at that, his own nostrils flaring and his eyes narrowing as he glares at her for the reminder.

"That spar lasted less than a minute. It was no real fight."

Camilla arches a brow.

“And our own spar afterwards? Would you say I did not properly defeat you?”

Alonses straightens up to his full height and for a moment Camilla honestly thinks he might try and claim her victory meant nothing, making excuses for why things didn't go his way. But... to his credit, he meets her eyes and shakes his head.

“No. You won our bout. It was hard fought and the first time you've ever bested me in combat, but nevertheless... you won.”

Camilla resists the urge to scoff at the way he still seeks to protect his own wounded pride, even in admitting his defeat. It had not actually been particularly hard fought for her. But she doesn't say as much. Instead, she focuses on the other part of what he's said.

“Exactly right. It was the first time I've ever bested you in combat.”

A flicker of confusion enters Alonses' eyes. Clearly he hadn't expected her to bring up her long losing streak against him.

“We've known each other since we were mere squires. Never once have I been able to beat you before this last spar. Never once have I managed to overcome you.”

Hearing her say it out loud... one might think it would make Alonses preen with pride. But perhaps he suspects something is amiss, because he actually squirms at how she talks down to herself.

“That is not necessarily a mark against your skill, Dame Camilla. You are still a capable warrior in your own right. I simply had the advantage over you...”

But Camilla shakes her head.

"That is not my point, Sir Alonses. Rather... I only managed to beat you in our latest bout *because* of King Thomas' training."

Her words land like a leaden weight in the room. Silence falls as Alonses finally catches on to what she's saying and is rendered somewhat speechless. Camilla takes the opportunity to focus her attention back on the Grand Master, staring Lord Commander Carlile right in the eye as he remains seated behind his desk, still as a statue.

"King Thomas learned how to fight in Last Hope faster than I've ever seen anyone else. He is a true prodigy, able to pick up any weapon he desires within days."

Alonses lets out a disbelieving scoff, but Camilla continues on.

"Initially, I was his better. Of course I was. He was an untrained noble brat and I was a Knight Bachelorette of the Order of the Saints. However... it only took him two months to surpass me in skill."

Now Alonses chokes on his own spit. Camilla once again ignores him in favor of speaking directly to the Lord Commander.

"After he surpassed me, I found myself despondent for a time. What use is a knight to her Lord if he is better at her in the very purpose she is supposed to be fulfilling for him? But it didn't stop there. King Thomas did not set me aside or forget about me. He continued our training... and also trained the people of Last Hope when dangers from the Darkwoods threatened their homes."

She's really building up to something here. She can feel it. Camilla continues on, pride swelling in her chest.

"His training worked. The people of Last Hope became better fighters in mere weeks. And I... well, I've become capable enough that my fellow knight and longtime rival is no longer a match for me."

As expected, this causes Alonses to break his silence, his face going red.

“Now see here-!”

However, as Camilla had hoped... it also finally brings the Grand Master into the conversation. Lord Commander Alfred Carlile raises his hand and Alonses immediately falls silent, the nonverbal command cutting him off in an instant.

Staring her right in the eye, Alfred Carlile frowns.

“You swear by these training methods, then? You swear by the King specifically? I must admit... when I first heard that the King was offering training to every warrior who intended to defend against the Dark Elf attack, I found it laudable... but also laughable. A stunt, at most.”

Camilla grimaces but inclines her head.

“I know sir. That’s exactly why the King asked me to speak with you. His training will save lives and make warriors out of even the weakest of men. But it will make *legends* out of our knights. We need to come together at this time. And the King has a way for us to do that... so long as we follow his lead.”

Of course, what she doesn’t say is that the Order of the Saints provides legitimacy to Thomas’ directives and plans. Sure, he’s the King now. And Camilla is very proud of that fact, don’t get her wrong. However, it’s like Alonses said... most people think he’s untested. And while everyone is willing to put aside their differences and band together to survive the Dark Elves, that doesn’t mean they’re all as willing to fall in line.

No, while Camilla is tangentially aware of certain dissidents and malcontents being dealt with behind the scenes, there are also the people who can’t be ‘handled’ in such a way... people like her people in the Order, who aren’t actually traitorous or treasonous, but are convinced that their way is better.

“I’m not the only member of the Order who survived the throne room. Surely you’ve spoken to them about what they saw that day. You must know that King Thomas fought and killed at least a dozen Dark Elves by himself. Without armor,

with a blade he had to take from one of his adversaries. He was grievously wounded in the process, but he survived and won every fight they gave him.”

The fact is, if the Citadel falls in line, everyone else will as well. If the Order sends knights to learn from Thomas like they’re hoping they will, then so many more will also show up to learn from him. And that will, in turn, help the Kingdom prepare so much more for the inevitable war about to show up on their doorstep.

“Hmph... I still say the stories are overblown.”

Camilla looks over to Alonses with an angry scowl, ready to snap at him to shut up or duel her if he’s going to continue doubting her and her liege’s honor. But before she can speak, he catches her entirely off guard.

“However... you speak the truth about the change in your skill. If you truly grew so much in those months in Last Hope because of the King’s training... then perhaps there’s something to it after all.

Camilla’s eyes widen, her jaw dropping open as... Alonses takes her side? Was he seriously admitting he was wrong and backing her up now?! That was... she wasn’t sure how to feel about that. But of course, just as she had thought back at the start of this meeting, it’s not Alonses who she has to convince.

Giving the man an appreciative nod at his support all the same, Camilla turns her eyes back to the Lord Commander, watching him carefully. He sits quietly once more, pondering the situation. Finally though... he nods.

“Aye. The Order will join the King’s training efforts. We shall see what comes of it. If there are to be results, we should see them relatively quickly, no?”

Camilla nearly falters now that she actually has agreement, a momentary lapse of trepidation and fear trying to take her over. What if they fail? What if Thomas can’t produce results?

But no, she rallies quickly enough that none of her moment of weakness shows on her face. Straightening up, Camilla gives a single, decisive nod, resolute in her certainty.

“Yes Grand Master. You will see. King Thomas is not playing around. He is not treating this as some game or like our knights and soldiers are mere toys. This is as serious as it gets... the Dark Elf Princess intends to finish what she started with the Rotlands and kill us all. We have to stop her.”

Lord Commander Carlile grunts.

“On that we are in full agreement, Dame Ackinworth. I shall have an edict drafted immediately. Go and tell our King that he should have the first of our knights join in by tomorrow’s lesson. I hope, for all our sakes, that you are correct about his skill.”

Camilla smiles. While she still struggled to have faith in herself sometimes... at least in this case, she’s completely certain.

“He won’t let us down, Grand Master. He would sooner die than fail us.”

And that... that, Camilla believes with all her heart. So much so that it hurts to consider. But it’s fine... she’ll just have to redouble her own training to make sure it doesn’t come to that. She won’t let Thomas die while she still draws breath. No matter what.

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A/N: Camilla is filled with determination!

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!