

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

A/N: Sevvi gets over herself and decides to HALP!

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After wallowing for a bit, Sevvi huffs and rises to her feet. Padding across her room, she bends over and retrieves the stupid communication orb from under the table. Straightening back up, she makes her way back out of her room, pausing when she sees Gruda standing there waiting for her.

Putting the communication orb back on its stand outside of her room with a bit more force than is probably absolutely necessary, Sevvi huffs as she stomps past her right hand woman. Gruda is quick to fall in line beside her.

“Well? How did it go?”

“Fine. It went fine.”

“Really?”

Whirling on the other Dark Elf, Sevvi narrows her eyes.

“What do you want me to say? Hoping I’ll say it went terribly and we’ve been ordered back home?!”

“What?! No, I-!”

“Because from where I’m standing, it certainly feels like that’s what you want, Gruda!”

Her second looks baffled and hurt, but Sevvi knows better than to actually buy it. They’re all raised from birth to be as naturally deceptive and manipulative as possible. She doesn’t believe for a second that Gruda couldn’t manage to hide her true feelings if she really wanted to...

“Don’t put words in my mouth! I never said I wanted to go home! I came out here with you, didn’t I?”

Sevvi growls at that and jabs a finger backwards, towards the communications orb and its pedestal.

“You did. And you brought that damn thing with you! Always ready to call home if the going got too tough, weren’t you?!”

“That... that’s not fair. Your mother is the *Queen*, Sevvi. She brought me into the throne room the week before we were due to depart and made it clear that if I didn’t do as I said, she wouldn’t let us escape in the first place. You know all of this!”

Yes, technically Sevvi did know all of that. Or at least, she’d heard it all before from Gruda. The excuses. The apologies. The lies. She was sick of it, quite frankly. She’d rather spend time watching the Lordling than be around Gruda at this point. The other Dark Elf’s presence made her sick to her stomach.

“Well, whatever outcome you were hoping for, I was telling the truth the first time. The conversation went *fine*. In fact, Mother has seen the value in us remaining out here for a while longer. She’s just as intrigued by the humans as I am and is curious to see if anything can be made of them!”

Gruda purses her lips for a moment before slowly nodding.

“A-Alright. So... what’s next then?”

For a moment, Sevvi wants to scowl. The easy agreement, what seems like an olive branch of trust being extended her way by her second in command... she hates it. Mostly because she doesn’t know if she can trust it or not. Once upon a time, Sevvi would have trusted Gruda with her life, something exceptionally rare in Dark Elf Society, even among seemingly close friends.

But ever since Gruda realized she was an agent for Sevvi's mother, willing or otherwise... that trust has been irreparably broken.

Still, she would be an idiot not to make use of the resources at her disposal. That included Gruda and the rest of the girls. So, putting aside her anger and suspicions, Sevvi sighs.

"What's next is that we escalate things. The humans have been dealing with goblins for years now... and the Lordling and his minder just got done exterminating the only goblin tribe within days of the human town. So the goblins are out. And of course, Liselle will be upset if we try to use her spiders... that just leaves the wolves."

Gruda slowly nods, following along with Sevvi's thought processes. Though, she tilts her head to the side at the end.

"Hasn't the Lordling already killed a bunch of the Dire Wolves though? He's literally wearing their pelts as armor at this point."

Sevvi scoffs, shaking her head.

"He's dealt with some of the smaller packs, sure... and always with his minder at his side. But I'm not talking about the small fry at this point. No, gather the girls together. I've got work for them to do."

A slow, wicked smile spreads across Sevvi's face as she feels a certain anticipation at what comes next. No matter what happened, it was sure to be interesting at the very least.

"We're going to be relocating the King of the Forest."

Her words hang in the air for a long moment, making Sevvi feel suitably dark, mysterious, and foreboding. But then she's reminded that she's not wearing her mask and talking to someone like Eloise right now... no, she's talking with Gruda, who accepts her words with a nod before tilting her head to the side again.

“What about the human girl, by the way? What are you going to do regarding her and her father if the Lordling dies in this test of yours?”

Sevvi frowns. Yes... she hadn't actually intended to help out Mayor Harper. Not originally anyways. After all, if the human man was stupid enough to contract something like Rot Lung, she figured he deserved his fate. Besides, she liked his daughter better. Eloise was cute for a human, and fun as well. She was fierce in a mouse-like manner that Sevvi found absolutely adorable.

But that fierceness had cropped up at the worst time when she refused to satisfy Sevvi's curiosity regarding the Lordling after watching him struggle against the Dire Wolf all those weeks ago. As such, the Dark Elf had had to come up with another way to make sure Eloise stayed in line... namely, through her father.

It wasn't like the magic to cure Eloise's father of Rot Lung was particularly taxing, especially with Sevvi casting such a small amount of it every week. She could probably heal the man within a day and she still wouldn't be more than a little tired.

However, she wasn't going to do that. Not and remove all the leverage she had on Eloise. Then again, if the Lordling did die to the King of the Forest, she would have no reason to continue healing Eloise's father...

“... There's no point in worrying about that now. If such a thing does come to pass, then the girl will simply have to find another way to pay me for her father's treatments, won't she?”

Gruda slowly nods, accepting that wordlessly. Thankfully. Couldn't a woman have a dark, ominous moment without being constantly questioned by her subordinates for once?! Sheesh!

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Life was good, Thomas couldn't help reflecting as he dodges a swing of Camilla's sword and then thrusts out with his spear, forcing her to jerk her body to the side as swiftly as she can in order to move out of its way.

Sure, he'd had a few troubled nights of sleep after getting back from the goblin extermination. Killing the ones that could fight back was one thing but slaying the offspring as well... it had to be done, but that didn't necessarily make it easier.

Still, after receiving heartfelt thanks from pretty much everyone in town, and as days and days passed with no further goblin raids on the edge of Last Hope, Thomas began to feel a bit better about things. It was necessary, at the end of the day. Pest control, just like he'd told himself back at the camp.

And besides, between exterminating the goblins and killing off every pack of Dire Wolves that made a play for his and Camilla's lives, they had really made their trips into the Darkwoods for potion ingredients so much easier. An average expedition on behalf of Arnold took half the time these days, what with Thomas moving even faster than before and the amount of threats in the Darkwoods so diminished.

It was all just kind of nice if he was being honest. Thomas had really found his groove, so to speak.

No more is this clear than as he's fighting Camilla now. Back when they'd started these sparring sessions, Thomas couldn't even really track Camilla's movements. He would try and attack her and she would easily move out of the way before smacking him down into the dirt faster than he could react.

But now, all these weeks later, almost two months after... Thomas could keep up with the swordswoman. He could track the Knight Bachelorette's movements, react to them, and even respond to them. Calling himself her equal probably wasn't very accurate just yet... but Thomas still felt like he was getting there all the same.

In fact, he was feeling particularly good during today's session. Every exchange was an inch more of ground gained on the Knight Bachelorette across from him. Every time they 'crossed blades' (even if his weapons were spear and shield), it felt like Thomas was coming out ahead just a little bit.

Actually, if he didn't know any better Thomas would say that Camilla was distracted about something! She really didn't feel like she had her head in the game and as he comes swooping in for another lunging attack, he's shocked when her sword doesn't manage to parry his spear for the first time... ever. Nor does she manage to dodge out of the way in time either.

For the first time in almost two months of training, three months of being in this world, Thomas' blunted spear point slams into Camilla's gut, taking her up off of the ground and expelling the air from her lungs as her eyes widen and her mouth opens in a surprised 'O'.

To her credit, she keeps her grip on her sword as she's flung back... and she even lands back on her feet as well. He doesn't manage to send her to the ground sprawling on her ass or anything as ridiculous as that. Still, they both stop, pausing as they process the absurdity of what just happened.

He shouldn't have been able to do that. He definitely shouldn't have been able to do that. Thomas might not know how long Camilla has been training her Gift of Swordsmanship, but he imagines it had to have been years, possibly even decades at this point. Meanwhile, he's just supposed to have a Gift of Leadership... and he's only been training with a spear for two months!

His progress, Thomas knows, has been more than just ridiculous... its been downright suspicious. And that means he needs to take control of the narrative before Camilla starts asking questions he really doesn't want to answer!

"... You seem distracted today, Dame Camilla. Something on your mind?"

It's a total shot in the dark to be fair. He's mostly just saying it to try and put the onus for his minor victory on her rather than himself. It wasn't that he'd improved by truly astronomical levels since they'd started sparring together (even though

he totally had), it was that she was distracted and not bringing her A Game today!

To his surprise (and immense relief), it actually seems to work. Rather than looking suspicious, Camilla grimaces and glances off to the side, his words hitting home harder than Thomas had really expected them to. Something really WAS on the Dame's mind, something great enough for her to buy the excuse that it was her distracted state that allowed him to land the blow, rather than his incredible improvement.

His relief gives way to worry as Thomas furrows his brow and steps forward.

"Camilla? You know you can talk to me, right? Whatever it is that has you in such a state... I'm here for you. I know we might not have gotten along very well at the beginning, but I like to think after all these months that you know I'm not the man you thought you had to despise... no?"

Strangely enough, that seems to make Camilla grimace even harder, though she does at least look back at him, regarding him in silence for a long moment. Long enough that said silence becomes rather awkward as she stares at him wordlessly. Until finally...

"No... no you are not."

Thomas straightens up. Camilla had softened up to him quite a bit over the past couple of months, but she'd never outright said something like that before. Even if she's really just agreeing with what he said, it's still a massive step for the Knight Bachelorette to take.

"... And that's the problem, Lord Thomas."

Wait what?

"Before we left the Capital, I was summoned by your mother, Lady Marlow, for a private conversation. In that conversation, she made it clear to me that she... she did not want me to 'waste my time' out here any longer than I had to. And

she told me... she told me that three months should be long enough and that if you had not gotten yourself killed before then, I should take matters into my own hands.”

Camilla looks off into the distance, eyes misty.

“... Three months comes in just two more days, Lord Thomas. But I already know that I will not be able to follow your mother’s orders regardless. They didn’t sit well with me then... and they don’t sit well with me now.”

Looking back at him, face drawn, Camilla shrugs helplessly.

“I do not know if the attempt at poisoning you was their doing. I do not know what will be done when they finally accept that I’m not going to kill you for them, Young Lord. I just... don’t know.”

Thomas stares, mouth agape, eyes wide. One thought runs through his head as he processes Camilla’s words.

That spoiled little asshole that originally inhabited this body was right all along?!

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A/N: *Points at Thomas* Haha!

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!