

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

A/N: Shit meet fan.

-x-X-x-

Pandemonium erupts with the arrival of the Dark Elves. Anna rises to her feet along with her father as the Royal Guards behind them rush forward to fortify their position and protect them from the armed intruders suddenly filling the center of the throne room.

She wasn't supposed to have to stand up. In fact, her father had made it clear that she was supposed to remain seated under almost every circumstance. Both of them were supposed to stay put, to present a unified front as well as give off the impression that they were... above it all. So long as they remained in their chairs, her father on her throne and her, the Princess, beside him, then they would seem unbothered and unworried, no matter what madness Lord Godman tried to spout.

And it was madness. From start to finish, the bastard of a man had tried to sell his own version of events. Even when he'd finally stopped lying and started ranting while admitting to his crimes, he'd been intent on making himself the hero of the story, rather than the villain.

Of course, when her father had given Anna those instructions about staying seated no matter what, he hadn't expected them to be invaded by an entire force of Dark Elves... obviously. Sure, they'd known that House Godman was in league with the Dark Elves thanks to Thomas Marlow and his Dark Elf Servant's efforts, but it was one thing to have a long distance alliance and another entirely to have a bunch of Dark Elf warriors on standby like this, ready to move at a moment's notice.

So yes, her and her father both rise to their feet. At the same time, the entire court is trying to rush backwards, attempting to escape the terrifying armored, sword-wielding non-humans suddenly in their midst. And of course, the Royal

Guards lining the hall are trying to rush forward, albeit with limited success given the press of bodies means there are only two clear paths at either end of the throne room and even those are rapidly clogging up.

Amidst this chaos, amidst this madness... Lord Solomon Godman stands in the center of the Dark Elves with a mad, vicious grin on his face. And right in front of him, having closed the distance between them with lightning speed, Thomas Marlow finds himself held at sword point.

“Kill him!”

Anna’s eyes widen at the Godman Patriarch’s snapped order, a vindictive sort of glee in his voice. Nobody is anywhere near any of them. The Royal Guards who might have made it in time are closest to her and her father making sure that they’re safe and secure first.

Thomas is all alone, armorless and unarmed, dressed in finery rather than anything that might have protected him from the bite of the Dark Elf’s blade. His life is forfeit and Anna feels a clenching in her heart at that sobering realization. This young man who played such a part in her survival, and who she’d been trying to get to know through Eloise’s stories, was going to be snuffed out here and now and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

Only, just as that thought is crossing her mind, a flash of movement occurs that baffles Anna and confounds her senses. It all happens so quickly that she can’t even track it with her eyes... but the end result is certainly something she can process.

In the blink of an eye, Thomas Marlow is no longer held at sword-point. Nor is he unarmed. Instead, there’s an armored Dark Elf on the floor of the throne room grasping at their throat while Thomas, having stolen their blade, has slipped in and buried it in Lord Godman’s equally unarmored chest.

The older man’s eyes are wide as an unnatural silence falls over the hall for a moment, his face ashen as he stares first at Thomas and then down at the blade piercing his heart.

“... H-How?”

Everything hangs for just a moment. Then, the moment passes. Lord Godman slides off of the curved elven blade and drops to the floor dead, while the Dark Elves all spin around, finally registering the threat in their midst. Anna too just manages to register this, even as Thomas takes up a stance and sets his jaw, clearly ready for a fight to the death if that's what it takes.

Except... before anyone else can swing a sword, a voice calls out.

“CEASE THIS INSTANT!”

And teleporting to Thomas' side... is the woman who saved Anna's life. The Princess blinks as Sevvī appears in a burst of shadow, arriving and blocking her Lord with her body. Instantly, every Dark Elf rears back as if struck, their blades lowering inches.

One of them speaks up after a moment, filling the silence with their stupefied voice.

“Fourth Princess? What are you doing here? And... wearing *that* of all things?”

‘That’ was of course Sevvī's maid uniform. Meanwhile, there's some surprise from others in the throne room as it's revealed that Thomas' exotic servant is actually royalty. Anna herself is of course unsurprised... she'd heard all about Sevvī, or rather Sevinarya Vairath, from Eloise. She knew what the Dark Elf had done and how ultimately she'd lost everything to her own hubris, resulting in her coming into Thomas Marlow's service.

Regardless, the momentary cessation in hostilities is enough for the Royal Guards to evacuate the throne room of the remaining courtiers too foolish to have already run. They try to evacuate her and her father as well, but the King refuses to leave... and so does Anna, even as he frowns at her, shooting her an imploring glance.

There's no way she's missing this. There's no way she's going to flee when the two people most critical to saving her life are fighting for their own lives half a room away.

"Never mind my attire. Your presence in this Kingdom is unwelcome and unwanted. The human who summoned you is dead and his plans have been foiled. It is time for all of you to depart so that you may inform my sister of this failure."

This too, Princess Anna had already been informed of. The Dark Elf that Lord Godman had been conspiring with was not their Queen, Sevv's mother... but she was only one step down. This 'First Princess' of theirs, a Synestra Vairath. She clearly had designs on their Kingdom... designs that would never come to fruition so long as Anna still drew breath.

The only confusing thing was the fact that Sevv was getting any sort of respect at all here. She'd been disowned by her mother the Queen according to Eloise's stories. She was Sevvarya No Name now, no longer a Princess of the Dark Elves.

And yet... it would seem these rank and file soldiers did not know that yet. Perhaps that would be enough to see them depart. Perhaps this could all end without any further bloodshed...

"I'm afraid we cannot do that, Fourth Princess. Not without further orders from her Highness."

Anna frowns as the Dark Elf spokeswoman reaches into her armor and pulls out some sort of strange device. From the look of dismay that flashes across Sevv's face, it's nothing good. But rather than attack them or any of the watching Royal Guards with it, the Dark Elf simply tosses it on the ground at her feet.

A moment later and it unfolds, seeming to almost anchor itself to the throne room floor. Then, a light shines up from it and... and a magical projection of a regal-looking Dark Elf far taller than she probably should be coalesces into being. Towering over all of them by several feet, the Dark Elf narrows her eyes

as she gazes around the room, seemingly able to see everything somehow, despite obviously not being here.

This has to be the First Princess; Anna can't help but think. Synestra Vairath in the not-quite-flesh. Her eyes seem to take everything in, from Anna and her father and their guards, to the corpse of Lord Godman and her own soldiers. The only time she shows even the slightest reaction is when her gaze lands upon Sevvī for a moment, her eyes widening slightly and her nostrils flaring.

Finally, she looks to the one who summoned her.

"Report."

The Dark Elf salutes with a hand to her chest and her helmeted head bowed as she speaks.

"Your Highness, we were summoned here by the human Solomon Godman. Things appear to have progressed rapidly beyond his control and he was slain almost immediately after bringing us in. The Fourth Princess has ordered us to stand down and depart. Your orders?"

Anna stands stiffly, watching from afar alongside her father as Sevvī's older sister turns to her with narrowed eyes.

"... Sister, what are you wearing?"

Sevvī jolts, an expression of incredulity spreading across her face. Anna thinks she understands why... it's one thing for these elven soldiers not to know she was disowned... but for the First Princess as well? Synestra is the closest thing to an heir that the Dark Elf Queen has, isn't she? Surely she should have been told. Was this... sentiment?

"You would still call me that, Synestra? Even after everything?"

The First Princess of the Dark Elves merely arches a bemused brow in response.

“Everything? What exactly does everything entail?”

If Anna had been more involved in all of this, she might have tried to quiet Sevvī in this moment. Because it’s rather obvious that she’s about to reveal things that her older sister somehow doesn’t know about. And yet, Anna is too far away... and Thomas Marlow doesn’t seem inclined to prevent Sevvī from speaking her truth.

“The Queen disowned me, Synestra! She stripped me of my name, of any connection to the Royal House of Vairath! I am Sevinarya No Name now! How can you not know that?!”

A ripple goes through the Dark Elves in the room, while the First Princess’ eyes narrow into slits, her entire body freezing for a single, long moment. Finally, she speaks in a clipped tone.

“This is news to me. But then, you have always been mother’s favorite.”

“Excuse me?!”

“Don’t try to deny it, Sevinarya. Do you think anyone else would have been allowed to flee from our obligations as you did? Do you think I or any of our other sisters would have been allowed nearly as much leeway as you’ve been allowed? Don’t make me laugh.”

Privately, Anna isn’t entirely sure that Synestra is capable of laughter. She’s not sure she’d want to hear the Dark Elf laugh anyways... it would probably be a sound worthy of making babies cry.

Sevvī, meanwhile, opens and closes her mouth for a few moments, clearly baffled by Synestra’s claim. Meanwhile, Synestra peers at her a bit more closely.

“What would make mother tell you that you’re disowned in the first place? What did you do that finally had her being even a little bit harsh with you?”

“... I swore a life debt to a human. He saved my life... my honor demanded I give him it in turn.”

Again, Synestra blinks, clearly taken aback. Then, her eyes slide over to Thomas and up and down him assessingly. Her gaze stops on his stolen weapon for a moment before moving to the only downed Dark Elf in the entire room.

“... This one, I assume?”

Sevvi nods sharply, lips pressed into a thin line.

“Hm... I see. Yes, that would do it. Even if it was clearly just a scare tactic on her part. She’s made no official announcement, sister. As far as the Kingdom is concerned, you are still Sevinarya of the Royal House of Vairath. You are still the Fourth Princess even now.”

Honestly, the look on Sevvi’s face would be more amusing if this entire situation wasn’t so fraught. They’re still in quite the standoff after all, with an entire force of foreign invaders standing in the middle of her father’s throne room, bristling with weapons.

Her father moves to step forward, clearing his throat and aiming to speak up.

“You-!”

But the First Princess ignore him. No, more than that... she overrides him. Ignoring Anna’s father entirely, the magical ten foot tall projection of the Dark Elf looks around some more before furrowing her brow.

“... Where is Graelo? He should be with the human, no?”

The Dark Elf who spoke before shakes her head.

“I do not know, Your Highness. We have not seen him.”

Her father makes another attempt to speak, but this time its Sevvu who cuts him off... who silences all of them.

"He's dead, Synestra."

Its almost like the air in the room has been sucked out of it. Every Dark Elf present goes absolutely still and this prompts a similar stillness from the Royal Guards watching them carefully. Nobody dares breathe, not even Anna and her father, even as the First Princess stares down at her sister uncomprehendingly.

"... *What?*"

Sevvu's face twists into a grimace, but she stands her ground.

"He's gone. You deserve to know that much."

"Ridiculous. There's not a single being in this worthless excuse of a Kingdom who is capable of ending his life. Not even you, sister."

"You're right. He ended his own life... for the crime of trying to take mine."

Oh no. A shiver runs down Anna's spine, a premonition of danger washing over her. Because... the way that the Dark Elf Princess is acting is not the way your average royalty or nobility would react at the death of a mere servant. Anna should know, she's not your average Princess herself.

As cold and unfeeling and uncaring as Synestra has appeared to be so far... her face shows something truly grief stricken in this moment. Sevvu fidgets before trying to speak.

"I offer myself up for judgment sister. Do what you will with me, just leave the humans-!"

"Kill them all."

Anna's eyes widen, even as the Dark Elves all drop into combat ready stances in a single instant. Thomas and Sevvu stiffen up, the former's stolen blade rising again. The Dark Elf spokeswoman clears her throat, sword lifted.

"Your Highness?"

Fury, rage, and raw grief fill the projection of First Princess Synestra Vairath's face as she stares out at them all.

"Kill every last stinking human in this room. And then remove my sister's limbs and bring her to me alive."

Anna barely has time to register those horrific orders before the Dark Elves all leap into action. The Royal Guards have plenty of forewarning... but it's not enough. Every single Dark Elf is capable of shadow stepping like her father's Spymaster can. Only a handful of humans in the entire history of the Kingdom have had the Gift of Shadow that Spymaster Qyvern possesses.

As such, the Royal Guards and other assorted knights who were in the court today and remained behind to fight off the invaders... they aren't used to fighting against opponents like these, barring fringe cases like Dame Camilla Ackinworth. In a split second, the Dark Elves are among them and only the likes of Thomas Marlow's knight is ready for it.

No, worse than that...

"Ah..."

It's the quietest of sounds. A faint gasp of breath. Its not the sort of noise that Anna would associate with her father at all. And yet... it comes from his position beside her. And as she turns... its to find her father, King Vincent Ashwood, looking down at the curved elven blade protruding from his chest, coated in the dark red of his heart's blood.

Behind him, the armored Dark Elf who just committed regicide twists their wrist and then drags their sword back out, doing untold amounts of damage. Her

father looks at her then, his countenance going pale and the light fading from his eyes... and reaches for her.

“A-Anna... run.”

But there's nowhere to run. The Royal Guards surrounding them, having created a defensive formation that would have been suited for conventional attackers, are all responding too slow. Even Qyvern can't react fast enough, the Spymaster several feet away. The same blade that just killed Anna's father comes around in a swing aimed for her neck... and there's nothing the blonde can do but watch it approach.

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A/N: Whelp.

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!