

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

A/N: Thomas has some fun~

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To their credit, they don't hesitate at least. But... that's about the only good thing Thomas can say about the ensuing charge. Calling the men from House Godman a disorganized rabble... would frankly be doing a disservice to disorganized rabble.

They rush in all at once, weapons drawn and everything from swords to clubs to daggers thrust and swung in his direction. But their movements are just... so slow. Thomas' halberd, the bladed part still covered in leather, swings through half of them before they can even get close enough to try and strike at him. He sends them all flying back with a simple flex of his wrists, their combined weight nothing compared to the sort of weight he can actually lift and manipulate these days.

The rest are in too deep to back off even as they see this happen and Thomas easily dodges each of their strikes, flowing out of the way of their weapons and sliding around them before they can even blink. He kicks one in the back and drives him into the ground, elbows another in the head and sends him falling in a heap and then uses his halberd again to take out another three of them before they can properly turn and face him.

He's not sure what to blame their general lack of competence on. He knew from Camilla that Sol Godman had brought the Captain of his House's Guard with him to Last Hope. That Renault fellow who had tried to ambush Camilla only to get stabbed in the chest for his troubles. Apparently he was supposed to be some sort of big deal or hot shot back in the Capital.

... But had Sol also taken House Godman's other skilled talent to Last Hope as well? Was this the best that Thomas' enemies could muster at this point? Surely not... right?

Perhaps they were just underestimating him. Perhaps they really didn't think they needed to send their most talented and capable thugs to try and bring him in. After all, as far as they were concerned, he was just a boy with one single knight to his name in the form of Camilla. A knight who should have been reluctant to want anything to do with him, in fact.

In the end, it doesn't matter. Their expectations meet reality... and they are the ones to suffer for it. In less than half a minute, Thomas is standing amidst a bunch of groaning, downed men, all of whom are holding different parts of their body that he's inflicted damage to.

None are dead or dying... but he definitely broke at least a few bones. Not everyone is sporting an injury that severe though. After all...

"You can all leave now."

Those who aren't too focused on their own injuries stare up at Thomas incredulously... but he just smiles a wide smile and twirls his halberd, pacing amongst them and making them flinch back as he reminds them who the predator and prey really are here.

"... And tell Lord Godman that if he wants to speak with me, he should come here for a face to face meeting. Or, if he's too scared to do so, he can always arrange a meeting on neutral ground at the Royal Bank. But if he thinks he can intimidate me... if he thinks he can cow me into submission... he has another thing coming."

They're all still writhing around on the ground. It's clear they've heard his words, but whether they can process them or not is up in the air. Thomas' smile drops and he lets the righteous fury that's been infesting him since this all started loose for a moment.

"I said... LEAVE!"

The shouted command finally gets them all moving, whether it's him raising his voice or the way his eyes bug out as Thomas feels a vein straining on the side of his neck. Regardless, those who can walk still clamor to their feet and scramble to pick up those who can't. In the end, the collection of House Godman men hobble out of the Inn in small groups, with the last two dragging their unconscious leader out by the arms as he bleeds from the broken nose Thomas gave him.

Thomas watches them all go in silence, waiting until the last of them are out of the front doors of the Inn and it's just him and his girls in the foyer. Looking over to check on them, he finds Camilla, Eloise, and Sevvie all looking no worse for wear.

To be fair, the fight literally hadn't lasted long enough for any of the thugs to get the bright idea of trying to threaten his women to get at him. None of them had even made it far enough past them for Camilla to have to raise her own blade in their defense.

Letting out an explosive sigh, Thomas looks around the foyer, even as a door into the Inn's kitchens opens up and one of the guards peeks their head out. He freezes up when Thomas makes eye contact with him, but before he can pull back, Thomas beckons for him to come out.

"It's over. They're gone. You lot can come out now."

Was he annoyed that the inn's vaunted security had done absolutely nothing to help him against the thugs that had just tried to take him and his to Lord Godman? Eh... maybe a little bit, but not really. The power dynamic in the city was rather clear at this point.

Either House Godman had the direct approval of the King himself, in which case the battle was less uphill and more flat cliff-face... or House Godman had friends within the Palace just like they seemed to have friends everywhere else in the city.

Based on what he'd experienced so far, Thomas was going to hope that it was the latter rather than the former for the time being. Otherwise, he doubted that House Godman's men would have been willing to play as nice as they did tonight by waiting for him down in the foyer. Hell, if the King himself was fully allied with House Godman, someone would have surely already tried to put Thomas in a Palace Cell.

Still, that didn't change the fact that even for an upscale establishment like this, the staff were going to be made up of little people just trying to survive. Even the guards. So when they all come out from hiding, Thomas doesn't bother showing his displeasure with them. Instead he just smiles and gestures around them.

"I think we can all agree I kept the damage to a minimum here, no?"

In fact, he'd thought it would be a lot worse than it had turned out. There wasn't a single destroyed piece of furniture and beyond the ground being quite scuffed, one wouldn't even know there'd been a fight here if they weren't looking for it.

... He really had expected the men from House Godman to be more capable than this, but Thomas certainly wasn't complaining.

"Y-Yes milord. I don't think there will be any p-problem regarding that."

Heh, he wondered if they'd watched what he did... or if they were simply inventing things in their heads now that they saw the aftermath was him standing there uninjured and all the thugs having run away.

Either way... Thomas nods and turns back to the stairs.

"Then I and my retinue will be going back to bed. Feel free to let me know if anyone else comes knocking."

"Y-Yes milord!"

With that, they really do go back to bed. But Thomas doesn't take his armor off again, nor does he leave his halberd more than a few inches away from his

hand. It's not like it's the first time he's had to rough it before and after many nights sleeping in the Darkwoods while he'd hunted for a certain Spider-Queen that hadn't even existed yet, Thomas was used to far worse conditions than this...

Besides, imagining Lord Godman's reaction when his men returned emptyhanded put Thomas in too good of a mood, a broad smile on his face as he drifts off to sleep. He had yet to meet Sol's father... but all signs pointed to the man being just as bad if not worse than his son. So really, any day where he got to ruin a bastard's plans... was a good fucking day.

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Fingers drum on the arm of a high back chair in front of a roaring fire as a man sits, staring into the flames. Until...

"L-Lord Godman..."

Swallowing thickly, the servant suddenly at the study's doorway lowers his head.

"The men you sent to retrieve the Marlow boy have returned, my lord."

"... And? Where is he?"

"T-They failed my lord. They've returned emptyhanded..."

The fingers finally stop drumming across the arm of the chair. The temperature in the room seems to drop quite a lot despite the roaring fire in the fireplace.

"... Excuse me?"

"I-It's a farce of a tale, my lord! They claim to have been defeated singlehandedly... by the Marlow boy himself!"

Finally, Lord Godman rises from his chair. He does not look happy as he approaches the servant selected to deliver this particularly bad news. The poor

man quakes in his boots as his lord, not at all known for his mercy, gets closer and closer... before finally passing the servant by and stepping out the door.

For a long moment, the servant remains frozen in place, heart pounding in his chest... then, his shoulders slump in relief as he realizes that the lord's fury isn't going to be taken out on him. Carefully, hesitantly, he scurries after his lord... even if he has no desire to watch the fate that will befall those who failed tonight, he knows better than to shy away.

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Elsewhere, in an even more richly appointed study...

"Your Majesty, you asked to be alerted if anything happened. There's been an altercation."

The King raises his head at that, arching a brow curiously.

"Oh? House Godman made their move then?"

"Yes, my King. Lord Godman sent men to retrieve the Marlow Heir from the Inn that the Royal Bank sent him to."

A disappointed noise comes from the ruling monarch.

"Ah. They do get bolder and bolder by the day, don't they? Hm... then the boy is already in House Godman's clutches. A shame, that."

"... Not quite, Your Majesty."

The King perks up at that, turning to give the speaker his full attention.

"Oh?"

“Reports say that it did not go well for House Godman’s forces. They were sent running with their tails tucked between their legs. Some of them weren’t even left in a condition to run.”

Furrowing his brow, the King tilts his head to the side.

“How many were there? Did they simply not send enough to deal with one lone knight?”

“At least ten men, possibly as many as fifteen. None capable of taking on a knight by themselves, but together...”

The King’s man trails off, prompting his liege to finish for him.

“Together, it should have been simple for them to overwhelm her. Hm. This knight that travels with the Marlow Heir... Dame Ackinworth, yes?”

“Yes Your Majesty. Dame Camilla Ackinworth. Our information suggests she’s nothing particularly special. She wasn’t one of House Marlow’s best or she wouldn’t have been wasted on her last assignment from them in the first place...”

The man hesitates for a moment before continuing on.

“This is where reports grow confused, however. The rumors are split. Some say it was the Dame who dealt with House Godman’s men. But others say it was the Heir.”

That gets the King’s attention, a sharp look sent the other man’s way.

“Excuse me? The boy? You told me he was nothing... less than nothing even. You told me that by all accounts House Marlow might be better off being named defunct than having him as its Lord.”

The King’s man bows his head.

“Yes. My sincerest apologies my King... all signs point to the Marlow Heir being worthless... ruined by House Godman’s machinations long before they made this latest move against House Marlow. And yet... things aren’t quite adding up anymore. The Godman Heir is said to have left for Last Hope to retrieve the Marlow Heir over a month ago. And yet, it is the Marlow Heir who shows up in the Capital now in a plain wagon of all things, with Sol Godman nowhere to be seen.”

The King lets out a distinctly unkingly snort, one quite derisive in nature.

“Just another reason why Lord Godman is desperate to have the Marlow Heir brought before him, I suppose.”

“... Yes my King. And yet, his efforts have failed. And to try again tonight or tomorrow... would signal weakness. It would seem the Marlow Heir has bought himself some time.”

Humming for a moment, the King reaches over and picks up a goblet of wine, taking a long sip.

“How intriguing.”

“There is... one more thing, Your Majesty. Confirmation of something else you wanted me to make sure of.”

The King pauses, his goblet suddenly held in a white-knuckled grip.

“... Oh?”

“Yes my King. At this point it has been confirmed. There is in fact a Dark Elf traveling with the Marlow Heir, seemingly as a servant.”

For the first time, the dour expression on the King’s face slowly disappears, replaced with the faintest upturning of his lips into a very small smile.

“Well now. That changes things, doesn’t it?”

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A/N: Mystery! Intrigue! Plot!

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!