a vision of the start of the end

by viceandvirtue

Summary

She was the Slayer of Kings and Conqueror of their Kingdoms. “Get me the Huntsman,” she says softly as she turns back to the throne room.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Viktor is young when his mother dies, and not much older when his father decides to marry Sara. Sara is kind and beautiful and charming – the same way Viktor’s mother was and he’s quickly charmed by her.

Charmed like his father, Viktor will later think, when his thoughts take a maudlin turn.

But soon, Viktor realizes that Sara might be beautiful, but she’s hardly kind and only charming when she wants to be. His life is confined to the tower cell for the rest of his youth and into his adulthood.

Christophe is gone, along with his uncle – probably dead – but Viktor has no way to know, stuck in the tower dungeon as he is. Sara’s brother brings him food; Viktor always pretends to be asleep during those times, not wanting to listen to the gloating and the hate.

Why Sara didn’t just kill him is beyond him. Apparently, it’s beyond Michele, too.

Sometimes there’s other prisoners, all young village women – but Viktor can never bring himself to talk to them, knowing that they’re there on Sara’s orders to render service to the Queen of Tabor.
But one girl does speak to him, and it surprises him because they rarely do.

“Hello?” her voice is strong and confident, but there’s an underlying waver that belies her fear. “I know there’s someone else in here. They told me.”

Viktor turns to the door and loops his fingers around the bars, peering to see a young woman with long dark hair, her eyes just as dark. *Like Sara,* he thinks. She usually targeted girls that looked similar to her. Whether it was for vanity or jealousy, he could never figure out.

“What’s your name?” he asks, his eyes darting back down the hall to make sure Michele wasn’t nearby.

“My name is Anya.”

“Is Duke Keswick still fighting in my father’s name?” he asks, eager for answers.

Anya tilts her head and squints before her eyes widen. “You’re the Prince!” It comes as a whispered gasp like the air has been forcibly stolen from her lungs. “I don’t know. They said everyone that resided in the castle died when Queen Sara took the throne.”

*No knowledge on whether Christophe might be alive then,* he thinks, disappointed.

“Do you know what she wants with me?” Anya asks tremulously.

Viktor looks away. He can’t tell her what Sara does to women like her. “I’m sorry, Anya,” he apologizes softly and his hands drop from the bars.

“Wait,” Anya hisses and Viktor looks back. She strains her neck to look down the long hall before crouching and sliding something underneath the door that lands at Viktor’s feet. He strains his hand under the door, his fingers grasping the cool metal of a blade. A woman’s dagger, he thinks, once he pulls it into his cell and gets a good look at it.

“Anya, why -?”

“I won’t have a use for it once the Queen gets what she from me,” Anya says impatiently. “You’ll know when to use it.”

Anya nods once before they both startle at the sound of footsteps echoing down the stone corridor. Viktor races back to his bed and tucks the dagger under his pillow, laying down in bed and trying to calm his breathing – pretend he’s napping so Michele doesn’t bother him. He hears the door to Anya’s cell open and listens as the guards drag her away.

It seems like an eternity before the Michele and the guards return with Anya. Viktor can hear his cell door open, and without even looking, knows that Michele is standing over him. As Michele’s hand touches his shoulder he lashes out, the dagger connecting with Michele’s face. He hears the door to Anya’s cell open and listens as the guards drag her away.

He looks to Anya’s cell but doesn’t see her. “Anya?” he asks hurriedly as he grabs the cell bars to try and peer in. He almost sobs at what he sees. Anya looks to have aged decades in minutes. Her dark hair is streaked heavily with gray and her skin is wrinkled.

“Go,” Anya says as she weakly pushes herself up from her prone position on the floor.

“But-”
“I said go,” she snarls and Viktor nods before darting off down the hall, his feet light on the heavy stone.

He all but flies down the stairs, ducking into deep alcoves to avoid the guards that rush up as Michele starts screaming from the cell Viktor’s locked him in. He makes it out of the castle and out onto one of the many outside pathways that lead into the city below. He hardly dares look over his shoulder to see if there’s pursuit. Knowing Sara, as soon as Michele told her he had escaped, the whole of the city’s guard would be after him.

It’s a lot of ducking through crowds but he finally makes it to the gates and hurriedly unties a horse left to graze and swings into the saddle. With a quick jerk of the reins, the horse is galloping off into the woods, Viktor riding close to his neck.

Sara screamed as she paced in front of the throne she had stolen from Ivan Nikiforov. Tabor was hers but she had lost his son, and if she didn’t get him back, everything was going to be for nothing. The kingdoms she had stolen and laid waste to would have been for nothing, the war with her sister would mean nothing if she did not get Viktor Nikiforov back in his cell. Michele was hovering in the corner of the throne room, his wound no longer bleeding but unfortunately, he could no longer see out of the eye.

She paused before one of the grand windows and looked out over the city below. She would not be bested by a boy when she was the Slayer of Kings and Conqueror of their Kingdoms. “Get me the Huntsman,” she says softly as she turns back to the throne room.

“Dear Sister –,” Michele begins to protest but hushes at her glare.

“Bring me the Huntsman,” she repeats, more forceful this time. “Now!”

Yuuri Katsuki simply wanted to live out the remainder of his life after the War in peace, but he was once again called to the Queen’s service – and it wasn’t even the Queen he had chosen to serve, he thought bitterly. He stole into the Dark Forest with a grimace, the axe at his hip and his bow and arrows a comforting weight on his body. Catch the Queen’s wayward prisoner. Hardly the hardest thing he had ever done, especially if they were unfamiliar with the woods. Yuuri knew the Forest inside and out.

It takes him a matter of hours to find the runaway, trapped in a small bog and breathing the hallucinogens in the putrid fumes. He hauls the young man up in his arms, rolling his eyes at the impracticality of the long tunic the other wore. Once safely away from the bog, he set the man down and settled at the base of a thick tree pulling out a whetstone and began sharpening his axe to pass the time, waiting for him to become lucid once more.
When Viktor regained consciousness, it was to a man across from him with an axe across his lap. “I have to congratulate you on making it this far into the Forest without dying. It was a good way to escape.”

“You found me, though.”

A rough laugh and a wry smirk are his answer. “Nobody knows the Forest like I do.” He’s not quite as tall as Viktor but he’s built along stronger lines – with broad shoulders, a strong chest and legs. His arms look well-muscled for being lean and Viktor wouldn’t be surprised if the man could snap him like a twig.

“I need you to take me to Duke Keswick’s castle,” he begs. “There’s an army, I’ll reward you. How much do you want?”

The Huntsman eyes him, unsure of how or if to negotiate and Viktor begins to feel desperate. He won’t survive the forest without the aid of this man if what he said was true – that nobody knew the Forest as he did.

“Two hundred gold pieces,” he offers boldly, unsure of where his confidence is coming from.

“I’ve seen sheep with more fight in them. He hides behind walls,” the Huntsman scoffs. “But we have a deal,” he says as he reaches out his hand. Viktor takes it gingerly and they shake on it.

“What makes you so valuable anyway?”

“I’m the King’s son.” It’s barely a whisper on his lips and he’s never said the words aloud, it’s an admission that holds weight. “No one can know,” he murmurs as his eyes stray to the Huntsman.

The Huntsman is silent for a moment before he speaks again. “I’m sure the Duke will be eager to know you still live.”

End Notes

The word count killed me. Hitting 1,500 words (according to Word) exactly is so difficult and I wasn't expecting that. But I did it! Let me know what you think about this. I literally just took the characters and put them in place of the Snow White and the Huntsman/Winter's War characters, so I know they're very out of character. For those familiar with the movie franchise, I am definitely treating Winter's War like a prequel here, because there is a lot to sort out and I wanted a more definitive timeline.

I'm honestly not sure if I want to work more in this verse or not. What do you guys think?

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