

CHAPTER 2



HEATH

FICTION

Rawly Rawls

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Illustrations by Eronautics

Written by RawlyRawls

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"I've never seen elves before, Gorm," Philip stood in the back of the welcoming committee. His father and mother were, of course, at the front. Gorm was close enough to whisper at. "They're shorter than I thought they'd be. And dandy-looking. They don't look very formidable."

"Do you judge me by my size?" Gorm grinned up at the eighteen-year-old lord.

"No ... but you're a goblin." Philip grinned back. "And you don't look ... dandy."

"Elves are more vicious than goblins." Gorm bared his teeth and tugged at his dress uniform.

"I also hear that they have keen ears." Gwendolen wasn't supposed to be part of the welcoming committee, but she'd found a way to stand quite close to Philip.

"Noted." Philip gave her a warm smile. "The elves look very regal indeed," he said in a slightly louder voice. He lowered his voice again, "You may be the master at arms, Gorm, but let's not start any wars just to keep you busy."



"If there's a war, I won't start it." Gorm wiped the grin off his face. "But I surely will finish it."

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“Queen Nonn, what a pleasure it is to have you here.” Rachel sat at the end of the table with the other ladies. She glanced down at her son and husband at the other end. They seemed very far away. The count was handling the elf king well. They were engaged in lively conversation. Rachel certainly hoped it was going better for Breddex than it was going for her. “I said, it is a pleasure to have you here, Queen Nonn.” The queen sat across the table from Rachel. Rachel was quite certain the queen had heard her. Elves were known for being keen of hearing.

“She will not be addressed directly by any woman of your standing.” Lady Rezzle sat next to the queen, fixing Rachel with a cold glare.



“My husband is –” Rachel began.

“He is not your husband, is he? You are his chattel, not his family. His feme covert, as you say.” Rezzle’s smile was chilly. “I do not doubt his decisions. Marrying one of your religion is fraught, is it not?”

“The Sisterhood is not ...” Rachel stopped herself. The queen might not address her directly but seemed to be enjoying the conversation. Rachel did not care for the queen’s sly smile one bit. Rachel took a deep breath.

“Please ask the queen if she requires anything of me.”

“She does not.” Rezzle turned to her side and addressed the elf next to her.

Apparently, the conversation, such as it was, was over. Rachel glanced at her husband again. She prayed things were going better for him.

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"They hate us, dear." Rachel was in her bedchamber, slowly undressing. "Are we safe?"

"Tonight went that badly?" Breddex watched his wife closely. Her alluring hourglass figure never disappointed him. If perfection could have been poured into a human form, it would be Lady Rachel. "I had a productive conversation with the king. He had several insights into increasing the baladeen honey production. If only the flowers were more -"

"Sure, they understand the flowers. This was their castle for centuries. It's practically their home turf." Rachel stood before him in her undergarments, frowning. "Which brings me back to my earlier question. Are we safe here?"

"We are surrounded by my best men, led by Gorm. All, close at hand." Breddex gave her a reassuring smile. "The elves are in their tents on the other side of the castle wall. Even if they decided to attack, we could hold out against a siege for a very long time. Certainly long enough for the emperor to send his troops. We're very safe." He motioned with his hand for her to continue undressing. "You are ever beautiful, even with a frown on your face."

"You can't possibly want to do it tonight. There's so much ... pressure." The lines in Rachel's face deepened.

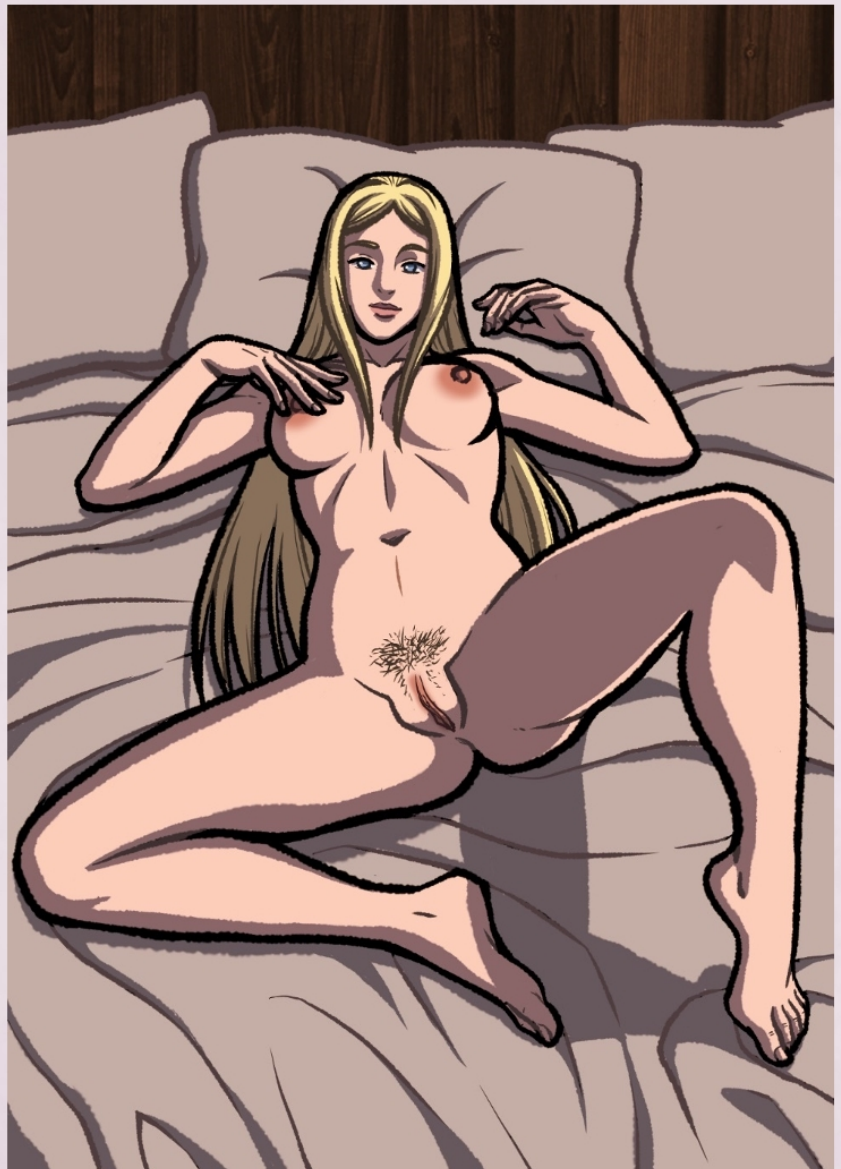
"Pressure ... no pressure ... war ... death ... nothing could make me want to deny myself another try at a baby with you." He rose and quickly disrobed. "Our new child will be a sign of fecundity and hope for all in this desolate land."

"Oh ... Breddex, you have a way about you ..." Her frown disappeared. She removed her undergarments and tossed herself on the bed, rolling onto her back. She opened her arms and legs in welcome to her husband. *He is my husband, I don't care what the queen's lady says.*

"I love you, Rachel." Breddex mounted her. She was wet and ready for him.

"Uuuuhhhh ... I love you ... my count." Rachel circled her arms around his shoulders and held tightly as he humped into her. Despite the threat of the elves, all felt right when her husband was inside her.

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"It's late, Doctor Urdess. Did the feast not sit well with someone?" Sister Hera stopped in the hall to get a good look at the dryad. *How can the count trust such a strange creature?*

"No duties at the moment. But the elves do not take kindly to dryads. I missed the banquet while hiding myself away." Urdess gave the woman a faint, polite smile. "I thought I might stop by the kitchens now that the elves were gone."

"And the feme covert's womb?" Hera stood very straight, her face still as stone.

"Ha! You certainly do have a one-track mind." Urdess let herself laugh, feeling the tension ease from her taut muscles. She stepped to the side as three guards passed them in the hall. "I have no news of that. Of course, the couple continues to try. It shouldn't be long before ..." Urdess stared past Hera toward the intersection at the end of the hall. "I see not all the elves have gone. Perhaps I better return to my chambers with an empty stomach."



Hera turned to look, but saw only shadows on the wall. Whoever had passed had already gone out of sight. "There are no elves in the castle, Urdess. You must have made a mistake."

"Oh, I know an elf when I see one." Urdess shrugged and turned to head back to her room. She barely noticed as Hera broke off into a run in the other direction. Humans were always doing strange things, like rushing when it wasn't called for.

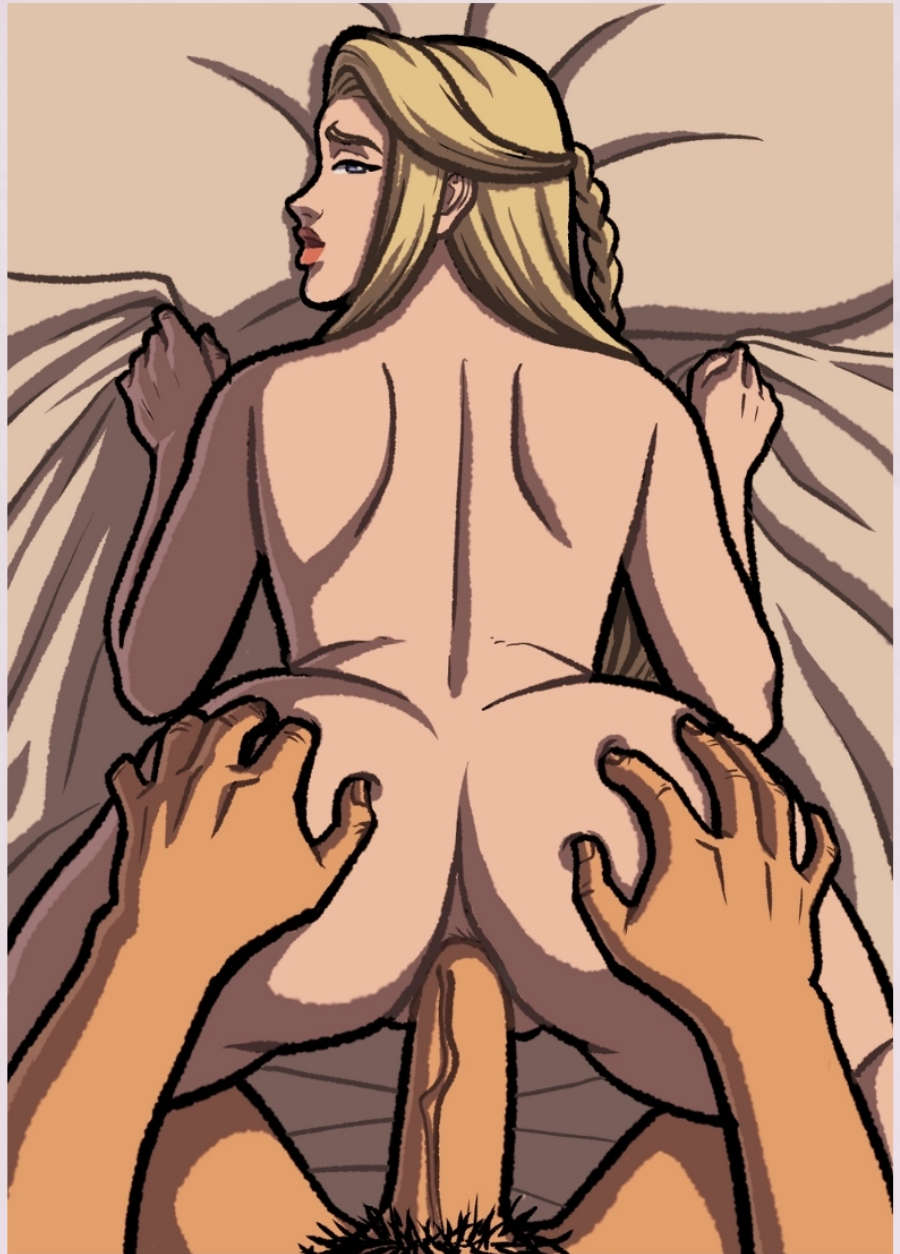
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"We shouldn't be doing this ... ugh ... ugh ... in your room ... we could ... get caught." Philip rode Gwendolen. She was on her belly, with her butt in the air. It was a splendid sight. He wiped sweat from his brow and let his hips continue at their frantic pace.

"Ooohhhh ... ooohhhh ... Philip ... you're so big ... in my butt." Gwendolen swam in pleasure. She would never grow tired of taking her sweet lord up her ass. "I love it ... uuuuggghhhh ... I love it."

Philip was so engaged in spellbinding sex that he didn't hear the commotion going on in the hall outside Gwendolen's door.

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Gorm sprinted toward his lord's room. He was too late. The door was shattered inward by some dark enchantment. Sword out, Gorm vaulted into Philip's room. With a howl, he took down the first elf before the fellow could raise his sword. The second elf was blinded by the splatter of his comrade's blood. Before he could blink the crimson away, the elf was pierced through the heart by Gorm's sword.



The goblin parried the last elf's blade, pivoted, and punched the elf in the nose with the pommel of his sword. It didn't take long for Gorm to finish him. "How did you vermin get into my castle!?" He spat at the dead elves and let out an anguished cry, turning his attention to finding Philip's body. It took him less than a minute to determine his lord wasn't there. "Very crafty, Lord Philip." Gorm whispered to himself. "Stay alive. I can't look for you now. I must see to our defenses."

His commanders needed him, so that's where he headed. Although, he did stop to kick one of the dead elves on his way out of his lord's chamber.

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“Sister Rachel ... Sister Rachel ... Sister Rachel ...” Hera said the words under her breath as a kind of mantra. She could hear fighting. Human voices were shouting ‘the cellar ... the cellar ... there’s coming from the –’

Hera knew that elves hated to be underground. Everyone knew that. Which was probably why this had come as a surprise. That and the count’s spies had looked for hidden passages since the moment Breddex had taken control of the castle. They hadn’t found any. But elves were clever. And now they were killing ... Hera came to a stop. Several human guards were getting pressed back by an onslaught of elves up ahead.

Changing course, Hera turned and ran back the way she came. She would have to take an alternate route to help the feme covert. The Sisterhood would be filled with rage if –

Something walloped Hera on the back. She staggered and leaned against the wall, her breath knocked out of her. She wasn’t young anymore, but her breath took longer to come than she’d expected. Her face blanched.



It wasn’t until she looked down that she realized an arrow had pierced her through the chest. She stared at the bloody head of the thing in disbelief. Her breath still did not return. Gasping, she turned around just in time to see another arrow speeding toward her. It caught her in the throat. She fell to the stone floor. She would have cried out to her sisters if she could. But instead, she gurgled for a moment and went silent.

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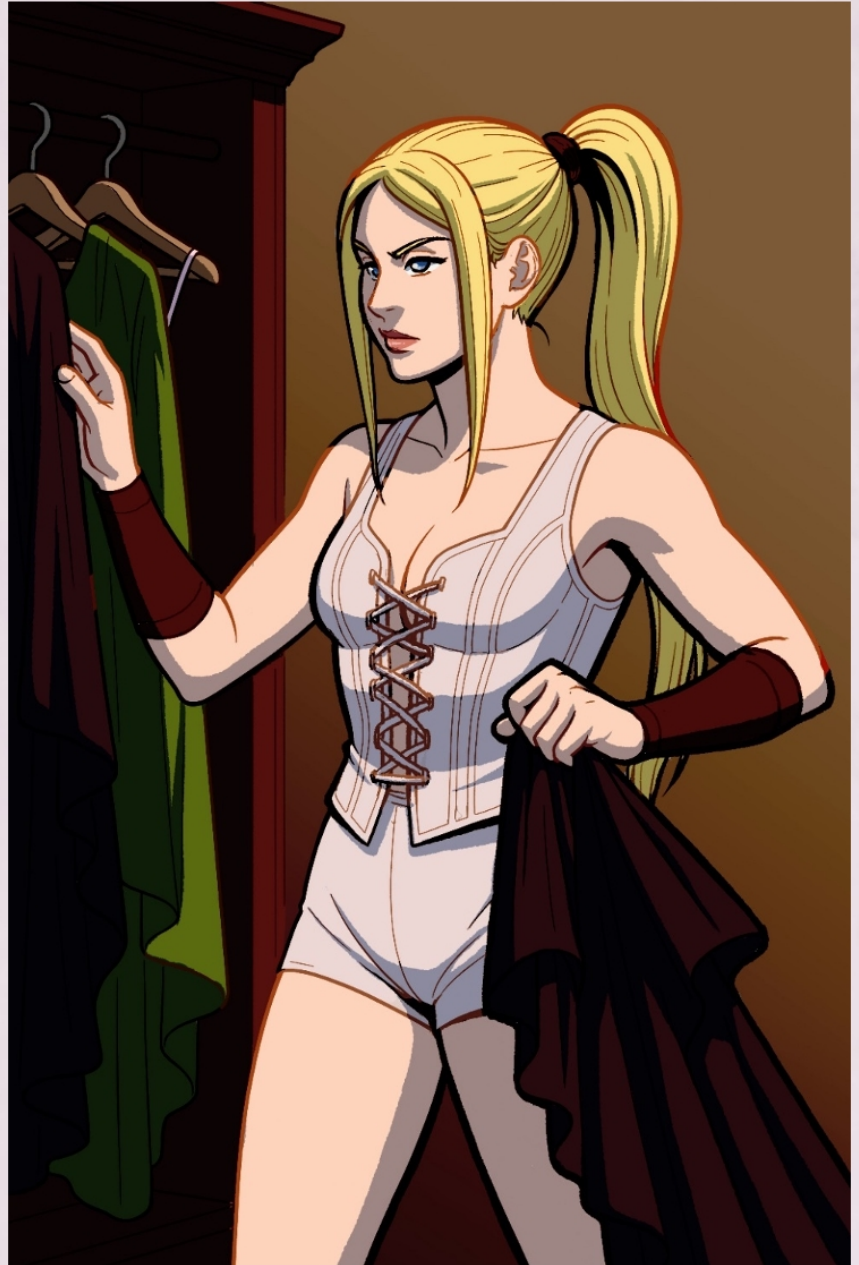
“Stay, Rachel.” Breddex dressed hurriedly. “You’ll be safe here.” His guards waited for him by the door.

“There won’t be any mercy from the elves. They came here under the emperor’s parasail. You know what that means. Don’t let them ensnare you.” Rachel dressed, too. She had already bound herself in her most supportive undergarments. Now, she was searching through her wardrobe for her most utilitarian skirt and bodice.

“We *will* repel them. They don’t stand a chance.” Breddex gave his woman one last worried smile and turned from her. He was quickly out the door with his entourage.

“Stay here, indeed,” Rachel hissed. How could Breddex think she wouldn’t go after their son? She finished dressing, tying her boots tightly. She put a sheathed, jeweled dagger on her hip. She strode to the chamber door and threw it open.

“You can’t leave, Lady Rachel.” One of the guards moved to block her path into the hall.



Rachel exhaled slowly, using her breath as she'd been trained to. "I'm still in my chambers. You didn't see me."

The guard turned away, and she slipped past him and his companions, heading toward her son's room.



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“What’s happening, Philip?” Gwendolen’s jaw was set tight as she pulled her bodice over her head.

“Sounds like fighting.” Philip looked around the room. Of course she didn’t have a sword. And his were all back in his room or in the armory.

“Thieves?” She added a hopeful lilt to her voice.

“No, we’re under attack. Listen to that.” Muffled screaming came through the door. “You should stay here. You’ll be safe.”

“No way.” Gwendolen shook her head and planted her hands on her hips. “I’m not going to die alone in my room.”

“Very well.” Philip wished he could grin, but he was too worried for his parents and his friends. He blew out a nearby candle and hefted the candlestick. It would do. He watched her finish tying her boots. “Stay behind me.”

“What a turnaround. You’re usually behind me.” She offered what she hoped was a brave grin. Standing, she found her own candlestick and tested its weight. “Are elves as dangerous as they say? I feel like I should be able to take one of those tiny creatures in a fight.”

“You heard what Gorm said. They’re dangerous.” Philip nodded gravely. “Come on, we need to go.” He opened her door and peered into the hall. There was no one in sight. He could hear the clank of steel on steel echoing toward him. A man’s war cry warbled through the air to his right. It was quickly followed by a pained scream. “We go left, come on.” Philip darted out into the hall.

Gwendolen followed her man into danger, moving just as well as his shadow.

