

Chapter I

Embers of the Past

Episode 11

Rain pelted down outside of the mountain tunnels yet again. The roar of thunder and flash of its twin. Whatever lay beyond that comforting stone insulation was unknown, no doubt most if not all having taken for shelter. Deep within though it was another matter.

Deeper into the system, a single chamber rest. Far in the bottom patched up on cushioned slabs rest both a patched up Thomas and a patched up Destiny. Her throat covered and wrapped with little to no life shown as she lay. Thomas, not nearly as pale but just as bandaged up.

A few chambers down sat Elise on her knees, eyes closed, her own shoulder patched up. She 'looked' down at the floor as a man paced in front of her. Sacho. Standing behind Elise were two others- a girl with floppy fluffy hair and magenta eyes, a guy with long tied back black hair and amber eyes.

Octavia and her brother Theron stood near the chamber entrance, a bit of blood on their sleeves. The pacing continued even as a group of warriors entered drenched. Britt and Rusty stood at the head of the group. Sacho turned to the brothers expectantly.

"Did you find the man?" he questioned boldly.

"No sir," Britt replied, "The... trail went cold with the rain."

"Any scent of the bastard was lost. The wolves picked up nothing," Rusty grumbled.

"I see... so- at the end, what do we really have?" he questioned looking down at Elise, "Two dead recruits. Little to no intel on what happened or why... and it ties back to you, again, for overstepping."

Her head turned away as Sacho stopped in front of her. His gaze rest upon her, a gaze of near fire. Behind Elise the siblings watched their adopted cousin. Britt and Rusty kept their own sights on the interaction.

“Look at me Bakuuva,” he grumbled, “Vulper isn’t here to bail you out this time. Had you stayed out of that incident in Emerton this wouldn’t have happened. Now the clan is a target for this bug tamer!”

“...”

Sacho shot a look up at Britt, “And your squad. Did you find any sign of the Stark Pack or the Vong?”

“No sir. Nothing,” Britt replied plainly, “The... rain, again.”

“... so what you’re saying, again, is that we have NOTHING,” he spat at the end turning fully to Elise now.

She did not move.

“Tch-” he growled stepping up.

SMACK

Elise slumped over onto the ground, raising a hand to her cheek, right eye now open and fixed on Sacho.

“You will look at me when I talk to you!” he spat, “Your actions have given us HELL! The humans are alerted to us, your cover is blown! The Inquisition is coming, we have NOTHING on our rivals, some masked energy user is targeting us now potentially, and recruits we needed are practically as good as dead or at the very least useless. Tell me Bakuuva, what more can you do for Vulfax?!”

She scowled, glaring up at him. He did the same looking down upon her.

“I thought so... you and that mentor of yours. Edmond brought nothing but trouble just the same as you. The other clans will know of your actions, what Vulfax is doing. If they decide to hold us accountable, it’ll be war!”

“... I’m sorry,” she uttered.

“Sorry doesn’t cut it! There will be substantial punishment. We need to be prepared!” Sacho shouted passing by Elise looking to the rest in the room, “A preemptive attack maybe to show our might. Yeah- that could work. I can speak to Lord Calagras. We could display our power by sacking the Vong, or maybe if we correct Elise’s mistake?”

“Sacho,” the gruff young Theron began, “Wouldn’t it be better to talk to some of the other elite about this? Our father’s word holds weight.”

“Yes- meanwhile your uncle will no doubt stand for your pitiful adopted cousin. We don’t need to involve them. Ugh I need to think-”

He paced behind Elise who by now had returned to closed eyes and looking at the floor. Behind her the elite wandered about with a hand to his chin. He moved, watched by the collective gathered there. Britt and Theron showed calm, Rusty a scowl, Octavia some unease.

“With all due respect,” Britt began finally, “The summit is fast approaching. Surely we should wait to come up with a cover story for what happened in Emerton?”

“Nrgh... no no we... could that?”

Octavia scoffed, “This is all a bit overblown ain’t it?”

Theron looked over to her, as did Sacho and Britt’s squad. Rusty raised an eye. Octavia huffed and stepped up.

“Look you’re taking this to be a bigger deal than it is. So what if she showed off her skills in Emerton. Ain’t like she flashed a big sign that says she’s part of a clan. You really think the other clans are gonna know what she did anyway? From her recap the masked guy didn’t seem too sure himself. And if the humans come snooping it could be good for us to have her on the front.”

“Watch your tone Octavia,” Sacho said as she came to a halt in front of him, “The guy knew it was someone of Vulfax. And you are far too young to know of the horrors of the Inquisition.”

“Yeah because his men were there. Do you think the Vong have some sort of informant among the humans? A bloody lizard would stand right out! And to hell with the Inquisition, she’s a human. That has to count for something!”

“Nrgh- no... but the Stark Pack might! Who is to say they don’t already know and tip someone off?”

“Then let Calagras handle it at the summit. The Full Moon is almost here.”

“I agree with Octavia,” Britt murmured, “Elise could have been acting in our favor... maybe the masked man is trying to cause havoc? Maybe it’s in our best interest that she got involved with the humans.”

“Hrmph,” Rusty grumbled stepping up with a glare directed at Sacho, “Hate to give her the benefit of the doubt but he has a point. Keeping the lords alive is good. Her being attacked by the assassins is better. And like Octavia said, she’s a card we can play now. The humans are probably gonna like her.”

“... ugh. Fine- fine I’ll, I’ll talk to Calagras and see,” Sacho grumbled brushing passed the group, stopping though momentarily, “New order... Britt, you and Rusty are

going to stay with Bakuuva. I'm pulling her old team for now- Mark's unit will have more to deal with."

"What?! Us?!" Rusty spat.

"Silence!" Sacho shouted, "Do not question me Rusty- yes. She needs to be kept under wraps. I'm assigning her to you for now. You just agreed that she's useful did you not?"

At that there came a shuffle behind him. Elise rose to her feet, boots echoing. She half turned, to which Sacho had then half turned. The two locked gazes.

"I don't need to be babysat Sacho. Calagras gave me my orders. If I'm such a disappointment then let me go off and die somewhere and be out of your way," she growled, walking right on into the crowd and bumping right into Sacho.

He staggered, watching her leave around another corner.

Those chambers up held the duo. Both still bandaged, both still as they were. Elise stood at the entrance with arms folded. Clenching at her own sleeves, her gaze rest upon them both.

Thomas breathed in sharply, ragged, as if gasping out for breath while practically drowning. Destiny on the other hand remained nearly unmoved, paler, almost unmoving. Elise remained there shortly not adjusting stance or expression. Moments would pass, and with the crackle of nearby torches she soon turned and began her way away.

It echoed before her even now. The stab of the dagger through Thomas. Her own weapon caught. The shrugged off stun spell. The indifference to being impaled by her blade.

The tunnels echoed with her steps, most other members of the clan already turned in for the night short of the occasional guard patrolling the depths. She stormed passed one trio of guards walking with spears of all things, the group parting two to the left and one to the right. They'd turn and watch her power through, eyes raised.

Her coat bellowed behind her as she kept on, her sway intensifying as she brushed down another corridor right through another group. Passing by one tunnel, the attention of Mark's team was caught. He and Sam both saw, heads turning and focus on her as she went by. He turned to the rest, nodding his head at the entrance, to which they all shot up and began after.

Soon she came upon another chamber, a large chamber, thee chamber before approaching a guarded tunnel. The guards quickly shot in front of her with hands raised.

“Hold on you can’t go in there-”

She smacked the hand away, barging through as Mark’s team turned the corner.

“Hey you can’t- Lord Calagras is-!”

The room lit up in a manner of speaking. Speech cut off as soon as she entered with guards around her. Calagras looked up from his seated desk- Philippe, Azala, Nora, and Vulper both in the room with the clan leader.

“Elise stop!” one guard ordered.

“We need to talk-” she said ignoring the orders.

Azala’s scowl erupted as he shot around, “Mind yourself child, this is a closed session!” he boomed.

Behind at the entrance entered Mark’s team. They stopped and spread around, Sam looking round.

Calagras squinted, the clear lack of concern in her fiery expression. The lord raised a hand, waving off Azala. The latter stepped aside while the former lowered his hand.

“You speak with such assertion Bakuuva. What ails thee?” Calagras posed.

“I want you to dispatch me as an envoy to the Stark Pack,” she spoke confidently.

“Eh?” Vulper uttered.

“Huh?!” Azala grunted.

Mumbles and utterances spread around the room; though with a wave these were silenced.

“Stark Pack?” Calagras questioned, “To what end Child of Bakuuva?”

“We need answers. And I’m willing to bet they know something about our mysterious assassins. We need to get on top of this before they take out any of the Lords. We know that they’ve been trying.”

“And why go to Stark Pack for answers? What makes you think they would know, or would even help? Eh?” Azala responded.

“... they tend to know interesting things about the mountain clans. They might know about the attackers, where they could have come from or where to find them.”

“What makes you think they’re from the mountains? What if they are humans? Even members of the Inquisition.”

She glanced at Philippe who had asked the question, "Because the first assassin was a Vampire. I confirmed that after my blade and the sun both burned him. And the leader I battled in the woods... I believe he was a Lyrian."

"A Lyrian?" Calagras questioned.

She nodded, "Lyrians are rarer around here. One that commands a Vampire is even rarer... and we have a name for that Vampire now too."

"Pah! Oh so he wears a mask and that makes him a Lyrian? And I suppose paler skin makes one a Vampire?" Azala mocked.

"Are you sure?" Vulper questioned.

Again she nodded, "He caught my blade, withstood my stun spell, was durable and withstood being stabbed twice, plenty strong, could sense the reinforcements, and his eyes... even if he were just an energy user, he couldn't do all of that."

"And you are sure he is not simply a Zaherian or Vampire?"

She shook her head, "No... my sword would have burned him if he were either of those. I'm positive."

"And you believe Stark Pack may hold the key to uncovering these vandals?" Calagras posed.

"Yes. If anyone knows anything, it would be them."

"... and say- if they are indeed our enemies," Philippe interjected with eyes turning to him then after, "You reported before that the Vong and Pack met near our border. Mayhaps this is some sort of plot to lure us into conflict? Or if the assassins themselves are Stark Mercenaries. Approaching the Pack could be a suicide mission."

"So send me alone," she uttered, "I'm already seen as expendable by more than half of our clan. If I don't come back then you'll have your answer without much loss."

"Elise-" Vulper began.

"Lord Calagras. This is the right call," Elise continued looking to her leader, "The Full Moon Summit will let you address the other mountain clans while I consult Stark Pack. We need to figure out the truth before something irreversible happens."

Azala turned to look to Calagras, as did Philippe at his side. Vulper looked across, as did they all.

"Very well, Child of Bakuuva. If you wish to speak to the Stark Pack so badly then you shall do so during the summit."

"Sir?"

“The matter we were previously discussing involved the Vong. A patrol returned recently with a message from the Vong leadership. They want the girl present who stirred up Emerton. That would be you, child.”

“... and, Stark Pack will be present as well,” Vulper muttered.

“It would seem a few clans are riled up with the Vong taking the lead,” Azala growled.

“And yet there are those who approve of your acts in avoidance of war with the humans,” Calagras conferred, “With word of these assassins it might benefit our clan though proof must be provided. The dagger that was recovered will be the start, as will be the pack’s recount of Emerton. Oh yes- they are well enough aware as you believe they are.”

“You... want me there... I-” she murmured before pausing.

All eyes landed on her as she looked down temporarily... soon looking back up and giving a nod.

“I’ll do it.”

“Hmph, very good Child of Bakuuva,” Calagras spoke, “I will summon you when the time arrives. For now be gone if you would. We have to finish our business.”

“Understood. I... apologize for the intrusion, Lord Calagras,” she spoke in conclusion, turning from there and walking back out of the room.

Azala’s scowl remained upon her as she swayed out, her eyes looking ahead rather than down or aback. What shown in them was not determination, hope, or even deadness... it was something described only as unease.