

Chapter I

Embers of the Past

Episode 4

The next day...

The early morning hours. A golden sunrise on a warm orange horizon. The faintest hint of blue was then beginning to show. Not a cloud in sight with the warmth of the early morning air hitting.

The small town of Emerton, bustling for its size at a fair town of around a thousand. The kind of rural town where businesses of all ranges could and would reside. Tall buildings of wood and cobble straight out of your given medieval fantasy town, because that was the reality of Emerton. A cozy low-tech town of old, complete with towers and bells and flags and the whole nine yards.

From the market stalls for food and weapons and miscellaneous, to the more artisan businesses where one would expect to find new shoes and clothes and the like, to the more residential housing parts of town, to the smaller specialized buildings like the regional school and the central library and of course the wonderful bakery.

Emerton's streets at this point in the day were ablaze with people heading out all around for their various needs. People heading to the markets, people heading to the fields, people heading to school and church and work as was the norm. People were heading out of town just the same via the main south gate's trail, a trail full of carriages and wagons- some horse-drawn and others mule-drawn. Off to the fields and off to the woods; but very few would be off to the mountains, let alone coming from them.

But that was different for one specific trio of figures strolling into town among the crowd. Along the trail that flowed both ways came Elise's party of her, Destiny, and Thomas all in casual attire. Elise of course headed the group in her normal attire, weapon included at her side. No cloaks or hoods though for this particular trip as there was no need for a couple of humans in a town of humans.

As such the group would pass by the outpost at the edge of the short wood fence gate- entering the town. Stone laid paths stretch on before them unlike the dirt trails of before. For the recruit duo of Destiny and Thomas it was an adventure all its own. Their heads shot round while their expressions gawked at some of the sights to behold, which to most were fairly normal.

Elise of course led the way with the two flanking her with their gawking-ness. Streets, not necessarily crowded but certainly busy due to the various residents during the early morning happenings.

“Whoooooaaaaaaaaa-”

“Thomas it’s just a town,” Elise remarked.

“I’ve never been to a town before! Not one that was actually alive anyways.”

“Heh. If this is surprising to you then you should see Skako.”

“Skako?”

“Skako is the biggest town in the valley,” Destiny remarked.

“She’s right. Skako makes Emerton look like a ghost town. I’ve only been there once myself but- I remember it quite well. It was something~” Elise hummed.

As they strolled through along the main road, a pig that had been rolling around in mud walked right across their path. Rather round and definitely pig-y. Elise wore then but the slightest of smiles as they continued down. All around where there were people there were only happy people.

A few old folks, a few kids running off to school. Once more people heading out to the wilds and the fields, some heading to the docks. Then there were those heading along with them to the market area with the various shops. It would take no more than a minute or two to move from the main gate to this part of town, a wide street with a tree at the center, surrounded with a ring of cobble. A few stalls sat at the center of the square, which itself was surrounded by several businesses.

From her pocket Elise pulled the list, “Alright lets see...”

- *Trade Furs For Coins*
- *Poppler Root*
- *Serenox Potion*
- *String*
- *Needles*
- *Cloth Fabric*
- *Rope*

“Honestly... not bad,” Elise murmured, “I can’t imagine this’ll take long.”

“How’s that?” Thomas asked.

“Mmm... Destiny you have some bartering experience right?” Elise asked whilst handing the pouch over to Destiny, “I’ll have you run and trade these. Then head to the different shops and purchase what you can. And keep Thomas in line if you can-”

“HEY!!”

“Haha! Sure thing Elise. What will you do though?”

“Intel gathering,” she murmured turning away from the duo, “We’ll meet back up under the tree. I expect neither of you to leave the market area though. Alright?”

“Gotcha!” both chimed as they headed off quick, Thomas attempting to take the lead but such was short lived as Elise hung back with the slightest of grins.

“Heh heh, well they are certainly eager I’ll give them that... hmm?”

From afar across the central plaza laid in stone, the sounds of marching men echoed. The clacking of armor born of people in said armor shuffling around with metal plates making noise. The noise of the armor was like a drawer of metal utensils being stirred about or a bag of rocks being tossed about. Murmurs of the crowd who parted way around for even though the plaza was rather quiet in terms of activity, people were quick to evade that which came from one of the streets.

Children pulled close as the marching white armored figures moved through. Sleek, fortified, sectional. Plated chest-plates, angled shoulder guards, forearm armor, plated gloves and high boots. Black fabric covered where there were gaps in the armor, tonlets of fur wrapped around their waists with the fronts open, fur along the shoulders and blue scarves.

V shape visors where only the color black was visible for their plated helmets, their eyes hidden by design. Each carried a sword at their side, small daggers sheathed to their left forearm armor, not one carrying a shield. A unit of an even dozen led by a man not wearing a helmet and with slightly different armor, adorned with a white cloak trimmed in blue.

Elise turned way from their direction as they marched into the plaza, sneaking her way behind the crowd. As across the plaza the cluster of knights began to move towards, she would duck behind another cluster of people to enter a shop. The ringing of the bell with the clack of the door. An echo of her boots as she entered, door closing just behind.

The storefront was a solid red with a huge glass window, a very classical design; though said window was currently draped with a curtain. The inside was that of a wood-lined book shop. Rows of shelves and books, signs hanging up as directories despite the

size of the very small store. Across the way to the other end of the shop sat the main desk and behind it a woman present.

Off in the corner sat an old fashion record player with the huge metal funnel sticking out. The record spun, playing what some in another dimension might regard as classic roaring twenties tunes. Vintage, classic, a sign above the record player stating '*Music is Acceptable*' hung there. The record spun on the turn table with a nice jazz playing.

A woman in a white coat over a dress shirt of some variety, glasses. Her black hair in a ponytail with bangs and loops hung over. She was staring down at some sort of book with a quill in hand as she jotted down in the journal. The atmosphere so quiet inside that one could hear the glide of the writing instrument as it soared across the page.

Her bright green eyes glanced up shortly after the clank of the closing door sounded out. For a moment she looked upon Elise before a warm smile crossed her face. Placing the quill down she sat right up.

"Why hello there Elise. It's been awhile~" she chimed.

"Oh Miss Holly- yes it has," she spoke with a little tone of surprise in her voice.

Holly's head tilted slight, "My my it sounds like you weren't expecting me. Everything alright?"

"I uh- sorry I honestly just ducked into a random shop to get clear of those Inquisition guys," Elise replied with a shrug, slowly now approaching the counter.

"Ah the knights. Yeeeeaaaaaaaaaah they've been around for a bit now. There's a lot going on."

"Tell me about it-" she groaned as she stopped in front of the counter, "I heard tale that the local lords of the area are gathering to discuss recent events?"

"You heard correctly my dear. Yes, they've been brought up to discuss the growing concerns of these... rebellions climbing up the mountains."

"The Orcs and rebels rising up. I've heard how harsh some of the attacks have been... I suppose that's why the Inquisition is here?"

Holly glanced into Elise's own eyes, offering a subtle shrug in the process, "Hard to say luv. I would imagine so. Theo Thompson arrived in town a short time ago as I understand it."

"The leader for the mountains? That's- oooo... I don't know how to-"

“Agreed. His reputation is something to be certain, is it not? Best to steer clear, who knows what you might become involved with as an out-of-towner,” Holly remarked.

“Mhmm...”

“Well- while you’re here dear, would you perhaps like to browse our newest selections? We have a new edition of Martin Trainworth’s best.”

“I uh, no sorry. I actually came to town for supplies and can’t really-”

“Oh come on now, surely~”

“Well-”

“Maybe some new Science Fiction? Isiah Avacados or Mariah Shores? Oh, oh, or maybe-”

“Sorry Miss Holly but I can’t- I’m a little tight on money right now; but maybe next time for sure!”

“Haha. Fair enough o fair enough. Well certainly no need to be a stranger my dear~” Holly chimed as Elise bowed out.

Goodbyes were exchanged and from there Elise moved to the door to exit. Holly’s smile remained as Elise exited the shop back out onto the street.

“Heh heh- do be careful now young one. Ancient powers are at play. This is not a game for a child who has yet to see the dawn rise,” Holly murmured.

“The only thing ancient here is that music of yours. Turn it off Holly, please!” a man called out from an aisle.

“Sorry Marv. I rather like it~”

The door closed behind her. For Elise as she exited, her hands would move to the flaps of her hood. A little toss and up it flung as she moved back into the crowds. The shroud over her face as she crept through the main plaza, head turning as she passed various stalls.

Her sight shifted as she looked back to see a few of the knights leaving the central plaza. And so she looked back ahead and continued down a trail. A few people passed her by but nothing too of note. Round another corner and sudden applause and cheer rang. A crowd had gathered before a decent sized building, akin to a small church really- the town meeting hall.

The applause as several men stepped up the steps. They had turned to the crowd, smiling and waving, a few heading straight inside. Among them a few of the knights of

the Inquisition as well as Captain Halkot himself. One man stood at the head of the group facing the crowd, dressed all snazzy with ritz and gems.

His arms swung out, an address being concluded as she rounded said corner, “-and so I assure you good people that we ARE in good capable hands and we will deal with this situation rationally!! With the aid of our good friends in the Knights of Shion we will be capable of putting down this rebellion WITHOUT interference from the Kingdom. Our autonomy WILL stand!!”

The eruption of cheers again, louder than ever. The speaker turned to enter the building. A few knights clambered to the door and blockaded as they swung shut. Cheers of the crowd died out slightly with that, two men stepping forward.

Halkot was one of them with his arms crossed and beside him a man in a jumpsuit of black with only a chest plate strapped to him. Albeit that man was decked out in some long sleeved robes, of which were tied rather well to his body. Blond shot cut spikey slicked hair, blue eyes, a scar on his left cheek, goggles, and a flamboyant smile. The second fellow stood so proudly whilst Halkot scanned the crowd with eyes slowly shuffling before locking unto some emerald eyes that would be otherwise hidden were it not for his vampiric abilities.

A brow raised and his arms lowered as he stepped forward down the steps. A subtle wave was given to the man beside him as he entered. Elise leaned herself against the building that she turned round, her own arms being crossed. And before long there came Halkot from the crowd who stopped right before her.

“Out and about again Miss Bakuuva?” he spoke.

“A girl stays busy captain. I had some business in town,” she replied.

The two turned together and began to head down another random dirt street. Walking relatively in sync with their coats billowing as they went on their way.

“You spoke to Vulper?” he questioned.

“No. Word already got back and I was dispatched before properly discussing it... Vulper wanted me to collect information. I suppose with you here I could-”

“I’m afraid not Miss Bakuuva,” the captain murmured, “I don’t know anymore than you do... other than a few of the Lords have been dealing with mysterious circumstances. Honestly rules out coincidence in my book.”

“Such as?”

“Happenings. One Lord’s house was set ablaze by a faulty oil lamp. Another had a tree fall in the path of their carriage and barely missed. Another got sick from some

meat but hadn't eaten all that much... their attendant on the other hand had a full helping and succumbed. And with the Scorupi Mamba attack recently-

"Someone is trying to eliminate the local lords. For what purpose? What gain?" she asked sincere as they moved slower along now.

"It remains to be seen. Lord Halvas called for the protection of the Inquisition for this meeting. Lord Matias wants the might of the Celestial Kingdom to be brought in. A few agree; but most disagree believing that the kingdom would not leave should they come."

"... would not surprise me from the rumors. But if these incidents keep occurring- you don't suppose the kingdom would have anything to do with this do you?"

"Queen Arganon and the Generals of the Kingdom are wrapped up in business of their own. And besides that with the condition of the mines it wouldn't be too much worth their time. But if asked to get involved I suppose... still I find it doubtful."

"I don't get it then..."

"We'll find out eventually I'm sure. For now though- I need to get back to the group. Try and stay out of trouble while you look around, cuz I'm sure that you'll be doing that, alright?"

"Can do captain. Thank you," she replied with a nod.

"Very good. If you find anything be sure to let us know. Until then best of luck kid," he stated as he broke off down a different road whilst Elise kept on her current course with hood still up.