

Chapter I

Embers of the Past

Episode 5

Elise traveled the streets even still. Small town chatter all around, a couple civilians out and about. Some on the sides near the shop entrances chatting it up and not much else. Others on their way to and from.

Little was really there to dissuade her as she moved along the roadway. Round the bend while keeping to the right, to her left passed a few clunking suits of armor. Her gaze shifted. The roaming whites of the Inquisition moved just across from her to the direction she originated from.

And as she continued to walk her sights soon loomed forward. Further up the path to a stall, one on wheels. A small fire beneath a set of grates. A street vendor was prepping some fantastic prawn skewers while in a pot to the side a bowl of fried veg was tossed, rice steaming right beside.

Across the way shopping, a couple of civilians and- one well-to-do individual with a couple of regular cloth garbed knights. English swords, cloth tunics, rather basic threads. The young man though was dressed in some finer linen but not too different from every other commoner in truth- just a little more spiffed up.

The basic brown pants, cotton button up shirt, fine blue overcoat with cuffs, and a purple scarf. The young man received a skewer of prawns, placing money down upon the counter space. Elise's eyes glimmered over this man, acknowledging him as he and his guard turned way and proceeded in the direction she was heading. After a brief moment her own pace would return as she then proceeded in the same direction.

“{That must be one of the Lords?}” she mused to herself, “{But so little... no- they should all be at the meeting hall. Is he related?}”

As she began to approach and neared the stall, a shadow moved off to her left. A side eye gave her view of a robed man, long coat of some variety, hooded. Whoever it was backed into a gap between two buildings and vanished. Then another spec of

movement a little ways further ahead, another person dressed just the same leaned against a building with arms crossed, another visible up above.

"{Odd?}" she thought to herself with a raised brow.

She soon returned to pace, walking in the direction she intended to before. By now the man and his guards were out of sight and the crowd was somewhat thinning out as they neared a more quiet section of town. Homes began to gain yards, and those yards began to gain distance. Properties opening up more as she neared the town's edge... and not too far along came an iron rod fence.

She kept along it before arriving at the gate of the park. It was a rather basic small community park, a few trees and a sandbox area with some slides and swings and the sort. Elise herself moved over towards the swings; but not dead on. Rather she moved towards a tree stationed near the swings.

And it was beside this tree that she finally stopped, a sigh escaping her as she slid against it. Arms crossed, looking out at the few kids in that park. Silence drifted from her as the children played round with the few adults present minding their own business. The calm was noticeable compared to before.

Her sights remained even as a slight shift of the breeze transpired.

"... I was wondering if you'd be here," she murmured aloud.

To the other side of the tree, a young man not much older than Elise herself. Short trimmed black hair, a black coat with a fur collar and red shoulders. Dark gray sweatpants, leather boots, and a sheathed sword at his side. His gaze forward- amber and all.

His head raised as he looked out, offering up a response all the while, "Sorry Elise. I got held up," he spoke calmly.

A slight smile formed upon her lips, "No biggie Alto."

The young lad sighed and took up a stance like hers, leaning against the tree with crossed arms and staring out- though with one foot up against the bark and the other straight out.

"So what's the scoop Alto?" Elise bluntly asked from behind that shroud cast by her hood.

"Well- I'm sure that you've seen the knights in white and the lords gathering by now right?"

"Yeah-"

“They’re meeting to discuss actions, obviously. The Orcs are making quite the mess in the lower parts of the Flax Mountains. And with the attacks on a few of the lords up this way, they’re weighing their options. Right now they aren’t too focused on what goes on around but that might eventually change.”

“With the knights around... right... did you hear about the attack on the ridge?”

“With the Mamba? Yeah, I heard about that one. You know that’s part of why they aren’t discussing actions against the clans up here. They figure you guys might remain useful. Theo Thomspen though... well, he certainly disagrees.”

“Heh. He would,” she murmured with a slight somber tone.

“Yeah..... unfortunately that’s all I have Elise. Whatever you were hoping to hear, I don’t have it. Whatever is going to happen is going to happen. We just have to be ready for it.”

“I see. Well that’s depressing- uh, have you heard about the rebels?”

“Nothing major. Orcs are gathering in strength and securing aid from a few other groups. Their leader is an Orc named Geldor. Other than that, I’ve got nothing.”

“Ah man. Calagras is going to be peeved if I go back empty handed. I haven’t been able to pick up on anything today,” she grumbled.

“Sorry Elise. I wish I could give you more but there isn’t much to tell right now. If anything you might find out more heading back into town. Maybe one of the knights might let something slip in conversation; if you’re lucky that is.”

“Yeaah...”

Alto looked over at her with a slight nod, “I’ll see what I can pick up. That said-”

From his inner coat was pulled an envelope, a large yellow one, handed right over to Elise. She would move to take it whilst giving it a once over.

“Hand that off to Vulper if you would,” Alto stated stiffening and standing right up, “He’ll find interest in the contents within.”

“Can do,” she murmured slipping it into her own coat, “You’re off already Alto?”

“Yeah unfortunately. Couple other matters I have to attend to here in town; but I’ll catch up with you at the summit during the full moon.”

“Oh- I suppose,” Elise said with a sigh escaping her, “I’ll look for you at our normal spot then?”

“Count on it. See you later Elise~”

“See ya Alto!”

Alto broke way from the tree and headed off. Elise just the same straightened back up and began to head back to the direction she originated from. A couple kids ran passed her side as she moved through the gate. She’d glance, offering a slight smile as they ran by.

Her direction would send her back towards the plaza along the road. Winding back through the houses on the outskirts and the properties attached, where few people actually were. It would not take long however and soon the houses would condense and the properties would shrink. A brief short few blocks would have her right back to the market area.

“{Not a single thing. I could eavesdrop on the knights... but I feel like Captain Halkot would have said something to me if they knew anything. Calagras and Azala are going to be angry if I go back empty handed but- if there’s nothing to report on...}”

Looking upon the ground as she walked, her hood would cover her side as-

OOOOF!!!

Thump and thud.

Elise flopped to the left as another figure crashed to her right. The sound of swords being immediately unsheathed. She sat up with a flopping hood and looked, just to see the young man from before with the two knights standing near the man.

“Lord Providence are you alright?” one asked with his sword held out at Elise.

She surveyed the two, then saw behind as two of the hooded figured emerged from the shadows of the buildings. No alleyways, just the buildings themselves. Her sights set back on the lord, Providence. He however was already in the process of standing and brushing himself off.

“I’m fine I’m fine,” he mumbled looking to Elise.

She too began to rise though not brushing herself off quite the same.

“Sorry about that,” the young man spoke, “I didn’t mind where I was walking.”

“No no- I’m the one who wasn’t paying attention sorry,” she replied quickly.

The two knights lowered their weapons slightly, and she could see back behind the two robed individuals standing by. And even then she took note of one up high on the roof, likely the same from before. She looked at the young Lord Providence who then extended a hand.

“Nonsense. It was certainly my fault,” he chuckled as she took his hand and was helped up, “I was busy gawking at the sights so that one’s on me. My guards clearly weren’t paying attention either- oh uh, sorry.”

He retracted his hand and gave a courteous bow.

“I’m William Providence, son of Lord Phillip Providence,” he continued.

“A pleasure to meet you. I’m Elise-” she began.

“The pleasure is all mine,” he said before awkwardly blinking a few noticeable times, “I’m not from Emerton. I couldn’t help but be taken in by the sights. It’s a rather friendly river town. Are you from around here?”

“We must be moving along my Lord, your father will wonder if we aren’t on time,” one of the knights spoke with a freshly sheathed weapon.

“Err- right,” he mumbled, glancing at Elise, “Apologies again. I bid you a fair afternoon.”

She stepped aside as the trio continued on their way. Her eyes remained on them for a short while before turning round to continue her own way.

“{Well, so much for keeping a low profile. Of all the people to literally bump into.}”

She took a few steps moving to pull her hood back over. As she did she finally looked back up- and froze. Blink blink. Neither of the robed people were in sight, having already disappeared.

She glanced up to the rooftops skimming left and right. Nothing. Blink... ???

Something there, paint? No-

It dripped, viscous; but not paint. The color red barely visible on the edge of the roof. Her eyes popped out slightly. She shot round at once looking back at William as he moved away.

Creeeeeeeeeek-

Unheard but seen, a shimmer of movement. High up top to her immediate right a figure stood barely visible. An archer, masked with black cloth over their face. The bow was drawn and an arrow was at ready, steadying as it was aimed.

“{Oh crap!} GET DOWN!” she yelled out.

Lord Providence and his guards stopped, the trio turning their heads and bodies to look back. The civilians rightfully so did the same right as Elise ripped from her side her own sword. William’s eyes widened as she ripped the sword into hand. The two knights roared round with hands on their own swords as she drew back.

“HYAH!” she howled, hurling the rapier through the air.

Providence ducked quick, the two guards skidding. The rapier slapped down right in front of them with a clang, while overhead an arrow flew right where William had been stationed. THIS caught their immediate attention as it struck the ground behind with an audible slice.

The knights shot immediate looks back, followed then by William. The knights however quickly turned their attention back to the rooftops, the exact trajectory. There the assailant was visible with bow still in hand. They stumbled back a pace, reaching round to pull another arrow.

The knights moved quick to secure William and pull him away. Elise on the other hand began to dash towards one of the buildings, leaping up and grabbing hold of a window ledge. Another arrow shot towards the lord but it would be quickly deflected by a sword swing. The assailant growled beneath their breath and turned round- just to meet Elise who hopped right on up top the short building.

“*Huff* If you’re looking for trouble *huff* you just found it,” she grumbled.

The assassin stepped back and reached round for another arrow. Elise bolted forward in that moment. Right as the archer readied the bow and arrow she would already be upon him, her right hand slamming into his face. One loud grunt and she threw her force into it.

The assassin howled as he flew back and tripped right over the ledge. His yell rang before being silenced by the crash as he slammed into a bunch of crates below. A low groan escaped him as he lay there. Elise stood at the edge looking down, glancing to the right then as white knights came rushing in from nearby.

CRASH

“AAAAAAAH!!!!” a piercing shriek echoed out.

Elise shot her gaze left and her eyes immediately double took. A massive claw held against a building which cracked around said claw. Screaming civilians shouting and pointing as the figure came into view. A large Scorupi Mamba crept forward with snapping claws. One of the hooded robed men hung in its claw, bloodied and limp.

The civilians scattered at once while William’s knights shot in front of him. One Scorupi Mamba, then came another. The two entered the main road with two more moving behind. Four in total.

Elise beyond, something behind catching. A large robed figure, totally in robe and hood, a visible white skull mask with black eye holes. This figure stood behind the

Mamba with two individuals dressed similarly to the assassin. Her focus on these individuals would be short lived though as she turned her attention back to the streets where the four Scorupi Mamba entered the road.

One lashed out with its tail, smashing through a window. Another jabbed at a couple civilians with its claws. They entered and moved towards William, three did anyway. The fourth moved towards the approaching Inquisition Knights.

“{They’re after him?}”

One of the creatures shot forward towards the two and the lord. She shot round immediately with her left hand flung out, “{Hope this works!} Tillanis Metradeuya!”

Visible white electricity surged around her hand and burst forth. Right as the Mamba stepped over the rapier the electricity struck. It howled out as the current rippled around it, the visible surging white. The beast stumbled at that and crashed to the left- straight into a building which it tore through as it gave.

A mountain of rubble collapsed atop the creature, half burying it. Elise turned her attention though from it to the other two that now were eyeing her up and down as they came towards her position. The knights had already engaged the fourth, thus it was two against one.

“Shoot,” she grumbled backing away from the ledge, “And here I am without a weapon or the Captain’s rounds.”

A claw ripped up and slammed down onto the roof. One of the Scorupi Mamba was already climbing and the other hung down in the streets. Elise turned at the ready as the one scaled up and easily stood atop the building as it creaked. Her hands flew up and she readied herself.