

Chapter I

Embers of the Past

Episode 8

Date: 23rd of the 4th Month, 3242 A.U.

The call of the wild. Birds of the night echoing out. *Hoot hoot, arooo arooo, reeea reeea*. The stars sparkling above with a glowing radiant crescent moon, willow wisps of clothly fluff above. While not a full glow, certainly enough of a cast upon the mountains.

Glowing eyes of the small nocturnal animals. Coyotes, lizards, the works. What could one truly say?

And it was under this glow of eyes and the moon that a few select souls were busy at work. Beneath the canopy of the trees this high up in the pine-filled mountainous segment of Flax, a clearing if one could call it such. Tall grass, some large rocks, some short to the ground patches that exposed the dirt itself. Elise sat upon one of the taller rocks that stood a couple human lengths tall and certainly wide.

Before her flew both Thomas and Destiny. The duo of humans with hanger swords swinging back and forth. A duel had long since been undergone with their back and forth antics. Destiny pressing the offensive and Thomas on the back burner with visible anguish in an attempt to hold.

The flurry of her thrusts and swings and his jagged movement to sway and bat away the attacks. The wrinkle of his brow intensified further as she jumped him. Closing the gap and pressing nearly to his neck with her weapon. Thomas backed way with a quick jolt, swinging left in a bid to drive her sword off.

Her eyes gleamed up. His frown shown brimming with frustration. A smile grew at once. A duo of blinks.

As her sword in right hand lay to the ground by his own, her left elbow jolted ahead to his nose. His teeth bore and at once Thomas fumbled his stance with his sword

leaving her own. And as she had before she struck- swinging away with a strike delivered to the edge of his hilt.

CLANG

Thomas's sword clattered to the ground while he stumbled onto his rear. Destiny closed, her sword to his chin. The sweat dripped from him as he stared from it in shock up to her smug face.

"Gotcha~" she cooed down at him.

"Guh. Good gods woman... what is with you?!" he barked back.

"Heehee~"

"And that's game and point for Destiny, again, to the surprise of absolutely no one," Elise called out.

"Shut up Elise!" Thomas choked out.

"Sorry Tom. Not my fault you don't know how to hold your handle proper."

"Destiny!!"

"Heehaa heh heh!!" she giggled while pulling her sword from his face.

Thomas in the next interval pushed himself up while Elise hopped down off of the rock. Her sheathed rapier dangled around as she moved forward.

"Remind me again why we're so hellbent on fighting with swords? Like don't we gain cool powers as Selenians??" Thomas groaned turning to Elise.

She stopped short of them with a sigh all her own, heading shaking, "Thomas we've been over this," she began before looking up at him, "Just because you can manifest your shadow, doesn't make you unbeatable. You need to know how to wield your power. Plus newbies like you can't really do much with it during the daytime."

"Ugh yeah but come on, Destiny keeps on beating me. How am I going to get stronger when I get beaten by a girl?!"

"Beaten by a girl, huh?" Elise questioned in a deadpan tone with a narrowed gaze, "You say that as if... I see I see."

"Eh? Hold on- wait a minute that's not what I-"

"No no it's cool Thomas. Just for that little remark I think you can catch dinner tonight on your own. Fishing stream is about a mile that way, have fun~" Elise retorted.

"Come on Elise- please?? I didn't mean it!"

"Ooooooo Thomas you just pissed our teacher off. Look at you aye? Now you get to be a man and catch us our dinner and clean it and cook it. Just what you wanted right?" Destiny mocked.

“... you all suck,” he grumbled walking into a direction pointed out by Elise.

Destiny’s arms crossed while she stood next to Elise, ever so taller than the latter. And both did watch as Thomas skulked out into the treeline and disappeared with the crunch of brush. The smirk on Destiny’s face and the blank stare from Elise.

“Heh. He forgot his sword,” Destiny murmured.

“He’ll figure it out,” Elise replied low.

“And if he doesn’t?”

“We’re going to go help him regardless right?” Elise questioned walking back over to the rock where there laid a book from earlier.

Destiny shrugged in response, moving over to the hanger left by Thomas, “I guess. I just think it’s funny to watch him struggle a little.”

“Ehhhhh- to each their own,” she replied picking up the book.

The book moved to her inner side pocket. A little bit of a swivel had her facing Destiny once again. And at that time the sword lifted from the ground and was held firmly in the young lass’s hand. Both turned after Thomas and began through the tall grass. From the grass to the forested edge.

The brush crinkled as they pressed through the taller stems and the branches, the crackle beneath their feet. A resting coyote with flaming stripes raised its head up, gazing upon the duo. With the grass shortening as they went, both would still push through the usual array of fallen branches and random patches of tall weeds, some grass remaining tall even further in.

Elise glanced up, up above into the higher trees. A flock of crows on high staring right back. A light squawk or two from the murder of crows. The slightest of glimmer in her eyes as she looked on up, seeing them as they were; though soon resetting her focus ahead.

A river’s babble. More of a brook than a true river, and it was running West of the Vulfax Mountain. Right through the trees, really with trees on either side. And it was here where the trio had long since arrived.

Destiny hovered near a small blazing flame surrounded by rock and full of debris. Thomas stood on the shoreline with sword in hand and a steady gaze set on the water. Elise herself sat idle near the trees with book in hand flipped open to around the mid-section. The glow of the nearby fire reached as did the glow of the heavens above.

A slight shimmer in the water.

SWING

A shape flew from the water and crashed onto the grassy floor of the woods. A flopping fish, a trout of some variety, moved about. Thomas's grin grew as he turned with the blunt side of his sword facing out.

"Score!"

Destiny looked over, then down at the two fish already on the fire. Staked and already roasting as he wandered over with the catch in hand. Elise herself glanced up from her page.

"Only took you half an hour to get three."

"Hey at least I did it right?"

"Could've just made a quick on-the-spot net like I said and made it easier."

"Wasted effort. The blunt side of a sword is just fine as a bat."

"... you hurt my soul sometimes Thomas, you know that?"

"Heeheehee~" Destiny giggled, "You guys are silly sometimes."

"Leave me out of this," Elise called back.

"I could but- nah," came the response with a bit of laughter.

Elise's book slapped shut and she rose. A small walk over to the fire where the other two were sat and she would join them. The third fish which had already been cleaned in a jiffy by Thomas was already piked and thrown on to grill over the flame. The crackle of the wood with the song of the crickets and birds of the night.

Destiny took from her pocket a small pouch and sprinkled a bit of white salt from it onto the last fish. And it was at that time that Thomas took an already cooked fish, following which Destiny would do the same. Elise on the other hand kept a blank stare over the flames. The continued crackle of the gathered brush below.

Thomas and Destiny both sunk their teeth into the fish and began to eat. Destiny chewed softly while Thomas tore into his. She however swallowed after only the small bite and took glance at Elise.

"Sooooo..."

"Hrmm?"

"Thomas and I... we're not far out from the change," she began.

Destiny lowered the fish skewer and kept her focus on it. Thomas across from her munched on his, looking up at her as she posed the question.

"Yeah, I suppose you both wouldn't be," she replied, "It's been a few months now. Couple weeks and you'll likely be deemed ready for the ritual."

“Do you think it’s the right call, for us I mean?”

Thomas choked slightly to the comment in that moment.

“I don’t see any downsides to it for you guys, no. If being warriors of Vulfax is your aim then that extra power will be crucial. You’ve seen Philippe and Javin fight. With enough training you’ll both rise to those heights.”

“Come to think of it. You’ve been with Vulfax for awhile Elise,” Destiny began while watching the crackling flame, “Why haven’t you ever been turned?”

Thomas looked after swallowing, lowering his fish. Elise’s attention returned to the flame blazing between them.

“Can’t say I’ve ever felt the need. I’m comfortable with where I’m at. Besides... I can be useful in my own way.”

“How’s that?”

“A normal human among a mountain of *monsters* and near a human settlement. I can deceive, I can blend in, kinda straight forward. Calagras says that’s more than enough. I don’t think he wants me turned anyway.”

“Calagras doesn’t??” Destiny questioned.

“Mmm. My mentor, before Lysander took me in. It was the same with him. Edmond Telvax. He was a man of faith, and he had always refused to give up on his human side. And our leader found it useful to the clan.”

“Can’t say I’ve heard of him,” Thomas replied.

“It was a good decade or so before your time. I think Lucian was six at the time? Maya was four and, I don’t think Lysander even had Diego by that point.”

“So man of faith. ‘spose he saw all the non-human races as evil but had some morbid curiosity? Did he pass that on to you? But then you don’t seem the type to care about your own humanity though so I don’t know if-”

“Thomas!” Destiny shouted.

“It’s fine,” Elise shrugged, “Edmond was fascinated with Vulfax’s approach. Plus heeeeeeee and Calagras were actually quite good friends.”

“Calagras was friends with a preacher man?”

She nodded, “Unlike the Inquisition, Edmond actually believed in a person’s morals and values over what they were. Can’t say I really know what his relationship with Calagras was but- they definitely got along. He taught me a lot while I was under his wing; but he never forced his beliefs on me. In the end..... he said the choice to remain human or be turned was my choice. He was fine with whatever I decided.”

“... sounds like a good man,” Destiny murmur before taking another bite of her fish.

“Yeah, I owe a lot to him,” she somewhat grumbled with a mild groan as she moved to stand right back up.

Both looked up at her as she stood over the fire, from which Elise moved away. Her steps were soft crunches and her rapier jangled a little. Her head turned back and she gave a nod, carrying on and looking back ahead shortly thereafter. The duo looked back to the flames as Elise left their sight.

The crackle of the flames in front of them as both looked down. Destiny took from her side a small wood-carved cup full of water and took a drink from it. Thomas across from her groaned. She looked over and set the water back aside, cheeks puffed with water.

“Tom?” she soon asked.

“Ehhhh nothing nothing.”

“... do you think we’re making the right choice, Tom?” she questioned.

“*Sigh* I think that this is what we need to do, yes. Remember what brought us to Vulfax to begin with Destiny. Your people, and my people.”

“Yeah... never again...” she murmured staring back down at the blaze, the orange glow washing over her form, “... we need the power.”

“Yeah. Never again,” he growled kicking the dirt in front of where he sat.

From across the way and out of view she remained. Though her back was to them she remained near the clearing. She had looked back, a somberness washing over her- not quite a frown but something for certain off. Her eyes shut as she turned and began to walk away.

The sun climbed the clouds. A moderately cloudy day though still with enough of the heaven’s gleam shining down on the woods. Smoldering ash and embers of the campfire surrounded by rocks so blatantly out of it. A campsite deserted with few if any signs.

Further to the north the trio had continued. Along the river and its shore, further up stream. There were no rapids, only a calm flow- any disturbances having long since been washed away. The trees themselves thinned between the high rises of the surrounding rock and mountain, and it was such a place where Elise had led the two.

She moved, her coat dangling around the sheathed sword that stuck back. Destiny and Thomas followed somewhat close behind with their own weapons on their backs. What rest before them was another flatland mostly with some rocks and few trees, the bulk of the forest left behind. Entering the space, Elise came to a halt and swung round.

“This will do,” she spoke.

Both came to a halt, Thomas slightly ahead, “Here? Oh joy what kind of training is it this time? Maybe seeing who can cut a rock in half with a single sword strike? Or maybe you want to watch Destiny throw sand in my eyes again.”

“Tom come on-” Destiny mused.

Elise shook her head, simple as that, “No. We’re going to try something slightly different today.”

“Different? All we’ve ever done is club at each other and befriend nature. What’s it going to be now aye??”

Elise smiled just-slightly, the glimmer of it with the sun moving behind the clouds and darkening her. Thomas blinked and raised an eye. Destiny stepped up beside him.

“Today... rather than fight one another, I thought I’d let you both try and fight me,” she finally spoke.

The duo blinked in unison. Both shifted back a little and stared with some set of shock.

“Book worm Elise wants to spar? With us?” Thomas questioned.

“Who are you and where’s our trainer?” Destiny followed up with.

“I’m not one for this kind of thing... but-” she spoke, moving a hand down to the hilt of her sword, “This might benefit you both. So... you guys ready?”

Log Entry- Selenians

Selenians are a 'Cursed' Nocturnal Race much like Vampires. They are named after the Moon Goddess, Selene. Selenians gain the ability to manifest their shadows into physical form, most often a weapon or appendage. This greatly bolsters their combat ability; though it has limits.

Selenians are able to survive in the daylight unlike Vampires. The downside is that their shadows can not be manifested, with direct sunlight destroying their shape. Only the strongest of Selenians can hold their shadows during the daytime.