

Act 2- The Decision

Chapter XXII

“Hey weakling.”

“Sup Loserlise? Hahaha.”

Mocking voices all around, laughter everywhere, people in the tunnels pointing and laughing at Elise as she walked by. Her eyes shifted to the ground as another group opened up with laughter, then right at the ceiling, “{Ugh, these- bastards!}”

“That’s enough you schmucks, get back to work! Let the brat go feel sorry for herself somewhere else.”

“Haha, like she always does? Sure, right.”

“Hahaha.”

“Ugh, why don’t you guys ever shut up?” she spat holding a book close to her with eyes zipping around.

“Because it’s fun to laugh at you?”

“Because you’re pathetic.”

“Says the one who eats literal babies like an evil sack of crap,” Elise growled back.

“Eh it’s a matter of perspective really.”

“This clan is doomed with morons like you running it, now get out of my way,” she spat.

One individual stepped quickly in front of Elise with a scowl, his hand thrust into her chest to shove her, “Morons huh? Oh, are you still sulking over Elen? Pft, should’ve slept with her sooner if you’re that way. Tell ya what, how about I just hel-ouch! My hand, whaa-”

There was a crash, rock falling and tumbling across the ground. Elise now stood in the opposite direction as she had been heading, the man laying against the wall rubbing his head.

“Ugh, my fricken head.”

“Where in the name of Hell did she learn to do that?”

“It’s called I do all the gathering around here. I carry a lot of weight back with me whenever I go collecting water. Try to do that to me again and next time I’ll plant your entire head into the ground.”

With a scoff she turned and stormed away leaving many dazed with confusion across their faces.

“Sheesh, where did she learn to do that?”

“So you threw him into a wall? Haha. Wish I could’ve seen the look on their stupid faces.”

“I mean come on, you’re really going to get in my face after I’ve had a couple spitting matches with my brother? Just stupid. And then to talk of Elen like that, ooooh that made my blood boil!”

“Just keep on learning from that novel and eventually they’ll see the results, and hopefully tone it down.”

“Well they don’t know that, not yet anyways. Besides I wouldn’t say much since I only just got the thing. Though I won’t lie, I’ve already torn through a fifth of it for a skim.”

Both Alto and Elise walked down a dirt path with blossoming flowers all around, the trees shaking slightly as they gradually seemed to shrink. At Elise’s side now rested a sheathed katana and in her hand the novel. Alto tilted his head with a slight glance turned towards her, “Well you are a bookworm so I’m honestly not surprised.”

He gave a sigh after and looked up as they continued on, "Ya know, I don't get why they won't recognize you. Remember the Battle of Norlan Wilks?"

"How could I forget. My father placed an incompetent moron in charge that got a quarter of our people killed."

"You told them to go left knowing it was too easy based on this and that. Left was through a mud field but it was a safer bet. Tragic that they didn't listen."

"And that pretty much summarizes my life."

"Right. So, are you ready then? If we're going to do this, we need to do this."

"Whoa but I only just started reading this!"

"Eh, you'll be fine. You've read more than enough I'm sure. Plus there's the sword there that Holly gave you with the book."

Elise's eyes drifted to her side. Hanging there, a sheathed Japanese Style sword, a Katana.

"Oh, welcome back Elise dear, good to see you."

"Oh uh, hi Miss Holly."

It stood cloudy out with a bit of rain fall as she stood at the front desk with *The Art of Defensive Stature* in hand. Holly glanced down, her slight smile fading with an eye raising itself and the other closing a bit, "So, why are you checking out a book on fighting defensively? Doesn't really seem like your thing."

"Oh, uh, you know just, reasons. The world is getting to be a dangerous place, figured I should learn a little bit right?"

"Heh heh, yeah, I suppose I suppose; though I don't quite get why you want a book. Typically fighting is something you work towards through training."

"Well, I do chores you know and a friend of mine thinks I'm already capable, just need to practice here and there."

"Logical, love it. You sure it isn't because of all those Vampire sightings people have been reporting?"

"What, Vampires? Oh please, don't tell me you're one of those crack pots that believes in supernatural stuff."

"You'd be amazed at some of the secrets of this world Elise. So, is that all?"

Elise glanced up and locked gaze with Holly who seemed to be giving her a look over. With a slight smile Holly nodded moving her hands over to the computer, "You know, you've been our number one for awhile. If you're interested in learning to protect yourself, might I offer you that katana in the window as a gift?"

"A katana? But why--"

"Consider it as a gift to help you shall we say. Besides, customers are starting to complain that it's too easy for someone to go grab it and use it to start an incident. And I just don't have the wall space to put it anywhere else, nor the heart to really hide it so, do me a favor and take it please? Before the over-sensitives start asking me to remove anything else that's offensive."

"Well uh, thanks Miss Holly, truly."

"Happy to help," she replied with a slight smile.

"I don't mean to rush you or use this against you; but if you don't get stronger, what happened to Elen is going to happen to someone else. You said it yourself, you want to get stronger for your friends and for your clan."

"Yeah, fine. So, how shall we do this then?"

"Well we'll start with me chucking a couple rocks at you to get your reaction time up, then probably throw some logs at you to deflect. After that we'll just see."

"Rocks? Wait, logs? What the hell man," Elise barked.

“Yeah I figured you’d say that. Stand over there if you would, I promise that this’ll be fine, heh heh,” he said pointing to the other side of the clearing. With a nod Elise walked forward step by step with a slight hum still.

“Ok,” she mumbled walking over, “So when will-”

Thwack!!

“Ow!” Elise yelled.

Forward she stumbled, tripping over a branch falling flat onto the ground with arms way out. Alto’s snicker could be heard following a brief pained sound. Pushing herself up her head turned, eyes resting on a rock on the ground and then up to Alto. In Alto’s hand, tossed up and back into his hand, was another rock. Her eyes squinted, “What the hell man!”

“Let that be your first lesson, never turn your back on your opponent.”

“Jackass, you didn’t say you were going to start without saying start!”

“Always be on guard. Now, use that anger as determination Elise. And uh, try to not make me laugh too hard if you would, haha.”

“I still have to go back to my clan later you know, don’t hit me that hard dammit.”

“Oh you’ll get used to it, trust me.”

With a smirk he launched forward, flying right through the air with a stick in hand raised high. She turned as he drew close, her eyes widening as the stick swung down.

THWACK

“Gyah!” Elise cried out, “Dammit!”

Her foot swung forward, up in the air straight at Alto’s face. He simply blinked, then came the next thwack. Backwards he flew, all in the time that he had time to blink

again. With a yelp he crashed straight into a tree, his head flinging back right into it, “Ah shit, shit that was my nose. Gah!”

Elise stood up, her face red with her right foot stomping down, “I told you not hit me that damn hard!”

Alto looked to her with a grin before shaking his head. He stood as Elise got back into stance, both chuckling a slight bit. Slowly he stumbled back up using the tree for balance, backing up right into it at one point with a hand to his face. Debris fell from the tree right atop his head, pine cones mostly as he inched forward, “Ugh, y-yeah I deserved that. Didn’t expect it though.”

“Train me for real or you’re going to get my non-existent boot up your ass,” she growled.

“I thought you owned boots? Eh, no matter. Alright Elise, I’ll stop with that nonsense and take this seriously now that I know you’re for sure serious. But I’m just going to say it, be ready for hell. I won’t go easy on you.”

“Now... dodge!”

THWACK

Chapter XXIII

Deep in the forest nearest the Vulfax Mountains, both Alto and Elise were on the move. Through the bushes, through the clay-like mud, through fallen branches themselves. They dashed ahead without pause, Alto on both hands and feet rushing like a dog while Elise charged along with an object to each hand. She swung her hands, a branch hung low splintering at the impact.

“Not bad, that pole still has its uses even in two pieces as you can see,” Alto called back as the branches crashed.

They tore out into a clearing, Alto skidding to a stop on just his feet now. With a turn he met Elise as she barreled into the clearing. Her own feet dug down, stopping her as she held both poles ready. A slight smirk rested upon her face. Alto nodded.

“So this is it then, the place where your own people have trained for centuries?” she questioned.

“Yes. I know it doesn’t look like much right now but trust me, this clearing has its history. Mannequins behind the trees, targets to practice leaping, oh yes the whole works,” he replied.

“Quite a history,” Elise mumbled looking around the area.

“Indeed. So. Here’s what I’m thinking. You already have strength and speed, and I’d venture to say you’re quite durable after everything in your life. You just need to learn to focus that raw emotion.”

He spun round, walking towards the opposite end of the clearing with his hands pressed together. He stopped, spinning around again to face Elise from a distance. His hands parted and his arms were at once held open, as if welcoming something or someone. She stood in place, head tilted a touch, looking around him. Beside him sat a wood pedal, sticking out of the ground.

“I am going to force your reaction time to spike, I am going to work on your coordination with weapons, work on your hand to hand combat. You will be pelted with rocks, you will be forced bat them away and to dodge when you can’t. You will be forced to catch branches and whatever else I throw at you, and throw them elsewhere. You will be dodging wood as well, mind you. You will be forced to evade me in my Wulfn form. And finally you will be forced to fight me hand to hand or weapon to weapon. Understood?”

“Got it,” she chirped.

“Good. Now then, be prepared for I will not be doing these consistently. We will be switching on and off to keep your mind on the up and up. Are you ready child?”

“So long as you don’t call me that again, yeah, let’s do this,” she chuckled.

“Alright then, you asked for it. Here comes the hurt,” Alto yelled out, his foot flying down right on top of the wood pedal.

BOOM

Leaves danced in the sky, branches sent crashing along the surface of the ground. Dozens of objects flew straight forward over Alto’s head, gray and white in color primarily. Large sections of leaves pooled away from the trees, revealing multiple tubes going to a large blue air cannon. It had just blown, and what it had blown were rocks.

Rocks flew through the air and dropped right at Elise. With a blink, her feet skipped back. She flew down to the ground, hitting face first with a turn as the rocks soared by. Wood crackled behind her, rocks flying all off the trees in pieces. Bark dropped along with more leaves.

Pebbles danced and skipped, landing right beside Elise’s head. She slowly perked up, looking around.

“Shit! Those were not supposed to be full of rocks, what the crap!?” Alto yelled out.

Elise, bit by bit, pushed herself up. Her hands pressed down as her feet hit. Up on both, she looked back to the trees and then back ahead at Alto. His jaw hung a bit as he too looked around.

“Th-that, that was, huh?” she stuttered.

“Uh... alright. Moving on- it seems like you dodged all those. Well done Elise uh, that’s step one. Your reaction time is good enough to dodge an air cannon spitting rocks at, uh, I dunno. What was that, a hundred and twenty meters? Took about two or three seconds. I think.”

“You fricken idiot, that could have easily killed both of us!” she spat.

“They were supposed to be the red barrels full of foam balls!”

“Good lord man, ugh- can I, can I just take like five here. None of the sass or surprise just, give me five or I will kick your face in,” she huffed, breathing heavily right after.

“Ya-ya know that’s fair, that’s very fair considering I just about accidentally killed you.”

“Guhhhh that was terrifying,” she groaned falling to her knees, slumped against a tree, “Didn’t have my life flash before my eyes but I definitely- definitely saw white.”

“I uh, yeah. Next we’ll just, we’ll move onto the mannequins and test your everything else,” Alto mumbled walking away, “I’ll be back.”

“Dodge!” Alto yelled.

“Whoa-” Elise stammered

THWACK

Elise rolled to the left just barely evading a blurred movement. Behind a small dent became placed in the tree following the sound of impact, then a slight skipping sound across the ground. Many pebbles lay around this single tree and many lay around Elise as she fell; her body covered in red marks and spots of swelling, her breathing heavy.

The sun was perched lower, having descended from the sky for a fair while now. The many trees around them lay scarred and some naked. Alto chuckled as Elise began to stand.

“Heh, not bad kiddo.”

THWACK

To the right she rolled again barely evading yet another sent flying to where she had been, “You practically killed me earlier Alto, of course my guard is going to be up.”

“Fair fair. Alright, I’ll take your word for it for now. I’ll let it slide and get on to this. Take those poles and swat them back!”

Rocks flew through the air as Alto barked, the sound of swooshing and many grunts following. She flipped back and with a crash, heaved against a tree. Slowly she stood back up with a huff, “Ack! Christ! Did anyone ever tell you that you can be a major asshole?” she barked out.

Elise swung both arms as more came in, the poles in her hands flying. Some rocks were sent flying off the pole halves, some missed her entirely, then some nailed her in both arms and legs. She yelped and stumbled back, bruised and rather battered.

“For God’s Sake Alto, I’m not trying to be a bitch and complain all the time but you’re coming at me about as bad as those rocks that nearly took my head off earlier. Would it kill you to use those foam rocks and not these hard hitting actual ones you shot out of that damn cannon earlier!?”

“The enemy won’t go easy on you cadet. No pain no game. You’ll learn faster this way now move it private move,” he spat while quickly lobbing more rocks at Elise, many of which continued to hit her body.

“I’m not a soldier jackass!” she barked back.

“Alright,” he replied stepping next to several ropes, “Then drop the rods and redirect these.”

Claws extended from where his fingernails had rested, slashing through the ropes. Logs flew down out of the trees and quickly arched towards Elise as she stood. Her eyes puffed as the rods left her hands, clambering to the ground now covered in rock. They came in heavy and fast, smashing into the trees behind Elise with the force of a car a piece. She shot left and right, rounding around the first few, then came the fifth dead center in her dodge path.

Her arms went out and up as one came down right in front. A thud followed a grunt as Elise was flung back, crashing into another tree. She slumped down, saliva flying out of her mouth. Behind there was another crash, the crash of the log as it struck the tree.

CRACKLE

SNAP

Then came the snap as the top half of the tree fell. It crashed backwards and behind, snapped many meters above Elise where the log had hit, far above where the others hit the other trees. Her eyes glistened up, then shifted towards a smirking Alto. She had begun to stand now.

“And now logs from hell. You really are trying to kill me aren’t you?” she groaned.

“Haha, well heck, you can dodge and redirect them a little now. That using your opponents weight and speed thing is kinda coming in handy,” Alto replied with a laugh at the end.

“Rocks that nearly kill me to pelting me with rocks to firing off wood logs, back to back to back. Ugh. It’d mid day and I’m already exhausted.”

“What, quitting already Elise?”

“I just, just need a bit to catch myself. I feel like jello, my arms are dead and my legs are rotting off,” she groaned.

The sun began to hang and barrel down inch by inch as their shouts became loud and very audible. Elise swooped back evading a swing from a wood sword. At once she thrust her own forward at which point she was smacked on her hands by Alto’s, “Ow!”

“Not good enough. Again. One two three four five!” he shouted advancing swinging away.

Elise swung up deflecting, then down tilting blocking, off to the side for the third and left for the fourth. She held it in the middle as it was thrust at her again, blocking with the wider part of the wood sword instead of swooping back. Her foot swung forward and landed. Alto stumbled as Elise moved forward and smacked away Alto’s wood sword with her own. An opening lay present though only temporary as a sweep sent Elise falling back, “Aieeee-”

Alto stood over her as she fell, “Again!”

SMACK

Elise tumbled backwards breathing heavily with shaky arms as Alto yelled.

“Again!”

A fist came at her. Elise quickly ducked her head right as the fist swooshed right by. A knee came at her gut, quickly caught by both hands on the block. A swooshing came from above, a fist making contact with the top of Elise's head driving her down into the ground, "Ooomph."

Alto huffed and looked down, "Are you going to quit?"

Elise gave no response as her shaky arms attempted to push her off the ground.

"Are you going to quit?"

"No!" she barked pushing herself back up.

His eyes lit up and grew bigger as she pushed up with her hands despite the shaking. A step back as she took a step up, shifting for a brief moment. She stood with her stare locked on Alto. Elise stumbled forward with shaking eyes, quickly standing ready for more.

It hit.

She collapsed backwards onto her back, arms flung to her sides, hands open, all tension leaving her at once. She breathed in and out heavily, still bathed in red. Alto stood before her, hardly a scratch to him. He looked down upon her, grinning. With a tilt of his head, he turned away and began to walk.

"Why am I this shot already? You've only thrown rocks and logs at me, and tried to swat me like a damn fly" she continued.

"Because you've been battered here more than you have ever before. And this is barely a whole first day. There's a reason for that though."

She remained there, huffing, her breath slowing as time went on. Alto remained before her, back to Elise. He continued, "As is the way of my people, training has broken you as it breaks us all. Truth is, the rocks earlier and the cannon, not a mistake. That was to bring you close to potential death to awaken your instincts. Most people when they have a gun pressed to their skull, with an open window to act of course, will

act. And me battering you down throughout the day, that was me breaking your mind open. Now we're ready to reshape you into a fine warrior."

"Ugh," she groaned, her head shaking up to let her eyes rest upon him, "You suck. You- you were trying to kill me. How does one day of this open me up!?"

"I warned you this would be rough. See I could make you run kilometers or lift a truck, maybe blast a little motivational tunes to get you going like people do these days. Humans, I don't get it. That's just slow for one who already has what they need. Your mind is your barrier and breaking your body breaks the mind as well, as I said. This was faster, and very necessary Elise."

"Yeah well thanks for not killing me!"

"Heh heh, right then."

He chuckled, strolling away. She heaved herself up as he moved, her elbows and the tree behind supporting her weight, "What now?"

He stopped in place, his head turning a smidge, a tilt beginning, "Well, that's easy. You rest for now. I've broken you so your body is ready. Tomorrow is day two and uh, we're going to work harder with less attempted murder and less battery. Genuine training is about to begin."

"Gee, thanks," she huffed.

"Get some rest," Alto chuckled walking away with his head fixated forward, "You're going to need it for what I have in store for you, heh heh heh."

Elise fell back down, rolling off the tree to her side. Face first, she planted herself to the ground with a groan.

Chapter XXIV

“Dodge!”

Elise zipped right and left quickly as rocks flew past, stopping short of another dodge as one passed to where she was heading. Ducking down another the size of her head flew by and crashed behind though was quickly followed by a rain of many more. Leaning back she bent and flipped, evading many of them though not all. Her eyes looked ahead as she skidded back upon landing, locking sight on Alto who seemed to simply grin.

“Dodge what?”

“Hmph, not bad. That time I didn’t even get your face or torso.”

“Because I know what to expect, huff. You pelted me enough yesterday, I don’t want to be hit anymore.”

“See, that’s muscle memory,” he laughed.

“No it’s not, that’s me not wanting to get hit anymore! Mate, I’ve only had one damn day doing this. I don’t see how I’d have any kind of memory or anything yet.”

“Is it? Well maybe but it doesn’t matter. Yesterday you would’ve just gotten hit and this time you evaded. Nice job. Your mind is becoming more focused and that’s what’s important. Most impressive.”

“Heh, thanks.”

“Still not good enough. Had those been bullets you probably would’ve been too slow and died.”

“Cut me some slack, I’m not fighting a war with humans. I’m fighting people who don’t use guns, beasts. Even Hunters don’t use guns unless they buy into that Werewolf legend silver bullet nonsense.”

“Uh huh. Well so far you’ve improved a bit from day one, so here comes the next wave,” he said walking over to a pile of rocks of varying sizes.

His hands shot into the pile and ripped from it many as he turned to face Elise once more with a smirk, grunting as many more flew. She stood ready, eyes locked, ears... perked.

SNAP

Her head shot up and she quickly bolted to the right, evading both rock and logs that slammed into the trees, “What the hell man, you said-”

“All is fair in love and war, and this is war!” Alto barked as more logs came flying down at Elise.

“{Shit- he has rope tied to these things in the rock pile probably. Can’t trust anything anymore. I can’t roll out of the way of this one, gonna have to try and redirect it!}”

Branches fell as Elise weaved around on the ground dodging some here and there, followed by more rocks at both her right and left locking her in. The log came forth, right in her path. She held both arms out with palms laid bare, her legs bending and shifting, feet skidding. The log came in, her palms brushing it.

With a grunt she heaved, throwing it and herself. She thrust her arms, her back arched. Again she fell to the ground, and this time the log flew high above her and slammed into a tree meters away. It shook, crackling, and then

splitting. Half fell as the log tumbled back like a pendulum. To the right she rolled, rocks no longer being launched.

With a skid and a scuff she flipped up onto both feet, still huffing in response. A slip, a slight cave backwards. Her arms flew out, nailing a tree beside her as support. She stood there, looking to Alto who remained by the rocks with flamed eyes, eyes well open and fully aglow with humor.

“Not bad,” he replied.

“Ya know this has, nothin to do with any martial art I don’t think. This isn’t me tripping a foe and using their weight to my advantage, this is me pressing on a log before it hits me to make it fly up higher and not right into me. Also me flying back a bit,” she called out.

“I know but still, it’s a thing,” Alto called back, “Alright then, I guess we just keep these games up for now. Day three and we can start hitting each other in hand to hand again.”

Chapter XXV

It was once more a new day. Elise stepped back with wood sword swinging to block another sword. The weight moved against, then softened. Without a second thought she had begun pressing forward to push Alto. He held, quick to take a step back and thrust forward only to be blocked by Elise's downswing. Her eyes of fire looked into his as both struggled slightly until Alto delivered a kick.

Forward he ran as Elise tumbled back though quickly she flipped back and rolled. With another flip she was back on her feet and swung to block Alto's latest swing. He let loose a grunt as he pushed with all his might evenly locked with Elise now.

"At last you're beginning to learn to read your opponent a bit better. At this rate you might be good in a straight up fight within a couple of weeks."

"Couple weeks? Pft, come on, I'll take you in just five days!"

She swung again, a swing that missed just barely. Alto's eyes narrowed, his sword swinging down right atop hers.

JAB

She spit up as Alto's fist flew into her gut, enough force to send her stumbling back with bent knees. Alto straightened himself and shot ahead, "Not with that much slack you won't, it's nowhere near good enough to even joke about."

THWACK

With another hit Elise went flying, rolling with skips off the ground until it was a tumble into a stop. She had rolled eight meters away, on her side,

right side pressed as a brace with the left arm and leg propping themselves to hold herself. Alto stood before her in seconds, the tip of his weapon held to her throat, "You've a long way to go. Don't rush it."

"I know it's stupid to be greedy, and I know the idea of becoming a warrior over night is just as silly but, I have the determination Alto," she growled looking back into his eyes, "I can't give up, I can't falter now!"

"Heh, what have you, a death wish or something? I swear, keep this up and you'll wear yourself out to nothing kid," he laughed.

"Gah, why do you keep calling me kid when we're both around the same age? Alright, come on," she replied sliding backwards from Alto's weapon, "Next round."

"Such determination. I like it. Alright, we're only on day three don't forget. We've plenty of time left. If you break a leg, it'll just take longer."

"I'm good to go," she replied.

"Right then, let's go!"

Chapter XXVI**THWAM**

“GYYYRAAAHHH-!!” came a wheezing yell.

A crash followed sooner after along with a spritz of laughter. Mark crashed onto his side while Elise sat comfortably across from him. A stone table lay before them with Elise’s left elbow on top, her hand down palm side on top of another hand which she held. The hand was none other than Mark’s, he who now lay on the ground.

Standing around was Zoey, Scott, Drake, Samantha, Thomas, and Destiny. Elise laughed herself as she pulled her hand away, “S-sorry about that,” she coughed, “I went overboard Mark.”

“Heck, she tossed you like a piece of paper Markie,” Scott laughed.

“Schooled the hell out of you,” Drake followed up.

“Yeah yeah, she really got you. She does have monster strength, doesn’t she?” Zoey laughed, “Guess that’s what happens when you’re worked to death, right?”

“I thought she was going to break my arm,” Mark coughed sitting back up, “God dang. That nearly, oh yeah I can feel that. Hell and I’m a big ol muscular guy.”

“What, do you think women are all weak?” Destiny muttered, questioningly with a glare at Mark.

Mark looked at her, eyes big, shaking his head quickly, “No no no, not at all Desti.”

“Oh, alright,” she chirped back.

Elise laughed, as did Scott and Drake. Samantha grinned for a moment; though quickly her energy left her. A deep sigh left her all at once, “I wish Elen were still here among us.”

The mood died, everyone drawing quiet. Eyes shifted towards the ground, heads tilting and turning. Both of Elise’s eyes closed as she brushed her lengthy hair out of her face. Once opened she looked up, “Yeah.”

“Ya know what,” Zoey began, looking around, “She may no longer be among us; but she is still with us.”

“That’s a rather stupi-” Thomas began, until a hand was placed upon him, “-stupi-stupendous way to think about it!”

His head slowly turned to meet the gaze of Destiny, whose glare turned to a smirk at the word stupendous. Her head in turn nodded while her hand pulled away from Thomas. Both Scott and Drake raised their right fists, nodding along, followed by Samantha who just grinned. Finally Elise turned and nodded with a smile.

“Cheers then, in her memory,” Mark said standing back up tall.

“Definitely,” Elise replied, looking over to him, “She will never be forgotten.”

Elise stood following that comment, looking over the group, “Alright, not to break this session up but by my count you guys have work to go and do.”

“Fair,” Mark said looking around, “Don’t need Vulper yelling at us again.”

“Right, see ya Elise,” Zoey stated.

“Bye Elise,” Destiny chimed.

“Later non-sis sis,” Drake laughed.

“What he said,” Scott added.

All of them departed leaving Elise alone at that moment; though with the passing time she went on her own way down a different tunnel back towards her room. As per usual it was nothing but a couple of twists and turns as she went on her way down the tunnels, a left here and a right there. Down another corridor and onward to another turn.

As she turned down another way she halted for a moment, staring ahead down the tunnel. That halt was short as she moved onward towards another person. In the middle of the tunnel was Britt, standing at ease, staring at her, waiting. She strolled down the tunnel, right by him. In return, he turned and followed.

Both walked in near unison down the hall; though Elise moved further on ahead by a few paces. Britt opened his mouth, first to speak, “So.”

“So?”

“It’s been awhile since we had a conversation Elise.”

“Ah, right, sorry about that brother, I’ve just had a lot on my mind lately,” Elise replied moving forward, eyes glancing back for a moment.

He chuckled at the response, eyes shut, head shaking, and head lowered, “I guess I can get that. For awhile I thought you were mad at me or something.”

“Mad at you? Oh I could never be mad at you Britt. At least I don’t think I could,” she replied as they moved down another hallway, “You’ve always been so good to me, unlike Rusty.”

“Our brother isn’t always... all there, so to speak. At any rate, I’m glad we can at least talk again for a bit. How are you holding up?”

“Better than I was a week ago, I can tell you that; though I can’t tell you why just yet.”

“Ah, alright alright. We’re all entitled to our secrets. Anyways, so long as you’re alright. Sorry to cut this short. I’m supposed to be out on a mission right now but I wanted to do a quick check in.”

“That’s totally fine, I understand.”

“Right, take care, we’ll catch up for real later on,” he said stopping in place.

With a turn and a dash he was gone in no time. Elise’s eyes remained behind her for a moment before switching back ahead as she curved round another tunnel. Her mind flickered, visualizing the novel and then the sword. A smile spread forth on her face, “{You’ll find out soon enough why I’m doing good brother.}”

Chapter XXVII

Elise stood in a clearing, katana at her side, book in the hand of her other side. She stared straight ahead at Alto, whose nails were lengthened into wolf claws. Before him lay a pile of wood, splintered off into many pieces. Claw marks lay in many of the pieces.

A sliver stuck forth from one of his claws. Slowly said claws began to crackle and dry, going from black to dull gray. Soon as they continued to dry they'd begin to shrivel, and as they shriveled they'd begin to fall off one by one to reveal the ends of his fingers. All ten fell and landed atop the wood, while Elise just stood in place waiting.

Finally Alto began to move, stepping left, "And that is the importance of melee weapons. My claws are a part of me but as you can see they still work. They can block, they can attack, they can boost me in ways hand to hand alone can not. Now, take up that sword."

"Take up?"

He face palmed, "Take it out and hold it."

"Oh uh, alright," she stated, placing her left hand on the hilt attached to her right.

She pulled it, bending her arm and body carefully pulling it from the sheathe. Once out, a simple twist of the hand, and then an adjustment. Both hands were placed upon the hilt as she held it out, angled between straight up and straight forward. Slowly she lowered it, pointing the tip right at Alto.

Alto nodded, holding out his right hand with hand outstretched, "How does it feel?"

“Heavy.”

“And do you think it should feel so heavy?”

“No, it isn’t made of much. I can’t honestly say why it feels this way.

Let me guess-”

“That’s because it’s an extension of yourself Elise, one you have yet to earn the right to hold.”

“Ah, so there is some manner of mystic wonder to it.”

“If you can master the sword and master it as an extension of your being, it will become weightless. Now, go on, wave it around.”

She slowly raised it up, high up. Then she swung it down. Up, then down. Swift and simple chopping motions.

“Alright,” she said moving it side to side.

“Now try swinging it with force.”

Raising it up high yet again, it was swung down far quicker than before. It clattered along the ground, bouncing.

“Whoops.”

“Tighten your grip next time,” Alto stated as she reached down, double handing it again, “But not too tight.”

She swung again, this time without it flying off. Alto gave forth a nod, “Alright. Try some different swings.”

“Alright,” she mumbled, raising the weapon.

It was down, right, left, forward, diagonally right, and then down again. Crush, sweep, sweep, stab, slash, and crush. A bash came next as she thrust the blunt side forward. Then once more, with both hands, the weapon was held high, “Like that?”

“Perfect. Well, good enough, not perfect, heh heh,” Alto chuckled.

“Gee thanks.”

With that Elise began to swing the weapon side to side again. Alto nodded, “Alright, play around with that for awhile until it sinks in. We’ll work on swordplay every three days or so I’d say.”

“Sounds good. You know Alto, I can’t thank you enough.”

“Oh? Why is that?”

“I mean, I could’ve always done this myself or found a way to have my clan friends help but you’re helping me progress far faster I’d say.”

“Oh, well then yeah you’re uh, you’re welcome.”

“I just hope this’ll all be enough to actually make a difference.”

“Time will tell princess, heh heh. We can only vaguely guess at the future, not predict it.”

The two exchanged nods and smiles. Elise returned once more to swinging the sword around, left and right, up and down. A thrust forward, a turn to block with the blunt side, a few spins. An attempt at one handed was quickly made; though the blade quickly flew off as a result. Elise watched as it crashed against a tree, falling to the ground.

With a burst of laughter she approached it, her smile maintaining itself strongly.