

Act 4- Empty Dreams & Twisted Despair

Chapter XXXIV

A golden sun rose on the horizon, its light cast upon rocks and trees alike with the blowing of the grass via the wind. Birds would chirp as they flew overhead through the glowing light, happy little chirps. For Elise, all appeared as just another morning with some exception. The exception lay off to the side, a cave to the left.

Vulper lay upon the ground, Sacho at his side, with Destiny and Thomas as well. Drool came from Sacho's lips, one of his eyes wide open though not reactive as he snored away. His body twitched, his tongue falling out into the dirt. She sighed at the sight, "{Hemlock is still in his system and he still has to be with the group. He's going to be so pissed when he regains full control of his body.}"

She turned her head, face facing the sky. Her expression left blank, her eyes locked up high and clouded.

"Elise, as you well know you are one of the very few Vulfax Drachen without the muffled blood of the Vampire running through your veins. Sacho also does but since he has still not fully recovered, you will be the one to watch over us in the day time," Vulper had stated.

Her head turned back towards the cave, thoughts locking to the group, "{I told them we should have left earlier. Now it'll be a whole day lost of just this. That's sure to anger father. Granted we're only late because I poisoned Sacho in battle but heck, he didn't have to tag along. Well, at least he isn't hostile about it at the moment.}"

The winds whistled, dancing around Elise like children on a playground. Her hair blew, curled yet still long. Her right hand motioned upwards, pushing the hair back from her face, eyes echoing with the impact of the sun. Slowly they curved right.

She glanced up to the ridge to her right as rocks tumbled. Before her sight walked people in red coats and hats, heading in the direction her squad had come from. Three looked down at her though continued to walk. One gave a slight nod and spoke among his group in such a way that Elise barely could hear it, "Just a girl, not a Vampire. Keep on men."

She watched as they carried onward, letting them exit her range, "{It's like these humans only think Vampires and Werewolves exist. So insulting.}"

Her head turned again and went up with eyes resting upon the sky. Birds flapped, moving along. A smile formed as her head continued to converse, "{Won't be long now I suppose. This is my first mission for the clan, like, first at being a fighter of any sort. Tonight I get to shine!}"

"Based on information we have gathered thus far, Stark Pack is looking to rebel," came a call.

Elise stood with arms at her sides, Thomas and Destiny before her. Vulper stood, facing another who addressed the group. Vulper nodded, "I am aware Phil. And based on Elise's report, if she would so kindly give again."

"Oh uh, right. It wasn't all that long ago. I ran into two of their own elite, David and Milly. They had a squad with them. Originally they were going to jump me thinking it would give them leverage until my friend Alto arrived. At that point we engaged them, took a couple out, and then the priests showed up spooking them off," she replied.

Phil looked to her, then to Vulper with a nod. She looked off to the right, "{A lie, of course, well partially. There's no need to mention all the details.}"

"Your mission is as Lord Azala stated. The Flatz Pack, also known as Stark Pack, is in need of a reminder of why they bow down to the Drachen

of Vulfax. Your presence will reinstate that idea, and if it doesn't you do what you need to do."

"Pardon me for saying but how can we be sure they won't just attack us?" Destiny questioned.

"They won't unless they want to be wiped out. Sure they might be rebellious but they won't risk a full blown fight with Vulfax, not alone. If they attack your team, that will be the trigger," Phil replied.

Elise glanced away, nodding feverishly.

"We'll set out immediately then," Vulper replied.

"No. Wait for Sacho to recover enough to move. Lord Azala's orders."

"That'll force us to leave just before sunrise though, meaning we'll have to wait in a cave or something for the moon to rise again," Thomas blurted out.

"Deal with it."

Her attention returned to the cave, her feet carrying her over towards it, "{This just doesn't feel right... but Vulper is here, so this'll all turn out right. I'm sure of it.}"

A branch crackled above, sending Elise's face flying. Up she looked, observing. Massive wolves moved along the ledge, one of silver looking down at her before turning away. With a deep breath, she moved in to settle.

Chapter XXXV

Night had fallen again as the group of five carried on through the valley. Elise held position to the back left of Vulper, Sacho to her right, and Destiny in the middle. Heading up the rear was Thomas who was constantly on the look out with a spinning head, occasionally twisting his torso around to look behind. Their steps echoed as they continued on, the end of the valley soon to be in sight as they turned one more bend.

Ahead it was there, the walls shortening off as the ground became greener, trees ahead. Elise smiled as Destiny groaned aloud, “Finally.”

Vulper nodded as they kept moving towards the end, “Finally indeed. We’ll address the Stark Pack and get this over with.”

“You’re sure they won’t attack us right?”

“Lord Azala’s logic is on point. Yes they probably want to get out from under our thumb but they won’t risk war. This is because their leader, Dustin, is an incompetent fat fool. What, are you afraid Elise?”

Her head shook as she murmured, “I just don’t really desire an encounter with them again after what happened last time.”

“Last time?” Thomas questioned, “What’s the big deal? You barely fought and the priests scared them off from what you reported.”

“There might’ve been more to the story that I just left out, alright? Doesn’t matter now though.”

“Isn’t it a bit irresponsible to leave things out of your report?” Sacho growled, looking at her.

“I talked to Britt about it and he said to keep it to myself because no one would believe it. I don’t think he even believed it. During that confrontation we battled them right? Well, the priests didn’t scare them off because there weren’t any, just two guys dressed like Priests. They could breathe fire and move around faster than any Vampire. And the Stark Pack had their own guy with super powers.”

“You know you’re right, I don’t believe it,” Sacho laughed.

“You had to have been high or something Elise,” Thomas replied.

“Be silent, we’re about there, and their are eyes on us already.”

“Eyes Vulper? Where?”

Rock crumbled down the slopes of the valley as the group came to a halt, figures soon visible atop as if on cue. Elise’s eyes wandered around , Thomas and Destiny froze, quick to stand on guard as Sacho grew tense. Vulper simply let his own eyes dart around, “Twenty-four eh?”

“{Tch, we’re surrounded?}” Elise thought to herself with muscles tensing.

Her eyes looked up the right wall and froze, the sight of David quickly churning her stomach. Milly stood to his right, both seeming to be looking down upon Elise in particular. David let off a smile once his gaze caught sight of Elise’s.

Vulper sighed and looked off to the right at once, “We are of Clan Vulfax here to seek an audience with your Alpha. If we can not see Dustin then we request that a message be delivered from Lord Azala.”

David was the one who spoke out, “I am David of Stark Pack, second hand to our Alpha. Lord Dustin is occupied and will not be receiving your

message, though as his second in command I will be more than happy to take a message.”

Elise glanced around, “This doesn’t feel right, why so many for the valley? Stark Pack can’t be big enough to allow this for all points of possible entry or patrol, can they?” she murmured.

“No,” Destiny mumbled back, “This is not normal.”

“I thank you then David. Lord Azala commands that you abide by our contract of blood. Stark Pack recently has been sighted as acting out in my master’s eyes. He says this will not be tolerated. Any further defiance could lead to the extermination of your Pack. As tribute he demands no more than twenty percent bonus this next moon.”

Yells of shock arose from those on the valley walls, all barking down as David continued to smirk. Destiny looked up, “That smarmy douche bag just had to be here.”

“Those terms are steep, far too steep. You already take twenty percent of our land, of our hunting grounds, of our resources. To take another, that’s simple insanity. We have many mouths to feed, many threats knocking. We can not devote such an extent of ourselves to you people.”

“Then it will be your own destruction David!” Vulper shouted.

“And what if we kill you now and frame the Goblins? Eh? Yeah you heard me, the Goblins. Those wretched creatures have been a thorn in your master’s side for ages longer. What if we never received your memo? What if we framed them? Vulfax would go to war with the Goblin and make themselves vulnerable, too vulnerable to take charge over Stark Pack. I think that idea is fair, what say you men?”

At once those along the valley walls cheered out in celebration, as if calling out to the heavens themselves. Vulper took a step back, his face showing signs of discomfort.

Sacho looked over to Vulper immediately, “Are you serious Vulper? You’re putting us in the Lion’s Den with this. Even with Elise’s newfound skill we can’t take on all these guys you dumb ass!”

“Didn’t it just get stated that they wouldn’t take this approach too?” Destiny hissed.

“Honestly I thought our Lord knew something that I didn’t,” Vulper replied taking a firm stance, “If it weren’t an order, I would not have agreed to this.”

“So what are we just supposed to be a martyr for Vulfax to start a war, is that what this is about?!” Destiny spat.

Elise broke rank, stepping passed the stationed Vulper. He held his hand out, “Elise, stay back!”

She stopped before the cliff, looking straight up at David, “Alright David, let’s do this, you and me!”

David looked at her, an eye raised. She continued, “Oh I’m sorry, I thought you wanted to avenge the life of that mongrel I put down that last time David. You seemed pretty shaken up by it if I remember right. Come on, let’s do this!”

David scowled with a growl. Beside him Milly’s nails turned to lengthy claws, her teeth sharpening, her eyes going wolf-like.

“Elise, the heck are you doing?” Vulper called.

“I have no idea, a distraction? Probably the best I can do. He seems prideful enough.”

“Fucking... little harpy. All Wulfn, get ready to rip these bastards apart!” David yelled out.

“Crap, that’s not what I was expecting-” Elise mumbled.

Howls were heard at once though not the howls of wolves or Wulfn, the howls of men and women. Rocks shifted and clattered all at once. Elise’s eyes stretched big as did those of her companions. All of the warriors with David quickly turned around, David himself doing such. Figures bolted down from the ledges above David and his patrol unit.

Among the many flew Rusty, Britt, and even Phil. Down rained the Vulfax Warriors with weapons at the ready from sword to dagger to bow and arrow. Arrows flew down into the many warriors of Stark Pack as blades were plunged into their flesh by many of the falling warriors of Vulfax.

Screams broke out and then yells. Several Wulfn fell backwards off their stationed points towards the valley floor though Drachen also fell. David moved quickly and slammed his right fist into the gut of one Drachen, flinging it over him and off to the valley below. The individual screamed until the splat.

Thomas stumbled back, Destiny coughed, Sacho grunted. Elise’s feet shuffled around as her hair flopped.

“Vulper, what the hell is going on here?” Destiny spat.

“An invasion proposed by Britt, confirmed by Lord Azala,” came the response, though not from Vulper.

A figure dropped down behind, that figure being Nora. She landed beside Sacho, looking at the raining Drachen who fell atop the Wulfn.

“An invasion? Explain!” Sacho barked.

“Lord Azala opted long ago to get rid of Stark Pack. Originally he was going to just send everyone in to fight; but then Britt predicted Stark Pack’s movements and made a compromise at long last. He convinced Lord Azala to send a small squad with a message to confront the Pack, estimating that they’d have a massive patrol watching the valley in preparation for exactly what David stated. He had you all wait for Sacho before starting this so he could amass our forces and follow.”

“And he couldn’t have said this before we went in?” Vulper mumbled.

“Couldn’t risk someone being overly confident and sending out red flags,” Nora said glaring at Elise.

“Don’t look at me Nora!”

“No matter. Now, while we hold them, head into the forest and drag Dustin out by his fat flubbering carcass. We’re to use him to force the pack to stand down and submit. Though he might be a pathetic slob, a Wulfn Pack will always answer to their Alpha and protect them. Dustin is the perfect bargaining chip.”

Several figures jumped down in front of Vulper with Britt among them. He turned his head to Vulper, “Alright, we need to move at once. My team is to accompany you to insure this goes off without a hitch.”

“I see, very well,” Vulper replied, “Then we must find Dustin as soon as possible!”

A shift of the wind came, carrying with it a chilling voice, the pitch almost ghostly, “Why bother, when he can simply come to you?”

Not more than sixty meters away stood several people shrouded in cloaks. Vulper, Sacho, and Britt turned and stepped back immediately. Eyes began to shift to the head of the valley, all upon a single figure.

At the head of the new group before them stood an individual cloaked. His pants torn and black with slight bloodstains, his shirt a darkened gray also torn and with blood stains. Even the cloak itself was torn.

With his grin he let show teeth filed to sharp points, each like a fang. His hands stretched and clenched at the air, big with nails also filed sharp. This individual stood tall at what appeared to be almost two meters or rather over six feet. Not only was he tall but he was also puffed out, muscular with a well built frame.

His hair long, spiky, and brown down his neck a fair bit while his bangs drooped to the sides of glowing amber eyes that seemed almost blood red. A scar lay over his left eye though no damage appeared to be present to the eye itself.

“Th-that’s-” Vulper stammered.

“It can’t be,” Sacho murmured.

“What, what is it?” Elise questioned immediately looking past the three to see the new arrivals.

“That’s- that’s him,” Vulper murmured.

“Wait, you don’t mean-”

“Yes Elise... that’s Dustin, Dustin Abbott.”

Chapter XXXVI

Dustin Abbott stood before Britt's group and Vulper's. With him were ten more of his own warriors. Behind approached many more who split apart and flew off at the rising sides of the valley walls, climbing to back up their compatriots. Vulper stepped back again as did the rest minus the young trio with Vulper.

Elise's focused shifted once again, attention turned towards Vulper, "That's Dustin? But how? I thought he was some slob that couldn't do anything?"

"That's what he's supposed to be- dammit. That's him though, no mistake. The scent, the general appearance."

Dustin's cloak tails flapped as his attention moved around among the group before him, a group now composed of eleven individuals. "A fair few of you I recognize. Britt, son of Azala. Vulper, one of Azala's best. Yes a fair few of you I know quite well," he chuckled in a soft voice.

His gaze drifted until sights were set on Elise. For a moment he stood there, observing. Elise looked back into the flames of his own eyes. Silence drifted among the group as soon Vulper and Britt followed the gaze of the two. Still Dustin said nothing.

"Dustin, caught dead struck by love?"

"Not at all Vulper. I just recognize her somehow, as if I've seen her before. Oh, I know, the girl that David reported. Yes, she is that child isn't she? His description really was dead on, perfectly pictured, heh heh."

"Wha- how would you know what I look like if David only told you?"

“Heh, I have my ways child. Now then, shall we get on with this? I’ll take you on right here and now.”

Stances changed immediately, feet shuffling for a brief period. Many stood together as a unit as Dustin grinned, his eyes dancing around watching each as they moved. Elise stood in the middle with Destiny to the rear. Vulper, Sacho, and Britt stood at the head with everyone else stationed around. Dustin let out a slight chuckle, stepping forward in response.

Britt stood ready, glaring forward, “Elise I want you to stay back.”

“What? But Britt I can fight too, I want to help,” she spoke boldly.

“I don’t want you getting mixed up in this. Please stay back little sister. At the moment we’re not quite sure what Dustin is capable of. We need you for this. As our tactician you must remain safe.”

“I can do more than that so while I appreciate your concern, I’m going to have to ask you to stop acting like Rusty. I can do this.”

“Are you sure about that?” came Dustin’s voice though not from in front of the group.

Shuffling gravel and the sound of feet landing, the sound of something falling quickly from the air. Elise’s body flipped around immediately to lay eyes on Dustin though only momentarily. His left arm swung and with a mighty smack, Elise was sent flying off to the left. Rock churned again as she crashed into the valley wall, slumping down with rocks falling down on her.

“Elise!” Destiny shouted out.

“So fast-” Sacho stammered.

“Dammit,” Vulper grumbled out loud.

“How dare you. Get him,” Britt commanded.

“Attack!” barked Thomas.

Thomas launched himself at Dustin as Destiny dove for the Alpha’s feet. With a slight scoff he spun, Dustin’s right leg up in a blur of movement with his foot connecting right into Thomas’s side. Saliva left Thomas’s mouth as he spiraled off to the side with a crash. Destiny would quickly join him as Dustin’s left foot flew to deliver a mighty kick. Both flopped grunting as Dustin stood with his back to the rest of the Vulfax warriors, chuckling.

“Such speed and strength. What exactly changed YOU so suddenly Dustin?”

“Heh, well Sacho it’s simple really. My position granted me connections with some very powerful allies who were more than happy to assist me with my transformation into a better Alpha.”

“Sacho, Britt, be on guard. I don’t know what kind of steroids this guy is on but I am heavily concerned by what he just pulled.”

“Shut up Vulper, all he did was knock away a few pups. We’ve got this,” Sacho laughed.

“Are you sure about that?” Dustin chuckled with a quick jolt forward at the remaining foes.

Britt returned the favor and took charge as well, a dagger in hand swung forward. Dustin’s left hand rose and flew, the blade slamming through the palm. It was at that point that Dustin’s fingers bent and he grabbed hold, a hold of Britt’s hand and weapon.

CRACK

Britt flew off quickly as Dustin released his grip, right fist slammed right into Britt’s gut. The dagger ripped its way out as the Drachen flew. Blood

dripped from the wound in Dustin's hand as his foe crashed off beyond the group. Steam quickly began to emit from the wound to which Vulper looked on in shock once more.

"The wound is already healing."

"What the hell are we dealing with Vulper?"

"I don't know Sacho. This is unlike anything I have ever seen any Wulfn do."

"Ha, I like how you people still think I'm a lowly Wulfn."

"What's that?" came a bark back.

"Here, allow me to show you what I am capable of, eh? Heh heh."

"Bite me, dastard," Sacho spat.

"Well that is most certainly an option," was the chuckled response.

Without another word spoken the two elite took charge at Dustin with several of their own following after, those who had arrived with Britt. Dustin simply grinned as the group approached, his arms out as if welcoming them. His eyes glimmered as he let off a slight snarl.

Crackling, smacking, and slapping. Kicks and punches were thrown out with leaps high into the air sending many a Drachen flying off as Dustin's speed surpassed what many could even react to. Vulper and Sacho flipped around unleashing their fists at Dustin who stepped gracefully, his torso moving ever so, evading each and every thrown punch. With a quick flip Vulper kicked up, another miss as Dustin tilted to his left with another grin.

CRACK

Vulper flew right into Sacho, both flying off crashing into two other Vulfaxians with grunts, Dustin's right leg lowering, "Hmph. Maybe I shouldn't have started as fast as I did. The fun is already over."

Vulper gagged with both hands holding his gut as he lay, "Ahh- what the flying hell. He's not even in a transformed state yet he packs that much."

"Yes. Feel it boys, feel it well. This is the power I have been granted by my new allies. I am now stronger than any Vampire, Zaherian, Goblin, Drachen, anything. And now you die."

With a laugh he jumped high into the air again and flew down with feet ready to stomp down on Vulper and Sacho. Both looked up struggling to move, paralyzed by the previous damage caused to them.

"Vulper," Sacho groaned.

"I know Sacho, I can't move-"

"Ha ha ha, now yo- pwaaf!"

Vulper and Sacho blinked, looking up as blood streamed out of Dustin as he flipped off to the left. With a thud he crashed atop a rock via his back first, a throwing dagger in his right side, one in his right shoulder, and one in his right calf. Vulper blinked again, glancing off to his left, "Elise?" he murmured shocked.

Elise stood in a defensive stance, two daggers in her right hand and the katana unsheathed in her left. Vulper turned his head to Dustin who laid upon the ground, then back to Elise as the foe slowly began to stand back up, "How did you-"

"Heh. Generally a person can't dodge in the air unless they have ample time to lean away or unless they have wings. I shook off that slap he gave me

and waited for an opening. Of course it's over for Dustin now," she chuckled raising the daggers, a slight dust coating drifting off of them.

Vulper's eyes shook, "Hemlock. She coated her weapons in it like a poison as well. Astounding."

Sacho coughed, breaking into a slight chuckle after, "Heh heh, that's Elise for you I suppose. She can't outfight so she out thinks. Pft, no wonder I lost. Well done child."

A smile popped up on her face, a nod given in response to Sacho's comment, "{He's right. I can't outstep an opponent with conventional fighting. That is definitely not my strong suit right now. So long as I can keep doing things like this though I have a chance.}"

A growl came from Dustin as slowly he began to stir, his hands down pushing him up. Up he stood with a slight stumble, steam venting from his wounds with the daggers being pushed out, "How dare you turn me into a fricken skewered pig, eh. I think I'll start with you first child."

"He just took those daggers and can still stand? I thought her Concentrated Hemlock was stronger than that-"

"Who knows, this guy isn't normal Sacho."

"You little flippin shit, that hurt!" Dustin spat as he caught one of the daggers in his right hand and another in the left, holding them at the ready, "I am going to take you down with this. Get ready."

Dustin took off at Elise at the same speed as before, like a blur. Elise quickly flipped her sword around and sheathed it with a swift thrust backwards, a dagger tossed up and caught in her left hand so that now each brandished one a piece.

“Elise, don’t take him on alone!” Vulper shouted as he stumbled yet again, his bearings still off as Sacho fell to his right.

Elise stepped back at once as Dustin came with a downward swing. Her left arm thrust up quickly, the right arm swinging with dagger covering most of the area before her. Dustin’s feet planted themselves for only a moment, after which he then leaped back to land solid. He grinned as he landed, having dodged the impalement and the slash.

“That was the correct response. Had you dodged or only moved one of those I would’ve had an opening. Your guard counter is fairly solid as well. I am definitely going to- ack!”

His eyes grew wide as at once he dropped to one knee, huffing as sweat began to drip down his head, “Gah- wh-what is this? My body, it’s on fire- poison?”

Elise smiled slightly and nodded. “That’s right,” she spoke, “Concentrated Hemlock Dust to be exact. Read about how potent it is if mixed just right with everything else. The right dosage taken the right way can cripple the body in seconds. Excess and boom, death.”

“I see. So those daggers you hit me with were laced in it eh? Well aren’t you the naughty one.”

“Thanks for that, I most certainly am. Brain can often beat brawn if used proper. Now then, for the sake of the Clan of Vulfax, I’ll conclude this with your capture.”

“How adorable. You’re trying to prove your worth among a clan of idiots, is that it? Not bad kid, though I think you underestimate my power.”

With arms and legs quivering he rose up bit by bit. Elise stepped back with arms held up at the ready, "But the Hemlock, how can he still-"

"Your talents are wasted in that clan smug brat, you could've been so much more if you had grown a metaphorical pair."

Vulper stood at the ready once more as did Sacho, Thomas, and Destiny close by. Britt stumbled forth to join them as Dustin went on with a smirk, "Ah yes, the question of how. Shall I show you what else I can do? Ah yes, that would be a good show."

His right arm extended towards Vulper and the rest. Puzzled expressions answered though only temporary. A misty cloud of blackness emerged forth around Dustin's right hand with palm held out, a sphere of darkness forming as the mist drew in towards the palm's center. Thomas's eyes grew big, Destiny's jaw dropped, Sacho's feet shuffled back, Vulper coughed, and Britt stammered. Elise looked on in shock as the sphere grew bigger with sparks of the darkness radiating out.

"Vulper- what the Hell is that?"

"I don't know Sacho. An illusion?"

"No that's-" Britt began before cutting himself off as Dustin let out a yell.

The sphere shattered and what appeared to be a massive beam of the substance flew out, an energy blast. With a mighty yell Dustin commanded the attack, "Dark Art- Petrification Annihilation!"

"Scatter!" Vulper quickly shouted as it drew in.

All of them leaped away, all except a stunned Destiny.

"Destiny, get out of the way!"

“I-I-I can’t move. My feet are frozen!”

“It’s useless, those that this attack targets who possess fear are unable to dodge. It is more than a simple attack, it’s magic. Heh,” Dustin chuckled.

Elise’s face filled with horror, “No, NO!” she yelled out, running at Destiny.

It struck with the force of a bomb blast, the intensity of a grenade, or the hit of a fast moving semi. Rock flew but that was not all that did so. Blood splattered the ground behind as the blast cloud flew upwards rather than around, Destiny having acted like a wall at that point. Body parts flew back and crashed against the valley wall, her body slumping over with a moan as blood flowed out.

“Destiny!” Thomas yelled out at once, turning to face Dustin with rage spread across his face.

A dripping sound could be heard immediately after, a gurgling, then a thud. Thomas stumbled back with his throat torn open, blood flowing out like a river. A dagger slammed into the rock behind him, a dagger pure black.

Once more Elise yelled out in horror, to which Britt yelled, “Don’t approach him!”

Dustin side stepped with another attack forming in his right palm, a grin visible. His arm flung out, the attack firing as it had before, “Too bad, I would’ve enjoyed brainwashing you. Dark Art- Petrification Annihilation!”

“You bastard!” Elise yelled as it came at her, feet skidding.

“What the-”

Elise launched herself over the attack as it flew by beneath her. Both arms flew up and then flung forward, the daggers she had held launching at

Dustin, "What the hell? She dodged my magic? No- it should've locked on regardless and followed. Has she no god damn fear in her?"

The daggers slammed into his chest as Elise came down meters away. Dustin flew back and crashed with a howl, the beam of darkness splintering off and fading. As she landed she fumbled forward with a cough, "Ugh, I inhaled a little of the Hemlock. Dammit-"

Vulper landed beside Elise as did Sacho while many wolves dropped down around Dustin who lay upon his back. Many Wulfn Beasts landed as well. Britt stumbled forward with a growl, "Dammit. Vulper we're outmatched."

"I know. Your father sent us into a trap to spring a trap that has trapped us."

"There's no way that he knew about this Vulper. Besides it was my plan."

"He pressured this Britt, he wanted immediate action and wouldn't let us observe a damn thing. We had to act immediately and it screwed us."

Sacho gave a glance back, then a glance forward, "Vulper. Grab Elise and run."

"Sacho? What are you-"

"That's an order to you sir. Everyone must pull back, this is a fight that can't be won without reinforcements."

"You can't hold them yourself Sacho you idiot!"

"Yeah I know but I can draw them off though with a little backup.

Vulper, just do it. Take Elise and insure that Azala doesn't harm her. She spared

my life prior and has saved it as well. By my own warrior code, I'll return the favor."

"I- tch, I understand."

With a nod, Sacho launched himself forward with the Wulfn readying themselves. Vulper quickly landed beside Elise grabbing hold of her, "All forces, fall back!" Vulper turned and bolted with his hand around Elise, holding her at his side.

Her eyes drifted, looking back as Sacho flew at Dustin. At once Sacho disappeared behind a wave of Wulfn who rained down behind, screams heard as several remained back taking on the Wulfn while many ran behind Vulper in retreat.

"{D-dammit,}" Elise thought to herself as her eyes closed.

Rusty turned round and bolted with many of his own, as Britt turned and ran with many others. "I can't believe this shit!" Vulper shouted out.

They continued to run as the sounds of laughing people could be heard, then the howls of the Wulfn, howls of victory, "Pathetic Drachen."

"Hahaha, look at them run!"

They ran unaware as it was more than the Wulfn watching. In the distance atop a ledge, the wind blew. Fabric flapped, the color of black with red stars. White hair blew in the wind as cold dark blue eyes observed.

Chapter XXXVII

“-and forgive me lord but I keep telling you that battle was not winnable.”

“Excuses Vulper. I do not want to hear your excuses for your failures, I want to hear why you thought it wise to return back here with such a weak performance!”

The Clan had gathered in the ma in cavern, multiple showing signs of injury and fatigue. Vulper stood in the middle of the room looking up to Azala with rage spread across his face. Atop the ledge stood Phil, Britt, Rusty, and the clan’s Queen Mindy. Many eyes on the group faced Vulper, many damning eyes.

“Vulper, you surely must understand my predicament here. You failed your assessment of the situation and jumped the gun when you should have just retreated. The failure is on your team, the failure of you and my daughter.”

“You’re the one who pushed for the immediate invasion sire. This has nothing to do with Britt’s plan. We were not privy to all the details of this assignment either!”

“I’ve heard enough out of you. Vulper, you have disgraced the Clan of Vulfax with your poor judgment and opened floodwaters to wash away the entire Clan. Where Stark Pack sees victory, others will see weakness. We will have an uprising on our hands. I can not let this go unpunished.”

“Father please, this was my doing, my plan that failed. If anything I-”

“No Britt, it was the execution of your plan that led to this.

Unfortunately three of the initial team are dead so I have only two to look upon

for judgment. Hmm, what to do what to do. Ah, yes. I shall have one of you banished for your failure.”

“What?” Elise spat out.

The crowd quickly parted as all eyes shifted focus to the rear of the room as Elise moved forward.

“Do not question my judgment girl.”

“I will most certainly question it Father. We had no idea of what was going to happen and from what I have heard you acted too swiftly.”

“Elise hold your tongue!” Britt shouted, a strong touch of worry in his voice.

“I will not Britt. Vulper has worked his ass off for this Clan for so long, becoming an elite. I’ve even broken my stance on being passive and started learning how to fight just so I could contribute more. And here for following orders you want to banish one of us? Our own died for this, really!?”

Azala smirked as he looked upon Elise, continuing to listen.

“You are just a useless girl Elise, I’m surprised you even bothered to-” another individual began.

“Shut up Nocknar!” Elise spat.

The individual who spoke crept back as Elise stopped beside Vulper.

“My you’ve certainly found some backbone recently haven’t you? Though really you should watch your tone my child. Did Vulper not detail you to the part where he knew about the ambush ahead of time?”

“What?”

“Vulper, yes, he knew what you five were walking into. Britt tasked him with that. He was supposed to pull back if he believed the battle wasn’t

winnable before the others attacked. He failed to do so, he judged the enemy's strength wrongly."

"That- that doesn't matter. How could he have known, he had no signal to give, no recon, he had nothing and was just as surprised as the rest of us to see Dustin! You know why this failed? Because of your rushed impatient viewpoint we lost many people in something that shouldn't have happened the way it did."

"Oh I get it. You're mad because those two friends you had died. Such is the way of a warrior though."

"Are you serious?"

"Enough! My mind is made up. I brandish you both as cowards who retreated and for questioning my authority. As for you, Vulper, I hereby strip you of your rank as an elite of Vulfax. Your performance was legendary for how crap it was."

"You weren't even there Father, don't judge what you did not see--"

"Enough! Be silent before I banish the both of you. And on that note, which of you shall it be that I send away, hmm?"

"My Lord, please, can't we just--"

"No more talk Vulper. I want one of you out of my sight right now for the last time."

Elise glanced down at once, "{This- this can't be real, can it?}"

Her eyes traveled around viewing the damning stares of her clan mates, her eyes shifting up to see a smirking Rusty and a sorrowful Britt. Her head turned to face Vulper with a glance and then back down, "{This is what

happens after all of this? Because he won't just- no, this is not. This is not what this should be like.}"

Vulper's feet shuffled as his right arm slowly went up. Murmurs of shock filled the room though only on the ground as Azala and Rusty continued to stare confidently, "My Lord, for the sake of Elise and for failure of my squad, I take full responsibility."

"Heh heh, expected as you are a proud warrior. Well in that case you may collect your things and go. As for you Elise, I'll gladly give you another opportunity to prove yourself. You must go to the Southeast Forest and meet with-"

"No!" Elise spat looking up with her face as a scowl.

"No? Explain yourself."

"I mean to say that I've had it with this Clan and I've had it with you. Vulper stays, I'm the one leaving tonight."

All at once the room filled up with chatter, many cries of shock, many coughs, many people shouting. At this point even Azala appeared phased, his eyes quivering slightly as apparent rage filled him, Rusty stepping forward, "Oh you can't be serious."

"Elise, no!" Britt shouted.

"Child, you had best rethink yourself-"

"Rethink? Rethink! Maybe *you* need to rethink *yourself*! Because of your arrogance people died tonight who did not deserve to! Vulper did his best with an assignment we did not know about, with such stupid restrictions I swear you had intended to get us killed... and yet you punish him? This Clan so easily rejects him after all he has done for the sake of everyone? I think not

Father. All I've ever been hammered with by all of you is contempt. I've been mocked, I've been laughed at, I've been shoved around, abused, beaten, and for what? If not for me you would've all had to have gotten your own damn water over the years. You wouldn't have these torches constantly supplied. You wouldn't have anything that the mortals have like chairs. You'd all be cavemen! And when I finally try to do something to show myself, after beating Sacho, it still doesn't end. To top it off some fat old shithead who sits on a throne while sending people to their deaths blames us for failure? Hell no. Everyone should think about it, if the cost of following orders we know are damned is going to get us banished no matter how we perform."

Yells of shock filled the room again as Azala appeared to choke, Rusty's jaw hanging, everyone roaring out. Phil and Mindy at such a point began to look uncomfortable with shifting eyes and slight sweat dripping down their foreheads.

"At least Sacho held his ground Father, at least I got some hits in, at least Vulper commanded us well even though there wasn't much to command due to your crap. Everyone here who went into battle did more than you!"

"Now see here, I will not have any of-"

"You never do. You know what? I'm done, goodbye."

Elise turned quickly and moved away with her back to the ledge. As she cleared the passage she brushed shoved passed an approaching individual. She moved passed.

"Excuse me, pardon my carelessness," the individual spoke.

His hair white seemingly glowing from the torch light. The individual crept forward into the room as Elise moved passed after granting him a quick

look, disappearing down a tunnel towards her room. Azala glanced down at the individual as the individual stopped to return a glance.

“The hell is this guy wearing?” Nocknar muttered, “What’s with the red stars?”

Chapter XXXVIII

Elise stood in the middle of her room, a book in hand as she faced Britt before her.

“Elise you can’t go,” came the voice of Britt, “Think about your friends who have died for Vulfax, the ones who are still here, do they mean nothing?!”

“They died in vein of nonsense. And Elen, tch, Elen was driven to suicide. She didn’t even die before the animals started feeding off her. She suffered in life and she suffered in death! So tell me- why shouldn’t I leave?!” she spat.

“Because it was an honest slip up on my part and Father’s.”

“His slip up got multiple people killed, that isn’t simple or honest. He knew what he was doing and it royally screwed us. To top it off, his reaction to it.”

“I should have explored every possible outcome more, alright? I don’t know what to even say other than I’m sorry sis.”

“Two of the very few people I could call friends in this craphole died because he orchestrated whatever that was supposed to be. And what does he do? He blames me and Vulper rather than taking-”

“Because that’s his position and he can’t look like an idiot or else we face trouble. Look, please stay and give it another chance. You’ve worked so hard to build yourself up and taken so much. Prove to everyone that you’re not who they think you are.”

“Originally, that’s what I wanted. I wanted to be useful, to stand up for myself and my friends. Here I finally do that though and this happens. I swear, it’s as if it were on purpose.”

Her head turned as her gaze caught hold of the floor now rather than Britt. His gaze did not change as he continued on, “Don’t turn your back on the clan. Destiny and Thomas both wouldn’t want that. I’m sure of it.”

“I’m not letting Vulper get banished. Since one of us needs to go it’ll be me. I’m half past useless anyway. I’ve always been a useless little nobody. Hell, I’m just worthless.”

“You’re not! You are far from useless, you are far from worthless. You are somebody. You’re a sister, you’re a friend to many. Listen- I’ll do what I can to convince him to reconsider. He’ll no doubt forgive you both if you pass a new mission,” Britt replied.

“New Mission? Pft, what does he want this time. For us to go fight the Goblins?”

“Uh, well-”

“Yeah that’s what I thought.”

“Look, I’ve taken the liberty of arranging a squad for you with a few others. Vulper will be by the front entrance. Please, do consider it. I’d rather not have to tell father that the mission needs to be scrapped,” he replied one last time, turning off out of the room.

“To go Goblin hunting, yeah you’re smart!” she barked.

She glanced back up as he left and then to her side where her sword remained, letting out a low growl, “Another mission. Dare I even after what just happened?”

“You had best,” came Vulper’s voice.

The warrior entered, followed by two others. Elise looked up and over to them looking rather sour. Her head shook just a bit followed by a casual yawn, “Alright then, you just came here anyway.”

“So are we going to get banished for following you two?”

“Or are we going to end up dead?”

“Shut up the both of you!” Vulper snapped.

“You and that useless Elise are the ones at fault for this, not us. I don’t see why we should be accompanying you.”

“Baskel, Dauntless, shut up,” Elise muttered in response, “I’ve had enough.”

“Whatever Elise, leave us out of this. I don’t intend to die.”

“Where are we heading anyway Vulper?”

“Kiyoto Pass, Baskel.”

“Kiyoto Pass? Isn’t that the-”

“No, the Goblins have cleared out I have been assured. Britt’s squadron did recon weeks ago and found it deserted. Clan Semmei is the one who suggested it as well.”

“I said something to Britt about that and he refused to answer me proper. So I’m pretty sure we’re just Goblin hunting.”

“I doubt that we’ll have a problem. We have to go get supplies from Clan Semmei so there’s no point in barking about it.”

“Ya sure about that?”

“Well Dauntless, no, but we four should be quick enough to be able to deal with it.”

“Yeah so long as Elise doesn’t get in the-”

“Hey you know what? I could cut you both right here and let the Hemlock take you out like it did to Sacho. Press me any further and I can leave the both of you here for the wolves to feed on. Got that?” she growled.

Both looked to one another and gulped while Vulper let out a slight chuckle.