

Dramatis Personae Aska Kjelu Russ WH40K OC

The Daughter of Leman Russ, Primarch of the Space Wolves

Von Garnet-Nihilia

Kapitel 4: Resurgence 1+2

4.1 Resurgence

He sighed slightly as he stood in front of Aska's room, gazing over the highly decorated doors. The wonderfully carved wood told the tale of an old Fenrisian legend. It was the first time in recent memory something that was normally an easy task gave him a horrible migraine. He wanted to give his sister and their Wolf Princess more time to grieve, but as a Wolflord he had duties and tasks and he couldn't allow one of his soldiers to languish in a room like this. He felt strongly that a proud warrior shouldn't languish in such mental pain. It was simply not the way of the wolf. Sadness at the loss of loved ones was understandable, but Fenris was a harsh world and every warrior learned quite quickly, that they had to get up again, to fight again and to go on with one lesser simple thing... Life.

Nearly a week had passed since Aska lost Bjorn and still the scream of her pain haunted the Fang's hallways. Maybe a week to grieve wasn't enough, but as much as Ragnar wanted to give her more time, war simply didn't allow him to do so. There were no exceptions for anybody, not even for Russ' own daughter. He sighed again and knocked on her door in a silent hope that she might answer this time with something like an invitation to step in, but as in the days before there was nothing but the smell of salty tears. So he decided to step in by himself and as expected, she still lay in her bed, closed eyes, one arm crossed behind her head the other hand gripping the necklace from Bjorn hanging on her neck. He saw her ears twitch for a second, a clear sign that she wasn't deep in sleep.

Slowly he stepped a bit closer to her, taking a seat on a wooden chair next to her bed and listening for a moment to the melody coming out of her music box. This music box must have been from her mother, considering that it was designed in Tavian musters and patterns, strange letters and carvings from another, long lost world. He murmured, stern but still sensitively, "Aska, I know it is not easy. You can believe me or not, but I really can understand your pain. I am sure that all of your brothers are able to do so as well, but war doesn't give us the luxury to spend much time with our pain." He heard a soft whimpering coming out of her throat as she turned around to show her back to him. Yet again Ragnar sighed and continued his words, "You know , Aska, I really would like to give you more time, but you have to be trained soon and you have to follow the way of the wolf again. I don't want to insult you, but what

would your father say? He and Bjorn wouldn't want you to be locked up in your room, staying in your bed and crying in pain for the rest of your life." He took again a deep breath and got up from the chair, walked around on her huge bed and gazed for a moment at the ceiling which looked more like a planetarium. The soft lights of the stars formed constellations and systems that spanned the heavens and he reflected on what to say next. He turned and knelt down to look into her face as he saw another tear running down on her pale cheeks. "Bjorn released you, so that you may continue your life and become a great warrior. You MUST get back onto your way and follow our paths. He would be even sadder than you right now, if he could see how much you suffer." It took him a moment to say this, considering he tried to show some empathy. The last thing he wanted was to cause her more pain. He had hoped for a sec that he might reach her with those words, but yet again, she turned around, showed him her back, gripped her fur she owned from the Fell-Handed and covered her face with it.

Ragnar got up and just stood there staring at her for a moment. He walked slowly over to the doors of her rooms, stood still for a moment before he opened the door and before he stepped out, he gave it one more try to lure her out somehow. "In about one hour we have training in the pits, it would be an honour for me if you would join us. I'd like to introduce you to your new pack. Fell-Handed told us some stories about your former pack and times with Russ, so I searched a similar one for you. He told me that you bantered and brawled a lot with two young Blood Claws called Bjarni and Hjllarstarni. He said that you three young bloods were fierce and furious and that you made a lot of pranks. He said it like you struggled a lot of our fathers nerves didn't you?" He smiled at her for a second, before he left he said again, "It would be a pleasure if you'd join us, Princess."

+++ Lars crashed on the floor, hearing his spine making an unusual noise, but he ignored this as it would be nothing and jumped quickly back onto his feet to punch Ullur again and again and again. He was one of the bulkiest young bloods in Hostors pack, and one of the ugliest as well. "You bloody ugly bastard will pay for this shit! By my iron balls you ain't win this time!" Lars laughed out loud while he pounded Ullurs face. Lars wasn't as bulky as him, and surely a lot more gentle man than the most usual Fenrisians, but they usually brawled each other just for fun and considering both had been in the same tribe once, they had been brothers longer than all the others in Hostor's pack. "Oh come on, you little brat! Are you on your period? Why are you so fierce today!?" he laughed back and punched Lars back in his face. Hostor stepped between those, laughing loud as well, "You two children can clarify this later in training, now we have to wait for our Lord to give us some instructions. He told me before he has a special training for all young bloods today. Calm down, you can continue to punch each other soon enough... oh and Ullur, don't call Lars brat, you know how he is in his special ladies week, this could hurt his feelings!" Hostor didn't even finished this sentences as the rest of the pack began to cry in laughter.

Elidor, one of the newest Blood Claws fell to the floor and held his stomach. Lars face just went red for a second as he spit some blood on the floor again. "What the hell is wrong with you all today?!" he yelled with a smirk and as he opened his mouth to reply to the joke, Ragnar appeared behind him. "Oh is it Lars' time of the month again?" This caused even more laughter in the pack and as though this wasn't enough, the other packs heard those words as well, so Lars stood there for a moment slightly exposed. Ragnar slapped Lars on his back and stood in front of the pits, waiting for them to calm themselves. He gazed around the room, thinking for a moment how much

responsibility was embodied in leading men who loved being under his command as much as he loved having them. From a corner, a voice rumbled suddenly, "So our princess isn't with you today?" He shook his head and cracked his tensed neck while a nearly distressed grimace ran over his face. "I invited her to our training today, but she didn't respond."

He barely finished his sentence as the Stormcaller appeared out of the shadows and walked over to Blackmane, "She has more to catch up than some usual training with her new pack, she has to improve her mental and psionic skills for the next battle as well. It will be required considering I can't join you this time. I will sail on the Redmoons side." Ragnar nodded again, "Let us talk about this later in my chamber Stormcaller, this is not the right place for this." The old Rune Priest nodded slowly. Like everybody in the Fang, he was worried about Aska. Ragnar turned back to the assembled warriors and raised his rough voice. "Today you will prove yourselves by being pitted against another pack. Your mission is simple, one member of your pack shall carry an heirloom of our Chapter!" as he held up two wolf skulls in his hands, raised them high for everyone to see them. "These two skulls have been used by our Chapter for time immemorial and are the same skulls that I carried and my ancestors carried once when they proved themselves as true warriors. Your mission is to retrieve this skull from the other team. Injuries are expected so do not hold back. This is your chance to show us that you are worthy to carry the Space Wolves sigil into battle." Ragnar waited for the pack's reactions after finishing his speech. The young Blood Claws usually reacted with joy when presented with tasks like this, but for some reason they were subdued today. He noticed a scent suddenly which didn't come from his brothers and a soft footfall coming down the stairs. The steps were too soft to come from one of his brothers, and they nearly sounded hesitant and unsure of themselves. As he tried to sort out the scent he realized what it was and smiled sudden, baring his fangs. The smell of honey and wild Fenrisian berries mixed with Aska's personal scent, a sweet, almost fruity tang. As he turned around, the Wolf Princess entered the pits. She looked ashamed to be there, holding her scythe nervously with her arms crossed behind her back, which shimmered brightly in the soft lights, brightening the dirt floor of the pits. She wore her power armor and was fully armed, but looked determined to overcome her grief. He met her eyes and she stared back at him, showing him the simple urge to survive, to fight, to come back and live. Again a soft smile ran over his face, and a weight disappeared off his shoulders that he hadn't known was there. "Ahh... Aska. I am glad you came to join us."

She nodded reserved as she spoke with a quiet but respectful voice, "You ordered me to join the training didn't you, Jarl?"

He showed her his warm smile in hope that it might ease her a bit. She seemed to be very tense and unsure herself now, away from her room. She wasn't ready yet to get back to life, but she did not really have another choice. "Indeed I did sister, please..." he said as he gestured his hand to join the ranks in front of him. He was happy she followed his order and she surprised him with this fact. To be honest he did not expect that she would come to join them. She walked over to the pack, slightly started to get annoyed a moment after because all eyes were pointed on her. She felt observed, felt like everybody was thinking about her as she couldn't hear any noise coming from her new brothers. Ragnar turned his face to a grim-looking middle aged man with a huge scar over his face and a tattoo of a raven on his left side of his shaved head. "Hostor, your pack is now back to its old strength. Our sister here can fight with you and you'll be happy to know that she is a psyker as well." Hostor just nodded with

a dark grin and twitched some strained grey hairs out of his face. "We will see what our sister can do, I want to see her skills with my own eyes before I judge her," he said and looked to Russ daughter. His eyes ran up and down her body, he was very concerned and looked rather serious as suddenly a nearly happy grin which bared his long fangs broke out on his face, "... but one of the legends is true indeed. She is a very pretty woman."

Aska narrowed, crossed her arms in front of her chest, rolled her eyes slightly and sighed. A compliment about her fighting skills was fine to her any time, but she really hated when somebody told her she was beautiful. Hostor began to laugh out loud as he saw her reaction. One of her pack mates, a very bulky one, added to Hostor's statement, "Well now we have two ladies in our pack!" He shot a knowing look at Lars, who rubbed his head. Aska rolled her eyes again and put her face in her hands. "I doubt that I am as ladylike as he is, still rubbing his head from a punch which was five minutes ago. What a weakling!" The pack tried to contain their laughter but it bubbled to the surface as it always did, and another round of guffaws broke out.

Lars just grinned and answered politely, "Well, we will see if you can take Ullur's fists, they're as bad as his jokes!" Ullur gestured a fist to his new sister and yelled a challenge, "Do you want to try it out princess?!"

She stepped without one more word into the pits and gestured Ullur to join her, as the rest of the pack clustered around to observe the event with excitement. The bulky Space Wolf stepped forward to meet her, and the ground broke and shattered under his boots as he stamped his feet to establish his position. When he stomped into the cage he punched a fist into his open hand and grinned. "This is going to hurt princess, but you have earned some respect for having the nuts to brawl me. Hrrraaahh! I am the mighty Ullur, former head of the Ice Claw tribe!" He raised his hands and showed her with this he was ready to fight. Aska just stood there and looked at him, truly unimpressed and threw her scythe into a corner. Emotionless... her face, her scent, everything was just emotionless, while Ullur's excitement was clearly evident. She pointed with one finger to him and then to the ground, but spoke no more words. They just stood in front of each other and observed their opponents, eyes alert to any sign of who would make the first move. Ullur was the first to break the still calm that had fallen, lunging forward into a punch that Aska dodged easily. "Too easy," she thought, "That was just too easy!" The rest of the fight was so quick that the Blood Claws almost didn't react fast enough to follow it properly. As Ullur drew back for the next punch her body blurred into a crouch and she swung around and twisted one of her legs between his feet to make him fall. Her momentum led her back into his body and she drove her elbow directly into his kidneys for a hard strike. He crashed on the floor and tried to jump back to his feet but a powerful kick cracked on his chin and broke his jaw. The impact rang out and his unconscious form slumped back, out cold. Her packmates regarded her in motionless awe as she breathed deeply, catching her breath. She sat down, crossed her legs and arms and looked with wintry eyes at Lars. "You wanted to give him a facelift, right? Well, I'm sorry but I'm taking over that task for you!"

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"Concentrate yourself! Focus on it, feel the power intensify as it runs through your veins, find your center and let the energies run through your body. You need to lead it into your arms, your hand and in the very end into the feather." Njal's stern and deep voice tolled out his instructions like a bell as his raven Nightwing came to rest on his shoulder. It squawked at her, scolding her failure. She ignored it and nodded, looking

into his eyes with a serious face and tried again. The feather crashed into the stone in front of her, but did not leave the tiniest scratch on it. "Again!" She took the next feather with a sigh. They had done this several times now, and no progress seemed to be made yet. Once again, she began to focus herself, and felt the power run through her veins. She could feel it building in her outstretched hand, and the feather started to rise off of it. It flew into the stone, directing all of its built-up energy into the block of granite, but.... nothing.

Nothing happened again, not even a tiny scratch. "Arrrrgh! It does not work! This is just stupid, how am I supposed to break this damned stone with a feather?! Let me just smash it with a light-explosion or my bare hands!!!" she screamed. Her fists pounded the ground and cracks appeared at her feet. She got up and stomped on them as well to get the cracks in the hard ground bigger. She needed to let her frustrations air out, Njal could tell. They had been working for countless hours now on the same exercise, before this they had several long meditation sessions. He sat patiently while she stormed around the exercise area hitting the ground in her fury.

"I told you how it works. You still have no idea about your true potential, you could be already mightier than I am if you'd had yourself under control before now," he paused as she turned and glared at him.

"NO! This is just pointless," she yelled at Njal, clenching her fists together and growling in a flaming drift while she walked over to a place across from the old Rune Priest and boxed one of her fists against the wall. The evidence of her fury was clearly noticeable in the air, proving it by leaving cracks in the floor and in the wall, "I can't do it. It's impossible!" "It is only impossible as long as you scream like a newborn baby. Now pull yourself together. We will practice this as long as we have to," he spoke calmly, with his stern and ice-cold growling deep voice. Where Aska was the flaming fire of a red giant star, Njal was the ice-cold depths of the sea itself.

"We will not end the training today till you have learned to clean up your act. And now... stop wasting my time, sit down. Try it again." A deep breath filled her lungs with air, and she clenched her fists yet again, screamed out loud and sat down with a snarl, "It just doesn't work. I do not have it under control. If I use my psychic powers I can make a huge attack, crushing down hundreds of enemies in one big explosion of light, but I cannot use it as you can. I do not have a middle ground."

"And this is exactly why we are doing this here, you HAVE to learn the control. Listen to your mind, to your heart, feel it inside of you. How often do I need to tell you? The powers you possess are a fickle, dangerous thing, and if you use it recklessly, it is not only dangerous to you, but to us as well. I heard what your powers unleashed at Tavia when Jarl Ragnar found you and you have to bring this under your control! We cannot risk your strength damaging anything except our enemies." Stroking his beard, he reflected that it may have been a good thing that Aska's gifts were not recognized for what they were, all those years ago. She was young, hot-headed, ferocious, wild, and stubborn, all characteristics that hindered her from increasing her skills. All powers gifted to her required calm, icy control and often a vast amount of patience in order not to overwhelm their wielder. He suspected, however, that she could and would one day become one of their mightiest psykers if their training succeeded. "Your psionic powers are a gift from your mother, as far as I heard it in the legends they were too mighty for her to control. That's why she meditated for hours every single day, but you... you are a demi-primarch. In your veins flows the power of Russ himself mixed with the powers of the ancient living stars of Tavia. You are the light in the darkness with a divine, sacred power which is dead since Tavian world was destroyed," he

growled, not letting himself back down from her temper. The only responses he got from his speech were more growls, snarls and rumbles.

"When you practice the Tavian fighting techniques you have an unbelievable amount of focus and concentration. Do not think I haven't noticed that you train by yourself when the others are resting. I saw you doing it in the moonlight. What is the difference between your martial arts and the psionic training you are doing right now with me?" he asked. The beads on his chest guard rattled as he stroked his beard thoughtfully. Aska looked up, unsure of herself. There was no answer she could give him, so she remained silent. She was grateful that she had a legendary Rune Priest training her, despite how angry he often made her. She knew he was there to help her to increase her skills. Something seemed to worry her, something she buried deep inside of her mind and the Stormcaller was sure that the distractions only made her more difficult to deal with.

"Hmmm..." a soft snarl left his throat, gazing into Aska's eyes as he tried to read her thoughts. A vision of a war long ago suddenly appeared to him, where she fought side by side with the first Great Wolf, Bjorn Russbrother, called the Fell-Handed. In this battle he saw the figure of a daemon prince who woke the anger of Aska and she lost control of herself. The Red Dream took her, and she raged at everything around there, slaughtering every daemon she could reach. In the end, she was gravely injured from all of the fighting she had done, and only Bjorn's voice brought her back to reality. He blinked, and the vision disappeared. Only a few moments had passed, but he understood now a bit more what Aska's mindset was like. This was why she was so restless, tortured by nightmares and terrors of the past. He was willing to ignore this fact for now, but surely would talk to her later about this. "Sit!" he ordered her. "Sit. NOW. Or I make you sit and believe me my child. You do not want me to help you out. You have acted like a spoiled pup long enough." Walking back to her place opposite to Njal she pressed her lips and fists together. The silence in the chamber was deafening. She was furious. As she sat down she crossed her legs, took another feather out of the wooden basket next to her and glared at it.

"Try not to use all of your power, you already look exhausted. Your fury is slowly overcoming you and I would not like to cut this short. Focus, concentrate, take another deep breath, refocus yet again if necessary for more time and try to feel instead of overthinking. Don't let your temper control your mind."

She closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and intensified her powers by concentration as he ordered her to do so.

"See with your inner eyes, do not unleash wrath, unleash your power, empty your mind from all distractions and feelings. Find your center," he whispered quietly as Nightwing let out a caw and settled onto his master's shoulders. Something rose inside her, free of her earlier wrathful anger. She had exhausted the fury enough to let her mind be free, cold, and determined, and indeed she felt the threads of her own powers become more flexible than before. It slowly built and collected itself between her hands, running through her veins, through her body while her mind was totally emptied. Visions of the stone in front of her appeared in her inner eye, and it was as though she could see it clearly in front of her, even with her eyes closed. Njal was sitting there too, watching carefully, but this time she did not let herself get distracted. The power began to run into her arms, flowing through it into the feather as she felt electricity flow along her shoulders and arms, lending a mighty force to the feather's flight. It glowed white hot now, and suddenly Aska's arms shot out and the feather flew like a light beam, crashing into the stone. She heard a soft cracking,

twitched her ears and as she opened her eyes again in an anticipatory thrill, she saw that the stone was not broken but at last, progress had been made. Cracks spiderwebbed out from where the impact of the feather had struck. It had disappeared in the impact, burnt to a crisp and then destroyed, but the evidence of its destruction was clear.

She stood up and kicked the basket containing the rest of the feathers into the air, frustrated that it had taken so long even in her joy at her success. She turned her face away to hide a tear of anger as Njal approached, clapping his hands in appreciation. "Very good. Try to remember what that felt like. You need that kind of control every time you cast a spell from the stars, your celestial brothers and sisters." He was triumphant, exulting in her success.

"Good. Enough for today. I may see you later in the halls or in the pits. We will continue at the same point tomorrow," he said. Aska nodded to him, and she left the chambers silently. As the door closed behind her, Njal heard her stomping up the stairs, and he looked back at the stone. He heard more cracks, and suddenly it broke in two. "She might become more powerful than any Rune Priest we have ever known, Nightwing. But first, she has to learn to bring herself under control." he whispered, staring at the broken stone. Nightwing cawed at him reproachfully.

"Yes... of course she has to learn not to behave like a young pup or an exploding star. She reminds me of a well-known young Wolf Lord, in fact..."

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They met outside, quite far from the Fang. The great fortress was barely visible on the horizon but the pale moonlight shined bright to illuminate its silhouette in the sky. The night sky was clear, full of visible stars and the Wolf's Moon was closer as usual. This was an event that happened three times in a Fenrisian year and always had been counted as a good omen. During the full moon, a clear sky indicated that the Full Moon's Huntress Vagnara would protect the world another year from the darkness caused by the Crescent Moon's Hunter Narghar. Nightwing flew over them in the sky, swinging in circles and calling out loudly several times as Aska stood on the icy frozen surface of a lake. It was a kind of meditation, moving slowly and calm, totally relaxed and as Njal observed her moving he noticed that Aska more serene than he'd ever seen her.

"Indeed she is like the sea... so abrupt and stormy, with waves that can smash anyone, but when the storm dies down, it is so calm and quiet that you can see all the way to the bottom of the water," he thought. The weeks since those first lessons with the feathers had seen Aska make leaps and bounds in her control over her powers. She now had no trouble becoming one with nature and listening to the sounds various sounds of their surroundings. She could hear the water flowing under the icebound lake, as well as every single shift of the wind whirling up the snowflakes fresh fallen and circling around. They seemed to help her to calm her hot, quickwitted mind. Her movements were slow but melodic, postures done in a relaxed, artful, and linked way, with the circular and rhythmic movements of one position flowing seamlessly into the next. The Stormcaller watched her as suddenly little balls of lights began to surround her, following each of her movements in the night and formed out of the light of the moon itself.

"This is the way!" he spoke quietly, impressed. "When you do this, your mind is totally calmed, completely stilled. I have never seen such a movement, how could I? Tavia has been dead for millennia and its knowledge vanished in the void. But you are still here, knowing and following the ways of the wolves and of the stars. Use these skills... use

what you feel now..." Pausing abruptly he gestured to a nearby stone and placed a feather in her open palm.

The feather danced in her hand as she turned away, continuing the form she had started under the light of the moon, surrounded by stars who came out of nowhere. A small light beam came from the feather, and suddenly the stone that he had gestured to a moment before was split in two halves. He gestured to more stones around the shore of the lake, and no matter how big they were, Aska cut them exactly in two halves, till no single stone or rock in the nearby area was left. +++

Weeks had passed and Aska was now fully integrated with her new pack. They had been in the pits as usual, brawling each other and playing pranks with Lars and Ullur. Most of the Blood Claws had been training more earnestly, but Aska and her new best pals had been sitting on each other's shoulders, punching and slapping like young cubs. Aska began to laugh hysterically as Ullur fell face first into the hard ground of the stone cold floor. The whole arena was brightened by their fun and slowly other Wolves began to laugh about their hilarious and amusing actions, while others just shook their heads and continued with some more serious, reasonable tasks. Suddenly she felt someone's hand gripping her shoulder from the back. Hostor stepped in front of the pack and gave Aska a gaze that would freeze a normal human's bones in terror to show her how annoyed he had been from their childish games.

"Listen up you little screwheads!" He shouted out loud to the pack as he let his hand go from her shoulder and stepped to the middle of their pit. "We have some reports of a meteorite crashing on Fenris! Usually it is not our place to investigate such trivial things but the Jarl himself insists on it. We have been steadily receiving disturbing reports from settlements scattered in the frozen tundra. We are used to Fenris beasts out there so it comes as no surprise that any report of strange creatures should be taken seriously!" With the word "seriously" he glared again at the three young Wolves... the same three who were always kicking and punching each other.

"I want all of you to prepare yourselves. We will meet in about one hour in front of the north gate to make our way to the destination. I hope none of you stupid bore-nutters will make me repeat myself!" with those words he looked again to the three troublemakers in his pack, who were not constantly following orders and as well, they usually did not seem to take him as seriously as they should. "YOU better get your arse moving before I put my boot in it!" he roared in anger again, "NOW!" +++ "Oh man, he was pretty pissed off!" Ullur whispered and sighed. "I can't blame him; we're not what others would call, 'grim warriors', maybe we should hurry up and act a bit more reasonable for today?" Lars answered narrowing his eyes. A hand gripped him from the back, as he turned around forcefully he saw Raiks face. A grin ran over his face for a brief moment, as it vanished to a grim face, "This is the most intelligent sentence I've heard from one of you guys today."

"Oh come on, what about last week? You joined us at the snowball prank, that was awesome, wasn't it?" Aska cheered joyful.

"Yeah we had fun, but after Hostor let us swim for hours in ice water and doubled our training sessions I doubt it was worth it!"

"Oh come on, it was more than worth it. I had a feeling like his head exploded any moment!" Ullur rejoiced victorious.

"Yeah it was very funny to see you pranksters acting like childish buggers, but it was much more satisfying to see you three get punished for this! Anyway I do not understand the point in making our pack leader hateful like this." From another corner of the room, Bjarni spotted them. Bjarni and Raik had been members of

Hostor's Spears as well, they were, as everybody in the pack was, hot-headed Blood Claws, but they took their tasks much more reasonable than Aska, Ullur and Lars. In fact Raik and Bjarni had been the newest recruits to join the ranks of the Blood Claws together with Elidor, but they seemed to be much more respectful than other members in the pack.

"Move your hairy asses, we have a mission and maybe this time, you screwheads will follow the orders of adult warriors instead of acting like children that want to be warriors when they finally grow up!" With those words the rest of the pack turned around and made their way to their chambers, to get fully armed and to prepare themselves for the mission.

"As if you would be so much better than us, Skitjati Skum Fikta!" Ullur shouted out loud to make sure Bjarni would hear his anger about his words. But it was true, all of the pack would become Grey Hunters while the other ones were stuck in their stubborn behavior. Aska attempted to calm Ullur down, slapping him on his butt with the flat side of her wolf-scythe, "Come on! We get our sweet cheeks to our chambers and meet later on. Just ignore him, maybe he has trouble with his maiden!" +++

Continued with 4.2 Resurgence

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Frozen wind lashed over their faces, cold as the winter wolf's jaws, like pins and needles hitting their face and armor. Trudging through the fresh fallen snow in Asaheim's wilderness, Aska and her squad mates, covered in ceramite armors and decorated with fur, runes, and bones, were blowing their nostrils as they walked, opening them wide to inhale every single molecule in the iced air. Their senses were sharpened to notice any scent or trail, as they made their way to their final destination. Straight in formation for no potential enemy could surprise them. The vision was bare, as the storm surrounded them in the middle of nowhere. It froze their lashes together, icing their hairs, beards and eyebrows, while they twitched their ears, to hear every single noise. They heard the sounds of snowbound trees and branches rustling in the wind, wind flowing over the ground, creaking in frozen bushes and distant howls of wolf packs far away from them. They had prepared themselves for everything possible. If need be, they were even prepared to die, in the name of their father and the All-Father himself. For that their sagas would be spoken in the mead halls of the Fang, as Bjarni started to hum an old legendary warrior's song. Words spoken once by legends, by Russ himself, words that would prepare them for whatever was out there. His humming turned slowly into a quiet cheerful singing, motivating his brothers and even the grim pack leader Hostor to step into the song. But never be mistaken, even when they began to sing, even when it began to sound like they would neglect their attention, a wolf was always alert. As their voices silently echoed in the storm, the enemy, the intruders, whoever they were, would know what came to hunt them down. They would know what they had woken. They would know the hour of their end was near.

"Herja, Herja, Her~jaaa, the time has come and we will rise.

Herja, Herja, Her~jaaa, the wolfs` spirit never dies.

Herja, Herja, Her~jaaa, we are the voice of wind and pouring rain.

Her~jaaa, the voice of your extinction and pain!

Herja, Her~jaaaahh, warriors of Russ coming for you!

Her~jaahhh Hej~hej~ja, we will forever remain!"

Verse after verse they sang their song, echoing amongst the trees in a storm of punishing ice, preparing themselves to die as the Wolf Princess noticed the effects of this old melody she sang in Russ halls ten thousand years ago. The warriors she walked with were serene, joyous almost. As the verses ended, she noticed they hadn't sung all of the old melody. The song was not finished; the last words were hidden in the past, forgotten in time's misty embrace, but still her brothers hummed the melody as they marched through the high dunes of snow and ice. She took a hairpin out of her pack and fixed a stubborn strand of hair back onto its place, as she began to raise her voice as Bjarni did before, first silent, then going louder to let it resound and roar together with the melody of the storm.

"Her~jaah, Heej~jaah, Herja, Hej~jaah, 'Neath the pale light of the moon.

Herja ~ The place where the wolfs bane blooms ~ Sacrificed in sacred slaughter

Her~ja ~ Moon wolfs daughter.

Her~ja when your false body lies ~ wreathed in ruby red ~

Her~jaaa ~ A scarlet halo round an enemies head!

Her~jaaa, Heej~jaaaah, Herja, Hej~jah, the force in winters time will grow.

Her~jaaa ~ A dance of blades when the storm will blow.

Her~ja ~ The voice of the past that will always be

Her~jah so am I filled with wrath and blood ~ in the coming battlefield.

Her~ja So I shall remain ~ Hej~ja future's calling me.

Herja, Hej~jaa, Hej~hej~herja so shall my legend echo in ~ mountain and sea!"

It took her a moment as she stopped singing to notice she was the only one continuing with the song and she realized the pack's eyes were upon her. Normally it was easy to read the minds of the other pack members but in that case, there was something she couldn't describe in their expressions.

"Indeed, the legend is true. Bjorn told us thousands of times of the calmness and comfort your voice and melodies bring to the heart of the wildest warriors. Even our wildest, most grim wolf Hedloy here seems to be more serene..." Hostor spoke as he turned his gaze from Aska to Hedloy who was marching as very last in the formation as the rear guard. "I'd really like to see you more often like this instead of showing a bad influence caused by those two bores marching by your side, Princess."

"Wasn't it Bjorn as well who told the Jarl the story of my former pack? Actually it was similar to this one and Eofjul, Hjallarstjarni and me had been once the wildest and most ferocious in the pack. I am actually disappointed that you cannot see with open eyes the potential of a combination as we three are." She spoke with a certain voice, stern and nearly glorious voice which he never heard from her before.

"May we should go more often into the wilderness of our home, it seems to let you grow. You three also do not seem to be as childish as I am used from you." "

That's because we truly can distinguish between a training day in the Fang and a dangerous operation. Do not be mistaken Hostor, we also know the earnestness of the training. Even, when we might seem to be childish, inattentive and disrespectful I'd entrust my life to Lars and Ullur here because they have an understanding for something that you do not seem to understand as a pack leader... and this is quite sad plus disappointing because especially you should."

Hostor clutched his hands together, the first time in weeks she had seen him nearly grateful and filled with joy. "You are arguing as a wild grown up warrior. You are arguing finally as you should, what happened in the short time we had been marching

through the snow Aska?!"

She pointed to the front, to a certain point that Hostor hadn't seemed to notice before. "We reached our destination, that is what happened." He turned around and nodded, smirked slightly, "Yes, we have, my little grown up child. Once this is finished, I'd like to speak in private with you, but now, keep up the good work. We will split soon and for now, you have the chance to prove your spoken words. I want you three to team up when we split!" He pointed to Lars and Ullur who simply rolled their eyes pretty disrespectful and formatted new with Aska. "Bjarni and Raik, you two come with me. Hedloy you team up with Ansgar and Elidor! But before we split to find out what happened here, we will investigate this meteoroid by itself."

A huge crater dented the ground ahead of them. The meteorite that had made it lay split in half from its entry to the planet, smoke still billowing from the impact. Hostor blew his nostrils in displeasure as a grim growl left his throat to voice his grievances. Old memories ran through his mind as he remembered past battles where he had lost a lot of brothers and his anger rose at the thought of his personal nemesis intruding upon his home. He clenched his fists and inhaled deeply, taking in the scent of an enemy that he and some others of the pack had fought before as well. Hostor stomped into the ground and spat into the snow.

"Helvete Jaevla! Tyranids!" He turned around to speak to the others. "We do not know exactly which creatures of this hive have come to us, but if you see a large one, make sure you kill it quickly. Tyranids have a hive mind and one creature will often control several others. If we kill the controller first, it shall not inform the hive otherwise we will have even more to slay soon enough! No Tyranid will dare to come to our home and live while I have something to say about it. Move out!"

They moved forward with a loud, "AYE!" Aska's team ran directly into the wood while they heard Ullur cheering, "You two can deal with the synapse, I will slaughter all the rest of them!"

"Pah! Who says that the creature isn't searching for you? You're both ugly enough to hook up for sure!" Aska returned grinning while she ran in straight formation with them.

"That's a point. Aren't you sure your mother wasn't one of the 'Nids? Maybe a Genestealer, it would explain a lot," Lars replied stern.

"Shut up, maid! At the end of the day, the mighty Ullur will have slain dozens of creatures if not hundreds and you two just killed one."

"Whatever the synapse will be, don't you think it counts as a dozen as well?"

"Whatever the synapse will be, don't you think it will count as well when I put its tentacles in your mouth to make you shut up?" Ullur murmured by copying Lars voice.

"And whatever the synapse creature will be, don't you two think that I might be the first of you who kills anything if you keep being slow as this?" Aska spoke by copying Lars voice as well.

"Hey, missy! We're covering your back right now!"

"Then move faster, you tortoise."

As their banter trailed off into the forest, Hostor put his hand into his face and beckoned Bjarni and Raik to follow him, "Why do I have a feeling that one of them might die today or at least will get badly injured?"

"Well, if they go on like this the creatures will notice them before they will notice any Tyranids, but, they have a mighty Ullur. This will do!" Bjarni smirked as he followed Hostor into another corner of the frozen snowbound woods.

Hedloy, grim as the darkest night, just growled in displeasure and gestured Elidor and

Ansgar to follow him without saying another word. They left the crater to another corner of the wood away from the places where the other two teams had vanished. A storm was threatening to break over them, the skies echoing Hedloy's growl. During the long hours of their search, Hedloy's luxuriant red mane slapped into his face as the storm increased its power and howled a terrible and somber song. Dim, overcast clouds covered the sky and did not allow a single ray of the moon's eye to touch the frigid ground. It felt like the world-wolf itself had foreseen a catastrophic downfall and Ansgar walking next to Hedloy noticed a terrifying shiver running down his spine. "Something is not right here. We have to be more alert," he whispered with a rigid, harsh voice. The hairs on his back were standing up, and he knew it was not a good sign. Hedloy simply blew his nostrils and another rough growl left his throat, he was not a man of great words nor did he speak a lot, most of the time he just growled and gave brothers and enemies likewise a gaze that chilled the bones to their marrow. His stomps through the snow increased suddenly as his senses noticed a scent which wasn't there before, Ansgar noticed this as well and turned around to brief Elidor, the youngest Blood Claw, to stay even more vigilant. "Hedloy!" he yelled rapidly, "Where is Elidor?" The grim warrior turned around, scowling, and pushed himself back to back with Ansgar.

"We did not even notice that he was gone, skitja!" Ansgar spat on the field, and they both scanned the forest, their senses ravaging everything they could reach in an effort to find their missing comrade. Yellow-golden wolf eyes pierced through the icy fog, trying to catch a glimpse of their pack mate while the rain's pins and needles crashed against their faces and armor, inhaling the raw glacial air to detect every single molecule of a scent that might have been missed before. For the first time since they had started their mission, Hedloy spoke. "All of our enemies are dangerous, but this one managed it to separate one of our brothers from us. If he is dead, I will crush its bones and its blood shall stain the snow before this is done."

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Elidor stepped carefully through the snow, trying to find the trail of his brothers. He was as tense as a tightly wound wire and anger at his own mistakes threatened to overwhelm him. He had been negligent, a mistake that might cost his life. His grip tightened around his chainsword, and he flicked the clasp of his bolt pistol's holster loose. "My first time in field and this is what happens," he grumbled. "But I will not die here, not today!" he growled as he activated a signal on his armor to tell his brothers his current position. "It must be here somewhere..."

He sniffed, testing the air again for his brothers' scent, but there was nothing, only the lonely scents of trees, snow and ice. The storm was getting worse and turning into a full blown hurricane, and vision was becoming ever more problematic from the snow whipping around area. His eyes searched the area, observing everything, trying to see any sign of Hedloy or Ansgar. He twitched his ears, murmuring to himself an old Fenrisian prayer of war to calm his thoughts. He had to watch out and still he couldn't explain himself how he got separated. He ran the events through his head once again. He had been directly behind Ansgar and Hedloy, he turned around for a mere second because he thought he noticed something behind him and as he turned around both of them were gone. No footsteps were evident in the snow, which made every single track from them vanish seconds after they stepped on it. As he called out to them, he heard only the sounds of the storm. Suddenly Elidor heard something that he had always dreaded in the deepest recesses of his mind, the sound of power armor being cracked and pierced. In shock the Blood Claw looked down and saw barbed hooks

jutting straight out of his chest. With a swift, merciless tug, Elidor was pulled up the tree. For the first time in his life he came face to face with the pitch black eyes of a lictor. His arms were pinned firmly by the massive grasping talons. Completely immobile and wounded, the only thing he could do was to spit at the creature and give the monster a swift head butt. The creature's hold weakened for a moment, stunned from the blow, and with a mighty heave he tore his right arm free and drew his bolt pistol, trying to get some shots off on his attacker. His efforts were too little, too late. The beast struck first, its feeding tendrils opened and a deadly maw completely enveloped the warrior's face. His last, desperate efforts echoed among the trees surrounding them, then silence.

The snow under the tree was painted in red, soaking the ground in Elidor's blood. The lictor perched invisibly in the tree, Elidor's corpse hidden in a nook made by one of the largest branches. No footsteps were left on the ground. No noises gave away its presence in the tree. The only hint of its predatory nature it left was the scent of blood in the storm to lure out other possible victims to feed upon. It lurked in the tree, clearly a hunter that knew how to hide itself even from the enormous senses of the mightiest warriors of mankind. It had a perfect battlefield. The blizzard had hidden it almost completely and the nature of this planet was a perfect fit for its kills, but there was one thing that this lictor did not know yet. The lictor was not the only one who knew how to hide scents, how to disappear and attack abruptly. It did not signal its master yet, for it was hungry and wanted to feed itself and its bretheren. It waited patiently in the trees and it did not take long for more prey to approach.

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"JAEVLA!!!" Ansgar growled, filled with anger and rage. "We are too late! And how are we ever going to get his body down?"

"Hush! Elidor was new blood and we could have shared his fate. This is what happens when you are foolish and do not keep your senses as sharp as the blades of your chainsword Ansgar," Hedloy warned as he kneeled to take a smell of his former brother's blood. They gazed in consternation at the tree where Elidor's corpse sat, still dripping blood on the ground below. Ansgar took a bit of snow from the ground, trying to get some information out of it. "But when this creature was able to kill him that way, to impale him like this, it is a true hunter. Stay aware!"

They made a thorough search of the area to find whatever had done this. They did not want to share Elidor's fate, and with determined expressions, they set out to find Elidor's killer. Ansgar's ears twitched and when his eyes met Hedloy's he knew they had both heard the same thing - a slow, stealthy cracking from the treetops which definitely did not come from the punishing wind of this merciless, blasting blizzard. Hedloy felt a breath of air on the back of his neck, and turned around just in time to see a shape move against a tree. He lifted his bolt pistol and hissed in warning to Ansgar, firing a shot at the tree where he had seen the unknown attacker. As the Lictor leapt into the fray, the snow shot up into the air from the weight of the beast. Its barbed hooks and feeding tendrils twitched eagerly as it came forward, hungry for more succulent meat. Quick successive noises arose from the bushes on the ground, creaking, shaking in the treetops all over them. Ansgar and Hedloy suddenly found themselves surrounded by not only the lictor but smaller creatures that had been concealed out of view, hidden and waiting. Tyranids were an enemy Ansgar hadn't fought before but Hedloy knew all too well from one of the first battles he was in, and had barely survived. A horde of genestealers skulked out of the growing shadows as the wind picked up again, and snow billowed through the area, hiding the

gruesome features of the genestealers and lictor. Both of them activated their homing signal and the com-net. "Hedloy here, Tyranids confirmed. Enemy contact has been made!" Ansgar growled, thinking he would make the first strike but Hedloy held an up a hand.

"Let them come to us," he said. The situation was dire. The order to kill the synapse controller as quick as possible still resounded in their heads, but there was no synapse creature to be seen here... yet. Maybe there was none, considering the creatures they had to deal with had a mind for their own.

They had to handle its minions quickly but the two of them couldn't kill this many enemies before the cults leader could escape into one of the cities, it would only be a matter of time until it would inform the hive. The shape of the lictor stamped its feet in front of Ansgar and he fired a few shots out of his bolt pistol which hit the beast several times in the chest. It raced forward, enraged, and Ansgar could not dodge in time. Its talons went straight through his left shoulder, and a devastating pain ran through his body as he howled in rage, the lictor staring at him with its cold black eyes. It withdrew the talon and camouflaged itself with its comelionic skin, trying to stop the bleeding as it withdrew from combat. The genestealers attacked mercilessly as well, and Hedloy and Ansgar were suddenly very busy trying not to die. Their blades tore into their enemies' flesh, the blood from both sides spackling the snow around them from both small and large cuts. Hedloy felt a claw bursting into his pelvis, and as he looked down to the genestealer responsible he snarled defiance into its face. One stroke of his whirring chainsword separated the arm, and the backswing off the genestealer's head. Both men were now wounded and surrounded by feasting, hungry enemies striking cruelly and ruthlessly. And if it would be their fate to die here, they would accept it but taking as many foes with them as possible so that their sagas would be told in the halls of the Fang. The lictor rose up again in front of Ansgar and he smashed his chainsword into its body, rupturing its belly. Its guts spilled out upon the snow as he dodged a hit from its hooks with his other arm, but the lictor stabbed again, and he could not get out of the way successfully a second time. It slammed him back against a tree, and its talons pinned him there as it drew back a knife-sharp leg and slammed it forward. He knew a moment of nothingness and then immense pain in his elbow, and when the lictor drew back its leg, it held his arm aloft in triumph. The creature was distracted by its success long enough for Hedloy, screaming in rage, to charge it and finish the kill. The lictor collapsed and fell to the ground, the stench of its purple blood giving the air a pungent aroma. Ansgar breathed heavily, gasping for air as he heard Hedloy yelling, "There is another one, watch out!" They gazed, in despair, upon what they were sure was their doom.

They heard heavy footfalls in the near distance, and slowly the arched back and sharp talons of a Carnifex came into view. They looked at each other and back to the Carnifex. Ansgar's armour systems had closed off the wound in his elbow and the blood was only a trickle onto the snow, but he was clearly wounded and not going to be able to fight at his best. The Carnifex paused, readying itself for the deep lunge, and they heard a nearby howl and three boltguns opened up into its carapace. The

ammunition smashed against the hardened external armor, and Aska, Ullur, and Lars made their presence known. Aska's speed was stunning as she leaped from snowbank to rock in her charge, determined to protect Ansgar from further harm. Her scythe sliced through one of the Carnifexes talons as though it was paper and she called out in challenge to it. Ullur helped Ansgar to his feet and got a shoulder under his body in support.

"Can you run?" he asked. "Aye, brother, my thanks," replied Ansgar. "I'll get to safety myself though, you take this monster down!" He turned away and disappeared into the trees, and the four warriors heard his voice over the communications relay, urging their other brothers to come quickly.

Ullur, Lars, Hedloy, and Aska faced off with the Carnifex, determined to bring it down. "Well well darlin'... Look at you," Ullur swung his arms around, limbering up for the coming battle. "That's a face only your mother could love."

Their brief celebration was brought to an end as the realization that this carnifex had regenerated its talon that was cut clean not moments ago. It turned its head slightly revealing a massive plasma burn that left the creature wounded and with only one eye. "I'm disappointed, I thought we would have some fun!" Ullur complained as he tightened his grip around the haft of his chainsword.

"Well at least it's not as ugly as you are!" Aska mocked him, swinging her scythe in wide arcs to keep it at bay.

"Indeed sister, but as well... it is not as mighty as I am!", he grunted cheerful as if it would be nothing more than a joyful challenge for him.

"Hostor! Where are you and your team? We may need some support if the genestealers are going to continue to attack like this", Lars said harsh into the communicator. Hostor's response, if there was one, was interrupted by a loud screech of the monstrous creature. Suddenly one of its talons stabbed out, and Lars and Aska both had to dodge as the enormous pincers crashed into the floor. It trudged forward with weighty stamps, and a loud screech left its throat again as the Carnifex's lumpy carapace twitched revealing scores of sinewy muscle and a second pair of heavy bulky crab claws, the wounds from the previous attacks were all but healed as the beast lunged at them for a second time. As Aska whistled to distract it and it turned its head as she swiped at it, snarling out a warning. Hedloy ran at it, and dodged another stab of its talons. It turned to follow him as he hit the carapace with the flat of his chainsword twice, and Aska had a brief moment to strike that she seized immediately. Her wolf-scythe struck deep into the carapace, and the Carnifex screamed in pain as she opened its back and threw a frag grenade into its stinking red innards. It reared back and the grenade came out as it bucked wildly and Aska slid away, falling to the ground under it. The explosion was muffled by the beast's belly, and it screamed in pain and rage again. Aska grunted in satisfaction as it collapsed, but it staggered to its feet again. The creature's ribcage had been blown clean open, the snow started to steam as streams of the creature's blood poured onto the white snow, but it had not breathed its last yet. "Ullur! Lars! Hedloy! I need you to distract it a bit longer for me. Apparently this thing will require my psionik gifts to be put down for good." She was growling in anger as she fought to control the currents of her celestial mysterious powers.

"Then what are you waiting for Princess? Want me to come over there to give you a kick in your arse!?" Ullur yelled. Aska ignored him, clasping her hands together around her scythe and using it as a staff to support her body weight. Within moments, she was gone, her mouth working out mystical words while her brow tying itself into a

knot as she searched for enough focus to cast her spell. The Carnifex's damaged chest was a bloody, putrid mess, but its amazing regenerative properties kicked in, slowly but surely the muscle sinews pulled the overhanging flesh into place as new bone and carapace matter was formed to cover the wound. In that instant Genestealers leapt out from the snow brandishing their rending claws, salivating at the thought of fresh prey to devour. Even though they were once human they were already too far gone, they were predators of humanity and if they could not be stopped now the infestation will spread.

"More of them?? When does this infestation end?" Hedloy was furious. "They are without number indeed!" He, Ullur and Lars stepped forward to meet them, and shots rang out as the genestealers charged. Two of the monsters faltered a little as bullets from Hedloy and Lars found a weak spot, but Ullur's shots missed and he found himself facing a charging, lethally angry opponent. He gave an evil smile as he revved up his chainsword, preparing for a mighty strike. The Tyranid lunged forward, its grasping claws searching for purchase in Ullur's body, but at the last moment he twisted aside, and as it went by he completed a full rotation with his chainsword swinging up and through its body. The momentum of both of their combined weight brought the sword ripping through the upper half of the genestealer, and the head went rolling away. Blood gushed from its neck as the body twitched on the ground, not understanding yet that it was dead. Its fingers flexed in one last grasp, trying to find purchase in Ullur's still form, and then it relaxed in the cold sleep of the slain. Ullur turned away, putting it out of his mind, and advanced towards Lars' opponent next. They needed to buy Aska as much time as they could.

Lars noticed Ullur's stealthy advance and pressed the attack, backing the creature up just enough for Ullur to hit it in the back. Its roar of pain was cut mercifully short by the voice of Lars' bolt pistol, and blood and brain matter spattered the snow as the genestealer's body dropped to the ground, joining its once living brother.

Hedloy had managed to dispatch the last genestealer on his own, and stood nearby, shaking the blood off of his chainsword. They closed ranks again around Aska, looking warily between her and the carnifex. Even in its wounded state, it was still dangerous. Hedloy was about to speak, when suddenly her eyes opened, glowing white in the darkness. She had found enough focus at last to cast her spell, and she could still hear Njal's words from her training lessons echoing in her head. The men stepped back as she felt the power rising in her, intensifying as her body slowly left the ground and she began to hover over it, stretching her legs and arms out as the spell took shape. Lightning crackled over the surface of her armor. This was the moment that Hostor, Bjarni and Raik arrived, breathing heavily from the dead run that they had set out upon receiving Hedloy's first distress call, to bear witness to Aska's spell. Runic lights surrounded her and seemed to decorate her face as she brought her hands together and extended them towards the carnifex. It looked up at her defiantly, glaring and growling as it stamped its feet and reared. The sky cleared for a moment, and the harsh breeze was still as the moon and stars came out, shining brightly. It felt like Aska would become the power of light itself, like she would make a bond between her and the nearby stars and the moon. Aska's hands glowed in a white-hot, blazing fury, and a pure beam of light hit the creature's body. It screamed in terrifying agony as its skin and the carapace around it blackened. It writhed in pain for a few more moments, and finally slumped to the ground. Ullur caught Aska as she fell from the air where she had floated, her body limp in exhaustion from the spell. The pack watched her carefully until she managed to stand back up on her own, and then howls of pleasure,

congratulations, and triumph broke out.

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Aska, Ullur and Lars had been summoned to Ragnar's chambers upon their return to the Fang. They marched down the hallway, their boots tramping to the beat of a drum only they could hear. "Did he say anything about what this meeting was going to be about?" Lars asked.

"Not to me," Aska said. Ullur shook his head wordlessly. "Hmph," Lars said. "I wonder what this is about."

"No use in waiting to find out, is there? Let's head on in," said Aska, trying to sound more cheerful than she felt. Deep down, she thought she knew what Ragnar wanted. The ornately engraved stone door swung open before them, and they filed into Blackmane's chambers. Ragnar stood before them in his chapter-uniform, Hostor slightly behind and to the right of him. They had clearly been waiting for their arrival. Five chairs had been set out for them to use, and a table divided the space between the three Blood Claws and the two leaders.

"Jarl," Aska greeted Ragnar and gave a slight nod to her pack leader. Both of them, the Jarl and the pack leader replied with a simple grin, baring their fangs, and Ragnar gestured invitingly for them to sit down. While Ullur and Lars preferred to stand, and declined to take a seat, Aska sat down in a comfortable position and crossed her legs. She noticed the eyes of both the Wolf Guard and Wolf Lord lay heavily on her. She raised her eyebrows at them and smiled uncomfortably. "So why are we here?"

Ragnar bared his teeth again. "You don't like to waste time, do you? Very well..." He and Hostor swept forward and seated themselves in the other chairs and Hostor turned his gaze upon each of them in turn.

"All of you have done an impressive job today. You saved two men, covered the flanks while holding the position until my team and I had arrived to your support. On top of it you slaughtered a carnifex as well." Hostor's voice was had the low, rumbling overtones of a distant rockslide as he spoke, but he was clearly annoyed. With every slight move of his hands, the runic charms and wolf teeth decorating his armour rattled against his shoulder guards.

"But none of you seems to be capable of showing any respect to me or taking responsibility for your own actions during the daily training. I can't even sense that you take your training seriously. Explain."

Aska's laugh cut the air like a whip cracking as she heard Hostor's speech, "Oh by my father's iron balls... Seriously, Hostor?!" As his ice cold gaze met her eyes she knew he was angry, which did not made any difference in her amusement. Lars and Ullur tried to contain their laughter, obviously not an easy task for them. Hostor crossed his arms in front of his chest and glared at them. "I'm waiting."

"The lictor separated Elidor from Hedloy and Ansgar, two experienced Blood Claws, wild and proud warriors with senses sharper than the tooth of Vargnara. How do you think this happened?" She waited for his reply, still holding her stomach from her hearty laughter. The sound of Hostor's teeth grinding together echoed in the chamber, and he struggled to hold his temper. "They were inattentive. A mistake that will not happen again."

"Yes, and why didn't it happen to Raik and Bjarni? They're quite a lot younger than Hedloy and Ansgar. It could have happened to anybody. Why do you think it did not happen to Ullur, Lars and me?" she asked, patiently waiting for him to see her point. Yet again Hostor growled. Saying nothing but waiting for her further explanation while giving the three Blood Claws in front of him an icy glower. Ullur and Lars had

finally had enough, and sat, taking their place at their sister's side in support. Ullur narrowed his eyes at Hostor and nodded. "With all due respect, Hostor. We might seem to be the ones who neglected their duties, careless and rough, as well it might seem that our..." he paused, searching the right words, "...childish games do not make any sense, but never forget one thing: we are used to being distracted. We are used to making it look like we are playing around. The reality is simple, whilst others are used to stay alert all the time, to focus on everything and to be fierce warriors, we are doing the same just in another way. What do you think will an enemy think when he sees us 'playing' like this at a battlefield?"

"He will think you are stupid pups and an easy target!" Hostor exclaimed. "I thought the same until today."

Aska's golden wolf-eyes sparkled at Hostor's grim gaze and grinned, "Yes, that's right, and once they attack us they will see how much they have failed and what they have to deal with afterwards. Don't get us wrong Hostor, we do have a lot of respect for you. In fact we are very happy that you are our leader. But I think you are simply used to the young Blood Claws following you without any doubt, without questioning your decisions and this is even more dangerous for you and your pack. As a leader you should know that as well. As a leader you should think about it when we question your orders."

While Aska spoke Hostor's harsh face expression turned to a wan smile. He sighed reluctantly, ceding them the point. "For the way you look at the world and for the things you have taught me today I nearly feel dishonored. Your argument is absolutely correct and this is why I don't want to stop you. But one more thing before you're dismissed for today. Learn to control yourselves. You three are my very best warriors. And without you I might not be standing here, and it's possible the rest of the pack would not have survived either." All three of them looked at each other in disbelief, even looking towards the Jarl who had been sitting there quite still and listened to the conversation. They looked to Hostor and then back to each other again, "Uhm... really?"

"Yes. I have learned a lot from you all today, and I hope you learned a lot from me and the situation we were in," he replied. In his scent and his emotion they sensed that he was serious, but still they couldn't believe what they heard. Before they stepped into the chamber for this conversation they had been sure that this would be pretty uncomfortable and they might be in more trouble afterwards. As Ragnar rose from his giant, highly decorated wooden chair he stepped next to Hostor, resting his hand for a moment on his shoulder he raised his voice, "When you fulfill your tasks in the next battlefield and you've grown even more, I am sure we can talk about your bolters."

Lars and Ullur's facial expressions went in a second from confused and unbelieving to a happy grin while Ullur's howl of joy echoed in the chamber and the nearby hallways, while Aska's eyes narrowed still not believing what happened.

"All three of you are hot-headed young pups. If you want to rise and fight for Russ and the Allfather, you need to be tempered in the fires of war. Right now, you are like a rough iron blade, needing to be sharpened and brought into its final form." Hostor got up from his place and nodded to Blackmane, and they shook hands. He signaled to Ullur and Lars that they were to follow him, as the meeting was at an end and they could leave. Aska made ready to leave with them, but then she heard Blackmane's voice calling her back. "Not you, Princess. Sit down again."

A queasy noise left her throat. A nauseated feeling sank into her stomach as she put her hand to her face and turned around.

"No need to get uncomfortable, if I wanted to rip off your head I'd already have done so." She walked back to the chairs, and crossed her legs again in her former position. For a moment her golden eyes met the blue ones of Ragnar. She suddenly uncrossed her legs, looking ashamed and turned her gaze to a corner of the room. "Yes, Jarl?" She tried to put some strength into her voice, but she was nervous. Why were Ullur and Lars allowed to leave, while she was not?

A rough laugh left Ragnar's throat, rough and harsh as the winter's storm, but he looked pleased. "I never thought I'd see you like this. You are looking like a young pup who stole their master's favorite toy. As I mentioned before... if I wanted to rip off your head I'd already have done so. Ease up."

Aska didn't find this funny. She was hungry and thirsty and all she wanted right now was to spend some time with Ullur and Lars in the great hall with food and mjod. He took down a drinking horn and offered it to her. "I cannot offer you a meal, this won't take long, but here. Have a drink." She looked at him like nobody offered her a horn of mjod before. She took it after she paused in hesitation, nodding and replying with a serene, "Thanks."

"It's been quite a while since we had a talk. I simply want to know how you're doing and if you managed to integrate yourself into your new company." He pulled his lips back in a small smile as he poured some mjod into his personal drinking horn. Aska emptied the whole horn in one big swig. A sound of enjoyment left her mouth as she whipped away some leftovers running down her chin, "Uhm... but don't you already know, Lord?"

He quickly downed his horn of mjod with ease just like Aska had done moments before, "Of course I do, I just want to hear it from you." He held the jug up in her direction and raised an eyebrow, offering to fill up her horn again. She smiled and held hers to get filled up. "I'm fine. I feel comfortable with my pack, sometimes they remind me of the old times when my father was still here. It helps me feel at home again. Sometimes I put Hostor's back to the wall, but it's nothing new to me. I usually had been arguing and critiquing my old pack leader as well. I think it's been a while since Hostor heard something he did not like from a subordinate," she spoke with confidence as she paused suddenly to search for her next words. Her emotion swung in this moment, from confidence to sadness. "I still miss Bjorn... every day... but I can understand his decision from a few months ago and accept the fact that I can't be with him anymore. I know I have no other choice. I don't want to dishonor my father or myself. Is that what you wanted to hear?" she asked.

"It is good to hear this from you. I am glad you came back to us and you brought a new hope to the Fang. Perhaps we can use that hope to make sure that your father will return to us and lead us once again," Ragnar said. His face lit up for a moment, and Aska realized how important Russ's return was. Ragnar looked determined and hungry, almost joyful in his hope for finding his Primarch. He was quiet for a moment, then resumed. "How is your training progressing with the Stormcaller? Not much time will pass till he leaves us to sail with Redmoon," he asked, giving her another smile.

"It has been going well. I feel a lot more control over my powers than I did when I started months ago. Njal has been a harsh but fair master," she answered.

"He is that," Ragnar agreed. "I had to learn a fair amount of control over myself as well, as a Blood Claw."

Her eyes narrowed, "Are you mocking me?"

"Not in the least," he assured her. "There was a time when I wanted to kill one of the men who became a pack mate."

"What happened to him?"

"We eventually made it past that. There was a mission where he saved my life three times, and I ended up carrying his almost-dead body out of labyrinth of cave tunnels. We couldn't hold onto our hatred after that, either of us." She didn't know what to say to that, and for a time silence ruled the chamber as they both just looked at each other.

"What was your father like?" he finally asked.

"He was strong, utterly fearless, and quick to anger. I got that from him," she said, and they shared a smile. "He pretended often to be an uncouth barbarian prince to people who he didn't know well; it was his favorite role to play, but those of us he trusted knew that he was fiercely devoted to the All-Father, his men, and his wife and me. He loved my mother and me with all his heart and would have broken the world in half if either of us had ever come to any serious harm. I am not my father; I cannot play the uncouth barbarian as he did and wouldn't want to, and I inherited his temper but not his control. It's difficult for me to control my psionic powers because of that. It's very easy to use too much energy, drain myself dry... or too little to harm anyone. I am slowly learning to find my center."

"I see. You are worried you could hurt somebody?" he queried thoughtfully.

"Yes... I am. Don't get me wrong, I am not afraid. None of us fears anything.... We shall know no fear, is that the new saying? I am simply worried I could injure one of my brothers with my power."

He pulled a stubborn strand of hair out of his eyes. "Did that happen before?"

Yet again she nodded slightly, "Yes, Lord. It gravely wounded me and one of my brothers." Her scent changed suddenly and as he felt it creep up his nostrils he nearly could taste the pain on his tongue.

"There is no need to go into detail. I can understand the burden of this. I dishonored myself once by killing a Dark Angel in an honorable duel when my anger and rage took control over me after I had lost to him by first blood. All I can remember was his dead body at my feet as my vision became clear again. We all make our mistakes. The most important thing is that we learn from it." Their eyes met again. She felt that he spoke the truth and his words cheered her up, "We all have lost something in the past, we all have our mistakes," she whispered serenely.

"I might be your Lord but I am your brother as well. I can understand that Ullur and Lars are not good companions to talk to. Neither is Stormcaller in his worse moods. But I want you to know that he has a high opinion of you as do I. If you need to talk to somebody, you are welcome to knock on my door." She gazed into his blue eyes for a moment, not sure what to say, just nodded again and gave him back the horn he had given to her before. He raised his hand and shook his head in refusal, "Take it. Consider it my thanks for a good conversation. I have many. Just don't let the lady and the tramp get ahold of it."

She giggled while holding one of her hands in front of her mouth. "You mean the man with maiden weeks and the mighty Ullur possessing the wisdom of a gretchin?"

"Indeed," he smiled briefly. "You are free to go now."

She got up from the chair and turned to leave, but before she stepped out, she turned around once again. One last smile ran over her lips.

"Anything else?" he smiled back at her. There was something in her expression he couldn't sort out.

She replied with a heartfelt "Thank you."

"You're welcome." he answered with a nod.

"No... I mean... thank you. You gave me comfort when I needed it. I was full of grief after I lost Bjorn. I am still sad on some days... but your words helped me out of the darkness to see some light again," she said honestly.

"That`s why I`ve offered you to be your mentor if you require it."

Yet again a giggle left her throat but before she completely left his chambers she had an urge she couldn`t resist. "Still.... thanks, Ragnar."

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