

Dramatis Personae Aska Kjelu Russ WH40K OC

The Daughter of Leman Russ, Primarch of the Space Wolves

Von Garnet-Nihilia

Kapitel 3: Good Bye

3. Goodbye

Passing by armored warriors in ancient Terminator armor Aska was escorted by Ulrik the Slayer to the current Great Wolf. The gate to his realm, decorated with golden ornaments, slowly opened. For every young Wolf this always was an impressive tour and exciting to stand before the Great Wolf. For Aska this was merely ordinary and if she was honest things like this didn't impress her anymore. She walked upright, like every child of Russ never showing reserve.

The room was illuminated by torches with a warm yet dim light. On the end of the room on a throne embellished by dozens of carvings and runes he sat, the one everyone here called Logan Grimnar, the Wolf King. For Aska it simply wasn't right to have this title given to anyone but her father, but she had to cope with things like that now. Alongside the current Wolf King however there were a few things that reminded her of her father, like the two Thunder Wolves keeping watch, or the giant mead horn resting in a brass stand to his side. There also were other brothers in the room. She nodded to Njal, as she spotted him as she did to the young Ragnar standing a few meters away. Furthermore there seemed to be other Wolf Lords and Priests, some she knew from when she awoke, some were entirely new.

His dark voice rumbled like thunder. "Lady Aska, daughter of Russ and warrior of Fenris. Come closer. I have been expecting you." And even though there was much friendliness in it, it was as deep and percussive as her father's. She approached the throne until she stood only two meters away from him, never losing his gaze for a second. At first she resented a short, formal bow, but it showed her respect for Grimnar.

He nodded in approval and continued, "While you were sleeping and getting your strength back, our Priests examined every single molecule of you, your armor and your spirit. Njal has already told you of this." While saying this, his view wandered over her, examining the young woman. He had a young maiden fill his horn with mead and emptied it in one big gulp. The ceramite of his armor clinked on his throne as he tapped it with his fingers, pondering. After emptying the horn he put it back on its stand.

Everyone in the room was silent, listening to the Wolf King speak. "You probably already know we have no doubts about your identity anymore. And I do apologize for

all the trials and tests while still begging your understanding. And yet..." he paused shortly again, looking Aska directly into the eyes. His gaze was like a piercing needle, looking into the soul behind, but she returned this piercing glance with one similar.

"...yet there still is one last trial I want to put you under. Maybe you will hate me afterwards, but you have my word I will not blame you for your anger."

She had many things but not with this and she had to admit his words unsettled her. But she had no choice but to nod respectfully and accept his decision. "With all due respect, my Jarl, test me as often and as long as you want. I already told Njal, you don't have to beg for my understanding." Meanwhile she examined the Great Wolf as thoroughly as he did it with her. As her view wandered over his throne she had the impression of the shadow of a giant behind him, much bigger than anyone on the room, followed by those of two Thunder Wolves and for a fraction of a second she thought to have caught the scent of her father.

Grimnar rose from his throne, seeming quite grave and tense. Aska didn't like the danger in his scent at all. Such tension was only normal before a big battle or impending doom. It was a compulsive feeling of a dark sense of foreboding that crept into her.

"Well, we'll see about that. If you pass it, which I don't doubt, we won't test you any further and welcome you into our midst a bit more open-hearted." His gaze wandered over her a last time, and then over to the other Lords and Priests in the room, stopping by a large gate which he marched towards now.

"Follow me. All of you!"

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They walked into the depths of the Fang, passing numerous quarters. They walked by the Great Hall and the chambers of the Aspirants. Nobody said a word and it probably wasn't necessary. But it might have made the situation a little more bearable for Aska. They walked ever deeper into the den below the Aett until they came to the caverns of the Dreadnoughts...

The place where legends slumbered.

The deeper they went, the more intensely she could smell a familiar scent. She couldn't put her finger on it and yet she definitely remembered it from days past. She didn't know from where but it was so strangely familiar.

They stopped in the big tombs as a few Iron Priests crossed their way. Grimnar asked them if everything was prepared and he got a positive answer. It was horribly dark down here. Well, it always was, but this time it seemed to be a particularly potent darkness that seemed to be at the source of the strange smell that stirred up Aska's memories. Aside from Grimnar, everyone kept their distance and watched her closely. A little distance away a cool light shined on the ground in a circle. Grimnar gestured for her to stand over there. She looked at him, questioning and skeptically, looked over to the circle and then back to him again. "Please..." he said, and this time not with a commanding growl but with a deep sadness. For a moment his voice even trembled slightly and she was wondering what could sadden a King like that. A moment later she followed his and moved into the circle of light with a sense of foreboding.

Njal approached her and put something small in front of her. It seemed to be a small chest or box, draped into a cloth of linen. She looked down, then knelt and unwrapped it. The cloth pulled aside and she gasped, clasping her hand over her mouth. She stared down on what she saw before her in disbelief. Her mother had two music boxes, the small one in Aska's room and a second, bigger one which Aska had

gifted Björn the Fell-Handed. She gently stroked it in disbelief and a tear streamed down her face. Totally immersed, she slowly and cautiously turned the small wheel on its side and opened it to reveal a melody that hadn't been heard on Fenris for eons. With gentle voice she softly sang the words of the song and closed her eyes. It seemed to completely isolate her from the world around her because she didn't notice the heavy mountain of steel and ceramite moving behind her. Only when the melody stopped she looked up. She noticed her heart starting to beat faster as she recognized the strange smell that had confused her all the time...

Hesitant and shivering she slowly turned around to look at the source of the smell.

Tears of joy and grief at the same time streamed down her cheeks, she felt as if her heart had been broken and her lungs felt as if filled with water.

For over ten thousand years he had not seen her, and all this time she had thought he was already dead.

Before her stood Björn the Fell-Handed.

After all these years it was not able to embrace the woman he had once loved into his arms or feel her skin, despite her standing directly in front of him, gazing at his walking grave.

For over ten thousand years they had been separated. For him it was as if an eternity had passed, and the laughter, drinks, and jokes that they had once shared were a shadow in his past. How many battles had he fought? Dozens? Hundreds? Or maybe thousands?

He had waited such a long time to see her again in his lifetime. In many Sagas at the large table in the Great Hall he had recounted a mistake, something he had always reproached himself about. A burden on his shoulders for eons now, the last few days had made him very restless since he might after all finally be able to free himself from it.

For her it seemed only a few months had passed, the shock and the pain about the events still lingering deep in her. She felt as if only a few months prior she had followed her father into the Eye of Terror and the exertion of battle still lingered in her marrow, even after she had slept and dreamt for such a long time. The wound was still fresh and gaped insufferably in her body.

She wanted to say something, anything. But all that left her throat was a faint whine followed by a hesitant attempt to say his name. Again and again she gasped for air in disbelief while staring into the darkness, unsure what to say.

Slowly and proudly his iron body, forged by the Iron Priests, emerged from the shadows. The Fenris-pattern Mark V dreadnought with the personal heraldry of Björn the Fell-Handed stood before her. The first Great Wolf after Leman Russ himself and Aska's closest confidant, mentor and best friend. If she had a quarrel with her father Björn always had had an open ear for her. Whenever she was angry Björn was there for her, trained with her until she had calmed down again or they thrashed each other in the snow for hours if they had the time for it. While at the feasts the maids danced with her brothers; he and Aska were always a pair in the dance halls, making themselves and the other couples laugh with their juvenile shenanigans and jokes.

Her former best friend and companion was gone and still he stood here. For ages he had lived as corpse to guide the holy engine and continue to serve the Chapter and the Allfather. For over ten thousand years he had waited for her and her father and the feeling of guilt washed over the young wolf, more severe than ever before because it was she who had run away.

Motionless she stared at the sarcophagus, weeping bitter tears of guilt and grief.

"Björn... I... Björn..."

The iron body slightly bent over, the deactivated Wolf Claw lifting Aska's chin slightly without leaving any scratch on her porcelain skin. An almost unbelievable gentleness was in this touch. For outsiders this must have looked awkward but it was astonishing how delicately Björn touched her.

"As..." a short crackle sounded from his Vox speaker, for a short moment it seemed as if he tried to say something, but then fell silent again. With one of her hands she cautiously embraced the claw, nuzzling her head a bit more against it as if she could feel his nonexistent body heat. For her it seemed as if he was not trapped in this shell, as if he was there with her. Her other hand grabbed a necklace that always hung around her neck. Even in her sleep she had always grasped for it which the Rune priests had noticed. Björn had gifted it to her for her sixteenth birthday.

"It's my fault..." she sobbed with a heavy heart. "It's all my fault... I... should... I should have..."

Then she howled, a cry full of anguish and despair that echoed through every corridor of The Fang. Her golden eyes stared at the magnificent, rune-adorned sarcophagus that contained the corpse of her beloved brother. Everyone present in the chamber felt as if stabbed with a dagger. Even if not visible in their cold, scarred faces, it was perceptible they were anything but unfeeling. Even the great Sky Warriors could understand how something like this felt.

The air in the chamber was filled with compassion and sorrow. She pressed herself against the cold plate, as if he could embrace her, as if this could give her a sense of consolation. "Please... forgive me." She could just about touch him.

"I shouldn't have run away, but I had to follow him, you know that... please..." she quietly sobbed and whimpered.

The sincerity and guilt in her scent plainly obvious she knocked against the sarcophagus a few times in despair until her strength left her and she shed calmer tears again....

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"It. Is. You. I. Knew. It. I. Knew. You. Would. Come. Back. You. Always. Come. Back." The dark voice coming from the vox speaker trembled softly. It sounded brassy and hollow, and there was only a trace left of his former tone of voice. He turned to Grimnar and his retinue, still standing in the chamber and watching the events.

"Great. Jarl. Please. Take. Your. Men. And. Leave. Us."

A few seconds later Grimnar answered with a pained expression on his face.

"Of course, first Jarl... We are at the annulus if you need us. But please, te-"

"IT. IS. HER. NOW. LEAVE!" the legendary warrior interrupted the Great Wolf aggressively. Never before could they sense emotions so clearly in the shell of ceramite and steel. "I. Will. Join. You. Later."

Logan Grimnar and his retinue then left the chamber quietly and left the two companions alone in their grief.

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Aska didn't care about the other Jarls and Priests that had accompanied them to the chamber until a few moments ago. For her the cold plate of the sarcophagus was warm and protective. Below it his heart pulsed, there she could sense a breath rising and sinking with his breathing and a feeling of comfort, which they hadn't felt for a long time, slowly rose in both of them.

"So. You. Truly. Are. Back. My. Little. Wolfling..." his voice echoed from within. 'Little Wolfling,' that's what he always had jokingly called her. He knew Aska didn't like to be

called little and so he teased her back then with it.

Sobbing she looked up at him, repeating time and time again how sorry she was for running away. "Fa-Father said I should stay with you... he explicitly told me to but still I followed him."

"You. Never. Listened. To. A. 'No'. Did. You? It. Was. One. Of. The. Things. I. Always. Loved. About. You..." even now with his heart so heavy he tried to take the grief from her. To take away a little of her pain with some small jokes and induce a small smile from her. What else could he do? Trapped in his cage of ceramite he could only gently stroke her with his claw.

"You. Have. Always. Been. Of. The. Same. Wild. Nature. As. Your. Father. Was. Nobody. Could. Keep. Your. Temper. And. I. Don't. Have. To. Tell. You. How. Infuriating. This. Was. For. Your. Father. Sometimes," a short crackle left his speaker as if he was chuckling to himself, "And. Still. He. Always. Spoke. Proudly. Of. You."

"I didn't want you to think I didn't want to stay with you... but Father... I just had to follow him. I had no choice, even if it was against his direct order."

His deactivated claw caressed her cheek again, then stroked over her head and along her long hair, giving her the feeling of everything being alright again. "You. Do. Not. Have. To. Apologize. Little. Wolfling. I. Myself. Wanted. To. Give. My. Title. Away. To. Follow. Him... To. Follow. You... But. This. Would. Have. Been. A. Much. Greater. Disgrace. To. Defy. Him. Too. He. Wanted. Us. To. Marry. Did. You. Know?"

Aska's eyes widened in shock and disbelief. Surely she had heard wrong... "No! I... I never knew that he allowed us to marry, why did you not tell me? I wouldn't have followed Father then!" She felt as though she'd been stabbed in the heart with a dagger.

"I. Went. To. Your. Room. To. Tell. You. But. You. Were. Gone. Already. Fate. Plays. Some. Strange. Tricks."

It was awful for them both. They were so close and yet couldn't be farther from each other. They stood directly in front of each other holding one another close and all that separated them was a few centimeters of ceramite. Ceramite and inevitable, unchangeable death.

"Then... then let's be together now. I'll stay with you..." she whimpered with a heartbreaking voice, which made Björn feel as though his innards were being ripped out barehanded.

"I... I'll just stay with you... yes... please..."

Sobbing she wiped her tearful face with the grey sleeve of her tunic, looking up at him pleadingly. "I can sing to you all the time... I'll just stay with you, I don't mind."

Björn wondered how obsessively she tried to persuade herself of that. How desperately she clung to him and the past, although it was painfully obvious they would and could never be together again. She would never become a proud warrior of Russ if she lived in the shadows of the past.

The vox speaker gave a creaking feedback, a strange tone that repeated a few times. He carefully grabbed her and lifted her gently, pressing her to his cold plate as if trying to embrace her and console her a little. In his current form he was over four meters tall and Aska reached without her armor only about halfway up to him.

"Please. Stop. Crying. I. Would. Rather. Be. Torn. Apart. By. Axes. Than. See. You. Cry." Aska wiped her eyes again, trying in vain to stop and smile at Björn. Her eyes and cheeks red from crying, the smile crooked and forced in her face, the view stabbing dozens of arrows into the heart of the Jarl. The feedback came louder and more clearly, leaving his speaker with increasing regularity.

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"Aska. I. Died. A. Long. Time. Ago..." It came brassy from the loudspeaker, followed by another feedback.

"No... You are here..."

My. Former. Body. Is. Trapped. In. A. Sarcophagus. And. It. Pilots. This. Iron. Hull. That. You. See. I. Am. Nothing. More. Than. A. Shadow. Of. My. Former. Self."

Like a small stubborn child she shook her head, interrupting almost every word with a "No!" But she knew what he was about to say. He would tell her she could not stay with him, but he knew her better than anybody and was sure she wouldn't put up with this, much less accept it. She was just as stubborn and bullheaded as she was back then and this would most likely never change. Aska liked to run her head through the wall, even if it meant pain for her.

He could do nothing more than hold her with his claw and press her to his cold shell. No emotion, no feelings in his monotonous voice and still, in some form she could sense it in his scent.

Slowly he set her back on her feet, she not letting go and making him bend over slightly. One of his claws stroked through her hair, gently and slowly, still trying to comfort her in some way.

"I. Am. Dead. And. Still. I. Roam. The. World. Of. The. Living..."

"No... Björn..."

"I. Waited. So. Long. For. You. To. Come. Back. To. Me."

"Yes... And now I will stay with you. Now that I can be with you again... I want to..."

She gasped for air, almost hyperventilating, inhaling as much as she could deep into her lungs, "I WILL STAY WITH YOU!"

"NO!"

"Wha...?"

"No. Aska..."

The harsh, monotonous answer scared her to the bone, shaking her down to her marrow. She became stiff as the ice on Fenris and the disbelief in her spoke volumes.

"Wh-what?"

"ENOUGH. Aska. Enough."

"What are you talking about?!"

"You. Are. Alive. Aska. Kjelur. Russ. And. You. Have. To. Stay. This. Way. I. Can. No. Longer. Be. Your. Companion. Or. Friend. How. Do. You. Think. That. Would. Work? Little. Wolfling. I. Am. Awakened. Once. Every. Century. And. Sometimes. For. Special. Occasions. Like. This. In. Between." His claw gripped her tighter again, embracing her completely as if he could take her in his arms like in the past when she cried. "You. Know. What. This. Means. Right?"

Even though some part of her, deep burrowed in the crumbling remains of her former world, knew he was right, her eyes filled with a dangerous emptiness. She refused to believe it, not for anything in the world, and still she knew whatever she wanted, it would not change the facts. "NO! I DON'T CARE!" She punched against the sarcophagus with all the strength she could muster. "...I couldn't care less..."

"We. Cannot. Be. Together. And. This. Would. Never. Make. You. Happy. There. Is. Only. One. Way. For. You. To. Ever. Be. Happy. Again. And. Laugh. With. The. Fenryka..."

Hoping that if she didn't hear it he would not have said it and it could be ignored, she covered her ears. She felt as if an endless hole had opened beneath her feet, swallowing her whole into its deep darkness. She had just managed to stop crying and

now the tears slowly crept back to her. Looking up at him like a small, pouting whelp she kept her lips shut. But she knew no amount of pouting would change anything about their current situation, which however did not keep her from trying.

"Aska. Kjelu. Russ... Daughter. Of. Fenris. You. Will. Always. Have. My. Heart. You. Always. Were. My. Dearest. Friend. And. Confidant."

He interrupted himself for a short moment, as if it cost him substantial overcoming to say this. "I. Love. You. And. That. Is. Why. I. Release. You."

Suddenly her desperate act stopped and she looked up at him with big eyes. Still silently crying she felt as if suffocating, but tried to keep herself together. Despite tears she tried to be proud, having no other option but to accept this she could only reply to his words. "You know I love you more..." softly whispering this with a warm smile because her voice had become weak and rough. She felt dizzy but still tried to maintain her composure.

"Aska. You. Have. To. Live. For. Us. Both. So. Please. Make. The. Most. Of. It... Be. Happy. And. Make. Sure. Your. Saga. Will. Be. Carried. On. By. The. Skalds. For. Eternity. And. Please. Don't. Hate. Me. For. This. Decision." The ceramite body bent over again, enabling her to look through his viewing slit. But she could hardly make anything out, only a faint silhouette that seemed to move a bit.

"One. Last. Time. I. Could. See. You. With. My. Own. Eyes. That's. More. Than. I. Had. Ever. Hoped. For... Now. Go. Join. A. Different. Company. Make. Your. Father. Proud. And. Lay. The. Shadows. Of. Your. Past. At. Rest. Find. Your. Way. Little. Wolfing."

She nodded, closing her eyes and whispering with her last bit of strength, "How could I ever hate you, Björn? How could I...."

Again, the harsh creaking of the Vox speaker...

"The. Only. Thing. I. Ever. Regretted. Was. That. I. Had. Never. Told. You. What. I. Told. You. Today..."

Then the pain became too great to bear. With all her strength she had fought it. For days her spirit had been tested, and terrible pain plagued her head. The events of the past were like fresh, gaping wounds and even with all her inner strength, she desperately needed inner rest. It just was too much pain, too soon. She succumbed to grief and pain, collapsing in a heap. Björn immediately called for aid over vox, holding her and wrapping her in a pelt he got from his hull. Only when she was safely handed over to the Priests he went to the annulus, knowing his little girl would now have terrible nightmares.

It was remarkable how silently he could move his massive grave over the ground, considering the immense weight. And still, he lived and continued his service to the Allfather. Knowing Aska could start anew in this world as soon as she overcame the pain he vanished into the corridors, going his own way.

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Almost everybody of distinction was at the annulus. They gathered around the map of the galaxy as Grimnar talked about the next missions and who would be going where. "Sven, there are reports of Tyranid activity in the Irilia subsector. Governor Hakat asked for our help since she heard rumors about a Genestealer Cult in the main hive of Irilia. I want you to investigate these rumors and if necessary purge the subsector thoroughly," the deep voice of the Great Wolf rumbled through cavern made of stone. "Aye, my Jarl!" the tattooed warrior bowed before his lord in respect. He bore the sign of the fire-breather and when he straightened again, showing his fangs in a fiery grin of anticipation for battle, they shimmered peculiarly beneath the frosty gleam of his eyes. Grimnar wouldn't lecture him about the details of the plan like a small child.

He was a Wolf Lord and now had the responsibility of it, so he knew what to do without a further word spoken about it necessary. So Grimnar turned to Kjarl, the fiercest rival of Sven Iceclaw.

"...and you will have to support the Helios subsector against an Ork invasion. The Greenskins already flooded two agriworlds and now also threaten Helios itself. The hives still hold against the green tide but you will have to dispatch immediately and beat back the scum before it can spread further through Imperial space."

Kjarl nodded, showing his fangs in a battle-hungry grin. His hot-headed temper matched his totem, the Grimblood. "As you wish my Jarl, we will burn them to ashes with the scorching breath of the Firewolf."

Grimnar nodded respectfully. The other Wolflords were still too far away, entangled in battles and their mission, and weren't expected back in the next years. Blackmane's company had been crippled in the dozens of battles they had to fight and would have to replenish its numbers back to normal, in the meantime doing sentry duty for the Fang. After a brief respite he continued, sounding less happy than usually.

"I myself will also leave the Fang. It has been far too long since I have seen battle and it is time again... also-", he was interrupted when the giant, ceramite-armored shape of Björn the Fell-Handed entered the room.

"Ah, I was just getting around to that... Björn will accompany me. At his personal request our oldest brother will march to battle again. We will discuss the details later in private." Björn went to his place next to the Great Wolf, saying no word and showing no reaction.

The last in the cavern without a mission was Engir Krakendoom, whose cloudy temper had traversed the oceans of Fenris. As always he had his harpoon strapped on his back, always ready to slay the next beast. And for him too Grimnar had a mission.

"Engir, I think you will like this. The floating cities of the water world Lymphonia report missing transports and alleged sightings of giant creatures in the water. Investigate this and if necessary do what you do best." He knew this mission was forged specifically for the man who had throttled a giant beast with its own tentacles. Engir's scarred grin split his face, his voice like a wolf's throaty growl in the cavern, almost as mighty as Grimnar's. Rough like the sea he had made his kingdom. "Those bastards will stand no chance..."

Lastly, he came to the point, Russ' daughter.

The sharp discipline of tactic planning in seconds made room for deep gloom. Pondering, the Great Wolf ruffled the fur in the neck of his Thunderwolf lying at his side, his voice seemingly less commanding as usually "So... summarized, our sister and Russ' child is back. But understandably right now she isn't in the best mood and we should give her a bit of rest to cope with all this.

Then he looked over to Björn, "Will she accompany us?"

There was a brief feedback from the Vox speaker, "No. She. Will. Have. To. Join. A. Different. Company."

Grimnar had a short break, calling for mead and gesturing for his men to sit and drink, too. The authoritarian mood vanished and some of the present men sat down on benches made of stone.

"The Inquisition let me now they of course already know about her. Don't ask me how they did it. As always they are suspicious but made it clear they will accept our decision, while still keeping an eye on us. I don't think I will have to explain that to you..."

"Well. They. Can. Talk. To. My. Fist. If. They. Want. To. Harm. Aska," Björn replied, quite

direct.

When the mead came the horns filled fast and were emptied even faster. The men listened to Grimnar who looked over to Blackmane, sitting on a bench.

"Like I said, it might be best to let her rest for a while and not immediately send her out to battle. And think of the bonds of our packs... what do you think Blackmane? You could become her mentor until she is ready to integrate in a pack," his iron gaze wandered over to Björn again. "What do you think, first Jarl? You know her best."

"Well. Back. Then. She. Was. A. Blood. Claw. Almost. Ready. To. Earn. Her. Boltgun. There. Were. No. Exceptions. For. Her. And. She. Had. Training. With. The. Rune. Priests," his brassy voice echoed throughout the chamber, followed by another feedback. "One. Day. She. Will. Be. A. Mighty. Rune. Priestess. Once. She. Learns. To. Control. Herself. And. Her. Fiery. Temper. A. Bit."

Grimnar couldn't hide a slight smile, and looked over to Ragnar. Ragnar thought for a moment, considered the offer. He could just decline; it sounded more like a request than an order. But something in him almost forced him to accept the invitation. He didn't know exactly why but he nodded, straightening himself.

"Of course she can join my Wolves, and if she wishes she can continue where she stopped. But she will only get her Bolter once I myself am convinced she has earned it. Also I think I already have a fitting pack for her."

Njal Stormcaller, having been standing in a corner silently watching the events, raised his deep voice now. "I think that would be best. In her spirit I saw the thirst for battle; she has a lot of rage to work off because of the events of the Heresy. When we look through the records and Sagas we can learn that already back then she fought at the side of her father, so why should we deny her this now and keep her in the Fang like a treasure? I think she will be in good hands with Lord Blackmane, but still I would like to take her as my apprentice. I don't think her potential is fully exhausted yet and it would be my honor."

Grimnar nodded, first to Ragnar, then to Njal, in agreement and took a big gulp of his mead horn, then looked to Björn again, questioning.

"Her. Talent. Has. To. Be. Used. I. Am. Sure. Both. Of. Them. Will. Keep. A. Wary. Eye. On. Her."

"Then it is decided. She will become part of your company, Blackmane. Blood Claw. She might be the daughter of our high king but like Russ always said... no one gets special treatment. She will have to earn her rank." He let his gaze wander to Njal again, probably thinking she would really be a good Rune Priestess. But Björn had told them Aska liked to be in her pack. Priests often had to be solitary and the Fell-Handed had told them Aska liked company. Grimnar ended the conversation by turning his back to them, walking away leisurely. Björn turned to Ragnar and bent slightly, as if nodding to him, before the first Great Wolf left the cavern at the side of current one. Njal looked at Ragnar, a strange look on his face before turning it into a rueful grin, before turning and also vanishing in the shadows. The other Jarls and Priests left, too, either to attend to their duties or war preparations.

"Even if she is a Blood Claw and doesn't get any special treatment, you still are responsible for her. I hope you know this?!" Ulrik the Slayer spoke to him from a corner. He was known to be a grim fellow and often criticized others. Why he didn't know, but there was a provocative tone to his voice.

"Slayer... if I didn't know that I would be a lot more hotheaded than one might think of me," his grin was just as provocative, "and I have the responsibility for every warrior beneath my command, even if most of them are not princesses."

"I am not talking about that, but what do you think Russ would say if he was eventually found only to hear about the suffering or even the death of his daughter? I wouldn't want the blame for that on me."

Ragnar looked up, annoyed. What did Ulrik want from him right now? With all due respect for the old Wolf, he didn't have the time or the patience for this right now. Irritated, he replied, "I would be proud of my sons or daughters if they found an honorable death in battle. And now excuse me. I have to attend to my matters!" With this he turned around, leaving Ulrik without the chance for him to answer.

On the way to his quarters he passed by her chambers. For a moment he thought about checking on her. But as his gaze wandered over the golden ornaments covering her door he decided to leave her alone and to be on his way. He could understand her pain and even without knowing what exactly happened between her and the first Jarl, he still had a hunch. But in his opinion it also simply was none of his business and only this one time they would give her time to cope with the situation. For now they had time, the company had to recruit anew, packs had to be formed and trained and they had to guard The Fang and the Fenris system.

All of these things needed to be set in motion and still most of the time he pondered about how to get a broken heart out of its room to integrate into one of his packs. Usually when he wanted to talk to someone in private he would send a message, requesting to come to him in his chambers. But in this case he decided to wait a few days, leave her alone and then come into her room himself.

He wondered if it would be better to keep a military tone, or speak to her in a more brotherly voice. It wasn't really Ragnar's nature to talk like a strict leader if it wasn't necessary, because he did enjoy engaging with his brothers on the same level, for example for duels. Even when the burden of leadership rested on his shoulders in such a young age, his ferocity still was that of the fires of youth.

He asked himself how to approach her, entering his ornate chambers. It was quite strange to treat her like a brother, like Björn had said. Slightly annoyed he rested on his wooden throne, etched from dozens of wolf-emblems, and sighed in irritation.

Suddenly he chuckled to himself, slapping on his thighs before getting to work with giving his company their instructions. The fact that he knew exactly what to do with a brother but had honestly no idea how to treat Aska strangely amused him. And in fact it really was. A warrior, a Lord, surviving and leading dozens of battles, who had already earned so much glory in this young age, had no clue how to lure a sad girl out of her room. He himself had already said she wouldn't get any exceptions, no different or preferred treatment. And still he somehow wanted to display some sort of sense of tact.

He decided to give the whole matter a bit of time, to check on her from time to time and if necessary to pull her out of her chambers by force. His position didn't allow for any exceptions and if the Sagas were true she didn't know it any different.

She was loyal to Russ and Björn, until the day the Primarch vanished and she defied his direct order, following him into battle. But she was his sister and one had to care for his family.

Everyone in the pack had his trust.