

First Solo Mission

Despite how it might seem from other stories, Korix was *not* the primary focus of my life, nor was he my only source of happiness in the years after my House naming. Sure, he played a large part in it, but I had many other things to occupy me. Most of that included the numerous tasks that my training required and a never-ending acquisition of skills, some of which I'd never once thought that the *Lokke Vitras* might need.

Boy, did the *Lokke Vitras* disabuse me of the notion that certain skills weren't worth a warrior's time. I couldn't tell you how many times simple things like *doing the laundry by hand* made themselves necessary during a mission. Once, I even had to sing my way out of a sticky situation. That didn't go over well.

The point here, though, is that I found joy and happiness in learning these things, just as much as I enjoyed maintaining the regimen needed to keep me in perfect shape.

Another of the things that kept me from going insane over that first year was Ace. Training him, feeding him, taking him on walks, all of these things helped to sooth the spark of my soul as it grew steadily more scarred and abused by my new role. Even so, Ace was—as I'd thought he'd be—a handful. He was curious, clever, and tenacious, much like his name declared. All of which meant that I spent a good sliver of my time chasing the bastard down and/or getting him out of scrapes.

On the day I would receive my first mission, Ace had once more found a way to escape the house. When I discovered this between morning drills and lunch time, I made a bee line to the *Lokke Vitras*, even knowing how the coming conversation would go. If I avoided it, he'd think I'd abandoned my training for the day, which wouldn't... end... well for me.

The *Lokke Vitras* was already in the kitchen when I careened into it, propped in a corner with his feet on the bench and a book in his hands.

Not once looking up at me, he said, "Ace is gone again?"

Completely out of breath from my sprint, all I could do was nod.

"Well?" Korix said. "Go find him."

And I would have left right then if I hadn't been absolutely loopy from lack of sleep. I'd stayed up for the last two nights, frantically finishing my studies on some obscure mathematical theorem that the *Lokke Vitras* wanted memorized by the end of the week. Originally, I'd planned to crash for a good five or six hours tonight to pay for the lack, but with this, I wouldn't have time for that. I wasn't sure I'd be mission ready, which the *Lokke Vitras* had always harped on me about maintaining, for the rest of the day.

Fortunately, by that point, I'd figured out that he was occasionally reasonable when it came to my training. He'd give me a break with certain things if he thought it necessary for my health. So, I wasn't too fearful for my life when I opened my mouth.

"Would you come with me to look for him?" I said. "I'm afraid my sleep deprivation might impair me today."

Slowly, the *Lokke Vitras* lifted his eyes to me, staring long enough for my heart to stop beating in my chest, before returning his focus to his book.

"Ace is your dog, *kuvesk*, and you're the one who didn't prevent him from escaping," he said. "So, you have a choice before you. Do you get the sleep you need, caring for your body and therefore leaving Ace in the wild, or do you rescue your dog from his own idiocy? You have until the end of the day to choose and then, act on your choice."

Or he could make this another damn training exercise. Sighing, I bowed to him.

"Thank you for the time, *evushk*," I said.

And I took off for a door outside. There was never a question about the decision I'd make. Ace was my responsibility. If I couldn't teach him how to stay safe, then I had to make a sacrifice to get him back home.

So, I wandered into the moors around the estate, looking for him. I won't detail how I managed that, as it's mediocre story material at best, but I will say that when I eventually found my dog, I was glad I'd gone after him. He'd gotten himself stuck in a bush, whining pitifully as I came closer. Poor thing probably would have starved to death or frozen solid by the time morning came again.

He knew he was in trouble too. For the entire hike home, he trotted beside me with his tail down and his head lowered. I'd never hit him or otherwise abused him, but still, he shied away from me whenever he could read that I was pissed off with him.

When we got home, I brought Ace to the kitchen, exceedingly grateful when I noted that the *Lokke Vitras* had left the room, but almost as soon as my dog had gotten himself settled, a connection opened in my array.

"Meet me in the staging room," the *Lokke Vitras* said.

Before subsequently breaking the connection. A mission? Great... That would be just my luck.

After I'd secured Ace, I hurried to my destination, knowing I didn't have time for anything else. Our 'staging room', as the *Lokke Vitras* had called it, was a small place with a holodrama plate and an attached closet/weapons cache that held everything we might need for a mission. Any random thing we didn't have on hand could be picked up from headquarters while on our way out.

When I entered, the *Lokke Vitras* never looked up, merely pointing me to the wardrobe.

“You need to look like a House Kirst member,” he said.

While I followed instructions, he continued with his brief.

“*Shukusen* Arion is meeting with Orin later this afternoon. Arion requested for the meeting to take place in the Preserve, which has made Orin understandably wary. He doesn’t suspect foul play. If anything happened to Orin, it would be pretty obvious who’d done it, but he still wants a form of protection with him. Talira wants us to take care of it.”

And we’d never find out why that was. My grandmother sometimes had us complete the most random of tasks, ones I at times wondered what the point of them was, but she had to have a good reason for assigning them to us. She wouldn’t have wasted valuable resources like us otherwise.

Having finished changing, I called, “Great. When do we leave?”

“You leave as soon as you’re ready,” the *Lokke Vitras* said. “I have things to do, so you’ll handle this by yourself.”

Halfway between the closet and the main room, I stumbled, casting a sharp glance his way. My first solo mission? Today? I’d told him not two hours ago about how sleep deprived I was.

But he met my gaze with nothing in his eyes, and I knew he didn’t care, or rather, that I was suffering the consequences for my choice that morning.

Swallowing hard, I said, “All right. Anything else I should know?”

The *Lokke Vitras* just lifted an eyebrow.

“I don’t know, *kuvesk*. Is there?”

And he left me there, cursing in my head.

Prep didn’t take long, and the process of doing it isn’t worth recording. Just know that by the time I was sitting in a skycruiser, on my way to Xygek, I was ready for almost anything to happen, but then, that was the state I was always supposed to be in.

When I arrived in the capital, I headed straight for House Kirst’s headquarters and once there, subtly announced my presence. At that point, I knew how to act around high Strata, or rather, I’d known how to do that for my whole life. With my own parents in the Second and Third Strata and my grandmother a *shukusen* in her own right, it was kind of hard not to learn behavioral protocol.

Even still, I’d been isolated from Lutovish society for close to two years. I... made some mistakes.

I’m not sure if Orin noticed them. He was a bit too occupied with preparing for his meeting.

His First Stratus, Kaeko, on the other hand, did. Or I think she did. Maybe she just didn’t know who I was. She certainly treated me like a stain on the earth during that mission, like most people did

with House Kolb members.

Soon enough, myself, the *shukusenth*, and their First Strata, left for the Preserve, and hell, if that wasn't awe inspiring. I'd been there a few times since obtaining my new role, but this was the first time I'd visited where the stakes were low. This time, I could pay attention to my surroundings.

Lutov doesn't have much in the way of forests. Ibis certainly does, so many that it boggles the mind, but I had yet to spend much time on the other continent. In my home, the makings of a forest sprinkle the bases of the Barasgami Mountains, but besides that, it's mostly made up of moors, tundra, plains, and the wasteland of the Eastern Reaches. So being surrounded by evergreens, nature blocking out the sky instead of towers, took my breath away.

Mother Time, it was so hushed there, and that hush permeated the *shukusenth's* conversation. I barely heard any of what they said, but then, I wasn't paying much attention to it. I made sure to mark my memories of when their words began so I could reference it later. Talira would undoubtedly ask for a transcription of it at some point, but in general, I was more occupied with watching my surroundings.

The Preserve might have been beautiful, but it was also different terrain than what I was used to.

Still, I caught the disturbance when it happened, although it wasn't of the type Orin had anticipated.

A bear tried to attack our group, and wasn't that fun to deal with? Poor thing must have decided we looked tasty or something. I don't know why it started lumbering toward us from where it had been resting, far off of the path. All I know is that I caught its movement when it got up and angled toward it.

So, yes. I fought a bear. Managed not to kill it too, Mother Time knows how. I'd rather never have to do something so strange again in my life, but it was certainly an experience at the time, and once it was asleep at my feet, I was grinning like a fool, letting the group I was supposed to be guarding get too far ahead of me.

The rest of the meeting continued without a hitch. The only other thing of note that happened came after we'd returned to Kirst's headquarters. Orin tried to berate me for abandoning my post while dealing with our disturbance in the forest. I had far too much fun explaining to him exactly why he was wrong about that before describing the danger he'd been in while I was 'gone'.

But then, I returned to the *Lokke Vitras'* estate with my first solo mission complete and yes. He went extraordinarily easy on me for my first foray into the world as the *Lokke Vitras* to come. I'm perfectly aware of that, both then and now, but it still felt nice to report in and hear very little in the way of criticism from him.

I went to bed happy that night, getting a full six hours of sleep, just like I'd planned.

Revision #1

Created 19 November 2024 06:01:12 by FatalisticFable

Updated 26 December 2024 07:53:19 by FatalisticFable