

## Chapter 14. Blackened hands made by hate

Meg was driving Elenore to the edge of where the restraining order dictated. Ten blocks within that boundary Elenore asked Meg to pull over.

"What's wrong? We're not even close yet." Meg asked wondering if she did anything wrong.

"Nothing's wrong. I need to think of what I'm going to say to Margaret when I get home. I've got time before she goes to school. So I figured I walk the rest of the way. If you're worried, I don't think those thugs would try anything in broad daylight." Elenore said in a reassuring tone.

"I guess I can't convince you otherwise?"

"I'll be fine..."

"Can I at least be worried about you...?"

"Isn't that in the job description?" Elenore said with a grin as she reached for the door handle.

"Wait before you go. I know I should've asked this last night but I want to get your permission before I do anything."

Elenore stopped and looked in Meg's eyes. "Permission for what?"

"Remember you said you didn't remember if you even pregnant and that was where the hole in your memory was?"

Elenore was a bit confused at first but she figured what her mother was getting at.

"Yes, I did..."

"The hospital didn't have any record of it or at least that hospital."

"You want to see if there's any record at another hospital? Am I correct?"

"I know this seems like prying, but if you did have a child and that child is alive...this is my grandchild." Meg said in a fraught tone.

Elenore knew her mother had a good point and with her hands full with Margaret and the Torc she wouldn't have time to go looking. Besides she reasoned her mother might have access to sources of information and other resources that she didn't have and she wondered if there was a child at all.

"Now that you bring it up I'm curious as well. You have my permission to do what you need to do."

"Thank you sweetie. You have my home and cell numbers?"

"Yes mother. I'll talk to you later, I have to get going." Elenore said giving Meg a kiss on the cheek and opening the car door.

"You call me when you get home, okay?" Meg said giving Elenore a kiss on the cheek.

Elenore grinned. "Yes mother..." Elenore said as she got out of the car.

Meg watched Elenore walk down the street for a little bit and then she turned around and drove off.

Elenore walked for three blocks when she heard a sound she dreaded hearing; gunfire. What Elenore didn't know was that *Enfant* was attacking a *Soldat* safe house and they were winning. Elenore froze as the shooting got closer. The memory of that day came flooding in and her heart began beating rapidly. What snapped her out it was a stray bullet hitting a trash can. She turned and ran; the memories of *Gazth-Sonika* came more quickly as she began to panic.

*"Oh God please not again...please..."* She thought to herself as she began to blindly run not caring where she ran to as long it was away from the shooting.

*Elenore ran through the jungle...*

Her heart raced as she ran into the street and she froze as an oncoming truck as blaring its horn at her.

*Elenore was standing at the edge of the cliff...*

*She could see the jungle canopy below...*

She didn't notice that she was quickly pulled into an alley just before the truck hit her.  
"Miss Baker..." A familiar voice seemed to call to her...

"Miss Baker..." The voice called to her again. Carrossea grabbed Elenore by her arms he knew that she was in some sort shock or experiencing a flashback.

*She felt the wind rush around her...*

Carrossea shook her trying to snap her out of it.

"Damn it Elenore snap...out of it!" Carrossea said he she slapped her face.

*She felt the bullet enter her...*

*She felt herself falling...*

Elenore looked around her surroundings rapidly and finding that she was not in danger she pressed her face against Carrossea and began to cry. Normally Elenore wouldn't cry in public never mind crying against Carrossea but this was different. She felt the sting of the slap on face, brushing it with her fingers. She would've been furious if he had done so for any other reason. Realizing that he; the person she had an intense dislike for saved her life. It wouldn't be proper not to show some gratitude, besides she wanted to ask him a couple of questions.

She backed away from slowly trying to wipe her eyes. Carrossea handed her his handkerchief which she took gracefully and wiped her eyes.

"Are you feeling better Miss Baker?" Carrossea asked in a non-confrontational tone.

"I'm all right Mr. Doone. Thank you..." Elenore handed him back the handkerchief which he put back into his pocket.

"I'm glad Miss Baker. I do apologize though."

"Its fine Mr. Doone, I would've done the same. Thank you for saving my life, I do appreciate it." Elenore said in a grateful tone wiping the remains of the tears.

Carrossea smiled. "I'm glad you weren't hurt. But we can't stay here for much longer. Enfant is retaliating against the Soldats and by the sounds of it, its spilled out into the street."

"How do you know this?" Elenore asked a bit skeptically.

"The Soldats set fire to an Enfant safe house last night so Enfant is returning the favor. Though I'm surprised that dump hadn't burned down before that. But anyways let me at least escort you back home. Anyways I need to speak to Margaret about..." Carrossea replied with a smirk.

"I have a good guess what that is as well so I will take your offer. There are a couple questions I would like to ask you."

"Ask me when we're far enough away from the shooting right now we have to move."

"But..." Elenore didn't finish as she was at first pulled and then she began to run following Carrossea.

They ran though a few alleys and crossed a few streets but in the direction of Burton Manor.

As they ran up the alley Elenore swore she could hear footsteps.

"Mr. Doone do you hear something?" Elenore asked while still running her speech heavy from the running.

Carrossea thought it to be the echoes of their own footsteps but he didn't stay alive this long by assuming things so he drew his gun from his holster. Just in case of course.

As they continued to run the footsteps grew louder and from the east.

Just as they reached the intersection Elenore could see the street where Burton Manor was on but her attention was drawn to a blond haired woman trying to slow down before she crashed into Carrossea. As she entered the intersection she could see an Asian woman wearing a white windbreaker following her.

For a brief moment it seemed that time stood still and then time moved again as Carrossea and Mireille crashed into each other knocking the other backwards.

Both tried to keep their balance as they tumbled to the ground with their guns pointed at each other. Kirika drew her pistol at first pointed at Carrossea then she saw Elenore and pointed the gun at her. Elenore held her hands up. "Please don't shoot! We're just trying to get home." She said loudly hoping that it would at least get somebody to look out the window.

"*Could this day get any better?*" Mireille grumbled to herself as she kept her gun trained on Carrossea. Kirika looked at Elenore's hands and saw that she wasn't someone who used a gun. What truly kept Kirika from shooting Elenore was something reminded her, was it her voice? Was it her eyes? But there was something... Kirika struggled to remember as a good deal of her past was still a mystery to her. "Kirika what are you doing!?" Mireille asked still keeping her eyes on Carrossea wondering about Kirika's inaction.

"Do I know you? Have met before?" Kirika asked politely lowering her pistol somewhat.

"No I don't think so but to be honest; I can't remember if we ever did. You see I recently lost a chunk of my memory... Please we're just trying to get home and away from the shooting." Elenore pleaded.

The image of a slain paper boy they passed before they went into the alleys flashed in Kirika's mind. Kirika lowered her pistol but she kept it out keeping one eye on the Mexican standoff in the middle of the intersection.

Carrossea kept his eye on Mireille, he wasn't worried about Elenore he knew if push came to shove she could take care of herself or at least that's what he hoped.

"Look, I gather you're trying to get away just as we are. So how about this; we all put down the guns, forget we saw each other and go our separate ways. What do you say?"

In the distance they all could hear sirens, from their respective perceptions they saw people looking out onto the alley. Mireille noticed the man hadn't said it too loudly but the woman with him had almost screamed her plea. "Looks like we have no choice unless you like explaining to the police." Mireille said sighing inwardly as she and Carrossea slowly rose and the pair slowly changed directions as both slowly put their guns to the side.

"Let's go!" Carrossea and Mireille said almost in unison.

"Could at least tell me your name please?" Kirika asked Elenore as she put the gun back into her pocket. "I'm Elenore Baker and I assume your name is Kirika."

Kirika nodded acknowledgement as she tried to remember. "Something about you seems familiar. I too am trying to recover memories."

"I see." Elenore replied as she headed toward Carrossea still staring at her trying to remember if she had met her at all.

Kirika rejoined Mireille and the pair watched Carrossea and Elenore go down the alley before they continued on.

"Either one of them could've shot me or you, I want..." Mireille started.

Kirika turned her head and replied in an unusually angry tone. "Just like that paperboy!? They gunned him down for no reason!"

"What does that have to do with that couple?" Mireille asked a tad surprised at Kirika's tone.

"She was unarmed; I wasn't going to shoot an unarmed person just because they were trying get away!"

"It's that Elenore woman; you know her from somewhere don't you?"

Kirika calmed down. "Part of me knows I've seen her but I don't know where or when I did."

“We’ll put that one on the back burner for now; we still have to gather information.”

“That’s right the Soldats...”

They walked toward a commercial area and all the while they felt someone was following them.

“Do you think it’s the Soldats?” Kirika asked not even looking her shoulder.

“Not sure, but we’ll have to make some detours and try to shake them.”

At the same time; Carrossea and Elenore emerged onto the street leading to Burton Manor.

“Who were those women?” Elenore asked Carrossea wondering.

“Who ever they were one thing was clear; they’re pro’s. I’m sure if you didn’t distract her partner she would’ve shot me.”

Elenore looked up at Carrossea as they continued to walk. “That was weird, the thing is; I don’t remember ever meeting her. Makes me wonder how much of my memory is missing.”

“I actually can relate to that.” Carrossea replied looking back at Elenore.

Elenore slightly quickened her pace and stepped in front of Carrossea, stopped, turned around with pleading look on her face. In a quiet and melancholy tone she asked;

“I apologize for the abrupt stop, but I need to ask. How do you deal with it?”

“Deal with what?” Carrossea asked aware what Elenore was asking.

“Please forgive me if this comes out bluntly. I’ll understand if you don’t want to answer. You’ve been dead and revived twice...so how do you deal with it? Do you have nightmares as well? Do you ever think of ending it?” Elenore asked in the same tone as before trying to hold back her tears.

Carrossea was floored...he knew that Elenore didn’t like him (granted he gave her enough reasons to) and here she was baring her soul to him. He was tempted to give a snarky answer but he changed his mind he just didn’t like seeing her like that and a part of him went out for her.

“I just try to live one day at a time. I know it’s not much of an answer but it’s the best I can give. To answer your other questions; yes, sometimes I get flashbacks and on a couple occasions I’ve wanted to end my life. So you see I do understand what you’re going through. Do me one favor please...”

Elenore raised an eyebrow. “What would that be?”

“I would ask to promise me but given our usual relations...at least promise Margaret or Miss Rene.”

“Promise them what?” Elenore asked a bit puzzled.

“That you won’t hurt yourself.” Carrossea said with genuine compassion.

Now it was Elenore’s turn to be floored. He actually sounded concerned for her well being. She had to admit that his request was touching. Normally she would be skeptical of anything he said, but from what she gathered he was trying to bear his soul as well. Elenore smiled a bit. “Thank you Carrossea for answering my questions and I do appreciate your concern.” Elenore said as she walked to the gate of Burton Manor.

Carrossea stopped a few feet from the gate.

“Didn’t you want to see Margaret?” Elenore asked.

“I did, but I know she’s going to ask about Limelda. And I know how it will most likely turn out; she asks, I tell her the truth, she gets upset, then you and or someone else gets upset, and I get either or get shot or beaten silly.”

Elenore tilted her head a bit. She had to agree he had a point. But as she learned she couldn’t shield Margaret from everything and as painful Carrossea’s truth might be, she thought it would help Margaret in the long run. “I can’t protect her from everything and as mean as this sounds I think the truth would actually do her some good. Besides she has to get ready for school and knowing Margaret she’s still asleep.”

“Bet you she’s still mad at Margaret.” Poupee chimed.

“Quiet you...” Carrossea responded.

"In that case, I'll stop by later. Anyways I do have some information about the artifacts that might help."

"Then I guess we'll be expecting you later then."

"Yes I suppose so. Have a good day Elenore." Carrossea said walking past the gate.

"You too and thanks again Carrossea." Elenore said as she headed towards the house.

"Wait, did she just call me by my first name?" Carrossea asked himself as he turned his head with a grin, watching Elenore go inside.

"Yes she did, twice actually. Come to think of it she didn't correct you when you said her name." Poupee answered.

"She's been through a lot as you well know." Carrossea replied.

Poupee giggled. "You actually like her."

"Quiet you..." Carrossea said wanting to drop the subject as quickly as possible.

As he walked down the street, he could faintly hear Poupee sing;

*Carrossea and Elenore sitting in a tree.*

*K-I-S-S-ING.*

Carrossea just sighed as he walked on.

Vanessa saw Elenore at the gate and she waited till she got in.

"I'm home." She heard Elenore say as she entered. Vanessa went to the front hall.

"Good Morning Elenore." Vanessa greeted glad that Elenore made it back safely.

"Good Morning Vanessa."

"I would've gone and picked you up from the hospital after I got Margaret and Laetitia off to school."

"It's okay, my mother dropped me off as far as she could then I ran into Mr. Doone who escorted me home. It seems those criminals are going at each other, though I would never think they would be so close to the manor."

"I saw the smoke and wondered what was going on. I'm glad you weren't caught up in that."

"Me too." Elenore fibbed.

"Have you had breakfast yet Vanessa? I'll make some after I wake Margaret."

"I was going wake up Margaret, but Margaret actually didn't get much sleep from looks of it. As for breakfast I was going to make cereal and toast but Madlax actually cooked some eggs and sausages."

"Then I have to get Laetitia up then."

"No, Margaret did that actually."

"They're probably waiting for me to drop the hammer so to speak. But right now I'm still tired. Spent most of the night talking to my mother."

"How did it go?"

"We got a lot off our chests. When the doctor cleared me we went to her home." Elenore pulled out the copy of the letter and restraining orders. "She showed me these." She handed them to Vanessa who looked them over. She was stunner at what she read.

"I gather you're going to show these to Margaret?" Vanessa said handing them back to Elenore.

"I will when she gets back from school. Right now I'm going to let Margaret know I'm home."

Elenore and Vanessa walked to the dining room. Margaret jumped up and started to go to Elenore but she stopped. "Elenore...I'm..." She started to say.

"We'll talk about this later." Elenore said without any harshness. Then she turned to Madlax and Limelda.

"Good Morning Madlax, Miss Jorg. Will you be accompanying Miss Margaret to school or will Miss Jorg? I need to ask so I can call campus security so they won't overreact." Elenore asked.

"Is that really necessary?" Margaret interjected, not really feeling up to that much escorting. "I mean, nothing dangerous really happened yesterday, and it's daytime now and the way to school is pretty calm but crowded enough to notice any disturbance. Besides... if I needed an escort to school so would Laetitia, don't you think?"

"Well, Laetitia doesn't have a powerful artifact around her neck and they're not interested in her it seems. We just want to keep them from grabbing you while you're at school Miss." Elenore said with grave concern.

"I have to agree with Elenore on this one Margaret. The artifact and you are too important to not put some extra security around." Vanessa added.

Madlax seemed quite keen on going to school because she never really experienced school life before. Limelda felt far less inclined, "*I don't want to spend more time protecting that spacey girl.*" she thought to herself.

"I will go with Margaret, besides it's my job." Madlax raised her hand enthusiastically.

"You certainly look young enough to be a student." Vanessa smiled.

"Thank you Vanessa." Madlax replied warmly.

"Oh well, if you both say so..." Margaret gave in, agreeing to the idea. "So are you going to classes with me as well, Madlax? I guess...that could be fun. But won't you be bored?" Margaret asked with amusement, trying to forget for a while that her situation was all but amusing.

"I won't get too bored; protecting you will be hard work." Madlax smiled. "Besides I'm not the one who has to pay attention." Madlax giggled.

"I'll call campus security. Madlax I'll help you find more suitable attire so you'll look more like a bodyguard and attract less attention as well. I almost forgot what name you want me to give to security? I think the name "Madlax" would raise a few eyebrows so an alternative name will have to do and I do apologize for the inconvenience." Elenore said relieved that Margaret agreed.

"I think I have something that she could wear." Vanessa added looking over Madlax.

"I'm not sure if I should like more like a bodyguard, maybe less like one. As for the name I could use Laetitia Lune, the same name as the passport" Madlax said.

"That's good, but if someone notices that you and Miss Margaret look related to each other how will you respond?" Elenore asked.

"How about cousin? No wait, how about distant cousin?" Vanessa asked.

"I like it." Margaret smiled and Madlax agreed.

"Okay that will work. I'll call them while you get ready." Elenore said cheerfully and she called up campus security and talked with them for a bit and then hung up.

"Okay, everything's all set. You'll just have to go to the campus security building with Margaret and they'll give you a security pass. That way they won't give you any problems." Elenore said confidently.

"Well, I guess we should get going then. See you all later and have a nice day everyone." Margaret said before leaving, with Madlax following.

A few minutes later Elenore escorted a sullen Laetitia to the bus stop. She noticed a police car nearby with the officer watching them.

Elenore looked at Laetitia who was very quiet. "I'm very disappointed in you. What you did hurt me more than you think. When you get home you and I are going to have a talk young lady."

Laetitia nodded as the bus came and she got on. Then Elenore went back to the house.

"Forgive me if I seem rude Vanessa, but would like to lay down for awhile. I'll make lunch afterword."

"I figured you would. I need to run an errand, if you want I can pick up groceries."

"Thanks Vanessa and I'm sorry."

"For what? I don't mind helping out. You get some rest and we'll talk over lunch. Deal?"

Elenore smiled. "Deal. Let me at least give you money for the groceries. Deal?"

Vanessa grinned. "Deal."

Elenore gave Vanessa money for the groceries and they gave each other a hug. Then Vanessa left leaving just Elenore and Limelda.

Limelda left Elenore alone as she went to her room. Once inside she sadly looked at the picture of her grandfather. She was about to turn it over but decided against it. Then she looked at the doll in the cradle and smiled. Finally she lay down on the bed and went to sleep...

Kirika looked around at the hungry, early-bird crowd just starting to trickle in. "Okay," she said, and "seems crowded enough."

After Mireille and Kirika got their breakfasts and sat outside, Kirika studied the scene again. "Hmm," she wondered, "So the Soldats are after us and we don't know why, even though we had an understanding...I wonder what happened. Should we call Breffort first?"

"Do you have a secure connection to him that cannot be back traced?" Mireille sighed. "Back in Paris, I could've arranged for some hacker...wait a second." Suddenly, she looked agitated. "I know a guy. Never met him in person but I hear he's quite good, goes by the name of Badgis. He was somehow involved in the Gazth-Sonikan case but came out clean. We could try contacting him."

Kirika nodded. "Hmm...Badgis. Do you have his contact information?" Kirika sipped on her tea, and then she focused her attention on a nearby tree.

*"Hmm...Why do I get the felling somebody is watching us?"* She thought to herself.

"I memorize such stuff by heart. All I need is a laptop and internet access..." Mireille noticed Kirika's eyes movement. She has long admitted to herself that in terms of reflexes and the sixth sense, Kirika was way superior to her, so when she noticed something, it was probably trouble...It was a strange feeling for a lone wolf like her but she felt...protected? "Relax, there's too much collateral damage to make here. And they like to play it subtle."

"You couldn't say same for *Enfant*." Kirika added which Mireille silently nodded.

Chloe smiled. "You know I'm here don't you, Kirika." She didn't understand why or know considering that they were at war with *Enfant* would they even bother with these two. Oh she had her reasons to be involved but there was too much going on to be concerned with them at the moment. But she couldn't help it; there she was just standing there. She imagined holding her in her arms and she smiled. "I'll just watch..."

After Mireille explained in detail about how they'd contact Badgis, and she and Kirika finished their breakfast, they left. Kirika told Mireille loudly, "So, we're going to a cyber cafe?", and then added, much softer, "The library." As they left, Kirika turned around and stared at that tree, certain someone was going to pop out at any minute. She caught up with Mireille and amended, "...the very long way." Chloe watched as they headed off. She wasn't under any orders to follow or do anything with them, this was personal. She noticed they were taking a long route to a cyber cafe as she followed from a distance. She chuckled to herself, they knew she was following them or at least Kirika did.

"Is someone tailing us?" The connection she shared with Kirika was not the wordless understanding like between twins yet but she could almost always feel when she was anxious or happy, as if it were her own emotions. She did now. "I'll try shaking him off, follow me."

The nearest internet cafe was just around the corner, actually. Dragging Kirika through a crowd of IT nerds talking in lingo and bad English, Mireille dashed through the room for the back exit. She was lucky; the back exit was at the end of a small corridor, not visible from the outside. Better yet, the bathrooms were located right there. An idea crossed her mind in a flash and she pushed Kirika inside men's restroom, quickly closing the door behind them.

"Try not to breathe in deeply," she whispered, pulling Kirika tightly to her and concealing them in an empty stall. "And count to sixty."

She noticed them go inside the cyber cafe. She waited a minute before going inside herself. As went inside she was assaulted by the noise of people talking in some language she didn't quite understand. She looked around the room and smiled figuring both of them would stick out like a pair of sore thumbs. She noticed the corridor and the nearby bathrooms; she went into the women's room and checked. She wanted to check the men's but there were IT nerds going in and out and she doubted that they went there without causing a commotion. "*Clever. Trying to shake me. Two can play this game...*" She thought to herself as she headed out of the exit and as the door closed behind her she waited.

"Let's go," Mireille pulled Kirika to the back exit, making sure they were not visible from the front. A male patron of the cafe looked at them in surprise but one cold look sufficed for him to swallow any questions. Examining the surroundings, Mireille exited to the alleyway behind the facility.

Kirika followed Mireille out the back exit of the noisy cafe. It hadn't been easy trying to pretend she and Mireille weren't there, in the men's bathroom. Even though she and Mireille pulled it off--Mireille had squatted on the toilet, using Kirika for support, and Kirika took off her shoes, just in case someone looked--she was certain some man would notice her small, feminine feet, get curious, and bust them. "*Well, Kirika supposed, \*Maybe I could've passed as a twelve-year-old boy...but what about Mireille?\**"

Kirika heard a \*whoosh\* behind her and turned around. Her mouth gaped open, and she looked like she'd seen a ghost when she saw who was behind them.

"M...Mireille...Mireille?!" Kirika asked in a strange voice, without looking back. Chloe smiled. "Hello Kirika...miss me?"

Without thinking, Mireille reached for her gun. Last time she saw this face, it heralded impressive acrobatics and she didn't see much reason for it to get any easier.

Chloe noticed Mireille going for her gun. This wasn't her day, first Madlax now Mireille. She kept calm and got into a stance incase Mireille decided start firing the gun instead of her mouth. "You miss me too, Mireille. How thoughtful..."

"You look pretty lively for a dead girl," Mireille retorted, keeping Chloe at the gunpoint and glancing anxiously at Kirika. She knew she was no match for her. "Did the guy downstairs grow bored with you?"

Chloe smiled mischievously. She knew she could easily beat Mireille but this was so much more entertaining and if she played her cards right she might even get them to go after Madlax. "The rumors of my demise are so greatly exaggerated. Not really, he was afraid I would take over." She loosened the photos underneath her cloak so could easily fall. She smirked at Mireille. "You remind me of that other blond I met, a lot prettier and a far better shot than you. Better be careful if she sees Kirika she just might steal her away." Chloe said goading Mireille.



"Like I give a damn," Mireille brushed off Chloe's words. Kirika and her were bound by much more than simple attraction. "Right now, I only care about you tailing us. Didn't we pay our dues to you people already? Why come after us now?"

She'd be surprised if Chloe actually answered that. But there was no crime in asking. Chloe pondered a few seconds and as she was to answer. She was interrupted by a child's singing followed by a hand clap after each line coming down the alley. It wasn't the singer that bothered her; it was WHAT the singer was singing.

*Noir name the ancient fate.  
Two ladies with blackened hands.  
Tied and made by hate.  
To protect the peaceful lambs.*

*Sin within the man,  
Sin within the love,  
Sin within the sin,  
Said the hermit to sinner  
and sinner to the saint.*

Mireille listened. Granted there was some difference but there was no mistaking it; it was from the Langonel manuscript but put into a child's rhyme.

The singer stopped both moving and singing a couple feet behind Chloe. She saw a short tween aged girl dressed in what appeared to be right out an illustration from Alice in Wonderland. The only differences were she had brown eyes and hair and spoke with a Nafrecean accent.

Mireille kept her gun trained on Chloe as she defensively turned to where she could see the girl and Chloe.

Kirika stared at the girl; she didn't know why.

"Oh hello." The girl said with her head slightly cocked to the side.

"Who are you and where did learn that song?" Mireille asked.

The girl beamed as she answered. "I'm the child of sin...the daughter of Lust and Wrath."

The girl looked at Kirika and smiled. "I know you...I remember you."

"I'm sorry, I don't think we met." Kirika answered which seemed to annoy the girl.

"That still doesn't answer my question." Mireille said slightly annoyed.

"Don't you mean questions?" The girl replied with her head cocked to the side.

"She does have a point, you did ask two questions."

"I wasn't asking you candy girl!" Mireille growled at Chloe.

Chloe ignored Mireille and asked the girl; "Who taught you that rhyme?"

"Mmm...A nun. I think she was a nun."

Chloe pulled a gun out concealing it from sight of the others.

"I'm sorry, but I can't let you go around singing that rhyme."

No one knew how she knew Chloe was going to shoot. All Kirika and Mireille saw was Chloe going down amid a flurry of well placed kicks.

The girl smiled wickedly as she went through Chloe's pockets. First she pulled out some photos, scowled at one of them and threw aside. Then she found some money but not enough to satisfy her.

She kept one eye on Mireille as she got up and started kicking a still downed Chloe in the stomach only alternating between the crouch and breasts with sadistic glee.

Mireille suppressed a chuckle as she watched the girl.

"STOP IT!" Kirika said loudly as she charged with unusual fury.

Both heard a slight growl come from the girl as she yelled pointing to a downed Chloe.

"You forgot me! I remembered you and her!" Kirika tried to grab the girl but she was too quick and she gracefully skipped backwards away from Kirika who was trying to catch her.

"Never mind her right now." Mireille said as she watched Chloe slowly get up off the ground. Kirika turned and went to Chloe.

"Are you all right?" Kirika asked.

Chloe brushed off Kirika and looked down the alley where the girl went down. "This is far from over..." She growled to herself as she picked up her gun and holstered it.

"We'll talk some other time." She said backing off away from Mireille and when she was far enough away she turned and walked away.

Mireille followed Chloe with her eyes as she left, then breathed deeply to relax her tensed body and tucked the gun away, hoping that nobody saw their exchange in the alley. She didn't want to admit to herself just how scared she was.

"Let me know if she follows us," she asked of Kirika and took a closer look at the pictures that were taken from Chloe and dropped by the girl.

Chloe grimaced as she walked away. She wanted revenge on that kid. The only consolation was that she hoped that Madlax and Mireille would kill each other and then she could have Kirika to herself once again.

The first photo was a young woman standing next a maid. Mireille looked on back of the photo for any writing. She saw written in black ink;

*Margaret Burton: total airhead, why even bother...*

*Elenore Baker: stuck up maid? Have I seen her before?*

Mireille recognized the maid as the woman they had "met" earlier. Mireille was getting an uneasy feeling in the pit of her stomach

The second was of Elenore in dressed in the same blue skirt and a white paisley peasant shirt she was wearing this morning. She saw written on the back of this photo;

*Crazy? Martial arts expert.... related to Duvet!?! Why does LA want her watched? Why does she seem familiar?*

From what she could gather; the maid was a bodyguard of the woman in the first picture and a possible relative of Duvet. Duvet that name Mireille had heard of; it was the code name of an elite bodyguard.

"Must be nice to be rich to afford people like that." Mireille thought to herself as she looked at the last photo.

The last photo was apparently a file photo taken from somewhere else. The blond haired woman bore some resemblance to the woman in the first one. On the back of this photo Mireille read the obscenities comparing her to herself and the words in red;

*Madlax...kill when have a chance...*

Mireille looked at the unfamiliar faces at the photos. The girl labeled as Margaret looked a little like Kirika, and this "Madlax" (what kind of name was that?) was obviously trouble. But as long as they didn't stalk them and set up ambushes at the train stations, she didn't care.

"You recognize any of these?" she gave the three pictures to Kirika, just in case.

Kirika concentrated on the pictures. "Mmm.....no, only the woman met earlier. What was Chloe doing with them? And why is she alive?" She looked up. "I mean I..." her voice faltered, "...killed her." She shook her head. "Let's find this Badgis person."

As she and Mireille walked away, Kirika looked back where Chloe was.

*"Chloe, for your sake, please don't return. I don't want to lose you again...or Mireille."*

Watching Kirika struggle with her past made Mireille uneasy; back when they first met, she'd probably shrug it off and ignore, but now she just couldn't. Turning around, she drew closer to her and said as softly as she could: "Don't think about it much, Kirika... You haven't killed her, which is a good thing, right? Thinking about such things will only make it worse." Mireille looked down the alley and wondered what connection that woman, the little girl, Chloe and Kirika had in all this...