

Chapter 33. Breakfast at Mr. Tootles

Early in the morning, Meg and Madlax along with Three-Speed and Gaston went to where they hid Vanessa's and her cars. They checked for sabotage, listening and tracking devices, and explosives. It took a couple of hours but the cars checked out okay.

"Thanks Gaston." Meg said gratefully.

"You're welcome Meg." Gaston said emerging from underneath Meg's car.

"Gaston, take Badgis and Ghost and head back to HQ. I'll follow shortly."

"Got it chief." Gaston said as he left.

"I had better get going as well. Meg...I wanted..." Roy began before Meg put her finger on his lips.

"Roy, I know we might not be able to see each other for awhile. I'm okay with that. I've waited this long, I can wait a little longer. Thank you for all your help."

"Thank you for understanding Meg."

"You're welcome. Love you."

"Love you too. Madlax I'll see you around."

"See ya Three-Speed."

Then Three-Speed left leaving the pair alone.

"What do you mean "we might not be able to see each other"?" Madlax asked a bit puzzled.

"There's going to be an inquest of Walter's activities. So Roy's keeping a professional distance till it all blows over. It's nothing personal; it's the way the game is played." Meg answered a bit stoically as she got into her car. Madlax got in Vanessa's car and then they drove the mansion. Madlax parked Vanessa's car and went to Meg's car which was idling nearby and got in.

They drove out into the country only stopping for gas and cat food. Madlax was admiring the scenery as it reminded her of the train ride. Fifteen minutes they came to a small plain looking farmhouse and pulled in. They got of the car and checked the perimeter. Finding no one was outside Meg took her key and opened the front door carefully.

"Valk, this Duvet. If you are here, please answer." Meg shouted into the house.

They waited a couple of minutes and went inside. The place smelled of cat. Meg opened a couple of windows and Madlax looked for Mr. Tootles. While Madlax was looking for the cat she went and changed the litter boxes as they were full and Mr. Tootles had defecated in the tub.

"I can't find Mr. Tootles anywhere." Madlax said to Meg as she was cleaning.

"Go open a can of cat food and put fresh water in his dish. I'm sure he'll come out for that." Meg replied.

As Meg heard Madlax open a can of food she saw Mr. Tootles head straight to the kitchen.

"There you are. I wondered where you got off to." Meg said as she noticed the message light on Valerie's answering machine was blinking.

Meg pressed the play button and the first couple of messages were telemarketers. The third and fourth were from Valerie herself from a couple days ago. As the message played Meg paid attention.

"Hi Meg

Don't ask me how I know you're there, just listen. In the bedroom closet there's a lockbox on the floor. It's got a password lock on it. The password is "Deus ex machina". Inside there's an envelope. Give that to either Elenore or Vanessa they'll know what to do with it."

The message ended and the other began.

Don't worry about my stuff; I have friends in Section Eight that will take care of it. Just take care of Mr. Tootles and one last thing. –Valerie's voice tapered at this point. – Tell Elenore I'm truly sorry."

The message ended abruptly. The last one was from Three-Speed asking if she was there.

Meg wondered why Valerie asked that and what was she sorry for.

Meg went to Valerie's bedroom and opened her closet. There on the floor was a small lockbox with something that looked like a cross between a metallic octopus and a keyboard.

Meg looked it over and grinned. "Oh, so that's what one looks like. Well here it goes."

Meg pulled the box out of the closet and turned on the display on the lock.

Very carefully she typed in the password and hit enter. The "arms" released and Meg opened the box.

Inside all there was; the envelope that Valerie said was in there. She took it out and put it in her purse.

Then she went to the kitchen where Madlax was looking in the fridge.

"There's not much in the fridge that hasn't gone bad." Madlax said hoping that would find something to eat herself.

Meg looked and there wasn't much; just a bottle of milk that probably expired, a bunch of rotten grapes, and a half eaten meat pie with mold on it. Meg looked for a trash bag and put the rotted food stuffs into it.

"We'll eat on the way home. Right now throw this in the trash can out front. Then get the bag of kitty litter and put it in the car, I'll put Mr. Tootles in his carrier and we'll be off.

Madlax frowned but as she lifted the bag of kitty litter and went out the door.

Meg had noticed a picture in a frame of Valerie, a young Madlax and herself in front of the old villa in Gazth-Sonika on the counter.

Meg remembered when Three-Speed took it and she smiled and she looked over the frame and made sure nothing has hidden. When she looked over the photo in the back she saw some writing on the back.

"Valerie, Madlax, Meg
Gazth-Sonika 2005"

Then on the bottom there was some recent writing.

"Give this to Maddie.

Love, Val."

At first Meg was a bit baffled but she chalked it up to Val being Val and put the photo in her purse.

Meg then went to get the cat carrier and had a hard time trying to get Mr. Tootles into the carrier.

She chuckled to herself. "You can smell Roy on me can you?"

Madlax came back in. "Got the bag in. Oh trying to get him into the carrier?"

"Yes, but I think he smells Roy on me."

"I think I know how I can get him in." Madlax said with a grin as she noticed a jar of catnip on the counter. She took a handful from the jar and put in the carrier and Mr. Tootles went to the carrier, sniffed and then went inside. Meg quickly closed the door and picked up the carrier.

"I know his one weakness." Madlax said with a bigger grin.

"Well, getting him hooked on catnip isn't very nice."

"How do you think I got him to destroy that purple couch?"

Meg chuckled as she remember Roy screaming about the cat destroying hi favorite couch.

Then they left the house and went to the car. Meg put the carrier in the back and then they got in and drove off.

After breakfast Elenore appeared to be staring out the living room window. She had her eyes closed as she bent her will and sight over to the ship that crashed.

Through the eyes and ears of ravens she gathered information. She noticed that the captain was relatively young and he looked like Vanessa's friend Charlie. Then it hit her; it was Charlie but an alternative version of him. She watched and listened as he confidently gave orders as he watched a view screen at the same time. The ship was surrounded by the military plus their allies from nearby countries. She also noticed a few troops from the New England Commonwealth and the Southern Confederation. She pulled back and came "back" to the living room.

"So what's the situation over there?" Vanessa asked when Elenore refocused.

Elenore turned to Vanessa and answered in a concerned tone. "It's really tense there. Neither side knows what the other wants. Plus the captain is a bit young so inexperience might be playing a part here. But I did find out something interesting that might be useful to us."

"What is it Elenore?" Margaret asked curiously.

"The captain of the ship is an alternative version of Vanessa's friend."

"Badgis?" Vanessa asked.

"No, the one with the pompadour."

"You mean Charlie?!" Vanessa asked with a slight giggle and Margaret slightly cringing.

"That's his name. Anyways when it's time to bring Susan there I'll need you to come with me Vanessa."

"Now you've got me curious...I wonder how this world's Charlie will react to his analog." Vanessa said in agreement.

Margaret looked out the window holding her tongue. Vanessa's friend Charlie always made her feel uncomfortable for some reason, even though he didn't do anything to her, there was just something about him or it was the fact that he rubbed her the wrong way.

Then she noticed Meg and Madlax pulling up and then getting out of the car.

"They're back!" Margaret said hoping to divert the conversation away from Charlie and his analog.

Margaret patiently waited as Elenore went to greet them.

When Elenore got the front door first Madlax then Meg came in. Elenore noticed her mother was a bit melancholy.

"Welcome back, did you two find anything?"

"Duvie did. I've got to use the little girls' room, I'll be right back." Madlax said as she went up the stairs.

"Did something happen, mom?" Elenore asked with concern.

"No. Sorry that we took so long. We brought Mr. Tootles to my house and I made both of us breakfast."

"That doesn't explain the look on your face and...have you been crying?" Elenore asked noticing Meg's eyes.

"Yes I was..."

"Why?"

"I don't want to talk about it right now. I'll be fine..."

Elenore nodded in understanding then asked. "What did you find?"

Meg regained more of her composure and replied. "I don't know if this is the ritual or what Val thought the ritual was." Meg pulled an envelope out of her purse and opened it. Inside there were a couple sheets of parchment and a pink sticky note.

On the sticky note in a firm but feminine writing was;

Give to grandma to give to my mom

E.

Elenore smiled as did Meg when they saw the note. "Elsa wrote down the ritual! But when did she have time to do so?" Meg asked knowing it was pointless to ask how Valerie got her hands on it.

"From what I gathered, there must've been sometime between her getting and when Lady Europa transported her. She had an advantage that few people in those days had; she could read and write."

"Good point, but is this the ritual?"

Elenore looked over what Elsa had written down and she smiled as the Ring confirmed it.

She put her hand on her stomach and looked down.

"Thank you sweetheart." Elenore said tenderly.

"Is that the ritual?" Vanessa asked as she and Margaret came down the stairs.

Elenore looked up the stairs and answered. "Yes it is."

“Good, we’re going to get Laetitia now. We still have to figure out where to do the ritual.” Margaret said.

“According to this it can be at any holy place like a shrine...”

“Or chapel...the mansion has a chapel and we can use that!” Meg said.

“That’s right! At least we don’t have to go far and it’s private. But who’s going to read the ritual? I know we have our parts but somebody needs to start it.” Margaret interjected and asked.

“Do you want to read it mom? After great grandpa did it...so why not keep it in the family.” Elenore asked with a proud smile.

Meg looked over the ritual and then looked back at Elenore. “Sure, I’m thankful we don’t have to sacrifice any animals or people.”

“True, thankfully times have changed.” Vanessa interjected.

“Awww...so we can’t use Charlie as a human sacrifice?” Margaret jokingly asked which got a surprised look out of Vanessa and Elenore.

“No, we can’t. Granted he’ll do anything for a paycheck but I don’t think he would go that far.” Vanessa answered.

“Let’s go before Laetitia drives everyone at the hospital crazy.” Margaret said half jokingly this time.

“Okay, we’ll be waiting.” Elenore said slightly shaking her head at Margaret’s attempt at humor.

“We’ll be back.” Vanessa said as she walked towards the door.

“Bye!” Margaret said as she went out the door.

“Let’s go look over the chapel while we wait.” Elenore said.

“Sounds good to me.” Meg said and both of them went to the chapel and found the sticky note where Elsa had placed it.

“Watch the bathroom on March 19th 2018. Why would someone want us to watch the bath...room...” Elenore said and then the image of Susan’s wrists came to mind and she looked at her stomach again...