

Chapter 32. Echoes

As Margaret watched as the police removed the bodies of the soldiers. She saw Three-Speed talking to some men and a woman; apparently Three-Speed's superiors took an interest in this attack. They found out that Walter did send the soldiers but as for the reason why, it wasn't not as Margaret originally thought. This kind of carnage reminded her of the bloodshed she saw in Gazth-Sonika and it disturbed her. She could sense the deep sense of remorse on one level or another from everyone in the mansion. They knew they had to do what they needed to do in order for all of them to survive. But it didn't ease or erase the burden on their consciences and Margaret felt at a loss on what to do.

At least her putting in a good word for Three-Speed and his men did help. She got the feeling they were pleased though they wondered where was Walter was. Three-Speed was apparently done speaking as he was coming back to the mansion.

As she watched them get into cars and drive off her attention was diverted by Meg shouting at Elenore in a very upset and concerned tone.

"What were you thinking pulling that kind of lone wolf stunt at the Manor?!"

"I had to split their forces otherwise Madlax and I would've been in a long dragged out battle and we would've run out of time." Elenore calmly replied knowing her mother would be upset. Meg thought a bit considering what Elenore had just said.

"But it isn't just you anymore. You're carrying another human being and I don't want to lose either of you." Meg replied in a more normal tone as she noticed her outburst had attracted attention.

Now it was Elenore's turn to ponder over her mother's statement.

"I'm well aware of both of those facts, but I had to do what I had to. If you please excuse me I want to lie down." Elenore noticing the audience they were getting.

"All right, but we're not through talking yet."

Elenore nodded catching her mother's drift. Elenore went to her room and after her and Meg had entered she plopped onto the bed with a morose look on her face.

"How do you deal with it?" Elenore asked.

"Deal with what? There's a lot I have to deal with."

"Having blood on your hands. Today I killed over fifty men. I can logically say I did it to protect the ones I love but emotionally I'm mixed on the subject."

"How do you feel about it?" Meg asked sitting in the chair next Elenore's desk.

"I feel remorse and admonishment for what I did, but another part feels thrilled about it. And another feels numb..."

"The sadness is normal and that thrilled part is just adrenalin. As for the numbness...I think you're just trying process or at least to protect yourself. When I was an agent I hid my face behind a mask because I couldn't bear to look at the woman in the mirror. I knew she was a killer and it was her job. Eventually I had to accept that the woman behind the mask and the person I saw in the mirror were one and the same. Of course I had support from Roy and Val..." Meg's voice trailed off at the mention of Valerie's name. For awhile Meg was silent until Elenore sat up and asked.

"Mom? What happened?" Elenore asked noticed the look on her mother's face.

"They found Val's car four miles from here. Roy said that she had found Walter's car. They haven't found her body but there is a lot of blood. I don't know if she's lying dead or wounded somewhere."

Elenore wanted to say that Valerie was all right but that would've sounded cliché. But she didn't doubt that she was a resourceful woman and was in all probability laying low somewhere at least that's what the ring was telling her.

"I have a feeling that she'll turn up somewhere and she'll have some weird story to tell."

Meg sadly chuckled. "That wouldn't surprise me at all knowing her. But it had better be a doozy of a story."

"I'm sure it will..."

"Anyways you've got a good support system in your sisters and your partner, me and... Of course this doesn't mean you're not seeing a therapist." Meg said trying change subjects.

"And who?" Elenore asked noticing her mother's half hearted evasion.

"How would you feel about having a step father?"

Elenore paused; the closest thing to a father figure was her grandpa. Her father couldn't pay as much attention to her for obvious reasons. She did wonder who her mother was going to marry and how would he react to herself and Susan?

"Are you getting married?" Elenore asked with her head slightly tilted.

"Yes I am. Took him long enough to purpose." Meg said with a tired grin.

"Congratulations! So who is he? Does he know about Susan and me?" Elenore asked happily mixed with a little apprehension.

"I know you've already met him. And he does know about you and Susan and he's okay with that. In he has an adopted daughter of his own once the paperwork all goes through. And I know you two will get along just fine."

"Does he have a name and how do you know I would get along with his daughter?"

Meg grinned widely. "It's Roy and as for getting along with his daughter, she is your half sister after all."

"Oh Mr. Three-Speed. Wait, half sister? Are you talking about Margaret?"

Meg gave Elenore an "are you kidding look". "No, I'm talking about Madlax."

"Madlax? Why is he adopting Madlax? She's Margaret's sister."

"Roy and I have been the closest thing to a family she's known. As for her being Margaret's sister; biologically yes she is, but on a legal level, no. And before you ask if Margaret knows about this, she does and understands. Plus Margaret is going to have a hard enough time declaring you her sister."

"Good point."

"So how do you feel?"

"Honestly I don't know. I'm happy for you but I don't know how to feel in this situation." Elenore answered trying to stifle a yawn.

Meg noticed and she felt tired herself. "Okay, I see...get some rest."

"Good idea, I'll make dinner after..." Elenore began to say but her mother had already nodded off and she soon did the same.

Margaret wandered around the house for a little bit. Then she checked on Vanessa, Three-Speed and his men in the armory. They were cataloging what was left in the armory and sorting out what was the government and what belonged to the Burtons. This wasn't her kind of thing so she left and went to check on Madlax but she found she was "busy" with Limelda.

So she went to the living room where she found Carrossea who was watching the news.

"Did they mention us?" Margaret asked wondering if the media noticed the attack on the mansion.

"Thankfully no. They're talking about the ship that crashed. From what the reports are saying that they are trying to communicate with whoever or whatever is on that ship."

"I hope they're friendly. The cure for Susan is on that ship."

"Well they haven't fired weapons so that's a good sign."

"You're right, do you want some tea? I think Meg or Elenore made some before they went off."

"That would be nice Margaret, thank you very much."

Margaret went to get the tea and when she returned she sat with Carrossea. She leaned up to Carrossea as they drank tea and watched the news reports. Not noticing that Susan was heading toward the bedrooms.

Susan knocked on her mother's door. She opened it and saw her grandma sleeping in the chair and her mother in the bed sleeping. Susan nervously approached the bed. She climbed up and snuggled herself

next to Elenore. Elenore partly opened one eye, saw Susan, smiled and wrapped an arm around her and went back to sleep.

An hour and a half later Elenore woke up refreshed. She saw that her mother had gone but Susan was still there beside her. She really didn't want to wake her but she was beginning to toss wildly. Elenore wished she could take her daughter's pain away. "I guess I have to get you to therapy as well..." Elenore said quietly as she began to wake Susan up. Then Elenore saw Susan's wrists blur and turn bloody as blood flowed from the wounds.

"Susan, oh my God. Please no..." Elenore said as she looked for the first aid kit and was going to wrap Susan's wrists when her wrists blurred and returned to normal.

Susan moaned grumpily as Elenore held her arm up. "I'm sorry sweetie, but have to get up now." Susan slowly rose and got out of the bed as Elenore let go of her arm.

"I guess the Ring is warning me to keep an eye on her...but what would drive you to do such a thing?" Elenore thought.

"You want to help mommy to make dinner?" Elenore asked trying to get the thought out of her mind.

"Okay." Susan said wiping her eyes and the two went to the kitchen where Meg had already started.

"Mom, I said Susan and I were going to make dinner." Elenore said glancing at Susan,

"Well, then you two can help me, how about that?" Meg said with Susan nodding in agreement.

Madlax passed by the kitchen as smelled pasta sauce being cooked. Madlax made sure that her presence was known before she entered the kitchen.

"I was going offer my help Duvie, but Elenore and Susan beat me to it." Madlax said with a smile.

Meg chuckled knowing full well Madlax only wanted to see what was cooking.

"Madlax." Elenore said while chopping vegetables.

"Yeah?"

"Vanessa said that your pasta recipe was very similar to mine. Where did you learn it? From Margaret or my mother?"

"A little of both actually."

"Well at least the recipe is staying in the family." Elenore said with a grin.

Madlax turned to Meg. "I see you told her Duvie."

"Well, she is your sister. Now go wash up..."

Madlax caught the sign that Meg didn't want to talk about it for the moment and left.

"Okay, I'll just go to the living room with the others." Madlax said leaving the kitchen.

"Susan why don't you go with your Aunt Madlax and makes sure she washes up. Okay?" Elenore said

"Okay." Susan said hurrying up to catch up with Madlax.

"What was that all about mom?" Elenore asked after Susan had left.

"I guess Madlax wanted to tell you herself. Of course she didn't tell me she wanted to."

"I wouldn't beat yourself up on it. –Elenore said before her tone grew serious. – But I do think we need to keep an eye on Susan."

"Why?"

"The Ring showed me a vision of Susan's wrists being slashed and going down the arm."

"Do you when?" Meg asked concerned.

"That's the thing, the Ring didn't tell me. I'm guessing it will be sometime in the future and that we need to be aware of it. She could do it when she's teenager or an adult or whenever."

"The problem is; we can't watch her twenty four-seven."

"I know and I also know what you're getting at. At least we're aware of it and we can take steps to prevent it or at least come to her aid."

"Also you have to wonder what would drive her to do that in the first place."

“That question crossed my mind as well. It could be any number of reasons and I feel so helpless to do anything.”

“We’ll cross that bridge when we get to it and maybe we as you said prevent this before it happens. So you don’t beat yourself up either.”

“Alright...” Elenore said still in thought.

Half an hour later they were all at the table. The conversations were lively and the food excellent as always. At the end of the table they set an empty plate and glass as a reminder and tribute for their missing friends.

At the end of the meal Margaret got everyone’s attention.

“I would like sincerely thank all of you for protecting our home and I would like to propose a few toasts. The first one goes to Misters Johansson, Badgis, Gaston, and Ghost for their bravery today. The second goes to all for the same and the hope we can put this all behind us. The third is for our friends who couldn’t be here; Nadie and Ellis.”

“Can you add Valk for Duvie and me Margaret?” Madlax asked.

Margaret smiled. “Sure...does anyone have any other toasts they want to propose?”

“How about one for the future and our family?” Elenore asked.

“Okay, is there any other?”

Roy and Meg were quietly and quickly discussing something then Meg rose. “As some of you may have heard Roy proposed to me and I accepted. We’re still working out the details like a date. But both of us agree to wait till the current chaos subsides before we can really make plans. So I propose a toast for all of our happiness.” Meg said diplomatically.

Then everyone rose and gave cheers.

After dinner Meg and Elenore cleaned up and joined Carrossea, Limelda, Margaret, Madlax and Vanessa in the living room, after Elenore put Susan to bed. Three-Speed and Badgis went back to armory while Gaston and Ghost went patrolling outside.

“We could’ve helped.” Margaret said feeling somewhat bad about Elenore and Meg doing the cleaning.

“You know how small the kitchen is and the two of us got it done quite quickly.” Elenore replied as she sat down.

“We were discussing about the ritual. We’ve tried asking the Goddesses of the Torc and Bracelet about the ritual but they said we had to figure it out. Maybe your ancestor’s journal might have a clue.”

Vanessa said when Meg and Elenore sat down.

“I’ll have another look through but to be honest I don’t think he wrote anything down about the ritual outside of him performing it. I really don’t think he wanted to do it in the first place.” Meg added.

“That’s understandable, considering the time period. But wouldn’t the ritual be pagan or Druidic?”

Carrossea chimed in.

“I’m going to have to say Druidic. Look at the Goddesses involved; they’re all Celtic deities. Granted they’re all from different groups but they’re all tied to the same area.” Elenore said pedantically.

“Okay, that helps narrowing it down. But I don’t think the Druids left sticky notes on how to perform the ritual.” Margaret said trying to lighten the mood and got a few chuckles for her efforts.

“Sticky notes...wait a minute.” Meg said to herself.

Elenore and Margaret turned her head to Meg.

“What’s wrong?” Elenore asked.

“I have a spare key to Val’s place.”

“What does having a key to Valk’s have to do with the ritual?” Madlax asked finally feeling that she could join the conversation as the subject matter was all over her head.

Meg gave Madlax a “you’re kidding” look and then answered. “Remember, Valk likes collecting supernatural stuff, so she might have something. Plus I want to see if she’s there. Roy hasn’t heard from her yet and I’m still worried.”

“Oh yeah, I forgot all about that. I’m worried about her too.” Madlax replied.

“I have to check our cars for damage anyways so I’ll head out there tomorrow.”

“Want me to come along?” Madlax asked.

“Sure. I was going to ask Roy but he’s going to be really busy. And I told him I would check Val’s place anyway. She has that cat of hers as well, can’t let Mr. Tootles starve can we?” Meg said with a wink.

Madlax chuckled at the thought of Three-Speed’s nemesis Mr. Tootles the cat.

“Okay, that’s settled for now. What do we wish for?” Madlax asked again.

“We have to make sure that none of our wishes are selfish. Otherwise Lady Europa gives a curse as well as granting the wish. So far we have: bringing Poupee into this world and keeping our enemies from bothering us. Any suggestions?” Margaret answered and then asked.

Elenore looked at Madlax and then thought of Kirika’s wish; *I would’ve liked the four of us sitting together.* “We know the artifacts can raise the dead if they’ve been dead for less than a year and a day.”

“Well yes, but no one we know has died. Who did you have in mind Elenore?” Vanessa asked.

“Put it this way, I want to grant Kirika’s wish of the four of us sitting together and talking.”

Madlax nodded and then commented with a slight grin on her face. “Makes sense but you do know that Mireille is going to have a fit.”

“Who’s Mireille?” Margaret asked temporary forgetting that Elenore told her who she was.

“You mean that girl that Walter did those things to?” Meg asked not wanting to bring up the details again.

“Yes, I do. And before anyone balks that she’s a killer. I’m well aware of that, but so am I and both of us were his and her victims as well.” Elenore interjected.

Margaret had no problem with it as she figured out who Elenore was talking about. “As long as she leaves our family alone I have no problem with it. How about you Vanessa?” Margaret asked with a shrug.

“It’s not a selfish wish and I do agree. As long she leaves us alone I’m fine with it as well.”

“We’re not the ones who have to worry...” Madlax said quietly imagining the look on Mireille’s face.

“That’s three wishes down and two to go. So what do we wish for with the last two?” Carrosea asked.

“Can these artifacts end wars?” Limelda asked finally as she remained quiet for the majority of the conversation.

“I believe so...there are legends of them ending wars.” Vanessa replied having an idea what Limelda was getting at.

“If that’s the case, how about wishing that the war between India and Gazth-Sonika end peacefully.”

Limelda said and that got her a surprised look around the room figuring that she would’ve wanted Gazth-Sonika to win, all except Madlax and Vanessa.

“What’s with all the looks? I just want that phony war to end.” Limelda asked with a little irritation.

“I actually agree with you on that one.” Vanessa said in sincere support.

Margaret got up and looked up the window towards where the ship had crashed. Then a thought came to her.

“I have an idea for the last wish!” Margaret said with a smile.

“How about wishing for peaceful contact between whoever is on that ship and the government. If there’s peace, we can get the cure for Susan.”

“That’s actually makes sense and it’s a good use for the wish.” Elenore said with a smile.

“If your daughter is sick why don’t you use a wish to cure her?” Carrosea asked curiously.

"I can't really explain it other than the ring showing me a vision of me bringing Susan to the ship and their doctors looking at her. My guess is that by bringing Susan there as an act of trust, the people on the ship would be willing to share." Elenore replied looking at the ring on her finger.

"Do you know who or what is on that ship?" Limelda asked.

"I was going to ask that as well Elenore." Madlax added.

"I know they're humans from an advanced alternative universe. Other than that I don't know." Elenore answered.

"That answers that. Hopefully Meg can find something at her friend's place that can help tomorrow."

"Oh, that reminds me. Laetitia is supposed to come home from the hospital tomorrow as well."

Margaret said just remembering that Laetitia was still there.

"We'll get her before we start the ritual, okay Margaret?" Vanessa asked.

"Okay." Margaret replied stifling a yawn.

"Someone's tired." Vanessa said trying from yawning herself.

"We're all tired. It's been a long day, a day far too long..." Elenore said.

"I'll go tell Roy we're all going to bed. I'm sure he'll want to bunk up for the night as well." Meg said.

"I already offered him and the others a room for the night." Margaret chimed in.

"Did he accept?" Vanessa asked.

"Yep." Margaret replied with a smile then a yawn. "Good night all, I'm heading to bed." Margaret said as she headed to her room.

Carrossea didn't dare get up as Elenore was watching him closely.

Then Elenore got up and kissed her mother good night. "Good night to you all as well and to you as well Mr. Doone..." Elenore said with a wave of her hand with the Ring on it in front of Carrossea.

Carrossea gave a nervous good night and remembering the power of the ring that Kirika had demonstrated on him.

"Good night sweetie." Meg said to Elenore and kissed her in return.

Then Elenore followed by Vanessa went to their room.

After Elenore had left Carrossea quietly went to his room grateful that Elenore didn't go off on him or at least not with the Ring still on her finger.

Limelda and Madlax, happy they didn't have to pull guard duty, went to her room after wishing Meg good night.

Meg went to Roy who was coming up the stairs with Badgis.

"Finished for the night, Roy?"

"Yeah, I can imagine the inquest that's going to come of this." Roy said wearily.

"I can imagine as well. What was he trying to accomplish? Was he planning to overthrow the government?" Meg asked sadly, looking down the stairs.

"Not with the forces he had. That's why he went after the Soldats, figuring if he could control them he could proceed with his plans." Roy said, as Badgis tried to get pass the couple. Meg and Roy let him pass as he went to his room.

"He's gone, but I have the feeling we all are going to feel his legacy for a long time." Roy continued after Badgis had left.

"Legacy? That's an understatement, as far as Elenore and Susan are concerned." Meg said as Roy wrapped his arms around her.

"True, but your girl is a tuff kid. Look who she hangs out with?" Roy said trying to cheer Meg up.

Meg smirked a bit but stopped as she remembered the vision that Elenore saw concerning Susan.

"I know Elenore can handle it, but we're both worried about Susan. How she's going to deal with it, knowing what she knows now?"

"We'll cross that bridge when we get to it. All we can do as grandparents are give her love and support." Meg smiled. "I knew there was a softy underneath that hard-boiled exterior. Now about Mr. ..."

“Oh no, that cat dies...even if I have to hire Noir.” Roy said half jokingly.

“It’s Val’s cat and besides Madlax loves him as well. Oh before I forget. I’m going to Val’s to check if she’s there and take care of the cat.”

“You don’t need my permission; she gave you a key just in case. I know she doesn’t have any sensitive material ...” Roy said trying not to mention the cat.

“Thank you Roy. Now let’s get to bed.” Meg said kissing Roy.

Roy kissed her back with a warm but tired smile. “Good idea...” And the two went to bed not knowing that Elsa was watching the scene from out of phase.

Elsa pulled out a pad of sticky notes and a pen from a pocket.

“Speaking of Susan...” Elsa said as she wrote then she walked to the chapel and brief came out of phase long enough to place the sticky note on the door.

On it, the note said.

Watch the bathroom on March 19th 2018.

Elsa wished she could’ve written more but at least she could give her mothers a heads up. Then she put the pad and pen back and pulled out a device, pressed a couple buttons and disappeared.