

Chapter 35. Night before the ascension

"You don't have to stay up if you don't want to, Limelda." Madlax said to Limelda who was sitting across from her.

"I'm not tired. Plus, I'm wondering how your niece made out. There hasn't been any word on the news about them."

"Thank you Limelda." Meg said, still watching out the window for Elenore, Susan and Vanessa, not even really paying attention to the conversation.

"You're just trying to see who goes to bed last." Madlax said with a playful smirk.

"I really don't think Carrossea or Margaret were "tired" at all." Limelda replied with a smirk.

"Well Margaret doesn't count. It's just you and me..." Madlax said with a grin and a playful yet competitive tone.

"What about Duvet?" Limelda asked, pointing towards Meg.

"I do have a name." Meg said, still looking out the window.

"To be honest, I don't know..." Limelda began.

"It's Meg. Only a few people call me Duvet anymore."

"I call you Duvie..." Madlax said with a smirk.

"Where did that come from?" Limelda asked, not really getting the reference.

Meg sighed with a nostalgic grin. "It was a nick name a mutual friend called me. Madlax picked up on it and started to use it when we weren't on missions."

"I've called you Duvie on a few assignments."

"Yeah and I could've strangled Val for that. She's the one who got you started on it." Meg said, turning around to look at Madlax.

Madlax chuckled as she remembered that day.

The chuckling stopped as they heard the front door open. Madlax and Meg rushed to the stairs to see Elenore carrying a very tired Susan and Vanessa coming in afterwards.

Meg rushed down the stairs followed by Madlax and Limelda.

"Hi, we're back." Elenore said with a tired smile.

"Welcome back. Here, let me take her." Meg said, offering to carry Susan.

"It's okay. I want to carry her."

"Is she going to be alright?" Meg asked with concern.

"She's going to be just fine. Sammy repaired the damaged DNA that was causing the disease." Vanessa answered.

"Who's Sammy?" Meg asked.

"I'll explain after I get Susan to bed." Elenore said with a smile.

"Madlax, can you make a pot of tea please." Meg asked.

"Sure, Duvie." Madlax said then stopped and looked at Meg. "Ummm Duvie, where are the teabags?"

"In a glass jar on the counter on the left." Elenore answered starting to go up the stairs.

Elenore climbed the stairs happily. "*I saved you...my baby...*" She thought to herself.

Elenore carried her to her room and got her ready for bed.

Susan wiped her eyes as she crawled into bed and looked at Elenore with a look that said she wanted to say something but was afraid.

"What's wrong sweetie? Did something on the ship scare you?" Elenore asked sitting on the side of the bed.

"No. I..."

"You can tell me...don't be afraid."

"I saw her." Susan said looking up at her mother.

"Who?"

"I saw Margaret...but I don't know what she said."

"Your Aunt Margaret?"

"No, my sister."

"When did you see her?"

"After I left the room where the shining lady was. She was in the hall, standing in front of me."

Elenore wasn't surprised considering the major supernatural event that had happened before hand.

"Was she doing anything?"

"She was holding her hand out to me. I think she wanted me to grab it."

Elenore was at a loss on what to say next. "Did you grab it?"

"Yes and then I saw myself falling down but I didn't feel it."

Elenore knew exactly what Susan was talking about as she had a similar experience in Gazth-Sonika with Margaret in that field of flowers.

"Then you picked me up mommy and Margaret disappeared." Susan continued.

Elenore held Susan close knowing that her daughter had, from her perspective, a near death experience.

"It wasn't your time sweetie. One day we'll all be together again. Just don't rush it...okay." Elenore said, thinking about Susan's wrists.

"Okay."

"Now go to sleep. Tomorrow is your Aunt Margaret's birthday."

"Is she going to have ice cream and cake?" Susan asked a bit excited.

Elenore smiled. "Yes, she will. Good night." She said as she was heading toward the door.

"Good night. I love you mommy." Susan said as Elenore began to close the door.

"I love you too..." Elenore said as she closed the door and headed to the living room.

As she was walking down the hall she heard noises coming from Margaret's room. She recognized the noises as sexual behavior. She sighed with some frustration as she figured out who Margaret was having sex with. She wanted to knock on the door and walk in but she stopped herself just as she was about to grab the doorknob. Margaret was an adult now and able to decide things for herself. *"She doesn't need me anymore. Which is good. I've got two other people... no wait, four, if you count Laetitia and now Poupee, who need me more than she does."* Elenore thought without regret, sighed and headed back on her way to the living room.

"I just got done putting Susan to bed. Did I miss anything?" Elenore asked.

"I was explaining what we saw on the Vigilant." Vanessa answered.

"It was lucky someone else on the ship knew you or at least your analog." Meg said to Elenore as she came into the room.

"You mean Sammy. From what she told me, she had met me through Captain Ross who was friends with my other me and Vanessa. Nice lady, if a bit overly chatty." Elenore responded.

"She was just happy to see people she knew. For all intents and purposes they're all stuck here, so a little leeway wouldn't hurt." Vanessa added getting up from the chair.

"I know. I'm just tired...and glad that Susan is going to be alright. As far as I'm concerned, this day is done and I want to relax."

"I agree. I'm going to bed. It's been a long day for all of us. Good night all." Vanessa said as she headed to her bedroom.

"Good night Vanessa." Was the response that came from Elenore, Madlax and Meg.

Limelda simply said with a brief rising of her hand. "Night."

"We'll talk in the morning. I'm going to check on Susan before I go to bed. Good night." Meg said with a tired smile happy that she had her daughter back and her granddaughter was alright.

“Good night mom.” Elenore said, giving her mother a kiss on the cheek and Meg returning it.

“Night Duvie.”

Limelda gave a respectful nod as she got up. “I might as well head to bed as well. You coming to bed Madlax?”

“I will in a moment, I just need to talk to Elenore privately for bit.”

“Alright, see you there.” Limelda said as she walked following Meg.

Elenore sat down in front of Madlax. “What’s wrong Madlax?”

Madlax looked to see if Meg was out of earshot and then began to speak.

“I think you need to know this. I don’t know if you noticed Duvie’s eyes when she came back here.”

“I did, I was going to ask her later when we had a chance to talk in private. Did something happen at Miss Dowland’s place?”

“At Valk’s place? Nah. Though getting Mr. Tootles into his carrier was a pain at first.”

“Mr. Tootles?”

“Valk’s cat. Three-Speed hates that cat for some stupid reason. He wanted first Duvie, Valk and then me to assassinate that poor kitty. He got flat out refusal from everyone he asked.” Madlax said a bit absent mindedly as she fondly remembered how she got the cat to destroy Three-Speed’s purple couch that she hated so much.

“Was my mom upset about it or Miss Dowland’s disappearance?” Elenore asked trying to get Madlax back on track.

“No. Though Duvie was really quiet on the drive to her house, too quiet... When we got of the car she stared at her keys for a bit and she looked like she was going to cry right then and there. Then just grabbed the carrier and we went in, she let Mr. Tootles out of his carrier and she made us breakfast.” Madlax said getting back on track.

Elenore frowned as she remembered the event of a few days ago.

“Walter was laughing as he took Meg’s house key and flung it at her. “You? Kill me? Please don’t make me laugh! You know what Meg, fine ...I’m done playing babysitter...you know what; you can play house with your shit for all I care. I have better things to do...”

“I can see why she was upset. But what made her cry?” Elenore said in understanding tone.

“I was putting the dishes in the sink when I heard a crash in the living room. I rushed in there. She had thrown a picture of Walter across the room. For a while she was just standing there looking at the table with a whole bunch of photos, then back where she threw the picture and back. She looked all over the photos till she saw one of her and Walter as kids. She grabbed and she was going to throw it but she sat on the couch, held the picture close to her and then she started crying. The way she was acting, it was like she was mourning him.”

“She was.”

“Why? Considering all he did...”

“She wasn’t mourning “that” Walter. She was grieving for the brother who had died long ago, before he became the monster he ended up as. Thank you for telling me this. Is there anything else?”

“No, I figured I would tell you. Duvie has had a few hard hits in the last few days and I can’t really help her anymore.”

“It’s okay Madlax...” Elenore said hugging Madlax reminiscent of when Margaret had hugged her at the aftermath of her battle with Friday Monday.

“Thank you Elenore...” Madlax said returning the hug.

“You’re welcome.” Elenore said letting go of Madlax.

“I’m heading to bed before Limelda sends out a search party for me.” Madlax said half jokingly.

“I’m going too. Tomorrow is going to be another long day, a fun day but long.”

Madlax stopped for a bit. “Fun?”

“Don’t tell me you forgot. Tomorrow is Margaret’s birthday.”

Madlax smirked. “No, I didn’t forget. I was trying to imitate Margaret.”

Elenore chuckled as the memory of meeting Vanessa again after she came to Nafrece and the conversation flashed through her mind.

“Good night Madlax.”

“Night Elenore.”

Elenore went to her room and turned on the light. She got ready for bed and before she turned out the light she looked at the picture of her and her grandpa. But something was different about it. She could see two ghostly figures standing on either side of her grandpa and her.

It took Elenore a bit to figure out it was her grandma and her partner standing there. She hugged the picture tightly. “Thank you all.” She said with a slight tear in her eye as she placed the picture back.

Then she went to the doll cradle and took out the doll. There was a sticky note on the doll.

“Good as new. ” The sticky note read.

Elenore thought it must’ve been either her mom or Elsa who did it. She smiled and took the doll with her to bed. As she turned out the light, she wondered what the morning would bring as she went to sleep lovingly holding her doll.