

Chapter 28.Sapling Serenade

When Elenore looked at the note she noticed three things; one, it was in the same handwriting as the note that was found on the windshield of her mother's car. Two, written in capitals and underlined on the top of the page was; "Do not show your family until after July 13th 2012!" Third, everything else that was written was written as a list. She assumed the ring; the bearer or both wanted her to understand what was written down. She found a second neatly folded note inside the first one. This one had an instruction as well; give this note to Madlax tomorrow. So Elenore put the second note in her pocket and continued reading. She finished reading the note, neatly folded it and placed it in another pocket. Then she went to Margaret.

"What does the note say Elenore?" Margaret asked curiously.

"For now I can't reveal what the notes contents are. May I have my keys please?"

"Oh, sure. Here you go Elenore." Margaret said handing Elenore her key set.

"Thank you Margaret. I apologize in advance if I do anything odd and don't explain it right away."

Margaret had an assurance from the Torc that everything was alright. "Alright I trust you."

"Thank you again Margaret." Elenore said with a smile. Then she turned to Madlax. "Madlax, could you please come to the armory with me."

Madlax was just as confused as everyone else was but she shrugged her shoulders. "Okay..."

Elenore and Madlax went down to the armory.

"So what are we supposed to do here?" Madlax asked still a bit baffled.

Elenore looked around the room. She gave a slight "ah ha" when she found what she was looking for.

From a box she pulled two belts that held pistol clips and room for two pistols plus a holster. She handed one to Madlax. "Fill the belt with clips of the ammo you use for your guns. I know it's a strange request, but it is necessary."

"Okay, that is a strange request. But I've heard weirder." Madlax thought to herself as she replied to Elenore. "Okay. " Then she went and found empty clips and ammo for her pistols. Then she checked the bullets and then loaded them in the clips. Meanwhile Elenore went to a gun rack and found a Colt forty five automatic and put it in the holster. Then she found ten empty clips and ammo for her pistol. Then she looked around till she found gun cleaning kits. With an ease she had long forgotten she had she loaded the clips and placed them on the belt. When she was done she went to Madlax who was finishing up loading her clips. "May I have your assistance on another task please?"

"Sure, what is it?"

"I haven't done this in a long while, could you please help me do some maintenance on a couple of pistols?"

"Sure, but you have one pistol if you mean the one you have with you."

"I have another pistol upstairs and I don't want to do this in front of everyone."

"Okay, no problem. Let's go."

Madlax and Elenore went back upstairs and they went to Elenore's room. Elenore went to her dresser, moved it slightly and reached under it and pulled out an older looking but obviously customized Colt forty five automatic pistol. Etched on the slide were the words "What love can destroy it can save."

Elenore thought the words were odd as she never really pondered on them. She holstered the pistol then they went out of the room and to the living room. Her mother was in the room now as well. Limelda went to take a nap but Susan was there.

"Oh I was about to get you two for lunch. I know you can't answer right now but I do want answers later young lady."

"I wish I can give them to you mom. But I want to ask you to do something for me."

"What is it?"

"Could you please get grandma's journal from the car?"

Third Moon Rising

“Alright, did that note say something or did you figure something out?”

“A little of both, let’s say the note confirmed something for me.” Elenore said to Meg then she turned to Vanessa.

“What do you need me to do?” Vanessa intercepted.

“I would like you to check the online police blotter and files for dates between July 6th and July 20th 1989.”

Meg hung her head and then turned to Vanessa. “Look under July 16th 1989.”

“Alright, I’ll do it after lunch. But you owe us an explanation.”

“I will.” Then she turned to Meg. “Mom did grandma ever teach you how to read Soldat symbols or codes?”

Meg thought a bit. “No actually, other than saying she was with the Soldats she didn’t say anything else to me. Why you ask?”

Elenore looked to Margaret. “She’s telling the truth. I’m not sure where you’re going with all this but I think I have an idea. But can we have lunch first?”

“Well of course. I’m hungry too.” Elenore said and that got a few giggles.

After lunch Elenore, Madlax, Meg and Vanessa were at the kitchen table. Madlax was helping Elenore do maintenance on the pistols. Vanessa had a copy of the police blotter for July 16th 1989 and was reading it to the rest with Meg filling in what details she could remember.

From the blotter and Meg’s recollection; Meg’s ex-boyfriend was going to confront her when Richard Burton intercepted him and shot him in self defense. They knew from Walter’s confession that he had sent him to kill Richard Burton.

“Is there any point to this Elenore?” Vanessa asked.

In a serious tone Elenore replied. “Yes there is. When Walter gave his “confession” something bothered me about it, granted I had to calm down first but when I did this question came to mind: how did he know that Margaret’s father was the one who impregnated my mother?”

The question brought a stunned silence to the room.

“Mom, please check grandma’s journal to see if she taught Walter how to read Soldats symbols or codes.” Elenore asked as she continued the maintenance.

Meg with Vanessa’s help poured over the journal. Luckily they found an entry that was dated the year before Elenore was shot that she did teach Walter how to recognize and read Soldats codes and symbols.

“Okay this proves that my mother taught him but what else does it prove?” Meg asked.

“I thought it would be obvious Duvie; Walter found and read your mom’s journal and...” Madlax began.

“Found out I was carrying Richard’s child. DAMN IT!” Meg finished as she slammed the journal shut.

“But there is one thing that I haven’t figured out yet. Why the hostility? Why direct it to me? He was going to be head of the family and my mother and I weren’t any threat to him. By telling Margaret’s mother, he ruined any chance that it would be kept quiet. No, there has to be another reason...” Elenore pondered out loud.

“Well you can’t tell what goes through the mind of a mad man. Look at Friday Monday for example.”

Vanessa said and Elenore raised an eyebrow. When she had finished with the pistols she started looking through the journal.

“What are you looking for now?” Meg inquired.

“Mainly to see if she mentioned bringing Walter to a doctor or if she recorded any observations on his behavior.” Elenore answered while going through the journal. Elenore checked if any pages were ripped out but there was no evidence that any were. There were a couple of entries where she had a confrontation with Walter but nothing of significance.

Third Moon Rising

"If there was any evidence, your grandma didn't write it down. Did you go through your grandpa's papers?"

"Yes I did, but I never found anything like that. If there was anything Walter must've gotten to it first."

"We might never know the answer. He's the only one who can really answer it." Vanessa said.

"I know. I was hoping I could find an answer to the real reason why he hates me."

Vanessa put her hand to her chin and thought and then she said. "You know I've never seen a picture of your grandmother Elenore."

"Oh, you haven't." Elenore said looking at the clock hanging on the wall. "Let me go get the photo album." Elenore went to get the album taking her pistols and ammo belt with her.

Elenore came back with the photo album wearing her reading glasses.

"I didn't know you wore glasses." Madlax said surprised to see Elenore wearing them.

Elenore cocked an eyebrow. "Well, yes for reading."

"I didn't see you wear them in Gazth-Sonika."

"There wasn't anything for me to read; therefore I didn't need to wear them."

Madlax thought a bit. "Oh that's true."

Elenore placed the album on the table and they looked through it.

When they found a picture of Elenore's Grandmother Vanessa looked at Elenore then back at the picture then back at Elenore. "Elenore you can pass as a dead ringer for her. No pun intended."

They looked at the picture then back at Elenore.

"Especially with your glasses...on. Oh God I think I know why Walter hates you." Meg said as a revelation flashed across her mind and she remembered Walter's confession. "*You know my father valued you above anything else including his own damn family!*"

Meg looked through the album for the pictures of her mother when she was a girl. Granted there weren't many as she knew her mother grabbed what she could. But it was evident, Elenore looked like her grandmother and her grandfather noticed and so did Walter.

"I think since you resemble your grandma, he thought you were her replacement or something, I'm just guessing here." Meg said looking at Elenore.

"You might be right...but we have to go." Elenore said looking at the clock.

"Go where? And what do you mean by "we"?" Meg asked.

"I have to meet her and I can bring Madlax so no one worries."

"You're meeting with the ring bearer?" Vanessa asked.

Elenore nodded as she put her glasses away in her pocket.

"Let me get my purse and we'll be off Madlax."

"I'll just wait for the Cliff notes version on what's going on here. Can I borrow one of your cars please?"

Madlax said a bit confused.

Meg handed Madlax her keys. "Keep an eye on her please Madlax." Meg said with a look of worry on her face.

"*I won't fail her this time....*" Madlax thought to herself.

Elenore went and got her purse on the way towards the kitchen when she saw Susan. Susan noticed that she had her purse. "Where are you going?" Susan asked curiously tinged with anxiety. Elenore bent down so she was looking Susan in the eye. "I have to go and do something very important. I will be back and I'll bring a present home, okay?" Elenore replied trying to allay her daughter's fears.

Susan smiled. "Okay."

"Grandma is going to be here as well as Miss Vanessa and your Aunt."

"Aunt?" Susan asked befuddled.

"You already met them; Margaret, Madlax and Laetitia are my sisters. We have the same daddy but different mommies."

Third Moon Rising

Susan processed that information. "So Laetitia is my aunt?"

"Yes sweetie. It doesn't mean she can't be your friend okay."

That cheered Susan up. Elenore gave her a hug and a kiss which she returned.

"Be a good girl for grandma okay. Bye bye sweetie" Elenore said getting up.

"Bye mommy." Susan said as she headed to the living room.

"You ready to go?" Madlax asked.

"Grab your passport before we go, I don't want to cause a scene and I'll tell you on the way there."

Madlax sighed. "Okay, I'll go get my passport."

After Madlax got her passport they left in Meg's car. As they pulled out Madlax asked the obvious question. "Where are we going?"

"We are going to the train station. I told you where we are going. Don't worry I will show you the way."

"That's a start but why have me bring my passport?" Madlax asked totally air heading the fact that Elenore did indeed tell her.

"Because the people we are meeting are going to Paris and I'm supposed to have a talk with them."

"So how long is the train ride then?"

"About one hour and a half, minus stops along the way." Elenore answered pedantically.

Madlax was actually excited; she had never been on a train before, though she did wonder who Elenore was supposed to meet. Fifteen minutes later they parked and went to the station.

Elenore and Madlax were surprised given recent news that neither of them was accosted. Elenore bought the tickets and went to the platform.

Mireille looked impatiently at her watch. "The train is coming in three minutes. She had better show up and who is she bringing?" Mireille said impatiently hiding the fact that she really wanted to leave Nafrece as fast as possible.

"She's here. She just bought the tickets and is coming to the platform. She's bringing an escort; you saw the news this morning."

"Aren't you afraid that she'll get spotted?"

"No, nobody will recognize her because of the mind fog I put up. So they'll appear to be ordinary tourists."

"Does this "mind fog" affect us?"

"No, oh here they are." Kirika said with the barest hint of a grin as she recognized Madlax.

Madlax and Mireille stared at each other as they recognized each.

"You're that bum from Saturday!" Mireille exclaimed.

"And you're that cheap hooker!" Madlax said in retaliation.

Kirika quietly sighed as Elenore rolled her eyes. Thankfully the incoming train drowned out anything else they were saying.

They managed to find an empty compartment and sat down. Madlax and Mireille gave each other dirty looks. Once the conductor had taken their tickets Elenore spoke up.

"Were going to be here for the next few hours, so please try to enjoy the trip."

"I thought you said an hour and a half?" Madlax said in surprise.

"Hours? What are you talking... -They suddenly found themselves in the throne room of the Goddesses. - About? Where are we and what's going on?"

"Oh we're back here." Madlax said casually with a grin noticing Mireille's discomfort.

Kirika explained about the throne room and the temporal properties thereof.

A table with four chairs appeared.

"Sit and speak your hearts. But be aware no untruth can be spoken here." A voice spoke sounding like Kirika but with an Irish accent.

At first they were surprised but they all sat down. When they did an entire tea set with a full kettle of Earl Gray and biscuits appeared on the table.

Third Moon Rising

“For some reason I feel at ease and I can talk about the things I need to talk about. I’m sure you do as well Elenore?” Kirika said in a relieved tone.

Mireille looked at Madlax then at Kirika. “So does the bum here represent Chloe?” Mireille asked pointing casually with her thumb at Madlax.

“By the time this train arrives in Paris, Chloe will be dead. I don’t want to talk about it please.” Kirika said with an apparent saddened expression.

Both Mireille and Elenore wondered what had or will happen to Chloe that Kirika didn’t want to talk about it. Madlax noticed the looks on the trio’s faces. From that one time they fought, and from what Elenore had told her Chloe seemed to be a capable, almost frightening fighter, considering she actually wounded Nakhl of all people. She too wondered what had happened to take down such a deadly assassin.

After a brief moment of silence Kirika spoke again. “I would’ve liked the four of us sitting together but fate had other plans. No offence to you Madlax, right?”

“Yes...I understand.” Madlax answered a bit taken off guard.

“What do you want to talk about Kirika?” Elenore asked starting off the conversation.

“I want to know your feelings about Altena. I know she forced you to kill and she used drugs on you.”

“I know she used me as a sleeper agent when I wasn’t doing her dirty work. But I can’t totally condemn her either. When I was assaulted by my uncle, she and this nun I think...do you remember a nun named Marenne?”

“I think she was a priestess, because the nuns wore habits.”

“Oh, anyways Marenne and she to some extent helped me deal with it. When I was pregnant...well Marenne was there and when my daughter died the day she was born Altena and her helped me with the arrangements of cremating her. From the look on Mireille’s face Altena did something to her as well.”

Mireille angrily spoke up. “I’m sorry for happened to you and I can understand Altena did a good snow job on you. But that loony had my parents and my brother murdered by Kirika.”

“Snow job? I said I couldn’t totally condemn her. I don’t think for one second that Altena had any altruistic motives in mind when it came to me. I was a hurt, frightened, little girl who had lost from what she knew was the last relative who loved her. Yes, I was preyed upon by her and only because my grandma was Noir. Do you think I can forgive her for ambushing and murdering my grandma and starting the whole chain of events that destroyed my family?! Do you think I forgive her for turning me into a murderer?! Do you think I forgive her for drugging me so she could control me and make me do things against the person I love?! Do you?!” Elenore answered just as angrily getting up to confront Mireille from across the table.

Mireille could see the fire of rage in Elenore’s eyes as it appeared that Elenore would go over the table to get at her. “No I don’t...What do you mean your grandmother was Noir?” Mireille replied seriously and at the thought of Elenore’s grandmother being the actual Noir threw her for a slight loop.

“Yes, my grandma was Noir, and yes she was a Soldat...” Then Elenore told what she had discovered in her grandma’s journal. Mireille’s expression softened a bit. “So they killed her partner and wanted to kill to her just because they were gay?”

“So it seemed. To be honest I don’t know much about the Soldats other than what I had learned which isn’t much. My guess is; a homophobic faction or part of one did it.”

“That would make sense...”

Kirika sipped her tea while waiting for Mireille and Elenore to finish their exchange.

“Do you have anything to say Kirika?” Mireille asked.

Kirika put down the teacup and then calmly answered. “You forgot to tell her about the Le Grand Retour.”

Third Moon Rising

Mireille looked at Kirika in astonishment. "You know more about that than I do."

"Le Grand Retour? I've never heard her mention that." Elenore asked puzzled on what the pair was talking about.

"It's some plan of hers to pretty much throw Europe back into the Dark Ages." Mireille replied somewhat aggravated.

"Sounds stupid to me." Madlax chimed in.

"No one was asking for your opinion you hobo." Mireille said still aggravated.

"Don't call my sister a hobo! You don't even know her. Who do you think you are?" Elenore retorted angrily.

"Stop it!" Kirika said in a loud enough voice so that their attention was drawn to her.

"I know your feelings about Altena. I wanted to know how Elenore felt about her because her experience is different from ours. If you had let Elenore finish explaining she would've told you what she had told you without the anger. Instead you continued and then you insulted her sister. Please Mireille let me have a chance to talk." Kirika said firmly noticing that Elenore was starting to calm down.

Mireille sat in her chair quietly as Kirika continued.

Turning back to Elenore, Kirika asked. "Do you know how many people Altena had us kill?"

"Yes, seven in total." Elenore said taking a deep breath.

"Did you feel sad? If so when?"

"Yes I felt sad and that part of me was locked away. Only recently I can actually express my remorse."

"I envy you then..." Kirika said.

"Do you feel sad Kirika?" Elenore asked.

"No and I sometimes wonder why I don't. I guess that's the real difference between us. "

"Do you feel anything else?"

"Yes I do. I can feel joy and love."

Elenore smiled not wanting to press the issue, assuming Kirika herself was trying to heal herself.

"Can I ask what happened to you when we last parted?" Elenore asked trying to change the subject.

"I was going to ask you the same thing. Since you asked me first I will answer."

"Then I'll tell my story in return."

Kirika with Mireille accompanying told Elenore about the events since they had parted.

Then Elenore with Madlax filling in some detail gave her side. Though both Kirika and Mireille were thrown for a loop when Madlax explained her origins.

When they were finished talking and drinking tea they all got up from the table and the table disappeared and they found themselves back in the real world. Mireille didn't quite know what to make of it but she was happy that Kirika was satisfied and they could go on with their lives. Part of her was happy that Chloe wouldn't be a part of it though she vowed to never admit it to Kirika. She found Elenore to be quite an intelligent and resilient woman though she couldn't say the same about her sister referring to Madlax. Though one couldn't pick their relatives she reasoned.

Madlax looked out the window watching the scenery go by as she enjoyed the rest of the ride.

Kirika also stared out the window though she was deep in thought. Between wondering what Mireille and her were going to do after they got to Paris and gave Elenore the ring, she thought of Chloe...and resolved to at least keep a place for her in her heart. It was the least she could do for her.

Between having small talk with Mireille and thinking what to buy for Susan and Margaret, she too thought of Chloe. Her fights with "Alice" did sadden her considering she was a victim just as they all were. She gave a silent apology to Chloe much to the frustration of "Alice".

The border crossing went smoothly and they were soon on their way. An hour later they arrived in Paris. The four of them went where no one should see them. Madlax was worried that Kirika or more likely Mireille would try something.

Third Moon Rising

Kirika took off the ring and placed the ring on Elenore's finger. For a moment Elenore was stunned as she received quite a lot of information all at once.

Once Elenore had recovered Kirika spoke. "This is where we part ways. Good bye Elenore."

"Good bye Kirika and to you as well Mireille, if you're in Nafrece please don't hesitate to contact me."

"I might do that, see ya Elenore... bye to you too you hobo. Let's go home Kirika." Mireille said walking off.

Kirika bowed slightly and then walked off with Mireille.

"Same to you, you cheap bimbo." Madlax said under her breath as Mireille and Kirika left.

After Mireille and Kirika had left Madlax turned to Elenore.

"So what do we do now?" Madlax asked wondering if they were going to take the train back.

"We are going to buy Margaret her birthday gifts, since her birthday is this Saturday and I promised Susan I would get her a gift as well."

"That's right, I forgot all about it with..."

"Understandable, now let's go before the shops close..." Elenore said as she was beginning to walk in the opposite direction of where Mireille and Kirika went.

"Elenore?" Madlax asked briefly stopping in her tracks.

"Yes, Madlax?"

"How are we going to get home?"

Elenore smiled with a raised eyebrow. "Trust me you'll like this, but for now I'll keep it as a surprise."

Madlax followed as she wondered what Elenore had in store...

A couple hours and few shopping bags later Elenore and Madlax went to where they couldn't be seen.

"What's here?" Madlax asked intriguingly.

"Oh, we're going home."

"From..." Madlax began to say but she was cut off as a cloud of black feathers surrounded her.

From their flat Kirika noticed a huge cloud of birds heading off into the horizon.

"Good luck Elenore..." She quietly said as she watched the huge murder fly off further and further away.