

Chapter 12. Scandals and Bloodlines

"I...heard...every...single...word...you said" Elenore said still groggily but making an effort to gather her wits.

Meg stood and silently stared at Elenore for a few seconds in slight surprise. She tried to say something.

"You heard all that...huh?" Meg finally said.

"I was somewhat unconscious not deaf, mother."

"I know I owe you an explanation, but there are some things I can't talk about."

"I gathered that when you said Nafrece Intelligence. I won't ask about any of that for now. There are some things I do want an answer for."

"You deserve that much. But I don't know really where to start. "

Elenore sat up and thought for a few seconds and then a realization came to her. "You said you had an affair with Master Burton and you had me. Mother please tell me the truth, I really truly need to know this. Is Master Burton my father?"

Meg struggled for an answer. "If they found out I told you."

"They? You mean Master Burton and *her*?"

"Yes."

"Mother...they're both dead."

"What?! When?! The last letter from your grandfather said that Richard had found Anna."

"No mother, they are dead. Let me explain, though I still don't understand this "Gift"." Elenore told Meg of the events from eight months ago. Meg sat in stunned silence till Elenore got to the part where she got shot. Meg sat silently as she took it in, her face partly hidden by her hands.

"If I had known...neither of you would've been in Gazth-Sonika."

"Don't beat yourself up over that. Margaret was obsessive and it's my job to protect her. Speaking of Margaret, though I don't know what your reaction will be."

"Go on..."

"Yesterday, I told Margaret that I was gay and I was in love with her. So I'm asking again; is Margaret's father my father as well?"

Meg looked at Elenore silently which made Elenore nervous with anticipation. Then Meg sighed and then spoke. "I still love you gay, bi or whatever."

"Mother...I understand this is a touchy subject for you but please tell me..."

"You have a right to know, but there's no concrete proof I can show you."

"It's all right as long as I know the truth, so please tell me."

"Margaret is your little sister..."

"Thank you mother. Well it explains why *she* hated me and you so much. Just gives me yet another reason to despise her. Though I do wonder if Margaret knew." Elenore lay back down with a sullen look.

"Then there's grandpa, did he really have to lie to me? But neither of us will know the answer to that one." Then a bolt of realization struck Elenore.

"*The only one I can entrust her to...is you Elenore.*" Elenore remembered her grandfather saying that right before he died. "*Was it because of my mother and Uncle Walter...?*" Elenore asked herself.

"Sweetie, I don't truly understand he did either or why didn't he tell me. I'm sorry. But regardless he is your grandfather and in his own way he did love you...so can you forgive him?"

"I'm still mad and hurt about it...but he's not around to defend himself so I can forgive him...after awhile. Oh, one other thing mother."

"Yes?"

"You said something about a picture of me in a pink tutu."

"Yes I did, it was the only picture your grandfather managed to give to me." Meg pulled out the picture and showed it to Elenore.

"I remember that, it was when grandfather brought me to my first recital." Elenore's eyes teared as a nostalgic smile crossed her face. "At least I know you were thinking of me."

Elenore and Meg hugged each other warmly for a few moments.

"If you come down to the house, I can give you some more updated pictures..."

Meg frowned sadly. "Sweetie, when I said I was barred from the house I meant it. I can't go within five hundred yards of the house and I have the legal papers to prove it. I get them every year."

"*Gee I wonder who did that, miserable bitch...*" Elenore thought. "I understand, but since father and her are dead you can contest it to have it nullified."

"The only one who could is Margaret and not till she's twenty."

"Well, that's this Saturday. I don't think Margaret would mind..."

"Speaking of Margaret, Madlax said there was a situation, what's going on? Plus there are still a couple of things I want to ask you about."

"Well it's just as strange..."

"Sweetie don't worry I've seen some very weird things in my time. So go ahead."

Elenore retold the events of yesterday that she knew of.

Meg grinned. "The Torc of Rhiannon huh...I know a certain professor who give her eye just to see it."

"Oh you mean Doctor Tudor?" Meg nodded to Elenore's question.

"But what's worrying me is these groups; I know of *Enfant*, we've been trying to bust them for years. But these *Soldats* are a total unknown. I've heard through the grapevine that *Enfant* was fighting with some other group but no one I knew who they were. I'll talk to Madlax and see what we can do."

"Thank you mother."

"You're welcome sweetie. The doctor told us that they found alcohol in your blood, what's going on there? I know you're old enough to drink but your friend Vanessa is concerned."

"Yes it's unusual for me, but I needed something to help me sleep. Ever since I got home from *Gazth-Sonika* I have been having these horrible nightmares every night so I have a drink or two. It makes the nightmares go away."

"Ever considered going to a counselor for the nightmares?"

"Vanessa suggested the same thing, but I'm afraid if I told somebody they would think I was really crazy."

Meg thought for a few moments. "I know of a therapist who deals with clients who've had supernatural experiences, I'm not talking seeing a ghost in the house, I mean the sort of thing you went through. Maybe your friend Vanessa should see her too. I'll give her the number too. Does Margaret know about your drinking?"

"No, as far as I know she doesn't. I do my drinking at night when she's asleep. I don't know how she would react; even now she must be worried sick."

"Madlax went back to the house and..."

"Oh God, I know she'll come here regardless of the criminals." Elenore slapped her forehead.

"Before she gets here, the doctor said you were pregnant at one time. When did this happen?"

Elenore struggled for an answer but couldn't. "I honestly don't know, I can't remember...was I pregnant? Seriously mother I can't remember."

Meg was about to comment when she was interrupted.

"Elenore!" Margaret's voice rang as she ran into the room ignoring Meg at first. "Oh I'm so glad you're all right." Margaret said ecstatically as she hugged Elenore. When she looked in Elenore's eyes her demeanor saddened and she backed up away from the bed with her head down. Elenore sat up and looked right at Margaret. Elenore guessed from Margaret's behavior that she may have had a hand in her being in the hospital. She didn't want to jump down Margaret's throat though she'll most likely be upset with the answer, besides there was that one question she wanted to ask.

“Margaret I see you have something to tell me, you have that look that you did something that shouldn't have. Before that I do need you to answer me these two questions honestly; did you know I was your sister? If so, for how long?”

Margaret was a bit stunned at first. “Sister? What are you talking about Elenore?”

“Mother, if you please...” Elenore gestured toward Meg.

Margaret turned to see Meg. Margaret was stunned as she pointed. “Y...you...”

“Hello Margaret, you do you know it's impolite to point and stare like that.”

“I'm sorry, but it is true?”

“That Elenore is your sister. Yes it is Margaret...”

Margaret through the Torc knew that she was telling the truth and she hung her head low. “I know you're telling the truth. Until this moment I didn't know that Elenore was my real sister. I mean we grew up together in the same house. There's so much I want to ask you but...” Margaret looked at Elenore. “I owe Elenore an explanation and know she's not going to be happy about.”

“Then tell me please Margaret...” Elenore asked.

Margaret told what Laetitia, Poupee and her saw. When Margaret had finished she wrapped her arms around her knees and her head on top and gave Margaret the thousand yard stare.

“Let me get this straight; Laetitia, Poupee and you marched around in my subconscious without my knowledge or permission, through my id no less and tried to pry open representing something I probably wasn't ready to deal with yet. This resulted; in a part of my soul and those memories connected to it being ripped from me. And now this piece of my soul is now running around somewhere just like Madlax. And to top it all off Carrossea Doone via Poupee has been running around in my mind. No Margaret, I am not just angry with you. I am very hurt, disappointed and feeling very betrayed by the two people I love. What do have to say for yourself?”

“You're right Elenore. You have every right to be angry. I knew I should've stopped this before we even started. We wanted to help you...I know it's a poor excuse when there's no excuse at all. I know saying sorry will not do right now. But I am sorry regardless.”

Elenore stared at Margaret for a long while. The room had a quiet tension.

“I have to do some thinking to do Margaret. But tomorrow when I get home you, Laetitia and I are going to have a very long talk about a few things.”

Margaret inwardly smiled, she understood Elenore was justifiably angry and there would be changes. But she knew Elenore would forgive the both of them.

“Oh there you are Margaret, you ran so fast ahead of us.” Vanessa said as she, Madlax and NakhI walked in. Margaret knew Vanessa was lying, she knew they were not too far from the door listening but giving them some privacy from unwanted ears.

Elenore's eyebrows rose when she saw NakhI come in. “Hello Miss NakhI. I didn't expect to see you here.”

“Greetings Elenore Baker, you would've seen me for it not for Margaret and Laetitia Burton trying access the sanctuary through your mind.”

“Believe me Miss NakhI, it wasn't my idea and I'm not going to ask how you even knew.”

“Be at ease, I know it wasn't your fault. With your permission I would like assess the damage that has been done.”

“As long you don't go prying into my thoughts I guess it's all right.” Elenore agreed as Margaret slightly winced.

NakhI stretched out her hand in front of Elenore's face and closed her eyes. After a few minutes she opened them and put down her arm.

"As I suspected; there is a hole both in your soul and mind. Whatever was behind the door is gone, only that piece of you knows. Fortunately for you it's not life threatening but we do need to get that piece back."

"Well considering what's happened so far, I'll take that as good news."

"We have both Enfant and the Soldats breathing down on us, plus we have to keep the Torc out their hands. We don't even know what she looks like or where to look."

"I can go look for her." Then she looked at Margaret. "Please do refrain from using the Torc until you how to use its power. "

"Wait, even if you do find the piece how can we put it in back in Elenore?" Vanessa asked.

"You already know the answer." NakhI replied which got somewhat of a stunned silence.

"I will contact you if I have made any progress." Then she left without a word.

"She didn't say goodbye or at least wished Elenore well." Vanessa said a tad bewildered.

"That's NakhI for you." Madlax commented.

"She did just not the way Westerners do." Meg added and everyone in the room turned to her.

"We still want an explanation out of you, old lady. So fess up." Madlax said a bit lightly.

"Okay, I'll tell you what I told Elenore, but I want your side of the story as well Madlax. Elenore told me what had happened eight months ago and it explains why you're running around with Richard's call sign."

Meg proceeded to tell what she had told Elenore then Madlax, Margaret, and Vanessa told their sides of the events between interruptions from a well meaning doctor and then a nurse.

After they had finished Meg silently sat thinking.

"This may have sounded bizarre but it's the truth." Vanessa said breaking the silence.

"I believe you. Trust me on this; I've seen and heard of things just as bizarre as you told me."

"So what do we do now?" Margaret asked.

"I'm sure Elenore needs her rest and you have school tomorrow Margaret." Vanessa replied.

"Oh that's right! I do have school but what about the Torc?" Margaret responded.

"Let's worry about that in the morning. Okay Margaret." Vanessa again replied trying to get Margaret to go.

Margaret turned to Elenore. "Good night Elenore...we'll talk tomorrow okay." Margaret wanted to say more but she stopped herself wondering if anything else would upset Elenore.

"Good night Margaret..." Elenore replied not wanting make the situation worse than it already was.

Meg handed Madlax a slip of paper and she put it in her pocket.

"Come on let's go Margaret. Night Elenore." Then she turned to Meg. "Night old lady." Madlax said with a grin while scooting Margaret out the door.

Vanessa stood near the bed with a sad look on her face.

"Let me guess; you're disappointed in me for drinking?"

"No I understand why you did it. I'm just disappointed you didn't tell me. I'm not some stranger, I'm your friend and I do care. You don't have to shoulder the burden alone you know."

"I'm sorry Vanessa. I know you told me this already."

"You keep hiding things from the people who do care about you. Speaking of which; the doctor mentioned that you had a previous pregnancy. I tried to think when and then it hit me; that day you came home beaten up when you were twelve. You said got into a fight with some girls about Margaret. I know you shield things from Margaret but please tell me what *really* happened that day."

Elenore tried to think and then her eyes widened. "I can't remember Vanessa...I try but it just comes up blank. Honestly I can't remember that day or even if I got into a fight. My mother asked me about my pregnancy but I can't remember that either." Elenore replied sadly.

Vanessa and Meg looked at Elenore and then each other in horror. Elenore got confused.

"That piece of your soul that's running around is the memory of that day plus any memories of your child!" Vanessa exclaimed.

"Then we really have to get her back. No offence to Miss Nakhl but I doubt she would know where to look." Elenore replied.

"Well she won't be alone, I'll help as well. I know the places you liked as a kid so I'll start there." Meg interjected.

"Thanks mother, there are other places as well, Vanessa knows where."

"I better get going, I'll see you tomorrow Elenore. Get some rest, okay." Vanessa said as she exchanged hugs with Elenore and headed toward the door.

After Vanessa left Elenore lay back down and Meg got up from the chair. "I guess your friend is mad at me as well."

"She's mad at us both, but more with me than you. Thing is; she's right I do hide things mostly to shield Margaret from them."

"What are you going to about Margaret?"

"I really don't want to talk about this right now. I need to think."

"Okay, sweetie. I'm going to head to the cafeteria to get a coffee and something to eat. Do you want anything while I'm there?"

"That's okay. They're supposed to bring me something to eat. Thanks anyway." Elenore replied a little dejected.

"Don't worry sweetie, unless you don't want me to. I'll stay with you tonight. And yes I have the doctor's permission."

Elenore smiled her eyes tearing slightly. "Of course I want you to stay. I want to talk to you."

"Thank you sweetie, I'll be right back." Meg said as she went out of the room.

Elenore laid there quietly thinking when she heard footsteps coming into the room. She sat smiling thinking it was either a nurse or her mother but when she saw his face her face soured.

"Well, Miss Baker. I come to see how you're doing and you give me that look."

"How long have you been running around in my head?"

"Straight to the point as always. For starters, I haven't been running around in your head and Laetitia's link is with Poupee and well Poupee is in mine. Beside's I don't have that kind of ability. Maybe you should ask Laetitia since it was her idea. In all honesty whether you believe me or not I was against this from the start and before you ask how I knew you were in the hospital. Poupee told me between his nearly nonstop "I told them so but they didn't listen. I also have a bone to pick you Miss Baker."

"Oh really Mr. Doone?" Elenore asked skeptically.

"I would greatly appreciate it if you didn't dump *your* hangover onto me." Carrossea said a tad irritated.

Elenore looked at him surprised and a little embarrassed.

"Get out Mr. Doone before I call for a nurse." Elenore said angrily.

"I will for now, but this isn't over Miss Baker." Carrossea replied as he left.

Elenore lay back down with a miserable look on her face.

"That could've gone better but with him who could tell if he was telling the truth. But did I see some concern on face? I doubt it...jerk." Elenore thought to herself.

Across town near the University, Mireille and Kirika warily headed to a nearby hotel.

"That proved pointless, the Soldats have all the routes out of the city covered." Mireille said with a great deal of irritation and frustration.

"So what does that leave?" Kirika asked.

"Not much, but I'll be damned before we get trapped like rats."

"It does seem a little excessive."

“Yes it does. I would like to think this is connected to their war with Enfant. But I don’t know.”

“I guess we go find out. Kirika?” Mireille said as she noticed Kirika looking down an alley.

Both of them instinctively reached for their guns ready for a fire fight. From the alley a cat came out bounding out towards the street to the alley across from it. They watched and listened down the alley for any other movement. No other noise or movement came from the alley.

“Come on Kirika, before we start jumping at shadows.” Mireille said as she started walking down the street.

Kirika looked down the alley one last time before she caught up with Mireille.

Further down the alley and sitting on a fire escape a little girl watched the pair walk off.

“Kir...rika...I remember a Kirika...” She said quietly to herself.

When Kirika had left, the little girl quietly sang;

“Noir name of the ancient fate...”

