

Chapter 29. Silent songs of Helianthus memories

"Where..." Madlax finally got to say. She looked around and found they weren't in Paris but in the parking lot of the train station back in Nafrece.

Madlax then looked at Elenore. "What just happened?" She asked, wondering what did happen.

"We teleported, the only drawback though is it isn't instantaneous. So we did have a bit of travel time."

Elenore pedantically replied.

"Still that was neat. How much time did it take?" Madlax asked while she checked along with Elenore for any bombs, tracking or listening devices.

"Almost an hour, any faster and that would've attracted attention because crows, ravens and rooks are supposed to go only so fast and we did have the wind in our favor."

Madlax mulled that over and it made sense; they didn't need any more attention than what they already had. After checking Meg's car for sabotage and not finding any explosives or devices they got in and drove home.

When they got home Margaret, Vanessa, Meg and a sleepy Susan were waiting in the front hall.

"I'm sorry we took so long." Elenore said apologetically.

"That's alright, but what happened?" Margaret asked, looking at Elenore's ring finger.

"We had an interesting conversation and I have the ring." Elenore replied, raising her hand to show the ring.

"Has Susan been good, mom?" Elenore asked, looking at Susan.

"She has been waiting for you to get home. It's past her bedtime."

Elenore went to Susan. "I've promised I would get you a present. -Elenore reached in one of the shopping bags and pulled out a small wrapped package and handed it to Susan. - Here you go sweetie."

"Can I open it?" Susan asked in delight.

"Of course." Elenore replied as Susan carefully opened the package looking up at Elenore while was opening it. Elenore noticed that Susan was tense; she gathered Walter did something to her.

When Susan finally opened the package; a look of delight spread across her face.

"Is this mine?" Susan asked holding up a doll with brown hair, button eyes, and a blue dress and black shoes.

"Of course it's yours." Elenore looked at Susan then her mother.

Susan beamed. "Thank you." She said politely.

Meg slightly kicked Madlax with the side of her foot to get her attention. "Okay sweetie, it's time for bed. Your Aunt Madlax will take you to bed and I'll be up there soon."

Madlax caught the cue and picked up Susan. "I'll tell you a bedtime story. Would you like that?"

"Sure..." Susan said as Madlax carried her up the stairs.

Once Susan was out of earshot Meg turned to Elenore. "Walter wouldn't let her have anything other than the basics and he prevented Gary from giving her anything. It was a small miracle he let her have the teddy bear. Everything else she has is at my house." Meg said looking up the stairs.

"That's one thing that's definitely going to change." Elenore said looking up as well and with a little anger directed at Walter in absentia.

"There's dinner in the kitchen. I've got to go tuck Susan in." Meg said looking at Margaret and Vanessa before going up. Elenore noticed the look her mom gave.

"Thanks mom."

When Meg was out of earshot she turned to Margaret and Vanessa. "I assume you two want to talk to me about something. Something private I gather." Elenore said noticing the concerned looks on their faces. "If it's about what the note said; I thought I explained all that."

"It's not about that." Vanessa answered.

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"It's a few things..." Margaret added.

"Well...go on." Elenore said trying to get either of them to get to the point.

"You remember Monday night when we saw that image of your grandma dying. You said you were sorry. Watching your grandma die like that reminded you of when your grandpa died right in front of you. Until that night you never said anything about it. I wanted to say something but I was in a bit of a shock myself that night." Margaret said knowing that what she was saying would anger Elenore, so she braced herself.

"Yes I do and if this is another "why didn't you tell me?" May I remind you on how long it took you to tell me the truth about father? Do you have any idea how painful it was watching him die and not being able to do anything about? And why are you bringing this up in the first place?" Elenore responded angrily with tears forming in her eyes.

"We saw a vision of you confronting Walter and Altena alone, and then some explosion happened. This is why we are worried." Margaret said inwardly kicking herself. In less than a week she had seen Elenore cry more than she had known her to do so and she had been the cause of some of it.

"And because we talked to him...while you were out his spirit appeared and we had a brief conversation. This was no vision of the past. Though he did show Margaret and Meg what happened in that room. I can understand why you didn't tell Margaret. But I helped you with the funeral arrangements, why didn't you tell me that he died in front of you?" Vanessa said taking over from Margaret.

"Then what would you have done back then Vanessa? Feel sorry for me? What?" Elenore retorted, her voice a bit louder than usual.

"Please don't use that tone with me Elenore. To be honest I don't know what I would've done. This brings me to the other point I wanted to talk to you about."

"And that is?"

"We want to know the truth. Back in Gazth-Sonika when those soldiers confronted you, you could've easily taken their weapons but you didn't. And you got shot, and if it wasn't for you hearing Margaret you would've just died right there. And from where your wounds were you could've stopped the bleeding long enough to get some medical help."

Elenore was going to reply but Margaret grabbed her and looked at her straight in the eyes, her own beginning to tear. "I know what I saw in your mind. You used the soldiers to commit suicide didn't you?! Why Elenore? Why did you want to die? Was it because of your grandpa? Was it because of Walter? What was it!?" Margaret asked gripping Elenore's arms tightly.

Elenore winced in pain as Margaret didn't realize the Torc increased her strength. "Margaret please let go, you're hurting me."

"Not until you tell me the truth!"

"Please Miss Margaret, let Elenore go." An elderly man's voice came from behind Margaret. As she saw who was behind Margaret, Elenore's eyes widened in total surprise.

Margaret let go of Elenore and stepped aside next to Vanessa.

"You summoned him didn't you?" She whispered.

"We should've done this instead of confronting her like we did." Vanessa replied in the same whisper.

"Grandpa? Is that really you?" Elenore asked wondering if she was seeing things.

"Yes Elenore, it's me or at least my spiritual form. I can see and hear you but I don't know if I can touch. Answer my question young lady; are you going to act like when you confronted Mistress Anna?"

"No sir. In my defense I was very upset with her for what she did."

"Understood. Now I believe your sister asked you some questions, I too would like to hear the answers." Elenore bowed her head in shame. "I'm afraid my answers will disappoint you grandpa."

"We're not asking you so we can judge you. We do care about and love you. Please answer."

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"Yes grandpa, I could've taken their weapons away even if I didn't want to kill. But I didn't and the results speak for themselves. I was too much of a coward to take my own life so I had strangers do it for me."

"You shouldn't call yourself a coward, if anything you're the most fearless person I've met, even if you are stupid." Madlax chimed in from the stairs where she sat.

"You're the one who told me, I would die if I followed you into Calistdale. To be honest, I didn't care but I did want to find Margaret first or die trying."

"I would like to know why you wanted to hurt yourself." John asked Elenore.

"It's a bit complex grandpa. I do want to know two things before I answer."

"Why did you tell me that my mom was dead? And why didn't you tell me that Margaret was my sister?"

John bowed his head in shame. "I made a couple mistakes; I thought your mother was condoning your uncle's actions and I wanted to protect you. All I did instead was make you vulnerable. As for telling you about Miss Margaret being your sister; I was asked by your father not to tell. He had a letter addressed to Margaret to be given to her on her twentieth birthday that revealed the secret."

"Thank you grandpa. To answer the question of why I wanted to die; combined with the abuse I received, your death and mom's supposed death, the assault I endured, the loss of my child, and the verbal abuse I suffered from others over the years, the only things that kept me going were; Margaret, Vanessa and the promise I made to you. In Gazth-Sonika I got pushed over the edge when I saw the only other friend I had in this world lying dead on the ground and my heart broke. After that I didn't care if I died but I did want to find Margaret first. - Elenore replied as tears fell down her cheek. - So now you know."

Hearing Elenore's answer, Vanessa surmised that they had unintentionally may have gone too far.

Elenore tried to keep her dignity as she wiped her eyes.

"Would you make another promise for me Elenore?"

"What is it?"

"Promise me that you won't try to hurt yourself or by proxy again."

"Yes grandpa. I promise and I'm sorry that you had to even say it."

"That is all I needed to hear. Good bye Elenore...we will be watching over you and we love you..." John said as he faded away.

"Good bye Grandpa..." Elenore said in bittersweet tone then after he was gone she looked at Margaret and Vanessa with a crossed look on her face. Elenore took some deep breaths before speaking.

"I understand that the vision you saw concerned you and while I appreciate you wanting help me, what I just said to my grandpa I wasn't ready to talk about. So unless there's an emergency or another vision or a spirit appears I don't want to hear another word from either of you for the rest of the evening."

Elenore said, trying to keep her temper in check as she grabbed the bags and began to go up the stairs stopping long enough to say to an alarmed Madlax. "Didn't you say you like helping stupid people?"

Elenore said in a matter of fact tone barely managing a grin.

"I do, but I won't hold it against you. By the way Duvie has your dinner in the kitchen and she sent me to tell you." Madlax replied with a slight smirk. "Thanks Madlax, you know in some respects you're smarter than me." Elenore replied with a slight smirk of her own as she continued up the stairs.

Madlax remained on the stairs until Elenore was definitely out of earshot. Then she went to Margaret and Vanessa. "That could've gone a lot better..." Vanessa said as Madlax approached.

"Before either of you ask if I used the Torc; I didn't. Maybe I should've but I didn't want to misuse its power and I don't want to lose her again especially now that she's..." Margaret said to no one in particular.

"I know you didn't, other than unintentionally almost crushing her arms. I think we should've just told her about the vision and asked her grandfather for help. "

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“What’s done is done. Just give her some space and she’ll be fine...I guess.” Madlax said trying to lighten the mood after that tense scene.

Margaret tilted her head. “You’re right, but I still feel bad about it though. She had a smile on her face when she came in.”

“So what happened?” Vanessa asked Madlax.

Madlax told of what had happened on the way to Paris, noting that she enjoyed her first train ride. Then she talked about Elenore and her shopping spree/ sightseeing tour in Paris.

“Oh see, while we were worried sick about you two you were tromping around Paris.” Vanessa joked but she was happy that even with the excuse of “getting birthday presents” Elenore and Madlax had a good time.

“You know after this is all over. Why don’t we all take a trip somewhere?” Margaret asked feeling a little better.

“Sounds good, but we have one slight problem.” Vanessa replied.

“What’s that?” Madlax asked, wondering what the problem was now.

“We don’t know the ritual used to summon Europa. I don’t think there’s any written copy of it.” Vanessa answered.

“Let’s sleep on it tonight and we all can brainstorm for a solution in the morning.” Margaret said as she tried to muffle a yawn.

“I’ll look over the book we got from Dr. Tudor maybe there’s a clue somewhere in there.” Vanessa said.

“I’m going to take a nap before my shift as well.” Madlax said looking up the stairs.

Elenore put her bags in her bedroom then she checked on Susan. Susan was still awake when Elenore came in.

“What’s wrong? Not used to sleeping in a strange bed?”

“Yes.” Susan faintly replied.

“Once grandma’s house is fixed we’ll go there.”

“Why does it need to be fixed?” Susan asked wondering why the house was broken.

“Something got broken and it needs to be fixed.” Elenore fibbed not wanting to upset her child.

“Why can’t I go back to my home? Does it need to be fixed too?” Susan asked. That question shocked Elenore but from her statement she got the impression that Susan understood what was happening. It wouldn’t have been surprised her if Susan saw domestic violence.

Elenore struggled for an answer. How could she say that the house she lived in was covered in blood and bullet holes? How could she ask why she wanted to go back to where that monster of a father lived?

Then Elenore heard a voice. At first she thought it was “Alice” but it was hers with an Irish accent.

“*It’s all she knows.*” The voice said and Elenore figured it was the Goddess of the ring talking to her.

“I’m sorry, you can’t go back there. You’re going to be staying with grandma and me from now on.”

Elenore replied at last.

“Okay...” Susan said.

“Don’t you like living with grandma?” Elenore asked.

“Yes, but I don’t get to stay very long, only when daddy and Gary are done with work.” Susan said.

Elenore didn’t know if Gary was in Echo or that “work” implied sex.

“Well that’s going to change sweetie. Go to sleep, okay. Good night.” Elenore said kissing Susan on her forehead.

“Night mommy.”

“Night sweetie.” Elenore said as she left the room.

Then she headed to the kitchen. A plate of pasta was sitting on the table for her. Meg was also at the table when Elenore came in.

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"Sorry I took so long. Susan is having trouble sleeping. How are you mom?" Elenore asked sitting down but not going for the fork.

"I was about to ask you the same question."

"Do you want to go first or shall I?" Elenore asked.

"Your grandfather and I had a long talk. Yes I gave him an earful. And yes I saw the room where he died. Judging from the look on your face I take it that your conversation with Margaret and Vanessa wasn't a pleasant one."

"No it wasn't. I know they love me and they're concerned for me and Elsa but they dragged up something I wasn't ready to deal with just yet."

"I understand. Oh by the way Roy was by earlier. He gave me the paperwork and the word that Emily could see you."

"If she's as good as you say she is then I'm in good hands."

"If she can handle Valk, she can handle just about anyone. Eat before your dinner gets cold." Meg said with a slight grin.

"Alright. I'll take a look at the paperwork after dinner unless you're taking custody of her. "

"No, I think you'll have a better chance than me of keeping her."

"Right..." Elenore said between bites.

"So how did that other conversation go? All I got out of Madlax was how she enjoyed the train ride, some bimbo named Mireille, and the sights she saw in Paris."

"I bought Margaret's birthday gifts, plus the doll I gave to Susan. Madlax wanted to see the Eifel Tower so we went there before we came back. As for that conversation...it's going to take a while. We went to the Goddesses throne room to talk."

"It's okay; you don't have to tell me if you don't want to." Meg said not wanting to force an answer out of her.

"I don't mind telling what I can. There are some things I can't talk about just like you can't on some things."

"Alright...I understand." Meg replied in understanding.

Between bites of pasta Elenore talked about the conversation between Kirika and her. When she got to Walter's name her eyes grew wide as she saw a pair of books. The sound of the fork hitting the plate combined with her mother getting out the chair and coming towards her snapped her out of the vision.

"Elenore, are you all right?!" Meg said apprehensively.

"I'm fine mother. I just got a vision just now."

"Of what?" Meg asked wondering what this vision was.

"Could you please go get grandma's journal and great grandpa's journal?"

"Okay, is there something in them that we missed before?"

"Yes, there is. I'll point it out when I find it."

"Alright." Meg said walking out of the kitchen leaving Elenore with a cross look on her face as she was putting the pieces together.

When Meg came with the books Elenore had finished and put the dish in the sink.

"Here they are. I still don't get what your great grandfather has in relation with your grandmother's journal." Meg said putting the books on the table.

"Thanks mom." Elenore said first picking up her great grandfathers journal and turning to the page where Europa had cursed Peter Burton.

Then she looked through her grandmother's journal and with a "ah ha" found what she was looking for. She pointed out a journal entry dated nine months before she was shot.

"Walter came up to me and asked me why we serve the Burton's. I showed him his very great grandfather's journal. I pointed out passages from it as we went through it. He paid close attention to the entry about this Europa woman. I highly doubt it was a goddess; it was probably a metaphor for

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something else. Walter then asked why we couldn't have been nobles. That I couldn't answer. I did ask him why he was asking these questions. He told me that the other teens were looking down on him because he was Master Richard's servant. All I could do was; tell him of his duty to the Burtons, he didn't seem too pleased and I made him drop the subject."

"This explains why he was mad at the Burtons unless...I mean, why throw away potential control of the Burton fortune after Anna and Richard died, by becoming Margaret's and yours legal guardian?"

"The answer is right here mom." Elenore said pointing to the line where Europa pronounced her curse.

"He wanted to be a noble. And when he found out that you were pregnant with me, he got jealous that I would be a noble instead of him. That's the real reason why he hates me. I have something he couldn't ever have."

"What a stupid man..." Margaret said from the entry of the kitchen.

"I have to agree with you Margaret. I'm sorry that I snapped at you and Vanessa earlier."

"We deserved that; I wanted the answer so badly that I forgot about your feelings or if you were ready to tell. I'm sorry about that and I feel bad because I made you cry. I've been doing that a lot this week." Margaret responded looking down at the floor.

"No, not as much as some other people have. Unlike him, I know your heart is in the right place.

Speaking of him, as Mr. Johansson said, there will most likely be a trial and I will be called as a witness. I feel it would be better if I temporary moved out. I don't want you caught up in this mess that this will cause. Also, I need some space to get my thoughts straightened out and I think you need it as well."

Margaret looked at Elenore mulling over what she had said then she answered. "I know you want to spend time with your mother and your daughter as well and I understand. I was going to suggest that we do that. I want us to see each other with smiles on our faces. As for protecting me, thank you for thinking of me but you're my sister and I'm not going to sit in a corner and do nothing. He destroyed our family out of petty jealousy so when the legal proof of you being my sister comes I want you to claim it! Don't give him or the people who've called you a "gold digger" the satisfaction that you didn't claim it, out of fear of hurting me. I will be at your side when you need me, just like you have when I needed you." Margaret said with a determined smile on her face. Elenore got up from the chair and hugged Margaret. "Thank you Margaret." She said then she let go.

Margaret had the feeling that Elenore had something else to say. "You're welcome. What's wrong?"

"I do have to confront Altena but not to kill her. I have to ask her a couple of things and then leave."

"Did the note say that?" Margaret asked remembering the vision.

"Yes it did and I know where you're going with this. That's why I'm not going alone. I'm bringing Madlax with me in case he does show up. If they want to kill each other but who am I to stop them but I do want my answers first."

Margaret was relieved that Elenore was bringing Madlax with her. She was curious what the note said, but she understood that she might never know. "When do you have to confront her?"

"Tomorrow afternoon. Plus the note said to expect another attack on the mansion, but it doesn't say by whom or when."

Margaret wasn't really surprised, from what she had learned both Infant and the Soldats were on the ropes due to the war and their own infighting. So she figured one or the other would made a grab for the artifacts.

"Shouldn't we tell Madlax and Vanessa plus Miss Jorg?" Margaret asked wondering what they should do.

"Well, yes we should."

Meg stood up and both of them looked at her. "Get everybody into the living room; if we're going to be attacked again we need a plan."

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"You know, I'm really getting sick and tired of these criminals attacking our home. I think it's time that we taught them that our family shouldn't be trifled with." Elenore said exiting the kitchen.

"I couldn't agree more." Margaret said as she followed Elenore. They heard Meg using her cell phone as she went to the living room.

When Margaret and her were out of earshot of her mother Elenore stopped and turned around to face Margaret.

"What's wrong Elenore?" Margaret asked wondering why Elenore had stopped and turned to face her.

"You're awfully calm about this Margaret."

"To be honest, I'm scared. I'm scared that somebody I care about will get hurt or killed. I really don't want to lose Vanessa or you again. But I'm not going to back down either. With Madlax, your mother and Miss Jorg I'm sure we can come up with a good defense."

"I'm scared as well. I know I have to kill again. But if I don't, somebody will die. It saddens me that we are going to have more blood on our hands."

"You're not alone...sorry but I really can't think of anything else to say."

"It's okay, neither can I..." Elenore said and then she turned around walking toward the bedrooms.

When they were all in the living room Elenore explained the situation as much as she knew. Then they discussed options and what they could do. For the next few hours they prepared the mansion for what they all knew was a siege. They closed off the East wing from the rest of the house, barricaded the windows, set magical booby traps in the bedrooms, checked the emergency generators, and planted anti-personnel mines from the armory in the back and sides of the mansion (the front was covered in stone.). Then they made sure that everything in the West wing was working, did a little cleaning up and Elenore brought a cranky Susan to the West wing. They hoped that they could force the attackers into attacking the front of the mansion and stall them until help arrived.

After they had all done what they could do they went to bed in the West wing though Margaret and Elenore felt a little uncomfortable not sleeping in their own beds. Meg, Madlax and Limelda took shifts watching. Before Madlax went on her shift, Elenore handed her the note that she had gotten with the other note. When she got a chance she opened it and read it. She was a bit surprised by who had written the note.

Madlax,

I apologize for the bluntness of this note and for Mireille's comments earlier. But this is urgent. You must go with Elenore tomorrow when she confronts Altena. There are three other things you MUST do before either of you set foot in the Manor. First: set your cell phone's timer for fifteen minutes, when Elenore reaches Altena activate the timer. Don't worry, you will have ample opportunity to do both. Second: tell Elenore the phrase "love can kill but hatred never saved anyone." (If you must show her the letter) She'll understand what it means.

Third: make sure she doesn't shoot Altena or Walter.

Signed,

Kirika

Madlax put the note in her pocket and set her timer for fifteen minutes. She had no reason to doubt Kirika but she would rather be safe than sorry. Besides, she reasoned she might not get a chance if they were going to confront Altena. Madlax stared up at the sky to see the blue and red moons high and full in the night sky and reflected on what tomorrow would bring.