

## Chapter 19. The Downpour begins

Mireille sat in the far corner of the diner away from the windows. She had made it there with a couple of minutes to spare. Her cell phone rang. She answered and recognized the voice as the man from Badgis' place. "*Could this be Walter?*" Mireille thought to herself.

"Listen carefully, the meet has been compromised. See the two men in suits sitting at the counter."

Mireille glanced to see the two men sitting at the counter sipping tea. "Good so here's what you do. So walk out of the diner and turn right. Walk to the end of the street and look for my car. Go now!"

The man hung up. Mireille left the money for her tea and casually walked out the diner. She turned right and began to walk down the street. There was no traffic and no other people. She heard footsteps behind her. She pulled out her compact mirror and used it to see the two men from the diner were following her.

She quickened her pace and the men did the same while drawing their guns. Mireille had to fight against every instinct to draw her gun but she remembered Kirika's warning. "*Whatever you do don't draw your gun.*"

Putting trust in Kirika's words she began to sprint down the sidewalk the men in close pursuit. As they began to aim their pistols, in quick succession they both fell to the ground with a bullet to the head. As Mireille approached the corner a green El Dorado sped up to her with the front passenger side door open. "Get in!" The man shouted and she practically leapt in and they sped off.

"Sorry about this, Enfant caught wind of our operation and they sent those two to intercept you. What happened to your partner?" The man asked. Mireille began to have suspicions about the man.

"Your name wouldn't happen to be Walter by any chance?" Mireille asked in return.

"Yes, my name is Walter. I would like to know how you know that considering neither me nor Badgis gave my name." Walter asked.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you." Mireille replied.

"Trust me, after what I saw tonight I would believe just about anything. So tell the tale if you please." Walter responded.

Mireille told of the black feathers and the silver ring with the bird on Kirika's finger.

"*I guess Meg was right, those artifacts are powerful.*" Walter thought to himself.

"So where is she now?" Walter asked.

"I don't know she disappeared before we supposed to meet with you. I have a feeling you know more than you let on." Mireille replied.

"Let's put it this way, we may have a common enemy Miss Bouquet. Does the name Altena ring a bell? She's the one who put the hit out on you and your partner. If you don't believe me you take a look at the data right there." Walter said pointing to a small pile of papers next to him. Mireille looked at them and was shocked. There in black and white were Altena's orders for the sanctioning of Kirika and herself.

"*She fell in that pit of lava; then again we didn't see her go into the lava. I should've known just by seeing Chloe. Damn! That explains a lot.*" Mireille thought to herself. "So why are you interested in these files?" Mireille asked when they got to a stop light.

"That bitch shot my mother in cold blood. Drugged my niece and killed my grand niece. That file has the medical information I need so I can reverse the conditioning. I see you have two files."

"There were two files with the same name so we took both. The women in these files are related."

"Thanks. Yes one is my mother and other is..."

"Your niece...are you a Soldat?"

"No I'm not. A long time ago my mother was one half of Noir. Something happened to her partner and she ran. It took twenty years for the Soldats to find her. Now they've dug their claws into my niece."

### Third Moon Rising

Mireille was stunned yet again. It would explain Altena's interest in Walter's niece and why she had Chloe following them. *"Elenore was supposed to be the fourth sapling..."* Mireille remembered.

"You and I should have a talk."

"Let me find a safe spot and we'll talk."

*"You'll find him to be a great ally..."* Mireille remember Kirika's words. *"He's bent on going after Altena. If he wants to kill her...fine with me. A win-win for me..."* Mireille thought to herself.

An hour later outside the Burton Mansion Badgis and Vanessa were sitting in his car.

"Thanks Badgis for dropping me off, but couldn't we have waited for Walter?"

Badgis had a concerned look on his face. "Something's happened; Walter should've come back or gave us a call. I hate when he goes silent like this."

"Are you working for Nafrece Intelligence too?" Vanessa asked a bit surprised.

"Officially I'm a computer science professor on retainer for Nafrece Intelligence. Unofficially I'm a member of Echo."

Vanessa was surprised but not entirely. She knew he was part of an "underground resistance" that was fighting against *Enfant*. "Why tell me this?"

Badgis looked Vanessa square in the eye and answered. "Because like it or not Vanessa; you're in deep, not as deep as your friend Elenore but deep enough."

Vanessa had a concerned look on her face. Badgis in an assuring tone said. "Don't worry Walter isn't going to put a bullet in your head or something. Knowing him he'll mostly put you on "retainer" status or have you join Echo outright." Then Badgis grumbled. "But he loves putting on a "show"."

"Was Meg a part of Echo too?"

Badgis was about to answer when his cell phone went off.

Badgis answered. "Hello."

After a few seconds he spoke again. "Where have you been? We're in front of Burton Mansion."

Badgis nodded and gave a few "Uh-huhs." "Do you want me to stick around?"

After a brief silence Badgis spoke before he hung up. "Could you please send someone to check my place out, just in case?"

Badgis smiled as he heard his answer. "Thanks, I'll talk to you later."

Then he turned to Vanessa. "Walter said he'll be back at the mansion in twenty minutes. He's got what he needed."

Briefly looking at the mansion she responded. "Well that's good. I better get in before they start getting worried."

"Okay, you take care and stay safe. Oh, could you tell Elenore I liked her tacos. They're better than the place down the street from my house." Badgis said with a smile as Vanessa was beginning to get out of the car.

"I will and you stay safe as well." Vanessa said as she closed the car door.

As Badgis drove off Vanessa looked forlornly at the mansion. What she now knew saddened her. Walter told her of his mother's murder and her connection to the Soldats. *Enfant* once had its claws in Margaret and now the Soldats had theirs in Elenore. Vanessa wondered if any of them (herself included) would live through this. Vanessa heard movement behind her; she quickly spun around to see Nakhli. But Nakhli was injured and covered with small cuts and a huge gash in her side. She had done her best to stop the bleeding. Vanessa looked at her in shock from what she had heard about Nakhli she was hard to injure. The fact that she was heavily injured said about the fight she was in.

"Hello Vanessa Rene. Pardon my appearance, but I must speak with Elenore Baker." Nakhli said in a pained voice.

"Let's get you inside first and somebody take a look those wounds." Vanessa said as she rapidly approached.

### Third Moon Rising

"I will...be fine..." Nakhl began but she began to lose consciousness and Vanessa caught her.

The doors to the mansion opened and Madlax came flying out.

"Madlax help me get Nakhl inside!" Vanessa said urgently.

Madlax was surprised to see Nakhl injured, never mind in the condition she was in. The pair brought Nakhl inside.

"Margaret get Ellis now!" Madlax shouted up the stairs, Madlax heard a faint "right..." before she heard footsteps.

"Who's Ellis? We need to call an ambulance." Vanessa said in while trying to make Nakhl comfortable.

"Trust me on this Vanessa." Madlax replied as they heard footstep racing down the stairs.

Ellis and Margaret rushed to them. The Bracelet glowed briefly and then stopped.

"Can you heal her Ellis?" Margaret asked.

Ellis smiled as she laid her hands on Nakhl and her wounds instantly healed.

"That's amazing!" Vanessa said with astonishment.

The Bracelet spoke through Ellis. "Ah about time you showed up." Then Ellis took off the Bracelet and grabbed Vanessa's wrist and placed the Bracelet on her wrist.

Vanessa stood there briefly as flood of information hit her all at once.

"Vanessa, are you alright?" Margaret asked with concern.

"Actually, I'm fine. Thank you Margaret." Vanessa said to Margaret then turning to Ellis. The Bracelet spoke through Vanessa. "Thank you Ellis for bearing the bracelet this far. As I promised, you and your loved ones will be free from your enemies." Vanessa then placed her hand upon Ellis' head and she began to glow. "Safe journey and Bright Blessings Child of Flowers." Ellis smiled as the tears flowed down her cheeks. Margaret hugged her in comforting embrace.

Elenore and Meg were in Elenore's room packing a suitcase.

"Sweetie, you and I are going to have to do some shopping." Meg said as she looked through Elenore's closet and seeing her high school uniform, a teal dress and great many maid's uniforms.

"*Father, were you trying to mold Elenore into mom?*" Meg sadly thought as she saw the number of uniforms.

Elenore was going to reply but she was interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Enter." Elenore said and Nadie came in.

"Hi Nadie, what can I do for you."

"I wanted to say goodbye before you left. I'm not really good at these kinds of things...especially with..."

Elenore hugged Nadie warmly. "Thank you Nadie. You two take care and contact me once in a while. "

Elenore wrote her email and cell phone number on a piece of paper and handed to Nadie.

"Thanks, it's been nice meeting the both of you." Nadie said trying to hold back the tears. Meg hugged Nadie as well.

Another knock at the door interrupted them. "Enter." Elenore said wondering who it was.

Margaret stuck her head in long enough to say. "Elenore, could you come to the living room. Nakhl has some news."

"Did Miss Nakhl find Alice?" Elenore asked.

"Yes and no. I'll let Nakhl explain it. Oh by the way I loaned her some clothes...hers were well..."

"I'll be right there Margaret." Elenore replied wondering what Margaret meant by that answer.

Elenore, Margaret, Meg and, Nadie all went to the living room.

Nakhl was sitting down sipping her tea when they came in the room. She placed the cup on the saucer and rose from her seat. They all noticed that Nakhl was wearing some of Margaret's clothing.

"Miss Nakhl are you all right?" Elenore asked wondering what had happened.

"I'm sorry Elenore Baker that I don't have any good news to share. I had finally found Alice, but I was interrupted."

### Third Moon Rising

"By what?" Madlax asked coming into the room.

Nakhl described Chloe which Limelda and Madlax recognized. Nakhl told in graphic detail the three way battle between Alice, Chloe, and herself.

"At least we know her name now." Margaret said glancing at Elenore who was now deep in thought.

"Apparently I either knew this person or have heard of her. Alice seems to know her, there's a good chance on a subconscious level I knew her. Margaret said you have an idea Miss Nakhl, may I ask what it is?"

Nakhl smiled. "I assume that you know the link between Madlax and Margaret Burton. So I was wondering if you had the same kind of link with Alice."

Elenore thought for a bit and then answered. "Don't I need the "Gift" or something like that?"

"Normally yes, but with the way Alice brought into this world there might be that chance. With your permission I would like to try something."

"Well...if it would help find Alice faster, I'll agree. What do you want me to do?"

"Sing."

"Sing?"

"Yes sing."

Elenore felt a little nervous and it showed. Margaret sent unseen calming waves towards Elenore.

"I'm not used to singing in front of other people."

"If you wish you can close your eyes."

"Okay, is there any song you want me to sing?"

"Please sing *Canta per me*." Nakhl noticed Elenore's eyes light up; at least this was a positive sign.

"Alright I will." Elenore closed her eyes and began to sing. Nakhl held out her palm towards Elenore.

For the next couple of minutes everyone listened to Elenore sing. When she was finished she opened her eyes and saw her mother wipe a tear from her eye, Nakhl smiling and the rest of the group astonished.

"Elenore that was beautiful! How come I've never heard you sing?" Margaret asked wondering what other talents Elenore had hidden from her.

"I sang when I was alone in the house. It helped me when I was cleaning or doing the laundry."

"Even with your memory loss, you remembered that song."

"What do you mean Miss Nakhl?" Elenore asked a bit surprised.

"When I found Alice earlier she was singing that exact same song. It seems some nun taught you that song. The memory of the song remained. I assume that song is your favorite."

"Yes...yes it is. For some reason I remember the words but not by who taught me it." Elenore responded and a slight frustrated frown.

"That song is the link between Alice and yourself Elenore Baker."

"I see, but how does that help us? I don't have the "Gift"."

"I know, but there's a way you can detect Alice."

"Let us go to another room and I'll show you a way to do so."

"Alright, we'll go to the kitchen." Elenore said as she led Nakhl to the kitchen.

When they left Margaret's expression saddened.

"What's wrong Margaret?" Vanessa asked.

"Have you ever heard her sing Vanessa?" Margaret asked.

"No, but I have seen her do ballet a few times. But every time I see her she acts as if she did something wrong."

Margaret didn't want to sound like she was whining. "I wonder why she didn't tell us." Margaret asked wondering what other talents Elenore had. *"Did she hide it in fear of making me feel or look bad? Did my mother do something to make her hide it?"* Margaret sadly thought to herself.

Vanessa sadly looked at Margaret and said nothing.

### Third Moon Rising

Nadie stood silently nearby the doorway. She enjoyed Elenore's singing but she got the feeling there was more to this and it was family business. She had enough to worry about. She was deep in thought when Ellis got up and approached her.

"Nadie, the Bracelet is gone." Ellis said with a smile.

"Where did it go?" Nadie asked in surprise not knowing that Vanessa now wore it.

"I have it now Nadie, I'm Vanessa Rene by the way." Vanessa said with a smile.

"Nice to meet you, I've heard a lot about you from Margaret, Madlax, and Elenore." Nadie responded with a grin.

"Oh I can imagine what Elenore said about me." Vanessa said in a mock pout trying to hide a grin.

In the kitchen Elenore turned to NakhI. "Miss NakhI, I really don't think singing a song is going to find Alice." Elenore said in a frustrated tone.

NakhI understood Elenore's frustration at not having the "Gift" and she patiently responded. "I'm quite aware of that, all I need you to do is concentrate on that song. You can sing or hum out loud if you wish as long you focus on it."

"Any particular reason why?" Elenore asked still a bit frustrated.

"Do you want the truth?"

"Yes."

"I do need your assistance. Allow me explain further; by you focusing on the song I can use you as divining rod to find Alice. Plus if Chloe does show up, your presence may throw her off, that and I have faith in your melee skills if it should come to that." NakhI said quite plainly. Elenore had to agree with NakhI on this; she didn't have the "Gift" and NakhI did, plus it was nice to hear NakhI say something about her skills. Also she wanted to know this Chloe as well and ask her a few questions if possible.

"Thank you Miss NakhI for the truth. You do have a good idea and if it finds Alice I'm in. Plus I would like to meet this Chloe as well... We should start tomorrow; perhaps we can ask my mother to help out."

"You're welcome, Elenore Baker. As for your mother I don't see why not. Could you please focus on the song?"

"Oh I see..." Elenore said guessing that NakhI needed to do fine tuning or attuning herself to her.

Elenore focused on the song, quietly humming it with NakhI holding her outstretched palm out.

After a few minutes NakhI stopped. "You can stop for now Elenore Baker."

Elenore stopped humming. "Could you detect Alice?"

"I've sensed her presence but it's a bit faint. My guess she's far from us. I didn't get an idea where she is but it seems she's looking for something or someone."

"Maybe that nun...oh I almost forgot Miss NakhI a package addressed to you came earlier today before we were attacked. It's from Gazth-Sonika."

"Please show me this package."

Elenore took NakhI to where the package was. NakhI looked at it deeply and smiled. She opened it casually and read the letter attached with some concern.

"Is everything alright Miss NakhI?"

"This letter is from Lady Quanzitta. She is informing me that I may not be able to return to Gazth-Sonika for quite some time."

"Why may I ask?" Elenore asked a bit puzzled.

"Lady Quanzitta is moving our people to a safer location, the storm is about to hit Gazth-Sonika."

"Is she worried about a flood?" Elenore asked not getting what NakhI was getting at.

"I have a feeling that it will become clear quite soon." NakhI said then she looked into the box and smiled and quietly said "Thank you Lady Quanzitta.". For with in the box were NakhI's daggers.

She concealed her weapons and folded the note and placed in the shirt pocket.

### Third Moon Rising

Elenore and Nakhl heard commotion from the living room. Then they heard Margaret run up.

"Elenore! Nakhl! Come quick!" Margaret said in frightened and saddened tone.

The trio raced to the living room where the television on a news story. India had declared war on Gazth-Sonika and a full scale war was underway.

"The storm has arrived..." Nakhl said and Elenore looked in horror as she got what Quanzitta and Nakhl meant.

"Why would they do that?" Nadie asked a bit confused.

"I can answer that one." Walter said and everybody focused their attention on him.

"Well...Walter..." Meg said in an impatient tone.

"With the data which we discovered; we found out that India is a major Asian stronghold for the Soldats and considering that Enfant is...you do the math." Walter replied.

"So the Soldats are using this war as a cover to get at Enfant in Gazth-Sonika, am I correct?" Limelda asked with a bit of anger in her tone.

"Afraid so and it gets worse..." Walter answered in a serious tone.

"How worse Boss man?" Three-Speed asked.

"There are reports of mob violence breaking out all over Europe and the America's."

"Looks like the Soldats are making all out attack on Enfant. I can imagine the havoc on the net right now." Three-Speed said referring to Badgis.

"Don't worry that's being covered. Three-Speed I need you to hit on your contacts and see what they know. After I wrap up things here I'll join you all in the field."

"Got it Boss man. Madlax we'll talk later. And Madlax..."

"Yes Three-Speed?"

"Be careful..." Three-Speed said then he quickly left.

"What did you find out Uncle Walter?" Elenore asked apprehensively seeing the two files in Walters' hand.

"This file is your grandma's medical file." Walter said placing an older looking folder on the table.

"This is your file Elenore. It confirms my suspicions; you chemically "conditioned" to a sleeper agent or a "sapling" as it says here. Here's the real sad part; the chemicals used on you caused your child to be born prematurely and she was poisoned on top of that. All at the order of that miserable b... I'm sorry...I..."

"It's okay Uncle Walter; I feel the same way right now." Elenore said with a very angry tone and tears running down her cheeks.

"If she's a sleeper agent, then what are the triggers?" Meg asked.

Walter focused his attention on Meg. "Would you believe a song; it's written down right here and there's another component. A tune from this type of pocket watch." Walter pulled a out picture of a silver pocket watch with two women holding swords.

"Oh my God! That's the ..." Meg began.

"I know...Elenore do you have a watch like this in your possession?" Walter asked.

"I'm not sure..." Elenore said not sure if she even had the watch.

Vanessa stretched out her hand and then turned to Margaret. "Margaret, in Elenore's room in the closet on the right side there's a little cubbyhole with a false panel. Open it and you'll find the watch and whatever you do; do not open it. At least until Elenore is safely out of the house and hearing range." Vanessa said.

"Got it." Margaret said as she raced to Elenore's room.

Madlax looked at the song; it was the same one she had heard in her vision!

"Vanessa, I've heard this song before! You know the weird visions I've gotten?"

"Yes, we all thought it was the Torc working through you through Margaret."

"It's the same song the little girl in my vision sang."

### Third Moon Rising

"You know, I have a feeling that little girl may be Alice." Vanessa said thoughtfully.

Elenore looked at the song in the file. "You're right Madlax, it is that same song! So what do we do now?"

"I'm sorry Elenore, you've have to leave for yours and our sakes." Margaret sadly said holding the watch tightly.

"It's alright Margaret...I understand...it just makes finding Alice more imperative."

"I'll go get your bag sweetie, and then we can leave." Meg said sadly.

Walter took the pocket watch and followed Meg. Once they were inside Elenore's room. Meg turned to Walter and asked. "Is it really...that watch?"

Both Meg and Walter looked at the watch, with Walter looking at it a lot more carefully. He took the watch and shoved it under a pillow muffling the sound as he opened it. Walter held his ear closely to the pillow as the tune inside the watch played and then stopped.

"Did you hear anything?" Walter asked without looking at Meg.

"No I didn't. Why did you open it?"

Walter carefully took it out from underneath the pillow and did a closer inspection.

"To answer your question, I needed to check something."

"What? Spit it out already."

Walter showed Meg the writing inside the cover. "To my darling Elenore. Yours forever. Love C."

"Is that mom's watch?!" Meg asked in astonishment.

"Yes it is. Mother showed it to me when father wasn't around in case I ever saw another like it."

"How did Elenore, find never mind get mom's watch?!"

"I'm sure this "Alice" knows. You better take Elenore with you now. I'll contact you if I find out anything else."

"Okay, we'll talk about this later. Leave the watch here Walter...you don't want to get caught with that."

Walter sighed and put the watch in a drawer in Elenore's desk. Meg grabbed Elenore's bag and they both headed out the room.

When they came out Elenore was hugging Ellis and then Margaret. It was evident that mood was somber.

"Okay sweetie, let's go." Meg said to Elenore.

"Alright I'm ready." Elenore replied in a distressed tone.

"Don't worry; you'll be back here before you know it, okay." Meg said trying to cheer Elenore up.

Madlax and Limelda went to see if anyone was watching. When they gave the all clear signal Meg and Elenore went to the car and they drove off.

Margaret forlornly watched from the window as they drove off.

Nadie carefully approached Margaret. "Ellis and I are going to bed...good night Margaret."

Margaret quickly turned around knowing that Nadie was trying to excuse them from the room so she could be alone. "Good night Nadie and Ellis."

Nadie and Ellis went to bed leaving Vanessa and Walter who was leaving. She could understand why he didn't want to be here and didn't take it personally. She could sense he was beating himself up for all what happened and she could sympathize with him. Walter silently left as he merely gave a causal wave good bye. Nakhl had left earlier after watching the news story, she couldn't blame her either. As she said *"the storm has arrived."*

"I don't want to talk about it Vanessa, at least now right now." Margaret said to Vanessa.

"Don't stay up too late Margaret. Okay?"

"Sure..." Margaret said as it began to rain outside.