

### Chapter 23. The raging storm

Altena gazed upon the vineyard with some concern; the last twenty four hours had been downright chaotic. The campaign in Gazth-Sonika was going well at the start but the Galza resistance added their strength to the kingdom army. This meant their forces in that area were bogged down for the foreseeable future. Then Nafrece Intelligence's anti terrorist squads went on a Soldat shooting spree; how they knew where the safe houses were at baffled her. She blamed Enfant or a traitor from another faction. Her sending men to kill Walter Baker head of Echo and his family seemed to divert their attention for now though Walter was unaccounted for. From what little intelligence she received she knew that he was hunting her down! She was miffed but unconcerned; Walter had more or less dug his own grave.

What bothered her was that the entire Soldat council was eliminated in one night, which set off a civil war between factions. Altena gathered what forces she could but they numbered only sixty not counting the twenty nuns she had around her. Another thing that bothered her was that Chloe had not checked in for at least half a day. Where she was annoyed her to no end and she wondered where her wayward "child" went.

After they assimilated Alice back into Elenore they headed back to the hospital. They found out the quickest a DNA test could be finished was eight hours. Even though they knew Susan was Elenore's concrete evidence would still be needed. What they didn't know was while they were gone Susan overheard a couple of talkative nurses talking about her and "mommy".

Margaret asked if Laetitia could be moved into Susan's room. At least they would both have someone the same age (relatively) to keep company and to talk to. This was seen as a good idea, provided Laetitia didn't say anything too odd.

As Margaret went to make the arrangements Elenore and Meg went to Susan's room.

Susan was sitting up holding the one good knee that wasn't in a brace up to her chin. Her head rested on her knee with a look of profound melancholy and uncertainty.

When they came in she looked at them with her eyes.

"Hi sweetie. What's wrong? Are you sad we have to leave?" Meg asked worriedly wondering if today's trauma had caught up to her and she was trying to process it.

Susan looked at Meg morosely then went back to staring at the wall.

Elenore went beside Susan. "What's wrong Susan? You can tell us."

Susan turned her head and looked into Elenore's eyes and asked in a perplexed tone. "Are you really my mommy?"

Elenore was taken aback by the question and she wondered how Susan knew. But she couldn't lie to her; it wasn't fair but she wished she could've broken the news gently to her.

"Yes Susan I'm really your mommy." Elenore answered fearing what Susan's reaction might be.

Susan looked at Elenore then at Meg and back to Elenore. "If you're my mommy and your Aunt Meg's daughter and my daddy is her brother; what does that make me? Is Aunt Meg my grandma?"

"Susan, where did you hear this?" Meg asked trying to keep herself together.

"I overheard the nurses talking about me and mommy. I asked and they gave me weird looks. Why would they do that?" Susan answered beginning to cry.

Elenore and Meg tried to comfort her but she rebuked their advances. Margaret came into the room and walked up to Vanessa who was a little inside the room. "Vanessa what happened?"

"Susan found out that Elenore is her mother and she's really confused and upset."

"I see." Margaret walked up to Susan. She could feel the child's confusion and anguish.

Margaret silently asked the Torc to help her project comfort and love as she approached.

### Third Moon Rising

"What's wrong sweetie? Here, blow your nose." Margaret asked handing Susan a tissue helping her blow her nose. After Susan blew her nose Margaret bent to down to her eye level. "Thank you..." Susan said trying to wipe the tears as she looked at Margaret. Margaret handed her another tissue and wiped her tears. "Why are you so sad? Did what you heard upset you?" Margaret asked.

Susan nodded her head in agreement.

"Well sweetie, I know this is very confusing right now."

"Can you tell me?" Susan asked Margaret in a beseeching tone.

Margaret struggled for an answer then she heard the Torc speak. *"Have faith in the child. She is strong; she will understand what you tell her."*

"This is not going to be easy to hear but it's the truth. You see both your mommy and grandma and you were lied to by your daddy."

"Why did he lie?"

"He wanted to hurt your grandma and your mommy. He did something very bad to your mommy that he shouldn't have done."

"Why did he want to hurt them?"

"He blamed them for something that wasn't their fault. He saw his mommy die and he blamed himself. Over time he passed his anger and sadness on to your grandma and mommy."

"Why?"

"I don't know sweetie. Only he can answer that."

"But if my mommy is Aunt Meg's daughter and my daddy is Aunt Meg's brother and she's my grandma; what does that make me?"

Margaret pondered her words very carefully before speaking and then Margaret let the answer flow.

"That makes you, you. In time when you're ready we'll tell you but for now just know that your mommy and grandma love you very, very much."

Susan thought over what Margaret had said and then gave a slight smile. She hugged Margaret and Margaret hugged her back radiating comfort and love.

When Susan let go she looked at Elenore then back at Margaret and asked.

"Why didn't she tell me?"

"She didn't know how to tell you. She wanted to but she was afraid of telling you the truth might hurt you. She didn't want to hurt you anymore than you all ready were."

Susan turned to Elenore.

"Were you afraid mommy?"

"Yes I was; I didn't want to hurt you. Please understand I love you, okay sweetie." Elenore said in a comforting tone sitting on the bed next to Susan. Susan leaned against Elenore who in turn wrapped a loving arm around Susan.

"Do you want me to stay with you for the night?" Elenore asked.

Susan looked up to her mother and gave a "uh-huh" sound and nestled herself against Elenore.

"I have your teddy bear in the car. Do you want it?" Meg asked feeling a little better over the situation.

"Yes...grandma." Susan replied.

Meg smiled and left the room.

"Oh looks like you two are going to have company." Margaret said as they wheeled Laetitia in.

Susan looked at Laetitia curiously and Laetitia smiled her usual cryptic smile and gave a quick hello.

Susan gave a quick hello in return.

"Elenore do you want anything from the cafeteria before we go?"

"Yes I would, thank you Margaret."

"It was nice meeting you Susan." Margaret said with a smile.

"Thank you Miss...ummm?"

"Margaret. I'm Margaret Burton and that's my little sister Laetitia over there."

### Third Moon Rising

Susan smiled briefly, closed her eyes and leaned up against Elenore's right breast holding her hand. Margaret walked over to Laetitia and leaned in close to her where Susan couldn't hear.

"Remember what we talked about Laetitia..."

"I know..." She replied in a slight pout.

"I want to make sure you remember. Do you want anything?"

"Some vanilla ice cream would be nice please."

"All right." Margaret said to Laetitia then turning to Susan. "Susan do you want anything?"

Susan opened her eyes at the mention of ice cream. "Can I have strawberry ice cream please?"

Susan asked as she looked up to Elenore who gave a nod and a smile.

"Of course sweetie, I'll be right back." Margaret said as she left the room.

Vanessa stepped out to the hall with her. "What's up Vanessa?"

"I noticed what you did."

"Are you upset with it?"

"No, granted you had the Torc to help out but you handled that wonderfully. I'm proud of you Margaret." Vanessa said as she walked with her.

"Thank you. Don't worry about Laetitia. I had a talk with her before I had her brought in."

"You beat me to the punch Margaret. Oh, hello Meg." Vanessa said as they saw Meg approach with a teddy bear.

"Hi, sorry it took so long I had Roy do a bug and tracker sweep before I brought it in here."

"Good idea."

"Well thanks and thank you Margaret. I don't know how you did it but you prevented the situation from getting worse."

"You're welcome."

"Margaret, I'm going to stay with Elenore and Susan."

"I can take her home Meg."

"Thank you both."

"Well, we're getting food from the cafeteria for Elenore and some ice cream for the girls. Is Susan allergic to anything like strawberries?"

"Not at all, she loves those."

"Okay, we'll be right back." Margaret said as Meg went to the room.

Carrossea stared at the lifeless corpse of Douglas Rosenberg sitting in a swivel chair with a bullet hole right between the eyes. "Got too cocky Dougie. Oh sure you can handle ninjas, but... oh well too bad. Hey thanks for the parting gifts. You're not going to need them." He said as he looked over the bodies of several men dressed as ninjas. The funny thing was none of them were Asian. He didn't care as he flicked the lighter and ignited the gas he poured earlier.

"See ya Dougie." He said as he laughed his way out of the house.

Careful not to leave any tracks he got far enough from the house and said in a loud voice.

"Okay I did what you wanted now..." Carrossea didn't get to finish that sentence as he was surrounded by a flurry of black feathers. When the feathers had cleared he found himself standing in front of the Burton Mansion.

"Well thanks who ever you are..." Carrossea said as he looked around and then back at the mansion.