



Third Moon Rising

A GwG crossover fanfic

Bee Train Fan
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This is a fan made work of fiction.

Warning

Third Moon Rising contains scenes of intense violence, adult situations, adult language. Reader discretion is advised.

Bee Train Fan are;

Bocayuki

MartAnime

Noirlax

Bulmafox

Kavi

Koveras

With special thanks to; Fellini 8.5, Untrue Noir and you the reader.

Third Moon Rising

By Bee Train Fan

Prelude 2033

Darkness...

I feel myself floating in darkness...

"I wonder if I died again." I ask myself as floated.

"No. You haven't died, but you came close." A disembodied voice answered.

"That voice...it sounds so familiar."

I try to go to the source of the voice but I find I can't move.

"It's okay just picture yourself reaching out with your hand."

I try picturing reaching with my hand but all I see is the memory of that day twenty one years ago. I couldn't reach her hand then and it seems I can't now.

A slight giggle echoes in the darkness. "I've should've known. I'm sorry. Here let me reach for yours." The voice spoke to me and I felt a warm gentle hand touch mine and then...

I found myself sitting on a bench in the park where I used to play as a little girl. It was quite bright out and I looked to the sky and what I saw stunned me for a moment. There in the sky were three moons; a red moon, a green moon and a blue moon. I've heard Laetitia and Margaret talk about it but since I couldn't see them I wondered if they were imagining it all. I briefly stared at the moons till I was given a much larger surprise. There standing in front of me with her red hair being blown by unseen winds and her green eyes reflecting the moonlight and with that cryptic smile of hers was Laetitia. I leapt from where I was sitting and I hugged her and I stared into those eyes and spoke with shock in my voice.

"Laetitia?! Is that really you? Where have you've been all these years?! We've been worried about you and..." Her finger reached out and pressed my lips so I could not speak.

"I'm sorry I worried you, but it is me and for various reasons I can't divulge where I'm at and where I've been. I only came back...to see you. I heard what happened and wanted to see if you were okay. You were caught in a terrible explosion when the building you were working at was attacked by terrorists. As of now you're in some kind of mold. I'm not really familiar with all this new technology but that's what I've heard the doctors say..."

Laetitia removed her finger from my lips and gave what she said some thought and then I answered her.

“I should’ve known you give an answer like that. As for the mold, well it seems I’m getting a new prosthetic body.” I said sadly figuring that my first prosthetic body was more or less a pile of pseudo meat and scrap from what I could gather that a good portion of it was charred.

“Laetitia, I’m glad you’re here and all. But how are we communicating?” I asked a bit confused realizing that Laetitia didn’t have any cyber wear in her. She smiled with that cryptic smile and answered. “I think you know that answer to that one. I just happen to catch you while you’re still lucid dreaming. In a few moments you’ll be in a VSR from what I’m hearing now. I’m glad you’re all right but I must go now. Goodbye Elenore...”

“LAETITIA WAIT!!” I shouted wanting her to stay a few more moments but I could feel myself waking up in a sense as my conscious went into the Virtual Simulated Reality.

In a virtual field of Helianthus flowers a female anime bunny dressed in maids uniform stood next to a book that was floating head level with her.

As Elenore’s consciousness logged in the VSR the bunny smiled as she appeared.

“Good Afternoon Miss. It is good to see that you are functional.” The bunny said in a cheerful tone.

“Good Afternoon Daisy. Can you tell me how long I’ve been unconscious? And why is my personal VSR being used?” Elenore asked a bit puzzled.

Daisy smiled and answered cheerfully and in the most comforting tone she could muster. “You have been unconscious for eighty hours and forty six minutes prior to your log in to this VSR.

Miss Vanessa brought your VSR from home when she heard you were incapacitated. She felt that you needed something “comforting”.”

Elenore smiled and then pondered on how long she had been unconscious and then she asked Daisy another question.

“I must’ve taken quite a lot of damage. Has my cyberbrain taken damage for me to be unconscious for this long? And what day is it?”

“From what I gather Miss you were buried under some rubble for an estimated time of thirty hours before you were found. You went into autistic mode to save energy, as for damage; no cyberbrain damage has been sustained Miss. To answer your last question Miss, It is July 6th 2033. Local time is 3:26 P.M.” Daisy replied cheerfully as always.

Elenore stared at the book floating near Daisy’s head, smiled and nodded her head to herself.

“I didn’t realize it was close to that time again. It’s been a while since I’ve read that book.”

“Is there new data you wish to add Miss?” Daisy asked.

“No, how long before I fully wake up and can see visitors?”

“In about three hours and forty two minutes till full conscious will be regained Miss.”

Elenore stared at the virtual book and walked over sat down next to Daisy in the virtual flower field, grabbed and opened the book and started to read.

“Well since I have some free time on my hands might as well read...read about those days long past...” Elenore said to herself as she began to read from the virtual book.

End Prelude

Third Moon Rising

Chapter 1.

If I really paid attention to what was going on elsewhere. I’ve would been more prepared for the chaos that came to our doorstep. All this started on July 7th 2012, seven day before Margaret’s twentieth birthday.

We all wanted to put Gazth-Sonika behind us, so we were happy when the civil war ended in a cease fire agreement eight months ago and by some miracle it remained intact.

Elsewhere as we learned later much to our regret that Enfant having failed in what that man was trying to do, a rival group known as Les Soldats took as a sign of weakness and began all out shadow war against Enfant. So in apparent desperation Enfant decided to hunt the artifacts that they though tip the war in their favor, unfortunately for them (and us) Les Soldats found out decided to find them before Enfant did. At the beginning we just took it as an increase of criminal violence not bothering to care as it didn’t affect us. (Another decision I and a few others regret.) That was a year and a day ago this all started, so I decided to document it for my own benefit of what happened...

Taken from the diary of Elenore Baker July 8th 2013

Friday Monday peered onto the screens in front of him, reading the reports from Gazth-Sonikan and European agents. The Soldats were on the move again, trying to get the merchandise before his agents did. He was on their blind side, now. They thought he was dead but the brainless body double he sent to Gazth-Sonika was but a ruse. Madlax did not know what he looked like. She fell for it.

Monday smirked. On the lowest level of this underground fortress, deep in the Amazon basin, not even a nuclear war was a threat to him. It took him many years to complete it but it was worth the effort. There will not be any more setbacks in the plan.

In Nafrece, Elenore awoke two hours before she had to wake Margaret. She cleaned herself up and prepared a clean uniform for the day. She almost forgot to put on the suit of body armor.

She looked sadly at it and wished silently to herself that she wouldn't have to wear such a thing, but recent events in her life necessitated her to do so if she wanted to protect Margaret.

She put on the armor and then her uniform and prepared for her morning duties. Before she left her room she looked at the picture of her as a small child sitting on her grandfather's lap and she smiled. "I'm doing the best I can, Grandfather..." she whispered to herself and went about her routine and was going to wake up Margaret. A few minutes later she woke up Margaret after threatening to use method number three.

Margaret, still sleeping in her bedroom slowly started becoming aware of a familiar voice attempting to wake her up early in the morning. The first two times Elenore comes into the room; what she says sounds more like a very distant and meaningless mumbling to her, easily taken for a dream, which is definitely a much more inviting alternative to a wakeup call.

"Yeah, it's just a dream... I'll just keep sleeping..." she thought to herself, half-asleep.

The third time Elenore enters the room though; some very specific words trigger an immediate response from Margaret: "wake up method number THREE"! She almost immediately gets up, upon hearing those words, trying her best to open her eyes and keep up a convincing enough wake up state.

"I'm awake!" she tries to assure herself, as well as Elenore, by saying it out loud, "Can I go back to sleep now?" she asks with a sleepy voice, still not entirely aware of what's going on.

"No Miss. It's time to get up. You're the one who asked me to wake you early so you could go shopping today. Elenore prepared Margaret's clothing and made sure that she didn't fall asleep while dressing. Then she went and woke Laetitia up and got her ready for the day. Then she went and made breakfast.

"I did? Hmm... Oh right! I don't have to go to university today. Why else would I get up early?" Margaret concluded. After the usual morning routine, struggling to stay awake, she got all set and went downstairs to join Elenore and Laetitia for breakfast.

Margaret really enjoyed having Laetitia with them. She never experienced having a younger sister, so it was a new experience for her, and somewhat of a challenge. Even though it didn't take long for them to familiarize and become strongly attached to each other, it sure put a bit of a pressure on her at times, to improve as a person and be somewhat of a good example for the younger child, but at least she still had Elenore around, which surely made things a lot easier for the both of them.

The course of events in Gazth-Sonika some months ago changed her a bit, and forced her to become a bit more responsible and self aware, but she still felt a bit lost at times, especially when she had the feeling that

Laetitia had a deep understanding of most things, which sometimes surpassed her own. She sure wasn't a regular child, but Margaret couldn't let herself fall behind, for she was determined to improve, still feeling slightly guilty for all the trouble she unintentionally caused to a lot of people, for a long time.

But the end of the civil war finally put an end to that chapter in her life, so Margaret could finally overcome her past and start focusing on the present and future. Today was yet another bright new day ahead! But she was still feeling sleepy, and could hardly hide it, while reaching the breakfast table and taking a seat. Some things just never change.

After serving Margaret and Laetitia, Elenore sat down and joined them for breakfast.

Elenore couldn't help but look at the newest member of her "family". This small child had been with her at the end and was her last memory before waking in a hospital bed in Gazth-Sonika.

Even during her convalescence she was there as was Margaret. Her mind wandered back to that time; She remembered waking up to see Margaret sitting there crying and holding her hand.

Though she was a bit groggy, she could hear her voice clearly. "Elenore you're awake! I'm so sorry for what happened to you. You don't have to say anything. I wanted to apologize and ask for your forgiveness.

I said some terrible things to you, please forgive me."

She squeezed Margaret's hand and smiled the best she could.

"Margaret...you are my family... I...forgive you" She remembered saying, she also remembered drifting back to sleep but not before noticing Laetitia.

Elenore smiled and said; "You..."

"Hello Elenore" Laetitia said to her before she drifted back to sleep.

Elenore....

Elenore....

Elenore snapped back to now to hear Laetitia calling out to her.

"Yes Miss?"

"Are you ok?" Laetitia asked with some concern not usually noticed on a child her age.

Elenore smiled and answered. "Yes Miss. I'm all right thank you for asking. Is there anything you need Miss?"

"No, just asking if you were ok." Laetitia smiled and then looked at Margaret who was half asleep then back at Elenore.

Elenore quietly sighed and smiled. "Miss Margaret please don't fall asleep while eating."

Laetitia giggled at this scene watching Margaret wake up or sleep eating, even she couldn't tell.

Elenore smiled at Margaret. At least some things were back to normal.

On the other side of the world in Gazth-Sonika; Madlax had been staring into the clear night sky out of her run-down Gazth-Sonika apartment for an hour now. She had been waiting for Three-Speed's call for months but the recent cease-fire had really stifled the need for great agents such as her.

Peering back onto the half-eaten hamburger on the table and pondering into the wonderful world of Europe Vanessa described to her, she wondered if she had been ripped off by Three-Speed all these years.

"I wonder if Three-Speed is living the good life with a penthouse in the Bahamas right now." Madlax sighed. "Maybe it's time to take a chance and travel to Europe, yep and some great pasta!" she smiled.

From the new Manor Altena read the reports with some concern. She had figured with Friday Monday eliminated in Gazth-Sonika, Enfant would be easy to crush, but events had proven otherwise. They were interfering with her plans to bring about the Le Grande Retour and THAT was intolerable. She wondered who was leading Enfant now.

Chloe noticed the expression on her face. "Lady Altena what troubles you?" She asked with concern on her face.

"My dear Chloe it appears that those infidels from Enfant are causing some problems."

"Is there anything you wish me to do Lady Altena?" Chloe asked.

Altena smiled "Not at the moment my sweet child. When the time comes I will let you know..."

Despite Limelda's reservations that she go to Europe for a better life, Madlax took her bags and flew into Nafrece. On arrival she found her combat skills and the money she earned amidst the chaos of Gazth-Sonika counted for nothing in this expensive and serene city.

"Luciano, why did you want to live in a place like this? Too peaceful. Oh well at least I can go and do some window shopping" Madlax thought to herself as the leaves whistled in the background.

Madlax gazed through the shops and sprawling cafes with people idly chatting sprinkled with the smell of fresh coffee. Nothing seemed out of sorts except the exorbitant prices and this rather astonished Madlax.

"Wow 300 Yurs for that dress. With that money I could buy enough dresses for a lifetime of fighting in Gazth-Sonika! Oh I'm a poor girl here, I wonder where Margaret Burton is?" She pondered.

As she was about to turn left onto another street, Madlax took an apple from her jacket and closed her eyes to take a bite. In an unusual case of carelessness she bumped into another blonde girl wearing a black mini-skirt and high heels.

"Are you trying to steal my handbag?" the blonde woman sneered with a cold stare.

"I wouldn't steal that! Besides that looks rather cheap" Madlax with her head tilted high.

"You're the cheap one and rather filthy." the blonde woman said quite angrily.

"Aw I am. But you don't have to be so mean about it" Madlax said, clutching the apple near her chest.

Madlax sensed this blonde woman was certainly no ordinary person; she seemed athletic and always had her right hand close to her pink and white handbag. She must have a gun in there; her senses seemed very deadly, sharp and probing.

Suddenly this little Asian girl with black hair wearing a white jacket said rather hurriedly. "Oh sorry, please excuse us. My friend is having a bad day." and the two girls walked off rather suspiciously to an alley across the other side of the road.

Madlax was no fool, she sensed the two girls were being followed and they knew it. The three men in black suits and the sunglasses she caught on the back of her eye were probably trouble.

"Not as peaceful as I thought" Madlax whispered to herself and continued towards downtown as she can see towards the horizon.

The chess pieces were not aligning well. With only two sides on the board, it's not possible to model the real world. He knew so he bent the rules.

The white queen has just been reduced back to pawn. His fool of a son, killed by some bounty hunter in the Andes. It took him a month's worth of mana reserves to resurrect him. Then, he lost the white bishop in Gazth-Sonika. It was a shame. The Bishop had the Gift and he was smart. Batshit insane, alright, but he got the job done. He badly needed another bishop and a new queen now. And he already had the candidates in mind.

Mireille and Kirika walked down the alley, both pulling their guns out. Then they split in opposite directions as the three men following them started shooting at them.

Mireille ducked behind a dumpster and from there started shooting hitting one of the men and at the same time Kirika ducked into a doorway and fired. She killed both of the remaining quickly. Mireille came from the side of the dumpster towards Kirika.

"You know with their war with Enfant, you figure they wouldn't have time to hunt us down." Mireille said with a sigh. "Perhaps they don't want us joining Enfant, so to eliminate that possibility they decided to get rid of us." Kirika replied.

"That might be true. But in any case we should lay low for awhile." Mireille replied and the two of them walked hurriedly down the alley.

The remotest sound of gunfire had Madlax excited and she ran towards the alley the two women were a few seconds ago. As Madlax suspected the three men lay dead on the cobbled street.

"9mm round, perfectly aimed in the heart and a quick clean escape. Very professional" Madlax thought after observing the bullet wounds.

Madlax stared into the wall and wondered why the men were after two innocuous looking women (at first glance anyway). She scoured through the suits of the dead men for clues, but found nothing extraordinary except the photographs of the women before and a little notebook.

She quickly browsed through the scribbled notes which seemed written in a secret code. But one part was written in a language she could understand, a list of names.

The police sirens were growing louder in the background and Madlax continued in the direction she originally intended. Hmm, Yuumura Kirika, Mireille Bouquet, Douglas Rosenberg and then someone she knew; Carrosea Doone! And then two secret words in an illegible language but they seemed important as they were circled and written in a far bigger font.

"I wonder what this is about..." Madlax whispered surprised as she turned the next page.

"More secret words; Jodie Hayward, Vanessa Rene and Margaret Burton!" she exclaimed.

"I better find them soon; I don't like the look of this." Madlax said to herself, hoping inside she wasn't too late.

Elenore cleared the dishes from the table and started washing them. Now and then she would turn her head to see if anyone was behind her.

Every time she did and saw no one she breathed a sigh of relief.

Everything was back to normal.

Back to her normal simple way of life; no madmen,

no wandering around in jungles

and no dead friends.

Everything was normal.

Then she heard footsteps behind her, she grabbed a kitchen knife and quickly spun around only to see Laetitia with not look of shock but a look of genuine concern on her face.

"Are you okay Elenore?" She asked.

Elenore looked at her and then at the knife dripping with soapy water and she quickly put it in the sink.

"I'm sorry Miss if I frightened you; I was just started that's all. Is there anything the matter or need Miss?"

"No, I wanted to see if you were okay and see if you were done. Margaret is getting impatient." Elenore smiled. "I'm fine Miss. This won't take long and we'll be on our way." Laetitia smiled "Okay." And walked away, as soon as Elenore's back was turned she glanced at her, the smile faded and replaced with concern.

"Her body has healed, but has her mind and spirit?" She thought to herself and decided to tell Margaret to convince Elenore to seek help.

She walked up to Margaret who was waiting for Elenore. "I'm worried about Elenore. Laetitia said in a concerned tone.

"Hmm... well, she has been acting a little weird lately. On the surface she's the same old Elenore as always, but I too can sense something different about her at times, ever since we got back from Gazth-Sonika. I just hope it's nothing too serious. I'd like to help somehow. Maybe I should confront her about it..."

"You know she'd deny it. She wouldn't want you worrying like that." said Laetitia.

"I guess..." It's times like this I wish Vanessa was around, she'd know exactly what to say or do, and I'm

sure Elenore would listen to her... we haven't heard from her ever since she left Nafrece for work, two weeks ago, I wonder where did she go and what is she doing..., she thought.

"You have something in mind?" asked the younger girl.

"Oh it's nothing... Don't worry! I'll try to approach the problem soon, somehow. For now we'll just have to try not causing her any additional stress okay?" Margaret proposed decidedly.

"That's more directed at you than me, I would say..." Laetitia answered playfully.

"Awww, you don't have to put it like that!" Margaret protested in embarrassment as they both broke into giggle.

"Okay, let's just get going at once! You ready now Elenore?" Margaret called cheerfully from the living room.

"Yes Miss!" Elenore replied carrying Margaret's and Laetitia's jackets in her arms. She had on her shawl over her uniform and handed Margaret her jacket and then help Laetitia put her's on. All the while she had a smile on her face but her eyes told a different story. As they left the house, she locked the door her back towards Margaret; she checked the pocket of her apron for the can of pepper spray, breathing a sigh of relief. She turned with a smile on her face.

"Where to, Miss?" She asked cheerfully as they headed down the street.

Margaret Burton was about to move. No matter how hard Monday stared at his chessboard, she wasn't on it. That crazy witch was just too difficult to handle, like catching a tiger with his bare hands. Take too long, and she'll bite your head off. The Bishop was an optimist.

Altena stared at the chess board. She was looking at the Queen's Knight Pawn and wondered when she would move and would her knight follow like the last time. This pawn became a Queen then back to a pawn and brought back her knight as well. She could be useful but she knew her knight would hinder any attempts. It had to be eliminated, but outright killing her would put the would be queen in Infant's camp. So she had to think of another way to remove the knight without actually removing it.

"My Dear Chloe please come here." Altena called out.

"Yes Lady Altena." Chloe answered and swiftly came by Altena's side.

"My Dear Chloe, I have a special assignment for you."

"I need you to watch these women and report their moves to me. Do not be seen nor engage them. I will give additional instructions as needed all you need to do for now is watch." She handed Chloe a picture of Margaret and Elenore.

Chloe bowed her head. "Yes Lady Altena, but may I ask why do want these people watched?"

Altena stroked Chloe's hair. "My Dear Chloe you will know in good time, but for now do as I say."

Chloe smiled. "Yes mamm."

"That's a good child, now run along." Altena smiled and looked at the chess board moving a black Bishop.

"Let's go to that new place downtown. We've never been there before. I think it will be fun." Margaret suggested and they followed. It was a nice day out so they decided to walk there. They were in no hurry after all. It was nice to spend some free time like this, just the three of them.

University wasn't as easy as back in high school, when she could sleep in class and somehow get away with it, she came to realize. So, granted she was no genius, studying had significantly taken up a lot of her free time during the week now, just to keep up with classes. Any free time she could spend leisurely together with her family was a lot more precious to Margaret now. Not to mention, after the experience of almost losing everyone she loved, she naturally came to cherish everyday with them more than before.

There was one person she had been missing though: Madlax. They haven't met again ever since they said goodbye back in Gazth-Sonika. She obviously shared a special connection with her too and, in a way, she was as much like a sister to her as Laetitia or Elenore, she couldn't help but get lost in thought at times, wondering where she could be and what was she doing... She had entertained the idea of having her live with them in Nafrece (Vanessa would probably like having her around too), but she imagined it would be extremely hard for Madlax to adapt to such a peaceful easy going lifestyle maybe.

Besides, she did left with that scary person last time they parted. Margaret could never comprehend what kind of relationship did they share, but it was definitely something behind her understanding. Surely, the list of things that were behind Margaret's understanding wasn't all that small, so she didn't gave it much thought and trusted Madlax must know what she's doing. As they arrived downtown and looked around for a while Margaret started feeling a strangely familiar presence really close to them. Was this just a coincidence or did her earlier reminiscence was a bit too suggestive and got her imagining things? She stopped walking suddenly, leaving Elenore and Laetitia a bit ahead, and turned around to face the blond figure that was now standing before her, looking as surprised to meet among the crowd as she was.

"Madlax? Is that you?"

As she followed Margaret, making sure that Laetitia kept up with them. She tried to relax and relish the free time she had with Margaret now that she was going to university. She wondered if Margaret really understood the meaning of her last words to her. Granted she asked herself this question many times before but with Margaret's free time dwindling due to her studies, the question reappeared. She remembered asking her if she knew what she meant by "my family" and her reply was, "We're like sisters." and part of her wept inside. When they got back from Gazth-Sonika, Margaret told her the truth about everything including what really happened to her father and her connection to Madlax and Laetitia. She understood why she did what she did and gave her all the love and support she needed, but due to the answer Margaret gave to her question, she decided not divulge her true feelings for her along with the fact that she fell off an over hundred and fifty foot cliff when she got shot (as not increase

Margaret's guilt over her death). The truth was; she was truly in love with Margaret and implications that it implied (she wondered if Margaret had any inkling about that too, considering she told no one.) Granted she didn't worry as much when Margaret went to university as it had excellent security (she made sure of that!). But going into a public space like this did worry her and her eyes darted back and forth looking for unseen enemies and she tensed up. But then she felt a small hand grasp hers and she felt like she did when she was a small girl; at peace and calm. (Elenore didn't know on a conscious level but Laetitia had linked her psyche to hers but the only part she could reach was when Elenore was eight years old, so when Laetitia grabbed her hand all that Laetitia saw was the child that Elenore was, not the troubled adult that she wanted to help.)

They passed Margaret who had suddenly stopped and they didn't notice for a little over a minute that she wasn't with them. Elenore's heart began to beat faster as she let go of Laetitia's hand. Laetitia saddened as she lost the link. She would have get help if she wanted to make the link stronger and she knew who to ask, but she hadn't seen him in either of his personas. She knew he was alive but she wondered if he felt unworthy to be near Margaret, of course then there was the issue of Elenore having a real (but deserved) dislike for him. But it was worth a shot. She had to do something, Vanessa wasn't around and Margaret would just keep running into Elenore's great wall of denial. Suddenly she felt a familiar presence, so she turned her head and saw...

Elenore looked to the left and right of her, and then behind her...And there standing in front of Margaret was Madlax. She wondered what she was doing in Nafrece.

"Hopefully she's just here to visit Margaret and Laetitia... (Granted she didn't get a chance to be close to her, but she did admire the woman though her occupation did bother her a little)."She thought to herself as she and Laetitia who was all smiles went towards the pair.

The black queen moved across the board, skipping squares like they were burning charcoal. She wasn't attacking, which was smart. Having her tail the Witch, on the other hand, was rather... stupid. The psychology class wasn't the black king's favorite. But that was playing into his hand, too, the black queen coming out of the castle, placed in a position she might have trouble coping with. Monday let out another smirk.

Carrossea sat in an outdoor cafe downtown, but he sat close to the building as not to draw attention to himself. Since his resurrection, he had been hunted on and off by agents of Les Soldats. How they knew he was alive when Enfant thought he was dead was a complete mystery. If weren't for the Gift, he would've been dead again. Something inside of him told him to sit and wait here. But for what he didn't know. He thought of visiting Margaret but with this hunt for him going on he didn't want to risk her life, that and that "*maid*" would try to prevent him from seeing her anyway.

He honestly missed her and another part of him missed Laetitia as well and besides part of him actually enjoyed subtly antagonizing Elenore as well. He smirked and sipped his coffee and read the paper.

Madlax smiled happily and replied "Yes it is me. Aren't I glad to see you? "

"What are you doing here?" Margaret asked.

"I'm looking for a change of scene. I've never traveled or worked in Europe before. "Madlax said with a tinge of embarrassment.

This was the first time Madlax had met Margaret since the epic day she fused with her and Laetitia. She felt again that same sense of warmth in her heart as if she's found a side to her that she thought she never had.

Margaret was like a good little sister and the kind words she spoke to her back in Gazth-Sonika resonated ever since. But at the same time Margaret was rather distant, her world, her manners were perplexing.

Madlax sensed a little tug on her jacket and peered below. "Hello little Laetitia" she said happily and patted her little head. Laetitia said cheerfully "Welcome big Madlax". Madlax turned her left hand on her waist, just privately checking the young one was referring to her height and not about the extra pounds from the lack of work. She intuitively felt it was most likely the former but she always worried a little about her lovely figure. But the remarked change in Laetitia pleased her the most, the young child she is now contrasted with the sad and troubled soul when she first met her. She was having a proper childhood, something she can only dream of herself.

"Don't I get a pat too?" Elenore suddenly said cheekily. Madlax smiled.

Madlax can sense behind the smile the maid who fought alongside her for Margaret had a certain discomfort. "Post war stress? No, that doesn't seem to be it" she thought. There's still a certain strength about her and neatness as well, her shawl and maid uniform immaculate as usual.

Suddenly Madlax felt a sudden tinge; it felt purple, like Limelda; just purple. The air seemed a little uneasy; the thought of the two women and the notebook reappeared in her mind, there was an undercurrent of violence in her veins even in such a jovial place. It's best to go indoors and escape any eyes peering around. Besides the shops were beautifully decorated with gold trim and that long beautiful red silk dress and red shoes out the antique window of the shop opposite the cafe was enticing. There was even a distant smell of pasta coming from that direction.

"Let's go into the shops Margaret and do some shopping?"

Laetitia smiled as she walked up to Madlax and tugged on her jacket. "Hello little Laetitia" Madlax said as she patted her head.

Laetitia smiled and said cheerfully "Hello big Madlax." She was happy to see her again, the three of them reunited again after a fashion. She was going to ask if she had seen Vanessa on her travels but she was interrupted by Elenore's amusingly sarcastic question. Laetitia giggled and then she felt a couple of strong presences nearby.

One was dark; just dark she couldn't find out anything else but it did bring a sense of dread, but the other was familiar and it was very close by. He was here! Her Poupee was here! Now only if she could slip away long enough to talk to him she smiled as she heard Madlax say; "Let's go into the shops Margaret and do some shopping?"

Perhaps she would get her chance after all...

Elenore walked up alongside Margaret and watched Madlax pat Laetitia on the head.

"Don't I get a pat too?" She said jokingly with a little sarcasm thrown in.

She noticed Madlax was looking her over. Inside she wanted to give her a hug and ask her a few questions. But this was not the time or the place for that. It would be unprofessional to show such casual emotions while on duty and her duty was to watch over Margaret and now Laetitia and THAT came first.

From a distance Chloe watched them. She studied them until they went into the shops; she didn't know why Lady Altena wanted this girl Margaret Burton watched. She seemed like a total air head to her and the maid seemed to be a little stuck up. But Chloe knew that appearances could be deceiving. But the blond hair girl with them could pose a problem. It could be a lot easier if she could just kill them, but she dared not disobey Lady Altena so she continued to watch; besides it might get interesting.

Impressions - Nakhil had always been taught to have impressions; deep feelings which beget instinctive choices. Yet the impression of this city of dark alleyways, dark shadows, dark hearts, was indistinct. Everything seemed so muddled - so many troubled lives, caught in a web of improbabilities.

Why was I there? I was there of my own choosing. But why I made that choice, I cannot say. She asked herself.

She had forsaken her normal costume for something...less evidently foreign, but she still felt as a stranger. Dressing in a suit just made her more uncomfortable than she already was.

She dipped her bread into the oil and vinegar and took it to her mouth. She was not hungry, but she had other reasons for being in the dim-lit cafe.

But again, she wasn't sure what those reasons were.

She glanced about herself. Outside sat Carrossea, his eyes fixed on his coffee with a brooding look. His very existence was a contradiction. Then she heard the footsteps of another whom she knew. One...or perhaps three. That didn't matter. It was three pairs in one, a trinity of sorts - it was the same step. And it was drawing nearer. Her heart rose, for her presence had always given her joy and peace.

But something else was drawing near; something she had not encountered before, yet important... Darkness...

Nakhil closed her eyes, for her senses would tell her no more.

Darkness...from far away...from another hemisphere, another age. A darkness that blocked the light, and enshrouded the world. This, also...it was inconsistent.

Purple...The thought of the color made her reopen her eyes. The brightness struck her, and into view came three pairs of red shoes, walking briskly along the pavement outside. Carrossea continued to focus on his coffee - no, on himself - unnoticing. She wondered how long that would last. The trio seemed to be in joyful conversation. She wondered how long that would last, too. She wondered if she felt what she felt. And wondered how much Margaret Burton's choices had disturbed or accelerated the natural entropy of time and space.

Red shoes under a blue sky, like the bowl of oil and vinegar, mingled but did not mix...that was the proper order of things.

But purple...

Nakhl paid her bill and rose to her feet, instinctively feeling for the dagger behind her back which was not there. So many things were not right...

...And yet, it was good to be back. She thought to herself.

As the four of them went into the store, Laetitia kept her eyes on the door looking for an opportunity to go. It was hard considering Elenore was keeping an eye on her, for one who didn't possess the Gift she was perceptive. She had to be considering Margaret kept her in practice. All it took was a moment...Margaret and Madlax distracted Elenore (did they know what she intended she wondered) and she was out the door passing a random customer and rushed as fast her small legs could carry her to the cafe across from the store.

She could smell pasta being served as she approached but something else immediately drew her attention. There walking on towards her was a woman she recognized, even though she was dressed differently. It was the apprentice to Quanzitta; she stopped briefly as she passed.

"You're far away from home. I would love to talk with you but I'm in a hurry. We can talk later." She said cheerfully and ran towards the table where Carrossea was sitting.

Carrossea felt a presence, a familiar one and looked to see Laetitia running towards him. In a mindscape his other persona stared in somewhat shock as she came running up to him. She embraced him crying. "Poupee! I missed you so much! I thought I lost you forever."

Poupee smiled and hugged Laetitia. "I missed you too, Laetitia. But what you're doing is dangerous. There are people after us and I don't want you to get hurt."

For a moment Laetitia was in shock, this was the first time he had ever spoken. With tears in her eyes she looked up to him smiling.

"Oh Poupee, you spoke!" As she felt the bond between them returning.

In the real world Carrossea was at a loss, here was this small child hugging him crying. He stroked her hair and looked into her eyes with a look of compassion and concern.

"What he said was true. This is very dangerous; you should be with Margaret or that *maid*."

"I don't care right now, I'm just happy to see you again Poupee."

Carrossea sighed and smiled. "My name is Carrossea in this form, but I'll let it pass.

Inside Carrossea was ecstatic; if she was here so was Margaret and he could see her once again. But that also meant that she would deal with her as well, a small price to pay to see Margaret but well worth it.

Carrossea pulled a chair out and sat Laetitia in it.

"Let's wait for Margaret, since this place serves pasta I'm sure come right here if not sooner." He said smiling and then he sighed. "No wait she'll be here before Margaret and I just imagine her reaction."

Laetitia smiled. "Pou...I mean Mr. Carrossea; I have a favor to ask but you may not like it."

"Of course, what is it?"

Laetitia explained the situation with Elenore and the link she had on and off established with her. Carrossea's initial reaction when he heard her mentioned was total shock mixed with annoyance, but he held no malice towards her he just found her extremely annoying and now Laetitia was asking to help form a link with her. Part of him didn't want to but he couldn't say no to Laetitia and besides helping her would most likely put in him in Margaret's good graces plus the through the link he could keep a eye on Margaret and annoy the maid at the same time.

Carrossea sighed and smiled. "I can't say "no" to you can I?"

Laetitia smiled and cheerfully said. "Thank you Mr. Carrossea."

Back in the mindscape Laetitia hugged Poupee ecstatically. "Thank you Poupee!"

Poupee hugged Laetitia and smiled. "You're Welcome. Now all we have to do wait for her to show up."

Laetitia nodded as she held Poupee tight.

Back in the real world...

"You're welcome Miss Laetitia. But I really think you should get back before she notices you're gone. Just bring them here and I'll help with the rest. Laetitia nodded and ran back to the store and slipped in just as Elenore noticed she wasn't near her. "Oh there you are Miss Laetitia. Please Miss, please don't go wandering off."

"I'm sorry Elenore." Laetitia said relieved that she didn't notice she was gone.

"Just please stay with us Miss, Okay." Elenore said with a smile. But deep inside a part of her panicked...

"Okay, let's go!" Margaret replied happily, as the four of them followed down the long crowded avenue of stores and cafes. This was such an unexpected surprise, to think Madlax would travel all the way to Nafrece without letting them know beforehand, but it was also one of those things about Madlax that Margaret could understand and relate to. Sometimes, they just set their mind on something and followed their instinct without much planning or consideration. It might seem a bit strange or reckless to act this way (one of the things about her personality that made Elenore worry about regularly, Margaret assumed), but despite her spacey personality, there were a few times when Margaret could see things clearly and understand them beyond appearances. It was this sort of instinct, which she knew Madlax also had, despite not possessing the Gift.

To meet for chance like this was definitely odd, but Margaret didn't really give it much thought, nor did she seem to find it all that weird. She had always been unsuspecting about coincidences and for now she would rather focus on the moment. Meeting Madlax was just one more reason to enjoy such an already bright day.

It felt very different to meet Madlax under such peaceful circumstances and even be able to spend such a calm casual time just chatting and walking around from store to store. It really contrasted with those dangerous moments they shared back in Gazth-Sonika. Madlax always appeared to keep it cool and sharp back then, under the occupation as agent she was so used to, but she seemed pretty comfortable now too, just enjoying a normal moment of peace. "She might actually like it here."

Margaret thought optimistically. After going through a few shops they decided to stop for lunch at some place nearby.

"Hmm... so, where should we go?" Margaret asked undecided, "I actually never been to this part of town before."

"Well, don't look at me, I just got here... Besides, you're the one paying cuz I'm absolutely broke! So I'll go wherever you invite me to." Madlax joked teasingly.

"Heh, sure. What do you think Elenore? Any suggestions?"

"Well Miss, that's absolutely up to you, but I'm pretty sure you'd like some place that serves pasta." Elenore pointed out knowingly.

"Pasta!" Margaret and Madlax exclaimed simultaneously, barely holding their enthusiasm, before looking at each other and letting out a small chuckle. "What about that place?" said Laetitia pointing to an Italian restaurant with an outdoor cafe, "I'd like to go there!" she eagerly insisted pulling Margaret's hand. "Okay, it's decided then." Margaret smiled, following the younger girl.

"Oh by the way, Madlax" she addressed her on their way to the restaurant, "are you staying somewhere

yet? It would be great if you could stay at our place! We could go there after lunch and get you settled if you want!"

"I'll reserve us a table Miss." Elenore added.

"Great! We'll meet you there." Margaret replied and Elenore went to the restaurant.

Once there she asked for a table and the waiter brought her to a table with four chairs.

At table next to theirs, she saw him...and a part of her seethed. But she kept her calm and tried to ignore him, hopefully he wouldn't recognize her, but...

"Hello Miss Baker, what a pleasant surprise to see you here."

Let the games begin... Carrossea thought to himself.

"Hello Mr. Doone. I doubt very much that you're surprised." Elenore said annoyed that he had noticed her.

Carrossea smirked. "Oh but I am. Who would've guessed the first familiar face I would see on my return to Nafrece would be your smiling face."

"BASTARD! He knows I won't make a scene here. I would just love to kick that smug smirk off his face, but what would Miss Margaret think... Elenore thought to herself.

"I doubt that as well Mr. Doone. Every time you show up, trouble manages follow right behind you. Perhaps you should go elsewhere before it finds you."

Carrossea smirked even more and replied in mock surprise. "Why Miss Baker, why would you think that?"

"Hmmm...I would like to tell you but this is a public place and I don't want to make a scene." Elenore retorted.

I better make this quick before Margaret shows up. Carrossea thought.

"Well I have two words to say to you Miss Baker."

"And what would they be Mr. Doone?" Elenore replied with a crossed look on her face.

Carrossea smiled and said. "Sarks Sark"

With that Elenore froze in place with a shocked look on her face.

Carrossea got up with and touched Elenore on the shoulder as she began to fall. "Miss Baker?" He said in somewhat mock concern.

"Now Laetitia!" Poupee said and they joined hands and the eight year Elenore appeared. Poupee's brow furrowed as she appeared but he noticed a long chain attached to ankle by a shackle.

"What's wrong Poupee?" She asked worriedly. As Poupee pointed, she turned her head and gasped in surprise upon seeing the chain. "Where did that come from? I didn't see that before nor that." She pointed to a doll in Elenore's hands.

"I don't know, we could ask her." Poupee replied just as puzzled.

Elenore looked around with a scared look on her face. "Where am I? What is this place? Where did everyone go?"

Laetitia walked up to Elenore with a warm smile and held her. "It's okay Elenore. You're safe here." Elenore nodded and calmed down. "Elenore can I ask where that chain leads to?" she asked. "What chain? Elenore replied with a puzzled look as she tried to look for the chain Laetitia mentioned. "She can't see it." Laetitia said sadly. As Poupee walked up to Laetitia, Elenore began to scream.

"NO! YOU STAY AWAY! I WON'T LET YOU TAKE HER AWAY FROM ME! EVER! EVER! EVER! I promised..." As screamed as she held the doll tightly close to her. "Promised who?" A shocked Laetitia asked as Poupee backed up a little shocked as well. Elenore sniffed. "I promised Grandfather... I would take care of her." As she looked at the doll lovingly. "Ask her what her doll's name is. If it's what I think it is this may be the root of a much deeper problem." Poupee said concerned. Laetitia nodded and asked Elenore. "What's your little one's name?" Elenore smiled as she held the doll in front of Laetitia. "Margaret. Her name is Margaret." She brought the doll closer to her and began to rock it gently in her arms. "You need to tell the real Margaret about this, she needs help before it's too late." "It may be already too late, but I'll tell her. Please help keep the link up. I need to keep an eye on her." Laetitia said with tears running down her cheeks. "All right, for you I will. But I have to deal with the other right now, Okay." Poupee said hugging Laetitia. "I will see you soon."

"Miss...?"

"Miss Baker...?"

Elenore found herself sitting in a chair. She turned her head to see a waiter and Carrossea with a look of genuine concern on his face. "How did I get here?" Elenore asked a little shocked. "You fainted and this gentleman caught you before fell. Are you all right Miss?" A waiter replied.

"I'm fine now, thank you. I'm sorry if I caused any trouble." Elenore replied with her head bowed slightly. She looked at Carrossea. "Thank you Mr. Doone." she said a little embarrassed and a little confused. She noticed the look of honest concern on his face and tried to collect herself before Margaret showed up. Carrossea noticed she was wearing body armor underneath her uniform when he caught her. "Why would she need to wear body armor, unless they're after Margaret too? I should lay off her for now. You've got some real problems lady..." Carrossea thought to himself as he saw Margaret, Laetitia and... Madlax (!?) walk up as Elenore rose from the chair.

"I will love to stay. I heard you live in a very big house." Madlax replied ecstatically. Madlax happily tagged along with Margaret as Elenore booked at the cafe, the avenue was classy with an old World charm. "Not something you find in Gazth-Sonika, not even the shopping complex next to the classy five star hotel where I met Carrossea and gagged that hotel maid. Poor girl, luckily I let her go although I had to threaten her not to talk about it." She thought.

But the negative thoughts and feelings of the civil war especially that masked villain Friday Monday drifted away as Madlax got further immersed into all the cafes with people happily drinking fresh coffee

and all the dazzling natural light from shop windows selling handbags, clothes and red shoes!

"Buying another pair?" Madlax asked Margaret jokingly

"No, tearing another dress?" Margaret replied cleverly as she observed Madlax staring at another long dress with considerable affection. Madlax noticed a sudden tug around her waist and turned around. Laetitia was slightly bored with all this shopping for fashion accessories and pointed in the direction of the antique doll shop on the far opposite corner. She smiled happily and said "Margaret, Laetitia wants to do a little shopping of her own". Margaret gladly agreed and started walking leisurely.

The mood was rather relaxed and calm but somehow this made Madlax even more alert.

Every movement felt in slow motion, she could even sense Nakhl was creeping nearby. But none of this bothered her at all. "What a lovely day to just be casual and relax." Margaret said while she stretched her arms and yawned.

"Welcome young ladies" the old shopkeeper greeted with an air of humility.

The old shopkeeper was an old lady slowly sewing a broken doll with her worn but experienced hands. Madlax peered around the shop there was every antique doll possible, some had rather worn clothes, and others were still pristine with dresses from a bygone era. At the back of the shop, the area was dimly light an old man was playing chess by himself with some antique dolls on an antique wooden board.

"What are you doing? Madlax asked curiously.

"Seeing how the game is played" the old man answers enigmatically.

"I want to buy this one" Laetitia jumped with joy.

Laetitia picked a rather old doll, the color was worn but the doll wore a rather distinctive velvet cloak with purple rags and the hair had a bright orange to it.

"That's a rather special doll; we put a bit of patchwork on that one. It has a special history its rumored to have been in a couple of warzones." the old woman said rather nostalgically.

Margaret found this intriguing but didn't think much of it and paid the old woman and waved goodbye as she gave the doll to Laetitia.

"Let's get back to the cafe I'm starving" Madlax said casually and as Margaret and Laetitia raced ahead.

Altena stared at the chess board. She had in her hand Chloe's latest report. From the looks of it she was getting impatient and that was dangerous. Her impatience might jeopardize her plan. If only there was something...That something came in the form of a copy of a letter addressed to Margaret Burton to be delivered on her 20th birthday. As she took the letter from the nun and read it over her eyes at first grew wide then sharpened. Then she wrote a letter to Chloe to stop watching the white pawn and watch the white knight very carefully. She smiled as she handed the letter to the nun..."Let's see if Love can really kill."

When they finally got to the cafe Margaret noticed Elenore was already sitting at a table... with a man? Only when she got closer did she realize who he actually was. That sure came as a surprise! She hadn't seen him or heard from him since the events in Gazth-Sonika. He just left without saying anything after she returned him back to life. Not like she was expecting him to be thankful or even stay in touch, in fact

she could understand perfectly well if he wouldn't want to see her, but this all made her a bit confused about where exactly did he stand in relation to her. But she decided not to think about all those complicated things for now and just let herself be happy at this meeting. She did kinda miss him after all.

"Carrossea? So you're here in Nafrece! You've been here all along? I worried a bit back then, when you left without saying a thing... But what a great coincidence! I just met Madlax and now I find you here! It's becoming quite an interesting day." Margaret said with honest, yet contained enthusiasm. "How have you been?"

Carrossea had to contain his enthusiasm, but he was happy that Margaret was happy to see him. "I just arrived in Nafrece a few days ago and to be honest I didn't know if you wanted to see me again. I do apologize if I made you worry". That got him a somewhat dirty look from Elenore, but he didn't press it considering what he knew. "It was quite fortunate I was nearby when Miss Baker fainted. I hope she's not working herself too hard." Elenore shot him another glance but kept quiet, after all he did catch her, and she felt he deserved some gratitude even if it was dead silence.

"I see Madlax is here as well. What an interesting coincidence. May I ask what brings you to Nafrece?" He asked politely.

"What? Elenore did?" Margaret immediately switched her attention from Carrossea and approached Elenore with concern, leaving him to catch up with Madlax for a while. "Are you feeling sick Elenore? Should we head back home now? I don't mind that you know? I really don't. I couldn't have fun if you weren't well. You should tell me about these things." Margaret somewhat wanted to go deep into the topic, as both her and Laetitia had been noticing these recent changes about Elenore, though now wasn't the right place for it and she thought it would be better to confront her about it at home, in private.

"I'm fine Miss. The weather is bit warm and I didn't compensate for it. I'm sorry if I made you worry Miss. I'm quite all right now Miss." Elenore flashed a reassuring smile. "Thank you Miss, for your concern." She removed her shawl and folded it. "There that should do it. I feel much better. Now we can spend as much time as you like Miss." Elenore said trying to reassure Margaret that everything was all right. Inside though part of her panicked. She didn't want to burden Margaret with her problems and she didn't want to tell her what was really bothering her. This fainting spell (though she suspected Carrossea may have had a part in it, but she couldn't tell for sure) didn't help matters one bit. She smiled reassuringly and said; "Please Miss sit, you must be hungry by now and this place serves some excellent pasta from what I've heard."

"Well, ok, if you say so Elenore." Margaret replied as they all got to their seats at the table. "But I get the feeling you don't tell me everything at times. I'd like you to trust me a bit more; I'm not a child anymore you know? If you have something that troubles you I'd like to help somehow, even if you think I might not be of much help. I guess I'm not as reliable as Vanessa at things like this... but I promise you I'll do my best!" she tried to sound reassuring.

"Oh, it just occurred to me!" Margaret said in a lighter tone, before Elenore could say anything else, "Maybe it just really surprised you to meet Carrossea here so unexpectedly?" She asked quite clueless. "I was a bit taken aback with Mr. Doone's unexpected appearance. Thank you for your concern Miss."

"But could've sworn he used those words on me. But it's best I don't mention it. I'll just keep a closer eye on Margaret." She thought to herself.

Elenore bowed her head. "No, you're not a child anymore. Perhaps it's time you did know. But why is it scaring me? But you do deserve the truth; you gave me that consideration when you told me what had happened." Elenore thought to herself.

Elenore smiled. "You're right Miss and I know you'll do your best and I do think a talk is in order. But I don't want it to spoil your day Miss; it can wait till we get home. Let's order some lunch Miss."

Madlax bluntly replied "I'm looking for work; business is quiet in Gazth-Sonika". "Why did you come here then?" Carrossea asked rather smartly. "Don't you know most of the fighting these days is in South America? Why don't you join me there? I'll provide the brains." he asked rather invitingly. Madlax did find the offer enticing but unlike Margaret she couldn't trust a man who was once the right hand man of Friday Monday. Madlax privately knew she can be a bit clueless but she wasn't stupid and has this feeling that he wanted her to be his "new Limelda". Suddenly she saw a flash of Vanessa in the jungle in her mind and felt the smell of tacos. "My pasta is ready, another time" as Madlax excused herself after noticing that aromatic smell.

"South America? Is that where you've been till now Carrossea?" Margaret's attention got driven back at him after she finished talking to Elenore and ordered some pasta. "What have you been doing all this time? You're not back to working with criminal organizations, are you?" she asked confused.

"Yes. Margaret I've been in South America." He briefly closed his eyes. "But I'm not working with those people, as far as I know they think I'm dead and I want it to stay that way. As for what I was doing there, I was looking for something." Elenore ignored him and continued eating, but keeping an eye on Carrossea.

He wanted to warn her about the Soldats, but he was afraid that they might involve her if he mentioned them. "It may be too late..." He thought to himself.

"I have some business to attend to Margaret, but it was a great pleasure seeing you again."

He briefly held her hand and started to walk off but not before saying.

"Take care Miss Margaret and you as well Miss Baker."

"I bet your neck deep in trouble already Mr. Doone." Elenore thought to herself.

"You have failed to capture her yet again, Jodie."

Jodie sighed quietly. Those weird triceratops/ninja hybrids found her about an hour ago, knocked her out and brought her to a closed bar. When she came to, she found herself hanging upside down, just above a billiards table while a ninja held a cell phone to her ear. Her coven's chairperson was scolding her for again failing to get Ellis. It's become quite routine actually.

It had been a while since the events at Wiñay Marka, and Jodie decided to leave the Coven and work at Amigo Tacos. But they contacted her about a month ago, informing her about some ancient and powerful artifacts, and Ellis's possible role with them. Because of what happened, Jodie, Ellis and Nadie had become good friends. She worried for the girl's safety, and so was forced to come back. Of course, her assignment was to follow Ellis and retrieve her, but she had no intention of doing the latter.

"I hope for your sake you will follow through next time."

The ninja hung up the phone, signaled for the others to let her down, and left her lying on the table. She dusted herself off quickly, walked out the door and immediately went back to staking the two girls out once again.

"So you're going already Carrossea? That's a shame, I wanted to talk some more." Margaret was particularly interested about that "something" he mentioned he was looking for, but she realized he must have avoided it intentionally. "Could you... pay me a visit sometime?" Margaret asked tentatively, trying her best to hide her embarrassment. She actually wanted to see him again and feared he might just disappear for a long time without saying a thing like before. And she had no way to reach him anymore.

"I'm sorry Margaret, but I do have pressing business that needs my attention."

As soon as Margaret asked him to see her Carrossea smiled trying to hide his glee. "Of course for you Margaret anything. Goodbye Margaret and take care." With that he walked down the street.

Elenore sat eating in silence. She wanted to say something to Carrossea but other thoughts crossed her mind. But she was glad he was gone but with Margaret's invitation it would be most likely he'll show up again.

She knew Margaret liked him, but that man attracted trouble and she hoped that he wouldn't get Margaret involved like the last time. She continued to go over in her head what she would say to Margaret, it wasn't easy but she felt she needed to.

"You're leaving again Poupee?" Laetitia asked with a little sadness in her eyes. "No, only my other self is. Now that we've relinked with one another I will be here by your side." Poupee replied with a warm smile.

"Oh that's wonderful!" Laetitia joyously said with a wide smile on her face, but the smile faded when she turned her head towards Elenore rocking the doll. "What about her? Do you mind that she's here?" Poupee looked at Elenore and then back at Laetitia. "I don't mind, but you really have to tell Margaret about this."

Laetitia nodded and they both sat on the bench and she held Poupee's hand smiling. Elenore stood there rocking the doll. "I will take care you because you are my family. You are all I have left in this world..."

Chloe watched the scene at the cafe with interest. There was Carrossea Doone just standing there and she couldn't do anything without revealing her presence. She saw him look towards her direction. Did he see her? She doubted it. She did see him catch the maid and then talk to the blond haired woman. She would have to ask Lady Altena for information about this woman, maybe she would get the chance to kill her. She watched him walk off and she went back to her duty; watching Margaret Burton and the maid. She understood the need to study a target, but this was getting boring, no those two were boring...

After finishing eating lunch the four of them started walking back home. Margaret was looking forward to welcome Madlax at her place and let her settle comfortably, she wondered what it was like to live in the same place with her.

"So Madlax, I heard you mentioning you were looking for a job before. What kind of job are you looking for in Nafrece? I don't think you'd be able to work as an agent here, and I would prefer if you didn't do that." Margaret said in a sad tone, "You could always take some vacation while you're staying with us!" she suggested more enthusiastically, "If we manage to contact Vanessa she might even help you find a job later! What do you say?"

"I am looking to be an agent; assassination, protection, infiltration, spying. I'm not picky though it's a sign of the times. I guess I can try something else Margaret but I doubt I'll be good at it and I won't be used to it. But I am glad to join you on vacation" Madlax told Margaret in a relaxed tone. Although she had been out of work and indeed real practice, this seemed like a real vacation. "I can barely remember having a real vacation in my whole life, why not? It's a free offer. Besides I might meet Vanessa again." Madlax thought.

Elenore noticed the happy look on Margaret's face when Madlax accepted her offer but she wondered how long that would last.

When they got home, she made tea and prepared the guest bedroom for Madlax. When she was finished she took a deep breath. "Well I did say that we needed to talk, but why am I so scared? I can't turn back now, I just hope..." She walked out to the living room and approached Margaret. "Miss, may I please have a word with you in private?"

Margaret nodded ascent and followed her to her another part of the house.

She waited till Margaret sat down. "Elenore please tell me what is happening to you. You've been acting weird since we got back from Gazth-Sonika and I'm worried about you."

Elenore bowed her head. "You deserve the truth Miss; after all you gave me that consideration. But there's more than one thing here. I would to apologize for keeping this from you but I didn't want to add to your guilt over my death but I will give the full details." For the next few minutes Elenore described in full detail her encounter with the soldiers, her fall from the cliff and the march through the jungle to reach the field of flowers.

"As a result Miss, I've been having flashbacks and severe doubts on how well of a protector I am to you. I couldn't pull the trigger, not at that soldier nor that man who captured you. But what I'm about to say scares me, I don't know how you'll react to this but I feel you must know this as well. Remember when I asked if you knew what I meant by "you are my family." This is what I meant..." She took a deep breath and closed her eyes tears beginning to well.

"Miss Margaret...I'm gay and I love you..."

For the next few seconds upon hearing Elenore's confession Margaret didn't really know what to say. This really took her off guard. She just stood there looking at her for a while, trying to make sense of those words. She couldn't stand seeing Elenore crying, and she felt guilty for that too, but she had no clue what to do or say to fix things. Right now, she didn't even know if anything she might say or do would do any good or just make things worse. She decided not to move for a while.

Margaret lowered her head and finally broke the silence, "How... long has this been going on, Elenore? Was it since we came back from Gazth-Sonika, or even before that? I feel so dumb now, for not realizing it..." she replied without looking up, obviously trying to hide her embarrassment.

"And also...why, Elenore? Why me?" she asked, raising her head and looking Elenore in the eye now, "It doesn't bother me one bit if you prefer girls to boys, but why me of all people? I'm so unsuited for you. I mean, I'm immature, clumsy, absentminded and not very clever, I'm afraid! ... I don't think I could ever actually help you with anything and I only cause you trouble!", at this point Margaret was feeling terrified and could barely keep her tears, this was a lot more than what she could handle, and she feared she wasn't quite reacting to it the best way possible, but all she could say was what came to mind.

"Doesn't it... feel awkward to you? Because we've grown up together in the same house, I always thought of you as a sister. And I thought you felt the same way and that's what you meant by family. And... and... I know this isn't important, but you work for me! This isn't right is it? Even if I felt the same about you, it wouldn't be right would it?"

Margaret asked confused as she got up to try and comfort her somehow. "I'm so sorry Elenore!" she said at last, with teary eyes, yet not daring to approach and hug her just yet. She felt her heart beating rapidly, no not beating but pounding in her chest. She took another deep breath.

"I'm so sorry..." Those words used to bring her some comfort after she came back to life, but now they felt like knives plunging into her soul.

She tried her hardest to keep herself together after seeing Margaret begin to cry.

She bowed her head in shame. "You're correct Miss, I do work for you and I've clearly overstepped my bounds by my statement. I will accept any disciplinary action you wish to take. To answer the Miss' questions; my feelings for you grew out from caring for you and that was before we went to Gazth-Sonika. I apologize for upsetting you and by doing so I've made yet another terrible mistake. If you wish, I will never bring up the subject again."

"My God, that was so cold." She felt disgust at herself. "But what could I do or say, she's right I do work for her and all I've done is made things worse. Grandfather must be turning over in his grave. I'm sorry Grandfather; it seems that even I broke your trust. Question is; what happens now?" Elenore thought standing in front of Margaret with her head deeply bowed.

"What are you saying Elenore?" Margaret was now even more confused at Elenore's excessively professional reply, "Do you really think I could ever punish you for whatever reason? How can you think that? And how could I ever... and after you finally go through the trouble of being honest to me about this! I really appreciate you telling me the truth, so please don't talk like that! It's... not your fault..." she struggled with her own words, noticing how nothing of what she said seemed to change Elenore's attitude, "It's my fault too, I guess... I never meant for you to fall in love with me. I'm sorry. I wish I knew how to deal with this better..." Margaret said in a low sad tone, turning her head away in shame and guilt.

"I need to step out for a while. I'm going alone, but please don't worry. I'll be back soon." was all Margaret could say before turning away from Elenore and leaving the house in a hurry, leaving Madlax and Laetitia with a slightly perplexed look. Elenore winced as she heard the door shut. She walked to the bathroom and closed the door and turned on the cold water faucet in the sink. When she thought the sound of the water as loud enough, she sat on the floor buried her face in her apron and began to cry.

After a few minutes of crying; got up and wiped her eyes and blew her nose. She looked at herself in the mirror. Elenore could've sworn the image reflected grew darker... "Well, are you happy now? That was pretty cold of you, but then again showing warmth was never your strong point was it?" The image asked.

"No I'm not."

"Then why the attitude? Poor Margaret was only trying understand why you have those feelings for her and what did you do. You turned into the Ice Bitch and made poor confused Margaret run away. "You think I wanted to, but she put me in a corner by saying I worked for her. I know that and I knew we couldn't have that close of a relationship because of that, but it didn't matter to me." Elenore said back with tears streaming down her face.

"Again why the cold?"The reflection asked coldly.

"What was I supposed to do? I didn't enjoy saying that to her and I'm disgusted with myself for doing so. But part of me is hurt, that part of me that loves her and feels rejected."

“So that part hid behind the Ice Bitch and you let her have it with both barrels. Congratulations, I'm sure she'll stay distant to you now. “The reflection coldly mocked.

Elenore was going to answer when she heard noise in the living room, she wiped her face and eyes, straightened herself, turned off the faucet and walked out to the living room.

Madlax was quite astounded when she arrived at Margaret's home. The air had an eloquence which she had started to become accustomed to. The bed had a fine fabric to it, and Madlax dived into it without hesitation and pondered into the ceiling. "Did I see a stain? What is this?" Madlax exclaimed. Suddenly Madlax saw a battle scarred world similar to the one she met Laetitia, there was parched rubble but also a church and a sky colored with the blood that cannot be washed away. There was all these men who looked rather numb like Poupee. Then it struck her these were some of the men who she killed, the crowd seemed listless but she felt she couldn't have killed every one of them. Indeed some of them wore suits too fine to be Enfant agents; they are similar to the ones worn by the dead men in the alley earlier today.

"This must be all a dream, but why? What is happening?" Madlax asked. "I need a bath and relax a bit" Madlax thought. After unpacking and finding some clothes, Madlax opened the door and saw Margaret rushing rather upset and hurriedly in the distance. "What's happening?" Madlax asked Laetitia.

"Another door is opening" the perceptive and enigmatic child replied.

Rather perplexed, Madlax walked to the bathroom only to find the door shut and some rather sad crying. "Elenore is that you?" Madlax asked but it was clear she was wallowing, too deep in sorrow to listen.

Elenore opened the door to find Madlax standing outside.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I needed to freshen up. Was there something you needed Madlax?" Elenore asked, her eyes showing that she obviously was crying.

"Is everything alright Elenore? I just saw Margaret rush pass me." Madlax asked with some concern.

"I'm sorry; I'm not at liberty to say at this point at time. Is there anything you need?" Elenore professionally replied.

"And the Ice Bitch strikes again... A voice echoed in Elenore's head.

"I was planning on taking a bath and relaxing before dinner." Madlax replied, a little taken back by Elenore's coldness.

"What's going on with you, this isn't really like you? Is it...? This is where I really wish Vanessa was here, she know how to deal with this." Madlax thought to herself.

"I'll draw your bath and start on cooking dinner." Elenore said.

After she drew Madlax's bath, she checked on a somewhat confused Laetitia.

"Where did Margaret go?" Laetitia asked.

"Miss Margaret needed to go out and she will return in due time. Please don't worry Miss Laetitia. I will prepare dinner soon Miss." Elenore replied with a fake smile. Laetitia could see the spiritual ice form

around Elenore in to the shape of a maid's uniform acting as armor. Protecting something she could not see.

"Margaret, what did you do? You were supposed to free her, but the chains are growing tighter."

Laetitia thought to herself as Elenore went to the kitchen to cook dinner.

She followed them home and got into a position where she could hear their conversations. At first the conversations were quite mundane and very boring until Elenore asked Margaret to have a private chat.

Chloe smiled as she overheard Elenore's admission to Margaret, then Margaret's bumbled reply and a hurt Elenore's response. She actually felt bad for Elenore. Here was someone who went through hell and died on top of it pouring her soul out to the one she loved. And what did that little twit do, she didn't say "I love you", no she said "you work for me". She might as well stabbed her in the heart with that response and then overreact when she forced her into a corner by saying that. Chloe fingered one of her knives, wanting to put one into Margaret but Lady Altena orders were no contact, just observe for the moment. She watched as Margaret ran out the door and into the night. She wondered which one to watch now; Margaret or Elenore?

Margaret didn't even realize how dark it was outside already till she had walked far enough away from home. She realized it might have been a big mistake to run off by herself like that, without even saying where she was going. But she couldn't have said that anyway, she didn't know where she was going herself. She needed to be alone for a while. She needed time to think what to say to Elenore when she got back home. She had messed things up, this she was sure about. She just wasn't quite sure what exactly upset Elenore the most. She could just apologize for the whole thing altogether, but would that really solve everything? What would she apologize for? For not loving her back? That wasn't the case, for she loved Elenore very much, just not the way Elenore would have wanted it. Maybe she should have just kept silent and not have said anything at all. But Elenore would probably want a reply from her after being confronted with the truth.

"What should I do?" Margaret thought to herself, "I don't want Elenore to stay angry at me. I just want things to be like they were before. How can I make things better? I don't like this. I wanna go home. Where am I?" she suddenly realized she had walked further away than she planned.

She figured she would be able to find her way back somehow, but she honestly didn't know where she was right now. "I'm such an idiot... I even managed to get myself lost..." she said to herself in a low tone, not realizing the person approaching her.

"Margaret, is that you? What are you doing here all by yourself at a time like this?"

Margaret turned back suddenly, upon hearing the familiar voice calling out to her "Vanessa?"

"It is you Margaret! Why are you out here alone? Where's Elenore?"

Margaret hugged Vanessa crying and Vanessa hugged her back. "Alright Margaret, start at the beginning and tell me why are you out here alone and without Elenore?" Vanessa said warmly. What Margaret couldn't see was the Torc around Vanessa's neck sending out waves of calm and peace.

"Vanessa, I think I did something awful." Margaret started explaining between sobs. "Me and Laetitia had been noticing Elenore has been acting weird ever since we got back from Gazth-Sonika. So this afternoon I decided to confront her about it and she explained me everything. But she also told me something I wasn't expecting. She told me that she loved me! And it's not like she loves me like a sister but, you know... and I must have said something wrong that really hurt her feelings because now she's acting weird to me. And I don't know what to do or say, I'm afraid she'll hate me. I just want things to go back to normal. What should I do Vanessa?"

"Well for starters, let's go to my car and I'll drive you home. While we're doing that just tell me everything you can remember saying to her and what she said to you." Margaret nodded and as they walked she told Vanessa what she said. As soon she said "you work for me!" Vanessa sighed and patted Margaret on the back. "Okay I think I know what happened here."

"First off, Elenore would never hate you, especially not after a declaration like that. When we get to your home, you'll give Elenore the night off and you'll tell her that you insist and that she comes with me. Part of the problem I think is that she hides behind her uniform and her professionalism. I know she would really like to tell you her feelings but as you said she works for you and that makes it difficult for her to do so. When you said you work for me you backed her into corner she couldn't get out of, so she hid behind her uniform so to speak."

Margaret smiled wiping her tears as they drove back to her home. "Okay, what else do I do?"

"I want you to remain calm and tell her and I'll handle the rest." Vanessa replied.

"But what about Madlax she's there as well?" Margaret asked not so sure what to do.

Vanessa smiled. "First I'll deal with Elenore and then Madlax, just keep her busy for me will ya?" Winking afterwards.

Meanwhile, on the other side of town, Mireille and Kirika returned to their hotel room that night, after taking a winding tour of the city, to make sure they lost their followers. As soon as they got in, Mireille collapsed in a chair, while Kirika made coffee in their complimentary coffeemaker.

"Eww," Mireille grimaced as she drank the black, bitter liquid.

"Sorry, they only have coffee pouches," Kirika said.

"So...I thought we were rid of them." Mireille was referring to that truce she and Kirika made with the Soldats as they left the Manor.

"We did. But something changed."

"But what?"

"Maybe Enfant?"

"Maybe." Mireille rubbed her temples. "I'll think about it tomorrow. All this exasperation and paranoia is wearing me out. Coming Kirika?" She had turned down the covers before she realized Kirika hadn't followed.

"...Kirika?"

Kirika's back was turned to Mireille, but Mireille could tell she was trying not to cry. "...I...killed. Again. I told myself I wouldn't."

"Kirika," Mireille sighed. "They were Soldats. They were following us. If we hadn't killed them, they would've killed us."

"I know, but....ever since Chloe...."

"Oh God are we on that again? Kirika, all the crying in the world and all the regret isn't going to bring Chloe back." As she got into bed, she muttered, "I never liked her anyway."

"OK, I'll do that." Margaret replied, trying to focus on what Vanessa said, "Thank you Vanessa! I wouldn't know what to do now if it wasn't for you..." she admitted embarrassed.

"Now, now, don't worry about it. I'm actually glad I found you at the right place at the right time. I'm sorry I have been away this long without contacting you, but you know I'm always here for you."

When they arrived at the door, Margaret was a bit worried about how Elenore would receive her. But she figured Vanessa's presence would sooth things out somehow. So when she got to the door the first thing Margaret did was hug Elenore tight and apologize. "I'm sorry Elenore. I'm sorry I run off on my own like that. I should have stayed and talked things over with you. I was an idiot. Please forgive me." Elenore was taken by surprise by all this, but before she could reply anything, Vanessa walked in and Margaret continued "Oh also, I really insist you take the night off. Vanessa needs to talk to you, so she thought you could go have dinner out with her. I can take care of things here, so you don't have to worry, we'll be fine! Okay?" she said with a hopeful smile, anxiously waiting for her reply.

"I take it I have no choice in the matter do I? I'll go" Elenore said with a warm smile, something inside pushed passed the Ice Bitch and to the real Elenore. As she started to walk to the door Vanessa grabbed her by the arm. "First things first. You're officially off the clock so let get you dressed in some more casual and no, you don't have a choice." And the pair walk straight to Elenore's room.

"Starting changing, young Lady." Vanessa said pointing a finger at her.

"To what? I don't have many "casual clothes" to begin with." Elenore said.

Vanessa sighed and opened Elenore's closet, only to find one teal color casual dress out the many maid's uniforms and her school uniform.

"Definitely going to have Margaret take her or tell her get some clothes for herself." Vanessa thought as she looked in the closet and she pulled out the dress and place it on the bed.

Elenore had taken off her uniform and was about to reach for the dress when Vanessa stopped her. "Take that off as well, we're going to eat, not to a warzone." Vanessa said slightly taken back when she saw the body armor Elenore was wearing. Elenore took off the armor and put on the dress and put on a pair of black low heeled shoes. She stared at herself in the mirror and then Vanessa held a tube of lipstick out. and she grabbed and put some on without protest (knowing that it would be futile anyway).

Vanessa hugged Elenore and they both looked in the mirror. "You look great! You should do this more often. Now let's go eat, I'm starving."

Vanessa said with a warm smile and they both went out to the living room heading towards the door...

After saying their good byes to everyone in the house Elenore and Vanessa got into her car and drove off. There was an awkward silence in the car then Vanessa spoke.

"Talk about déjà vu." Vanessa said with a grin.

Elenore was deep in thought then distracted by Vanessa words. "Yes, it seems it."

Vanessa's tone became serious but compassionate. "Elenore, you've haven't been the same since we got back from Gazth-Sonika and that's got everyone concerned. I asked Margaret to give you the night off for a reason; to give you a chance to talk freely without being bound by your job. I'm your friend and I'm worried about you. Can you at least tell me?"

Elenore stared out the window and then looked at Vanessa. "Alright, but you have to tell me where you've been? Margaret and I have been worried about you too."

"It's a deal, so what's on your mind?" Vanessa said with a smile.

Elenore described in full detail her encounter with the soldiers, her fall and trek through the jungle to reach the flower field where she died. Then she expressed her concerns about not being able to pull the trigger and her doubts on her abilities as a protector.

Vanessa pulled the car over and reached over to hug Elenore and then went back. She had a sympathetic look on her face.

"From what you told me so far, sounds like you have a classic case of Post Traumatic Syndrome. You really need to see someone about it. You just can't leave that untreated; it can lead to other illnesses. I'll give you the address and phone number of a women's clinic I went to after I got back, they're very helpful there. Just promise me you'll make an appointment there tomorrow, I don't want to have use Margaret as a club to make you do it. But it's is for your own good, and you shouldn't suffer in silence."

Elenore closed her eyes and thought for a moment and then spoke. "I know you're doing this because you care and I'm sorry I've dragged you into my mess. I'll make the appointment tomorrow."

There's no need to apologize, that's what friends are for. And besides I always look out for my friends." Vanessa said warmly smiling.

"Now let's go eat, I'm really starving here." Vanessa said in a mock pout.

"Now, why doesn't that surprise me? But it just so happens I'm hungry as well" Elenore said with a grin on her face.

"Now there's the Elenore, I know and love." Vanessa said smiling as she pulled back out into traffic and drove to the nearest restaurant.

After finishing their meal and Vanessa buying a carafe of tea they went out to her car.

"I guess it's time to head back home. If you need a place to stay for the night I can put you up in my room and I'll sleep in the living room." Elenore said.

"Oh no, we still have to finish our talk and besides I still owe you an explanation." Vanessa replied.

"That's right, you do owe me that. So let's go."

The pair got into the car and drove to a parking spot overlooking the city. There they got out and they walked out to the front of the car.

Vanessa made two cups of tea and handed one to Elenore who was looking at the distant city lights.

"Pretty out, I've never seen the city like this before."

"It's a very nice view from here, but I didn't bring you here just for the view."

Elenore sighed. "Right, I guess you know too, if Margaret told you."

"She did in her own way. No offence Elenore but I kinda figured that you were when I first met you."

Elenore looked at Vanessa in shock. "Really? Was I that obvious?"

"Yes and I saw the bookmarks to a few lesbian sites on the computer and I really doubt that they're Margaret's."

Elenore blushed. "Wait a minute, what were you doing on my computer?!"

"Well I needed to use a computer and Margaret was busy on hers so she told me to use yours."

Elenore sighed again.

Vanessa noticed and said. "Actually I'm not surprised you would develop feelings of that nature towards her considering you two grew up together.

"But Margaret's having a hard time in trying to deal with it."

"I know. I understood that there couldn't be any serious relationship. She sees me more as sister than anything and the fact I do work for her. "

Tears welled in Elenore's eyes. "Vanessa, I feel horrible for saying what I said to her, but she painted me into a corner and a part of me was hurt.

I could accept she couldn't love me the way I wished, but I did wish she would've said "I love you" somewhere in the conversation so I..."

"So you hid behind your uniform and put up a professional front, instead of telling her what you wanted to say. Am I right?"

Elenore nodded while Vanessa gave her a hug. "If you want I can talk to Margaret about this and see what we can work out, Okay."

"Thanks, I appreciate that."

"Oh one other thing, you need to get out the house more often. And by that I mean go out and make some friends and have a good time. Taking care of Margaret and Laetitia is great but you need to take care of "you" as well. Life is too short, as we both well know..."

"I get what you mean and I'll make an effort." Elenore grinned "It at least it will get you off my back."

Vanessa looked at Elenore in mock shock. "Elenore you make me sound like a nag!" She smiled and said "Shall we head back now."

Elenore grabbed her by the arm. "You still owe me an explanation and I want to hear it."

Vanessa sighed. "You're right, we made a deal and now it's my turn." She unbuttoned the top buttons on her blouse to reveal a golden Torc with a horse head on each end around her neck.

"What is that?" Elenore asked with concern.

"This is the Torc of Rhiannon. Are you familiar with the legend of Rhiannon?"

"Not off hand, I think I've heard of her in school."

"I'm not surprised so I'll give you the short version. Long ago in the kingdom of Dyfed, Queen Rhiannon gave birth to a son; however, on the night of the birth, the child disappeared while in the care of six of Rhiannon's ladies-in-waiting. They feared that they would be put to death, and to avoid any blame, smeared blood from a puppy on the sleeping Rhiannon, and lay its bones around her bed. Pwyll the King imposed a penance on Rhiannon for her crime, to remain in the court of Arberth for seven years, and to sit every day near a horse-block outside the gate telling her story to all that passed. In addition, she was to carry any willing guest to the court on her back. Well to make a long story short she proved her innocence and in remembrance of her ordeal she crafted the Torc and imbued with the power to help ease suffering."

Elenore looked a little puzzled. "Well that's nice story but what does that have to do with you being gone for so long?"

Vanessa looked down the road with a look of deep concern. "Elenore get in the car now! I'll explain on the way." Both of them got in and sped off. A little further down the road they noticed the headlights of another car behind them. Vanessa rolled down her window, pulled out a gun and with a trick reminiscent of Madlax shot the front tire of the car behind them.

As the car spun and slowed, they drove away. Vanessa smiled with some satisfaction. "Wow, that trick actually worked!"

"Who were those people following us Vanessa?" Elenore asked with great concern.

"It must be one of the three groups after the Torc." Vanessa replied.

"Well who are these groups?"

"One of them is only known by "The Coven" I don't know much about them other than they want the Torc or the reason why. The other group is known as Les Soldats and they too want the Torc for their war against another group you should know as well."

"Who?" Elenore asked with some apprehension as she could probably guess.

"Enfant... They're after the Torc to use it against Les Soldats."

Elenore's face saddened. "Now I know why you stayed away. You didn't want us to get involved. But why come back here?"

"Honestly I thought I gave all of them the slip in Peru, but I guess I was mistaken. I'm sorry."

"It's Okay. I figured they would show up sooner or later. Carrossea Doone made his presence known, saying that he wasn't working for them. I knew that bastard was lying." Elenore said a little angrily.

"Actually, he's telling the truth. He's not working for Enfant; in fact he's the one who helped me get out of Peru."

"Please tell me your joking Vanessa." Elenore said with a little surprise.

"It's no joke. I've said what I can say here and I'll explain later but right now let's get you home. I think we've lost them for now."

Elenore nodded with a worried look on her face as they drove home.

Back at the Burton estate, Madlax, Margaret and Laetitia were finishing dinner, without much being said between the three. Margaret wanted to speak out and clarify things for them. Especially Madlax, since she was their guest and this whole situation must have made her feel rather uncomfortable, not to mention confused about this sudden change of mood. But she didn't really know where to begin.

"Hmm, I guess I own you two an apology as well... for leaving like that... without saying anything..."

Margaret finally started with hesitation, "You must be wondering what happened between me and Elenore. And why was Vanessa here just now and the two of them left right after... well, where should I start?"

Laetitia could easily see Margaret's difficulty on bringing the subject so she decided to speak out and make things easier for her. "If this is about Elenore being in love with you, I already know that."

Margaret was taken by surprise by her words and suddenly felt that embarrassing feeling coming back. "Wait! How... how could you know about that? Was I the only one who hasn't realized it? Don't tell me you knew about this as well Madlax?" she asked a bit shocked.

Madlax had a long and relaxed bath and got dressed and had dinner rather quietly until Margaret popped her question. "Don't be stupid, I already knew that." Madlax replied in a rather confident voice. "I've known for a long time, Vanessa sometimes speak of it when we were alone when it felt like when we were together facing the world alone." Madlax sighed. Suddenly the trio heard a sound from the front door and Margaret ran quickly hoping Elenore had returned.

Vanessa and Elenore made it back without further incident. They went up to the front door and before they went in they stopped.

"Before we go in I would to say thank you Vanessa. I really needed that and I hope we can do this again in the future..."

"You're quite welcome Elenore and I'm sorry that you had to see that. I didn't want to get any of you involved. But I fear it may be already too late."

"It's okay; I figured sooner or later those criminals were going to target Margaret for revenge or something." Elenore said sullenly.

"So that's why the body armor, well with Madlax here, she could help you protect Margaret so you don't have to worry about pulling the trigger." Vanessa said hugging her.

"We better get in before they start worrying." Elenore as she pulled out the key.

"Vanessa!" Madlax exclaimed with tears in her eyes. "Where have you been? What happened?" the young blonde asked. Vanessa was flabbergasted, "I never thought I would see you here! Why did you come so unexpectedly?" Vanessa replied and hugged Madlax warmly. "Well I've been looking for work here but I took the invitation to stay while I'm looking" Madlax said.

"Ah let's go sit down on the couch, I've heard of a few opportunities out there Madlax." Vanessa said.

Meanwhile on the other side of the Atlantic in Mexico. Nadie and Ellis had been on move keeping one step ahead of the Coven. So far they managed to do so with few problems, but the lifestyle was starting to get to them both. It was approaching sunset when they entered a small desert village.

We can stay here the night, if we can find some place." Nadie said looking over the cluster of buildings that made up the village.

As they walked towards the center of the village, the pair passed an old woman selling trinkets on a blanket.

Ellis stopped and looked as Nadie continued walking. The old woman was selling native crafts along with the odd piece of silver jewelry. One piece stood out from the rest; It looked like it wasn't made around here, the designs on the bracelet looked like knots intertwining with each other.

"May I look at it?" Ellis asked pointing at the bracelet. The old woman nodded and Ellis picked it up and looked at. She could feel something benign from it but nothing else.

"How much for this?" Ellis asked with a smile.

The old woman squinted at the bracelet and at Ellis. "Oh that thing, I've had that for years and I've never been able sell it. People say it's cursed or something."

"I don't think so, it's very pretty. I like to buy it." Ellis said digging in her pocket for money, but she could pull out was a few coins and she frowned.

The old woman reached out to Ellis' hand and felt the coins in her hand and then took them and smiled. "This will do child, I'm glad somebody was willing to buy this. May it bring you good fortune child."

Ellis smiled and said "Thank you." She could hear Nadie calling out for her and she ran to her. Ellis turned to look at the old woman, but she was gone...

Back in Nafrece; Chloe continued to watch from her vantage point. She had decided to stay than go chase either of them around. Besides watching Margaret trying to make dinner was amusing to a point. She wondered what she would do if Elenore hadn't returned."She probably would've burned down the building trying to make toast or something."She chuckled to herself if it wasn't for Madlax she probably would've started a fire tonight. She had read the dossier

that her relief had brought and it raised some concern. This "Madlax" was not only one the top agents for hire in Gazth-Sonika but from the sketchy report related to Margaret Burton as well. Listening to Margaret's admission of her cluelessness to how her maid felt about her and how everyone else knew but her provided some the evening's entertainment. She was going to go when Elenore and Vanessa Rene entered the house. Chloe listened and watched intently. "Now the real show's about to begin." She said smiling evilly.

Chapter 2.

I've heard Love is a funny thing. It can make you do things that you wouldn't do normally. Well I proved that to be true in Gazth-Sonika. It definitely played a factor in what transpired later...

Taken from the diary of Elenore Baker July 8th 2013

Altena smiled as she looked over the vineyard. The news she received was more than she hoped.

She knew the Ring of Morrigan was in Nafrece and now the Torc of Rhiannon was there as well. Both artifacts in her backyard and if the laws of attraction held up the Bracelet of Brigid would come, but there was one catch, the possessor or the "key" of the Torc; might a run for it or go back into hiding. That was easily fixed, have her agents stop pursuit and keep Enfant and this upstart Coven from getting near. With the illusion of safety, she hoped Margaret Burton would come across the ring with the Torc's key helping.

And when the bracelet showed up, easily collect all three artifacts and their keys and the Le Grand Retour could begin at last. She wrote down orders and passed them to a nun.

Margaret was looking forward for Elenore and Vanessa to return, but at the same time she feared that awkward feeling would come back and get between her words once she tried to talk to Elenore again. She didn't really have the chance to clear things out with Elenore properly and she felt this subject wasn't settled just yet. As Margaret was trying to approach Elenore with hesitation, while Vanessa and Madlax talked in the other room, Laetitia suddenly popped in.

"I'm starting to feel sleepy already Elenore, could you help me get ready to bed please?" the little one asked with a sleepy voice. Sure she was tired from the long day, and it was past the bedtime for a child her age, though the main reason for Laetitia's plead was to leave the scene for the night and give the two of them more privacy, as well as buy Margaret some time to get her act together. Elenore might have realized it right away, expecting no less from Laetitia, but still indulged the younger one's request, as it was usual for her to see her to bed every night anyway.

Even though she was officially off the clock, she didn't mind and she guessed what Laetitia was trying to do.

"Oh course, let's get you to bed." Elenore looked at the clock. "It's way passed your bedtime." Laetitia nodded and she let Elenore carry her to her room.

Laetitia could feel the difference between the Elenore of earlier and the one of now. It seemed to her at least she was the Elenore she saw and comforted her in that field of flowers not too long ago. But that chain was still there...

Elenore got Laetitia ready for bed and tucked her in. Before Elenore left Laetitia spoke; "I know there is something...no a few things bothering you. But those doors haven't been opened yet." If it was anyone else's child that had said that to her, Elenore would've been a more than little creeped out.

But she knew out the three (?) Burton sisters, she seemed a great deal mature even for her age and got the feeling at least she was concerned with her well being. Elenore tried to think of a reply.

Elenore smiled warmly and said reassuringly. "Yes there is, but you shouldn't worry, all right. Now it's time to go to sleep. Good Night Laetitia." She hugged her and started to towards the door.

"Elenore..."

"Yes Laetitia?"

"I love you." Laetitia said in a sisterly way.

"Thank you Laetitia, I love you too." Elenore replied as she turned out the lights.

In the dark, Laetitia stared at the ceiling and at Elenore in the mindscape.

"Please remember that when the darkness comes..."

When Elenore came back from Laetitia's room she saw Margaret waiting for her at the bottom of the stairs with an apologetic expression.

"Can we talk?" Margaret asked decidedly, yet in an extremely humbled tone. Elenore looked at her for a brief moment, before nodding and following her. They went back to the dining room and sat at the table in front of each other. Margaret made an effort to look Elenore in the eye as she started talking.

"I talked with Vanessa about this... as you must know... and we both agreed that I probably shouldn't have said what I said. I mean the part about you working for me. I'm really sorry I said that! Especially because...it's really not important to me! You've been living with me in this house for as long as I can remember, and this is as much your home as it is mine. You know I trust you, and rely on you, and even indulge a bit and allow myself to be spoiled. That has nothing to do with the fact you are my maid, but because, for a long time, you've been the only family I have ever known. You're very important to me and I love you very much, just not the way you would have wanted me to. And I don't think I can ever apologize enough, if you feel I don't appreciate you the way you deserve, but I want you to know that I do! I know this is awkward for the both of us, and I understand if you'd rather not keep working for me, especially after the hurtful things I said.

But I want you to know that even if that's the case, I'll feel the exact same way about you, and I would like you to stay here, with me and Laetitia, forever. I want you to know that you're irreplaceable and we'd be

really sad if you ever left us. So Elenore, if you can forgive me at all, please stay! I just want things to be all right! What do you say?"

Tears welled up in her eyes as she smiled.

"I'm sorry for what I said as well. I would never do anything to intentionally hurt you. You mean so much to me and I would do anything if it would make you happy." The tears slowly rolled

down her cheeks. "I remember the first time you said those three words, it had been years since you had spoken but only that one word. It was when my mother died and I was crying in a corner of my room when you walked up and hugged me and said I love you. That day I felt truly loved. I understand and accept that you can't love me the way I wish, but to know that you love me is good enough for me. As for working for you I'll repeat something I said to you...; waking you up in the morning, brushing your hair, making your breakfast and seeing you off to school, cleaning the house, doing the shopping and making your dinner. Those are all I need to be happy. Plus to be with you and Laetitia forever is my wish and I will always forgive you no matter what..."

Elenore took a deep breath. "With that being said, I do have some personal issues that do need to be addressed by a professional. I made a promise to a friend I would do it, that and make time for me as well and maybe find that "someone" to share my happiness and wish with." She tilted her head so the bottom of her right ear was showing. "And I have one more thing to say and I mean it the way you answered when I asked you...you are and always will be my family..."

She thought for a few seconds and then asked. "Miss, I do have one question; I know that Laetitia is your sister but is Madlax? I have to ask Madlax of couple of things." "Hmm, that's complicated..." Margaret wondered for a while, feeling far more at ease now, after having cleared things up with Elenore, and having guarantees that there were no hard feelings between them. "I guess you could call it that way; it'd be the best way to describe it in normal terms. You know she's originally a part of me, but she's an entirely different person with an individuality of her own, just like Laetitia.

Since we all come from the same place and share this bond it's not too far off to say we're sisters." Margaret concluded in a pleased tone.

"Should we join Madlax and Vanessa at the living room? You could ask her about that thing now." Margaret suggested. Elenore wiped the tears from her eyes and they both went to the living room.

Madlax sat on the main couch with Vanessa, the two women wrapping their arm around each other's shoulder. Privately Madlax reflected on this pleasant day and the painful memories of war escaped her conscious mind.

But creeping beneath the surface, her subconscious mind was brooding. Brooding who might kill her and her friends, brooding where there was new work and brooding whether the jobs will be enough to support her existence. Margaret would've been happy to support Madlax for life, but the thought felt rather uncomfortable.

"Vanessa, thank you for helping me, do you really have jobs out there for me?" Madlax asked. "Yes, but I don't know how good the offer is. After my trip in South America, I heard there was someone who was looking for an agent". Vanessa handed Madlax the note with the phone numbers which Madlax held firmly. Madlax peered sadly onto the floor, looking rather numb. "Madlax, what is it?" Vanessa asked.

"I can't stay here too long, I will bring only pain and suffering to my friends" Vanessa stroked Madlax's hair and said softly "No you won't and thank you for keeping my promise when I had

failed." Madlax turned around and hugged Vanessa tightly. "I don't want to lose you again Vanessa" Madlax spoke softly into Vanessa's ear as a shadow peered over her. "Elenore?" Madlax gasped.

She stood in front of Madlax and said very apologetically; "I want to apologize for my behavior earlier this evening. Madlax there's a couple of things I need to know. Where were you that day? And what were you doing? I'm sorry if these questions seem blunt but I have to know." Placing one hand over her scar on her back.

Madlax again stared into the floor numbly and remorsefully. "Well, I did manage to clear them early. But when Limelda arrived, I couldn't resist." Madlax spoke quietly in a confessional tone. "I needed her, someone to remember me. I wanted her to remember my dance with guns, my face. I wanted someone to confirm my existence so badly that I forgot you Elenore; I didn't want to be fake, I didn't want to disappear."

"Sorry".

"Thank you Madlax for being honest with me and I'm sorry if my questions seemed blunt, but I needed to know."

She could understand Madlax's need to be remembered and acknowledged as she nodded her head.

"Please don't think I'm mad at you, I knew the risks when I went with you. I was worried about you and hoped nothing had happened to you. As for what happened to me, there's enough blame to go around including myself..."

Elenore bent down and gave Madlax a warm hug. "I do want to get know you better."

Madlax hugged Elenore warmly, feeling for the first time the person deep beneath Elenore's inner armor.

"Thank You, Elenore I want to know you better too". She spoke softly.

"We ought to get you out of that uniform more often; you're almost a different person when you are." Vanessa said jokingly.

"Just because I act professionally doesn't mean I'm a different person." Elenore joked back.

Vanessa cocked an eyebrow. "Wait a minute are you calling me unprofessional, what gives you that impression?"

"Do you want a list?" Elenore joked.

Vanessa thought for a few seconds and then she and Elenore laughed.

"Oh, that reminds me, I've wanted to ask about something too Madlax! I mean, I just never understood... who is this Limelda person exactly? How did you meet her? And why was she trying to kill you back then? When we came back to Nafrece and you left with her I thought you two must have become friends. Does she know you're in Nafrece now?" Margaret asked rather innocently.

After the moment of light-heartedness between Vanessa and Elenore, Margaret asked an innocent question about Limelda. But the question provoked some serious thought within Madlax, even though Limelda lived with Madlax since the Era; she was still in many ways an enigma she cannot comprehend. "Limelda, she knows I'm in Nafrece. I met her couple of times through my missions; I remember meeting her in a tall building. Who she is? Well she is someone I still do not truly understand." Madlax answered in a slightly perplexed manner "But she's an honest person, at least with herself anyway." Madlax sighed.

"She originally wanted to kill me but as we met we felt we wanted to toy with each other more. There were nights where she spoke to me, deep inside all she wanted was to defeat me, subdue me, and make me submit to her in open battle." Madlax spoke clutching her hands to her chest. "I feel Limelda is my friend but sometimes I'm not sure. Whether she hates or love me she will always be a scary person."

The laughter stopped the moment Margaret asked her question. Vanessa's feelings about Limelda Jorg were mixed; part of her was angry that she shot her (granted she was aiming for Madlax, but still...) and the fact because she wouldn't leave Madlax alone that Madlax left with her instead of herself. But on the other hand she did help get Elenore to the hospital and provided a copy of the data which proved her parents and her innocence. Plus she didn't come with Madlax to Nafrece so maybe she could cut Limelda some slack.

"Honestly Madlax I think you're far better off not being near her. Hopefully I can help you find a suitable job here in Nafrece." Vanessa said to Madlax. "Is that the woman who shot you, Vanessa?" Elenore asked with some concern. Vanessa looked at Elenore, again her feelings were mixed. "Yes she was, but she also helped bring you to the hospital and for that I am grateful. I still have bitter feelings toward her though; I guess I haven't really forgiven her yet."

Elenore hugged Vanessa. "Promise me you won't let it eat at you..." Vanessa felt Elenore's emotional warmth via the Torc and she smiled and hugged her in return. "I promise. But seriously you're more you're real self when you're out of uniform." "Are we going to start this again?" Elenore said with an eyebrow raised and her head tilted. Vanessa just shook her head with a smile and Elenore just let it go.

Earlier that evening; it took her awhile, but she managed to get transport to Nafrece. Limelda Jorg looked at the night sky, the city lights obscured the view plus it was a bit colder than she was used to. She went through customs with no problems (the hefty bribes helped) and retrieved her gear.

"Madlax, you can't run from me. You are Mine now and forever and I WILL find you!" She thought herself.

She didn't know where in Nafrece Madlax was or even if she was still in the country. But she did have one lead; the girl Margaret Burton. Maybe she would know where Madlax might be. All it took was where to find Margaret Burton and that shouldn't take very long. She walked out into the Nafrece night, thinking of Madlax...

"Hmm... well, if Madlax and Vanessa were able to forgive her I think we should as well Elenore." Margaret suggested rather lightly. "I actually just want to put all those horrible things that happened behind and hope we can all just enjoy what we have now. As long as this Limelda person doesn't come back to torment Madlax and shoot anyone we'll be ok, right?" she concluded optimistically.

"And, hmm... you three can stay here talking for as long as you want, but I'm feeling really sleepy right now, so I think I'm heading to bed already...", she admitted in a silly tone that revealed her sleepiness.

"Oh, I figure you're staying for the night, right Vanessa? We can settle you in!" Margaret added rather hastily.

"I'll help you get ready Miss." Elenore said cheerfully.

Margaret said good night to Madlax and Vanessa and went up to her room, followed by Elenore. Recently, she had been occasionally trying to assure Elenore that she could get ready to bed on her own, especially when she was trying to act mature in front of Laetitia. But right now she was too tired and sleepy to really care or think about it.

Elenore helped Margaret get undressed and into her nightgown. As Margaret got into bed Elenore stood by the door. "Is there anything I can do for you Miss before you go to sleep?" She asked with a warm smile.

She almost let it slip her mind, but Elenore's question reminded Margaret of one more thing she felt she wanted to tell Elenore before going to sleep "Elenore, could you come sit by my side for a little while?", she asked. Elenore just complied and sit by the side of Margaret's bed, facing her, keeping the same warm smile.

Margaret leaned over towards her and rested her head on Elenore, pulling her closer into a warm hug and just staying that way for a few seconds before saying anything. "You know, Elenore... I really like to see you like this. You haven't been quite yourself for these last few months and I kinda missed your old warm self.

It's good to have you back. And I don't know if it's like Vanessa said, about the uniform or not, but I'd like you to stay this way, because I really want you to be happy." Margaret said, before slowly letting go of the hug and looking up at her with a sleepy smile. "Good night Elenore! I love you!" Margaret said at last, before leaning back to her pillow, looking forward to sleep. Elenore smiled as she got up from the bed. "I love you too and good night Miss and pleasant dreams."

She turned off the light as Margaret's head hit the pillow and then quietly exited the room. As she closed the door behind her, she smiled. "Margaret's right, I haven't been myself lately but Vanessa has a good point. When I am out of uniform I'm free to truly be myself, perhaps I should ask Margaret for "time" for myself." She thought to herself. Then a small voice echoed in her mind. "What about your promise to Grandfather?"

Quietly to herself she answered. "Well, Miss Margaret is growing up and become more mature and less dependent on me. But then again there are those criminals and I can't protect her alone. I'm going to need help for all our sakes and I think I know who to ask."

She walked to the living room and up to Madlax. "Madlax, I don't know if Vanessa has explained the situation to you. Please, I would really like your help in protecting Miss Margaret. If need be, I can pay you out my own salary."

Vanessa looked at Elenore and then at Madlax and smiled. "That's good idea Elenore and I'm sure Margaret would agree as well. Well Madlax, your first day in Nafrece and already you have a job offer. What do you say?" Both Elenore and Vanessa looked at Madlax for an answer. Madlax thought the offer was enticing but had her reservations. "Well, Madlax?" Vanessa asked. "I like to but are you sure? I didn't save either of you last time and barely saved Margaret

from Friday Monday." said a little humbly. "Why don't you try it for a little while? You can leave anytime you want." Vanessa offered.

"Okay, just a little bit" Madlax answered. "Great, you can start in the morning" Elenore answered.

The girls then waved goodnight and Madlax went to the bedroom. She lay on the bed in her nightgown, staring into the beam of moonlight out the window. She tried to sleep but she just couldn't, protecting

Margaret was too urgent to hold till tomorrow morning. If Limelda shows up there will be a gunfight here, or worse there might be villains lurking in the shadows, perhaps even one grander than Friday Monday in Gazth-Sonika. Madlax put on her gear, clipped on her trusty SIG P210s and went out into the Burton garden from the window. "This is where I'll sleep tonight". Madlax told herself.

"I'll go prepare a room for you Vanessa. And thanks for what you've done." Elenore said relieved that at least Madlax was willing to help. "You're welcome Elenore, just remember your promise." Vanessa replied.

"I will." Elenore said as she led Vanessa to another guest room.

Chloe smiled. Tonight was very informative and entertaining. She watched Madlax go out of the window and into the garden. She was making it was making it easy for her. Lady Altena didn't say anything about her and since she's out of the house there's little chance she would be seen by Elenore, Margaret or the "Key".

She motioned to the trio of Soldats that were sent to relieve her and they stalked their way towards Madlax with weapons drawn.

On a nearby rooftop, Limelda watched the Burton home through a pair of binoculars, she too watched Madlax go out into the garden.

She smiled. "There you are Madlax. I told you, you'll never hide from me." She noticed movement heading towards Madlax. She spotted at least three men in black suits with guns drawn.

"Damn it must be Enfant. I won't allow it. If anyone is ever going to kill Madlax, it's going to be ME!" She pulled out her sniper rifle and peered through the scope. There she spotted the men and a purple haired boy (?)/girl (?) wearing a green cloak trailing behind them using the men as cover. She saw the one with the cloak pull out a pair of throwing knives and saw it was a girl.

Chloe smiled as she pulled out her knives. This was too easy, perhaps Madlax's reputation was overrated she thought to herself she threw the knives.

In an amazing feat of marksmanship Limelda shot the two knives in mid flight and both clanked to ground alerting Madlax to the danger and then she took aim at one the men and fired. She couldn't get a good shot at the purple haired girl as she was ducking for cover.

Damn Enfant! Chloe cursed to herself as of the men fell to what appeared to be a sniper. She had get out the line of fire and quick. Whoever it was they were a crack shot to be able to shoot her knives in mid flight.

Now she had tend to this and a now alert Madlax. And the night was so wonderful...

Madlax laid herself near a tree behind the bushes and roses sleeping though just half asleep but highly aware method of rest. She felt in the back of her mind people were stalking her looking at her like a piece of prey asking to be consumed. "It'll good to give them a false impression of I'm completely unaware" she thought and pretended to sleep. In that silence she can hear the

pistols drawn and the sense Limelda was watching her through her scope. But that tranquility of certainty was broken when she felt these knives thrown at her.

Madlax was surprised she didn't sense this at all until now, "How could this be?" she gasped. She wanted to wait till the last moment to move but then that familiar sound.

The familiar sound of Limelda's PSG-1 rung into her ears, "it's gotta be her" she thought to herself. Madlax saw the two daggers falling into the ground and there were a couple of people with guns hidden as she turned her head across. Madlax fired quickly taking down one of them and he flew into the oak tree. The rustling sound of the leaves gave away the position of the men and Madlax rushed into them. The black suited men were not much opposition and Madlax spectacularly shot both of them with her eyes closed as she spun in a twirl. But the purple haired girl who started bolting in a cloak was a different matter, she comfortably dodged her bullets and Limelda's was running towards the dense scrubs to hide in the corner of the Burton complex.

Madlax followed in pursuit and the few extra pounds did make her a little sluggish but she still leapt into the scrubs.

Madlax fell into Chloe and the two women gave each other rather astounded looks as their bodies huddled together facing each other side by side. But quickly the young girl looked rather cross as she saw the flicker of her blonde hair and chest in the moonlight. "So Enfant agent, now why are you suddenly so angry, do I remind you of someone?" Madlax asked.

Chloe didn't know what she was more angry about; The fact her attack was foiled and was forced to flee and then being crashed into by Madlax, Enfant sticking their nose in (via the sniper), or just the fact that Madlax did remind her of that damn Mireille and she that she called her an agent of Enfant. "I'm not one those losers." She spat out. She threw two more knives which Madlax easily dodged. "This is far from over Madlax." She said as she made an hasty retreat, she dreaded telling Lady Altena but she knew she would forgive her considering Enfant got in the way and greatly underestimated Madlax.

Meanwhile inside the house Elenore and Vanessa heard gunfire. "Miss Margaret! I have to check if she's all right!" Elenore said worriedly.

Both women ran to Margaret's room and burst in only to see Margaret still apparently asleep. Both of them breathed a sigh of relief. "Elenore see if Madlax needs help, I'll stay here with Margaret." Vanessa said to the relieved but still concerned Elenore.

"I'll have to go get my body armor and taser first." Elenore said and Vanessa nodded and Elenore headed to her room leaving Vanessa alone with Margaret.

Vanessa's eyes glowed and she unbuttoned the top buttons on her blouse and removed the previously irremovable Torc from her neck and placed it around Margaret's neck. Then she stepped back far enough from the bed and then collapsed into unconsciousness.

Elenore ran to her room, threw off her dress and put on her body armor and uniform and grabbed her taser and ran towards the garden. She looked out onto the garden and yelled for Madlax. She gasped as she saw at first the two knives on the ground and then the corpses of three men. "I hope she's all right?" She said to herself as she saw movement in the bushes. Then she thought of Laetitia. "I better check on her as well." And Elenore raced back into the house and to Laetitia's room.

"What's going on Elenore? I heard gunshots" Laetitia asked groggily.

Elenore breathed a sigh of relief.

"Everything's all right, just stay here and go back to sleep. Okay?" Elenore replied reassuringly. Laetitia nodded and lay back down and as Elenore left she smiled. "The doors are beginning to open and some will find their door of truth..." She said to herself as could hear Elenore run towards Margaret's room.

As Elenore opened the door to Margaret's room she saw that Vanessa was sprawled on the floor unconscious. She rushed to Vanessa's side. "Vanessa!

Wake up Vanessa! Please be all right!" She loudly said with her eyes tearing as it this reminded her of that terrible day she found Vanessa laying on the ground dead. She didn't notice that Torc was gone or that Margaret was stirring.

Margaret's sleep was suddenly interrupted by the noise of Elenore's voice nearby, as she called Vanessa's name in a loud panicked tone. She opened her eyes and got up on her bed quickly, as if awakening from a nightmare.

She felt this intense emotion of fear taking over, and it didn't take her long to realize why, as she looked to the side and saw Vanessa lying on the floor unconscious, as a worried Elenore attended to her. What she didn't realize right away was the Torc now around her neck, as its power grew stronger, bonding to its true bearer.

"What happened, Elenore?" Margaret asked worried as she approached them hurriedly, "What happened to Vanessa?"

"I don't know Miss. I came back here to check on you two after I checked on Laetitia and I found her on the floor." Elenore said teary eyed.

"Please Vanessa, get up!" Elenore said loudly and Vanessa began to stir.

Vanessa groaned for a little bit and sat up quickly with tears in her eyes.

"They're dead. They were murdered and thrown in a nameless grave. For nothing..." Vanessa said her hands covering her face. Elenore hugged Vanessa and asked worriedly.

"Vanessa, what happened?"

"I was standing here looking at Margaret, when I received these visions of my parents being taken away and then executed and thrown into a pit and that was the last thing I remember before waking up and talking to you."

Vanessa felt around her neck and looked at Elenore in horror. "The Torc! It's gone!"

Elenore noticed that the Torc had disappeared from Vanessa's neck.

"Where could've it gone?" Elenore asked.

The response shocked both Elenore and Vanessa as they heard Margaret's voice but it had an older and with a slight Welsh accent.

"Fear not. The Torc is now on its destined bearer. Thank you Vanessa Rene for bringing me here, though you had no conscious thought of doing so and as a reward, sad and tragic as it may be you were shown the truth about the fate of your parents. I wish I could've granted you something better, but that was the strongest desire in your mind. I hope you find peace..."

With that Margaret blinked and her voice returned to normal.

"Hmm... did I just say something? I can't remember..." Margaret said out loud to herself, confused, but as she noticed Vanessa and Elenore her attention was brought back to the urgency of the situation at hand "What happened Vanessa? Are you all right? I just woke up with the noise and there seems to be some sort of commotion going on... What happened?" she asked both of them, wondering why they were looking at her with such surprised expressions.

"The Torc, it's around Miss Margaret's neck! Why did it choose her? Can we get it off? Why did Miss Margaret's voice sound different just then?"

Elenore asked with equal parts shock, worry and the feeling that any sense of normalcy just went out the window and down the street and heading to the local dive.

"I don't know but I do know it won't come off unless it wants to. Why it chose her, I don't know either. As for her voice that I do know, it was the spirit of the Torc talking through Margaret. I wish I could give you better answers." Vanessa said wiping the tears from her eyes. "I'm sorry I've dragged you all into this." Vanessa said apologetically.

"What? What are you talking about?" Margaret asked in surprise and fear as she brought her hand to her neck and touched the Torc, trying to remove it immediately. "What is this thing and where did it come from?"

I didn't have it before! What do you mean it choose me? She questioned anxiously as she kept trying to remove it with no success, which only made her increasingly more nervous about it.

"And did you mention a gunfight outside? Is Madlax all right?" she asked worried about Madlax.

"It's okay. The spirit or whatever it is said you didn't do on purpose. It wanted you to come here. But I still would like to know why it chose her, but I get the feeling we're not going to get that answer soon. And besides there's a gunfight outside, I couldn't see anyone out there."

Elenore replied.

"Hopefully Madlax took care of it, I would ask you to go back out there but I don't what would happen next if you left." Vanessa sadly spoke.

Vanessa explained what she knew about the Torc to Margaret who listened intently.

Elenore's brow furrowed. "It's gotten quiet out there. I had better go see if Madlax is okay."

Elenore said hoping nothing else strange happened.

"You're right it did get awfully quiet." Vanessa said also hoping nothing else strange would happen, but she had a gut feeling that tonight would get even stranger as Elenore headed out of Margaret's room.

Madlax saw an infuriated Chloe flee with considerable disgust. The cloaked girl certainly left an impression on her. "She is certainly part of this unknown organization. They must very powerful to have people like her." she thought. Madlax wanted to chase Chloe but her client comes first, the feeling of failing Eric Gillian resonating in her psyche. As she was standing up, a shot whizzed past her. Madlax decided to tease Limelda again prancing around and evading another couple of PSG-1 shots which hit a small Helianthus patch near the back garden. Limelda jumped from her vantage point and drew her pistols. "Oh Madlax, still so confident you are a bigger and plumper target these days you know". Limelda said quite cheekily.

"Quiet down Limelda, people are sleeping" Madlax whispered. "How about some hand to hand combat then" Limelda asks. Madlax dropped her pistols without hesitation but as soon as Limelda sensed the gun

leaving her hand, she draws a pistol from a hidden holster. "You are mine Madlax, I will kill you". Madlax put her hands in the air and said "you got me Limelda." with her head tilted downward. Limelda smiled with a big smirk but during that small gap in concentration, Madlax slid to the ground and kicked her pistol into Limelda. The pistol hits her arm and Madlax charged, trying to take advantage of the confusion. Although surprised, Limelda pulled a wicked roundhouse which Madlax easily evades and fires her Beretta but the bullet just scrapes the blonde's silky hair. Madlax flawlessly somersaults behind her and braces Limelda's neck with

her arm strongly causing her to drop her pistol. "Tsk, Tsk, Sneaky Limelda, sneaky" Madlax whispers in her ear.

"Well what now, Madlax?" Limelda asks. "Let's go inside and have something to eat." Madlax replies.

Limelda was rather surprised "They wouldn't mind?" "Only if you are on your best behavior!" Madlax smiles chirpily.

Limelda reluctantly agreed and walked slowly to the main door with her with the moonlight dimly illuminating their path. "What a girl" Limelda thought to herself. "What a girl!"

Elenore ran out to the garden, taser in hand. She spotted Madlax with some purple haired woman next to her walking towards her. She ran towards them enough to get in firing range of her taser.

"Is that the maid?" Limelda asked noticing Elenore running towards them.

"Elenore, yeah that's her. She doesn't look too happy. Let me talk to her, okay." Madlax replied.

"Fine." Limelda said stopping herself from reaching for her pistol.

Elenore ran and pointed the taser at Limelda. "Madlax are you all right and who this with you?"

"I'm fine Elenore, we had some visitors but I don't think they were with Enfant. Limelda and I took care of them." Madlax said trying to reassure Elenore.

Limelda smiled looking at the taser Elenore was pointing at her. "Didn't know Heckler and Koch made tasers. By the way you're looking better than the last time I saw you."

Elenore looked a bit confused. "Do I know you?"

"I'm the one who helped Madlax and your employer bring you to the hospital. I'm Limelda Jorg."

"Well I guess I owe you thanks. But wait aren't you the one who shot Vanessa?"

Limelda looked at Elenore calmly. "You're welcome and yes I shot Vanessa Rene, but she wasn't who I was aiming for." Before Elenore could speak Madlax put her hand on Elenore's taser and lowered it. "Let's get inside before anyone else shows up. Oh, Elenore could you please make us some tea and something to eat." Madlax said smiling.

Elenore was a bit flabbergasted at first, but recovered. "Sure. We have some Earl Gray at the moment, will that do?"

"Sure that will be fine." Madlax replied smiling as the trio went into the house and Madlax and Limelda made themselves comfortable in the living room while Elenore made tea.

The whole incident made Margaret completely forget about sleep, as unusual as that was for her. All this information about the Torc was too sudden and complicated for her. Adding to the fact she could not remove it from her neck, it made Margaret feel very uneasy. She sure wasn't expecting to get involved on anything of this magnitude ever again since the incident with the books that happened less than a year ago. Most importantly, she wasn't interested in pursuing whatever purpose this Torc had for her, and would rather just get rid of it or give it to someone else. Not to mention she wasn't willing to sacrifice any of her friends again, because this time they might very well not come back. She decided to get dressed and went downstairs with Vanessa, quietly enough not to wake Laetitia up, to see what exactly was going on.

As they got to the living room they could see Madlax talking with someone. Vanessa seemed to recognize her immediately and she looked rather disturbed by her presence there. Only after a while did Margaret remembered who she was. "Oh right, that scary Limelda person! I wonder

what she's doing here..." Margaret mentioned to Vanessa, temporarily forgetting about the problematic Torc, as Limelda's presence at her house was an interesting enough occurrence. She approached them easily and stretched her hand at Limelda, introducing herself. "Hi, I'm Margaret Burton. I've wanted to thank you, for helping Elenore before. I heard you are Madlax's friend! Welcome to my place! Hmm... About the rest... I know we all have done things we regret in the past, but it would be nice if we could all just put that behind us and get along, right?, she said politely with a smile.

Limelda took Margaret's hand and shook it. "I'm Limelda Jorg and your welcome. Thank you. You have a very nice place here and yes I am Madlax's friend." She said with smile glancing at Madlax and then at Vanessa. "That was an unfortunate incident and I don't want to cause a scene in your lovely home." She said at Margaret and indirectly to Vanessa who didn't look too happy to see her.

Vanessa was about to say something unpleasant, but she held her tongue given where she was and Margaret's indirect request. So she sat across from Limelda, both women staring and smiling politely at each other.

Margaret sat next to Vanessa and waited for Elenore to come with tea.

"I thought I heard you come down Miss." Elenore said emerging from the kitchen with a tray with five cups and saucers, a large tea pot and the condiments and silverware. She placed the tray on the table began to serve tea, first to Margaret and then to the others. Then she poured herself a cup and sat down next to Margaret. She noticed the quiet tension in the air.

"Miss Jorg, earlier you said you were surprised that Heckler and Koch made tasers. How did you know it was made by that company?" Elenore asked hoping to break the tension.

Limelda stopped staring at Vanessa to look at Elenore. "That's quite simple; it says it on the barrel. I also noticed it didn't have any wire extension. Is it wireless?"

"Yes, it's the newest wireless model; it can hold about six darts and can incapacitate a large person or animal for a few minutes." Elenore replied.

Limelda nodded. "Impressive, so what's the range?"

"About six meters accurately, but you need to be in three for the capacitor to release its charge." Elenore said with a raised eyebrow.

"Still that's not bad." Limelda said still impressed.

Vanessa looked at Elenore and Limelda in some disbelief, with that had just happened these two were talking about a taser as if they were at a gun show.

"Ah, I suppose you know a lot about guns, don't you? Margaret asked Limelda curiously, between sipping her tea and getting startled at how hot it was "Oh, it's hot!", she noted out loud, half surprised and half embarrassed at this silly habit of always getting her tongue burnt when drinking freshly made tea. "Is that why you and Madlax get along so well, since you both seem to deal with guns a lot?" she asked casually while blowing at her tea trying to cool it down enough so she could drink it.

"Yes I do. Though I was surprised that a company that makes handguns; would start making tasers." Limelda replied.

"Be careful Miss it's still quite hot." Elenore chimed in after Margaret burnt her tongue on the tea and then turned to Limelda. "Well they started that product line last year to compete with Colt, Steyr, and Mashino. I found that their model was the best for my needs and the excellent service warranty is quite robust with free upgrades."

"That's unusual for that company to offer that, but if they're competing against those three you mentioned it's not surprising. May I take a closer look at it?" Limelda asked.

"Of course." Elenore removed the clip from the taser and handed it to Limelda who looked it over and weighed it in her hands and handing back to Elenore with Vanessa looking in utter shock.

"Thank you. Quite a hefty piece even for a taser. If it was a regular handgun the recoil probably snap your wrist every time you fired it." Limelda said. "You're welcome. Would you like some more tea?" Elenore asked.

"Yes thank you. Do you have any more of those biscuits?" Limelda asked.

"Yes we do. I'll go get some more." Elenore replied noticing that Margaret had a quite few near her.

"How can everyone be so calm? Next thing you know somebody would ask for the lights to be turned out so we can all drink tea in the moonlight." Vanessa asked somewhat in shock.

Vanessa quickly regained her composure and asked Limelda. "So what brings you to Nafrece Limelda?"

"Why to see Madlax of course. I figured you've would've been busy with the maid here since you two seemed to be very chummy in the hospital. Besides I think you two would make a very nice couple." Limelda answered politely.

Elenore blushed and looked at Limelda and then to Vanessa who was speechless and blushing as well.

The gentle breeze from the window swept across Madlax's hair, all she really wanted to do was enjoy the moment. She felt serene, the biscuits fresh and none of the chatter really interested or bothered her. But the sensation was a little surreal too, having someone who shot and practically killed you have a quiet and civilized chat must be odd for Vanessa. Suddenly Vanessa sarcastically suggested turning off the lights, but it felt right for Madlax. "What a great idea, Vanessa, let's turn out the lights Elenore?" Madlax said.

"Yeah, I'd like that too." Margaret said softly. "We have large windows and no buildings around, so we can get a pretty clear view of the night sky if we open the curtains." she added. "Would you please do that Elenore?" Margaret tilted her head to the side and asked with a smile, before sipping her tea again "Ah, it's still hot!" she giggled to herself.

"Yes...Miss." Elenore stammered as she rose from the chair. She shut off the lights and then opened the curtains her face still blushing from Limelda's comment.

Vanessa and me? A couple? The thought has crossed my mind a few times, but she's involved with Madlax and I already had my heart broken once tonight. But still..." She thought to herself as she opened the curtains and she stared at the moon. It's light pouring into the room. She turned around, her eyes adjusting to the light. She looked at Vanessa and then spoke. "There we go, does anyone need more tea?"

Vanessa looked a little uncomfortable as Margaret, but thankfully the dim light hid her face. She knew that Margaret was being her usual kind self and meant no malice but it still made her uncomfortable knowing that Limelda was in the same house with Madlax and her.

I guess I'm going have to confront them both... She thought to herself. Thinking of faces; she noticed that Elenore's turned six shades of red before she turned out the lights. I'll ask her about that later... She thought and giggled to herself.

Limelda smiled in the moonlight. "Why thank you Miss Burton for your generous offer. I accept and I do apologize for coming at such a late hour." Limelda replied politely.

Yeah right... Vanessa thought to herself.

"I'll go prepare a room Miss." Elenore said her face still slightly red but thankfully the lighting in room hid that.

The turning off the lights was a small gesture, but it gave Madlax a great sense of joy. She felt like an angel of moonlight with a similar innocence to the time she met Gwen McNicol. Rather ironic for a harbinger of death such as herself; but this young lady has many contradictions. Madlax felt a slight stroking sensation on her leg beneath the table and she turned her head towards Vanessa. Vanessa smiled and sipped a part of her hot tea but that did not give a hint of who it was. "How's the tea, Vanessa?" Madlax asked "Oh its fine Madlax" Vanessa replied in a slightly irritated tone turning her glance towards Limelda.

Madlax tried to smile and avoid the thought of Limelda. She looked at Margaret and regained the aura of innocence that emanated from Margaret.

"You're not burning your tongue anymore?" she asked "Uh, no" Margaret giggled. This eased tension a bit and after a little friendly banter, Margaret had asked Limelda politely about staying. "Limelda certainly wouldn't refuse but which room will she ask for?" she thought.

Luckily Limelda didn't ask for a room next to hers but she felt she had to talk to Vanessa and Margaret who were hiding a thin layer of discomfort about the whole situation.

Elenore went upstairs to prepare a room for Limelda. As she was preparing the room she heard footsteps in the hallway and went to investigate. She saw Vanessa walking towards the bathroom.

"Is there anything you need, Vanessa?" Elenore asked with some concern for her friend.

"No just need to use the bathroom, but thanks anyway Elenore." Vanessa replied as she went to the bathroom. Elenore went back to preparing the room while she was doing so do she thought to herself.

Why did Margaret invite that woman to stay? She knows how Vanessa feels about her, but then again Margaret is Margaret. I don't think she meant any harm by doing so. But it's going to cause problems that I can be sure of.

"I'm sorry; I've gotten you two into this mess."

Elenore's train of thought was interrupted by a voice behind her and turned and saw Vanessa standing in the doorway.

"It's not your fault. You came here to help me and I doubt that you knew what was going to happen." Elenore said trying to comfort Vanessa.

"It's been a very bizarre night and I have no idea what going to happen next." Vanessa wearily said.

"You're not just upset with Miss Jorg about the shooting are you?" Elenore asked raising an eyebrow.

"No, it's the fact she won't leave her alone and it doesn't help when Madlax bounces between us. I'm really afraid of having to place an ultimatum in front of her." Vanessa replied with some sadness in her voice.

"You really do love Madlax, don't you?" Elenore asked.

"Yes, but I wonder if she really loves me or does she love Limelda?" Vanessa asking out loud to no one particular.

"Well from what I've seen, those two have a lot in common. But I can see why Madlax would be attracted to you." Elenore answered.

"You can, how?" Vanessa asked.

"You're an intelligent, beautiful and loving woman, who wouldn't be." Elenore said smiling with her head tilted to the right.

"Thank you Elenore." Vanessa said with a smile on her face.

"Oh by the way I saw the look on your face when Limelda said what she said. What were you thinking Elenore?" Vanessa said mischievously.

"Me?! Your face was just as red as mine." Elenore said somewhat defensively.

"Ah ha! You admitted it, now what naughty little thoughts you were thinking there Elenore?" Vanessa asked

while gently poking Elenore in the ribs.

Elenore giggled as she tried to get away from Vanessa's finger. "All right I'll tell, just stop poking me."

Vanessa stopped poking Elenore and then Elenore stepped back to doorway and said with one eyebrow raised and her head tilted; "Well, it would be very rude, to tell you what I was really thinking. But I did mean it when I said you're intelligent and beautiful and I do find you very attractive." Elenore looked down the hall. "I had better get back, before something else happens." With that Elenore scooted down the hall and back toward downstairs.

Vanessa stood there in shock for a few seconds and then said to herself with a smile on her face.

"Did she just say what I thought she said? Thank you Elenore, that was very kind of you." Then she went out and raced down the hall hoping to catch Elenore.

"Elenore." Vanessa said in the hallway hoping to stop Elenore before she went downstairs.

Elenore stopped long enough for Vanessa to catch up. "Yes Vanessa?" Vanessa caught up with Elenore and gave her a warm hug. "That was very sweet what you said back there. I didn't know you had feelings for me too. Thank you."

Elenore tried to keep her face from blushing. "You're welcome. To be honest with you, I didn't know how you felt about me or knew my orientation so I kept it to myself."

Vanessa was about to answer when they both heard footsteps coming up the stairs.

Without Vanessa or Elenore momentarily around, Margaret suddenly felt rather uncomfortable around the two gunslingers' presence. Not like anything about Madlax made her feel uneasy, but Limelda had this very strong intimidating presence to her, scary even. Also, with Limelda there and the others away she did feel like an outsider who could not understand these two women's world very well. She wasn't sure what to say at the moment, for she felt Limelda didn't want to be disturbed with casual talking and she'd just avoid what she didn't want to talk about. It might also have been just her imagination but Margaret felt like they actually wanted to be alone for some reason. Conveniently, she was getting quite sleepy now, so she wished them

both good night and excused herself, going upstairs to her room.

On her way up she noticed Vanessa and Elenore at the top of the stairs, talking about something she didn't hear clearly. They stopped talking and turned to her when they noticed her. "Oh, so this is where you two were!" Margaret said happily, already showing signs of her sleepiness. "I'm going to sleep now, so good night!" she told them both, closing her eyes as she

gave them a smile and passing them into the direction of her room. "Oh, there's one thing... I needed to ask you Vanessa..." she turned back looking at the older woman, "I really hope that you're not upset that I asked Limelda to stay, are you? I just thought it'd be tough for anyone to sleep outside, and since we have enough rooms... Also, she is... Madlax's friend, I guess..." she hesitated, "Hmm... are you angry?" she asked nervously, lowering her head and looking rather apologetic.

Vanessa smiled and shook her head. "No Margaret, I'm not. I know you were just being kind hearted as usual. So don't worry, okay and good night Margaret." She hugged Margaret reassuringly and watched her she went to her room.

"Good night, Miss. Sleep well." Elenore said smiling glad that Margaret interrupted their conversation.

As Margaret went into her room, Vanessa turned to Elenore and said. "Before we were interrupted, I was going to say you're my friend and I love you just the way you are. Actually I'm quite flattered that you thought of me in that way. I truly do hope you do find someone who loves you for you and wants share your happiness with you." Looking down the stairs with some sadness and concern. "Now I have to do something about my happiness." She was about to go down the stairs when she could hear Limelda talking to Madlax.

Meanwhile downstairs Margaret had just left leaving the pair alone. Limelda turned to Madlax and said with some anger and sadness in her voice. "Madlax why? Why must you be with that woman? You and I have so much more in common. What does she have that I don't? What do you see in her Madlax? Tell me, please!"

Madlax felt deeply torn and stretched by the question Limelda posed to her. It was a question she wished she could avoid, for she loved both women in her own way. She wanted to be loved by both but felt she will be loved by neither one. Madlax pulled her eyes out to the night sky, staring into the blue and red moon appearing from the mist and hoping to avoid this as long as possible. "Well, Madlax well?" Limelda asked impatiently. Madlax took a deep breath and blurted her soul "Yes our existence is far more alike, but I like her because she isn't like us Limelda! She has strong ideals, she isn't self-righteous like many Nafrecan people and she's tender and warm."

Limelda was feeling rather indignant and arose from her chair "well wasn't I warm, Madlax? The way I held you closely at night? No?" Limelda whispered as she stroked her hand softly on her back. "You cannot live in her world can you? It's too different isn't it?" Limelda asked in a rather rhetorical tone. "I do not know, I do not know" Madlax said melancholically. "I like you too Limelda, Please don't make me choose! Please don't make me choose!" as Madlax laid her sorrowful head onto the table with teardrops running across her cheek.

Vanessa's face saddened as she heard the conversation. "Are you all right Vanessa?" Elenore asked with concern. "I'll be fine, thanks Elenore." Vanessa replied.

"I have to go check outside and see how much damage has been done and see if I have to call the police."

Elenore said knowing not to push the issue further.

Vanessa looked at Elenore with some concern. "Are you going to be okay out there?" She asked. "I'll be fine, nothing's happened within the last hour or so. So I assume our "visitors" have left for the night." Elenore said reassuringly. Vanessa nodded and they both went down the stairs and back to the tea party.

"Miss Jorg, your room is ready. I'll show you after I've checked outside." Elenore said to Limelda and then looking at all three said. "I would like to remind you all you are guests here, please refrain from any violence in here. There's been enough of it tonight. Now if you excuse me." Elenore then went out to the garden.

Inwardly Vanessa smiled. Thanks Elenore... She thought to herself and then turned towards Limelda and Madlax. She saw Madlax's head on the table and then turned to Limelda. "Was that really necessary and can't you leave her alone?" Vanessa snapped at Limelda. "Because she's like me and she has no place in your world." Limelda snapped back. "How can you say that? Did you ever consider that she might want something different other than a life of violence?" Vanessa asked angrily.

"It's what she's good at and you want to make her into something she's not. I understand her, how could you ever understand?" Limelda shot back.

Elenore looked around garden. She could hear the argument between Limelda and Vanessa. "I hope Vanessa and Madlax are going to be all right." Elenore said to herself as she looked but she could find no sign of the battle other than minor scratches.

"Humph. Well at least our visitors know how to clean up after themselves." Elenore said to herself as she looked back at the house. If Elenore knew what would happen in the next days, she would've have been so casual with her comment.

"Please stop arguing, please" Madlax softly interrupted Limelda and Vanessa. There was an eerie and concerned silence; both women understood this will have to be resolved later. "What is normal? What is normal for me?" she spoke to herself quietly. "Are you alright?" Vanessa asked with Limelda staring in a worried paralysis. "I'll be okay" Madlax said in a quiet but assuring voice, although the tears will still candidly visible and the tone distinctly sad. "I'll go to bed now, goodnight" Madlax spoke as she walked slowly with head drooped low towards her bedroom.

Elenore came back into the house. The arguing had stopped and she saw Madlax go upstairs. She waited till Madlax had gone into her room before showing Limelda her room.

"Please Miss Jorg. If you are ready I can show you to your room now." Elenore said politely. Limelda nodded and followed Elenore to her room and then Elenore came back down and started clearing the table.

She noticed Vanessa sitting there with a very sad look on her face.

"Vanessa, are you all right?" Elenore asked with great concern.

"I'll be fine, I just need to sit here for a bit and think. Thank you again Elenore." Vanessa replied. Elenore looked at Vanessa with concern. "Maybe you should get some sleep. I'm going to be here a while cleaning up."

"It's all right I'll wait till your done. Thanks for your concern though." Vanessa replied.

"You're welcome, isn't that what friends do for each other?" Elenore answered in return.

Vanessa smiled a little and said. "Yes they do..." With that Elenore continued to clean up. After a nearly a half hour later Elenore had finished she saw Vanessa still sitting there thinking. "I'm done now are you ready to go to bed?" Elenore asked Vanessa snapping her out her reflection.

"Oh, so soon. Sure okay." Vanessa said and with that Elenore showed her to her room.

"Now you get some sleep. I'm sure things will work themselves out Vanessa." Elenore said before Vanessa went into her room and Vanessa smiled and gave Elenore a warm hug and said. "Good night Elenore and thanks again."

"You're welcome and good night Vanessa" Elenore said as Vanessa closed the door and Elenore went to her own room.

When she got inside she looked at the picture of her grandfather and said with some melancholy;" Well grandfather, I've gotten myself into another mess and I don't know how to fix it. What would've you've done in this situation?" After a few minutes staring at the picture, she got undressed and got ready for bed and went to sleep wondering what the next day would bring.

Chapter 3.

As if the Torc, the attack on our home, the appearance of Limelda Jorg and the midnight tea party weren't strange enough, the events of the following day made that pale in comparison. My life had definitely changed from that day on...

From the diary of Elenore Baker July9th 2013

The morning dawned with majestic sluggishness, as if the sun didn't have a worry in the world. Mireille was once a sound sleeper, preferring to get up late... Times change. If you are in a situation like theirs, you can only think of minimizing the dangers.

"Kirika..." she called, "we need to get out of this place before it gets crowded. You can sleep in the train, if you want to."

There was only one bed in their room. She was used to it. The little Japanese girl sleeping uneasily near her was the best thing that happened to her ever since that day, many years ago. Mireille didn't mind staying like this for hours. But time wasn't exactly a luxury they could afford.

"Hmm...What?" Kirika asked drowsily as she heard Mireille's voice from the bathroom. She wasn't used to waking up without the blonde next to her. She drowsily lay in bed for a minute before her eyes snapped open. Of course, the Soldats!

Kirika said hurriedly, "I'm up", got dressed, packed, and swept the room, making sure to leave nothing behind. She was ready in a few minutes and waited impatiently for her partner to come out of the bathroom. She smiled and shook her head. Even at a time like this, Mireille always made sure to freshen up before they left. Kirika always just got up and went.

Finally, after what seemed like eternity, but was probably only a few minutes, Mireille walked out, looking as done up and beautiful as always.

"Ready?" As they left the room--the smaller girl carrying the bags--Kirika asked, "So...where are we going to?"

"To the train station," Mireille replied matter-of-factly. "We must leave town, or the Soldats would be coming after us again." The crows were circling over their heads ever since that night at the Manor. Breffort said they'd leave them alone. He was either dead or switched sides by now. She couldn't really blame him. She and Kirika were mad dogs on the run, tearing the entire Soldats system apart. Killers who refused to kill. It was so ridiculous, she couldn't laugh. "Let's go." The elevator hummed softly as it took them down to the ground floor. Ding. The hall was empty, the concierge nodding off to sleep, his shift almost over. Mireille placed the keys and a 500 bill on his register. "We checked out last evening." The concierge nodded, his drowsiness gone as if it was never there at the sound of hard cash.

The hard part lied ahead. If the Soldats monitored the hotel, they could attack on the way to the station. Under surveillance of a hundred itchy triggers, Mireille always felt herself like Pheidippides, starting off on her own Marathon. Except no Spartans were waiting on the other side, no matter how she looked at it.

Kirika felt something slam into her as she tried to keep her balance. A small voice spoke apologetically "I'm sorry. I didn't see you. I'm trying to find my mother and I know she's in town." Kirika looked down keeping a hand on her pistol, she saw a small girl about eight years old with green eyes and short brown hair. (Ironically Kirika would meet this girl's mother before the girl ever would.) "I'm sorry to trouble you." The girl said as she ran off and as she ran Kirika heard a ringing sound as something metallic hit the ground.

She looked on the ground and saw a silver ring engraved with Irish Celtic knots and what appeared to be some kind of bird holding a heart with its talons? Mireille always found little kids annoying. Maybe that's because she envied them, growing up in peaceful country, with not a worry on their mind. Maybe not. She didn't think about it much. Mireille let go of the gun she reflexively grabbed inside her handbag. Mireille picked up the ring and examined it for a bit. Curiosity got the better of her sometimes, but it wasn't really the right time to chase after her. "What do you think, Kirika?"

Mireille handed the ring to Kirika, who inspected it, wearing a confused face. "It looks....old. And...Celtic, maybe? I wish we'd covered Celtic culture in school. What should I do with it?" "Just leave it here, maybe, she'll come back looking for it," Mireille shrugged. "We've got better things to do than play lost and found for her..."

Kirika looked at the ring, then behind her, then at the ring again. She debated to herself whether to keep it or throw it out, after some hesitation, she stuffed it in her jacket pocket. It looked important, like the pocket watch she'd found in her room back in Japan. More importantly, even though she knew now wasn't the time, she'd been meaning to ask Mireille something, and keeping the ring would save her time and the embarrassment of stumbling around jewelry stores, not knowing what to buy Mireille. Mireille didn't notice Kirika's little theft. Her eyes darted across the street, looking for suspicious movements. This early in the morning, the streets were clear as if before a bombing raid. But that was good, less chances of civilians getting caught in the crossfire... They continued moving towards the train station but stopped when they saw an obvious Soldat waiting for them.

"This is bloody ridiculous." Mireille gave an exasperated sigh. "If we cause too much noise, we can forget about leaving this place today... We have to sneak around. How many do you count?" Kirika stopped. She knew it was too quiet for their own good. "Mireille," she whispered, "There are a lot of them. There are probably more hiding. This place is too deserted; they could be anywhere. Let's head for a crowded place. They might not attack if there are witnesses." Kirika said more loudly, "But Mireille, I didn't get to see downtown yet."

"Oh, hush, you know very well that we can't stay anywhere for long." Mireille sounded annoyed, readily accepting the game Kirika suggested. She then added in low voice: - You're right... we lose either way. Let's go back. We'll try finding a car and getting to the next town... With that, they started in the direction of the town center.

Meanwhile on the other side of town; Elenore woke up a hour later than she normally would but considering last night's events, didn't think anyone would actually notice (and actually thankful that Margaret liked sleeping late on Saturdays). She went through her normal routine of getting herself ready for the day. As she left she looked at the picture again. "Once more into the breach and let slip the dogs of chaos." She chuckled at herself knowing her grandfather would both chuckle and correct her for her alteration of that famous line and with that she went out to do her usual routine. When she went out the living room towards the kitchen she saw Laetitia watching anime on the television. "Good Morning, Miss Laetitia. I sincerely apologize, if I had known you were up I would've fixed you breakfast."

Laetitia turned her head and smiled. "Good Morning Elenore. It's okay, I know last night was unusual and everyone was tired. It's nice to see that you're feeling better."

"Thank you Miss. That was very nice of you to say Miss. I'll go prepare breakfast now." Laetitia smiled, nodded and returned to watching television. "Things are going to be very unusual." She said quietly to herself as a part of her reached out...

Elenore was cooking breakfast when she heard footsteps behind her. She grabbed a butcher knife and spun quickly to see Vanessa, the knife nearly missing her throat. "That's it. You're making that call today and hopefully we can get an appointment as soon as possible." Vanessa said with some surprise and concern. Elenore bowed her head with a sad look on her face. "I'm really sorry Vanessa, I just get really jumpy when I hear someone behind me and I don't know who it is. I wish I could put it all behind me, but I can't." Elenore said sadly.

Vanessa hugged Elenore. "We'll get you help..."

Vanessa didn't finish her sentence when heard she Limelda say;"I knew you two were together..." Vanessa let go of Elenore and turned around and pretty much got in Limelda's face. "You have no idea what's going on here. This doesn't have anything to do with the three of us."

"Oh really... From what I just saw..." Limelda snapped but she was interrupted."Get out! Get out, both of you or I swear to God I'll..." Elenore said angrily, her eyes shown with pain, fear and sadness holding the butcher's knife in her hand once again. Limelda and Vanessa put their hands up and slowly backed out of the kitchen.

"All right Elenore, we're leaving." The pair went down the hall a bit, listening to Elenore resume cooking.

"She has it bad, doesn't she?" Limelda asked.

"Yes she does. But I didn't think it was that bad." Vanessa answered still in some shock in Elenore's behavior.

"I've seen that same look in those who fought in the civil war. She really needs to get some help before she does something she'll regret." Limelda said in somewhat less shock."I was trying to get her to get some help before you started. Look, our fight is between you, Madlax, and me. You leave her out of this." Vanessa said angrily but quietly enough so no one else could hear. Limelda nodded having some idea what was going on. "I understand..." And the pair went to living room and waited for breakfast.

Elenore calmed down and resumed cooking breakfast with a sad look on her face. What has gotten into me? Maybe Vanessa's right and I do need help, but what about Margaret? I can't do anything while all this is happening, she needs me..." Elenore thought to herself. Soon she finished cooking and putting it on trays and then she put on her happy face and went to wake Margaret and Madlax. She knocked on Madlax's door and announced that breakfast was ready. She heard what she thought was a reply and then she went to Margaret's room.

"Miss Margaret. Time to get up, breakfast is ready. You don't want it get cold do you?" She said as cheerfully as she watched Margaret stir.

Waking up in the morning was never easy for Margaret. Even after having slept for 10 hours she still felt sleepy. She did hear Elenore's wake up call, somewhere between the weird dream she

was having, which she couldn't quite remember anymore the moment she opened her eyes. She was still reluctant to get out of bed though, and just closed her eyes again and turned the other way, pretending not to have heard Elenore at first and hoping to buy some extra sleeping time by doing so.

"Miss Margaret, must I remind you that you have guests this morning? It would be rude to make them wait any longer for you or skip breakfast, wouldn't you agree?" Elenore said in a cheerful tone, knowing that if good sense didn't work she could always resort to wake up method number three to get Margaret out of bed.

"Hmm, Elenore is right." Margaret thought, slowly opening her eyes, "I almost forgot Madlax, Vanessa and Limelda were staying over." She slowly sat on her bed, rubbing her eyes, trying to get rid of her sleepy face, before greeting Elenore with a faint good morning.

Margaret was going through her usual morning routine of trying to brush her teeth and get dressed without falling asleep, and as she was adjusting her tie in the mirror she couldn't help but notice the strange artifact around her neck. Suddenly she had a quick flashback sequence of the dream she was having just before waking up, but it was all too quick and confusing to sort out any meaning except for the voices of people arguing as well as gunshots and screams. The Torc seemed to glow and she felt it tighter around her neck.

Margaret jumped startled away from the mirror, gasping for air and instinctively bringing her hand around the Torc in a futile attempt to remove it once more. Margaret blinked and looked back at the mirror confused, only to realize everything seemed to be normal again, though her actions made Elenore seem more than a bit concerned.

"Miss, are you all right?" Elenore asked with great concern pushing aside her own problems.

"I'm fine Elenore. But I can't get this thing off. What are we going to do?" Margaret said reassuringly mixed with worry. "Let's have breakfast, and then we can figure out on what to do next Miss." Elenore said trying to reassure Margaret.

Margaret smiled. "You're right Elenore. I'm sure between all of us we can do something. I really want to get this off my neck."

"Yes Miss, I'm sure we can. But now let's go have breakfast; I'm sure the others are getting impatient." Elenore said with a smile trying to forget this morning's confrontation. And the two went down to dining room where everyone was seated waiting for Margaret.

When Madlax finally glumly went to bed, even for her it was a long and exhausting day. The darkness of the night lulled her into a dreamy and blank asleep. Suddenly all she can see was a hellish fire enveloping her, the crimson sky singing death upon the ruins and the dead. Madlax walked upon the shattered ruins and saw a fiery haired woman in a long purple robe with an outline of velvet similar to the doll Laetitia bought. "What is this place?" Madlax asked. The

woman just bobbed her head and smiled and raised her arms in the air as the fire raged more savagely. Madlax turned to her left only to see a maniacal masked man laughing in the distance. She ran into this image and noticed the man was Friday Monday although he seemed slightly different. He was calmer than he was before but took even more delight in the burning silhouettes of human suffering. "Friday Monday? Aren't you dead? Is this the past?" "No, this is the future." Madlax heard. The voice was of a young girl but by the time she turned around, the image faded into the mist. The image looked like Laetitia with the two women she met yesterday in the alley. Then everything turned blank.

Madlax fell off the bed bumping onto the wooden floor. She heard a faint sound most likely Elenore's voice. "It must be time to get up." she yawned. Madlax wore her red dress which was the only other piece of clothing she had and headed down to the breakfast table. Vanessa asked "What a lovely outfit, what's the occasion?" Limelda interrupted as Madlax was about to speak "She doesn't need a reason to be pretty". "Uh, why thank you Limelda and Vanessa" Madlax replied in a slightly embarrassed voice. "We are still waiting for Miss Margaret" Laetitia said as she sat attentively and elegantly. Madlax stared into the young girl's eyes, wondering if she was in her dreams. But such thoughts didn't linger in Madlax too long as she was enticed by the salivating smells of breakfast.

"Good morning, everyone!" Margaret said in a low tone, as she got to her seat at the breakfast table, still struggling a bit with her usual morning sleepiness. "I'm sorry to keep you all waiting, hope I didn't take too long.", she excused herself, a bit embarrassed. "Oh, did you all sleep well? I hope you're comfortably installed!", she asked cheerfully, directing the question more at Madlax and Limelda, who were guests at her place for the first time, since Vanessa was pretty much used to staying over frequently already. As they ate breakfast, Margaret curiously asked about everyone's plans for the day. She herself didn't had any, but with such unusually crowded company it might turn into an interesting day, she thought, her concerns about the Torc being completely replaced by that.

Vanessa looked at Margaret. "Well I am planning to get Madlax some clothing suited for this area." She looked at Elenore. "But before we go I want to make sure someone keeps their promise." Then she turned back to Margaret. "Oh Margaret, do you mind if I borrow Elenore for a while or do you have need of her?"

"Umm...Ok I guess." Margaret answered.

"Great! While we're out, we'll see what other information we can dig up about the Torc."

Vanessa said cheerfully.

"But who's going to guard Miss Margaret?" Elenore asked with some concern.

"Well, I'm sure Limelda wouldn't mind. It should an easy job for her."

Madlax chimed in before Limelda could say anything. Limelda agreed if somewhat reluctantly.

After breakfast Elenore cleared the breakfast dishes and Vanessa took Elenore to a more quiet area of the house near a phone.

Elenore bowed her head and said; "I'm sorry for earlier this morning Vanessa." Vanessa put a hand on Elenore's shoulder and replied; "I know, but I didn't help matters by having a full blown argument with Limelda in front of you." Vanessa handed Elenore the card with the info and she called, gave intake info and made an appointment. "Is this all you needed me for Vanessa?"

Elenore asked with apprehension considering she just bared her soul to a total stranger.

Vanessa smiled and said; "Well no, I was planning to take you clothes shopping along with Madlax, the both of you could use an expanded wardrobe and we might hit a few other places as well."

"I take it I can't say no, can I?" Elenore asked.

"Well you could say it, but I'll ignore it anyways." Vanessa replied smiling and helped Elenore put some casual clothing on and then they went out.

Margaret saw the three of them leave and went back to the living room, casually joining Laetitia who was watching TV in the couch. Limelda was sitting there as well, ignoring the TV and looking rather frustrated. Margaret wanted to say something but found it rather difficult to approach her. Thankfully, Limelda took the initiative for her after a while.

"So, what do you have in mind for the day, "Miss Margaret"? It's not like we have to stay here waiting for them to return." Limelda asked rather ironically, not trying to hide her boredom.

"Hmm... you can just call me Margaret." she replied, not catching the hint of irony on Limelda's voice, "I was hoping I could call you by your first name as well!" she said with a smile.

"I actually have no plans for the day; I'll probably just stay around and maybe do some homework. Also... you really don't have to stay here with us Limelda. Please feel free to go outside and visit the city if you want!" she said in a kind reassuring tone.

Limelda chuckled at the young girl's carelessness regarding her own security, considering the dangerous people who attacked Madlax last night were there for her reason. "I am not leaving your side. It was Madlax's personal request." she replied.

"Oh you really like Madlax, right? She told me a bit about how you two met, but I could never understand very well... what kind of relationship do you have with her?", Margaret asked interested, if rather casually, hoping to learn more about Limelda and Madlax indirectly.

"Well now, didn't you say you had some homework to do? Maybe you should get that out of your way as soon as possible, so you can enjoy the rest of the weekend with your friends without having to worry about it.", Limelda cunningly dodged the subject, if a bit obviously, though she figured she didn't need much subtleties when dealing with this clueless girl.

"Ah, you're right Limelda!" she agreed, "I do have a problem with procrastination at times." she chuckled embarrassed. "Well, I'll let you be now. Please feel at home if you need anything, and if you want to ask something I'll be in my room. You be good and don't cause Limelda any trouble, okay Laetitia?" The younger girl nodded at her, if a bit embarrassed at the implications of such instructions, and Margaret left upstairs to do her homework, leaving the two of them in the living room.

After Margaret went to her room, Limelda looked at Laetitia. "What do you usually do Laetitia? She asked hoping the kid would go and get out her hair as well.

Laetitia smiled. "I rather ask you a few questions Limelda." Limelda was a little shocked if not a little perturbed by the brashness of this little girl.

"Actually, I'm surprised you didn't go look for Carrosea. But then again your preoccupation with Madlax..."

Limelda was actually shocked. How did this little girl know about Carrosea or her relation to him? "How do you know about Mr. Doone?" Limelda asked with some irritation mixed with curiosity.

Laetitia smiled enigmatically. "I know quite a lot actually. I know you and him shared intimate relations with each other while in Gazth-Sonika. Actually to be honest with you, I'm quite jealous." Laetitia shot Limelda an very adult look of envy and jealousy.

Jealous!? Why or how would this little girl know? Why would this child be jealous of?"

"How would you know about such things? What business does a child like you know about such things?" Limelda asked greatly unnerved by Laetitia.

"Madlax is like you but she's different...you can't truly relate to her no more than Vanessa Rene can. You're both wasting your time and time is beginning to run short..." Laetitia answered cryptically.

"I'll think I'll check around the house." Limelda said unnerved and spooked by Laetitia as she went and checked around the house. Limelda checked around the house, nobody was watching the house but she did find a few listening devices and one hiding spot. So she booby trapped the spot and disabled the devices. Whoever's watching the house did a thorough job. Wonder if as those Enfant agents or that other group. Doesn't matter, if either of them tries to hurt Madlax again...Madlax...what did that kid mean she's different?" "That look she gave me wasn't a normal look; if anyone's different it's her. Limelda thought to herself.

Limelda returned to the living to still find Laetitia watching anime with some disinterest. Laetitia said without even looking at Limelda. "Did you find anything? I gather you did otherwise you've would've been back sooner. They think they're so clever but they're also having their strings pulled just like this false one here." Laetitia held up briefly the doll that

Margaret had bought at the doll store for her and put it back at her side.

"What do mean by that? And what do you know?" Limelda said a bit spooked again.

"I could tell you, but you're blinded by the false hope you have. It all will become clear soon..."

Laetitia said almost nonchalantly but just as cryptic as before.

Limelda glared at Laetitia, she wouldn't...she couldn't do anything.

"I don't what game your playing little girl. I...ah forget it." Limelda stormed off and did another sweep of the house.

Madlax quickly and happily went with Elenore into Vanessa's car and they rode into a fashionable part of town. "Oh it's good to be spending time alone with you in a relaxed atmosphere again" Vanessa quipped. The trip was a peaceful but a long one and Madlax rolled into the shops like a little child in a delightful theme park for the first time. Madlax walked into a plush and classy shop and instantly took fancy to a black short ruffled mini-skirt with Elenore in ever-watchful attendance.

"Oh that's nice" Vanessa said, "It's a little expensive" Madlax said in disappointment. "Don't worry I'm paying" Vanessa smiled. "Don't worry about me carrying the clothes and bags, that's what I do" Elenore smiled in a relaxed mood. "This one is casual just a shirt and pants, will you like that one?" Vanessa asked while she helped Elenore get some more casual clothing for herself as well as helping Madlax do the same. Vanessa was having fun getting Elenore to try on stuff and watching Madlax enjoy herself as well.

Vanessa and Madlax were waiting for Elenore to come out the dressing room. Vanessa knocked on the door. "Elenore are you okay?"

"Yes, I'll be right out." Elenore answered and opened the door and came out. She was wearing a paisley white and purple peasant blouse with a cornflower blue ruffled skirt.

"You look great Elenore!" Vanessa exclaimed. "Well, it's quite a change from what I usually see you in." Madlax added with a smile. Elenore blushed a bit while smiling. "Thanks." She replied and Vanessa waved over the clerk and talked to her a bit and handed her a credit card.

"What was that all about Vanessa?" Elenore asked.

Vanessa smiled. "You're wearing that out of the store and I'm sure Margaret would love to see you in it."

Mentioning Margaret stifled any protest Elenore would've made and she just nodded as the clerk came back with the card plus a receipt and bag and then removed the security tags off the blouse and skirt. Then after they finished paying for what they had bought they left the store.

"So what was taking you so long in there?" Madlax asked when they outside.

"I took a long good look at my scars, especially the one on my back..." Elenore answered somewhat melancholy.

Both decided not to press the subject. "So where to now?" Madlax asked trying to change the subject.

"I figured we would try and see if the local university would have any information about the Torc and perhaps the other artifacts as well." Vanessa answered.

"Sounds like a plan to me." Madlax agreed.

An hour later they arrived at the local university and began walking towards the antiquities department when they heard a voice saying; "Excuse me Miss, the one in the blue skirt." They turned to the voice and saw what appeared to be an older and a little heavier version of Elenore with dark brown eyes framed by a pair of black rimmed glasses with reddish lens holding a digital camera and a sketch pad.

Madlax cocked an eyebrow. "Wonder why the old timer is here?" She thought to herself.

"Yes may I help you?" Elenore asked bit curious.

The woman smiled and asked; "Could you please stand by this pillar here while I take a picture. I think you make an outstanding model and give this drab building here some color."

"Well..." Elenore began to say. "See, I told you that outfit looked great on you. Now let her take the picture." Vanessa interrupted and Elenore conceded and then she stood in front of the pillar in her usual pose and smiled.

The woman took the picture and thanked Elenore. "Thank you very much. I hope I'm not keeping you?" The woman asked.

"Not at all but we do have to get going." Vanessa said.

"Then by all means don't let me keep you." The woman said smiling as Vanessa and Elenore began to walk off with Madlax still standing. "I'll catch up with you." She said as the duo continued to walk off.

"Hello old timer, been awhile." Madlax said to the woman.

"Hello to you too Madlax, Yes it has been awhile. What brings you to Nafrece?" The woman asked.

"I was going to ask you the same thing. I heard that you retired after your last job." Madlax replied.

"Your right, I'm officially retired almost bought the farm on the last job though I still do equipment procurement for Three Speed. Why, do you need anything?" The woman said.

"Not at the moment. It's about time you got out of the bodyguard business. Getting up there old lady. So what brings you to Nafrece?" Madlax grinned.

The woman cocked an eyebrow and grinned. "Did anyone tell you to respect your elders? Besides I was born in Nafrece and decided to take up art as hobby and enjoy my retirement."

"Well, I don't usually see any elders and I'm glad you're taking up a hobby..." Madlax joked.

"Humph. You didn't answer my question Madlax. Why are you in Nafrece?" The woman asked.

"Just visiting some friends here, Oh by the way Duvet, if I do need anything can I give you a call?" Madlax answered.

"Sure, just give a call and I'll arrange a pick up point. Better get going before your friends start getting worried." Duvet said trying to shoo off Madlax.

Madlax got the hint and started walking off. "Thanks Duvet, I appreciate it."

'Yeah yeah get going" Duvet said looking at her sketch pad as Madlax walked off.

As soon as Madlax walked off, Duvet looked at the camera and looked at the picture of Elenore. "You've grown so much. Your grandfather would be so proud of you sweetie." She said quietly to herself. "At least now I have an updated picture of you..." The woman said holding another picture of a ten year old girl. A tear rolled down Duvet's cheek.

Margaret opened her eyes and she was no longer in her room. She was back at that flower field that felt so familiar. It felt very warm and calming. She thought she was alone till she felt a presence standing behind her and turned around. She could see a woman. Someone she could not recognize at first, but looked at her tenderly as if she knew her. Who could she be?

Margaret never entirely regained all her memories from before that incident, but after a while it finally hit her and she could remember this much: this person was her mother.

Margaret wanted to approach her and say something but she couldn't move and the words wouldn't come out. Margaret stood there looking in disbelief but she couldn't say a thing before her mother started talking: "I don't have much time, and I know I shouldn't interfere with this, but I must warn you Margaret! The power that has come to you is more important than you might imagine. And the doors to your past haven't been completely closed yet. You'll encounter hardship once again, soon enough. You must be ready for it. You must be strong! I must go now, but I want you to know I've always been watching you... and I always will." the woman said before fading, as a sudden windstorm hit the place, and the once pleasant flower field turned dark and cold, forcing Margaret to cover her eyes at the unpleasant feeling.

Margaret opened her eyes suddenly, still shocked by the vision in her dream. She was awakened by the knocking on her door apparently. After her initial confusion usually following her waking up moments she concluded she must have fallen asleep while doing homework (nothing too uncommon for her). Before she could rationalize her dream properly she got up and went to open the door, doing her best effort not to look like someone who had just woken up. She was expecting Laetitia, but was surprised to find Limelda!

"Sorry to disturb you Miss Margaret, but I've found listening devices planted around the house and I need to check your room as well, with your permission of course. I'll ask your maid later to do the same with hers." Limelda said standing in the doorway.

"Really?! Why would they want to do that for? But if you think it's necessary go ahead, I'll ask Elenore when she gets home." Margaret replied still trying to act as she was just waking up.

"I don't know why, but I doubt this is mere retaliation. Nobody goes through all this unless there's another reason behind it." Limelda said as she checked the room and after a few minutes through searching found one under the nightstand table where it wouldn't be spotted.

She yanked it from its hiding spot and showed to Margaret with some concern. "Whichever group is doing this has done a thorough job. I'm betting your maids room is bugged as well as the phones."

"I don't really understand why they are doing this, but I do wish they leave us alone." Margaret said sadly looking at the device in Limelda's hands as she was disabling it.

"We'll find out soon enough I guess. Oh by the way Miss Margaret, your little sister said some very odd things to me." Limelda said trying to pump Margaret for information.

"Like what? She says a lot of odd things." Margaret replied.

Limelda repeated what Laetitia had said to her and Margaret was a little confused but answered. "I don't know what she meant by all that, but I've never told her about your relationship with Carrossea in fact this is news to me as well." Limelda sighed knowing that this clueless girl was most likely telling the truth and decided not go any further with this line of questioning. "I'll have to wait for the others get home to finish checking. You should tell your little sister to be careful of what she says, someone might get offended." She said as she was leaving the room nearly bumping into Laetitia in the process. "Were you listening to our conversation?" Limelda asked Laetitia trying to hide her irritation.

"No, actually I came to talk to Margaret, unless you need to say something else." Laetitia said with her usual cryptic smile. "I'll be in the living room waiting for Madlax." Limelda said suppressing the urge to strangle Laetitia. Laetitia closed the door behind her listening for Limelda's footsteps echoing off the hallway, when she sensed that she had gone far enough she looked at Margaret and said. "We need to talk Margaret..."

Margaret felt really surprised and upset about the devices Limelda found in her room. If anything, she thought she'd be safe at her own home, but apparently she was not. For how long have those devices been there? And who planted them? How could they just break in unnoticed like that? These thoughts were all very revolting, but she felt relieved that Limelda found out about it and disabled them, at least. It bothered her most when Limelda brought up the name of Carrossea. "What...Limelda and Carrossea? How can that be? He never mentioned anything about it... then again; I guess there are many things he never told me..."

Margaret admitted to herself, feeling rather saddened by that fact as well as Limelda's words, yet trying to organize her thoughts and hide her shock. She hardly had any time to vocalize her feelings on the matter before Limelda started leaving and Laetitia broke into the room and said she wanted to talk to her.

"What is it Laetitia?" Margaret asked, after they were both left alone in the room, "Limelda just told me you two had a strange conversation regarding Carrossea. Is that true? How is Limelda related to Carrossea? Do you know anything I don't know? Do you want to tell me about it?" Margaret asked with anxious curiosity, yet hoping it was all just a lie or one big misunderstanding.

"Yes we did. She's fooling herself if she can truly have Madlax." Laetitia told her of the link between her and Poupee and their conversations including the knowledge of the intimate relationship that Carrossea and Limelda had between them. She also told her of the link she made with Elenore's unconscious mind and of the chain around her ankle and with the doll Elenore held. Plus she told of the visions of ravens and crows flying in a circular holding pattern forming a ring and of a unopened door of truth with a old man standing sadly next to it holding a letter but both of the visions she couldn't really understand what they meant and that frustrated her. After she was done speaking she waited for Margaret to speak, her expression cryptic as usual.

The revelations about Carrossea and Limelda turned out to be truth, and this of course made Margaret feel a bit hurt, disappointed and pensive about the subject, wondering what exactly Carrossea felt about her. However, such thoughts didn't last too long once Laetitia started mentioning the other subjects. She couldn't understand Laetitia's vision about this door, but she shared her own dream visions she had been having lately ever since she had gotten in contact with the Torc, as well as bringing up the subject of the Torc and explaining it to Laetitia for the first time, hoping this information would contain important clues that could relate to it. Elenore's subject was what was troubling her most though.

"Why do you think is that happening to Elenore Laetitia? And how can I make things better? If I knew what to do, I'd do anything! But I just don't know..." Margaret concluded sadly, lowering her head, still feeling pretty guilty about Elenore's situation.

Laetitia stood there as she listened as Margaret told her about the Torc. For a few minutes she stood there silently as if trying to hear something far away. Then she cocked her head to the side and spoke. "Did you try to speak to the Torc? It's been trying to tell you something. All I'm hearing is "chain...lies and broken hearts mixed with a lullaby". Since the Torc was made to ease suffering why don't you ask it how to do it?" Laetitia stood silently for a few minutes and then smiled. "I have an idea. Maybe this will help with both problems. I'm linked with Elenore and you with the Torc perhaps we can follow the chain. It's worth a try."

Margaret was pensive at first but she felt she had no other choice but she was worried what would happen to Laetitia but she just smiled and said not to worry. With that Margaret got on her knees, opened her shirt to expose the Torc and closed her eyes. Laetitia touched the Torc. At first it tingled as if to ward off but it knew the intent and soon both Margaret and Laetitia were in the shared mindscape.

"Where are we Laetitia?" Margaret asked looking at the nighttime park with three moons?! "This is the shared mindscape I have with Poupee and Elenore." Laetitia answered looking for Elenore. They soon found her sitting playing with the doll. While they were approaching her they heard a voice that Margaret recognized as Elenore's but little older than the eight year

they were approaching singing a lullaby.

"Hello Elenore, please don't be frightened this is a friend." Laetitia said reassuringly.

Elenore nodded and smiled. "Hi Laetitia, who's she? She looks familiar." Margaret looked at the eight year old version of Elenore and smiled. "Hi Elenore, I'm Margaret." Elenore looked at her in surprise and then held up the doll. "Really? Her name is Margaret too and my grandfather said I should take care of her." Margaret smiled and asked; "Where did you get the doll Elenore? I promise I'm not going to take it, okay."

Elenore smiled and replied; "My mommy gave it to me and grandfather said it was special and that I have to take care of her. Have you seen my mommy? I don't get to see her much. Grandfather takes me to the park to see her and we get to play."

"That's nice Elenore, but I'm sorry I haven't seen your mother. But I can go look around for her if you want; you just stay right here in case she comes back."

"Really?! Ok I'll stay here." Elenore beamed and replied.

Both Margaret and Laetitia saw the chain and Margaret grabbed and as she did she heard a jumble of familiar voices. She wanted to let go but she had to follow the chain and so they did. As they followed the chain they saw a image of Elenore's grandfather telling her that her mother had died and Elenore crying. They heard the crying and a whisper in the wind it's a lie and they decided to follow chain further....

They followed the chain further till they saw they were in a park. It was bright noon and they could see Elenore's grandfather and someone that at first glance to be Elenore but it turn out not be as they recognized the six year old Elenore sitting next to her. "That must be her mother. I've never met her, but she really looks like Elenore especially at that age." Margaret commented but Laetitia hushed her and told her to listen.

"Thanks father for bringing her here. I know you're taking a risk by being possibly being seen with me." Elenore's mother said with her head slightly bowed.

"You're my daughter and Elenore is yours. The Master doesn't mind me or Elenore seeing you but it's the Mistress. She's bitter still and if she found out she could bar you from seeing her completely." Elenore's grandfather said putting a gentle hand on her mother's shoulder. "I'm sorry for all this except one thing; I never regretted having Elenore. She's the only good thing that come from all this. I'm sorry father for getting you into this mess." Elenore's mother said apologetically mixed with sorrow.

"Yes Meg you made a mistake but out of it you've given me a wonderful grandchild and I forgave you a long time ago." Meg's father said smiling. "Thanks father, I won't keep you both much longer but can I give something to Elenore before you go?" Meg asked and her father nodded consent. Meg called over Elenore.

"Yes mommy?" Elenore asked.

"I have a present for you, but must promise me you will never tell where you got from okay."

Elenore looked a little confused. "Okay mommy, but why?"

"Because sweetie some people might get mad and try to take it away from you. If anyone asks just say that your grandfather gave it to you. Okay sweetie?" Elenore smiled. "Ok mommy, I promise." Elenore's eyes grew wide as her mother gave her a doll with a blue dress, brown yarn hair, black button eyes and red shoes.

As soon her mother gave her the doll they were in Elenore's bedroom. This time they saw Elenore when she was twelve years old. Her face was bruised and she had a black eye. Her clothes were dirty and torn and she was holding the doll close in her arms. When they tried to approach both Laetitia and Margaret were pushed out by a unknown force. Both of them blinked. "What just happened, Laetitia? What was that?" Margaret asked a bit confused and saddened. Laetitia stood thinking for a moment and then spoke. "I think it was the power of that promise she made that pushed us out, but that scene where she looked like she was beaten up saddened me." "I remember that day. Elenore came home and said she had an accident." Margaret added innocently.

"I highly doubt she had an accident. There's more to that scene than what we saw but I'm willing to bet that doll is the key." Laetitia thought to herself. To tell the truth I don't know what really pushed us out, but it does give us some clue. Just don't mention that we saw this to Elenore."

"But why?" Margaret asked feeling a bit helpless.

"Because, Elenore's very sanity is on the edge right now. We shouldn't be pushing it." Laetitia said trying to get the point across to Margaret.

"Can we mention the doll? You could ask if Elenore has one since you have one, I don't think that would hurt. Besides I want to take a closer look at that doll myself." Margaret said a little more confidently and Laetitia smiled and nodded.

Meanwhile back at the University; "I wonder who that was. Madlax seemed to know her." Vanessa pondered while they were walking into antiquities building. Elenore seemed deep in thought at first, seemingly distracted and then in response to Vanessa's comment replied; "She seemed so familiar, but I can't really place where I've seen her before."

"Actually she reminded me of you, well an older version of you. Perhaps she's a distant relative you didn't know of; after we're done here you could ask her, If she's still there of course."

Vanessa said noticing that Elenore was spacing out which was quite unusual for her.

"She might be, I honestly don't know many relatives I actually have outside from my immediate family. All mine are dead, my grandparents, my mother and my father...well scratch that I never knew my father and no one ever talked about him. So I'll take your suggestion and ask her. It wouldn't hurt to ask." Elenore replied somewhat distracted.

Madlax returned and both women looked at her with questions in their eyes.

"So who was that?" Vanessa asked.

"Oh that's Duvet. She was a bodyguard I worked with a couple times in the past. She was also like a surrogate mom to me." Madlax answered nonchalantly.

"I thought you were in an orphanage, then trained by that Three Speed person?" Vanessa said a bit confused.

"That's true, but while Three Speed was training me to be a agent she taught me the things that a girl "needs" to know plus she's the one who taught how be ladylike after the job was done."

Madlax replied with some fondness in her voice.

"That explains a lot, you seemed fond of her." Vanessa said.

"Well ya, she's nice for someone of her profession but she only stuck around long enough to teach me and then she had to leave. But during that time she did show me love and affection when I needed it and as said before we've worked a couple times together."

Madlax replied nonchalantly as before.

"So it was a working relationship. Did she ever tell you her real name?" Elenore asked hoping Madlax could provide some answers.

"No, I only know her by her code name. Why do you ask?" Madlax asked somewhat surprised Elenore would ask that.

"Vanessa pointed out that she reminded her of me, I did notice some resemblance. I was wondering if she's a relative of mine that no one told me about." Elenore replied. Madlax shrugged her shoulders and then pondered. "Hmm now that you mention it, she does look like you. Maybe she is, we'll go ask after we leave here."

"Thanks." Elenore said as she approached the front desk and asked about whom to talk about Celtic artifacts. They were given directions and they walked to an office. They knocked on the door and they got a response and they opened the door. The room was lined with bookshelves with a small table and sofa and a couple of plush chairs. Sitting on the chairs was a elderly woman dressed in simple blue dress looking at some notes.

"Doctor Tudor?" Vanessa asked the woman and she looked up from her notes and saw that they weren't her assistants.

"Yes I am. How can help you?" She said in a friendly tone.

"We were wondering if could tell us anything about the Torc of Rhiannon." Vanessa replied.

"Ah, I guess you heard the rumors as well. Even though it maybe prove to be just a rumor it's nice to see people take interest in the past." Dr Tudor said looking over the trio and then nodding to herself.

"Rumors?" Vanessa asked.

"Rumors of the Torc surfacing in Nafrece of course. I do say you three seem to be quite nicer than others who've asked about. They all had the stink of greed, death or evil about them, but

you three seem different." Dr Tudor replied gesturing the three to take a seat while she prepared some tea.

"Thank you Doctor. That's very kind of you say that, we're not looking for the Torc per say. We're curious about the legend behind it and what makes it so special." Madlax said taking a seat.

"We know the legend of Queen Rhiannon herself but we were wondering why she would craft such a thing?" Vanessa asked.

Doctor Tudor made some tea and offered the trio some which they accepted and then she sat back down and spoke.

"The answer is quite simple; she wanted a reminder of her ordeal and help others going through their own. As for what makes it so special is the stories tell of the Torc being used to settle feuds between families, to see into the hearts of men and know their past and their desires. One story tells of the time it was used to repel an army of invaders by seeing in their hearts and convincing them to make peace among other things. But my guess some Druid was good at negotiating and they attributed it to the Torc."

"Wow, is the Torc that powerful?" Elenore asked with some surprise.

Doctor Tudor smiled expressed by Elenore's demeanor. "Those are just legends young lady. But even in myth and legend there's always a grain of truth behind them. I wrote about the Torc and other legendary artifacts awhile back including the two other artifacts connected with Torc."

"Two others?" Elenore asked.

"Well yes; the Ring of Morrigan and the Bracelet of Brigid." Doctor Tudor replied.

"Would it be possible to buy a copy of your book Doctor Tudor?" Vanessa humbly asked.

Doctor Tudor smiled. "Well of course, I have a few copies lying around here somewhere here. Would like to buy one now?" She asked happily as she went to look around the room and came back with a very thick book (dictionary thick). The trio asked for a price and the doctor gave a price which they happily paid and threw in thirty dollars extra.

"That's very generous of you; I'll even sign it for you since you've been very kind and polite. Who should I make this out to?" Doctor Tudor asked.

Vanessa pointed to Elenore and the doctor nodded pulling out a pen. "May I ask your name young lady?" Doctor Tudor asked.

"Of course Doctor Tudor, my name is Elenore Baker." Elenore replied nicely.

"Baker...? You wouldn't happen to be related to a Meg Baker by any chance?" Doctor Tudor asked.

Elenore's eyes almost grew wide as saucers. "I don't know. But that was my mother's name but she died ten years ago. Why do you ask Doctor?"

"There's an older art student who comes by here and looks at the pictures of Celtic artifacts and we chat. Quite a pleasant woman, if a bit quiet, Just like you, are you sure you're not related."

"I think we saw her outside drawing earlier. Please forgive me Doctor, but I must really go now. Thank you for your time." Elenore said hurriedly but politely as she rushed out the door and down the hall.

"I'm sorry about that Doctor; she's been going through some rough times lately." Vanessa said apologetically.

"I understand, she seems to be a very nice young woman." The doctor said signing the book and handing it to Vanessa who was getting up.

"Yes she is, but we must be going ourselves. Thank you again for your time and the book."

Vanessa said shaking the doctor's hand and then she and Madlax headed out of the office.

After they had left Doctor Tudor sat down in her chair and sipped some tea. "Well Meg, so that's your Elenore. You knew this would happen sooner or later. I just hope you can give her a good explanation..." She said to herself.

Meanwhile down the hall Madlax and Vanessa were hurriedly walking down the hall trying to catch up with Elenore. "Now we know why Enfant and the Soldats want it. If it has that kind of power, they'll be unstoppable." Madlax said with grave concern.

"True, but right now I'm worried about Elenore. You saw how she reacted and how she left in a hurry." Vanessa said with equal concern as they speedily walked to the entrance.

Elenore ran outside to where she saw Duvet, but she was gone. She stood there with her head bowed. "Where did you go? Are you...?" She said quietly to herself as Madlax and Vanessa caught up. Elenore turned her head to see Vanessa who hugged her.

"Let's get back and take a look at the book. It may help Margaret with the Torc." Madlax said trying to distract Elenore who at the mention of Margaret somewhat snapped out of it.

"Your right..." Elenore said almost quietly and the trio went back to the house and back inside...

Chapter 4.

Finding out my mother was still alive was a big shock for me but that was nothing compared to shocks we got as time went on. Though I was upset at her, I have to admit I was happy that she was still alive and I didn't feel quite so alone...

Taken from the diary of Elenore Baker July 9th 2013

As they heard the voices downstairs Margaret and Laetitia decided to come down, to reunite with the rest of the group who had just arrived back home. For now Margaret decided

not to mention anything of what she had just witnessed with Laetitia. She sure felt glad to get company again though, and get her attention pulled out of homework. That drove away the feeling that she was somehow imposing on Limelda as well.

"Hey, welcome back! I hope you had fun!" Margaret greeted cheerfully. "Oh, you have new clothes Elenore! It's... different. It looks good on you!" She added with a content smile. "Hmm, it seems Limelda isn't here any longer...", Margaret noticed her absence while she looked around for her - "Oh right! She was searching the house for something; she must be at another division. I didn't want to disturb her so I was upstairs doing homework." Margaret felt the need to justify Limelda's absence, least they'd think she was slacking from her "temporary bodyguard" duties. "So, did you find anything about the Torc?" - Margaret asked curiously, if rather unexcited, not really hoping they'd have found any additional information this soon already.

"Thank you Miss. I know it's not my usual attire but I'm glad you like it." Elenore said cheerfully temporary forgetting what happened at the university. "Well we know why Enfant and the Soldats want it. But other than that we don't know any more than we do now." Madlax answered Margaret and sensing her unease. "This book we have may contain a clue, but it's going to take me awhile to pour over it. In any case I think we need to be on our guard, but the real question is why hasn't either group gone all out for it? Could it be the power of the Torc that's keeping them at bay or is it something else? I'm going to go start reading in my room, Elenore can you please make me some tea." Vanessa said concern with hope in her voice. "Of course, I'll bring some up right away." Elenore added heading to the kitchen.

Laetitia followed Elenore to the kitchen, she noticed her following and turn around. "Is there something you need Laetitia? Oh that's cute doll. When did you get it?" Elenore asked noticing the doll in her hands. Laetitia smiled. "Thank you, I got this yesterday when we went shopping. Do you have a doll too Elenore?" Elenore bent down to Laetitia and smiled. "I have one that my grandfather gave to me when I was little. It's the only thing I really have to remember he...Him by." Laetitia frowned slightly seeing the image of the battered twelve year old instead of the eight year old in the mindscape. "That's so sad; you must miss him a great deal. Can I see it please? Your doll I mean." Elenore hesitated before giving her answer which raised Laetitia's suspicions. "I do and I'll show you when I finish making tea for Miss Vanessa, okay."

Laetitia smiled and waited by Elenore's door. Ten minutes later Elenore had finished giving Vanessa her tea and went up to Laetitia. "Sorry to keep you waiting." Elenore said apologetically.

"That's okay. Can I see her now?" Laetitia said cheerfully.

"Of course you can." With that they went into Elenore's room and there in a cradle that was too large for a doll was the doll. Elenore gently lifted up the doll from cradle as if it was a living baby

and showed to Laetitia who noticed this behavior, she smiled and asked. "Can I hold her?" "Well only if you're very careful, I've had her for a very long time." Elenore replied with some worry in her voice. She was about to give the doll to Laetitia when there was a knock on her door.

Margaret stood in the living room talking with Madlax for a while, till Limelda got back. "Madlax is back! And she's alone! Good!" Limelda could hardly hide her gleeful smile. Well, not exactly alone, but it shouldn't be too hard to get rid of this airhead...again." Limelda thought - "I see you're back! That took you long enough." Limelda said to Madlax, teasingly "And I see you're done with homework already, huh?" She asked Margaret; rather surprised she'd be done with it so soon.

"Hmm...Not quite. I got bored with it for now. But I'll get back to it later for sure, don't worry." Margaret said with a casual smile, not guessing Limelda's intentions. "Have you asked for Elenore's permission to search her room yet?" Limelda insisted, trying to hide her frustration, hoping to keep her busy and out of sight.

"Oh right! I almost forgot about that! Thanks for reminding me Limelda! I'll go ask Elenore right now!" Margaret replied, honestly appreciating Limelda's concern. She got up and went upstairs to look for Elenore, approached her room, assuming she must be there since she was nowhere else to be found, and finally knocked at the door, hoping to find her there.

Elenore heard a knock on her door and went to answer carrying the doll like she would a child much to the frustration of Laetitia. She opened the door and saw Margaret standing there. "Is there something you need Miss?" Elenore asked still holding the doll. "Well, Limelda needs to check your room for listening devices. She found a quite a few already and this is the last place she needs to check. She wanted to know if she could look around." Margaret said staring at the doll. Elenore felt a little apprehensive, but if they had already planted devices inside the house there was a chance that her room might have them too she didn't want Limelda looking around in what was her sanctuary. "Yes Miss, but I do want to watch her while she does it. I feel a bit nervous if someone was rummaging through my belongings." Elenore finally answered. "Okay. I understand Elenore; you can keep a eye on Limelda." Margaret said remembering Laetitia's warning.

"Oh that's a cute doll. Is that Laetitia's? I forget..." Margaret asked looking at the doll cradled in Elenore's arm.

"No Miss, it's mine. It's the one my grandfather gave to me when I was a child Miss."

"That's not true. Is she trying to keep her promise to her mother? But why her mother made her promise such a thing in the first place? Margaret thought to herself.

"Can I take a look at it, please Elenore?" Margaret asked. Elenore looked at Margaret with suspicion and masked fright. "Miss, may I ask why the Miss wishes to take my child away from me?" Elenore replied or that's what Margaret heard when she saw for a brief moment the image of the twelve year old Elenore holding a baby in place of the adult holding the doll. Margaret saw behind Elenore to see Laetitia covering her ears and shaking her head violently silently saying no. Elenore held the doll close to her as Margaret looked in concern. What was she seeing? Was it something in Elenore's past that was trying to tell her something? Margaret felt confused by the reaction and vision she saw and Margaret also got the hint from Laetitia to immediately drop the subject as, judging by Elenore's reaction (or was it?), it probably was a pretty bad idea to even ask.

"Hmm, well... actually... never mind that Elenore!" - Margaret replied nervously, trying to force a smile. "I... I think I'll tell Limelda to come search your room now... if that's ok with you?" She asked evasively, hoping not to provoke any other unpleasant reaction from Elenore. "Hmm, yeah... I better go now." Margaret announced and rapidly turned around and left the room, thinking that maybe it would be best to avoid Elenore for now, for her own good. This bothered her a lot, it obviously didn't feel right for her to avoid Elenore, and it was definitely unnatural. But at the same time, lately she had been feeling like her every action towards Elenore only seemed to make things worse somehow and those strange visions weren't any help. If she couldn't approach Elenore about this she needed to tell Vanessa at least, maybe Elenore would talk to her instead.

Margaret went downstairs and into the living room, briefly interrupting Madlax and Limelda's lively conversation. "I'm sorry to disturb you." Margaret approached them apologetically. "Elenore said you could go search her room Limelda, but she wants to be present while you look. Well, I'll leave you alone now, see you at lunch." - Margaret excused herself, not really putting in much effort to sound any cheerful.

She went upstairs again, and knocked at Vanessa's door this time, not really caring if she was interrupting her study on the Torc, since her issues with Elenore caused her much more worries at the moment. Hopefully Vanessa would understand about this.

Vanessa opened the door to find Margaret with a worried expression. "Oh it's you Margaret! I'm afraid I haven't gotten much into the book yet, I really can't give you any more clues about the Torc, but if you could wait just a bit longer..."

"It's not that." - Margaret interrupted - "May I come in? I need to talk to you. It's because of Elenore!" She added with a sense of urgency in her voice. Vanessa would obviously never refuse to help Margaret, especially not when she seemed this troubled and determined about something. She immediately assumed this was about Elenore's confession the day before,

something Margaret might be having trouble dealing with. Most probably an exaggerated reaction from her part, led by her insecurity and overall immaturity. But she gladly invited her in with a warm smile. And tenaciously asked her what the problem was, in a comforting tone.

Margaret found it hard to start explaining, but she told Vanessa, in detail, all about the visions she and Laetitia shared and how they thought that was affecting Elenore, much to Vanessa's shock. "Just now, I was in her room and I simply asked to see her doll and I thought she reacted very strangely. She sounded so defensive and hostile even and she looked like she did that day she had that accident when she was twelve and she definitely wasn't herself! And the worst is, I can't even begin to approach the subject to her! Because I'm so afraid of her reaction. I'm so afraid of making things worst. And she doesn't tell me anything! And nothing of what I might do or say seems to do any good, to the point I feel it would be best to avoid her completely, even though I don't want that. I wish she wouldn't treat me so condescendingly... but I guess that's what everyone seems to do, all the time, and I end up feeling like I'm the only one not knowing what's going on around me, because of that!" Inadvertently, Margaret drifted from the subject at hand and let her thoughts rest for a while on all the things happening lately that made her feel this way. "And, as if that wasn't enough, why did this thing have to come to me?" Margaret continued, bringing her hand to her neck. "Why can't I just get rid of it? If they want it why can't I just give it to them? I really don't want to get involved. And I certainly don't want any of you to get involved because of me!" Lost in all those revolting thoughts, Margaret suddenly realized she had diverged from the motive that brought her there, and decided to sort out her words more concisely- "Please, Vanessa, I'd really just like you to help Elenore. Maybe she will trust you the way she can't trust me. You seem to really know what you're doing all the time, and you're the only one I can ask for help right now. As for the rest...well, it doesn't really matter, and I'm sorry if I ranted, I guess I would just like not to be left in the dark anymore, about most things..." As she stopped talking, Margaret tried her best to calm down and get her act together, as she waited for Vanessa's reply.

Vanessa pondered a bit as she tried to remember that day when Elenore came home with clothes dirty and torn and her face bruised. She originally thought Elenore had gotten into a fight and fibbed to cover the truth but from what Margaret had told her it may have been something else. Vanessa sat down next to Margaret and in comforting tone said. "It's okay, I'm sorry if I've unintentionally left you in the dark but you do tend to act immature at times and that makes people wonder if you would take anything important seriously or could even rely on you if push came to shove. If you want people not to treat you condescendingly, you have to act more mature. About the Torc, I honestly don't why the Torc came to you. If I had to make a guess I would have to say it may be the "Gift" you have that might have attracted it. I also know you don't want any of us to hurt but you have to keep it away from them for it must never fall into evil hands that much I know."

"As for Elenore, you do know how much she cares about you. For the vast majority of her life she had to protect and care for you and because of it she's had to keep things to herself." Vanessa began explain what Post Traumatic Syndrome was and how it was affecting Elenore. "Margaret, do you know how long has Laetitia had this psychic link up?" Vanessa asked getting to subject of the visions. "She told me of this today so I don't know how long, but if I had to guess I say at least a month. I didn't even know she could even do this." Margaret answered glumly.

"Don't beat yourself up, I get the feeling she's hiding a lot more than just that and she's good at hiding it. But I think this link may have done more harm than good. When I was wearing the Torc I got the feeling she was lied to in the past and I think something else from her past has come up to haunt her. Earlier today we saw a woman that resembled an older version of Elenore. At first we thought she may have been a relative that she didn't know of but later we found out she had the same name as her mother and she bolted out of the office we were in, but the woman was gone. Plus Madlax seems to know her as well. As for what you two did, I know you wanted to help her but that may have made things worse. Apparently from what you've told me, there may have been a fight between your mother and Elenore's and from the sounds of it, it had to be a vicious one at that if her father had to sneak his own granddaughter out to see her mother." Vanessa said.

"Why would my mother and hers be fighting for? I've never met the woman so I don't know how long ago this fight was. It might explain why Elenore was made to promise to say her grandfather gave it to her. Maybe when we saw that memory we could've triggered something inside that made her get defensive. I wonder if my mother tried to take the doll away." Margaret pondered.

Vanessa smiled. "That's very insightful, that may have been the case and there may be more to that doll than we suspect. But for now let's leave her alone and we better tell Limelda to hold off looking till we get her calmed down. I'll have a talk with her when she's calmed down but right now I like to see any old photo albums to see if there's an old picture of her mother in there. It may help diffuse the situation."

"Good idea, I know where they're kept. I was looking through them after we got back from Gazth-Sonika and thanks Vanessa." Margaret said a little more confidently. "Your welcome Margaret, can you show where they're at please." Vanessa replied getting up and waited for Margaret to show her.

"That was easier than I thought. I'm actually amazed she survived Gazth-Sonika. But now I have Madlax to myself...Limelda thought to herself as Margaret left the room.

"So Madlax what did you three do while you were out?" Limelda asked almost accusingly.

"We went clothes shopping as you see by the bags over there and I gather you saw Elenore's outfit." Madlax snapped back. "I do see the bags and I saw her outfit. So what else did you three do?"

"We went to the university to get info; you saw that book in Vanessa's hands. That's where we got it. Are you jealous?" Madlax asked with some annoyance.

"Jealous? No. I had to deal with that airhead and that creepy little girl for the last few hours. No wonder why the maid pulled a knife on me, I would go insane too if I had to deal with them on a daily basis." Limelda said angrily.

"Okay granted Laetitia would creep anyone out. Hell, she creeps me out and I'm related to her. But calling Margaret an airhead is totally uncalled for, you don't know her as well as I do! Wait a minute, did you say Elenore pulled a knife on you?!" Madlax said angrily at first but turned to concern when she asked about Elenore pulling a knife on Limelda.

"Yes she did, that girl has a serious problem and I bet Margaret hasn't even noticed it. I really hate to be around her when she finally really snaps..." Limelda said calmly glad that Madlax had temporarily forgotten her comment about Margaret.

"Why would she pull a knife on you?" Madlax asked.

"I saw Vanessa hugging her in the kitchen. I commented on it and she flipped out which is why I asked what were you three were doing in the first place. That girl is a danger to herself and others and don't want you to get hurt." Limelda replied with concern mixed with anger. "I know that Vanessa and Elenore have been friends for a long time and she most likely noticed that problem too and tried to comfort her." Madlax said thinking that Limelda was trying to imply that there was something going on with Elenore and Vanessa and noticed that Margaret had entered the room.

"I'm sorry to disturb you." Margaret approached them apologetically. "Elenore said you could go search her room Limelda, but she wants to be present while you look. Well, I'll leave you alone now, see you at lunch." Margaret excused herself, not really putting in much effort to sound any cheerful.

"I wonder what's going on and what she meant by searching Elenore's room." Madlax said distracted by Margaret's interruption. "I made a sweep of the house and found numerous listening devices planted all around. I found one in Margaret's room and I'm sure the maid's room has one too. Somebody made an effort to know what was going on in this house." Limelda replied.

"Well it could be both Enfant and the Soldats who planted them. That was a good idea checking the house, at least now we can plan our next move without them knowing." "I'll go check the

maid's room now and we'll talk later." Limelda said heading towards Elenore's room. "You can count on that Limelda, this is far from over." Madlax said to herself.

Madlax sat back down on the couch with her arms folded and with a sad look on her face. It was bad enough when she had to deal with her indecisiveness, but with the Torc and now dealing with Elenore potentially going insane (though she kinda thought that she was a bit crazy to begin with consider her actions in Gazth-Sonika.) it was a bit overwhelming. Then she noticed Laetitia coming into the concern with a concerned look on her face.

"So I hear you creeped out Limelda. I can only imagine what you said to her." Madlax said to Laetitia somewhat annoyed. Laetitia looked up at Madlax with a "what do you want, I'm busy look" and said. "Then I guess you can go on imagining." She looked towards Elenore's room. "I have other things to worry about than what I said to your obsessed stalker."

"Like what?!" Madlax said exasperated.

"I made a mistake..." Laetitia said.

"What mistake? What are you talking about?" Madlax asked concerned.

Back in Vanessa's room; "Sure Vanessa, those are in my room. Let's go there now." Margaret answered as they left Vanessa's room and started walking towards her own. "Hmm, I guess we better tell Limelda not to bother Elenore first. I think, from what I told her before, she got the idea she was supposed to go look in there now..." Margaret suggested and both of them stopped before getting to her room. "I'll go tell Limelda! I know you don't like to be around her so much..." Margaret stated carefully in an apologetic tone. "Could you go ask Elenore if she could start making lunch, since it's about time anyway? That would keep her busy for a while and we could look for clues without so much secrecy." She proposed to Vanessa.

"Sure, I'll go ask Elenore to make lunch. Hopefully that would distract her and we can go look at the photos while she's doing that." Vanessa said going to Elenore's room and watching Laetitia just leaving from there silently.

Elenore watched Margaret and then Laetitia leave and close the door behind them leaving Elenore standing there holding her doll. "Hmmm, that was strange. Wonder what happened? I bet it was that Torc that did something. She looked at the doll lovingly and smiled. "No one will take you away from me again..." Elenore said quietly to herself when she heard a knock on the door.

She gently put the doll back into the cradle and answered the door and saw Vanessa. "Oh, hi Vanessa. Is there something you need?" Elenore asked with a smile. "Margaret asked me to ask you to start making lunch. Elenore are you okay?" Vanessa asked with concern. "Oh you're right Vanessa, I totally forgot about that. I'm sorry; I'll go start on it right away. Speaking of Margaret; she was acting strange while she was in my room, could it be the Torc influencing her?" Elenore

asked trying to avoid Vanessa's question and she went towards the kitchen. Vanessa looked at Elenore with concern; this wasn't the Elenore she knew and loved. Something was bothering her; well hopefully by looking at the photos we can find a clue.

As Margaret was going downstairs she met Limelda on her way up, supposedly going towards Elenore's room, she assumed. "Oh, I'm glad I found you here, Limelda! I was actually just going downstairs to tell you something. Hmm, you see, since it's almost lunch time, its better if you go search Elenore's room later. She'll be busy cooking for a while, and can't see to it right now. So you can go back to the living room while we wait for lunch if you want! Sorry if I mislead you a while ago." Margaret apologized with an embarrassed smile. "Well, I have some things to attend now and I'll be at my room. See you at lunch!" She said cheerfully and went into her room to look for the photo albums and wait for Vanessa to join her.

Vanessa joined Margaret in her room. Margaret had pulled out quite a number of albums out and started looking through them with a nostalgic look on her face. She saw Vanessa come in and cheerfully said; "Here's the oldest I can find. I think there are ones with Elenore's grandfather in them, but I don't which one."

"Well let's get started then." Vanessa said picking up an album and looking through it. For the next ten minutes they looked though about most of them till they got to the one with the pictures of Elenore's grandfather. The first few pages were filled with Elenore as a child with her grandfather and then a few photos of her grandfather as a younger man, then midway through the album they saw a couple they both thought impossible at first; an adult Elenore standing next to her grandfather. Margaret carefully took the picture out and looked at the back. There on the back in black ink were the words; "Meg at the Burton Estate March 1990"

"Wow! She really does look like Elenore or Elenore looks like her mother. Take a look Vanessa." Margaret said handing the picture to Vanessa. Vanessa looked at the picture and at the back and gasped. "That's the woman we saw at the university though she's older now, but it's definitely her. No wonder Elenore was upset. I know she told me a while back that her mother had died and now to find out that she hadn't."

"But why all the deception? I don't get it Vanessa, if Elenore's mother was still alive why didn't she come back here?" Margaret pondered out loud.

"I'm assuming something happened between your mother and Elenore's, most likely before you were born. Maybe she was barred from returning here for some reason, it would've been nice if she had been able to return maybe all this wouldn't have occurred."

Margaret eyes flashed with insight. "Maybe she didn't know what happened to mother and father and had stayed away assuming they were still alive."

"That's a good observation, but the only person who can answer that is her." Vanessa said pointing to Meg in the picture.

"Well, normally I'd just go and talk to Elenore about it. I used to feel like I could talk with her about just anything. But now, given her complicated situation towards me and her current mental condition, how can I even think about confronting her about this subject..." Margaret said with disappointment. "I really think it's best for me to avoid her for a while, even though it's hard for me... But if you're sure the person you met this morning is Elenore's mother, and if Madlax knows her, we should definitely contact her and get her to meet with Elenore. I'm sure she would like that! That would probably solve all her current problems too!" Margaret said enthusiastically, imagining how she would feel herself, if she could meet her own mother again, even if just for a little bit.

Vanessa smiled for a bit then turned a bit sullen just as concerned about the Torc and Margaret's behavior. "It would be nice. But we don't know the full story and forcing a reunion might cause more problems. Still it's worth a shot, just tell Laetitia to break that link in any case."

"Why?" Margaret asked somewhat puzzled.

"Let me conduct an experiment here, now stand up." Vanessa said and with Margaret stood up and Vanessa put one finger on the back of Margaret's head.

"Now walk around with moving your head or touching my finger." Vanessa said.

"Umm okay." Margaret said as she started move. As she moved Vanessa kept her finger on the back of Margaret's head increasing the pressure to the point where Margaret moved her head and turned around to face Vanessa with an annoyed look on her head.

"Now do you see what I mean?" Vanessa asked.

"Yes I do, now I'm beginning to see what's been happening in some part. I can only imagine what it's doing to her; I just hope no permanent damage has been done. I'll get Laetitia to break it as soon as possible." Margaret said insightfully.

"While you're doing that, I'll go talk to Madlax and hopefully we set up a meeting. I just need to borrow this picture for a bit, okay?" Vanessa said cheerfully as Margaret nodded and the two went to the living room where they heard Laetitia and Madlax having a lively conversation.

"I asked you, what mistake? What have you done Laetitia?" Madlax said with her voice raised. Limelda stood hidden in the parlor listening to the conversation and smiling. Good. It's about time that little brat learned her place. Limelda thought to herself.

"Why should you care what I do?" Laetitia said annoyed.

"Why should I care?! I care if what you are doing is hurting someone I care about!" Madlax replied angrily.

"Yes I've seen what your care has done. I'm sure Vanessa can tell you or even better ask Elenore

about how much you "care". You were more interested in Limelda and your own existence than protecting Vanessa or Elenore." Laetitia said calmly but bitter.

Madlax rose with tears running down her face. "How dare you say such a thing! You have no idea how much guilt I'm carrying about that!"

"Not much I gather given the answer you gave Elenore last night, she deserved better. I was the one who greeted and comforted her spirit when she passed from this world! You only truly care for yourself otherwise you would've given both Vanessa and Limelda your decision, but you chose to give them both false hope. I hope it doesn't lead to further tragedy for all your sakes." Laetitia said now angry herself.

Madlax was about to slap Laetitia but she stopped herself.

"If anyone asks I'll be in my room." Madlax said hurriedly walking off trying to wipe the tears from her eyes. Limelda looked at Laetitia angrily but decided not to confront the brat, all least not in here and she walked out to the garden.

Madlax passed Vanessa and Margaret in the hall and went to her room leaving both confused on what happened. In another part of town Carrossea was rubbing his temples as if trying to get rid of a headache. "What the hell is going on? I told her it was a bad idea linking with that maid now her screaming is echoing in my head. I think it's time I paid Margaret a visit." With that he drove toward Margaret's home.

Chapter 5.

There are only two people in this world I genuinely hate; One I don't want to know his name, nor even when I'm back on the "other" side. The other I know his name all too well and wish I didn't; Carrossea Doone. That piece of garbage has made more trouble of us than even his former employer could. Pity I never got the chance to kick that smug grin off his face while he was in Nafrece. Oh well, I guess...

Taken from the diary of Elenore Baker July 9th 2013

Margaret couldn't hear the whole conversation between Madlax and Laetitia, but she could clearly sort out both their angry voices coming from the living room as she and Vanessa approached. She could hardly believe that they, of all people, would be arguing like this. This was definitely bad and Margaret couldn't stand it. They were both like sisters to her and she felt like she should say or do something to ease things between them. - "Madlax, wait! What's wrong? Please come back and let's talk about it!" She told Madlax as she passed both her and Vanessa without saying a word or even turning back. Limelda left right after and went outside, but she would rather not approach that scary person right now. "Could you please go talk to her, Vanessa?" Margaret asked rather desperately, as she knew Madlax was much more likely

to listen to Vanessa than herself. "I'll go talk with Laetitia!" She said in a hurry as she went into the living room and found Laetitia crying.

It might have been an unusual sight for her, to find Laetitia in such a vulnerable position, but she remembered the day she first met her in the real world, after the confrontation with Friday Monday was over; how she looked so lost and lonely, and how much it cheered her up to receive Margaret's invitation to become her little sister. Right now, she looked like she needed an older sister more than ever. And given their special bond and proximity it just came very natural for Margaret to approach her, without saying a word, and kneel down to embrace her in a warm comforting hug, as Laetitia kept sobbing for a while. "What happened, Laetitia?" She asked gently after a while, as Laetitia seemed to calm down a bit, without letting go of her hug just yet. "Why were you and Madlax fighting? You know how much I would like you both to get along, right?" She asked Laetitia, keeping her hands on her shoulders now and looking her in the eyes with a sad expression.

"I'm so sorry. I only wanted to help. I saw she was in pain, but I think I've made it worse. When she was on the other side, she comforted me and I could feel the love and warmth emanating from her. I wanted to do something ease her suffering. Madlax confronted me on this and I got angry. I didn't like what she said to her and that made me angrier and I told her she only cared for herself. I'm so sorry Margaret..." Laetitia said crying.

Vanessa knocked on the door and opened it. She saw Madlax sitting a corner with her hands covering her face. She was definitely crying and Vanessa walked over and bent down to Madlax. "What happened?" Vanessa asked with concern. Madlax uncovered her face, her eyes red from crying. She grabbed Vanessa's arms and said tearfully; "I care...I care. I don't want hurt either of you that's why I can't decide, because I know one or both of you will get hurt."

Vanessa hugged Madlax. "I know you do..."

"That wasn't fair what she said. I didn't intentionally abandon Elenore, but Limelda got in the way and I didn't get back in time and she said I didn't care and that was only interested in myself." Madlax said with tears streaming down her face.

Vanessa hugged Madlax tighter trying to comfort her. "I know you care about Elenore, but I believe Laetitia has closer bond with her than you do and perhaps you said something to Elenore that upset her."

"She didn't like the answer I gave to Elenore last night. How she knew is beyond me." Madlax said wiping the tears from her eyes.

"Well that answer from her point of view seemed greatly self-centered. I knew what you meant and Elenore seemed satisfied with your answer. Granted, she's an unusual girl but she when she sees the people she loves in pain she goes out of her way to try to help." Vanessa replied letting go of Madlax who was trying to get up from the corner.

"Yeah I know but she really creeps people out sometimes and don't if she does it intentionally or that's the way she is." Madlax said getting up from the corner.

"I don't know either way, but for now just let it be." Vanessa said in an assuring tone.

"Okay, I'll let be for now. But you look like you have something on your mind as well. So what's up?" Madlax asked with a small smile.

"I need you to take a look at this picture and tell me if you recognize the woman in it." She handed the picture to Madlax who looked it over. "When was this taken? It looks like Elenore with an older man but I can tell it isn't. Wait a second, that's Duvet I see the mole next to her right eye." Madlax said somewhat puzzled.

"Just look on the back of the picture." Vanessa answered.

Madlax looked stunned. "How did Margaret get this picture and was Duvet really here?"

"I believe that is Elenore's mother and for some reason she was thrown out of the Burton house. Plus I from what I've gathered she was barred from seeing Elenore and as a result Elenore was told she died. Madlax I need you to arrange a meeting with her and when do you take Elenore with you. I think she may help her." Vanessa replied.

"I'll do it, but I get the feeling this could get ugly real quick." Madlax said with some worry.

"I understand. I'll let you make the call and I better go check on Margaret." Vanessa said heading towards the door.

As Vanessa left, Madlax picked up her cell phone and dialed a number. She waited for an answer.

"Hello Duvet..."

Margaret listened as Laetitia explained herself between sobs. "It's ok, Laetitia. It'll be all right, I'm sure!" She tried to reassure the younger girl as she patted her head gently. "I'm sure Madlax will understand, she's one of us after all! Though, you really shouldn't say such harsh accusing things, especially not to your elders. You must apologize to her and try to restrain yourself a bit from now on, ok?" She admonished the younger one, yet trying not to make it sound like scolding. "As for Elenore, you should break the link you made as soon as possible. I talked to Vanessa about it and we might have a better way to help her!" - Margaret said with a smile, as she told Laetitia about hers and Vanessa's discovery regarding Elenore's mother, and their plan to reunite the two, though she had no idea on what to do about the other vision concerning Elenore but she hoped their reunion would shed some light...

"Oh there's one more thing Laetitia!" The sight of Limelda walking outside a while before returned to her. "I guess you don't like Limelda so much... To be honest, I find her intimidating myself. And she really doesn't seem to act very friendly towards me, though I've been trying... But we have no reason to be impolite to her. Remember she's still our guest, and an important person to Madlax. As for her relationship with Carrossea..." Margaret unexpectedly found herself at a lack of words to express her thoughts on this matter "Well, I guess you know how I feel about this..." She finally said, trying to hide her sadness. "But we really shouldn't hate her for that. The fact is, there are a lot of things I don't know about Carrossea. A lot of things I'm sure he didn't tell me. I don't know if he ever will. And the fact he's been away for so long without saying anything... I'm not even sure if he ever cared for me at all or if he had just been using me all along to learn about his past. You have to understand that he is a different person than Poupee. Just like you, I and Madlax are different people." Margaret said with certain firmness in her voice that sounded uncharacteristic. But as painful and sad as these realizations might have been for Margaret, they started to make sense in her head.

Laetitia wiped her eyes and sniffed. "Okay I'll apologize. I'll be more careful with what I say and break the link." After hearing Margaret's plan she smiled. "Do you think it will work?"

"We'll have to see, I know it's going to be painful for the both of them. Now please break the link." Margaret replied in the firm tone.

Laetitia nodded and closed her eyes and held out her hands concentrating. For a couple minutes she stood there silently as Vanessa walked up to Margaret and about to speak but Margaret put her finger over her mouth making the sign of silence. Then Laetitia opened her eyes and smiled.

"There the link is broken, sorry it took so long but I didn't want any psychic backlash on either end."

In the kitchen Elenore breathed a sigh of relief then she wondered why she did that and went back to making lunch.

"That's one problem solved and it looks like you have things under control here as well Margaret." Vanessa said impressed.

Margaret grinned and said still in the firm tone. "Yep, did you talk to Madlax? Will she make the call?"

"Yes I did and when I was leaving she looked like she was going to, oh here she is now." Vanessa said seeing Madlax walk up.

"Well I made the call. She'll meet me later today but nowhere near here though, but I guess with what happened it can't be helped. Just get Elenore ready okay." Madlax said with a grin. Margaret looked at Laetitia. "Don't you have something to say?"

"I'm sorry Madlax. I was angry and I said things I shouldn't have. I'm sorry." Laetitia said apologetically.

Madlax bent down to Laetitia. "Look I know didn't mean to say those things, but they were very hurtful. I do care about them and granted I don't have the bond you and Elenore share but I do care about her too. Also you really have to watch what you say. I guess you're just being yourself but it tends to really creep people out and I forgive you." Madlax hugged Laetitia as she nodded.

Elenore came into the room. "Miss, lunch is ready in the dining room."

"Okay, thanks Elenore." Margaret said as they all went toward the dining room.

Meanwhile outside Limelda was stewing. She really wanted to strangle that kid but she remembered she was a guest here and in a foreign country to boot. She heard footsteps behind her and turned around drawing her pistol. There standing there was Carrossea.

"YOU! What are you doing here!?" Limelda said loudly.

"I came here to see Margaret. Question is what are you doing here?" Carrossea said calmly.

"I'm a guest here..." Limelda replied.

"I assume Madlax is here as well since you tend to follow her like a puppy dog."

"What makes you think I won't shoot you?" Limelda said aiming her pistol.

"Because I know you still have feelings for me." Carrossea said still in that calm tone.

"How does that brat know about us and how much did you tell her?!" Limelda asked angrily. Carrossea chuckled. "I see Laetitia rattled your cage."

Limelda fired a bullet missing Carrossea's head and hitting the post behind him.

"Was that really necessary?" Carrossea asked in that calm tone.

Elenore noticed that Limelda wasn't there and Margaret had told her that she went outside. Elenore sighed as she went to the front door. As she was opening it she heard the shot. There she saw Limelda pointing a gun at Carrossea.

"Why, hello Miss Baker, Pleasant to see you again." Carrossea smiled.

Elenore gave them both her professional but angry look and said. "Miss Jorg please remember that you're a guest here. As odious as Mr. Doone is please refrain from unnecessary gunfire, this is Nafrece not Gazth-Sonika. Lunch is being served in the dining please join the others." *"If you were going to fire off your gun, at least you could've grazed him..."* Elenore thought to herself.

Limelda didn't want to cross Elenore but did smirk as she called Carrossea odious and went inside.

"As for you, Mr. Doone May I ask what brings you here?"

"I came here to see Margaret. She did ask me to stop by. Sorry if it's unannounced."

"I'm sure you are Mr. Doone."

"Could you please tell her I'm here?" Carrossea walked to the front door.

"Miss Margaret is having lunch at the moment, but I will tell her."

"I'm sure you will and may I say that's a very stunning outfit you have on Miss Baker."

Carrossea said trying to rattle Elenore.

"Why thank you Mr. Doone. If you please wait here I will tell Miss Margaret." Elenore replied unfazed by Carrossea's remarks and walked to the dining room.

As soon as Elenore was out of earshot he mumbled; "What a bitch."

Limelda came into the dining room and sat down. She was silent, her eyes showing a mix of anger and fear. Then a few seconds later Elenore came into the room and walked up to Margaret.

"Miss Margaret, I apologize for interrupting your lunch. Mr. Doone has arrived and wishes to speak with you." Elenore said with thinly veiled contempt towards Carrossea.

"Carrossea's here? What does he want?" Madlax asked noticing Elenore's tone.

"I have no idea what that man would want, other than he wishes to speak with Miss Margaret." Elenore replied.

Vanessa knew that Elenore intensely disliked Carrossea and blamed him in part for what happened to them. "It won't hurt to see what he wants. I know some people in this room aren't too happy to see him but he did ask to see Margaret. Beside he might have information we could use." Vanessa said and then looked at Margaret for her reaction.

Margaret was surely taken off guard by this. She did tell him to drop by sometime, but she wasn't expecting him to show up this soon. She was actually hesitant to see him, not really knowing what to say to him, especially considering all the recent events. And what did Vanessa mean, "He might have information we could use"? Could he know about the Torc? He sure had a history of knowing more than he let show, and remembering this, Margaret wondered if he already knew the Torc was in her possession and if that was the main reason for his visit. She figured she couldn't just ignore him, and part of her did want to see him and clarify things.

"Thank you Elenore, I'll go talk to him now. You all don't need to wait for me, keep eating, I'll be back in a few." Margaret said, before leaving the table and walking out into the front hall where he was waiting.

"Hmm... Hello Carrossea. I... wasn't expecting to see you again this soon. I'm afraid this isn't the best time... Hmm, did you come for any particular reason?" - Margaret asked more directly than she had intended, clearly letting show her uneasiness. She wanted to bring up the subject of the Torc and confront him about Limelda at some point, difficult as it was, but she thought she'd hear him out first.

"Hello Margaret. I apologize for arriving unannounced but there's something I do need to talk with you about." Carrossea replied noticing Margaret's unease and tried to appear non confrontational as possible.

"The reason I came because Laetitia and my other self made a psychic link with your maid much to my disapproval and to be quite honest it's been giving me major headaches. So I would like you please ask Laetitia to break this link for all our sakes."

Carrossea noticed that Margaret wanted to say something and then he asked.

"Is there anything you want to say, you look like you want to ask me something?"

"Oh! I already told Laetitia to break that link, since it wasn't helping Elenore so much. I didn't know you were involved with this... but you should be free from it already, I think!" Margaret informed him, surprised this was the reason that brought him so hastily, and wondering if he actually cared about Elenore to get involved to that extent, even though he made a point of expressing his disapproval on it.

"Well if that's the case, I'm glad. I really didn't want to get involved but both of them can be quite persistent. In any case I do hope Miss Baker can get the help she needs."

"Besides I enjoy our little game. Sparring with her is quite amusing." Carrossea thought to himself.

"And... well... yes, I have something I wanted to ask you." Margaret said with a more serious expression. "I don't know what businesses have you been occupied with all these months. Yesterday you just told me you have been looking for something. I've been wanting to ask you about that and...I wonder..." Margaret hesitated for a while, but finally decided to tell him about the Torc as she loosened up her tie and unbuttoned the top button of her shirt to reveal the Torc on her neck. "Do you know anything about this artifact? Is this what you've been looking for all this time, by any chance? I'd really appreciate anything you could tell me about it." She asked apprehensively.

Carrossea's eyes grew wide in mix of shock and horror when he saw the Torc around Margaret's neck.

"Margaret, how did you get hold of the Torc?! I thought Vanessa Rene had it! And yes that was what I was looking for along with other two artifacts. Singly they possess great power in of themselves but all three together at a holy place can grant the gatherer any desire they wish within reason. I was looking for them so I can finally live my life without continuously looking over my shoulder and also separate myself from Poupee so I can be myself. I honestly never wanted you to get involved in this but I guess the Torc has a different plan. I know the Ring of

Morrigan is in Nafrece and the Bracelet of Brigid is somewhere but since both the Torc and Ring are here they'll call the bracelet here. With all three we could have just about anything we could wish for. Don't you have any desires Margaret? "

"Any desires? I just wanted to get rid of it, honestly! Yes, it was with Vanessa, but something strange happened and when I came to I had it around my neck, and now I can't remove it. This is troublesome... Not just for me! Last night, there were some agents outside, around the house. They're after it, and they already know it's here apparently. If Madlax wasn't here to stop them and then that's when Limelda showed up too..." The subject of Limelda came to mind and she wanted to bring it up to him badly, though she was afraid of his reaction "I just...I can't use the Torc. I don't know how, nor do I want to. I'm afraid! I feel this will only bring trouble, to me and everyone else involved... It's just like Secondary all over again! I just don't want that to happen again." Margaret grew anxious as she said this, the memory of all the terrible past events involving the books coming back at her. She remained silent for a while and turned away from Carrossea, hoping he wouldn't notice her teary eyes.

"Now that you know this, what are you planning to do? You had your secret agenda all along; you must have your own plans... Are you planning on using me again?" She turned back at him and saw how Carrossea seem taken off guard by her words, but she continued before he could say anything.

"Laetitia told me all about you and Limelda. And it really is none of my business, but it helped me realize something. You probably never cared for me the way you cared for her. You showed up when you needed both my Secondary and my Gift, and you tricked me and manipulated me for your own interest. I might not have realized it back then, because I was too obsessed with learning about my own past as well. But you seem to be doing the same thing all over again! Why else would you be away all this time, after all we had been through together, without contacting me even once? And only now that you want this thing that for some unfortunate reason has come to me, you decide to show up all interested again. I'm just having a hard time understanding all this. I don't want to be deceived anymore, so I'd appreciate if you could be more honest with me." Margaret finally confronted him with everything she wanted to say, not making any effort to hide the pain that bringing this subject caused her.

Carrossea bowed his head. "All right Margaret you want the truth, I'll give it to you. At least you deserve that much. It's true I only wanted Secondary to find out my own truth and if it wasn't for that damn maid I would've had it and left you two alone. But I started to develop feelings for you and that bitch kept getting in the way. At the end I truly cared about you and when I came back to life I took a good long look at myself and found myself wanting. I didn't want to cause you anymore trouble with the Soldats on my back, so I felt it was better if I stayed away. At the very least I thought you would be safe, but it seems Fate has something else in mind considering what happened last night. I don't want to use or trick you and if you don't want my help I'll understand. Now, as for Limelda and myself that's bit complicated. At first I wanted her to go hunt down Madlax to get her out of my hair and one thing led to another and we wound up together until she found out Enfant was behind the civil war and she could've shot me dead right there but she didn't. I gathered she still had some feelings for me as she pretty much hit

the wall instead of my head. You did ask what my plans are so here they are, though you having the Torc change a lot of things. If you didn't want my help at the very least I could try to draw off the Soldats to give you some breathing room. I do want to ask when you do get the other two could at least separate Poupee from me, I want to give him a chance to live his life."

Carrossea saw over Margaret to see Elenore staring angrily at him. "You look you want to say something as well Miss Baker."

"Yes I do Mr. Doone, but what really I want to say to you would very unprofessional and would greatly offend Miss Margaret." Both looked at Margaret for a response.

Carrossea's words confirmed all her deductions on his condemning past behavior, and even though deep inside she wanted to forgive him, she didn't detect any hint of regret or apology in his voice, but anger instead. Not only did he sound upset at Margaret's confrontation as he also aggravated his situation by letting out his anger on Elenore, even though he should probably know they were close. What was he thinking? Did he really felt it was acceptable to openly insult Elenore in her presence, at her own place, just like that? Margaret was already feeling quite uncomfortable with the subject at hand to begin with, but Carrossea's reply was more than a bit shocking. Margaret suddenly looked behind as she heard Elenore's voice, not wanting to believe she had actually heard all that he just said.

They changed some words between them, but Margaret was too astonished for a while to sort them out properly. The sudden silence brought their eyes on her, awaiting some sort of response. She didn't know exactly what to say right away, but not only did she wish for Carrossea to leave, as she was sure that if he didn't leave soon enough things could get really bad, for she knew what Elenore was capable of when she was angry.

"Just... leave." She struggled to keep herself from breaking down as she told Carrossea. "Unless you have any intention of apologizing, just leave immediately." She told him in a hurting voice, without even raising her head to look him in the eyes.

"You wanted the truth and I gave it. Good bye Margaret." Carrossea said as he was opening the door to leave. He didn't say anything else as he didn't want to give Elenore the satisfaction of throwing him out personally. He closed the door behind leaving a hurt Margaret and a very angry Elenore standing in the front hall.

Margaret didn't look at him as he said goodbye, and dared only to look at the door a few seconds after his departure. She remained silent for a while, in shocking disbelief at what just happened, still trying to understand how he could be this insulting. She felt she should be angry at him, but the disappointment his actions caused her brought her more pain and sadness than anger. She could tell Elenore was very angry though, and if anything could be said to ease her feelings it should be said right away. She only hoped she could keep from crying, as she turned to speak to Elenore.

"Elenore, I... I'm sorry. He just... I'm so sorry! You shouldn't have to hear any of that! You have all the reasons in the world to dislike him and... I must agree with you now. I'm sorry I've been so foolish when you've been trying to warn me about him all this time. I never thought he could be this cruel..." - Margaret said in a quivering voice, unable to hold her tears any longer.

Elenore looked at Margaret with sympathy. She knew she liked him even though she had warned her repeatedly about him. Elenore didn't take any satisfaction that she was proven right all along. Only thing Elenore cared about right now was Margaret, so she did the only thing she could do; she walked up and hugged Margaret and let her cry on her shoulder. "It's okay Miss Margaret. I'm more worried about you and how you feel than my own." Elenore said compassionately trying to comfort Margaret.

"I won't forget this Mr. Doone. Your petty insults don't bother me, but you crossed the line when you hurt Miss Margaret and that's unforgiveable!" Elenore thought to herself as she continued to gently hold Margaret in her arms.

Elenore handed Margaret a handkerchief. "Please Miss dry your eyes. I know he hurt you and you have every reason in the world to be upset. But don't give him the satisfaction Miss. You're far better than that man will ever will be." Elenore said in compassionate but reassuring tone. "Thank you, Elenore. Thank you for everything" - Margaret said as she accepted the handkerchief Elenore gave her before hugging her one more time. "I don't want the others to see me like this." She said with embarrassment, trying to dry her eyes between sobs. "I'll be in my room. I think I'll take a nap." She told Elenore, as she excused herself and went to her room, crying herself to sleep.

"All right Miss." Elenore said sympathetically and watched Margaret go upstairs and heard her go to her room. After Margaret shut the door to her room Elenore stared at the front door in anger. She felt frustrated that she couldn't do anything. "Just once I would love kick that smug look off your face." She said quietly to herself and then she remembered the others in the dining room. She wondered if they could hear anything and she knew they would ask what happened. She took a deep breath and walked back to the dining room.

As she entered she felt all eyes on her and then said as professionally as she could.

"Please excuse me, Miss Margaret isn't feeling very well and has taken to her room to rest. The Miss sends her deepest apologies."

For a few moments there was total silence then Laetitia spoke her eyes filled with sadness.

"Elenore I'm going to my room as well. Please forgive me everyone." With that Laetitia went to her room and sat in a corner and cried.

Meanwhile back in the dining room everyone waited till Laetitia was out of the room and out of earshot and then Vanessa asked Elenore noticing her anger just below the surface; "What happened Elenore?"

As Elenore told them the entire conversation the reactions were mixed from shocked to angry. For a few more moments the room was quiet as they all took in what they just heard and then...

"THAT BASTARD!!!" Elenore angrily said slamming her fist into the table which surprised everyone, then she realized what she had just done and momentary covered her mouth in total shock. "Please forgive me. I...I..." Before she could say anything else Vanessa got up and hugged Elenore. "It's all right we all feel the same right about now and don't worry we won't tell Margaret, will we?" She said looking everyone else seated.

"About what?" Madlax said.

"Didn't see a thing, but you know you could've have let me shoot him again." Limelda said with some actual sympathy.

Elenore looked at Limelda. "If I had known what he was going say, I would've let you."

"You really hate him that much don't you." Limelda said to Elenore.

Elenore looked Limelda square in the eye and said coldly. "Let's put this way I rather forgive his former employer than I would him."

Hearing that from her shocked everyone at first, then Vanessa grabbed Elenore by the arm and said; "Come on, lets you and I take a walk. Madlax can keep an eye on Margaret please."

"Sure, no problem." Madlax said figuring out what Vanessa had in mind.

"But the dishes..." Elenore protested.

"I'll take care of them as well, so don't worry Elenore, both of you just go." Madlax said with a smile and started collecting the dishes as they headed out the door.

Elenore and Vanessa walked outside and silently they walked till they reached their usual spot overlooking the river.

"That was very unlike you Elenore. Is something else bothering you?" Vanessa asked with concern and compassion for her friend.

Elenore looked at Vanessa with a hopeless look. "As we were walking, I realized something; this is Gazth-Sonika all over again. Instead three books it's three pieces of jewelry. Instead of a civil war we have two criminal groups going at each other and were stuck in the middle of it. I feel useless here as I did there. I couldn't protect Miss Margaret and I couldn't even protect myself. I'm afraid and angry and there's nothing I can do about it. I don't want to anyone I care about die like the last time. I can't even kick that smug look off Mr. Doone's face. And to top it all off there's the fact that my mother has been alive all these years and the fact my own grandfather lied to me for whatever reason. It's a wonder I haven't lost my mind yet."

Vanessa looked at Elenore sadly, she knew she was right. All this had a déjà vu feel about it and she struggled for something to say. She felt as helpless and part of her wondered how many tragedies it would take for it to end.

"Honestly Elenore, I don't know what to say about this. I mean your right this looks like a repeat of 8 months ago. As for your mother, Margaret told me she a had a vision concerning your mother and you when you came home beaten up when you were twelve, but she was afraid given your recent behavior to approach you with either of them."

"Well I don't blame Miss Margaret for being afraid. I haven't been myself for some time. Please tell me what she saw." Vanessa told what Margaret had seen but she left out Laetitia via her link with Elenore's psyche had seen this and the chain. Elenore stood there silently in thought and then spoke in a melancholic tone. "From what you just told me I gather that grandfather hadn't truly forgiven my mother and by telling me that she was dead kept me from going looking for her or he thought that the Master and the Mistress would return. I honestly don't know."

"There's the fact she might not know what we know and stayed away on the assumption that Margaret's father and/or mother had returned. I gather she knows her own father is dead." Vanessa said trying to snap Elenore out of the funk she was sinking in.

"True, but would like to ask her for her side of the story." Elenore replied in the same tone.

"Well, Madlax made a call to Duvet to get equipment and information, why don't you go with her and that way you can ask her."

"Really?! But I wouldn't know what to say." Elenore replied.

"That's up to you. Do you forgive her for being away for so long?"

"Well if I can forgive Miss Margaret... I can forgive my own mother. As for me coming home that day beaten up when I said I had an accident. I did get into a "fight" but I really don't want to talk about it right now please understand Vanessa."

"All right, but I do want to talk this at later date." Vanessa replied. *"I just hope it wasn't what I think really happened."* Vanessa added to herself then both women looked at the river in deep compilation for a hour and then headed back to the house.

Elenore and Vanessa came back to the house. Thankfully Margaret was still sleeping and Madlax had put the dishes in the sink. Elenore started on the dishes as soon as she got in and Vanessa went to the living room where she saw Limelda and Madlax sitting there.

Both looked at her with Madlax more concerned than Limelda. "Sorry it took so long, we had a long talk. But hopefully when Elenore talks to Duvet she'll be better." Vanessa said apologetically.

"It's okay. I'm just glad she's feeling better, one scary chick is enough." Madlax said half jokingly and even Limelda chuckled a bit.

"Limelda and I were talking. We have a lot of info on Enfant but we know next to nothing about the Soldats other than they've been around for a very long time." Madlax said in a serious tone.

"Let's wait till Margaret wakes up and then we all can discuss what to do. I know that a frontal attack on either group would be plain suicide but I don't want to just sit around and wait for them to make their next move." Vanessa said just as serious.

"Neither do we, but do need more Intel on the Soldats before we make a move and I'm hoping Duvet knows somebody who does." Madlax replied.

"I'll get back to studying that book we got earlier and hopefully it will give us some clues." Vanessa said and then she went back to her room and started reading and taking notes.

Who is there? I can't see anything. Why is it so dark? Why is it so cold? I can faintly begin to see now... his face... lit by the moonlight. But why do you look so angry? What are you doing... pointing that gun at me...again? Why do you want to shoot me again... father? But... this isn't that time... this happened before!

The sound of a gunshot woke Margaret up from this nightmare with tears in her eyes, unable to tell whether the gunshot she heard was real or not. After a few seconds of shock she realized it had all been just a dream, as realistic as it sounded. She could not see the Torc glowing, but she felt its suffocating warmth around her neck as she tried to catch her breath. "You're causing this." She thought as she touched the Torc. "But why this dream now?"

Margaret's mind rapidly drifted away from her dream and she remembered Carrossea and the hurtful things he said. She definitely wasn't feeling any better over it after such a short nap, and waking up to such a nightmare on top of it... she hugged her pillow and curled up in her bed thinking. "Why do I have to go through all this? Wasn't it enough eight months ago? Wasn't it enough thirteen years ago? That stupid Carrossea... why did he have to be so mean now? I

hope he apologizes...No, I shouldn't...even if he does apologize..." Margaret struggled, as she felt the tears coming to her eyes and closed them tight hoping to fall asleep again quickly. "No, I can't! I don't want to sleep if I'm just gonna have these dreams again!" She made up her mind as she rose from her bed quickly and decided to join the others downstairs.

Elenore had just finished doing the dishes and had brought out tea. She had brought a cup in case Margaret woke up and wanted a drink. They were all (except Vanessa and Laetitia) sitting there when Margaret came into the room. Elenore stood up and prepared a cup of tea for Margaret. "Are you feeling any better Miss? Please Miss have a cup of tea." Elenore asked sympathetically.

Taking the cup of tea. "Thank you Elenore. No, my nap didn't do me much good. I had a nightmare and believe the Torc had something to do with it. "Margaret said sitting down next to Elenore trying to shake the cobwebs out.

"Since you're awake now I'll go get Vanessa and we can talk." Madlax said getting up and heading towards Vanessa's room.

"Okay, I'll wait till you two get back. Ouch!" Margaret said before burning her tongue on the tea.

"Please Miss; do be careful it's hot." Elenore said.

Before Margaret could speak Vanessa spoke. "Oh good Margaret, you're up. Now we can discuss what our move is going to be."

"Miss Margaret had a vision." Elenore told Vanessa.

"It was more like a nightmare than a vision. I could feel warmth coming from the Torc so I gathered it was showing me something but I don't know why." Margaret added in a firm tone. Vanessa looked at Margaret and spoke in a serious tone. "Please Margaret tell us what you saw."

For the few minutes Margaret described what she saw in as much detail she could remember and then she waited for everyone to speak.

"One of the powers of the Torc is the ability to show the wearer visions of the past. At least we can set a possible time frame of it being during a winter night and before the incident thirteen years ago." Vanessa said still in a serious tone.

"Yeah but who knows when that happened and why would it show that in the first place?"

Madlax asked a tad puzzled.

"From what I've gathered so far the Torc doesn't just show visions on a whim. There has to be some significance to it. "Vanessa answered.

"Now that we're all here lets plan out what we're going to do. We need Intel both about the artifacts and the Soldats since those are the big unknowns. Vanessa's covering the artifact end and I'll ask Duvet if she knows anything or someone who does know about the Soldats and getting supplies and gear at the same. I'll take Elenore with me for back up.

Limelda agreed to do security around here till we get back." Madlax explained.

"So what do I'm supposed to do?" Margaret asked feeling a bit left out.

Madlax smiled. "You've got the important job; you'll stick close to Vanessa and if you have more visions, dreams or the Torc does anything weird. Tell her or write it down in as much detail as you can."

Margaret smiled and asked with a confident tone in her voice; "Okay I can do that. But what are going to do? I gather we're going to do more than just that."

"Once we get the Intel we need, we going to do a end run around both groups and get the other two before they do and go from there." Okay Elenore, we need to get going if we're to meet up with Duvet." Madlax replied and Elenore nodded and got up.

"Is there anything you need to add Margaret before we leave?" Madlax kindly asked.

"Hmm... Oh right, Carrossea said something... about the artifacts, I mean." As unpleasant as it was having to mention him, she did felt some of the information he told her could be helpful, and thankfully (or unfortunately for her) their conversation was so stuck in her head that she could remember all the details. "He told me the artifacts possess great power by themselves, but when gathered together at a holy place they can grant any sort of wish. He also said the Ring of Morrigan was in Nafrece and the Bracelet of Brigid is somewhere else but will likely join the other two soon. But he could be lying for all I know..." - Margaret added with poorly disguised indignation, as she took another sip on her tea. "Hot!" She protested instinctively as she burned her tongue once again, feeling silly over it right immediately. "Where is Laetitia by the way?" Margaret asked curiously, suddenly noticing her absence.

"Okay we can take that with a grain of salt. But since he is or was looking for them as well there might be something to what he said. I'll research if there's a holy place mentioned in any of the legends. If it turns out to be true we can bring the artifacts there and if not then we can chalk it to him being a dick." Vanessa said with a little humorous touch at the end which made everyone chuckle.

"Laetitia wasn't feeling well or so she said and went to her room as well. She didn't seem too happy." Madlax said.

"I'll look in on her and see if she's okay." Margaret replied.

"Sorry to rush off. But Elenore and I have a date and we can't be late." Madlax said grabbing Elenore by the arm with a silly grin on her face.

Elenore grinned and said. "Well I hope you do bring me home at a decent hour, can't stay out all night."

"Oh, but of course. Margaret would have my head if I brought you home late!" Madlax replied in mock surprise.

Vanessa and Margaret chuckled as Limelda just shook her head trying to hide a grin.

"Just get going you two." Vanessa said still chuckling.

"Okay, bye Miss." Elenore added before they went out the door.

Meanwhile Laetitia was still in the corner but asleep after crying herself there....

Chapter 6.

Sometimes the oddest friendships can start under the strangest conditions. My friendship with Nadie and Ellis is a classic example of how people with very little in common can become good friends. Granted I don't see much of them nowadays, we do keep in touch...

Taken from the diary of Elenore Baker July 9th 2013

Ellis looked at the bracelet carefully and smiled. It was pretty but she could've sworn that the knots had moved, she put it in her pocket and caught up with Nadie.

"I got us a room for the night. I need to take a shower, come on let's go." Nadie said with fatigue in her voice.

"Yes sir." Ellis replied and they went into the hotel room.

A few minutes later Nadie went to the shower and Ellis heard the water running. Ellis took the bracelet out of her pocket and looked at it some more. It didn't look like the knots were moving and she wondered how it would look on her. She slipped the bracelet on and then suddenly she felt pressure on her arm where the bracelet was and her eyes grew wide. She could see visions of a far off land across the water, a huge tower in a big city and of a young woman with pigtails wearing some kind of necklace.

She heard a gentle voice echoing her mind.

"Go East. Go across the water. Go to Nafrece..."

"Nafrece? Where's that? I've never heard of it." Ellis asked the voice.

"East. Across the water. Hurry." The voice replied.

Nadie came out of the shower and saw Ellis floating in the air with a red aura surrounding her.

"ELLIS!" Nadie shouted and she approached her. "ELLIS, SPEAK TO ME!" Nadie yelled at Ellis hoping to get through to her. Ellis turned her head and smiled and in a Irish accent spoke. "Go East. Go across the water. Go to Nafrece."

"What the hell?! Not this again." Nadie said with dismay in voice. But her question would have to wait as the aura faded and Ellis went unconscious and began to fall. Nadie quickly caught her and put her on the bed. Nadie tried to wake Ellis up nothing seemed to work. Then she noticed the bracelet on Ellis' arm and tried to remove it with no avail. "Where did this thing come from?" Nadie asked herself as she tried in vain to get it off and stopped when she heard Ellis speak.

"Ouch! Nadie stop." As Ellis woke up in pain.

"Ellis where did you get this? Why did you say we have to go Nafrece?" Nadie asked with concern.

"I bought it from an old lady and a voice told me we have to go across the water to get Nafrece. Nadie where's Nafrece?" Ellis replied.

"It's a country far away from here across the ocean. Ellis, see if you can get it off." Nadie replied pointing to the bracelet.

Ellis tried to take it off but it wouldn't budge. "Nadie, I can't get it off. Help me." Ellis pleaded.

"I don't know what to do. This looks like something Blue Eyes might know about. I have her number so I'll go make a call. You stay here and don't go anywhere, okay." Nadie said.

"Yes sir." Ellis replied as Nadie left to make the call. Ellis felt tired and decided to go to sleep.

She saw a round fireplace in the ground and it was lit. She saw the woman with the pigtails sitting across from her. She heard herself speak but not quite in her voice...

"Greetings Rhiannon. It's been awhile."

"And the same to you Brigid. I see you found a bearer."

"Aye, so did you. So when are you coming?"

"Well I have to cross the ocean to get to you. Oh any word on Morrigan?"

"No but I know she's nearby. She'll make her presence known when finds a bearer."

"I see. I'll get there as fast I can."

"I will be waiting for you."

"Oh one last thing before I go."

"What is it?"

"Just have taco's ready when I come."

"Tacos?!"

"Taco Taco Tacosu...." She sang before she drifted into deep slumber.

Kirika looked around as she and Mireille walked to downtown. The buildings all looked quaint and cozy...and oddly familiar. Why hadn't she known this country was here? She figured it was due to her lack of geographic schooling, but even so, with all the travelling she and Mireille did, she should've known about this country that could pass as France's twin. She made a note in her mind to come back once the Soldats were dealt with, and explore to her heart's content....and maybe fill up her sketchbook in the process.

Kirika ended her train of thought and looked up. She and Mireille were already in a bistro, in the crowded downtown district.

Meanwhile back at the Burton estate; Margaret headed upstairs towards Laetitia's room and gently knocked on the door, awaiting some sort of response. She didn't hear any reply and everything seemed pretty quiet, she assumed Laetitia must have still been asleep, but decided to check up on her anyway. She slowly opened the door and walked in to find Laetitia sleeping on the floor at the room's corner.

She approached her silently, and tried carrying her to the bed without waking her up, as she would definitely be more comfortable there than in the floor, Margaret thought.

As she was trying to adjust Laetitia's head on the pillow the younger one slowly opened her eyes and looked at Margaret. "Oh, I'm sorry. Did I wake you up? I just wanted you to feel more comfortable. Hmm... Why were you sleeping on the floor?" She asked, noticing Laetitia's expression growing sad as she was coming to herself. "Madlax told me you didn't feel well, I think I know what's wrong. I think you know... all about my conversation with Carrosea, don't you?" She asked in a sad tone. "I hope you understand my position. He was very cold to me and mean to Elenore. I didn't want to get upset with him, but he gave me no other choice... But if what he told me is true, I'll use this power to help Poupee, I promise you that!" Margaret said, trying to cheer Laetitia up.

"Really?!" Laetitia said with a smile and tears running down her cheeks.

"Thank you Margaret!"

"You're welcome. Rest now and when Elenore and Madlax come back we'll have dinner okay." Margaret replied in a comforting tone.

"Where did they go?" Laetitia asked curiously.

"Well they went to see Elenore's mother. Why do you ask?" Margaret answered curious about Laetitia's question.

"Because there's something hidden and Elenore's hiding something too and it worries me." Laetitia answered.

"Well I'm sure Elenore can handle it..." Margaret said in a reassuring tone.

"Are you sure you can handle it?" Madlax asked while they were driving to the meeting spot.

"If you're worried I'm going to get into a shouting match or jump down her throat. That's not the case. I am upset that she didn't contact me all these years, but I want to hear her side of the story. I suspect there's something more to this than her just not contacting me." Elenore said in a reassuring but serious tone.

"Like?" Madlax asked.

"There's the fact my grandfather lied about her being dead and her being kicked out of the house. I doubt a fight between Margaret's mother and mine would cause all that. I have my suspicions but I need to confront her on them." Elenore replied.

"Well just don't push it if she doesn't give an answer right away. Will you do that for me?" Madlax asked.

"Sure Madlax, I'm just happy I'm going to get to talk to her. So as much as I want answers, I'm not going to force the issue if it comes to that. I'm sure I'll get my answers eventually. Oh when we get the time, I want to ask you about your experiences with my mother." Elenore replied.

"Okay, I can do that. Boy, you are a pushy date." Madlax teased.

Elenore smirked and raised her head up. "Well I expect only the best from my suitors." Elenore teased back.

"Okay we're here; we have to get out and walk the rest of the way." Madlax said parking the car.

And both women got out and headed to an old building.

"Are you sure this is the place?" Elenore asked.

"This is the address Duvet gave me." Madlax replied as they walked up the front steps.

Madlax knocked on the door three times. From an intercom next to the door a woman's voice queried. "Who is it?"

"It's me, Madlax." Madlax said.

The door opened and Duvet came out. Duvet's facial expressions changed from shock, resignation, and fear as she saw Elenore standing behind Madlax.

"Please Elenore you have to leave, if the Burton's found out you had seen me. You could get into trouble." Duvet said sadly with concern mixed in.

"You don't know, do you?" Madlax asked sadly. "Know what Madlax?!" Duvet asked a tad puzzled. "Both of them are dead, they died thirteen years ago." Madlax answered still in the same tone.

"What! Are you sure? The last letter I received from my father said that Richard had returned and sent a search party for Anna. I'll show you the letter if you don't believe me." Duvet said in shock.

"They're both dead, mother. I think we need to explain a few things though the story will sound bizarre and I do want to see that letter." Elenore said in a somber tone.

"Well I've seen a few bizarre things in my time and I'll show you the letter. Now let's get inside before anyone sees us." Duvet said moving out the way so Elenore and Madlax could enter.

They both entered the house and Duvet showed them to the living room where they sat down on the sofa. "I'll go get the letter and then I'll make some coffee." Duvet said still in some shock. A few minutes later Duvet returned with the letter in hand and gave it to Elenore to read.

August 5th 2001

Dear Meg

As you well know the Mistress' plane had crashed in Gazth-Sonika two years ago. As soon as the Master found out he sent search parties to look for the plane. It had taken the Master's parties to almost that to find the Mistress. Yes, I'm sure you have heard reports that no one else other Margaret had returned. But the Master did find the Mistress living with a tribe of native hiding from the civil war there. At this moment the Mistress is convalescing in a private clinic in Switzerland and may return soon while the Master returns to Gazth-Sonika to supervise our forces there. I am telling you all this, because the Mistress had found out about me sneaking Elenore to see you behind their backs. The Mistress has forbid any further contact with you and I hope I don't have to remind you why.

I know this must be disheartening to you, but I will give Elenore your love and try to give her an explanation.

Signed

John Baker

Elenore stared at the letter in disbelief. It was in her grandfather's writing alright but it was one lie after another and it seemed so cold. It strengthened Elenore's suspicions that her grandfather hadn't truly forgiven her mother.

"Before we tell our story, answer this one question for me; did you have an affair with Miss Margaret's father?" Elenore asked in a very serious tone. Madlax was shocked that Elenore even asked that. Duvet began to open her mouth but stopped and bowed her head and her shoulders slumped.

Elenore sadly sighed. "I thought as much. It explains a few things though. I know I'm not making much sense right now but let us tell our story all I ask is that you wait till we are finished please." Duvet nodded and Elenore and Madlax began telling what really happened. During the telling they could see the tears pour down Duvet's saddened face. After they had finished, Duvet got on her knees still crying and hiding her face in shame. "I'm so sorry Elenore. I failed you miserably as a mother. I wasn't there when you truly needed me and that's unforgivable. I'll understand if you hate me, I wouldn't blame you at all in the least. I...I don't deserve any forgiveness."

Elenore got up; her own eyes tearing bent down and hugged her mother.

"No I don't hate you. You had no idea what was going on even though I do wish you were there. I truly forgive you. Right now I'm just happy to know that you're alive and I can see and talk to you." Both women held each other tight crying into the other's shoulders. Madlax wiped a tear from her eye as she watched this.

"Were you really shot?" Duvet asked sorrowfully as she tried wiping the tears from her eyes.

"Yes mother, I was..." Elenore replied in the same tone and turned her back to her mother and lifted the back of her blouse to reveal the scar the bullet had made, then turned around and rolled up her left sleeve to show the one on her arm.

Meg collapsed in a chair and began to cry some more. "Oh my God, Please forgive me Elenore. I'm so sorry." Then she got up and hugged Elenore tightly and Elenore hugged her back.

"It's not your fault. If it's anyone's fault it's that man's fault for what happened." Elenore said in comforting tone mixed with a little anger when she mentioned Carrossea.

Meg looked at Elenore and asked a bit confused. "You mean the leader of Enfant or the one who wanted Margaret's book?"

"Well the leader of Enfant shares part of the blame, but most of it goes to that piece of trash Carrossea Doone!" Elenore explained angrily.

"Well If I ever see this Carrossea. I'm going break his damn legs and what else I can get a hold of." Duvet said her anger rising as well.

"Sorry to interrupt, there's another reason we came." Madlax said trying to calm the pair down before they whipped out torches and pitchforks.

"Oh yeah that's right. But why do need that much for?" Duvet asked a bit distracted.

"Let me explain mother. Please sit down this will take while." Elenore said just as distracted.

"Okay, but first let me get the coffee. I take it from Madlax's face this story is just as strange."

Elenore nodded and Duvet sighed and went to get the coffee. She came with a pot of coffee, the condiments and three mugs. She poured coffee in all three and then sat down.

Elenore told her the events of the last day and a half. Meg's features grew concerned.

"Well I was right, that was just as strange. But before I tell you anything just answer this one question truthfully and please forgive me for my bluntness; have you had sex with Margaret?"

At first Elenore and Madlax were a bit shocked, but they snapped out it and then Elenore answered.

"No I haven't. May I ask why you asked that?" Meg breathed a sigh of relief. "Trust me on this sweetie, there's a very good reason I asked that question I just don't want to get into details at this moment. But if you truly love Margaret, love her like a sister like she said."

Elenore suspected her mother was hiding something, but other issues prevented her from pressing the issue.

"As for the Soldats. I've had more than a few run in with them than I care to count. They're like Enfant but been around for over a thousand years and lot nastier and they're a group you want to avoid. But I do know for a fact that their elite assassin Noir rebelled against the Soldats and survived."

"Noir?! I've heard of him or her, an assassin like no other. But I doubt we could find Noir."

Madlax said impressed and a bit surprised.

"Well as luck would have it I know a woman who knows a man who can get in touch with Noir. She may be able to get in touch but it's going to cost. As for the rest of the gear you wanted it's going to take a day to get it all. The ammo I can give you now and I'll write a note and give you the address to meet her." Duvet said writing a note and then directions.

Elenore looked at the address and her eyes widened. "This is the address to the beauty salon I go to!"

"Well that makes things easier, just hand me back the note." Meg said taking the note and writing down a couple more things and taking a few \$100 Euro bills and then handing it back to Elenore who handed her a check.

"When you go there, ask for Paulette and hand her the note and the money." Duvet explained.

"Okay, the check should cover the cost the supplies and gear we need." Elenore explained in return.

"Let's get your ammo and then you better head to Paulette's before she closes." Duvet said as she motioned the pair to a room and started handing them boxes of ammo in bags. After a few minutes they were ready to leave.

Madlax took the bags to the car while Elenore lingered.

"I'm sorry we have to go so soon mother. But we need to hurry."

"I know, but can you come and see me tomorrow?"

"I can do that." Elenore kissed Meg on the cheek and Meg returned it.

"Bye mother, I love you." Elenore said happily but in a slight hurry.

"I love you too sweetie." Duvet said as Elenore headed to the car with Madlax impatiently waiting. Then they drove off.

Elenore was smiling but at the back of her mind something nagged at her.

"I wonder, what's the real reason why she asked that question?"

"I'm glad things turned out well between you two." Madlax said.

"So am I. But I know she's hiding something, but what I'm not sure." Elenore replied.

Madlax smirked. "There's no denying it, you are your mother's daughter all right..."

Fifteen minutes they arrived at the beauty parlor and went in. Paulette noticed Elenore and went over. "Hello Elenore. What can I do for you and your friend here?" Paulette said looking at Madlax

Elenore played with her hair a bit and said handing the note with cash to Paulette. "Hello Paulette. We both could use a trim." Paulette read the note sticking the money into her pocket, then looked at Elenore and then back at the note.

"So your Meg's little girl, who knew." Paulette pointed to the note. As for this I can pass it along, but I wouldn't hope for a speedy reply. Are you sure you want to meet with Armitage?"

"We understand, but we don't have a lot of options right now." Elenore stated.

"I see. Take a chair and I'll work on that trim." Paulette said nodding.

A couple of hours later they both left and got back into the car and drove home.

"I hope this works. From what I gathered this Noir sounds dangerous and this Armitage doesn't sound any better." Elenore said hopefully mixed with a bit of worry. "We just need to ask a few questions and then go our separate ways. Hopefully it won't get ugly." Madlax replied.

An hour later they returned home and Elenore went to go start cooking dinner. Madlax went to Vanessa's room and knocked.

Margaret left Laetitia's room and decided to go to her own and try to finish her homework before Madlax and Elenore came back. It sure was a pain, but she was bored, had nothing to report to Vanessa at the moment and figured it was better not to interrupt her right now. Thinking about the current situation only got her worried and annoyed... hopefully, homework would get her mind off of it for a while.

Margaret stood in her room for a couple of hours, somehow managing to finish all her homework, between trying not to fall asleep and worrying about Elenore's reunion with her mother. She remained sit on her chair at the desk for a while, looking out the window, as the thought of her last dream unexpectedly came to mind. She was still feeling very disturbed by

it, especially considering it might be more than just a dream and it was actually a vision from a past event. But when could this have happened and why? Did her father really try to kill her before that time 13 years ago? Suddenly, images from the dream sequence flashed through her eyes, as she witnessed it all once again in her head, in disbelief. But she saw a bit further this time: she saw it from a different perspective, she saw another man. She didn't recognize him, but he was definitely the one being shot by her father in this dream. He was shot and killed by her father, at this same house, long ago, on a cold winter night.

The vision ceased and Margaret came to herself. This raised some new questions about this past event the Torc was trying to tell her about. If all this was real who was this man? And why did her father kill him with such anger? And how was this related to her? She rushed out of her room and went to see Vanessa to tell her about this new part of the vision she just had. As she approached Vanessa's room she saw Madlax knocking at the door.

"Madlax? I see you and Elenore are back, I hope everything went well! I just had a new vision and was just going to tell Vanessa about it." Margaret said in a rush, hardly able to contain the confusion and disturbance caused by the still very vivid image in her head.

"Hi Margaret. We just got back and I was going to tell Vanessa the news. So why don't we tell her together." Madlax said, Margaret nodded in agreement as they heard Vanessa's voice telling them to come in.

"Vanessa, I had another vision!" Margaret exclaimed.

Vanessa pulled another piece of paper. "Okay, now tell me everything you saw, as you can remember."

As Margaret told them the vision, Vanessa wrote it down and Madlax stood there puzzled.

"Why would our father shoot someone? What happened here? I just don't get it." Madlax asked out loud.

"If something did happen here, wouldn't there be a record of it somewhere? I mean your father shot someone in this house, even if it was an intruder there should be a police report, right. We could look at the police database." Vanessa asked.

"How about the newspaper?" Margaret asked.

"We could look there too. We'll go there, if we don't find anything in the police database." Vanessa replied.

"But don't we have to hack into their system?" Madlax asked.

"Actually no. It's not a current case and it's over ten years ago so it would be in the public access. Sometimes the police post copies of reports in case someone comes forth with new information." Vanessa answered reaching for her laptop and turning it on.

"I didn't know that." Both Margaret and Madlax said nearly the same time.

Vanessa smiled as she accessed the police's public database.

"So how did Elenore's reunion with mother go?" Margaret asked curiously.

Madlax thought a bit and then answered. "Well, it was strange..." Madlax told both of them what happened at Meg's place.

Both Margaret and Vanessa were shocked but before either of them could respond a beeping sound came from the laptop. They all looked at the screen, the search found a match. Vanessa clicked on the link and the report summery came up.

February 1st 1991

Intruder shot dead in home of Richard Burton at 1:30 A.M on February 1st 1991.

Man shot was one David Gedoe (24). Mr. Gedoe's motive for breaking into the Burton residence was to kill his ex girlfriend Meg Baker (23) an employee of Richard Burton. Miss Baker had broken up with Mr. Gedoe about six months earlier due to abuse on Mr. Gedoe's part. Miss Baker was pregnant with child at the time of the shooting.

Mr. Burton heard a noise and went to investigate and was surprised by Mr. Gedoe.

Mr. Gedoe allegedly threatened Mr. Burton prompting Mr. Burton to shoot Mr. Gedoe in self defense.

Mr. Gedoe died instantly from the single gunshot.

End summery

Vanessa printed a copy. "I think we need to show this to Elenore as well.

Vanessa turned towards Margaret. "Why would the Torc show us visions of this? There's more to this than meets the eye. What do you think of this Margaret?"

"I'm not sure..." Margaret replied with some hesitation, still overwhelmed by the shock "By the looks of it, it seems like the person that father shot was Elenore's father!" Margaret concluded, with sadness in her voice. "Should we really tell her about it right now? Will she be okay knowing this?" She asked with concern in her voice. Margaret was honestly worried about Elenore's reaction towards learning about her father like this, especially considering the circumstances. But she also felt a bit ashamed and partly guilty for her father's actions, even not knowing the full story, and she feared Elenore might keep some resentment towards her because of it.

They heard a knock on the door and then it opened. Elenore came in and said that dinner would be ready in ten minutes. Elenore noticed them staring at her except Margaret who had her head bowed in shame.

"What happened, Vanessa?" Elenore asked with concern.

"I think you should take a look this." Vanessa said handing her the printout. Elenore read it and a sad look washed over her face.

"I'm sorry Elenore. My father shot yours. I feel so ashamed right now." Margaret said in a sorrowful tone.

Elenore walked up in front of Margaret. "Miss, I really don't think that was really my father. I know we shouldn't keep secrets from each other, but I have my own suspicions but right now I don't have enough proof and I don't want anyone to jump to conclusions. So you shouldn't feel ashamed Miss for something that happened before you were even born and on the off chance he was my father, I don't hold it against you Miss. But I do plan to confront my mother about this tomorrow, I get the feeling that there's something more to this than this." Elenore said in a reassuring and comforting tone.

"But Elenore, isn't it the most logical conclusion? Unless your mother had another boyfriend... Did she tell you anything about it? Did you ask her about your father?" Margaret asked rather insistently, puzzled at how this whole thing didn't seem to surprise Elenore as much as she thought it would. Margaret felt as if she was more surprised at it than Elenore herself.

She seemed to be awfully composed for someone who had just learned something this shocking involving her parents.

Elenore shook her head slowly. "No Miss. I know my mother had an affair with someone else and I have my suspicions this man is my father and not the one your father shot Miss. As I said before Miss, I need more proof before I can say anything and I do apologize for that. But I don't want anyone including myself to jump to the wrong conclusions without knowing the full story or as much that can be learned." Elenore's face saddened as she continued, motioning to the printout in her hand. "As about this incident, I'm going to have to ask my mother about this. I was happier to see and talk with her than trying to get answers, though I did get a couple answers."

"I'm sorry if I seem calm about all this, Miss. With all that's going on I don't think it's a good time to go probing into details for now. But these visions your having Miss, has something to do with yours and mine families past. I'm determined to get to the bottom of it." Elenore said apologetically mixed with confidence.

"Hmm... Okay, if you say so Elenore. I guess you're right. I want to know the whole truth as well, before taking any rushed conclusions." Margaret said in introspection, remembering the whole incident eight months before, and the times when her incomplete visions and rushed conclusions had led her to act unfairly towards Madlax.

"Well, I better go wake Laetitia up now, before dinner time!" Margaret said as she left the room and went to check on Laetitia. "Hmm... Are you awake? May I come in?" Margaret asked while knocking on Laetitia's door.

Laetitia found herself in a very large Celtic hut with a circular fireplace lit. She looked around wondering where she was. In one corner she saw Margaret? It looked like her, but she was dressed in robes and a much wiser expression on her face. Next to her playing with a doll was little girl that looked like Elenore but her face was rounder than Elenore's.

"Well come here child; just don't stand in the doorway." She heard in a Welsh accent with Margaret motioning her come closer. Laetitia walked slowly towards her.

"You're not Margaret are you?" She asked and the women shook her head slowly.

"No child, I may have the appearance of your sister but I'm not her. Now, who you might be?"

"I'm Laetitia Burton, mamm. But I think you already knew that." Laetitia said feeling compelled to curtsy.

"Aye you're a clever one, like your eldest sister. I am Rhiannon, but I get the feeling you knew that." Rhiannon said smiling.

Laetitia seemed a bit confused. "I love my older sisters, but I don't think either Margaret or Madlax are very clever. "

"Perhaps, but I wasn't talking about either of them but I think you know who I'm talking about don't you?"

"Lady Rhiannon, may I ask a couple of questions?"

"Of course, if you managed to get here. I don't suppose a few questions will hurt."

Laetitia curtsied. "Thank you Lady Rhiannon. May I ask why are you sending those visions to Margaret? What are you trying to tell her?"

Rhiannon smiled. "Well I'm trying to tell Margaret something very important and better if Margaret figured it out than me telling her outright. But your eldest sister is pretty close to figuring out a good part of it. The other vision does involve your eldest sister and the little one sitting here. Can you keep a secret?"

Laetitia smiled. "Of course, but you knew that already Lady Rhiannon."

Rhiannon smiled back and motioned Laetitia over. "Come here, if you swear not to tell till it be the proper time. We'll tell you a couple of secrets."

"I swear." Laetitia nodded and smiling and Rhiannon bent down and whispered in her ear. The first secret didn't shock Laetitia as much as when the little girl whispered in her ear. Laetitia wanted to hug the little girl but...

Laetitia woke up in shock; she couldn't believe what she heard. But she had sworn not to tell, until it was time. She rubbed her eyes as she heard the knock on the door and Margaret coming in. "I just woke up. Is there something wrong? Is it time for dinner?" Laetitia asked.

"Hey Laetitia? Oh, I'm glad I find you awake! I really don't like having to wake people up. I know how unpleasant it can be." Margaret said in a playful tone. "We'll have dinner in ten minutes, so just get ready and get downstairs okay?" Margaret said, leaving downstairs herself, right after receiving Laetitia's acknowledgement.

Madlax stared at Elenore a bit confused. "Why didn't you tell her what you asked your mother?" she asked.

"As I said I don't want to jump conclusions, but I do know that the man that Miss Margaret's father shot isn't mine. I have an old picture of him and my mother and I look nothing like him at all and I've looked into my mother's past before and had a DNA test done with the one of the surviving Gedoe's with a negative result. Besides there the evidence of the fight between my mother and Miss Margaret's and I really don't think she would bar my mother from seeing her own child just because of a disagreement. I believe there was an affair between my mother and Margaret's father and she confirmed it tonight. Plus there was that question she asked me. I just need a little more proof before I can confirm it." Elenore replied.

Vanessa looked at Elenore in shock and then spoke. "If you're right that would make you..." Before Vanessa could say anything else Elenore pressed her finger against her mouth and Vanessa stopped.

"Well I guess I better put dinner on the table, meet you all downstairs." Elenore said leaving.

"Madlax, I don't know if you figured out what Elenore just said, but I'm asking you to keep it to yourself for now. I'm sure Elenore has her reasons." Vanessa said to Madlax in a conspiratorial tone.

"I think I have it figured out, but I'll keep my mouth shut. We better get downstairs." Madlax replied as the two headed to the dining room.

Elenore went to the kitchen, Limelda was standing near.

"May I help you Miss Jorg?" Elenore asked.

"I would like to check your room after dinner for listening devices." Limelda asked.

"Of course, but as I told Miss Margaret, I would like to be there when you check. Will that be a problem?"

"Not at all, Porn collection under the bed?" Limelda said trying to joke with Elenore.

Elenore raised an eyebrow at Limelda's attempt at a crude joke. "Not that it's any of your business, it's in the closet. You can wait in the living room and I'll call you when it is ready."

Limelda smirked and gave Elenore a questioning look as she was heading to the living room.

"Oh don't worry Miss Jorg nothing happened between Madlax and myself and nothing ever will." Elenore said.

"I'm not worried, just curious what happened while the two were out. Vanessa's is more your type from what I've seen." Limelda replied as she walked to the living room. "If you only knew..." Elenore thought to herself as she finished preparing dinner.

A few minutes later, Elenore had set the table and called everyone to the table. Everyone sat down as Elenore served them and then her and sat down.

While at the dinner table Vanessa asked. "So did you get any information?"

"Duvet didn't have very much I figured that much anyway. But she did tell us of someone who would." Madlax replied.

"Does this somebody have a name?" Vanessa asked curiously.

"Armitage and he supposedly has information on another person who would have information." Madlax replied.

"Who does this Armitage person know?" Vanessa asked.

"Noir." Madlax almost casually replied and as soon as she said the name Limelda nearly dropped her fork in surprise.

"You're joking, right?" Limelda asked with a little fear in her voice.

"No joke. Noir has the info we need and we left a message to contact us ASAP." Madlax replied in return.

Laetitia smiled and looked at Elenore. "How did the meeting with your mother go?"

Elenore smiled back. "It went quite well, thank you for asking." She answered back keeping her answer short and simple even though a certain child could easily comprehend a more detailed answer but Laetitia didn't need to know.

"You're Welcome. I'm glad it turned out well..." Laetitia answered back.

"Hmm... who is this Noir? And how can he help us? Did you and Elenore meet him today?"

Margaret curiously asked Madlax. "And you seem to know this person too, Limelda?" She asked Limelda as well, almost simultaneously, hoping that, for once, Limelda wouldn't completely ignore or avoid her questions.

"Noir is an assassin, one of the best and very much feared. The reason we asked for Noir's help was he was the only one who went up against the Soldats and lived. So he might have information that might be useful to us." Madlax replied in a serious tone.

"I only know of Noir through rumors but Madlax is right, Noir is very dangerous. I've heard one time Noir took out two squads of armed soldiers, then the man who sent them. There may be

people know Noir personally...I am not one of them..." Limelda answered with a mix of awe and fear.

"Oh I see! Hmm...I guess that makes sense. But do you think Noir will really help us? Just because we have an enemy in common, does that really make him our ally?" Margaret's hesitation increased with this thought, as she was afraid of committing the same mistake as with Carrossea, back then.

"Also, if Limelda says he's dangerous, he might very well be evil too, and Vanessa said we can't let the artifacts fall to evil hands, ever. How can we know that he won't try to seek the artifacts for himself once he learns about it?" - Margaret asked, obviously uneasy about getting associated with a dangerous assassin, and honestly scared by the simple fact someone like Limelda would express fear towards this person.

Madlax noticed the hesitation and unease in Margaret's voice. "We only need information and we don't need to give out any details like the artifacts. So if Noir does ask why we need it but I really doubt it, but if he does we'll tell him that we're trying to get Soldats off our back. I think he'll understand." Madlax said in reassuring tone but underneath Madlax was just as worried as Margaret. Even from the rumors she had heard, Noir was no one to mess with but they needed the Intel.

"As long we watch what we say and don't bring him here, we'll be fine right?" Vanessa asked with grave concern.

"Yeah, but we don't know if Noir got the message yet. So tomorrow Elenore and I will go and see." Madlax answered.

Just be careful you two." Vanessa said trying to hide the worry in her voice.

"Pity we couldn't just beat the information out Carrossea. I'm sure that worm knows about them." Limelda said in some disgust, with Elenore barely hiding a smirk.

Margaret was somehow convinced by Madlax's words, and her apparent confidence made her feel a bit more at ease, but mentioning Carrossea's name sent her into moodiness all over again. "Just so you know, all of you... I have no way to get a hold of him at the moment, even if I wanted. And I definitely don't wish to see him anytime soon, much less talk to him. Not unless he has any intention of apologizing to me and Elenore. And even if he did, I doubt I could ever bring myself to trust him again..." Margaret said, lowering her head, hoping not to let the pain and sadness completely take over her again - "Laetitia could probably find him through her link with Poupee. She said unenthusiastically, looking at the younger child - "But if you really intend to contact him for information please count me out, and please do so somewhere away from here." Margaret humbly requested, trying to keep together and hide her teary eyes.

Madlax and Vanessa gave Limelda a dirty look who simply gave a "what did I do?" shrug.

"We'll use him as a last resort if we get nothing from Noir. For all we know he could've sold us out to the Soldats already. Hopefully we can get in touch with Noir, soon. "Madlax said.

"If it wasn't for Poupee, we could've hired Noir to get rid of him. What am I thinking, that's not like me. It's probably just from the stress today. Elenore thought to herself.

"We don't need that man's help; he'll just most likely lie anyway. Can we please drop this subject?" Elenore asked looking at Margaret sympathetically and shooting a dirty glance at Limelda.

"Madlax, now that we have time. Can you tell us how you met my mother?" Elenore asked trying to change the subject and hoping the story would cheer Margaret up.

"Sure." Madlax said noticing the look on Elenore's face.

Then for the next hour and a half over the rest of dinner and desert Madlax told how she met Duvet when she hit puberty and a few funny stories of Duvet teaching Madlax manners and other misadventures before she became an agent.

Elenore listened intently keeping an eye on Margaret and hoping her mood would improve. Inside though, a part of her was crying and envious of Madlax being raised in some part by her mother.

During the conversation Elenore stared at Madlax, doing her best to hide her envy at the woman who knew more about her mother than she did. Though she did find the fact her mother used a high tech ritual mask when on assignment interesting.

"So why would she use something like that and what did it look like?" Elenore asked Madlax curiously.

Madlax thought for a almost a minute and then answered; "She was a bodyguard and sometimes she had to shoot people in order to protect her client and or herself. It bothered her that she had to it. So by donning the mask and becoming "Duvet" she could do her job and not hesitate, which will get you..." Madlax stopped there noticing the sad look on Elenore's face, "As for what it looked like well..., from the inside it has a one those tactical displays and what from I could tell she could see behind her as well."

"That still doesn't tell us what it looked like. Come on Madlax, tell us." Vanessa asked somewhat impatiently.

Limelda pulled out a pen and a piece of paper and drew what appeared to be a anime girl with a smiling face then she showed it to everyone.

"That doesn't look very scary at all." Laetitia said and both Madlax and Limelda gave her an odd look.

"I see it's a psychological warfare tactic; people are usually unnerved when they see someone with a friendly face committing a hostile act put it simply." Elenore explained.

Limelda gave a impressed look.

"I didn't know you knew about psychological warfare." Vanessa added.

"I've done some reading while researching other topics." Elenore answered back.

"When did you meet Duvet?" Madlax asked Limelda.

"A few years ago, she was protecting a Nafrecan dignitary and I helped coordinate security with her. Despite her getup, she's extremely professional. Not once I got to see her face though." Limelda answered glancing at Elenore.

"Gee...Wonder why they would send a bodyguard." Vanessa sarcastically thought. All during the conversation, Margaret just sat there....

Earlier on the other side of the Atlantic; she stared at the plate of tacos in front of her, having an internal war with herself about whether she should eat them or not. She was taking a

break from monitoring her two friends. Just this once, she thought to herself. Just as Jodie was about to pick one up, her cell phone rang. Oh, thank goodness.

"Blue Eyes," she answered with confidence.

"Ah, Blue Eyes!" a much shaken voice said.

"Nadie? What's wrong?"

"It's Ellis! Something's happened! Can you help us?"

"Alright, I'll be right there."

"But wait you don't know—" but Jodie hung up before Nadie could finish.

Fifteen minutes later, Jodie walked up to the hotel room where Nadie and Ellis were staying and knocked on the door. Nadie opened it and was surprised at how fast she arrived. "Oh good you're here. But... how did you know where we were?" Nadie asked, very confused.

Jodie paused, shoot. But she dismissed the question with a shake of her head and said as she walked in, "What happened? Where's Ellis?" They walked over toward the bed, where Ellis was sleeping. Nadie sat down and told Jodie what happened when Ellis slipped on the bracelet, constantly looking at her companion. "So what should we do?"

Could this be the artifact that the Chairwoman wants? How much power does it have, and what are they going to do with it? She knew it was a bad idea to betray the Coven, but her love and concern for Ellis was much stronger than her loyalty to the Coven. It was a given she would help them. "Well," Jodie started, "I think the most obvious thing to do is to go to Nafrece. Are you ready to leave now?"

"Well, yeah I guess..." Nadie was a little unsure about getting involved in something huge again, but she stared at the bracelet on Ellis's wrist. The only clue about how to get it off was in Nafrece. She had no choice.

"Alright, let's go," she said, her mind set.

Jodie nodded and whipped out her phone, dialing a number very quickly.

"It's me. Yes, it has been a while. I'm sorry about this, but I need a favor..."

Two minutes later...

"Any particular reason why we're on the roof now?" Nadie asked, confused.

Ellis, still unconscious, lay in Nadie's arms.

"We're going to the airport. But it's kind of far from here, you know. So we're taking a helicopter there," Jodie told her, "Oh. There's our ride now."

The helicopter landed and out came Jodie's old assistants. They smiled widely; glad to see their former boss alive and well. She walked up to them and put a hand on each of their shoulders, also happy to see them again. She hadn't spoken to them since she was ordered to kill Nadie. But now wasn't the time for catching up. "I promise to make it up to you after this whole thing is done. Thanks again." They nodded enthusiastically.

After everyone was strapped in, Jodie's assistants took them to the airport.

Many hours later, they finally arrived in Nafrece and found a hotel to stay in. Jodie sat down on one of the two beds while Nadie and Ellis (who finally recovered during the flight and was looking much livelier) occupied the other.

Jodie sighed wearily, "I'm going to rest for a while. You two can explore the city if you want."

"Nah, I think I'll pass," Nadie started laying down on the bed, but Ellis tugged on Nadie's arm.

"But I want to see the city, Nadie," she smiled cutely. Nadie looked at her companion's irresistibly adorable face and sighed in defeat.

"Ok, ok," she said getting up, "but only for a few hours." Ellis smiled again and they both walked towards the door, with Ellis latching onto Nadie's arm.

"Just make sure you don't whip out your gun in public. People here don't like that," Jodie called before they closed the door. She thought she heard "yessa!" before falling asleep.

Nadie and Ellis wandered around the city looking at the sites. To both of them, this city was bigger than any either had been in. Fortunately Jodie had given them plenty of spending money before they left.

They wandered around for a few hours till they caught a glimpse of Nafrece Tower.

"Nadie let's go see that!" Ellis said excitedly pointing to the tower.

Nadie felt hesitant at first especially with her stomach grumbling. "Let's find someplace to eat. Wonder if there's Amigo Tacos nearby?" Nadie said.

"There's a cafe on top the Nafrece tower, which serves Spanish food as well." A woman voice said behind them and Nadie almost whipped out her gun but she remembered where she was and turned to see a brunette haired woman in her early forties standing behind carrying a sketch pad.

"Oh I'm sorry if I startled you. I heard your friend talking about the tower. Oops where are my manners, Hello I'm Meg Baker and you are?" Meg asked in a friendly tone.

Nadie acted if she wasn't surprised. "I'm Nadie and this is Ellis."

"I take this your first time to Nafrece?" Meg asked with Ellis nodding.

"Are you an artist?" Ellis asked looking at the sketch pad in Meg's hand.

"I'm studying to be one; I retired recently and needed something to do." Meg answered cheerfully.

Nadie's stomach rumbled. "Not to be rude, I really need something to eat."

"Well you can kill two birds with one stone. There's a cafe on top of the tower and since I'm heading there I can lead you there." Meg said.

Nadie shrugged her shoulders. "Sure why not. Come on Ellis."

"Yes sir" Ellis replied and they both followed Meg to the tower.

Twenty minutes later they were at the cafe on top of the tower. Ellis was staring out the window looking at the view in wonderment. Nadie was eating when she noticed Meg not touching her food but looking into a image on digital camera and sketching it.

"Who's that? If you don't mind me asking?" Nadie asked curiously.

"It's my daughter, I ran into her accidentally earlier today. It's haven't seen her in ten years. It's a long story and I'm sorry I really can't talk about it."

"Sure I understand. She's got your eyes, very gentle looking." Nadie replied looking at the image of Elenore.

"Why thank you. May I ask what you do for a living Nadie? I noticed your hands." Meg said looking at Nadie's hands.

"Bounty hunter and you? I see your hands have held a gun too." Nadie replied.

"I was a professional bodyguard till my last job nearly got me killed. So I decided it was time to retire."

"Is that why you haven't seen your daughter in so long because of your job?" Nadie asked.

"No, as I said it's a long story but my job had nothing to do with it." Meg said hoping Nadie would drop the subject.

Ellis went beside Nadie and grabbed her arm. "Nadie you have to come and see."

"I'm busy talking here, it's rude to interrupt." Nadie said a bit annoyed at the interruption.

Ellis frowned. "I'm sorry Nadie."

"It's okay, the view of city is quite spectacular I can see why she would want you to go see it."

Meg looked at her watch. "I'm sorry but I must go, it was nice meeting both you. Oh you might want to go the national museum which near here." She said pointing east.

Meg began to pack up her stuff and summoned a waiter over to put her food in doggie bag.

A few minutes later, Meg got her food and paid for her and Nadie and Ellis' meals.

"Enjoy your stay in Nafrece." Meg said as left.

"Bye Meg" Ellis said waving. "

"She was a nice lady. Though a little sad. I wonder if she'll see her daughter again." Ellis said after Meg had left.

Nadie looked at Ellis in surprise and then sighed. "How could you hear us talking?*sigh* Oh wait I remember. Yeah I wonder too. Want to check out the museum?"

"Sure!" Ellis beamed.

"Well, let's go." Nadie said motioning to Ellis to follow.

"Yes sir." Ellis said saluting and she followed Nadie.

For the rest of the day Nadie and Ellis wandered around looking at the sites. They visited the National Museum and few historical sites, a few shops and bought souvenirs.

Ellis thought she saw Meg's daughter at one point but she was gone before they could get there. It was nearing sunset when they went back to the hotel.

They ate, showered and then went to bed. All the while Nadie wondered about the bracelet on Ellis' wrist. Ellis didn't act like it was bothering her, in fact she seemed happy. Nadie guessed that it was the excitement of being in another country and being in a very big city.

In another place...

"Remember Rhiannon, tacos. Taco Taco Tacosu..." Ellis was singing that as she was sleeping...

Earlier in Eastern Nafrece; the reports were distressing. In the last two days Enfant managed to rally and now were pushing them back. Some of their computer systems had been hacked into mercilessly and both data and financial information had been lost and worst of all their was rumors that some cells have defected to Enfant, which meant she had no one available to monitor the Burton home.

The only silver lining in all this was Chloe's (if failed) attack did manage to keep them from running though she had no Intel on what they were doing.

Margaret and the Torc would have to wait, she had to repair the damage that Enfant had done and quickly. She wondered who was leading Enfant, to mount this fierce of a counterattack. She wondered where Chloe had disappeared to as well.

Upon entering downtown, Mireille backed down somewhat and let her partner lead the way, looking slightly amused. When they ended up before a bistro, she did her best to hide a chuckle and asked: "Wanna go in?"

Chloe emerged from the Soldat safe house from the alley. She hadn't filed a report on last night's bungled attempt to eliminate Madlax. All it did was put them on their guard and she could imagine Lady Altena's displeasure. After her retreat she and few others were ambushed by Enfant agents. At least that fight was far better than the one at the Burton home, there would be a few less Enfant agents running around today.

She got some much needed sleep and more knives; she was going to the bistro across the street when she noticed Mireille and Kirika. She smiled to herself.

"I found you..." She said to herself as she watched them from the alley.

Kirika looked around at the hungry, early-bird crowd just starting to trickle in. "Okay," she said, and "seems crowded enough."

After Mireille and Kirika got their breakfasts and sat outside, Kirika studied the scene again. "Hmm," she wondered, "So the Soldats are after us and we don't know why, even though we had an understanding...I wonder what happened. Should we call Breffort first?"

"Do you have a secure connection to him that cannot be back traced?" Mireille sighed. "Back in Paris, I could've arranged for some hacker...wait a second." Suddenly, she looked agitated. "I know a guy. Never met him in person but I hear he's quite good, goes by the name of Badgis. He was somehow involved in the Gazth-Sonikan case but came out clean. We could try contacting him."

Kirika nodded. "Hmm...Badgis. Do you have his contact information?" Kirika sipped on her tea, and then she focused her attention on a nearby tree.

"Hmm...Why do I get the feeling somebody is watching us?" She thought to herself.

"I memorize such stuff by heart. All I need is a laptop and internet access..." Mireille noticed Kirika's eyes movement. She has long admitted to herself that in terms of reflexes and the sixth sense, Kirika was way superior to her, so when she noticed something, it was probably trouble...It was a strange feeling for a lone wolf like her but she felt...protected? "Relax, there's too much collateral damage to make here. And they like to play it subtle."

Chloe smiled. "You know I'm here don't you, Kirika." She didn't understand why or know considering that they were at war with Enfant would they even bother with these two. Oh she had her reasons to be involved but there was too much going on to be concerned with them at the moment. But she couldn't help it; there she was just standing there. She imagined holding her in her arms and she smiled. "I'll just watch..."

After Mireille explained in detail about how they'd contact Badgis, and she and Kirika finished their breakfast, they left. Kirika told Mireille loudly, "So, we're going to a cyber cafe?", and then added, much softer, "The library." As they left, Kirika turned around and stared at that tree, certain someone was going to pop out at any minute. She caught up with Mireille and amended, "...the very long way."

Chloe watched as they headed off. She wasn't under any orders to follow or do anything with them, this was personal. She noticed they were taking a long route to a cyber cafe as she followed from a distance. She chuckled to herself, they knew she was following them or at least Kirika did.

"Is someone tailing us?" The connection she shared with Kirika was not the wordless understanding like between twins yet but she could almost always feel when she was anxious or happy, as if it were her own emotions. She did now. "I'll try shaking him off, follow me."

The nearest internet cafe was just around the corner, actually. Dragging Kirika through a crowd of IT nerds talking in lingo and bad English, Mireille dashed through the room for the back exit. She was lucky; the back exit was at the end of a small corridor, not visible from the outside. Better yet, the bathrooms were located right there. An idea crossed her mind in a flash and she pushed Kirika inside men's restroom, quickly closing the door behind them.

"Try not to breathe in deeply," she whispered, pulling Kirika tightly to her and concealing them in an empty stall. "And count to sixty."

She noticed them go inside the cyber cafe. She waited a minute before going inside herself. As went inside she was assaulted by the noise of people talking in some language she didn't quite understand. She looked around the room and smiled figuring both of them would stick out like a pair of sore thumbs. She noticed the corridor and the nearby bathrooms; she went into the women's room and checked. She wanted to check the men's but there were IT nerds going in and out and she doubted that they went there without causing a commotion. "*Clever. Trying to shake me. Two can play this game...*" She thought to herself as she headed out of the exit and as the door closed behind her she waited.

"Let's go," Mireille pulled Kirika to the back exit, making sure they were not visible from the front. A male patron of the cafe looked at them in surprise but one cold look sufficed for him to swallow any questions. Examining the surroundings, Mireille exited to the alleyway behind the facility.

Kirika followed Mireille out the back exit of the noisy cafe. It hadn't been easy trying to pretend she and Mireille weren't there, in the men's bathroom. Even though she and Mireille pulled it off--Mireille had squatted on the toilet, using Kirika for support, and Kirika took off her shoes, just in case someone looked--she was certain some man would notice her small,

feminine feet, get curious, and bust them. *"Well, Kirika supposed, *Maybe I could've passed as a twelve-year-old boy...but what about Mireille?"*

Kirika heard a **whoosh** behind her and turned around. Her mouth gaped open, and she looked like she'd seen a ghost when she saw who was behind them.

"M...Mireille...Mireille?!" Kirika asked in a strange voice, without looking back.

Chloe smiled. "Hello Kirika...miss me?"

Without thinking, Mireille reached for her gun. Last time she saw this face, it heralded impressive acrobatics and she didn't see much reason for it to get any easier.

Chloe noticed Mireille going for her gun. This wasn't her day, first Madlax now Mireille. She kept calm and got into a stance incase Mireille decided start firing the gun instead of her mouth. "You miss me too, Mireille. How thoughtful..."

"You look pretty lively for a dead girl," Mireille retorted, keeping Chloe at the gunpoint and glancing anxiously at Kirika. She knew she was no match for her. "Did the guy downstairs grow bored with you?"

Chloe smiled mischievously. She knew she could easily beat Mireille but this was so much more entertaining and if she played her cards right she might even get them to go after Madlax. "The rumors of my demise are so greatly exaggerated. Not really, he was afraid I would take over." She loosened the photos underneath her cloak so could easily fall. She smirked at Mireille. "You remind me of that other blond I met, a lot prettier and a far better shot than you. Better be careful if she sees Kirika she just might steal her away." Chloe said goading Mireille.

"Like I give a damn," Mireille brushed off Chloe's words. Kirika and her were bound by much more than simple attraction. "Right now, I only care about you tailing us. Didn't we pay our dues to you people already? Why come after us now?"

She'd be surprised if Chloe actually answered that. But there was no crime in asking.

"Actually I'm busy with someone else. My running into you was just coincidence. I wanted to see the looks on your faces. As far as I know Lady Altena doesn't give a damn about you two, my guess is some other faction wants you dead."

"That bitch is alive?" Mireille gasped. "What is it today, October thirty first?"

"Oh yes she's very much alive, no thanks to you two."

"Okay, look here, candy girl, I won't say it twice," Mireille stared straight into Chloe's eyes, tired of playing around. "You come after us, you die. It's as simple as that. Tell this to that master of yours and to the downstairs guy when you see him again."

"As I said before, I've got new playmates. I just wanted to say "hello". Lady Altena is more interested in them than in you two. Chloe slowly backed away, as she did the photos dropped from her cloak. "We should do this again sometime." She said backing off away from Mireille and when she was far enough away she turned and walked away.

Mireille followed Chloe with her eyes as she left, then breathed deeply to relax her tensed body and tucked the gun away, hoping that nobody saw their exchange in the alley. She didn't want to admit to herself just how scared she was.

"Let me know if she follows us," she asked of Kirika and took a closer look at the pictures Chloe dropped. She didn't believe even for a second that that wasn't done on purpose. Chloe just wasn't a person to let stuff fall like that.

Chloe smiled evilly as she walked away. She knew they knew that she dropped them on purpose. She hoped that Madlax and Mireille would kill each other and then she could have Kirika to herself once again. And just maybe they would take out the other two as well.

The first photo was a young woman standing next a maid. Mireille looked on back of the photo for any writing. She saw written in black ink;

Margaret Burton: total airhead, why even bother...

Elenore Baker: stuck up maid?

The second was of the maid in dressed in a blue skirt and a white paisley peasant shirt. She saw written on the back of this photo;

Crazy? Martial arts expert.... related to Duvet!? Why does LA want her watched?

From what she could gather; the maid was a bodyguard of the woman in the first picture and a possible relative of Duvet. Duvet that name Mireille had heard of; it was the code name of an elite bodyguard. "Must be nice to be rich, to afford people like that." Mireille thought to herself as she looked at the last photo.

The last photo was apparently a file photo taken from somewhere else. The blond haired woman bore some resemblance to the woman in the first one. On the back of this photo Mireille read the obscenities comparing her to herself and the words in red;

Madlax...kill when has a chance...

Mireille looked at the unfamiliar faces at the photos. The girl labeled as Margaret looked a little like Kirika, and this "Madlax" (what kind of name was that?) was obviously trouble. But as long as they didn't stalk them and set up ambushes at the train stations, she didn't care.

"You recognize any of these?" she gave the three pictures to Kirika, just in case. If Chloe wanted them to help her take these people out, she obviously counted on a wrong person. Unless they were somehow related to the renewed attacks by the Soldats... But that's what this hacker person would have to confirm first.

Kirika concentrated on the pictures. "Mmm.....no. What was Chloe doing with them? And why is she alive?" She looked up. "I mean I..." her voice faltered, "...killed her." She shook her head. "Let's find this Badgis person."

As she and Mireille walked away, Kirika looked back where Chloe was.

"Chloe, for your sake, please don't return. I don't want to lose you again...or Mireille."

Watching Kirika struggle with her past made Mireille uneasy. Back when they first met, she'd probably shrug it off and ignore, but now she just couldn't. Turning around, she drew closer to her and said as softly as she could: "Don't think about it much, Kirika... You haven't killed her, which is a good thing, right?.. Thinking about such things will only make it worse."

After their encounter with Chloe, Kirika and Mireille for several hours wound their way through the city hoping to shake off anyone else following them. When they were by the Nafrece Tower they found a suitable cyber cafe and began to contact Badgis.

"Ookay," looking around to check that nobody's looking, Mireille touched the keyboard, "let's do some magic. Let's see, an anonymizing proxy...damn, they don't even have a Fox here... ah, here it is... let's try this one, whaddya know, I'm lucky today... get a new account, download the key, merge it..." She connected a USB stick to the PC. "...like this... the password, right... and we are set."

She beamed triumphantly at Kirika.

"See, that wasn't so difficult. Now all we gotta do is compose an email and wait for a reply."

While Mireille messed with the Internet, Kirika looked at the pictures again; she paid particular attention to Margaret's.

"Hmm...it says she's a total ditz....I bet she doesn't have to worry about anything. I'm kind of envious. Look at her. We could almost be twins...if I were white...and rich...maybe she's what I would've become if not for Altena." Kirika thought to herself.

After Mireille finished, Kirika showed her Margaret's photo. "Mireille, look at this. Don't we look kind of alike? Maybe that could've been me, if I were normal."

"Nah, I don't think so..." Mireille glanced at the picture as she typed.

"And she is not normal, either," she added matter-of-factly. Meanwhile, an email from a dummy account to a dummy message box that eventually landed at Badgis' desktop was done. A request to meet, details of payment, all in code. Encryption was there to sign it, even if someone broke the key, it wouldn't say much. She hit the send button and leaned back. "Now we wait."

"Yes...we wait..." Kirika said. She fondled the ring in her pocket and grew red. She looked down. "Um...Mireille...I know this isn't the right time, but we can't do anything but wait until he replies.Um...what--what do you think about...marriage?" She asked, her heart beating fast, both eagerly awaiting and dreading Mireille's reply at the same time.

"Nani o sore?" Mireille was so astonished, she blundered out Kagami's favorite expression without thinking...Mireille's eyes widened in astonishment. Come think of it, Kirika rarely saw her so surprised. After a couple of seconds, she replied: "What was that? First of all, marriage is for people with known past. And we, frankly, do not exist," she looked away, pouting, and continued quieter: "And if you mean the ceremony, we first need to find a priest who'd agree to... And how the hell are we supposed to marry with all those MIBs on our tail?!"

"Oh." Kirika said. "Never mind, then. Sorry." She looked away and stayed silent, too embarrassed to look at Mireille or talk to her.

"Look, Kirika..." Mireille obviously had trouble finding the right words.

"Marriage is... a formality. And we two are... already bound by much more than... you know. The black thread of fate and all. You care a lot about formalities... of course, you should, just like that ID card that almost got us killed back in the Middle East... but right now, it's better for

us to concentrate on staying alive, okay? We shall talk about in when we get out of this mess.
"Promise?"

A message came up that an email was received from Badgis' contact address but she disregarded that, looking expectantly at Kirika.

Kirika felt Mireille's eyes on her and reluctantly turned back around. She averted Mireille's gaze.

"Um, yes. I promise. Sorry to trouble you."

A moment later, she looked at the screen and said, as if to break the pregnant pause,

"Um...you better answer that."

As soon as Mireille opened the email the following brief email message appeared;

I can help you out.

Meet at me at this address at 6:30PM

a map to get there is included

Badgis

"Is this guy really a pro?" Mireille wondered, looking at the map.

"Agreeing to meet us in open like that...Unless it's his liaison, of course."

Mireille quickly deleted everything she could on the PC they were using: cookies, cache, resident files, registry keys, everything. She would have set a timed virus, too, but they were running out of time.

"Let's move out."

In another part of the city; as she sat back in her chair Meg Baker held her coffee. Her saddened face and eyes told a silent story. "I really didn't want to send them to Noir, but what choice did I have. Some mother I am, I put my own child in danger. There has to be something I can do."

She glanced at the phone and then the picture of Elenore and then back and forth. "I'm sorry sweetie; it looks like I might have to make another sacrifice for you."

She picked up the receiver and spoke into it. "I know your listening. I need to talk to you." With that she hung up the phone and sat back down.

A couple minutes later, her phone rang but not with the usual ring. The ringing carried a tune that was all too familiar to Meg.

She walked to the door and opened it. There stood a well dressed man in his early thirties. His most noticeable features were his well combed dark brown hair, his deep blue eyes and his disarming smile.

"Hello Armitage." Meg said to the man with a fake smile trying to hide the sadness she felt..

"Hello Meg. Can I come in?"

She moved out the way and Armitage went in and Duvet closed the door after him...

Armitage sat down on the sofa as Meg went and made fresh pot of coffee. He was holding a thin file in his lap. When Meg came back and sat down he handed her the file.

"What's this? She asked a bit confused.

"Let's put this way, when we Baker's get into something we get into it quite deep." Armitage said half jokingly.

"Before we go on, I want to know something; how long did you know that Anna and Richard were dead and don't give me the "it's news to me" bullshit and why didn't you tell me?!" Meg asked in a dead serious tone.

"Before you jump down my throat, our father before he died used what pull he had left on the high council to make sure you never knew to the point where *my* family was indirectly threatened so I wouldn't talk when I found out after he died. I guess that was his way of punishing you from beyond the grave." Armitage answered in a serious tone.

Meg sighed. "Heh, he had to get one last dig at me and just because I stuck up for you. So what's in this file?"

"Read it. Your daughter has been busy." Armitage said in a very serious tone.

Meg opened the file and read it. Inside it described Elenore's encounters with *Enfant*. Her penchant for information digging and her other online activities had been noted. What saddened Meg when she read the psych profile; it read she has a general dislike of men in general and a psychotic hatred of one man in particular; Carrossea Doone. Her rants about him on a lesbian forum (before she got banned for one really horrific rant about what she wanted to do to him) attracted *Enfant's* attention. From what they had discovered; that a *Enfant* agent had asked her questions about the supposedly dead Mr. Doone. There was a red sticky note warning that the Burton place should expect an attack the next time Carrossea appeared there. What also got Meg's attention was when she read down the list of sites Elenore had been visiting were her review of her will and funeral arrangements (Meg thought it odd that Elenore had insisted having a doll buried with her and the name Margaret along with hers put on her tombstone.)

Also noted were her changes in her behavior recently and a possible psychotic episode, plus her isolation and dependency on Margaret Burton for self confirmation.

Meg didn't want to go on reading. Her face streaming with tears as she read on, it was clear that Elenore needed help in the worst way. She felt deep guilt for not being for her when she needed it and she felt helpless.

The last page was a photocopy of the letter Margaret was to receive in five days. She read the letter and threw it on the coffee table in disgust and then she dropped the rest of the file and began to cry and hid her face behind her hands.

Armitage got from the chair and placed a gentle hand on Meg's shoulder. He knew his sister was deeply upset and he wished he could ease both Elenore and Meg's suffering.

"I'm terribly sorry I had to show you that, but I felt you needed to know." Armitage said in a compassionate tone.

"Thank you. But what we, no what can I do? My daughter is in trouble and I don't know what to do unless I become "Duvet" again." Meg started to rise but Armitage gently pushed her down back into the chair.

"You're not one hundred percent yet and with your mental state, becoming "Duvet" is a BAD idea." Armitage said.

"So what can I do? She's got both *Enfant* and *Les Soldats* on her! I just can't stand by and watch my daughter die again. I failed her once in that area and I don't want to again." Meg said morose fully.

"If it makes you feel better, I can have Echo extract her if things get too bad. Plus I'll see what we do have on the Les Soldats that you can pass to her. But you know we can't attract either group's attention, so we have to move quietly. Oh the coffee's done." Armitage said in a reassuring tone.

Meg got up from the chair and started towards the kitchen but not before asking; "When this is done. Do you think they'll let me see her on a regular basis?"

"I don't see why not. You're on the retired list and she's over twenty one and as far she knows the Burton's barred you from seeing her. Plus she found you, she doesn't need to know the other real reason you stayed away and I'm not talking about the letter either, so how about that coffee?" Armitage said with a warm smile.

"Sure and thanks little brother" Meg said as she went to the kitchen to get the coffee.

"Hey that's what family is for." Armitage replied when he his cell phone rang. He answered and spoke but he mostly listened.

"Meg, can I get that coffee to go. I got to go and play taxi and chaperone."

"Can do, cream and two sugars right?" Meg said from the kitchen.

Mireille and Kirika barely made it in time, just enough to scout the surroundings a bit and find an escape route or two. The street was paved with cobblestones and the street lights hadn't even come on yet it was still light out heading to twilight. They saw a green El Dorado sedan parked near a short (compared to Mireille) well dressed man in his thirties sipping from a Styrofoam cup. The whole street appeared to be typical upper middle class/lower upper class. They got the feeling that this area was chosen because that any disturbance would be noticed almost immediately.

"Cover me," saying that to Kirika, Mireille slowly approached the man, keeping her hands where he could see them. "Hello, sir. Could you help me find the Bagpiper Street? I'm a bit lost here..." That was the pass phrase they agreed upon.

The man looked at Mireille calmly and said "Of course mamm, it's two blocks north of Duvet Street." This was the return pass phrase they agreed on.

"Right," Mireille motioned for Kirika to come closer. "So. You clean? No tails, no snipers on the roof?"

"I'm clean. He asked me to bring you to him, so I made sure there was nothing of the sort. Can we go; I rather not stay out here too long." The man said pointing with his hand to the nearby parked car.

"Alright, let's go," Mireille cast a last look around and moved towards the car.

The man walked over to the car and opened the driver's side and got in. He waited till Mireille and Kirika got in and then started the car and drove around making sure of no tails and then when they got to a squat brick building he stopped the car in front of it.

"Here we are ladies, if you follow me please." He said getting out of the car.

He waited for them to get out and he set the alarm and gestured to follow him.

He led them to a side door and pressed the buzzer on the side and spoke;

"Saruman! Saruman come out!"

"Who is it? What do you wish?" They heard from the speaker.

The man pressed the reply button and spoke. "Tell Saruman, I Gandalf the White wish to speak with him."

The door buzzed and man opened it and motioned to the pair to go inside and then he went in and closed the door. He led them to a lounge where another man was sitting on a couch.

"Ladies may I introduce Badgis." The man said gesturing towards the man on the couch.

Mireille always knew IT guys were geeks, but who was she to talk, reading Dostoevsky for pastime herself?

"Bouquet, Mireille Bouquet," she introduced herself. "And this is my partner, Kirika Yuumura. We need your help in obtaining some valuable information, Mr. Badgis."

"What kind of information are you looking for?" Badgis asked looking over the pair.

As he waited for an answer Badgis turned to the man who had also come into the room and asked. "I take it you weren't followed here?"

The man answered; "I took all the usual precautions. By the way did you get what I was asking for?"

"Yes I did, but why the rush? You could've gone through normal channels for this info."

Badgis replied with somewhat saddened look on his face.

"Because she's in trouble and I needed the info ASAP." The man answered back.

"Damn shame that's she's involved. She's a nice woman. I really hate to see anything bad happen to her."

The man nodded and looked at Mireille. "Sorry for the interruption, I too needed Badgis' assistance."

"I didn't hear anything," Mireille assured the man. "The less you know, the sounder you sleep. As long as it doesn't concern you, anyway...May I sit down?" she asked Badgis. "I'm more comfortable with talking on the same eye level..."

"Of course, Miss Bouquet. Now what would you like for me to find for you?" Badgis said gesturing to a plush chair.

Mireille sat down where Badgis pointed and looked questioningly at him and his client.

"I do not mean to intrude, but... is your client trustworthy enough? I'm afraid, our business here is not quite... on this side of the law."

"You may trust him; in fact you both might have the same enemy." Badgis said casually pointing to the man.

"I'm Walter Baker by the way Miss Bouquet."

"And what do you know about our enemy?" Mireille suddenly got tense. "Do you know about us, as well?"

While Mireille and Badgis were discussing business, Kirika processed the other man's name.

"Walter Baker....Baker....hmm..."

She pulled one of the photos out and asked Walter--softly so as to not interrupt Mireille and Badgis--"Excuse me..Mr. Baker? Are you related to a--" Kirika flipped the photo over "--Elenore Baker?"

Walter's eyes widened as he saw the picture and as softly he asked. "Yuumura san may I ask where did you get this picture? And to answer your question, yes she is my niece."

"Someone I know dropped it. Is there something special about her? Something that makes people want to kill her?"

"She's the caretaker of a very "special" young woman. I suppose they want to get rid of her so they can get at her charge more easily." Walter replied.

"I found out the Soldats were chasing a pair of women, so I assumed you might be those women. As for you are, no I don't know who you really nor do I want to." Badgis replied.

"You do not, indeed," Mireille relaxed a little. "People who get too involved with us usually end up dead. So let's keep strictly to business side. I want to know why the Soldats are after us. No, wait, I know that much and you are better off not looking into it. I just wanna know who gave the order. We already had a run-in with them some time ago, but we called a ceasefire. Now that they are after us again, I want to know who's behind it and where we can find him."

"So what exactly would you want me to do? I could hack into a few Soldat databases but I get the feeling you want more. Am I correct?" Badgis said.

"I just need a name and an address," Mireille shrugged. "But even the name should do nicely. How you get them is up to you. Now, about the payment...I haven't worked with you before, is your fee in the same margin as French specialists'?"

"That I can do but it will take time. As for my fee, it's on par with the French." Badgis replied.

"That's fine with me, contact me when you've got something," she passed over a card with one of their dummy addresses. "It's a dummy address, but it's never been used before and I think it's clean. Just leave a letter there and someone will pick it up for me. As for the payment, I think the A7 tariff would do nicely, yes? We are not exactly in a position to afford a bank transaction at the moment..."

"That will do. I'll notify you as soon I find anything." Badgis replied.

Mireille somehow got a feeling that Badgis would take the job even if she said she didn't have any money. But she knew better than prying. Wishing him a good day, she stood up and walked to Kirika and the Baker guy.

"Kirika, I'm done negotiating."

As Mireille called for Kirika, Kirika and Walter stood up. "Here," she said as she handed him two of the photos. "You might want them. Um...I'm not very good at saying this, but...I wish them...luck."

Kirika then caught up with Mireille.

"Was he someone you know?" Mireille asked, as they walked outside. There was no reason for them to be taking the same route back as they came here. In fact, it would be outright dangerous for them to.

"No; he's just related to that maid in the photo. It seems like it's just a family squabble."

Upon further thinking, Kirika asked to no one in particular, "But if it's just a family squabble, then why is Chloe watching them?"

"They're after their inheritance?" guessed Mireille, then stopped dead in her tracks. "Wait, don't tell me... Are you thinking she may be... the next Noir?"

Suddenly, it all fit in: the Soldats trying to kill them, Chloe watching some girl from an influential family... Altena was planning for a new Noir. She screwed up both their fates and now she was screwing around with some other innocent girl.

"That despicable bitch..."

Kirika stopped in her tracks. "Wait...a new Noir...Altena isn't satisfied ruining three lives? She needs more?"

She looked at her hands and thought back to everything that happened—most notably Mireille's parents' and Chloe's deaths. "No. There shouldn't be any more me's. There just...shouldn't. Mireille, please, let's go to the Manor."

"The Manor?" Mireille considered it for half a minute. "I don't think it'll help us... We desecrated the place already, so Altena is probably not there. And even if we get there and kill her, we can't protect the girl, who is here in Nafrece somewhere. Plus, we gotta wait for Badgis' results... though I'm pretty sure I know the name already. How about we find the girl, scout around a little, wait for Badgis, and then go for the Manor, once we confirm her safety?"

Kirika thought about Mireille's suggestion. She still thought it was best to go straight after the source...but Mireille might have a point.

"Hmm...Okay." She looked up and just now noticed the night sky. "It's getting late so we need to hurry."

"We have to find a hotel to stay overnight, I guess. Preferably far away from the downtown area and the place we spent last night in...One where they don't ask many questions." Mireille said.

As Mireille and Kirika left, Walter looked at the photos with a grim look on his face.

"I've seen that look before Walt. You're going to do something that can get you into hot water." Badgis said.

"You know I've been a good boy and did what they told me to and I stepped back. Don't worry they said. No one will bother with her. Well guess what; I did just that and my niece gets a bullet in her back for her trouble. No Badgis, this time I'm not going to just stand on the sidelines twiddling my thumbs. It's time I did something to protect what's left of my family."

"So what are you going to do?" Badgis asked with concern for his friend.

"Nothing overt right away, I'm going to just check up on a couple things before I go home tonight."

Badgis grinned as Walter left. Knowing Walter as he did he could imagine what a "check up on a couple things" might be?"

Chapter 7.

Looking back over it, July 8th 2012 had to be one oddest and profound days of my life. I reunited with my mother, found out how intertwined both Margaret and mine families pasts were and with more questions than answers...

Taken from the diary of Elenore Baker July 8th 2013

Margaret kept quiet for a long time, just listening, occasionally letting her focus slip and wander into her own thoughts. Hard as it was, given this was still a very recent subject to her, she wanted to forget about Carrossea, so she figured she should try to ignore him and focus on the real problem at hand: the Torc. There was also the subject of Elenore's mother, and though Madlax's stories were funny and entertained her out of her moodiness, she couldn't help but wonder how Elenore felt about her mother being a former agent. She knew Elenore was against killing in general, but it was a good thing that her mother had retired from that line of work at least, she thought.

This did raise other questions though; something that Margaret had just begun to considerate and seemed too confusing to be left without questioning... she probably didn't evaluate the weight of the question very well, but her innocent curiosity got the better of her, when she suddenly broke her long silence and asked Madlax. "Madlax, do you happen to know why did Elenore's mother become an agent? From the little I know, she used to work as a maid for my parents, so why leave that for such a different and dangerous occupation? Also, considering she had Elenore..."

The room became quiet after Margaret asked her innocent question. Madlax looked at Elenore who was looking to her for an answer as well. Madlax thought back to the first time she asked that question as well; "Duvet, why did you become an agent?" She remembered Duvet staring at her in deep thought for awhile before answering and then sadly sighing and then she gave her answer.

"This wasn't my first career choice. My family had served a rich family for generations and I was trained to be a maid to replace my father and mother. Then *deep sad sigh* a couple things happened and I was told to leave. For awhile I did domestic services for the elderly until I saw something I wasn't supposed to see and I was given a very simple choice; either become an agent or get a bullet in the head. As you can see I took the former, though it still cost me dearly."

"Like what?" Madlax asked innocently.

"My father practically disowned me when I tried to tell, but he didn't believe me thinking I was lying to him again. I never saw him or my daughter again after that."

"You have a little girl?" Madlax asked surprised this scary woman had a child.

"Well yes I do, here's the only picture I have of her now. She's older now..."

Madlax remembered Duvet showing her a picture of little girl dressed in a child's ballet outfit complete with a pink tutu.

Madlax smiled and laughed. "So that was you Elenore. I would've never imagined you in a tutu." Elenore was a bit embarrassed; of all the pictures her mother kept she kept that one.

"I did take ballet when I was younger." Elenore said trying to hide her embarrassment.

"Wonder if they're any other pictures of you dressed like that. You must've been adorable. It must've meant a lot to your mother if she kept that picture." Vanessa added watching Elenore's face turn a few shades of red from embarrassment to a somewhat saddened look.

Margaret did find it surprising that Elenore's mother had been forced into such an occupation, but the violent aspects of this tale were quickly overshadowed by the mention of Elenore's picture. "That's funny, Elenore!" Margaret exclaimed with an amused smile. "You never told me that! Hmm...or maybe you did and I forgot about it?" She added clueless, not worrying too much about sounding silly. - "But isn't that great? This means your mother never forgot about you! She always loved you and thought of you, even though she was forced to stay away. I'm sure, knowing this; you can overlook whatever happened in the past, and start anew!" Margaret reassured enthusiastically, wanting to be sure of Elenore's complete reconciliation with her mother, with no resentment over her past occupation whatsoever.

Elenore smiled as she saw Margaret smile. "No Miss, I never told anyone that. If you wish I can show some more pictures and I still have my shoes from back then. And yes Miss, I'm happy my mother didn't forget about me and that she still loved me. There are still some unanswered questions but I'm willing to start over again." Elenore warmly said and then she thought for a moment and said to Margaret; "Miss, all this talk about my mother must making you think of yours. So I thought why I can't share my mother with you. I know she's a loving woman and I think there's room enough in her heart for you as well. When I see her again I'll bring it up, if you want me to Miss."

"Really? You would do that, Elenore?" Margaret asked happily and with visible emotion, overwhelmed by a feeling of warmth from Elenore's words. "I mean, do you think your mother would be okay with meeting me? I'd really like to get to know her, and she is very welcome at our place but... from what we gathered before, wasn't she really upset with my parents about something? Wasn't that why... she left?" Margaret lowered her head a bit, still looking at Elenore as she hesitatingly asked.

Elenore smiled warmly and answered in kind. "Well, Miss I don't know the full details on why she left but you're right Miss. It's time to start over again and since you're an important part of my life Miss I think she would be okay with meeting with you, but I don't know about how she would feel coming here. So once I get her answer Miss, I'll bring you to her. If that's all right with you Miss. Now I said I'll show more pictures, if you excuse me Miss." Elenore happily rushed back to her room and pulled out a small photo album and her ballet shoes and brought them back to the dining room.

They looked through the pictures together, some where her in various costumes and few of them were snapshots of her performing. Plus there were a few Halloween pictures.

Vanessa and Madlax giggled as they looked at Elenore, neither of them imagining her doing anything like that.

"Awww, you look cute Elenore." Madlax said and even Limelda cracked a warm smile.

"You ever considered taking up ballet again Elenore? You've got the build for it and I think you would be great at it. Don't you agree Margaret?" Vanessa asked.

Elenore looked at Vanessa figuring out what Vanessa was trying to do.

"When I have more free time, I'll think about it." Elenore said somewhat reluctantly.

"Oh maybe you can do one move for us" Madlax giggled.

"Aren't you enthusiastic Madlax?" Vanessa hinted.

Madlax couldn't help herself and she started twirling with a smile.

"My, Madlax I can fancy seeing you in a red tutu" Limelda shrugged cheekily.

"Come on, one move please Elenore." Vanessa merrily pleaded.

"Please Elenore, I want to see too. I've never seen ballet dancing." Laetitia asked with her face filled with curiosity.

Elenore looked at Margaret and saw she had that same look and she bowed her head giving in.

"All right, please give me a moment." She put on her point shoes and went back to the dining room. She gave herself enough room and at first she rose half pointe and then full pointe and then did an en dedans followed by a glissade and a Fouetté rond de jambe en tournant ending with a small arabesque et allegro all while on en pointe.

Everyone was amazed on how well Elenore could dance and as they clapped she returned to half pointe and then curtsied.

Laetitia was speechless, she watched in total fascination as Elenore gracefully danced.

"That was amazing Elenore! So you do have a hobby after all." Vanessa said amazed.

"Well I haven't been to a recital in years, but I do keep in practice when I have the time."

Elenore said a bit embarrassed that her little "secret" was out.

"Seriously Elenore, I know you have your job but you could do amateur ballet. It would be a shame if no one else saw your talent in action."

Vanessa said towards Elenore but also at Margaret hoping that she would get pick up on what she was saying and get Elenore to do more with it.

Elenore went back and changed her shoes and went back to the dining room.

Elenore went back to the dining room and collected her photos. She smirked a little as she watched Laetitia try to stand on her toes and falling on her rear. Laetitia frowned at her failure. Elenore bent down to her and said in a warm tone. "That's very nice try Laetitia, but it takes years of practice. I remember falling on my rear when I first learned how to do pointe so don't feel bad, okay."

Laetitia smiled as Elenore told her and replied. "You did that so beautifully, I want to do that too."

"Well if you're interested after we get through this mess, you can ask Miss Margaret if she can sign you up for classes. But I have to warn you, it takes hard work but well worth the effort."

Elenore said reassuringly and Laetitia nodded in happy approval.

"Miss Jorg, when you are finished eating we can go check my room for devices." Elenore said to Limelda.

"I've all ready finished, we can go check." Limelda replied and they both went to Elenore's room.

As Limelda began to search the room she said in a impressed tone. "That was quite a performance. Was that from a particular ballet or was it just a demo?"

"Thank you Miss Jorg. It was just a small quick routine. I didn't know you were interested in ballet Miss Jorg?" Elenore answered back a bit surprised.

"Despite what "some" people think of me, I do have some culture in me. I can appreciate fine dancing like ballet."

"Do you have any hobbies Miss Jorg?" Elenore asked bit curious and impressed that this scary woman had another side to her.

"Yes I do, I enjoy making floral arraignments and the occasional cookie basket. You breathe a word of this to anyone I'll shoot you." Limelda replied with Elenore wondering if she was serious or half joking.

"You needn't worry Miss Jorg I'll keep this between us. I have to admit Miss Jorg you don't look the type to be interested in that sort of activity." Elenore said reassuringly.

"We're all filled with surprises aren't we? By the way do you mind if I borrow this one?" Limelda said as she looked though the chest with Elenore's "collection" holding up a DVD case.

"Okay, as long you don't show it around anyone else, especially Miss Margaret." Elenore replied.

"Don't worry, I can be discreet when I need to be and thanks."

Limelda found one device and showed to Elenore before disabling it who wasn't happy that someone was listening in on her. They both exited the room, with Limelda dropping off the DVD in her room and they both went back to the dining room.

Limelda chuckled silently as Laetitia tried to put on a little show of her own,

Margaret was also amusingly looking at Laetitia as she hopelessly tried to mimic Elenore's performance."Elenore's right Laetitia, if you want to do it well you really should take classes. If you'd like to you have my full support, you can start anytime." She told Laetitia, approaching her and patting her head. "And maybe Elenore could go with you and practice together!" Margaret suggested, looking at Elenore for her reaction.

Laetitia beamed ecstatically at Margaret's words. "Really?! Thank you Margaret!" And she hugged Margaret.

Elenore smiled and looked at Laetitia."Of course Miss, I'll be happy to go with Laetitia and the studio I go to is close by. Oh by the way Miss, there is a mini stage in the east wing of the house. Apparently your ancestors hired theater companies to perform at parties and such. I do use the area to practice in as well..." Elenore didn't get another word out as Laetitia glomped on her tightly. "Thank you Elenore!!"

"It's good to see Elenore take her mind off her mother, albeit temporarily." Vanessa whispered to Madlax.

"And for that little brat to stumble a bit" Limelda thought to herself.

"Yes it is, Vanessa but we have other things to attend to." Madlax replied.

"Like this little device I found in Elenore's room." Limelda spoke as she showed the sophisticated little device to Madlax and Vanessa.

"Certainly above Gazth-Sonikan technology." Madlax quipped as she handled the device.

"Looks like it, how do you know Madlax?" Vanessa asked.

"Well I'm in this business, I'm not a total blonde airhead" Madlax smiled.

"I hope Noir or this Armitage person contact us soon" Madlax thought to herself as Limelda and Vanessa stood quietly.

"I've never been to that part of the house Elenore. Can you show me?"

Margaret said curious why she had never known about this, then again she didn't have any real reason to know but when Elenore mentioned it her curiosity peaked.

"Of course Miss please follow me." Elenore said and Margaret, Laetitia followed her.

At first Margaret expected the unused east wing would full of cobwebs and dust but Elenore explained that she had kept up with the maintenance every few weeks though it had been a lot easier when there were a lot more Baker's around.

When they reached the room, they found that it was kept in good condition with modern lightning. Rows of chairs lined the floor and not a speck of dust was to be seen.

Elenore led them to the stage and she flip on the lights.

Laetitia's attention was transfixed on an old costume rack with costumes left by a troupe years before any of them were born. (Elenore had made sure they were still in good condition.) But what really got her attention was a green tutu which a dark emerald dress form was over.

She pointed and innocently asked Elenore. "Is this yours? It looks like it fits you." Elenore blushed as she saw Margaret come near.

Margaret entered the room and was taken by surprise by how big it was. She probably had been told about it before, but she usually would forget such unimportant details, as well as some of the important ones. She drifted away from Elenore and Laetitia for a few minutes to look around and explore the place better, not really sure whether she had ever been there before or not. She sure didn't remember it, at least. "I completely forgot we had a room like this!" She said, approaching both Elenore and Laetitia who were entertained talking about something. "I'm really impressed, it's so big! I don't think I've ever been to this part of the house! It's a bit of a shame it's been out of use all these years... oh well, at least you've been using it Elenore! I don't suppose we have any other house divisions I don't know about, do we?" Margaret asked, not entirely serious, but enthusiastic with the idea all the same.

"I remember coming here when we were little and I thought it would be a great place to practice my ballet here Miss, I think I have a costume or two here. Plus there's old costumes left by a troupe of Shakespearean actors.

As for the rest of the house, well it's been a long while Miss since we explored the house. I remember when we were children Miss, we would go exploring and then my grandfather would scold us for wandering around. As for the rest of the house, the east wing here was used to entertain as well as have the servant's quarters that weren't Bakers. I also remember grandfather telling me not to go into the west wing for some reason. I do have the keys to the doors that lead there but even I haven't gone there.

But now that you mention it, we could go exploring the west wing if you wish Miss?" Elenore explained quite cheerfully with a hint of curiosity in her tone.

"That sounds mysterious! Why don't we go look there now, Elenore? I have no idea why it would be off limits, but I think we must know about our own house. Besides, what could happen?" Margaret decided and asked Elenore to lead the way.

"Yes Miss." Elenore said with some enthusiasm and she led them to the locked door to the west wing. With some excitement and trepidation she unlocked the door and slowly opened it. She reached for the light switch and flicked it on and the hall lit up.

What got Elenore concerned was that there were no cobwebs or dust on the floor. Even if the last time this area was used nine years ago there should've been cobwebs considering she hadn't been here.

"Miss, it looks like somebody's been using this wing of the house for some reason. If anything should happen, Miss, you and Laetitia run and get Madlax and Miss Jorg." Elenore said with grave concern in her voice.

Margaret nodded and followed Elenore who pulled out her taser.

They walked down the hallway to a set of doors, they found it was locked.

Elenore tried a few of the keys and eventually she unlocked it. She carefully opened the doors and what they saw surprised them. There was a large table with a map on it much like a war room battle map. They looked at the map; it was map of Western Europe. There were markers some had the Burton family crest and some a symbol of what looked like two women holding swords. There were a lot more of the ones with the women on it than the ones with the family crest on them.

As Elenore and Margaret pondered the meaning of all this, Laetitia opened one of the side doors. As she did Elenore rushed to her and pulled aside away from the door.

"We don't what's or who in there, so please don't go opening doors without us." Elenore said with some worry in her voice.

She peered into the dark room and with one hand fumbled for the light switch and turned it on. It appeared to be a library or lounge of some kind. She could barely hear a small refrigerator running. There were five overstuffed leather chairs with a couple of ash trays surrounding a round table. There was a recently used glass on the table and empty bottle of wine on it. But what attracted their attention was a large old book with the Burton family crest on it.

"Laetitia run and get Madlax and Miss Jorg now please! It looks like somebody has been here and quite very recently."

Laetitia nodded and ran as fast her little legs could carry her. While she was gone Elenore picked up the book.

Elenore picked up the book and started reading, she found it was written in Latin and the style was very old.

"What does it say Elenore?" Margaret asked curiously and upset that someone was in her house that she didn't know about.

"It's in Latin Miss, but I can read it." Elenore replied.

"Good, please read it to me Elenore." Margaret said sitting down in one of the chairs.

"Of course Miss." Elenore said and began reading.

She flipped past some medieval illustrations and started reading the text out loud.

"In the year of our Lord 990, a most evil of plots was set toward the King of France. A group of nobles planned to assassinate him and take his throne. The plot was discovered and a mighty war ensued. Many lives were lost among the nobility, the clergy and the peasants. Many acts of the devil were committed during that war" Elenore read off the medieval descriptions of many of the battles and atrocities committed which unsettled Margaret but she urged Elenore to continued reading.

"The King was victorious but his power was weakened. A group of the three estate got together and formed Les Soldats to prevent such a thing from happening again.

After awhile I learned of a plot by our very council to murder and replace the kings of nearby countries with members of our group with the King's blessing.

This went against very the reason Les Soldats was founded. So I gathered support within our group from five powerful Lords that where in western France and we decided to break off from the Les Soldats and form our own group "Les Justicars". Les Soldats were angered that we did this and with the help the King of France waged war upon us." Elenore read of more battles, treaties with foreign leaders and demon slaying and witch burning and other so called noble deeds (which Elenore thought was mere propaganda) "In the end we were victorious and the sovereign nation of Nafrece was founded. But our battles with Les Soldats never ended. We had to be careful for in some places they outnumbered our noble group.

*It was signed

Charles Burton of Normandy 1015*

"Miss, do you know what this means? Your ancestors had a hand in the forming of both the Soldats and Nafrece! From the looks of it Miss, your father was a part Les Justicars and helped against the Soldats. My guess Miss, somebody from that group is still using this place. I wonder if my grandfather was a member as well. There's more to this book but its looks like was written later. From what I read it looks like rules of engagement and etiquette between themselves and Les Soldats. That's not surprising considering they've been fighting each other for so long." Putting the book down she looked to Margaret for a reaction.

Back in the living room; "We haven't heard from Badgis for awhile we have?" Vanessa asked curiously.

"Why don't you just go alone and meet him in private?" Limelda asked.

"So you can have Madlax all to yourself?" Vanessa replied with a humorous but sarcastic tone.

"Oh Vanessa, how could you accuse me of such a thing?" Limelda replied with a slightly bemused and shocked response.

Madlax was again slightly embarrassed by all the attention but her professionalism held firm. Her supreme and sublime intuition of possible danger overwhelmed any other sense she had at the moment, including her nubile and carefree femininity.

"Should we look for Elenore?" Vanessa asked.

"I think we should do a quick sweep of the whole residence, Vanessa stay here, Limelda keep radio contact." Madlax said confidently.

"Good idea, we don't know who might come snooping around" Limelda said firmly.

Madlax and Limelda walked their separate ways and started to promptly scan the residence while Vanessa stood on watchful guard.

"Elenore, I don't like this place, let's leave right away. We can bring those books back to the house so we can find more about it later. I have a bad feeling about this... and there's such an evil presence in this room..." Margaret said hurriedly in an uneasy voice.

Elenore picked up as many of the books she could and they both rushed back to their part of the house. They saw Vanessa standing there with a gun in her hand.

"Are you two all right? Laetitia came rushing in and said you found a room and someone had been there recently." Vanessa asked with grave concern.

"We're okay, but we found some books." Margaret answered taking the books from Elenore as she locked the doors.

"Where's Laetitia? Is she okay?" Margaret asked worriedly.

"She's fine; I left her in the living room." Vanessa answered reassuringly.

"You should take a look these books Vanessa. I think our problems with the Soldats go much deeper than what's happening now. But right now unless, Madlax and Miss Jorg want to check the room out I'm putting a barricade in case whoever's been using that room decides to come out that door." Elenore said.

"Good idea, we'll go back to the living room and meet you there." Vanessa said and she and Margaret went back to the living room.

Elenore made a temporary barricade in front of the door plus a make shift alarm in case someone got through and then she went back to the living room with the others.

Margaret went to the living room and found Laetitia waiting for them there, sitting in the couch with a worried expression. "What happened, Margaret? What did you find?" She asked anxiously. "I'm not very sure myself..." Margaret replied - "But we'll talk about it tomorrow. We brought some books that might give us some clues. But don't worry Laetitia; I'm sure we're safe here, at least. Besides, we have Madlax and Limelda with us. Now I think it's time for you to go to bed, don't you think?"

Laetitia agreed and said good night to Elenore and Vanessa, grabbing Margaret's hand as they both left upstairs.

"What did you find Elenore and what do you mean by our problems with the Soldats go deeper than what's going on now?" Vanessa asked curious but deeply worried.

Elenore picked up the book with the Burton family crest and handed to Vanessa.

"Can you read Latin?" Elenore asked.

"Yes, why is this book written in it?" Vanessa asked her curiosity piqued.

"You should read it." Elenore said sitting down and watched Vanessa read.

Vanessa read the book, her eyes becoming wide as saucers. "This is unbelievable! I never knew this group existed or they were involved with the Soldats. This group was instrumental in the founding of Nafrece and Margaret's ancestor helped found it!" Vanessa said in astonishment.

"I know, I was just as surprised as you are and makes me wonder if my relatives were with Les Justicars. It's one more thing I have to confront my mother with. Well it may explain why the

Soldats haven't hit us full force; maybe they're afraid Les Justicars might get involved. From what I've read so far, there are rules of engagement and etiquette between them and it looks like by attacking us they're slightly breaking them. But I also wonder who's been using that room?" Elenore explained with concern.

"When Madlax and Limelda get back we'll check out the room together." Vanessa said.

"Miss Margaret said she felt an evil presence there. But I didn't get that feeling at all." Elenore said.

"She was probably nervous and somewhat in shock to learn all this and wanted get out of there." Vanessa said thinking that Margaret did just that.

"You might be right, but I do feel uncomfortable that this been going on under my nose for so long." Elenore said.

"I guess, they felt you didn't need to know. What are those other books about?" Vanessa asked.

"From what I gather they're logs of prior engagements with the Soldats spanning a few centuries by the look of some of them. We can look at them while wait for Miss Margaret to come back."

Vanessa nodded and read though the logs until Margaret came back. As they read the accounts two words kept popping up. In the various battles between the Soldats and Justicars; Duvet and Noir kept appearing. From what they read Duvet was not a code name but a title of an anti assassin fighter. Elenore thought this was yet another thing to confront her mother on the next time they met.

Margaret walked back into the living room, after putting Laetitia to bed, and found Elenore and Vanessa looking at the books they had brought from the West wing. "Hmm... Oh you're reading that again?" She asked, as she sat down on the couch next to them "Laetitia was very curious about the whole thing, but I don't think she's scared at all, she went to sleep pretty easily. I think she'll be fine... well, I guess it's not like her to be afraid anyway..." Margaret added with some apprehension, forcing out a smile, trying to hide her own fear about the situation."So, what should we do about these books?"

"We now have somewhat an insight of who we're up against." Elenore said noticing Margaret's fear sat next to Margaret and held her warmly. "Miss, if you're worried about Les Justicar's. I don't think they would want to harm you Miss, after all your ancestor helped found the group. Though, it bothers me as well that they did this under both our noses. As for the books we'll take a closer look at them and see what else we can find. Unless something else is bothering you Miss?" Elenore said in a comforting tone.

"Is something else bothering you Margaret?" Vanessa asked.

"Well, there's still this." Margaret said, touching her shirt collar which concealed the Torc underneath. "They might be after it as well. I guess they are my ancestors but... they're Soldats' rivals, the same as Enfant. They might be a criminal organization too. There are too many things I don't know, even about my own parents. I don't know what kind of person my father was, one of the few things I know is he tried to kill me. If my own father was capable of turning against

me how can I trust some unknown people spying on us secretly all this time?" Margaret said with increasing unpleasantness about the subject at hand. "Either way, I decided I'd like to gather the other artifacts and use them to help Poupee. He gave his life for me once, and I still own him that. Besides, I promised Laetitia, so I won't give away the Torc to anyone."

"Don't worry Miss. We're not going to give the Torc or the other artifacts anyone. I plan on confronting my mother with this as well, one way or the other I'll get to the bottom of this. I'm NOT going to let this become another Gazth-Sonika!" Elenore said very firmly bowing her head. "This time, I WON'T let any of them get to you. I WON'T feel useless even if I..." Elenore stopped herself as she heard herself and she hoped her outburst wouldn't be noticed as such.

Vanessa looked at Elenore with concern *"Did she nearly say what I thought she was going to say."* *"Please Elenore don't go down that path."* Vanessa thought to herself.

Margaret also noticed Elenore's reaction and was taken aback by her sudden bowing "Thank you, Elenore." she said, placing her hands on Elenore's shoulders, encouraging her to straighten up and look at her "I really appreciate your help, more than anyone else's. But don't overdo it, Okay? I couldn't lose you again. We have Madlax and Limelda with us now, so don't go off to fight on your own. I need you to stay with me and...I want to protect you too, this time around." Margaret said with an honest smile, looking at Elenore.

Elenore straightened and looked in Margaret's eyes. "Thank you Miss. I won't overdo it Miss and I will stay by your side" She said with a warm smile but deep down she was saddened and worried. Her reaction hadn't gone unnoticed by any of them or by another presence.

In her mind she heard a familiar gentle kind voice with an accent whisper. "I will help you too..."

"Just ask for my help and I will walk beside you..." A soft gentle voice echoed in Elenore's mind.

"I'm sorry Miss, did you just say something?" Elenore asked a bit distracted.

"Elenore are you okay? You look a little distracted there." Vanessa asked worriedly, wondering if the stress was taking its toll on Elenore.

"I'm fine Vanessa, thanks for asking." Elenore replied a tad confused.

"Hmm... no, I didn't say anything after you, I think..." Margaret said, tilting her head to the side with a puzzled expression not knowing that the Torc was softly glowing underneath her shirt collar. "Oh well... it's getting late, I should probably go to bed, I have classes tomorrow. I'd rather not go, but it's my final week and I have evaluations. You know, maybe you should go to sleep too, and get some rest; you had a long day as well Elenore. Madlax and Limelda are on watch so we don't have to worry." Margaret suggested with genuine concern, hoping Elenore would agree.

"Your right Miss, it's been a very long day and you should definitely get some rest. I should get some sleep as well. Is there anything you need before you retire for the night Miss?" Elenore said actually feeling a bit tired herself.

"Hmm... I don't think so." Margaret thought for a while, feeling she might be forgetting something important "Oh, I know! Elenore, tomorrow, for dinner, I think I'd like Tacos." She said decidedly, feeling this was a detail of relative importance, yet not being very sure why. But such thoughts weren't perceived as unusual by Margaret, especially when this close to

bedtime. "Good night Elenore! Good night Vanessa!" She said, before leaving the room and retiring for the night.

"Just ask...." a voice whispered in Elenore's mind as Margaret left.

"Yes Miss, I'll pick up the ingredients tomorrow. Good Night Miss." Elenore replied a bit puzzled on why Margaret wanted tacos but figured she must've seen served at the university café and wanted to try them.

"Good night Margaret" Vanessa said waving to Margaret and they both watched her go.

As soon as Margaret was out of earshot Vanessa turned to Elenore and said in a compassionate yet serious tone.

"I'm worried about you, if you were going to say what I thought you were going say frightened me. I know what you're capable of when you're angry but to go that route isn't like you at all. Did you make the appointment like I asked?"

"I'm sorry Vanessa if I've worried you; it's just all this..." Waving her hand towards the books.

"It's bad enough we two or three groups coming at us now possibly another one.

I wish they would just leave us alone, but there's no chance of that is there and I made the appointment for next Friday. But I wonder how am I going to tell a therapist all this stuff without her thinking I've gone totally off the deep end. I'm sorry I'm just tired and I'm rambling." Elenore said warily.

Vanessa hugged Elenore. "That's a good question but I don't have an answer for you. But please know that we love you and if need to talk I'm here for you. Margaret's right you do look tired, you should get some rest. Good night Elenore."

"I agree, Good night Vanessa." Elenore replied before heading off to bed.

Elenore went into her room and got undressed. She sadly looked at the picture of her grandfather. She wanted to say something but she was too tired and sad to think of anything to say so she turned out the lights and went to bed. As her head hit the pillow she was fast asleep.

She found herself walking through the park she went to as a child. "What a worthless child you are." An older male voice came out of nowhere.

Elenore turned to see her grandfather sitting on the bench with a scowl on his face, her mother kneeling at his feet.

"You couldn't protect Miss Margaret or even yourself, you're more pathetic than your mother here." He said smacking Meg in the head.

"Why are you saying such things grandfather?" Elenore said crying.

"Grandfather?! Don't make me laugh. Why should I even associate with a worthless spawn like you. You're just as useless as this piece of trash here." Smacking Meg in the head again till it exploded. Elenore ran crying hearing the words over and over again "Worthless girl." She found that she was running through the same jungle again, she could hear footsteps behind her, bullets whizzing past her. She ran and suddenly she found herself in the same field of flowers where she died eight months ago.

There was a person standing in the field and she went towards the figure.

Much to her horror, it was none other than Friday Monday! She saw she had the same gun she had that day and pointed at him.

Friday sneered at her and said not worried in the least. "Oh it's you again. You didn't have the courage to pull the trigger then what makes you think you have it now."

Elenore's hands trembled as she pointed the gun. "I'm warning you stay away!" She screamed. Friday chuckled as he held his arms wide open and Elenore found herself surrounded by men in black suits, ninjas and soldiers. "Please, you're not even worth the effort to crush." And Elenore was kicked and punched by those who surrounded her; she tried fighting back but to no avail.

"I'll save you Elenore!!" She heard a familiar voice say. She looked in the direction of the voice and saw Margaret dressed in a red fuku and she rushed at the men but she got defeated and was held by Friday.

She heard another voice that sounded like hers say. "Just ask and I will help..."

"Save me Elenore!" Margaret cried.

"Don't waste your breath on that one Miss. That one can't even defend itself." She heard her grandfather say.

"Don't worry Elenore I'll protect you!!" She heard Madlax say, she too was dressed in a fuku but in blue. "Can you hold on I got to make sure I exist." Madlax went over to Limelda and Vanessa who started playing tug of war with Madlax.

Elenore continued to get pummeled and she heard the voice say again. "Just ask and I will help..."

"You know if you ask you'll be like Madlax and me. Oh by way the Elenore after your done getting owned could you make some pasta or was it tacos. I forget." Margaret said.

"I'm not a killer! I don't want to do that! I don't want to be one!" Elenore yelled as she continued to get pummeled.

"I told you, she's all talk. Now come here Margaret." Carrossea said as he grabbed Margaret and started to assault her.

"Help me Elenore!" Margaret cried out.

"Forget it she's not going save you. You're all mine to do as I please."

"Get your filthy paws off her!" Elenore screamed.

"Or you what? That's right absolutely nothing." Carrossea laughed and started to sexually assault Margaret.

"You can help her, just ask..." The voice said again.

"Please help me. I want to protect Margaret! I WANT TO PROTECT MYSELF!!" Elenore screamed.

Then a shining light surrounded her and the men were pushed away and in front of her a kigurumi mask of a cheerfully smiling girl with brunette hair appeared floating.

"You know what I have to do right? I'm sorry that it had to come to this but there is no other way." The voice asked.

"Yes."

"If you accept it, take the mask and place it upon your head."

Elenore grabbed the mask and put it on and she was transformed. As well as wearing the mask she was now wearing instead of her maid's uniform a suit of black and white body armor and a black trench coat. She held out her hands and two HK .50's appeared in each one. The men started rushing toward her, but as they did Elenore...pulled the triggers.

Each time she pulled the triggers men would fall till she got to Friday Monday.

"Think I have the courage now?" She asked him right before she blew his head clean off. Then she went to Carrossea and kicked him off Margaret.

"I told you get your filthy paws off of her you bastard!" She said first kicking him in the face and then emptying both clips into Carrossea. After she was done she kicked his carcass some more.

"How's that for coincidence Carrossea. Huh, you piece of shit!"

She holstered the guns and picked Margaret from the ground and held her.

"You were great! Thank you!" Margaret said gleefully.

"Don't worry Margaret. I'll protect you. I'll protect us all..."

Then Elenore heard Margaret's voice coming from another direction and with a Welsh accent.

"Wow, you have some issues. No wonder Vanessa is concerned."

"Who said that? Show yourself!" Elenore said drawing the guns and waving them in every direction.

"I did. As for showing myself, turn around." Elenore turned and saw sitting on that familiar park bench was Margaret but she was wearing a highly decorated robe which changed into an elegant ruby red dress. She motioned Elenore to sit beside her.

"Who are you?" Elenore asked pointing the gun at woman who looked like Margaret who just smiled and the guns disappeared and Elenore was wearing instead of the armor and mask a emerald green dress.

"Now that's all be taken care of please do sit Elenore and I'll tell you." Elenore sat where Margaret gestured to.

"I want to call you Margaret, but I know you're not her. Who are you?" Elenore asked again.

"The full story is a bit complicated, but you can call me Lady Rhiannon."

"You're the spirit of the Torc!" Elenore exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes and no. I'm a piece of the Goddess Rhiannon that she put in here when she created the Torc so I'm more than a mere spirit."

"May I ask why you are sending Miss Margaret these visions?"

"Miss Margaret?" Oh come now Elenore, I know you've figured out the truth so you can drop the Miss."

"I don't have proof..."

"Of course, you do but it doesn't matter to her if you did or didn't. As for the visions I want Margaret to at least try to figure them out without having someone outright telling her."

"But why show her visions of me when I was twelve?"

Rhiannon looked in Elenore's eyes with both seriousness and compassion and spoke. "We both know why. You've been suffering in silence for far too long. She's a big girl now and you do owe someone the truth and I know you know who. Because of your silence an innocent soul has been trapped here for eight years. Trapped by your grief, your guilt and your anger."

"Mommy..." A small girl's voice rang out and Elenore turned to see a little girl holding the doll her mother gave her.

"I'm so sorry..." Elenore said with tears in her eyes.

Elenore rose to go to the child but instead the scene turned to mist and faded to black.

"Elenore...?" Elenore woke hearing Vanessa's voice...

Vanessa sat in the living room deep in thought. The situation was getting worse with the discovery of another unknown group probably wanting the artifacts as well. She knew Margaret was trying her best to deal with it and as long she kept an eye on Elenore she would be fine as well though she could tell that the stress of all this was taking its toll on Elenore. Then there was the issue of Madlax, Limelda and herself to deal with, the on and off verbal sparring with Limelda wasn't helping matters any.

Limelda came into the living room and stood near Vanessa and asked her where was Madlax. "I'm guessing she still out patrolling. Anyways Limelda, you and I should have a talk."

"Oh, what about?" Limelda asked getting ready for another verbal battle with Vanessa over Madlax.

Vanessa explained about the room in the previously inaccessible west wing and the books. Limelda became concerned as Vanessa continued.

"So in light of this new development, we have two options; we could force Madlax to make a decision one which of us she wants to be with or we can both call a truce and wait till this current situation is resolved. It's up to you Limelda." Vanessa said with conviction.

"Bickering isn't going to help, but I want an answer out of Madlax as well and who knows if any of us will survive this mess. So when Madlax gets back we'll both force her to make decision once and for all? Agree?" Limelda said in confident tone.

"All right, agreed. We wait till Madlax gets back and then we ask the question." Vanessa replied.

Vanessa and Limelda wait in a patient and uncomfortable truce in the living room; their mutual objective seemed to have united them temporarily. They both heard the ever louder footsteps and the two women's heartbeats grew faster and more eager to hear the defeat of their rival.

"Madlax" Vanessa and Limelda called.

"Yes" as she gazed upon them attentively.

"Who do you prefer Madlax, me or Vanessa?" Limelda asked.

"I don't know, why the fuss? You're both very good friends; do I really have to choose a best friend?" Madlax replied in a slightly sad, naive and perplexed tone.

Vanessa and Limelda looked at each other a little confused and bemused at her response.

"Madlax, we're not talking about general friendship. We're talking about an intimate relationship, you know the kind where two people have sex." Vanessa said hoping to clarify things to Madlax.

"Yes, which one of us Madlax. We need to know." Limelda added. Both stared at Madlax waiting for an answer.

"The kind where people have sex!" Madlax exclaimed. Ohhh..." Madlax stood in a moment's reflection.

"Shouldn't love be a sweeter thing?" Madlax asked with a degree of idealism.

Her tender cheeks blushed reddish pink, her eyes closed timidly and her arms pressed anxiously across her warm chest.

"Um, what gave you the idea I was just interested in women?" Madlax asked and both Limelda and Vanessa gave Madlax a "what the fuck?!" look.

"Also, both of you never asked me on a date" Madlax giggled shyly.

Both women looked at each other in surprise and they realized despite all the time they spent with Madlax neither of them had asked her for a date.

"You have a point Madlax. Neither of us has." Vanessa said somewhat embarrassed.

"If that's the case. Madlax would you like to go on a date with me? And Vanessa can bring her maid friend and we can double date." Limelda asked with a not too subtle jab at Vanessa.

"That sounds like fun! What do you say Vanessa?" Madlax asked Vanessa in joy.

Vanessa felt the little jab Limelda poked at her but she noticed that Madlax is too naive to comprehend. She decides to go along as refusing wouldn't make her friend feel any better.

"Alright, let's go on a double date, Madlax. But I have to ask Elenore about it too." Vanessa explained to Madlax.

Vanessa stood there deep in thought and then she came to the realization;

If Madlax and she were just friends, maybe she could pursue a serious relationship with Elenore.

She loved Madlax but all it seemed that she was only interested in just friendship which was okay with her. Vanessa felt a bit disappointed but relieved at the same time, it was one less headache she had to deal with.

"Now that's been taken care of, did you find anything Madlax? Wait, scratch that, it can wait till morning I'm tired. You two can do whatever you want." Vanessa said trying to hide her sadness and she walked upstairs leaving Madlax and Limelda to their own devices." Vanessa said as she headed toward her room.

Meanwhile in Margaret's room the Torc glowed as she slept...

Margaret was in that flower field again, just wandering around endlessly.

The field went as far as she could see in all directions, but she didn't find anyone or anything.

She stopped suddenly, and felt a presence, and turned around to find that familiar figure from before, standing still and silent, looking at her nostalgically from a distance. "Mother, is that you?" Margaret asked anxiously, realizing she couldn't approach any closer though she could speak now, unlike the last time "I killed him, you know? I killed father!" She said in a sorrowful desperate tone, to which her mother didn't seem to react, as she kept the same sad serene expression "I'm sorry. I wanted to live, so I killed him. I just wanted you to know that, and hope you can forgive me." She said in a quieter tone now, turning her eyes away as tears started flowing.

"I already know that. I always knew, Margaret." Her mother replied in a sympathetic tone "You shouldn't worry about that anymore. You were able to put that behind you already, and so have I. There's nothing to forgive." She reassured with a smile. "But there is another thing concerning your father... I'd like to tell you more, but I can't. Please, tell Meg... I forgive her. Tell Elenore's mother..." She said hurriedly as she started to fade away.

The flower field was replaced with a graveyard. It didn't look spooky in fact, it look like it was a bright sunny day outside which contrasted with tone of the setting. Margaret looked around not knowing if she was still dreaming or having a waking vision.

"Margaret?" Vanessa voice came from behind.

"Vanessa, I'm so glad to see you. How did we get here? The last thing I remember was I was talking to my mother and then she and the field disappeared and this appeared." Waving her hand around.

"I was heading to my room when I found myself walking in here then I saw you." Vanessa replied.

"What does it mean? Is someone going to die?" Margaret asked a worried tone.

"I don't know but there's someone at a grave let's ask them." Vanessa replied and Margaret nodded and they approached the person. When they got close they shocked to see a twelve year old Elenore lying flowers on the grave.

"I'm trying really hard grandfather to care of Miss Margaret. But I miss you and mommy and Uncle Walter. I better get back home before Miss Vanessa starts getting worried." Elenore said to her grandfather's grave and she started to walk away with her back turned to Margaret and Vanessa.

Both of them called out to her, but she didn't hear them proving that this was a vision of the past. Margaret noticed a man walking behind the gravestones heading toward Elenore. Elenore was unaware of the person that was approaching her.

Margaret yelled out Elenore's name hoping that Elenore would turn around and see who was behind her. Vanessa started to run but found her legs turned to lead. Margaret screamed as the man grabbed Elenore from behind and Margaret woke up suddenly, agitated by her dream. She was back in her room, and it was dark and quiet. It was late and everyone in the house was asleep, she figured. All she could hear was her heavy breathing as the glowing artifact felt tight around her neck, slightly suffocating her. There was no doubt now, this was another vision caused by the Torc. Margaret didn't want to wake everyone up, but she felt she should tell Elenore right away, at least, since it concerned her mother and what she had just saw worried her for Elenore's safety. So she ran out and down into the hall and she saw Elenore just saying something to Vanessa...

Vanessa found herself in the hallway with Elenore in her nightgown walking toward her oblivious to anything around her.

"Elenore!" Vanessa said loudly hoping to snap Elenore out of whatever daze she was in.

Elenore snapped out of it in somewhat of a shock. "Oh Vanessa, what are you doing in my room?"

"Your room? You're in the hall dressed in your nightgown and you had a spaced out look on your face. Is everything okay?" Vanessa asked with concern.

Elenore was about to answer when Margaret glomped on to her with tears in her eyes.

"Oh so glad you're all right... I was in a flower field talking to my mother... and she forgave your mother and then I was in ...a graveyard and you were there but you were a little girl and you talking to the grave and then you walked away and we saw you grabbed from behind and I got so scared." Margaret said between tears holding her close. Margaret said between tears.

Elenore was torn between her feelings and Rhiannon's wishes. She stumbled trying to think of something comforting to say. "I'm right here Miss, safe and sound.

I know it must've been frightening to see and honestly I don't know what the Torc was trying to show but I'm sure we can figure it out in the morning Miss." She said in a comforting tone she was trying to dodge the subject.

Margaret looked at Elenore compassionately. She knew Elenore was hiding something from her but knew it was something very painful to her to talk about. A part of her shuddered on what that could be, at the least she knew something bad had happened and she decided to talk to Vanessa about it and maybe the two of them could find a way help Elenore talk about it but for now she wasn't going to push the issue as she was far too tired to debate anything.

"Well I'm glad you're safe Elenore and you're right, I'll talk about this in the morning with Vanessa. Good Night Elenore..." Margaret said giving her a warm hug and went back to bed. Vanessa smiled as Margaret went back to bed and wondered if the Torc or her concern for her loved ones was making her more assertive. Then she turned to Elenore. "Margaret's right I think we all need some sleep and we can talk about this in the morning." "Vanessa what's wrong? Did something happen between you and Miss Jorg again?" Elenore asked. "So how did you wind up in the hall?" Vanessa asked trying to avoid the subject.

Elenore noticed that Vanessa was evading the question and replied. "Last thing I remember was going to sleep then I had this really strange dream. By the way can you see any bruises on me?" "Not in this light, we can check in my room." Vanessa replied and Elenore followed her to her room. In Vanessa's room Elenore could clearly see the sad look on Vanessa's face. "Are you okay? What happened?" Elenore asked with understandable concern.

"First let's check you out and I'll explain afterword." Vanessa replied. Vanessa looked over Elenore but found no bruises of any sort on her, but what caught her attention was the darkened areolas; a clear sign of a previous pregnancy. She made a mental note to mention this to Elenore in the morning she was also curious about Elenore's dream. Could she be getting visions too, she wondered.

"What was your dream about?" Vanessa asked temporarily skirting the subject of her trouble. Elenore told her in full detail about the dream. Vanessa was saddened and shocked; it seemed that Elenore was subconsciously preparing herself for the worst case scenario where she might have to take a life. Vanessa hugged Elenore tightly and guided her to the bed and sat her down, wishing that she could ease her friend's troubled mind.

"Thanks, but what about you? What's gotten you upset?" Elenore asked concerned but a bit confused why Vanessa sat her on the bed.

Vanessa explained as she got undressed and into her nightgown and began to cry. Elenore got up and hugged her tight. "Come on let it out." Elenore said in comforting tone with Vanessa crying on her shoulder.

"I didn't want to drag you into this mess..." Vanessa said crying.

"It's okay. You're my friend and I care about you." Elenore said still that comforting tone.

Vanessa recounted the confrontation that she and Limelda had with Madlax.

"I thought Madlax's behavior was a tad erratic, well this proves it. Though going on a double date sounds nice. I'll be happy to go with you, after this mess is done and over with. Elenore said with a comforting smile.

"Thank you Elenore. I know this may weird but can you stay with me tonight? I think we both use the company." Vanessa said wiping the tears from her eyes.

"Sure. I could use the company too." Elenore replied and went into the bed and Vanessa followed suit.

When she got into bed Elenore was fast asleep. Vanessa wanted to say at least good night but she understood that Elenore was going through a great deal of stress. She stroked Elenore's hair and said good night to her and then laid down herself and went to sleep.

Madlax and Limelda were left alone as Vanessa went to bed. The night has been long and both women looked rather exhausted especially with all the intense pouring of emotion all around.

"I'm going to sleep." Madlax yawned.

"So I have to keep watch?" Limelda reluctantly asked.

"How about you take the first shift?" Madlax asked

"Alright, my date." Limelda said as she cheekily pulled Madlax's cheek.

Madlax strolled into bed wondering what sort of unexpected things may happen tomorrow.

In another part of town Mireille and Kirika finally found a hotel to spend the night...

And yet another part Nadie looked at the slumbering Ellis who was still singing the Tacosu song on and off and she wondered if she was going to any sleep as she leaned back in the chair was sleeping in.

Chapter 8.

As if previous day wasn't strange enough things got weirder as the second of the three came.

But I had my own concerns and I struggled on how to resolve them...

Taken from the diary of Elenore Baker July 9th 2013

Elenore awoke to see Vanessa lying beside her. At first she was surprised but then remembered that Vanessa had asked her to sleep with her last night. Granted nothing happened but she felt needed to get herself out of there as fast as she could, she had things to do starting with getting Margaret and Laetitia ready for school. She kissed the still sleeping Vanessa on the head and went to her room and got ready.

She went and got the morning paper and glanced at the headline; Maid sexually assaulted last night!

She shook her head and wondered what the world was coming to, of course in the back of her mind this was a cold reminder of the past and also wondered if this was done by the same person. She looked at the paper sadly and went back inside. She woke Laetitia and got her ready and then she went to wake Margaret.

"Miss Margaret! Time to get up!"

"Hmm... wha..? Is it morning already?" Margaret asked with a muffled voice without getting her head off the pillow. "Just five more minutes." She said evasively as she drifted back into sleep on the warm fluffy comfort of her bed.

Elenore silently sighed and said; "Well I guess I have to use Wake up Method number three this morning." As she waited for Margaret to rise out of bed.

"Awww, not fair Elenore! I just wanted five more minutes!" Margaret complained as she rose from bed almost simultaneously, holding her pillow and looking at Elenore with puppy eyes, with no result "How late am I, exactly?" She gave in after a while and got up, reluctantly starting to get ready for the day. "At least it's almost summer break..." She thought.

"Good Morning Miss Margaret. Did you sleep well last night Miss? Please Miss get ready for school while I prepare breakfast. "Elenore replied waiting for Margaret to get out of the bed before she left to prepare breakfast.

As Margaret adjusted her tie in front of the mirror she couldn't help but notice the strange artifact she was starting to get used to wearing around her neck. She didn't want to get rid of it any longer, but it still bothered her she couldn't at least remove it. She was glad she could hide it under her shirt collar at least. Thinking of the Torc inevitably reminded her of last night's dream, and what she meant to tell Elenore about.

"Say, Elenore, remember you, Vanessa and me are going to have a talk. I know it must be pretty painful to talk about but I don't want you to suffer in silence anymore and if there's anything I can do to help I'll do it. One thing is...well puzzling me; what does it have to do with the doll your mother gave you?" Margaret asked, turning around as she finished fixing her tie.

"If it's all right with you Miss, can I answer that after you get home from school today?" Elenore asked sadly trying to get Margaret to drop the subject at least temporary.

Margaret put a comforting hand on Elenore's shoulder. "I didn't mean you had to answer right this second but sure." Margaret said knowing that the subject was deeply bothering Elenore. Oh I almost forgot, I saw my mother too. She didn't say much, but I think she tried to tell me something about my father. And she wanted me to tell that she forgives Meg, your mother, Elenore. Do you have any idea of why she said that? Could you please tell your mother that today, if you go see her?" Margaret asked in high spirits, after most of her drowsiness wore off. Elenore was glad that Margaret didn't dig deeper. When she heard that Margaret's mother had forgiven hers, her spirits lifted as well.

"I think it had to do with the reason my mother asked to leave. I'm sure she'll be happy to hear that and I'll tell her when I see her later today Miss. Thank you for sharing that with me Miss." Elenore replied with a warm smile on her face and she went to prepare breakfast.

"Oh you're welcome, Elenore! You know I tell you everything." Margaret replied with a closed eye smile, before Elenore left to get started with breakfast.

After finishing getting ready Margaret went downstairs and waited at the breakfast table for the others to arrive, surprised she had been the first for a change. A few minutes later Laetitia then Limelda and Vanessa came into the dining room and sat down and waited for Madlax to show up. Vanessa began to read the paper while they waited, and was concerned about the headline. She guessed that Elenore had seen this as well and she made mental to talk to Elenore about this later.

Elenore served everyone at the table and then sat down herself.

"Where's Madlax?" Limelda asked.

"She's getting ready; she asked we start without her." Elenore replied.

Madlax had done a thorough patrol of the Burton residence throughout the night and she was rather tired and gave herself some extra sleep. Elenore woke her up and asked if they could start with her till she was fully dressed. Wishing she didn't have her breakfast too cold. Madlax rushed into her attire as quickly as she could and was rather relieved everyone was still at the breakfast.

"Good Morning, how are you all this morning?" she asked with a bit of drowsiness still in her eye.

"Good Morning Madlax. Will you be accompanying Miss Margaret to school or will Miss Jorg? I need to ask so I can call campus security so they won't overreact." Elenore asked.

"Is that really necessary?" Margaret interjected, not really feeling up to that much escorting. "I mean, nothing dangerous really happened yesterday, and it's daytime now and the way to school is pretty calm but crowded enough to notice any disturbance. Besides... if I needed an escort to school so would Laetitia, don't you think?"

"Well... Miss, Laetitia doesn't have a powerful artifact around her neck and they're not interested in her it seems. We just want to keep them from grabbing you while you're at school Miss." Elenore said with grave concern.

"I have to agree with Elenore on this one Margaret. The artifact and you are too important to not put some extra security around." Vanessa added.

Madlax seemed quite keen on going to school because she never really experienced school life before. Limelda felt far less inclined, "*I don't want to spend more time protecting that spacey girl.*" she thought to herself.

"I will go with Margaret, besides it's my job." Madlax raised her hand enthusiastically.

"You certainly look young enough to be a student." Vanessa smiled.

"Thank you Vanessa." Madlax replied warmly.

"Oh well, if you both say so..." Margaret gave in, agreeing to the idea. "So are you going to classes with me as well, Madlax? I guess...that could be fun. But won't you be bored?" Margaret asked with amusement, trying to forget for a while that her situation was all but amusing.

"I won't get too bored; protecting you will be hard work." Madlax smiled. "Besides I'm not the one who has to pay attention." Madlax giggled.

"I'll call campus security Miss. Madlax I'll help you find more suitable attire so you'll look more like a bodyguard and attract less attention as well. I almost forgot what name you want me to

give to security? I think the name "Madlax" would raise a few eyebrows so an alternative name will have to do and I do apologize for the inconvenience." Elenore said relieved that Margaret agreed.

"I think I have something that she could wear." Vanessa added looking over Madlax.

"I'm not sure if I should like more like a bodyguard, maybe less like one. As for the name I could use Laetitia Lune, the same name as the passport" Madlax said.

"That's good, but if someone notices that you and Miss Margaret look related to each other how will you respond?" Elenore asked.

"How about cousin? No wait how about distant cousin?" Vanessa asked.

"I like it." Margaret smiled and Madlax agreed.

"Okay that will work. I'll call them while you get ready." Elenore said cheerfully and she called up campus security and talked with them for a bit and then hung up.

"Okay, everything's all set. You'll just have to go to the campus security building with Miss Margaret and they'll give you a security pass. That way they won't give you any problems." Elenore said confidently.

"Well, I guess we should get going then. See you all later and have a nice day everyone." Margaret said before leaving, with Madlax following.

Elenore escorted Laetitia to the bus stop and waited till she got on and went back to the house. Vanessa was waiting by her car for Elenore. "Where to first?" She asked.

"Let me get that book and then we'll go to my mother's and then we have to go the store and pick up groceries plus the ingredients for tacos." Elenore replied.

"Tacos? That's unusual for Margaret to ask for that, usually she asks for pasta." Vanessa pondered out loud.

"I'm assuming that she saw them at university and wants to try them or we're having unexpected guests that like tacos but that's just speculation on my part." Elenore added just as somewhat baffled.

"I guess so." Vanessa answered and Elenore went and got the book and then they got into the car and drove off leaving Limelda to her own devices.

As soon they left, Limelda checked the house and then went to get the DVD she borrowed from Elenore and watched porn for awhile.

Elenore showed the way to her mother's home and after an hour they arrived.

Vanessa parked the car and they got out and they went to the front door and rang the buzzer. Meg came to the door with a smile on her face.

"Welcome back sweetie! Who's this with you?" Meg said looking at Vanessa.

"This is my friend Vanessa Rene. I told you about her last night." Elenore replied warmly.

"Well hello, we meet again. Now I know your name and I'm glad Elenore has friends that care about her. Oh where are my manners, I'm Meg Baker." Meg said warmly.

"Nice to meet again you as well Meg. I've heard a few things about you from Madlax." Vanessa replied.

"I'm sure you have. Well come on in girls and I'll brew some coffee." Meg chuckled and they went in and they sat down in the living room while Meg made a pot of coffee.

After she was done preparing the coffee Meg sat down in her favorite chair. "You look like have something to ask me, what is sweetie?" Meg asked.

"I told you about the visions that Margaret has been getting, well last night she had one of her mother. She gave Margaret a message to pass along to you; she forgives you for everything." Elenore explained.

Tears ran down Meg's eyes. "Anna finally forgave me. I never meant to hurt her. We were best friends in high school and I betrayed her with my affair. I'm sorry you had to suffer for my mistake, though I don't consider having you a mistake. In fact you're the only good thing to come out of that whole mess." Meg said with an apologetic tone.

"I know mother, which brings me the second reason I came here. I told Margaret I wanted to share you with her since all my talk of you reminded her of her mother. I wanted to ask you if that were okay with you. I don't know if you're comfortable going to the house, so we thought we can bring her here, if that's okay with you that is?" Elenore asked.

Meg thought for it for a few seconds while wiping the tears from her eyes and then she answered.

"I have nothing against Margaret and she's much as a victim as you are in this. I'll show her as much love as I do you sweetie. As for going to the house I'm not comfortable going there, so it's okay if you bring her here."

Elenore smiled gleefully. "Wonderful! I'll tell Margaret when she gets back from school."

"What's that book you have in your hands sweetie?" Meg asked.

"Please tell me what you know about this mother." Elenore said in a serious tone.

Elenore placed the book down on the coffee table and Meg's eyes grew large for a moment and then went back to normal.

"So, I see you finally went into the West wing." Meg said after a pause and then continued.

"This complicates things, all I was going to say I was with Nafrece Intelligence as a field agent if the topic came up but this book changes everything."

"So that's how you became an agent, okay Madlax's story makes sense now. But what about this book mother?" Elenore asked.

Meg stared at the book for moment as she thought of an answer and then she spoke.

"Everything in that book is true, but our family is involved just as deep as the Burtons were. If certain events didn't happen you would've been told about all this."

"How could you or our family be involved with criminals mother!?" Elenore asked confusedly.

"Les Justicars is not a criminal organization; it's a law enforcement agency that's not supposed to exist on paper. We handle cases and criminal groups like *Enfant* and *Les Soldats* who operate above the law. Does that make sense sweetie?"

Elenore thought for a bit and then replied. "It does, but what does it have to do with our family?"

"I think I can explain that a little better than your mother can Elenore." A man's voice emanated from the kitchen.

"Come on out Walter and say hello to your niece." Meg said a tad annoyed.

"Walter?" Elenore turned her head and seeing the man come from the kitchen gasped in surprise.

"Uncle Walter?! Grandfather told me that you died in a helicopter crash!" Elenore said in shock.

"The reports of my demise as they say; are greatly exaggerated. Ah, Vanessa Rene is here as well. This will save me time tracking you down." Walter said with a grin on his face.

Walter sat down and started explaining noticing the look of skepticism on Elenore's and Vanessa's faces. "Like your mother said everything in that book is true Les Justicars were formed to oppose Les Soldats and bring justice to the world. I would also like to point as well that we're not a criminal group though we have to operate in secret due to the nature of our opponents like the Soldats and Enfant who would do everything in their power to stop us if we acted out in the open. A great deal many of our members serve in law enforcement and the intelligence communities to keep tabs on those groups. Unlike the Soldats, the Justicars have remained true to its founding principles and our families along with the Burtons have served proudly since its founding a thousand years ago."

"That's all well and good but why all the deception about your demise? Are you after the artifacts as well? And what do you want with Vanessa?" Elenore asked still a tad skeptical.

"My supposed demise was started by your grandfather, as he could stand his only son being gay. So I was dead to him and he let everyone know including you. Your mother tried to defend me but she paid a high price for it; she was told that Anna had come back and didn't want her seeing you." Walter answered.

Elenore's head hung low. "Then he would've disowned me as well, if had he still lived. Like you Uncle Walter I'm gay as well and it explains a few things. But you still haven't answered my other questions." Elenore said.

"I was getting to that. As for the artifacts; only a couple on the council believes they have supernatural powers and the rest think they just have some religious significance. Since Margaret has one it falls under the Margaret protocol and before you ask what that is I'll tell you. Since Margaret is the great, great, etc granddaughter of the founder of Les Justicars and with her "Gift" a policy of non interference was established and that means we can't act openly in front of her even if she learns of our existence.

This brings me to your last question." Walter pulled out a gun and pointed it at the pair. "I'm sorry I have to do this, but this is protocol. Elenore Baker and Vanessa Rene now that you know of the existence of Les Justicars I am authorized to ask this question. For our presence must remain secret from the world at large. Will you join us or die? If you refuse I must silence you to prevent our enemies from gaining anything what you have learned. So I ask this question again; will you join us or die? What say you?"

Meg remained silent as Elenore and Vanessa thought over the question for a few seconds and then Elenore spoke in a serious and stern tone.

"I will join."

"I accept your answer Elenore Baker and I welcome you to Les Justicars and what of you Vanessa Rene?"

"I will join. If you really have held true to your principles of truth and justice I gladly join."

"I accept your answer Vanessa Rene and I welcome you to Les Justicars." Walter said putting away his gun glad he didn't had to use it.

"Your grandfather did the same thing to us when we were younger. Apparently it's tradition, so we both apologize for this." Meg said.

"Will the Justicars help in protecting Margaret; even they have to remain hidden?" Elenore asked with concern.

"The best we can do under the protocol is keeping the Soldats and Enfant from the house. You two have a little more leeway as you're Margaret's sister and Vanessa is yours and Margaret's friend. But I swear we'll do all we can. As for you Vanessa, the council wanted to extend to you an invitation to our group since your father and mother were also members." Walter said.

"WHAT! My parents were part of the Justicars! That explains why Enfant framed them for helping start the civil war." Vanessa exclaimed then sadly as the truth hit her. Elenore put a comforting arm around her.

"Thanks Elenore. But what of Margaret? She knows about Les Justicars and thinks they want the artifacts and they're criminals as well." Vanessa said.

"Fortunately the protocol covers this as well. Just tell her the truth. We're not criminals or after the artifacts and whatever she wants to do with them is fine by us. Now since all that is out of the way, Elenore mind giving your uncle a hug, since the last time I got one from you was when you were four."

"Of course Uncle Walter." Elenore said smiling and she hugged her uncle.

"I do have a question Uncle Walter. After grandfather died I went searching to see what had happened to you and mother and I found little to nothing can you explain?"

"Well in part that has to do with your mother's and mine cover jobs; we both work for Nafrece Intelligence. Your mother was kind of forced into it and I was a part N.I. already. The other part was I went by my married name."

"Married name? You're married?" Elenore asked a bit confused.

"Yes, when the gay marriage bill passed in Nafrece I married my partner and took his last name as my own which is Armitage which ironically is my code name but you two didn't hear that last bit, right?" Vanessa and Elenore nodded as Meg went and got the coffee.

As they all were sitting around drinking coffee a thought came to Vanessa.

"Meg, from what I understand you were asked to train Madlax in a few things so does that mean the man who trained her to be an agent is part of Les Justicars?" Vanessa asked.

"Oh Three Speed. Yes he is, he was originally sent to find out what happened to Richard Burton and your parents using an agent not with Les Justicars. I didn't like the fact he used Madlax like that, but there was little I could do but at least give some love and support along with the training. Speaking of Madlax if she or either you need a gun or ammo, in the west wing of the house there's an arsenal you can get one from. Walter can give the pass code to it." Meg answered.

"Uncle Walter, were you in the room with the book recently?" Elenore asked suspiciously.

"Yes that was me. After your grandfather died, I was given the task of up keeping the place without being seen by either you or Margaret. Don't ask me why the council didn't want me to be seen, to this day I still don't know the reason behind it but I suspect your grandfather to be behind that." Walter answered in a somewhat sad tone.

"Well that's all in the past now, I want us all to start fresh. Can you go the house Uncle Walter? I mean though the front door rather the way you get in to the west wing." Elenore asked.

"Well since you're my niece and you live there I could but I couldn't tell her if I was with Les Justicars. When I do come through the front door, it will be as your uncle Walter."

Elenore seemed satisfied with that answer and her spirits were lifted, now from being alone she had a family along with Margaret and Laetitia and she planned to share with the two of them.

"One last question, what about Noir? Why send us to them mother?" Elenore asked.

"Honestly sweetie, I don't know much about the Soldats, my duties never involved the Soldats. So I sent you to who I thought would give you the information maybe even gain a potential ally against the Soldats. But since you're with us now you can ask your uncle here, he's the Soldat expert." Meg answered.

"I don't know everything, but I can tell you what I do know if it can help. And if you can get Noir to help you that make a lot of people happy and some very unhappy." Walter said with a grin.

For a couple more hours Walter told them what he knew of the Soldats and then afterwards Elenore hugged her mother and uncle. Meg hugged Vanessa as well and both gave their goodbyes.

After they left they went food shopping and went home.

When they got home they unloaded the groceries and went to the living room where Limelda was sitting there holding the DVD case.

"A bit tame for my taste, but quite entertaining. Do you mind if I borrow a few more?" Limelda asked looking for a reaction from Vanessa.

"Really, you thought it was tame. Sure as long you remember our agreement." Elenore replied.

"I see you found Elenore's porn collection too. She's got a quite a number there. And yes I do know of Elenore's collection, in fact I've borrowed a few over the years." Vanessa said noticing the look of shock that Limelda was trying to hide.

"If we're done discussing my collection I would like go find out how to make tacos before Miss Margaret gets home and I'm sure Miss Jorg has some patrolling to do and Vanessa have some studying to do." Elenore said in somewhat mock anger with an eyebrow raised.

"Your right, I have some studying do. I'll be in my room studying." Vanessa said before hurrying off to studying.

"Well I've do another sweep of the house." Limelda said and she left.

Elenore grinned. "Well that takes care of that. Now to look up how to make tacos." And with that Elenore went and looked up how to make tacos.

As they both walked to school, Margaret could notice Madlax's excitement.

She couldn't quite understand why. School was interesting at times but not particularly exciting and having someone escort her like this felt excessive. She just felt she was burdening Madlax unnecessarily. "You ever had been to school, Madlax?" Margaret asked, out of curiosity.

"Other than the orphanage's school and what I've learned from Duvet, Three Speed and others, I never really attended a real school as a student but I've been to some on assignments but they were high schools. I heard we are going to a big university." Madlax replied.

"It's not that special." Margaret said a little sadly that Madlax had missed out on what she thought was a normal life.

"I think it will be fun." Madlax smiled, clapping her hands.

"Is that how a bodyguard acts?" Margaret asked, with a smile on her face.

"Only when she's happy and excited." Madlax answers cheerfully.

Soon, Margaret and Madlax arrived at the school's entrance and had to get through security. Margaret just showed her student card as usual and hoped they were properly informed and wouldn't raise any problem with Madlax.

"Miss Burton a pleasure to see you. Your personal assistant called and informed us that would have a bodyguard with you. I can understand with all that's been going on the city of late. Oh one more thing, it may be an isolated incident but the police have asked us to inform any student with domestic help to tell them be careful and limit their activities to daylight hours." The Security chief said to Margaret looking over Madlax.

"I would've figured it would've been a man, but I guess a man can't enter the ladies areas. Here's your pass, just do your job quietly and try not to spook the other students okay." The Security chief said in somewhat flirtatious and impressed tone.

"Thank you very much." Margaret replied happily at the security as she walked inside. "Well, let's go then Mad... Hmm Laetitia." She corrected in a hurry, remembering Madlax was supposed to be using a fake name.

As they moved inside they approached the building and walked directly towards the classroom. Margaret discreetly greeted back some of the students waiting outside with a timid "hi", but didn't really join them, as they were all chatting in small groups, going straight inside the room instead, and picking a seat by the window. Madlax followed and sit next to her as they awaited the class to start.

Madlax's initial joy was no longer apparent; her job was to protect Margaret even if they are bonded far stronger than guard and client. No emotion, no love or hate, a rather familiar routine for an agent of hire.

"Madlax, nobody followed me right?" Margaret asked

"Nobody yet, although those group of three students in the bottom row feel suspicious."

Madlax replied professionally.

"Margaret" Madlax said softly

"Yes" Margaret responded quietly

"What class is this for?" Madlax asked with a hint of embarrassment.

"Oh, it's calculus. It involves functions and derivatives and... It's kinda like math, I guess. We'll have the final exam tomorrow. Are you any good at it? Maybe you could help me out..."

Margaret replied quietly, showing her notebook to Madlax.

Madlax glanced over the book Margaret was looking at and balked. She had some schooling from Three Speed but he never taught her much math.

"I rather read the holy books than this." Madlax softly spoke to Margaret.

"What is this snake line? It looks like my page." Madlax whispered with a degree of surprise.

"That's an integral sign I think." Margaret giggled.

"I'll stick with shooting people thank you" Madlax joked in a black humor kind of way.

"Who's giggling at the back row?" the professor shouted.

"Uh Oh." Madlax whispered.

"Hmm... I'm sorry professor, it won't happen again." Margaret said hurriedly in a stressed out voice.

"Hope not Burton. There's a final exam tomorrow you know? If you can't stay focused just go back to sleep as you always do." The professor said in a harsh way, as the rest of the class tried to keep from laughing themselves, not to attract further reprehension.

"Yes professor, I'll focus. I'm sorry." Margaret replied in a humbled tone, sitting back and lowering her head in embarrassment.

"My, he sure is mean today. He must be looking forward to summer break as well." Margaret complained to Madlax, as silently as she could.

For the rest of the class they tried to keep quiet and unnoticed.

After all the classes were finished for the day, Margaret wanted to the campus library to look up any information about the Torc or Rhiannon. Margaret asked where was the Celtic mythology section was and she was guided there by one the assistant librarians. When they got there they saw a woman in her early twenties reading a book in one hand. What struck Margaret and Madlax as odd that the woman was tall as if not taller than Vanessa but she looked like Elenore but with green eyes? The woman turned her head towards them and said cheerfully. "Hello."

"Oh I'm sorry if it seems like I'm staring but you do look like someone I know. I'm Margaret Burton and this is my bodyguard Laetitia Luna." Margaret said holding out a hand.

"It's okay, I get that a lot. I do tend to resemble quite a few people. I'm Elsa Rene, pleasure to meet you Miss Burton." Elsa said shaking Margaret's hand.

Margaret looked at Elsa with her head tilted. "For some reason you so seem familiar, but I can't put my finger on it."

Elsa shrugged her shoulders. "So what brings you to the library?" She asked Margaret.

"I want to find out who is Rhiannon and her Torc, especially the part on how to work it."

Elsa smiled a bit and shook her head. "The thing is that Celtic mythology isn't that straight forward about things about that. But as for Rhiannon, she's one of the Goddess from the Mabinogi."

"Mabeenogee?" Margaret asked mispronouncing the word.

"Mabinogi, it's the collection of stories of Welsh mythology. As for Rhiannon; she is the Goddess of Horses as well as the comforter of those in distress or undergoing an ordeal."

"I didn't know that, but is there anything in the myths that can tell how the Torc works?"

Margaret asked with the feeling she could trust this woman somehow.

Elsa thought for a bit and then answered. "Not directly, but I think there is a way. Since the Torc is connected to emotions and the heart is considered the seat of emotions. What I'm trying to say instead of using your head to use the Torc use your heart instead. If you're looking for magic words; there aren't any, at least none that are written down. If I had the Torc I would

close my eyes at first and relax letting the Torc talk to me. Then I would put my hand as to reach out to who I wanted to comfort, at least that's what I would do."

Margaret thought over Elsa's words carefully and then she smiled as she realized something important. Shaking Elsa's hand with a knowing smile she said. "Thank you Elsa for your help. But we have to get going before Elenore starts to worry."

"You're welcome Margaret and nice meeting you "Laetitia"." Elsa replied and Madlax nodded as she and Margaret began to walk away.

As soon as Madlax and Margaret were out earshot Elsa smiled. "I hope that helps Aunt Margaret." Elsa pulled out a small tube with five different colored buttons and pressed a sequence and she faded away before Margaret or Madlax looked her way.

At the same time at the Burton home Vanessa poured over the book trying to glean information about the Torc and the other two artifacts. She mainly concentrated on the Torc and found some useful information though her study and she wrote them down.

Powers of the Torc?

1. Looking in people's hearts and see what they are feeling and what their desires are.
2. Though emotional manipulation comfort people in emotional distress.
3. Detect lies (she guessed that Rhiannon put that there after what happened to her)
4. Speak to the dead and if the wearer had a strong enough will, project an image of the dead person so that others could see.
5. Show visions of the past if said visions could end a feud or other problem
6. Prevent an enemy from attacking and if they were invaders tell to go home.
7. Give the wearer supernatural senses beyond normal human range
8. Aid the wearer in combat (slightly) if truly needed.

At least she could give Margaret this information and try to help her in learning how the Torc worked. The other two artifacts more of a mystery; there were fewer stories of the bracelet and other than the cattle raid of Cooley there were even less about the ring. In fact people seemed outright scared of the ring. (Well considering it was made by a jilted war Goddess it wasn't surprising in a male dominated Europe.)

She smiled as she looked over what she had and waited till Margaret got home.

After they left the library, Margaret and Madlax left the campus and started walking back home.

"I guess nothing unusual happened after all. Sorry I took all your day." Margaret told Madlax, wondering if she was somewhat disappointed.

"Well, at least you got to see what it is like in school. Did you like it?"

"I liked it but we didn't get to go to the cafeteria or bar and hang out. Plus I got a few interested looks. Less study!" Madlax shrugged happily.

"You're lazier than I am Madlax." Margaret giggled.

"That's not true, I don't just fall asleep!" Madlax teased casually then she got serious as her senses tingled as she felt as if they were being watched.

"Move quicker, someone is watching us" Madlax whispered to Margaret.

The two girls walked quickly and Madlax then promptly ran and tugged Margaret into a cafe around a crowded street.

"Who is watching us Madlax?" Margaret asked, gasping for some breath

"She's familiar, purple and creepy" Madlax replied.

Then the intruder from the other night flashed upon her mind.

"It's her" Madlax said.

"Her? Who is her, Madlax? Someone from before? How long do we have to wait here? "

Margaret asked curiously.

"She's an intruder from two nights before, creepy like Limelda but arms herself with knives".

Madlax said.

"What do we do now?" Margaret asked.

"We'll hide and have a snack. When it's clear we will go back." Madlax suggested.

Chloe had staked herself outside the university on the most likely route Margaret would take. For hours she waited, till she spotted her with that damn Mireille clone. Chloe was surprised that from judging from Madlax's actions as they ducked into a nearby café, knew she was watching. How did she know she was there? Did she have an unknown power? She would have to ask Lady Altena on what to do about Madlax. Chloe didn't realize that there was someone watching her.

Of all those who were roaming this city who were not supposed to be there, I had to start somewhere, so I decided to confront the most promising if the most disturbing sample. She leant against a brick wall facing the school, shadowing Madlax and Margaret not far off if she thought herself unnoticed, she was wrong, but it didn't seem to bother her. Her object was not simple subtlety. If the woman once thought to have governed over death was involved also, that would explain much, but would demand more questions.

But it is useless, I reminded myself, to speculate further. Now was the time for action. I walked slowly towards her along the wall, ramming my heels hard into the ground. I did not want her to think I had ill intentions.

That didn't stop her from drawing a knife when I was about five feet away.

"I am unarmed," I said.

Her eyes narrowed a trifle. Did she not believe me? Was there any trust left in that embattled mind?

"I know who you are. I know your past. You are a woman of intellect. A woman of quality. I just want to ask..." I hesitated a moment, watching for a reaction in that stern gaze, but there was none.

"...one question."

"If you survive, you can ask your question. I want to know who you are. Are you with *Enfant* or the *Justicars*?" Chloe began to throw a couple knives at Nakhl.

Surprised, but not unprepared, I spun and ducked, kicking my right shoe into my hand as I did so. It was the nearest thing I had for a weapon and she didn't seem in a mood to be reasoned with.

"Would you believe me if I told you?" I said, dashing into the alleyway behind me. Getting the police involved was the last thing I wanted, and this was better made a private encounter. A second knife thudded into the wall inches from my ear. "Do you even care?" Tracing her path behind me, I cast the shoe. She caught it, as I thought she might. "And does that look familiar?"

"You move quite well, I would've killed you by now if you were with *Enfant* or the *Justicars*. Actually I'm having fun, do you know how boring it is watching that ditz. Her sister is lot more interesting, at least I know she would put a fight." Chloe said tossing the shoe down and throwing a couple more knives before pulling out a combat knife. "I don't suppose you have a name? It would be shame not to know who you are before I kill you." Chloe said as she rushed at *Nakhl* with combat knife in hand.

"Do you enjoy underestimating people?" I replied, flicking the other shoe into my hand. The cold cement met my feet with a welcoming chill. It was better this way. "Names are meaningless. I am but one who leads to another. I gave you a clue, and you threw it away."

I caught one knife in my free hand, and parried the second away with it. She seemed prepared for that, as she was already rushing at me with the melee weapon, but why? So irrational...such blind hate...She rushed at me, hearing but heeding not, just as I saw her, but I was not watching her, but the unseen visage of the one whose ears took in every word. I shut my eyes, and let instinct guide the blade in my hand against Chloe's just one glance, and her momentum took her past me. She spun to strike again, while I, facing away, held the remaining shoe behind me.

"Red shoes, Chloe. Is that what interested you in Margaret? Is that why you dislike *Madlax*? Is it because of her?"

"I could care less about that little fool. Her own sister served her for years and it never dawned on her that they were sisters. *Madlax*? You mean that poor man's copy of *Mireille*?! Oh she reminds me of her all right, but at least I can kill her without worrying about someone else thinks..." Chloe spat as she fought *Nakhl*, trying to get an opening. No doubt this woman was quite good, far better than any *Enfant* or *Justicar* or anyone else she had fought except *Kirika*.

Kirika stood behind a tree, making sure not to be seen. She and *Mireille* had found a dinky, no-tell motel, and settled in without hearing from *Badgis*. She had woken up early and left *Mireille* a note explaining where she was going. Somewhere along the way, *Kirika* took out the ring, took one last look at it, and then tossed it, figuring she was never going to use it anyway.

She got through the university security by posing as an exchange student, and spent the morning watching Margaret in class; far from a boring affair. In fact, she paid rapt attention to her, as if she'd never seen a college student before.

Afterward, she started following *Madlax* and Margaret home. But then the clank of a throwing knife distracted her. She gasped silently when she saw Chloe, apparently stalking her target.

She was fighting with another woman who apparently was yet another expert stalker/assassin. Kirika hid around the corner from them and listened in...

"But you do need to worry, Chloe, about one person," I replied. She was desperately trying to take me off my guard why did she not tempt me to attack? Because she knew I wouldn't? Or was this just her style to attack furiously until the other broke?

"What about yourself? What is there here for you to hate...or love...? That is my question. Why are you here?"

I'm here because she told me to! If I had my choice I would go to the one I love! Why are you here?" Chloe spat as she continued to fight.

Kirika looked on with interest. So that was why Chloe was following them?

Because the blonde--Madlax--reminded her of Mireille, and not because Margaret was to be the next Noir? She would have to ask Chloe about it later.

Also, apparently there was another group opposing the Soldats, called the Justicars. Were they after Mireille and her too?

But what unsettled her most was the nimble blond woman who was making sport of Chloe. She thought no one on the world was better than Chloe, except herself. Now she had someone else to watch out for; someone who might be a match for her.

That was ten questions; you answered them all, and far better than I had anticipated. It seems combat is the drug that loosens your tongue, but now I know all that I need to know," I said calmly, parrying another flurry of attacks. She lunged too fast again, and I leapt off the wall onto a nearby roof, dropping the remaining shoe on the ground. "May I keep this?" I added the knife in hand as she poised to follow me. She looked up at me in disgust at the words she valued too well it was all the time I needed to disappear over the other side. Would she follow me, I wondered? Would her curiosity drive her to me again? I hoped so, for the girl had quality

A deep, gentle soul under that mire of hate called Noir. Evidently, the woman once thought to rule over death was alive and well and that was the most disturbing thing I learnt from the exchange. Yet her eyes the fury of her love for Kirika was still strong.

It could be her salvation - or her demise, I reflected.

As soon as Kirika threw away the ring and walked away a raven took the ring in its beak and flew off with it. The raven flew a bit till the ebon bird caught sight of two people; a small red haired girl and a maid walking home. The raven flew down and buzzed Laetitia. Elenore tried to swat the bird away. The bird dropped the ring and flew away. Elenore noticed the ring and it's Celtic design.

"Are you okay, Laetitia?" Elenore asked with the ring in her hand.

"I'm fine, but that bird did scare me." Laetitia answered.

Elenore smiled trying to comfort Laetitia.

"Those kinds of birds are attracted to shiny things so your hair must've reflected just right for it to take notice." Elenore explained in a comforting tone.

"Really I didn't know that. Hmm...That's something I have to read about." Laetitia said her curiosity piqued.

As they walked home Elenore looked at the ring. It looked nice, no doubt the raven or crow saw it and took it from somebody. The ring looked about her size and she guessed it wouldn't hurt to try it on, she decided to turn it in to the police when she got the chance.

Elenore put the ring on and the world around her turned black. She could see a woman in ancient Irish armor being spurned by a warrior with a large unusual spear. Then she saw an image of the same woman holding the head of the warrior in her arms and weeping.

Then she images of herself being attacked first when was younger and then when she was shot by those soldiers all the while the same question came up over and over again; "Do you want revenge?"

Laetitia sensed a presence but she didn't where it was coming from. Above them ravens, crows and blackbirds took to the sky cawing all the while and she got frightened.

"Elenore?" Laetitia asked Elenore in frightened tone tugging on her sleeve.

"What is it Laetitia? Oh something must have spooked the birds, let's get home before something happens." Elenore answered snapping out of the trance and picking up Laetitia and nearly running the rest of the way home.

Elenore and Laetitia got home without incident and they went into the house and Laetitia went and looked up information on ravens and crows.

Elenore heard an Irish woman's voice in her head. "Don't mention me to the others I'm here just yet. It's not the right time yet. Do you understand?" Elenore nodded as the ring turned blended in with her flesh. "Good, I will help you when you need me the most. Now be a good lass and make supper and act if nothing has happened."

In another plane; the two Goddesses were greeted by a third.

"Ah Morrigan I see you found your champion. But why the cloak?" Rhiannon asked noticing that Morrigan had a hood over her face.

"Aye I did. My first choice rejected me so I went with my second. As for the hood, let's say I want to keep it a surprise, Hmmm." Morrigan replied

Margaret stood still as she heard the three Goddesses arguing.

"What do you mean a surprise?" Rhiannon asked.

"Your champion hasn't figured out how use the Torc and my champion might distract her.

Besides Brigid's champion hasn't shown up yet." Morrigan replied.

"For your information, my chosen bearer has figured it out already." Rhiannon replied with grin.

"She's getting there; in fact she'll be there for supertime. I'm also curious why the cloak?"

Brigid added.

"They haven't even figured out where to take them and besides there's a few people I want to play "tag" with." Morrigan smiled wickedly.

"If I'm not mistaken, your idea of "tag" involves people becoming corpses. Am I right?"

Rhiannon asked trying to look under Morrigan's hood.

"Oh quite correct and since you've been trying to see under my hood, I might as well show you." Morrigan replied and she step in front of Rhiannon and removed the hood. The shocked look on Rhiannon snapped Margaret back to reality without knowing who Morrigan's champion was.

Back at the cafe Madlax noticed Margaret's strange and sudden reaction.

"Is something wrong, Margaret?" She asked surprised.

"Oh... I... hmm... I think it was the Torc trying to tell me something again. I could hear these voices in my head, they were arguing... I can't say for sure what just happened Madlax, but I think we might find the other two artifacts pretty soon."

"Oh well...should we head back home? Is it safe already? Or would you like another cup?" - Margaret asked, noticing they had both finished their tea already.

"Wait a second." as Madlax approached and peeked out the shop window, she could feel this woman but she seemed slightly distracted. "I better get her out now, she seemed rather distracted". She said to herself.

"Margaret let's go quickly" as Madlax pulled Margaret's arm as the shocked young lady quickly throws her note for the orange pekoe tea.

As they ran quickly Madlax saw Chloe shouting at Nakhl. From her lips she was saying "Madlax, You mean that poor man's copy of Mireille?!" "What I'm a poor man's copy, that's a mean thing to say. Who is this Mireille anyway? What is Nakhl doing here? Not time for that now, I need to get Margaret out of sight" she thought to herself.

She slid herself and Margaret in the small bushes of a small park nearby.

"That hurt Madlax." Margaret said. Madlax held Margaret in her arms and put her hand over her mouth. "Sorry, Shhh" she whispered and waited patiently.

"I think we lost her." as she slowly released her grip on Margaret.

"This isn't fun anymore." Margaret said with a sulky voice, as she got up, brushing the leaves from her head and clothes. "How many people were after us? Is it safe to go back now?" She asked apprehensively.

"I don't do this to you because I enjoy it you know." Madlax answered slightly agitated at Margaret's sulkiness.

"The close is clear, there was a couple but only the purple haired one I was worried about, let's go its safe now" as she led her out of the bushes. Then Margaret got a tug on the Torc and she took a good look at her surroundings and gasped.

"This is the place!"

"What's the place?" Madlax asked a bit confused.

"You know the vision where I saw Elenore's grandfather and mother sitting in the park. This is that park! This way!" Margaret said excitedly as she felt she was on to something.

Margaret raced to the bench and then suddenly stopped and looked in shock. Madlax followed behind and almost crashed into Margaret when she made her sudden stop and she was a bit confused and wondering how was she seeing this? There sitting on the bench was Elenore when she was twelve looking at the ground with her hands on her slightly distended belly. She seemed to be a little pale as well. Margaret cautiously approached Elenore and sat down beside her.

"Hi are you okay? You don't look so well." Margaret asked.

"I just feel a little nauseous Miss thank you for asking." Elenore replied.

Margaret put her hand on Elenore's forehead and in a flash she knew what was really going on as the image of Elenore disappeared. It became clear to her what had happened to Elenore at the graveyard but she got the feeling this wasn't just all about Elenore; someone else was involved. She resolved to confront Elenore with this as soon she got home.

"Margaret what was that all about?" Madlax asked a bit confused.

"I'm not exactly sure, but I'm sure Elenore could fill in the rest. Let's go home Madlax."

Margaret said a bit sadly and after the danger had passed and the strange image/ vision (?) the two walked back home without further incident.

Chloe managed to escape from Nakhl. She was upset and impressed at the same time. She didn't know who she was or why she had to pick a fight with her, but she was good. She knew that Enfant had no one like that and the Justicars recently had to put the only who could stand up to her on the shelf. She had lost track of Margaret and that unsettled her and well as being goaded into answering her questions instead of hers being answered. So Chloe stewed for a while.

"Chloe," Kirika said, showing herself.

"Is it true? Are you really after the blonde in the photo? Do you want to kill her because you're still jealous of Mireille? Why are the Soldats after us? And who are the Justicars? Who was that blonde girl?" Kirika asked question after question, figuring Chloe would know the answers as well as anyone, and if Chloe would tell anyone, she'd tell her.

"Quite pathetic wasn't it. She played me like a puppet and I never got to know her name. I guess there will be a next time. As for your questions; yes I'm after her and as for me being jealous, well you'll have to figure that one out, but I think you know the answer to that one. And as for the Justicars, let's say them and us have a shared history. We have been battling each other for centuries just because they didn't like how we wanted to do things. This nation was created because of them, bunch of self righteous bastards. Oh that's right you asked why we're after you again, well isn't obvious. I'm sure Mireille has figured it out if you haven't yet. Perhaps when all this is over and you survive, you and I can be together once again. Till our next encounter..." Chloe said and she walked off into the shadows...

Kirika walked away, deep in thought. She filed away the Justicars as some squabble that didn't concern her or Mireille. The blonde, however, still concerned her; what if she came after her and Mireille next? This hatred Chloe had for the blonde in the photo--Madlax--also worried her. She knew how Chloe felt about her and how much it hurt when she chose Mireille over her, but Madlax was an innocent bystander. She didn't deserve Chloe's hatred. She walked back to her and Mireille's place to share the news.

Earlier that day; after a good night's sleep after wandering the city all day yesterday Ellis and Nadie woke up in their room. Now that they were in Nafrece Nadie wondered what they should do now. "Ellis does that bracelet tell you anything?" She asked a tad annoyed that she had no idea what to do.

Ellis thought for a bit trying to remember if the bracelet said anything. "I guess we wait?" "Great, now what do we do in the meantime, I would ask Blueeyes but she's nowhere to be found." Nadie said with a frustrated tone.

"I know we can find Meg." Ellis said trying to cheer her partner up or least get her out her grouchy mood.

"How are going to do that? This is a big city you know." Nadie said still in a grouchy mood.

"How about this?" Ellis said holding her hand up to show the bracelet.

"We don't even know what it does." Nadie replied a bit skeptical and worried.

Ellis pictured Meg in her hand and held out her hand with the bracelet on it. The bracelet glowed briefly and Ellis smiled.

"Well?" Nadie asked a bit curious.

"I know where we can find Meg; the bracelet gave directions to her house." Ellis said still smiling.

"Okay, we can go there for now till we can figure out what to do next. Let's go." Nadie replied.

"Yessir" Ellis replied and the pair left their room and walked to Meg's house.

The pair walked a couple hours with Ellis leading the way. Of course Ellis wanted to look at the buildings, the people and any other odd thing she noticed which given her senses was quite a lot and all those stops added another hour to their trip.

Finally they got to Meg's place and before they got to the front door.

"Let's not tell her about the bracelet or that you're a witch okay." Nadie told Ellis.

"Yessir" Ellis replied and they walked up to the front door and knocked.

Meg answered expecting it to be Elenore returning but was a bit surprised to see Nadie and Ellis.

"Well more unexpected visitors today. What brings you two to my home and how did you know where to find it?" Meg asked a bit puzzled.

"We didn't know what to do next in the city so we decided to see you. As for finding the place we asked around till we got directions." Nadie said hiding the fact that bracelet led them there. Meg shrugged, they didn't seem to be lying and since she was the only person who really bothered to talk to them so it seemed natural they would look her up.

"Care for some lunch, I can't promise you tacos but I can whip something." Meg asked inviting them in.

"Thanks, we're a bit hungry from all that walking." Nadie replied as they entered Meg's home.

"You said you've had visitors here earlier, what happened. Hope no one bad," Ellis asked.

"My brother decided to pay me a visit and then you wouldn't guess who came after him." Meg said with knowing grin on her face.

"Who?" Ellis asked very curiously.

"My daughter, managed to find me and we had a good long talk." Meg replied leaving a great deal of detail.

"You mean Browneyes was here?!" Ellis exclaimed.

"Browneyes?! Why call her that?" Nadie asked.

"You call Jodie, Blueeyes and she's a friend..." Ellis replied in somewhat of a pout.

"Yeah, but you don't know her daughter to call her something like that." Nadie replied keeping on Meg to look for a reaction.

"Browneyes? Well, I suppose she does have brown eyes and I think it would do her good to have a nickname. I'm glad you remembered that Ellis." Meg warmly said with a smile.

Nadie just shrugged in surrender.

For the next couple hours over lunch Nadie, Ellis and Meg talked about their lives without giving much detail or any secrets for that matter.

They thanked Meg for lunch and asked her about where else in the city they could go. Meg told them of the park nearby and few other places of potential interest.

They left Meg's home with full belly's and someplace to go and so they went to the park and went exploring along the way neither realizing the bracelet was subtly guiding them towards Margaret's home.

Nadie and Ellis wandered around for few more hours then Ellis looked east and started to head in that direction rapidly. It took all the effort Nadie could muster to keep up. Ellis was leaping from building to building and Nadie running all the way till they got to a large gated house.

There Ellis stood and Nadie caught up panting.

"Why did you do that Ellis?" Nadie asking trying to catch her breath.

"The bracelet told me to come here as fast as I could." Ellis explained the best she could.

Nadie grumbled and asked; "Why did the bracelet asked you to come here?"

"Because it said she's coming and we'll have tacos!" Ellis replied with a big grin on her face.

Nadie looked at Ellis exasperated, this weird bracelet had led them to someplace and for some reason and for tacos?!

"Taco taco Tacosu" Ellis sang as she waited...

As they got home, Margaret and Madlax walked through the front gates and approached the front door to find two strange girls standing around.

Margaret had never seen these people before and she sure wasn't expecting any visits and she was concentrating on confronting Elenore. Still, she didn't really consider for a while they might have been enemies and casually started talking to them.

"Hmm... Hello? Can I help you? I live here, is there something you need?" She addressed the younger girl, who was standing closer.

"Hello I'm Ellis and this is Nadie. I hope we're at the right place, I was told to wait for the girl with the Torc and there would be tacos." Ellis said waving with the hand with the Bracelet on it.

Nadie was looking over the pair that walked up and hoping that Ellis hadn't got them into another mess. Ellis was talking to apparently the owner of the house, but the other girl got Nadie's attention. She looked like a bodyguard or bounty hunter from the way she looked and stood and she knew both Ellis and her were being checked out as well.

Madlax looked into the two strange girls at the front gate. She was checking the smaller young blonde who seemed clueless, the redhead on the other hand seemed street wiser and the way she looked indicated she was a gun for hire. Although she felt the redhead in the poncho was dangerous she felt they weren't against them. Actually Madlax felt they were sort of comical and this allayed her fears a bit.

"Hello I'm Margaret Burton and this is Madlax" as Margaret introduced herself.

"Where are you from?" Madlax asked.

"Mexico." Nadie replied.

"Oh Mexico, you eat tacos right?" Madlax answered as this was about the only thing she knew about Mexico which earned her a sideway glance from Nadie who didn't look happy about that statement.

"Oh tacos! That's funny, I usually have pasta, but for some odd coincidence we're having tacos for dinner tonight... Would you two please stay over for dinner with us? We've been learning about and trying to gather these artifacts actually, and I see you heard about them already, so I'd really like to talk about it with you two. But before we get to that there is something important I need to do." Margaret invited enthusiastically, glad that one of the other two artifacts had already appeared as she had felt a while ago. It seemed things were starting to feel a bit easier and she felt relieved at it. Hopefully it'd all be solved soon.

"Looks like they're in the same boat we are, maybe we can find a way to get this bracelet off of Ellis." Nadie thought.

"Sure, thanks. Looks like we both have the same problem." Nadie replied to Margaret.

Ellis' reaction was different; she went into the Amigo Taco dance and singing the catch phrase. Nadie was flabbergasted. "The sooner we get that bracelet off the better."

"That's great! Yeah, it's been a problem for me as well, but me and my friends have been working together on this and I'm sure we'll be able to solve it soon! Let's get inside then." Margaret said, as she led them to the front door and she reached into her pocket and remembered she forgot her key again so she rang the doorbell.

Elenore heard the bell and opened the door. She saw Margaret, Madlax and two other women with them, but since they didn't have weapons drawn and Madlax was in somewhat of a relaxed mood she didn't think they were any threat. "Welcome home Miss Margaret. Who are these ladies with you?" Elenore greeted Margaret cheerfully.

"Browneyes!" Ellis exclaimed (till the day she died in the far future, other than a few very rare occasions Ellis continued to call Elenore that.)

Elenore looked a bit confused and then Nadie clarified and explained how they met Elenore's mother and why Ellis called her "Browneyes".

"Oh I see, well that's a very nice compliment." Elenore said knowing on some instinctive level that trying to correct her was going to be futile at the best.

"Dinner will be served shortly Miss." Elenore said but she was interrupted by Margaret before she could say anything else.

"Elenore, I had another vision and it was about you and..." Margaret said hurriedly.

Elenore looked at Margaret and she wondered what this vision was about and why her of all people? "Let's get inside Miss and I'll fetch Vanessa and then you can tell us." Elenore said with Margaret nodding in agreement and they went in and Elenore closed the door behind them and then she and Margaret went to go find Vanessa.

Madlax watched as Margaret and Elenore rush off and then she turned her attention to the newest guests of the Burton household. She felt relaxed around them and glad to have friendly company for once noticing that the pair was impressed with the opulence of Margaret's home and she decided to loosen them up.

"Hey while we are waiting can you teach me your taco dance?" Madlax asked of Nadie.

"Taco dance? Why are you asking me? Ellis was the one who did it." Nadie said a bit confused on why Madlax asked her and then she sighed in resignation.

"Have to admit, Ellis' version was cute. But I'll show you how it's done." Nadie said with Ellis waiting for Nadie to do the dance.

"You do it really well Nadie." Ellis said cheerfully.

Nadie did the taco dance along with the Amigo Taco's theme song and Ellis clapped.

"Yay Nadie! See I told you, you do it better than me." Nadie was a bit embarrassed. "Well yeah. When's dinner? I'm starved." She said trying to cover up her embarrassment.

Madlax noticed and then she remembered the vision as well. "It should be soon, but I think we have small crisis on our hands."

"Is there anything we can do to help?" Nadie asked feeling little more embarrassed.

"No, it's a family matter but I can tell you what has been going on while we wait."

Madlax led the pair into the living room where she began to tell what she knew of the last couple days and then Nadie and Ellis told their side of the story while they waited.

Margaret and Elenore went to Vanessa's room and knocked on the door. After hearing Vanessa's answer they went in. She noticed the look on Margaret and Elenore's faces and asked what had happened.

Then Margaret told them both what she and Madlax had seen in the park. Then she told what she did all the while Elenore was looking at the floor in shame.

"She knows now Elenore, so you might as well tell us the full story. I have a good idea on what happened." Vanessa said with a sympathetic yet deeply concerned tone.

Elenore took a deep breath and said; "Please follow me to my room and have a few things that might help explain."

Vanessa nodded and Margaret sadly looked in silence at Elenore as they both follow her to her room. Once there Elenore went to the closet and pulled out a small box.

"That vision you had was quite true; I was sexually assaulted after visiting my grandfather's grave and I was beaten up as well."

"Why didn't you tell me Elenore?! I could've gone to the police!" Vanessa asked in a mix of sadness, anger and concern.

"At the time I didn't know you as well as I do now. Plus I was threatened if I told anyone or went to the police that he would come and kill my family and me and all I had for family was Margaret. I had lost my grandfather and I didn't know that my mother and uncle were still alive and I was afraid of losing the only family I believe I had left; Margaret." Elenore replied tears flowing down her cheeks.

Vanessa looked at Elenore sadly; she had a feeling there was more to this tragedy. "Go on..." She said bracing herself for what was to come.

Elenore took another deep breath and continued; "I soon found out I was pregnant and I decided to keep the baby; at least the three of us could be a family and something good would come out of that. But it didn't turn out that way; for just about the entire pregnancy I grew sicker and sicker for some reason as if my body trying to keep the baby alive. I didn't make it to the third trimester as the baby came out premature. She was so tiny and sick, they put her on life support but it didn't help; she died less than two hours after she was born. I didn't get the chance to hold my child and looking through a glass plate as she tried hang on for dear life.

When she died and after the autopsy I had her cremated and had her ashes placed in a steel urn." The tears were streaming down Elenore's face as she looked toward the cradle and Vanessa's eyes lit up in shock as Elenore went to the cradle and lifted the doll from it.

"I then placed the urn in the only other thing in this world that any sentimental value to me; this doll my mother gave to me and if anything should happen to me I left instructions that this doll be buried with me if all possible." Elenore said holding the doll close.

Vanessa was in shock; what could she say? Where the visions just to remind Elenore of those tragedies? She looked at Margaret for a reaction and saw that tears were flowing down her face as well and the Torc was beginning to glow brightly.

Margaret was having a silent conversation with the Torc; *"How?! How am I supposed to help? How can I comfort her? I feel so helpless in this situation, please if you can help I'm humbly asking. Please help Elenore."*

Margaret heard a sigh of relief and then a familiar Welsh woman's voice spoke with warmth and kindness; "Finally, Margaret you figured it out. You asked for my help and I shall grant it. All you need do; is place your hand on Elenore."

Margaret reached out with her right hand and placed it on Elenore's shoulder. The Torc glowed brightly and the world seemed to blur for a moment and Margaret couldn't focus on her surroundings. When she regained her focus she found that she wasn't in Elenore's bedroom anymore and that both Elenore and Vanessa were here with her, at least that gave her comfort. From what the trio could see they were in an immense throne room; the pillars though made of stone resembled trees right down to the leaves and texture of the bark. The floor was tiled with Celtic designs from what they could see from the red carpet they were standing on.

"Come forward and tell me of your troubles." They heard a familiar yet older sounding voice in a definite Welsh accent. All three looked at each other silently and then they began to walk. As they were walking towards the voice they noticed that between the pillars were huge marble statues of horses and they got the feeling that they were watching them as they approached the throne. The throne unlike the rest of the room had a very ancient feel to it; it was made of what appeared to be a huge stone carved by the winds and rain to resemble a throne. There sitting on the throne in a regal manner but deep in thought and dressed in ornate robes of purple and blue was a woman that looked like an older version of Margaret. The trio stopped before the dais and got on their knees in respect. With a mere gesture of her hand she silently bade them to rise.

Vanessa stepped a little forward and asked humbly; "Lady Rhiannon, may I ask where we are?" Rhiannon smiled and answered; "You're in my throne room and before you ask why you're here Vanessa Rene, you're here as a witness and to give love and support to your friends."

Vanessa looked at Margaret and Elenore and smiled as she stepped back. Then Rhiannon spoke again;

"I'm proud of you Margaret; not only did you managed to figure out a way to operate my Torc you did it on your own intuitive. You asked me to help Elenore and so I shall, complicated as this situation is, so in that light we'll address one issue at a time. The thing is Elenore doesn't want to burden her loved ones with her problems so she keeps them hidden even when she shouldn't. Let's start with her PTS; that Margaret is something that she must deal with herself all you can do is give her the love and support you can and give her a nudge when she needs it. "Rhiannon noticed that Margaret wanted to say something. " Go on, what is it that you wish to say."

"Thank you Lady Rhiannon. I understand and I'll do the best I can but something puzzles me; you showed me visions of my father shooting a man I thought was Elenore's father and then you showed me visions of Elenore being attacked and then of her in the park holding her belly. I'm confused, how are these connected?"

"I apologize for that, my intention was to test you but another issue came up that I wanted you to be aware of. As for the meaning of your father shooting someone in your home; I believe that Elenore has the answers to that, Elenore please tell her." Rhiannon said in an apologetic tone and then she gestured to Elenore to speak.

"What I'm about to tell you, I learned well...yesterday and your visions helped me get the truth from my mother. From what I had gathered; my mother had broken up with her boyfriend long before than what it said on the police report. So your...no our father had an affair with my mother and she became pregnant with me and all this happened before you were born. What I'm trying to say Margaret is that I'm your half sister and I know it may be hard to believe, that's why I wanted to have hard evidence before I told you. I'm sorry I had to keep it from you but I honestly got scared of how you would react to all this." Elenore said in an apologetic but explanatory tone and waited for Margaret's reaction.

As Margaret processed this information it all started to make sense to her. Sure it was shocking and sure it hit hard inside, it was difficult to accept such a thing about her father, even though she hardly knew him. But now she already knew two things, and none of them spoke in his favor. Not only had he betrayed her as a father, 12 years ago, when he tried to kill her, but he also betrayed her mother as a husband, even before she was born. What could this mean? It immediately crossed her mind, how much her own existence might have been an unwanted one. And was this perhaps the main reason why her father tried to kill her before? Now it all made sense, Margaret acknowledged, as tears started falling from her eyes.

"I loved guess he never me. He might have hated me, even. That's why he did that! I understand now Elenore, thank you. Thank you very much for telling me this!" Margaret hugged Elenore strongly and silently let her tears fall for a few minutes.

"I... I just want you to know this doesn't change anything between us. You were like a sister to me all this time, and knowing now that you are for real, by blood, it doesn't honestly make much of a difference to me, Elenore. But, as I told you two days ago, and I really must insist now, you can't keep working for me. I mean, we'll work out something different, I'll help you out, or we'll hire someone else. It wouldn't be fair for you to keep it like this, under the circumstances, don't you agree?" Margaret approached this issue, feeling much calmer and rational after the initial shock.

Elenore felt as if a great weight was taken off her shoulders and in the mindscape the chains that bound her began to break and disappear holding Margaret close and smiling." I agree, but right now we have to deal with this current mess that we are in and we'll deal with it as a family after we'll figure something out." She said to Margaret and then she turn to Rhiannon and humbly asked; "Lady Rhiannon, what the visions of me? And what is this other issue you spoke of?"

Rhiannon smiled and she spoke; "This issue has somewhat to do with the reason that Margaret asked for my help. But in all honesty there's nothing that could be fixed, it was a terrible tragedy, one that could've been prevented had your grandfather been a little less vengeful. All that can be done Margaret is to give her support and your love but that's not the crux of the matter. When I came into this house when the Torc was on Vanessa Rene's neck I ran into this young soul." Rhiannon looked to her right and smiled and she waved her right hand as to beckon someone. A little girl that resembled a chubbier version of Elenore came to the throne, curtsied and then looked at the trio standing before the throne.

"In the spirit world souls of the deceased resemble what they looked like in life but since this little one died before she could grow she grew here in this realm. In her grief, guilt and her need for family Elenore unintentionally bound her dead daughter's soul to her by placing her ashes in the doll. "Rhiannon explained as Elenore looked in horror. "I didn't know...how could I do that? I didn't mean any harm I just wanted you near me. I'm so sorry, please forgive me." Elenore said in tears falling to her knees.

Elenore's daughter looked at Rhiannon who nodded and she walked in front of her mother and smiled. "I forgive you mommy." Then she looked at Rhiannon and asked innocently; "Please, can I?"

Rhiannon smiled and answered;" Normally the living aren't supposed to touch the dead, but since your mother had died once that exception come into play. So yes you can give your mother a hug Margaret."

Little Margaret hugged her mother and Elenore silently held her child tight letting the tears silently flow for a few minutes.

"I love you and I miss you. I didn't mean to chain you here and if there is something I can do to break the chain I'll do it."

"I love you too mommy, but I don't know how to break the chain." Little Margaret replied.

"That I can help with, you just need to take urn out of the doll and bury the urn. That should break the chain and eventually your daughter will head toward the light." Rhiannon said with a knowing smile.

"Where do I bury it at?" Elenore asked a bit confused.

Margaret listened to the entire exchange and she thought and then she got an idea.

"I know where Elenore!" She said excitedly.

"Where?" Elenore asked.

"There's that statue of that baby angel in the garden we can bury the urn next to." Margaret replied.

Tears ran down Elenore's face. "Thank you Margaret...Once we get out of here I'll...no we'll do this together as a family."

Rhiannon smiled and she spoke with joy and warmth. "Now Margaret Baker say good bye to your mother, she needs to go back to the world of the living for now."

"Bye mommy, I love you." Little Margaret said cheerfully.

"I will always love you too sweetie no matter where you go, good bye Margaret." Elenore said with tears in her eyes.

"It's okay, you can go now." Little Margaret said with a smile and then the world seemed to blur again and Elenore, Margaret and Vanessa found themselves outside in the garden standing in front of the statue of the baby angel.

But what surprised the trio was; Vanessa was holding a shovel and there was a small pile of dirt in front of the statue indicating that something had been buried there. Elenore holding her doll but it felt much lighter and the busted seams giving evidence that something had been removed. Margaret's hand was on the front of the base of the statue and when she moved it she saw there was some carved writing and she guessed she had done it but she had no tools and she wondered how she did it.

They read the words and tears began to flow from all three;

Here lies

Margaret Meg Baker

B. May 11th 2004

D. May 11th 2004

Beloved Daughter

Beloved Niece

Margaret hugged Elenore and they both cried on each other's shoulders and then they heard a girl's crying and they turned to see Laetitia standing there with a very sad look on her face.

"Laetitia, how long have you been standing there?" Margaret asked a bit surprised while wiping the tears from her eyes.

"Since you three came out here. I went to Elenore's room looking for you three and when I was going to knock you all came out and marched outside holding the doll. The Torc was glowing brightly and I got curious and followed. When you got here Miss Vanessa got a shovel and dug a hole and then Elenore took something out the doll and put it in the hole and then Vanessa covered it up. But what was really interesting was when Margaret took her finger and wrote on the statue and then words came."

"Did all that really happen?" Elenore asked a bit confused herself.

"Yes." Laetitia answered seeing the looks of confusion on their faces.

"We must've done it while we were in the throne room. Laetitia, how bright was the Torc glowing?" Vanessa added and then asked Laetitia.

"I could read by it." She answered.

Margaret touched the Torc and she wondered how powerful it truly was if it could make them do things they weren't aware of.

"I guess Lady Rhiannon wanted this done so she made sure it was done." Vanessa said looking at the Torc.

"Oh by the way Laetitia why were you looking for us?" Margaret asked.

"I was going to ask when dinner is because our guests are getting hungry and Madlax is making them do silly dances." Laetitia answered and Elenore's and Margaret's eyes lit up.

"I totally forgot about them!" Margaret said

"We better head indoors, hopefully it didn't get cold! Oh everybody wash their hands." Elenore said as she headed toward the back door with Margaret and Vanessa close behind.

Laetitia looked at the statue come grave marker and said quietly; "Good bye Margaret, I'm sorry we didn't get a chance to play together."

Then she heard a small voice on the wind.

"Good bye Aunt Laetitia..."

After they all got back inside and cleaned up, they went to the living room. Along with Madlax, Limelda was also in the living room."

"I'm sorry about that. I hope we didn't keep you both waiting long."

"It's okay, we understand." Ellis smiled knowingly.

"Well now that everyone is in the living room, we have something important to discuss about the artifacts, and that's the real reason why Ellis and Nadie are here." Margaret said with enthusiasm.

Laetitia looked over the new visitors. She looked at Ellis and with her head cocked to one side said one word to her which confused Ellis;"Blodeuwedd"

"Blodeuwedd? What does that mean?" A confused Ellis asked as everyone sat in the living room.

"Blodeuwedd? What does that mean?" as Madlax whispered to Vanessa. This confusion and the artifacts made Madlax feel once again she was different; the outsider, she's not directly connected but somehow she is. This is not her moment or event, but she feels something profound may happen and she stood attentively waiting.

"It's Old Welsh for flower face. Blodeuwedd was created by the Wizard King Math ap Mathomwy to be a substitute wife for Lleu who was cursed to never have a real woman as his wife. Dr Tudor speculates it was the primitive Celts trying to describe a clone by the way she was made as the three plants represent a DNA chain, but that's just speculation." Vanessa said seeing the sad look on Ellis' face but her explanation only made Ellis sadder.

"I wasn't trying to hurt your feelings but that's what sense when I look at you. I'm sorry."

Laetitia said apologetically.

"I'm sorry as well if my explanation upset you." Vanessa added also apologetically.

Ellis smiled at Laetitia." It's okay. You are a very clever girl, that's what the bracelet told me. But your right by calling me that."

Ellis said and for the next few minutes Ellis with the help of the bracelet told of her origins which shocked everyone in the room and surprised Nadie who would've never guessed that Ellis would tell her story.

An awkward silence filled the room, wondering what to say...

Margaret was deeply touched by Ellis' story. She was reminded of Madlax and her struggle to keep her existence. She remembered that time eight months ago when she had the chance to erase Madlax and Laetitia but decided to keep them as individual beings, free to live their own lives, regardless of their origin. This was also what she was trying to accomplish now for Poupee, give him the chance to live the life he gave away for her, long ago. Margaret slowly approached Ellis and hugged her sincerely, with tears on her eyes.

"Even if you never had parents... even if you were artificially created... your life is yours to keep and live the way you want please remember that always." Margaret said as she held Ellis close, breaking the embrace a few seconds later and looking at her with a kind smile.

"Ellis, I have this." Margaret revealed the Torc around her neck, under her shirt collar. "At first I didn't want it, and I was annoyed it just came to me and I couldn't remove it. But I've been told if we gather the three artifacts, mine, yours and the Ring of Morrigan, at a specific place, we can make a wish. Any sort of wish. I have a friend I'd like to help. Is there something you want?" Margaret asked anxiously, trying to show Ellis she didn't mean to use her to accomplish her goals, but she was willing to share her own artifact to help Ellis.

Ellis hugged Margaret in return and thought about what she said for a while and then she answered. "Thank you Margaret, I will. As for what I want, I'm happy being with Nadie. But I would like those people who have been chasing us to leave us alone. If I do get to have a wish I want to talk about it with Nadie first and when it's time make the wish it will be something we both want." Ellis said with a warm smile.

"I'm glad that's all settled. Ladies, dinner is served." Elenore said with a smile and she led them all to the dining room where there was a platter filled with tacos along with Nafrean baked fish and a Gazth-Sonikan noodle dish that Elenore picked up the recipe from.

Over the course of dinner they all talked about their adventures and trying to forget their current troubles. Nadie and Ellis enjoyed the tacos as well as sampling the other dishes.

"These are good Browneyes!" Ellis said between bites.

"She has a name Ellis." Nadie chided Ellis.

"I know, but it fits and they're gentle looking too." Ellis replied.

Vanessa looked in Elenore's eyes and said jokingly; "I don't know about that Ellis. Browneyes here can get pretty vicious when she wants to be."

"Et tu Vanessa." Elenore said with a mock pout and then smirked.

"Gentle eyes, that's a better name for yourself. You seem very gentle." Madlax smiled at Ellis. "It's hard to be artificially created, I understand." Madlax told Ellis rather sympathetically recalling from her own experiences.

"Don't worry, I'm a lot better now" Ellis responded while eating her tacos with Madlax trying one rather clumsily and spilling some filling on the table.

"This is a tasty noodle dish, tastes like back home." Madlax complimented Elenore as she enjoyed the dish considerably.

"Yes it does, remind me of my mother actually." Limelda said as she stared in melancholy upon the firm and fresh noodles.

"Thank you, I got this from a recipe." Elenore replied proudly.

"Yeah, these tacos are pretty good!" Margaret commented in a pleased tone "But I still think Elenore's pasta is the best in the world!"

"Pasta, what's that Nadie?" - Ellis turned to Nadie, as she usually would when she didn't know something.

"Oh, it's a dish from a country not too far away from here, I think. I never tried it before actually." Nadie replied, not being much of a gastronomical expert herself.

"If you two would like, why don't you join us for dinner again, tomorrow, and we can have pasta?" - Margaret happily suggested, not only being convenient for them to meet again because of the artifacts, but she also seemed to really enjoy the company of these two fun people. "Oh, actually, are you staying somewhere else already? I'd be very pleased to have you stay at my place, at least till we can solve this whole thing with the artifacts."

After hearing Margaret's invitation Nadie replied; "That's not a bad idea, we have no clue on what to do with it and you guys seem to know what you're doing. I doubt we could stay any longer where we were staying at, granted we didn't have much with us."

"Thank you very much." Ellis said cheerfully, happy she could stay with her new friends.

"If you want I can take you there and you can get your belongings and bring them back here." Vanessa volunteered.

"Thanks, we appreciate it." Nadie replied.

"Say Elenore, we are going to get another floor show?" Vanessa said teasingly hoping Elenore would treat them all to another ballet demonstration.

Limelda gave a subtle nod of approval to Elenore and the others were quietly rather keen too.

"How about it Elenore? If you do it I'll give Nadie and Ellis a taco dance too!" Madlax asked in excitement.

"My, you are keen." Nadie said with a bit of surprise.

"Hmm... I approve! I think we could all use some evening entertainment."

We can use the east wing too. So, besides Madlax and Elenore, anyone else interested in performing?" Margaret asked encouragingly.

Outnumbered Elenore gave in. "Let me serve dessert first and then I'll go get my gear."

Elenore served dessert and then with Laetitia went to the east wing. "Are you sure this all right?" Laetitia asked a bit nervous as Elenore helped her get changed and fixed her hair into a back bun. "Of course, I'll dance for a bit and when I come to this side of the stage you'll come on. You don't have to worry. I'll guide you through it and you did practice today, anyways this is will get you used to an audience when you do recitals." Elenore explained what she was going to do to Laetitia who paid close attention as she got changed. She turned on the main lights and waited for Madlax and whoever else was going to perform.

"Wow that looks pretty on you Elenore!" Laetitia said as she saw Elenore dressed in the green tutu/ dark emerald dress form with a jade colored tights and a emerald colored ribbon tied around her neck.

"Well thank you and look cute as well." Elenore replied referring to Laetitia's pink ballet outfit complete with tutu. They could hear the others gathering in the room and then they heard Ellis speak.

"I can do a trick." Ellis chimed in pulling out a deck of cards.

"Don't people need to be close to see that trick Ellis?" Nadie asked wondering what Ellis had in mind.

Ellis winked and smiled as she got on the stage. "I got that covered." Ellis held out the deck of cards which kind of confused and then surprised Nadie as the deck floated from her hand and it shuffled itself! Then the decks lined up and then flip to reveal the face and then with a wave of her hand she flipped again showing the back and then she flipped them once again and all the suits were lined up and matched. Then she made the cards form a flower pattern, and then a dog and then she spelled out her and Nadie name's with a big heart and smiley face and as finale an image of Kokopelli. Though out the performance Nadie was shocked that Ellis gained that much control over her powers and wondered if the bracelet had something to do with it and surprised her and everyone else that she did it floating a foot above the stage!

Everyone in the room was stunned by Ellis's powers, everything turned silent for a few seconds. "Just magic" Limelda exclaimed and in that moment there was a loud cheer and whistle for such an amazing performance although inside everyone they felt some other power might be at work.

After the ecstatic celebrations, Madlax performed the Taco Taco Tacosu dance as the small but very supportive audience watched under a bright set of stage lights. The dance suited her relaxed and casual athleticism. She was born to just turn, twist and gesture, with her dexterity

joking around the stage. Nadie smiled at Madlax approvingly and wondered what she finds so special about a dance that sells tacos.

She couldn't remember the words or sing very well but she smiled and just tried; unafraid to embarrass herself. "Taco Taco Tacosu Oijishi um whatever Taco Taco Tacosu" as she sang off key.

That didn't seem to mind the crowd though it's really a night out between friends and everyone clapped with Ellis the most cheerful and enthusiastic.

"Thank you, Is it Elenore's or Laetitia's turn?" Madlax asked as she took a small bow.

As Madlax walked off the stage; the lights on the stage dimmed and classical music began to play. Then a spotlight came on lighting the center of the stage revealing Elenore in her full ballet outfit. As the music played she danced gracefully. Elenore felt the music flow through her as she danced and after a few minutes danced to one side of the stage and out came Laetitia and they danced together with Elenore guiding her with her legs and them both doing en pointe to one side of the stage to the other and then letting go Laetitia who went backstage and Elenore continued to dance.

While she danced the artifacts began to glow with the ring masking itself made a illusionary copy of Elenore but dressed in a male's costume and together they danced with her doppelganger lifting her up a couple times and then they did a twin Arabesque and they both did the coda. The artifacts stopped glowing and the doppelganger disappeared leaving Elenore alone on the stage. They all clapped as Elenore left the stage.

"Wow, I didn't know the artifacts could do that?!" Ellis exclaimed looking at the bracelet on her wrist. "That must be one the powers when two of the artifacts are in close proximity of each other. Strange as it was, it did make Elenore's performance even more interesting." Vanessa added.

A light murmur moved through the small audience as the music faded, though I did not catch the words passed among them. The performance must have been something special, and I had a notion as to why but the importance of urgency eclipsed all else. In my hand I still clutched the letter I had received that afternoon. The clerk at the hotel almost didn't let me in then, shoeless, with the hem on my skirt torn from my fight earlier...but he relented without much fuss. Customers who paid as well as I did had some leverage that the ordinary occupant did not. And as I left to return to my room, mail in hand, the letter caught my eye.

It was a letter from Quanzitta.

It sat unopened on the table for about ten minutes as I changed into more familiar clothing. When I finally tore it open and read it, the contents disturbed me greatly. I was surprised, though I should not have been. Perhaps Chloe is reading a similar letter at this very moment from her mentor, I thought. My eye moved from the letter to the knife beside it. Yes, perhaps it is possible. But...I knew more than Quanzitta did. Or so I thought.

Hurriedly I scribbled a letter in reply. It wasn't her fighting ability that made me decide to refuse Quanzitta request, though that was the excuse I gave. It was that glimmer of hope I saw in her eyes. For just a moment, she let me see her soul. That was enough for me to have thrown the letter away, and my entire honor with it. But honor and duty demanded that I at least formulate a reply.

"I do not believe my abilities to be equal to the task," I wrote. It was a profound lie but a faithful lie, at least. I wondered if she would detect it. I posted it before I could reconsider. And, not long after, I found myself walking toward the Burton Manor, hoping to find a gathering - and an ally. I had to move fast, for Quanzitta and Altena's little game of chess far too far removed from the hearts and souls of their subjects was moving about me, and I had no idea on which piece each would lay her firm, decisive hand.

But I at least knew one whom they would not, could not touch one of the most powerful pieces of all. We were moving along the board, to the center, where the human touched the divine, and the once-dead danced andante for a sister's love...

A sister's love...yes, much may depend on that.

"Margaret," I whispered softly through the darkness. The lights were still dim, and still concentrated on the stage. With luck, I would go unseen and unheard. Laetitia was still backstage, probably wrestling with her frilly clothes. She could never wear anything quite right. Vanessa and Madlax seemed engrossed with her new friends from the west, an almost comically relaxed pair, though the taller looked perilous enough, and the smaller one's eyes shone with an aura of magic the like of which I had rarely encountered. A hundred years could go by without meeting such a creature, and now I had no time! And ever the hint of the divine permeated the air, as if mocking my errand as so much chaff in the wind of time eternal.

At least Margaret was awake, I reflected. But engrossed as she was with Elenore's performance for several moments after it ended, she hadn't heard me at all.

"Margaret!" I whispered, a little louder.

For the next few moments, Margaret stood still in her seat, still fascinated by the magical moment that had just taken place. All the others seemed lost in chatter, she assumed by the surrounding noise, but she suddenly heard someone call her name. Margaret looked around for the others, but none of them seemed to have to call her, they were

still distracted, commenting about the performance with enthusiasm. Maybe she had imagined it? "Margaret!" She heard once again, this time being sure it wasn't just her imagination. Without really considering it, Margaret strayed away from the group without them noticing it, and followed the voice to the back of the room, which concealed the mysterious entity calling out to her from the darkness. "Who's there?" She asked in a low tone, with a mix of curiosity and sudden fear, as she remembered she was still being targeted, even at her home, and this course of action was probably not the wisest.

As Elenore went backstage, she was a bit in a daze. "Did the artifacts do that? Was that the "other" me? For some reason I'm not freaked out, actually for some reason I feel calm...Thank you" She thought to herself and voice whispered back.

"You're welcome, my looking glass sister."

Laetitia tried to get Elenore's attention, not as a child that wanted attention but as someone who was concerned for a loved one. Elenore snapped out it. "Oh sorry Laetitia, I was..."

"It's okay Elenore, not many people get to truly dance with themselves.

That was so beautiful." Laetitia said awed and glad that Elenore snapped out of whatever fugue she was in.

"Why thank you, I have to admit that was a bit strange but I enjoyed it. You did wonderful as well Laetitia. You really should take lessons; you have a lot of potential there." Elenore replied warmly and in an encouraging tone.

"Really?!" Laetitia said happy that Elenore said that.

"Of course, you picked it up quickly and give you a few years and lot practice you could be a professional." Elenore encouragingly said while helping to change Laetitia into her clothes.

"I had a very good teacher. Thank you big sister." Laetitia said a sincere complementing tone.

Elenore was taken aback but then realized if she had figured it out it was likely that Laetitia had as well. "I guess you know, I didn't know till I found out yesterday. In case you didn't know, Margaret now knows as well." Elenore said warmly hugging Laetitia.

"I'm glad but I wanted to let you know that I acknowledge you as my sister. It might be the only thing I can give to you other than my love. You comforted me in that field that day and wanted to give it in return." Laetitia said with tears forming in her eyes.

Elenore lovingly hugged Laetitia. "You already have and thank you my little sister."

The pair held each other for a few moments and then Elenore finished changing Laetitia and help her dry her eyes. "Now let's go and greet our audience." Elenore said taking Laetitia by the hand and going out to the stands.

"I'm sorry if I startled you," said I, stepping out in front of her. "I'm not sure how to begin and I'm not sure how much I can tell you. Excuse me if I seem flustered..." I paused a moment to gather my thoughts.

"You are being watched. Your life may be in danger though right now I'm more worried about

Madlax. It's not the usual, there's someone new. Someone far more dangerous. I think that Madlax knows as much as I do...but that's the trouble." Margaret looked at me quizzically. "Margaret, please...please don't let Madlax...or anyone else...harm her."

I opened my palm to reveal the knife I had taken from Chloe.

"She travels alone, clad in a deep green cloak, and wields these. She has distinctive purple hair and narrow eyes. Her name is Chloe. I know this is a lot to ask...can you help me?"

She did remember NakhI, and though it was weird for her to sneak in like this when she was among friends, Margaret kept the secrecy as she was completely focused on every word she said, trying to sort out the meaning of her enigmatic words.

"Hmm... okay. I know I'm being watched. And I think Madlax told me about this person. She's the stalker from before. What can I do about it, NakhI?" Margaret asked cluelessly.

"Still your old self, I see," I slowly replied, smiling and relaxing as I did so. "You don't need to do anything about it...but if something should happen...all I ask is that you use your own judgment, even if your friends disagree. Can you do that, Margaret?"

"Huh? I... I think so." Margaret said hesitatingly "Look, I don't understand very well... I can tell them not to harm Chloe... but I don't want her to harm anyone else either. Please, tell me what to do!"

Margaret asked desperately, at the thought someone close to her could get killed again.

"I'm not sure what to do myself, Margaret. We must trust ourselves...."

I paused a moment, wondering how much I could trust her. I decided to lay open my hand.

"You see, Margaret, I was ordered to kill Chloe. But I'm not going to."

I could see from her eyes that she didn't quite comprehend this either, but I felt she would when she had to.

"I want to save her. I don't know how, I don't know why, but...I want to give her another chance. She's burdened by so much hate, Margaret, that she knows not where to direct it. People who say they care for her but don't, they push her around like...like pieces on a chessboard. She's confused, and alone. Like you were, once, and Madlax. But you have each other, and your friends. She doesn't have anyone."

Margaret pondered on NakhI's words for a while. She was deeply touched by her speech and even without knowing or having even met this person before; she could feel sympathetic for Chloe. In the end she was just being manipulated and at the hands of someone far more powerful and ill intended, Margaret concluded.

"Nakhl... do you think Chloe would join us? If we helped her, would she help us? Maybe she could become a friend."

"I...would like to think that, Margaret." I made an effort to smile reassuringly.
"I hope so."

"You know she's lost to the darkness. You might find the only to save her is to take her life." Laetitia said breaking the silence and watching Margaret jump and hiding a quiet giggle, but she was dead serious what she had said to Nakhl.

A few seconds earlier Elenore and Laetitia went out to the others, Elenore still dressed in her costume.

"That was unusual, I take it the artifacts had a hand in our performance?"

Elenore asked with them staring at her costume.

"We think so, but still that was a wonderful performance from all three of you." Vanessa answered eyeing Elenore. "That costume by the way looks great on you, it gives off a certain kind of appeal." Vanessa said flirtingly.

Ellis looked at Elenore awestruck. "Wow that was beautiful. It's been a long time since I last saw a ballet."

Nadie looked at Ellis in surprise; she never mentioned she had even seen never mind know what ballet was. She guessed between the bracelet and being around kind people helped Ellis open up a bit more.

"Thank you Ellis, I'm glad you enjoyed it but I could've done it without my other co stars. Now where did Laetitia disappear to?" Elenore said and then looking to see if she could see Laetitia. Laetitia felt a familiar presence, and thankfully for Elenore providing an unintentional distraction. She smirked as she overheard Vanessa and Elenore's subtle flirting and keeping to the shadows walked up behind Nakhl listening to what they were saying before she decided to speak.

I blinked, more taken aback at the words than the sudden presence of the speaker. "I thought I knew quite the contrary, Laetitia. Please, I mean no offense...but tell me what you mean."

"Laetitia, you were listening?" - Margaret turned back in surprise, wondering for how long her little sister had been eavesdropping on them.

"Listen, I don't really know Chloe. But if she's being manipulated by someone like Friday Monday I think we should help her. She deserves a chance at least. I just think... if we could avoid killing anyone else, that would be good, don't you agree?"

"Margaret the woman controlling Chloe is far more evil than Friday Monday. She holds her strings and her heart tightly and she will not let them go. She also wants the strings of another and from the look on your face you know who I mean NakhI." Laetitia said to NakhI and Margaret in that serious tone that she used when she needed to get a point across.

"Yes, Laetitia. I know whom you mean," I replied solemnly. "But we need to be clear exactly who are enemies are. If Chloe is dead, she will still be a force to be reckoned with. And as for Chloe herself...that is not a justifiable sacrifice."

"Then what will you do? How will you cut the strings that bind? My concern is for the one she's after. I don't want her to be swallowed by darkness like Chloe was and if Chloe must be sacrificed to save her..." Laetitia replied solemnly.

"Who do you mean?" Margaret asked confused, suddenly feeling left out of the conversation.

Laetitia hated to be blunt, she liked when people figured out the answer for themselves. But she was dealing with Margaret and despite her having the Gift; she seemed not see what needed to be seen. So in a rare moment of bluntness she told Margaret.

"The person who controls Chloe wants Elenore. She wants to make Elenore into something she's not and don't go telling this to Elenore. You know she'll want to confront either Chloe or her master and that would lead to very bad things." Laetitia inward cringed at her being blunt but it was a necessary evil she thought.

"There is something in that even you may not know, Laetitia, which we may work to our advantage. Chloe respects Elenore she will not treat her with the same disdain with which she treats the rest of the world. She mentioned something else as well something which didn't strike me till later about Elenore and Margaret. Do you know of what I speak?"

"So you plan to use Elenore as the knife to cut the strings. How will you do that? Will you tell the knife how to cut? And yes I do what you speak of but I'm waiting for Margaret to know too."

"Wait! Slow down a bit, you two... Why would this person want Elenore? Why doesn't anyone tell me these things?" Margaret said with disappointment, demanding an explanation, as she felt this matter definitely concerned her.

"She wants to enshroud Elenore in darkness and turn her into her new killer". Laetitia cringed as she bluntly told Margaret.

"Laetitia," I said, "is right. But the immediate danger is not to Elenore. It is to her friends to you, Margaret, to Madlax, to Vanessa. To her, these are like obstacles which keep Elenore from her destiny and Chloe and the Soldats are pitifully unaware of her ultimate goal. I suggest we stop the Queen at the first square. If the tie between Altena and Chloe is cut, Altena will have no-one to do her dirty work. And that tie is already breaking. Chloe spoke of her mentor with

far more bitterness than I would have thought her capable. There is a rebellion in place there, which we need but encourage. Furthermore, Elenore would not be alone in this. There is another, whom Chloe loves more than any other creature on this earth. I felt her presence this morning." Margaret listened to all this with increasing annoyance. People kept keeping things from her, even though she'd end up finding out about it, sooner or later. She was starting to get used to it. But how could they not, at least, warn Elenore she was being targeted?

"If Elenore is being targeted she should know! Why can't we tell her?" She asked Laetitia, not understanding why they shouldn't do what seemed like the most logical thing for her. "And if we can reach out to Chloe with the help of this person you speak of, Nakhl, please tell us who she is, and where can we find her!" Margaret asked, trying to follow Nakhl's train of thought.

Laetitia grew annoyed. Margaret was whining again hoping that someone would tell her so she wouldn't have to think and this made Laetitia angry. She wanted to get the point across to Margaret as she stared at her and in very angry but quiet tone she spoke to Margaret.

"Margaret, I already told you why, you damn well know she would go off and confront Chloe and a big fight would occur and one or both of them would wind up dead. DO you understand?! You can't keep going through life waiting for people to just give you the answers. You to figure things out for yourself so stop whining and use the damn Gift to connect the dots!"

"My dear Laetitia, have patience," I said. "Not all of us have pruned our social skills in non-dimensional space. Communication is much easier when you don't need words, isn't it? Margaret, her name is Yuumura Kirika. Like Chloe, she is a deadly assassin, but unlike her, she has managed to conquer and control that side of her. I know not exactly where she is now, but if we keep our eyes and ears open, I have no doubt that she will appear before long."

"But time is running short dear Nakhl. The Queen grows very impatient and I fear that she might do something that would cost all of us dearly. Sometimes a hammer must be used when the knife fails." Laetitia said to Nakhl.

Margaret didn't appreciate Laetitia's tone at all. Laetitia might be wise and insightful, and old behind her age, but she was still her little sister and her reaction felt rather hurtful and disrespectful. After a moment of shock, Margaret got herself together and replied, trying to keep her calm. "Fine Laetitia so you know everything! Good for you! I'm sorry I can't live up to your expectations. But don't talk about Elenore like you're the only one who cares about her!" Margaret said in a sulky voice and with visible discomfort. "I've known Elenore all my life. And I know her well enough to know she's a strong person and she's incapable of being corrupted, by Friday Monday or anyone else! I know she's been through a lot of stress lately, but we can help her if she trusts us. You know what I think? If we all relied on each other more openly, things would be a lot easier. But we keep hiding things from each other, because we can't trust

enough or for whatever reason...and I really don't see how that can be a good thing." Margaret concluded with a bit of sadness, but unwilling to confront Laetitia any longer. "Well, Nakhl, if we can find Yuumura Kirika, I'll talk to her about it. Thank you very much for telling me all this tonight. Now if you'll excuse me, I have an exam tomorrow and I should get going to bed. You're welcome to stay over tonight, if you wish." Margaret said, before leaving, feeling she no longer belonged in this conversation. Laetitia stared intensely at Margaret as she left and she felt frustrated. She loved Margaret, but she could be so dense. "Go ahead Margaret walk away. When this is all done, everyone here will walk away unless she does something about it, which by her reaction she won't. Perhaps it's time I walked away before I get pushed away." "Laetitia, you are right, Margaret does need to find things out or herself. But that also means we need to trust her and each other, like she suggests," I said. Laetitia seemed engrossed in her own thoughts.

"Despite her kind offering of hospitality, I should return to my hotel here is the card, if anyone should need to contact me. Ask for Miss Morrissey." I turned to depart. It was a bitter success, but a success nonetheless.

Taking the card from Nakhl. "I know that Nakhl, but the Torc is testing her. If Margaret isn't careful she might lose more than she can imagine." Laetitia said in a sad voice. Elenore had changed back to her uniform. When she came out she saw Margaret leaving the room. She quickly caught to Margaret.

"Oh, Elenore! That was a great performance back there! You were great, I really liked it!" Margaret smiled, trying to hide the sadness in her voice for a while. "Thank you Margaret! I'm glad you enjoyed it." Elenore said happy that Margaret loved her performance. "I was just going to sleep. I feel sleepy all of a sudden..." Margaret said and turned around and she was starting to walk away but she kept herself and turned at Elenore again. "Elenore, do you...trust me at all?" Margaret asked with a low tone and a sad expression.

Elenore thought of the answer and sad expression came over her face. "Of course I trust you. Why ask that? Elenore answered a bit concerned.

"Let's go talk in my room, please." Margaret suggested and Elenore followed, as they both left the east wing without being noticed by the others and went upstairs to Margaret's room.

"Elenore, I trust you completely. I argued with Laetitia about this, actually... She might be right about me being too dense to realize certain things on my own, but I just think we should share all information among ourselves more openly, and rely on each other more to solve our problems, instead of each one acting on their own. You understand what I mean, Elenore? I don't want feel compelled to act on your own. Please, don't do this. Please, let me and everyone else help you as well."

Elenore took off her apron and sat down next to Margaret. Now what's this about you and

Laetitia arguing?" Margaret told Elenore about her conversation with NakhI and the argument she had with Laetitia. "But, I don't know if it's a good idea to talk to Laetitia... She was really angry at me. If she knows I told you this she might get even more angry. She might not forgive me." Margaret claimed hesitatingly, still feeling saddened for having argued with Laetitia. "She thought you'd do something dangerous if you knew. I just think you should know if you're being targeted, it's better this way, isn't it? You won't do anything dangerous or act on your own, please, promise me that!" Margaret asked rather desperately.

"I see I'll have a talk with her and don't worry I won't go looking for a fight, but those people don't scare me and if this Chloe or her master do try to hurt either of you. I will do my best to protect you both and I won't hold back. You both are my family and I won't anyone hurt either of you." Elenore said in strong but loving tone. "Thank you, Elenore. But I really don't think that will be necessary. If we always stay together, and with Madlax's help, I'm sure we will all be safe. NakhI gave me a name, Yuumura Kirika; I think we should try to contact this person. She might help us with Chloe."

"I'll see if my mother knows someone that we can ask to contact Miss Yuumura. But I don't understand why NakhI wants with this Chloe person. Then again figuring out what NakhI wants can be frustrating as well." Elenore added with a bit frustration towards NakhI.

"NakhI told me Chloe was... a lonely person, being manipulated by someone like Friday Monday that doesn't really care for her. I know she's targeting us, so it's dangerous, but we might be able to reach out to her through Yuumura Kirika. It might seem unreasonable to do so, but I trust NakhI and I think we should hear her on this." Margaret said noticing the frustration in Elenore's voice.

"And about Laetitia; that's the first time I've heard of Laetitia ever getting angry, she's not the type to get angry so I'm sure she's calmed down by now. You do know she loves you in her own way and she'll forgive you. I'm sure she said what she said out of concern for me, she feels that she owes me for what I did for her in that place even when I've told her she didn't have to. You have to remember that for the last twelve years she was trapped in the sanctuary and while her mind and spirit aged her body didn't and only having Poupee who from what I understand didn't speak a word her social skills aren't the norm. So that must be frustrating to her having the mind of an adult in a child's body with minimal human contact. So I give her a little leeway when she gets cryptic but I do remind her that people tend to get upset when people talk in riddles. So I'll talk to her and smooth things out, okay." Elenore said in a warm compassionate and explanatory tone trying to change the subject.

I'll apologize if it helps, but I don't think I've said anything that justified her anger. She told me I had to figure things out for myself, and that I should use my Gift. I just can't. The Gift is not

something I can activate or control to my advantage, whenever I feel like. How was I supposed to know about you being targeted? I had no way to gather such information on my own! And if no one tells me anything...I end up feeling as if I'm just a burden to everyone. And I don't want to be. I'm doing my best not to be. I wish she'd know that."

"To be honest with you Margaret I've never quite understood what this "Gift" is exactly or what it does and I'll probably never will. I know your trying your best and when I talk with Laetitia I'll let her know that."

"And well, I myself never understood the Gift very well either, Elenore. I usually just ignore it." Margaret replied agreeing with Elenore.

"Oh speaking of family, I was meaning to tell this earlier but well our newest guests had me distracted. I spoke to my mother about sharing her with you and she agreed with me. I think your vision of your mother forgiving her helped. And as I surmised she's still a bit uncomfortable coming here so you might have to go to her for now, but we'll work on getting her to come here." Elenore winked and hugged Margaret warmly and then let go.

"I'm very glad to know that about your mother. I'd really like to meet her, and I understand if she doesn't want to come here. I'll go see her with you sometime." Margaret said with a smile, pleased with Elenore's warm words and feeling closer to her now, even more than before.

"Perhaps after school tomorrow, we could go over there. I'm sure my mother wouldn't mind." Elenore warmly suggested. "Well, tomorrow afternoon I'm free, and done with classes for the summer, finally. I sure don't mind paying your mother a visit, if you think it's not too soon. Now, I'm a bit too excited to go to sleep, with all this, but I should really try to get some rest if I want to get through that final exam tomorrow."

"No I don't think it's too soon, I'm sure she'll be happy to see you. You're right you should get some sleep now, especially when you have that exam." Elenore warmly hugged Margaret and started towards the door and then she turned and said."Good night and I love you Margaret."

"So it's settled then, we'll visit your mother tomorrow. Good night, Elenore. I love you too!" Margaret replied in a tired but happy voice, and went to sleep after Elenore left.

Elenore went through the living room to get to the east wing. While she was going through she saw Ellis sitting on the couch staring at the television even though it was off. Elenore walked up to Ellis and looked at the blank screen and then turned to Ellis and spoke in a friendly manner;

"Would you care for something to eat or drink Ellis?"

"Not really, I'm waiting for Nadie to come back but thank you Browneyes."

"Where did she go?" Elenore asked curiously.

"She went with Vanessa to go and get our stuff." Ellis replied.

"Oh that's right, I'm sure they'll be back soon. Ellis may I ask you a question?"

"Didn't just ask me one Browneyes?" Ellis asked a tad confused.

Elenore thought for a few seconds and smiled. "Yes I guess I did, but I would like to know why you call me "Browneyes

Ellis looked at Elenore with a puzzled look and then she told Elenore about Jodie "Blueeyes" Hayward. "Your eyes say it; they say I'm a gentle person. But calling you Gentleeyes is a bit silly" Ellis said.

"I've done some very "ungentle" things in my past and if things keep going I might have to do more "ungentle" things." Elenore said in a sad tone.

"Everyone has even me, but you do it because you care about the people you love. That's what I see in your eyes." Ellis replied with a sad smile of her own.

"I never thought about it that way. You have gentle eyes too Ellis and don't let anyone tell you otherwise." Elenore warmly said.

"Why thank you." Ellis respond with a smile. A flash of inspiration crossed Ellis' face. "Since I call you Browneyes you can call me Flowerface." Ellis said with a sincere smile. Elenore grinned. "Flowerface it is then."

"Before I forget, I would like to apologize for my younger sister's comment earlier. She has a well... a unique origin of her own and sometimes she says things that can upset people even when she's trying not to." Elenore said in a apologetic tone.

"I know, she's like me in a way. So I can understand why she does it." Ellis said holding the bracelet up as to say where she got that insight from.

"I have to go find her and have a talk with her." Elenore said a bit baffled but getting the gist of what Ellis was saying. Ellis smiled and held out the bracelet for a few seconds and said; "If you want to know where she is, she's at the back of the room where the stage is."

"Thank you Ellis." Elenore said wondering for a few seconds how Ellis knew that but guessed it had to be the artifact telling her and she went off to the east wing.

Laetitia still sat in the dark corner of the room pondering what to do next when she noticed Elenore coming up beside her. Elenore stooped down to her and spoke in a firm but compassionate voice; "I think you know why I'm here don't you. You know Margaret is trying her best and what you said to her was uncalled for. I can understand some of what you're going through, but still that was very unlike you."

Laetitia bowed her head. "I know, but it was the very first time I've ever felt angry and I didn't mean to hurt Margaret but ..."

"That's why you need to work on your social skills a little more so you don't hurt people unintentionally." Elenore replied compassionately.

"I know, I'm sorry, Oh here's the card Nakhil left if you need to get in touch with her." Giving the card to Elenore.

Elenore looked at the card still wondering what intentions Nakhl had in mind and then looking back at Laetitia. "Well it's past your bedtime and you should get to bed and you will apologize to Margaret in the morning." Elenore said in a firm tone.

Laetitia bowed her head knowing full well that arguing with Elenore was a bad idea and she got off lightly and she knew it. "I'll apologize to her tomorrow, good night Elenore." And she ran off to bed before Elenore had a chance to say anything else.

Elenore smiled as Laetitia went off to bed. She could've been justly harsher with her but she reasoned that Laetitia knew she'll get scolded and considering she didn't argue back and went to bed without complaint didn't warrant any further scolding. So she went back to the living room. She found Ellis still sitting on the couch waiting for Nadie.

Elenore went to the kitchen and made a pot of tea. Limelda walked past and then stopped and knocked on the doorframe making sure that Elenore knew she was there.

"Hello Miss Jorg, I'm making a pot of tea. If you wait a few minutes I can make you a cup"

"No thanks, I just wanted to thank you for the dish you made tonight. That was thoughtful of you." Limelda said.

"You're welcome, I'm glad you enjoyed it." Elenore replied getting a tray and placing a plate of cookies on it as well as cream, sugar, cups and spoons.

"May I ask where did you get the recipe from while you were in Gazth-Sonika? The way you made it was like the way my mother used to make it." Limelda asked in a nostalgic tone.

"I got it while I was recovering in the hospital from a very friendly nurse who I swapped recipes with. I know the recipes for a few more Gazth-Sonikan dishes, I can make them for you if like for next time." Elenore answered.

"Why...? Why are you being so nice to me? I..." Limelda asked greatly confused.

"Why you ask Miss Jorg, despite that the fact you shot my best friend, stalk my sister and treat my other sisters condescendingly I do think I do owe you for getting me to the hospital and I think underneath that tuff exterior there's actually a good person inside. And yes I may be a fool for thinking such but I believe almost everyone deserves a second chance." Elenore replied while the kettle boiled and she prepared the tea.

"Sisters...?! But you're a..." Limelda said in shock.

"I found out yesterday that Margaret and Laetitia are my sisters so that also makes Madlax my sister as well and no as of tonight I'm no longer the maid." Elenore said as she went out to the living room with the tray leaving Limelda somewhat in shock.

Elenore offered Ellis an cup of tea while they waited, which Ellis accepted.

"Are you waiting for Nadie too?" Ellis asked while sipping her tea.

"I have to show you two your room and I'm also waiting for Vanessa to return so you can say that I am." Elenore replied.

"That's right. Do you like Vanessa like I like Nadie?" Ellis asked innocently.

Elenore's face blushed a bit and then she answered. "Well...you can say I'm very fond of her." Ellis was about to respond when they heard Vanessa say; "We're back!" And Ellis jumped and hugged Nadie.

"Nadie! You're back!" Ellis shouted in glee as she hugged Nadie.

"I was only gone for a hour and I went and got our stuff. But I'm glad to see you too." Nadie said a sleepy voice.

"I can show you two to your room now if you like." Elenore said helping Nadie with their meager belongings.

"Sure thanks Elenore. I want to get some sleep I promised Madlax and Limelda I help patrol the house." Nadie said sleepily.

"Vanessa, can you come by my room when you get a chance I want to talk with you. There's some tea in the living room if you want some." Elenore said in a cheerful tone.

"Thanks I will, but I want to get ready for bed as well but I will stop by before going to bed."

Vanessa replied a bit tired herself.

Elenore brought Ellis and Nadie to their room and bade them good night and she went to her room. She looked at the picture of her grandfather with an angry then sad look and placed the picture face down on the nightstand. She changed into the lingerie she bought yesterday and put on a robe and sat on the bed looking at the doll her mother gave her.

She was about to grab the doll when she heard a knock on her door.

"Who is it?" She asked still sitting on the bed.

"It's Vanessa, can I come in? You did ask me to stop by." Vanessa said on the other side of the door.

"Of course come in." Elenore replied and Vanessa came in and sat next to Elenore on the bed.

"What do you want to talk about? Did something happen while we were gone?" Vanessa asked.

"Where do I start? You remember Nakhl right? Elenore began.

"Yes I do, what about her?"

"She made an appearance while I was performing and she talked with Margaret and Laetitia."

"About what?" Vanessa asked curious why Nakhl was so far away from home.

"I don't know the full details especially where Nakhl is concerned, but it has something to do with a Soldat named Chloe and she wanted us to find this Yuumura Kirika person who's somehow connected to her. I told Margaret that I'll ask my mother if she knew someone that could contact her." Elenore replied.

"That could be tricky considering we're both Justicars now." Vanessa said with concern.

"I know, but if it hurts the Soldats with minimal risk to ourselves I'm all for it. To continue during the conversation Margaret and Laetitia got into an argument and I had to talk to both of them."

"Laetitia and Margaret arguing, that's very strange. What were they arguing about?" Vanessa asked a bit surprised.

Elenore told Vanessa of what she knew of their argument and her conversation with Laetitia.

"You look like you have something else on your mind, is it your daughter?" Vanessa asked.

"Well actually, I'm upset with my grandfather as well." Tears began to roll down her eyes. "He lied to me...He lied to me about my mother, lied about my uncle and worse of all lied about my real relationship with Margaret and that fact I found out he was a homophobe didn't help matters either. I really wonder if he really ever loved me at all. I was brought up to always tell the truth, but he lied to me all the while." Vanessa hugged Elenore as she cried on her shoulder trying to find something to say to ease Elenore's pain at the unpleasant revelation.

"I know it hurts but you can't change what has happened. The good thing is that Margaret knows and she accepted you as her sister and I think the both of you can overcome your pasts." Elenore stopped crying and began to wipe the tears from her eyes. "I know you're right we have each other now and we'll get by somehow."

Vanessa let go of Elenore and started to get up from the bed, but Elenore gently held her wrist and before she could say anything Elenore asked; "Vanessa, will you spend the night with me? I could use the company tonight." With the other hand she took off her robe and standing in her lingerie.

"I may be getting a mixed signal here so...but I can ask you a personal question?" Vanessa asked.

"Of course, what is it?" Elenore asked letting go of Vanessa's wrist.

"In your adult life so far did you have any intimate relations with anyone?" Vanessa asked trying to keep the question as polite as possible. "Oh you mean have I had sex with another adult. No, not really and I assume that you're not counting masturbation. I would like to..." Elenore replied with her face blushing. Vanessa was a little surprised at the way Elenore answered that question.

"Elenore, lovemaking is not like a porn flick where two or more people just fuck other. Making love on the other hand is an act where two people share each other." Vanessa explained.

"I got this dread feeling that things will get worse before they get better and at least once in my life I want to make love with someone I care about. Granted my experience in that area isn't much so I'm asking; Vanessa please can you show me? Can you make love with me?" Elenore asked anxiously her heart rapidly beating in anticipation of Vanessa's answer.

Vanessa went to Elenore and warmly held her close and Elenore wrapped her arms in return.

Then Vanessa looked deeply into Elenore's brown eyes and she kissed her their lips interlocking then soon they let their tongues intertwine with each other while Vanessa gently stroked Elenore's hair and Elenore following suit.

Vanessa gently guided Elenore to the bed and then she took off her robe. She had on her usual nightgown her breasts slowly bouncing as she moved and then soon in a small strip tease she took that off as well as a pair of blue floral print panties and flung them to the floor. Then she got on the bed and slowly undressed Elenore kissing her as she slowly and gently removed her clothing.

Vanessa gently caressed Elenore's body all the while working her way to her breasts while Elenore paid close attention. Elenore smiled and gently placed her hands on Vanessa's breasts slowly squeezing and caressing them and playing with her nipples and then she began to suck on the left then on the right. She could hear Vanessa give off a slight moan and Elenore stopped and listened to Vanessa's heartbeat, she backed up a bit and slowly thrust her breasts and Vanessa understood the invite and she did what Elenore did. After Vanessa was done playing with her breasts Elenore laid Vanessa down then she put her head between Vanessa thighs and started nibble and lick her groin. She heard a loud moan of pleasure and she briefly stopped for air after a few minutes. Then Vanessa got Elenore into position where they could please each other and they did so till they came.

After they finished pleasuring each other they sat up. Vanessa held Elenore in her arm as laid against her left breast. "Thank you Vanessa that was...no wait you were wonderful." Elenore said affectionately. "You're welcome Elenore, you were just as great." Vanessa replied and kissed Elenore on top of her head.

Elenore looked at Vanessa and lovingly smiled. "I know this is sudden and I'm not usually somebody does things on the spur of the moment but I..." Elenore's face blushed as she tried to get the question out.

"It's okay Elenore it can wait till tomorrow..." Vanessa said.

"All right I'll ask you tomorrow." Elenore replied and they kissed each other good night and went to sleep.

Limelda was walking towards Elenore's room wanted to borrow yet another DVD from her collection (or at least that was Limelda's official excuse) when she heard intimate noises coming from the other side of the door."Hmm...Seems like your preoccupied at the moment, I'll just come back later...much later." She said to herself and continued her patrol.

Nadie woke up and got out of the bed trying not to wake Ellis in the process.

"Nadie..." Ellis said sleepily wondering where Nadie was going.

"Go back to sleep and I'm just going to do patrol." Nadie replied.

Ellis sat up and asked; "Nadie what do you want to wish for?"

"That's odd question to ask in the middle of the night." Nadie replied in a puzzled tone.

"I been trying to think of something to wish for but I can't think of anything." Ellis said in bit of sad tone.

"We don't have the third artifact and we still don't where to take them so we have time to think about that."

"We have each other and we're in a new land with many new places to journey to, what more could we really want?" Ellis said in happy tone.

"We could wish for money, but that seems a little shallow. I really can't think of anything I really want either right now. But we'll see just get some rest and I'll see you at breakfast okay?" Nadie said smiling as she went out the door and began her patrol.

Ellis sat there for a few minutes thinking and then went back to sleep.

A few minutes later Madlax saw Nadie coming and was relieved she could relax a little now.

"Hello, good you showed up. Can I look at your gun?" Madlax asked curiously.

"Only if you show me yours" Nadie asked.

The girls did a swap and Madlax looked at her weapon with a bit of sympathy.

"It looks a bit old and you've been using this awhile?" Madlax asked.

"I have, I don't have much money to get a new one." Nadie sighed.

"Why don't you use one of mine? It's not the latest but its cleaned well." Madlax suggested.

Nadie gladly took Madlax's gun and a couple of clips and thanked her for her generosity. After Madlax quickly debriefed Nadie on the different areas of the house, she quickly went to bed. But lying there in bed, she couldn't quite get to sleep, it just felt different.

Meanwhile Carrossea laughed as looked over the dead bodies of the Enfant cell he just eliminated. Apparently they found out he was still alive and a few were trying to hunt him down.

After helping himself to equipment and money he poured gasoline over the bodies and set the place on fire all and laughed evilly as he left and went to find different kind of target...

Altena stared at the chess board. She hadn't gotten Chloe's latest report, but that was to be expected. (She didn't realize the growing discontent in her protégé.) The only good news she heard was an Enfant cell was eliminated in Nafrece. The Intel on the Burton estate was cut off due their finding the listening devices. The council was complaining that her surveillance was bound to draw in the Justicars and they didn't want to fight a two front war. Altena smirked; if everything went as planned both Enfant and the Justicars would be things of the past.

Instead of going back to Burton home like she was supposed to she decided to go and hunt down a cell of Enfant that was nearby. A couple hours later she had found where they were at but she found a burned out ruin.

The fire department was still there sifting through the remains. She asked one the onlookers what had happened and they said they had found charred bodies. Chloe silently cursed her luck today, all her plans went to pot, she got bested in a fight by the unknown woman and worse of all; Kirika saw her get defeated. Chloe decided it was best to hole up till tomorrow and hopefully the day would go far better than today did. But when she got to the safe house she found Altena's orders and she blanched inside. "Is she insane?! A daylight attack of this size on a place being watched by the Justicars. This would definitely bring them into the fight." She thought to herself and cursed her luck even more. Perhaps some sleep would do her some good as she lay down for the night.

On the way back to their safe house, Kirika's cell phone buzzed. She took it out and checked her messages (What? A text message?!). It read, "Kirika, get over here! I'm at B'ton Mans. B (Badgis? she guessed) got delayed." Kirika tried not to laugh at Mireille's poor excuse for txt speak, then made her way to the Burton mansion as nonchalantly as possible which meant stumbling around until she found a suitably big house, and then sneaking in. Kirika said to herself, "I guess we're stalking them after all."

Chapter 9.

July 10th started out like any other day with a few exceptions but it would become a day that none of us not even Margaret with her occasional forgetfulness will never forget...

Taken from the diary of Elenore Baker July 12th 2013

Elenore woke up at her usual time and for a few nano seconds forgot that Vanessa was sleeping right next to her. She lovingly gazed upon Vanessa's sleeping form and smiled. She gently stroked Vanessa's hair and gently kissed her head hoping not to wake her up.

Vanessa stirred but slept on and Elenore went to get herself ready for the day with a definite glow on her face. After cleaning herself she was about to put on a maid's uniform when she remembered she was no longer a maid and pulled out a black skirt and dark teal blouse as well as an apron. Maid or not, having the apron gave her some comfort and she enjoyed doing housework in any case.

While was getting dressed Vanessa woke up and yawned.

"Sorry if I woke you, I was getting ready for the day. Elenore said apologetically.

"No you didn't wake me. I know you get up at this time in the morning, but why? You're not a maid anymore." Vanessa asked still waking up and noticing the apron.

"Regardless, there are chores that need to be done and I'm the one who does the cooking around here remember?" Elenore said with a grin.

Vanessa smirked. "Right."

"I want to thank you again for last night. You were wonderful and I hope I made you just as happy." Elenore said in a very loving tone. Vanessa smiled and responded in the same tone; "Your welcome and you made me very happy and I'm glad I made your "first" time a wonderful experience as well, I can see the glow on your face."

"It's that obvious?" Elenore smiled and Vanessa nodded. "I have to go wake up Margaret and Madlax and get them ready for school and make breakfast. I'll see you down at the breakfast table." Vanessa chuckled quietly to herself figuring that Elenore wanted to talk about it later but she knew she was happy, happier than she was in a long while.

"Okay, I'll see you there." Vanessa said as Elenore went out the door.

Elenore went to Margaret's room and went in. She saw the apron she left last night and picked it up.

"Margaret, time to get up. You have school today." She said hoping she didn't have to threaten to use method number three and waited for Margaret to wake up.

"Hmm... what? School? Oh right, school. Exam... today. Thank you Elenore, I'll be downstairs in a minute." Margaret said half asleep, but awake enough to remember last night's revelations, and trying to keep up with her decision of not troubling Elenore unreasonably, now that she was no longer her maid but actually her sister. She got out of bed quickly and started getting ready for the day. "Hmm, you can go now, Elenore. It's okay." Margaret assured Elenore as she noticed her still in the room. "Could you just please make sure Madlax doesn't get up late?"

Elenore smiled warmly. "I still like to greet you in the morning and make sure you get up." She said in a warm tone wanting to keep that "tradition" alive and well.

"I'll go wake up Madlax and the others then I'll fix breakfast. Before you go to school, I believe Laetitia has something to say to you." As she was going out the door. Elenore knocked on Madlax's door, "Good morning Madlax, please wake up, I'm not going to try wakeup method number three on you." Elenore called. She heard the call but her feelings didn't notice immediately. Last night was different, the rustling of the leaves, the strange noises from Elenore's room, Nadie, Ellis, perplexing but not bewildering to Madlax whom was used to living life as a transient chaos. "What are all these artifacts about? Why do I feel someone wants me badly? That stalker. In a bad way." as she clutched her frightened self upon her chest.

"Please Madlax, breakfast will get cold".

"Coming Elenore" as she quickly got dressed and prepared her mind for another day of something completely unexpected.

After Elenore woke up Madlax she went and woke the others. At Laetitia's room she reminded her to apologize to Margaret before she went off to school and then went to fix breakfast.

Margaret finished getting ready and went downstairs. Though she tried not to think about it, she was nervous about confronting Laetitia after last night's argument. She was also nervous about meeting Elenore's mother in the afternoon, which, though she was looking forward to, would also unavoidably bring up the subject of her father. But she tried to worry about the exam for now, even though it felt like the most irrelevant thing at the moment. She couldn't even stay sleepy in the morning as she usually would, with all this. "Good morning everyone." Margaret said discreetly without looking at anyone in particular, taking a seat at the breakfast table.

Elenore and Laetitia noticed Margaret coming to the table and before Margaret sat down Laetitia walked to Margaret with her head bowed and spoke in an apologetic tone.

"Margaret, I'm truly sorry I snapped at you last night. It was uncalled for and I know you're doing your best to figure this all out. But I was worried about Elenore and I temporarily forgot I wasn't the only one who cares. I want to sincerely apologize to you." Margaret half expected Laetitia to apologize, but she was still taken off guard and feeling a bit awkward about the whole thing. "Hmm... It's okay Laetitia. I'm not angry really. I guess you had your reasons to say what you said. But let's forget about it." Margaret looked at Laetitia and smiled slightly, before sitting and saying good morning to the others.

After listening to Margaret's reply she sat down at the table while Nadie, Ellis, Vanessa and Limelda came down said Good Morning to Margaret and each other and sat down as well.

Elenore noticed Madlax coming down to the table. "Good Morning Madlax. Hope you slept well." Elenore cheerfully said.

"Morning Elenore." Madlax replied and sat down.

"Vanessa would it be all right if you could drive Margaret and I to my mother's this afternoon?" Elenore asked.

"I don't see why not, I'll be happy to. I'll be studying most of the day and I'll probably need the break." Vanessa replied who had that same happy glow as Elenore did.

"Thanks Vanessa! Hopefully you can find more about the artifacts and where to take them." Elenore replied cheerfully.

"As I said yesterday, there isn't much about the Bracelet and far less about the ring. But I'll look over the stories and see where they were taken."

"Elenore, I wanted to borrow another DVD from you last night but I guess you were preoccupied." Limelda said nonchalantly and Vanessa shot her a nasty glance.

Elenore blushed. "I thank you for not disturbing me though. If you want I can lend you

more than one if you want."

"Whatever you were doing last night sounded energetic when I passed by." Limelda said noticing Vanessa's glare and she smiled mischievously.

"Miss Jorg, this is neither the time nor the place to "discuss" such things if you don't mind." Elenore said hoping that Limelda got the hint, and Limelda quieted and continued eating.

Limelda may have got the hint but had gotten Madlax intrigued as she took a spoonful of porridge into her mouth.

"Preoccupied, Elenore was preoccupied last night. Vanessa didn't seem too happy at what she said either. Why is Limelda so keen for DVDs? She might be bored." Madlax thought.

"Can I get a DVD from you too Elenore? I don't watch much TV or relax often. It would be nice to have a DVD to watch, Limelda seems to be amazed at your collection?" Madlax asked innocently.

Elenore blushed six shades of red when Madlax asked her.

"I...don't know if you would be interested in what I have." Elenore looked at Laetitia and chose her words very carefully.

"My collection is of a mature subject matter, so perhaps at a later time we can discuss this." Elenore said hoping that Madlax would drop the subject.

Vanessa tried to contain a snicker as she watched poor Elenore trying to get Madlax to drop the subject before anyone else asked.

Margaret was distracted from the whole conversation, but with all the ruckus being made over it she got her attention drawn to it from her own daydreaming, and she didn't understand anything of what was being said either. "Hmm... What? Mature DVDs? What is that supposed to be?" She asked innocently, but vaguely and not too insistently.

"Ummmm.....Nothing important Margaret. Good luck on your exam today!" Elenore said trying to skirt the subject while Vanessa silently chuckled.

"See you when you get back Margaret! Bye!" Elenore said her face still blushed red.

"Oh well, we should get going now Madlax. I have that exam with the mean teacher. He'll be angry again if I get late." Margaret got up and ready to leave for school, waiting for Madlax.

Madlax thought Elenore wasn't really the sharing type, which was okay with her, considering she didn't know her much. "But what did she mean by mature, could it be..." she thought about it but she decided to be ready for her task.

"Margaret is going for an exam which only spells more trouble, maybe that stalker will come again." she pondered.

"Okay, let's go Margaret; I might get to test one of your guns out today Nadie." Madlax replied in a bit of jest as they showed each other the gun they swapped last night.

"I hope not." Margaret replied subtly, scared at the thought. She sure wasn't feeling up to any more running, hiding and shooting today. Though she briefly remembered Nahkl's request not to kill Chloe, the stalker Madlax was talking about. "Have a good day everyone." She said as they both left.

They were silent for a long time as they walked to school. Margaret was lost in her thoughts, concerning everything that happened yesterday. She decided to tell everything to Madlax, still believing that honesty and sharing all information between them was the best course of action.

"Madlax, you know... last night, Nahkl showed up at home. She asked not to kill Chloe no matter what. You think you could do that, if she were to show up? I mean, as long as you don't compromise your safety..." Margaret asked with visible uneasiness.

"Certainly, Margaret. I have no reason to kill her, besides we need to ask her a few questions." Madlax replied.

"You're calm about this Madlax." Margaret replied anxiously.

"It's my job and I've been stalked before." Madlax joked trying to relax Margaret a little.

"Please concentrate on your exam, we don't want to have to guard you a second time if you fail." Madlax told Margaret, knowing that it was serious.

"Yeah, I know... I'll pass. Don't worry." Margaret answered reassuringly. - "There's something else... You might have known it already. Elenore just told me last night. Did you know she's my... she's our half-sister?" - Margaret asked calmly as they kept walking, actually expecting Madlax to have known about this beforehand.

"Yes, Margaret we knew for awhile but we didn't tell you till we can confirm it was true" Madlax answered. Madlax saw the slightly distraught Margaret feeling that she is the last to know anything. "We didn't want to tell you these things till we know it was true Margaret, it would've caused unnecessary pain if it was not true." Madlax trying to reassure Margaret as the countdown to the examination beckoned.

"It's okay. To be honest, I thought you might have known. I guess Vanessa knew as well then? Either way, it doesn't upset me you all hid this from me so much, and of course it doesn't upset me Elenore is related to me. It's just that... I finally realized a lot of things about father. I think I understand why he tried to kill me back then...Also... I'll visit Elenore's mother today. I'm nervous about that too. I don't know how well she'll accept me. She's important to Elenore and probably the only person alive that knew father and mother well. I'd like to give a good impression."

Madlax smiled. "I wouldn't worry about Duvet, just be you and everything will work out. Granted I don't know much about Elenore as I should but I do know her mother pretty well." Madlax replied as the pair entered the university grounds.

"I'll need to watch you in the examination room too, so I will be coming in too." Madlax answered.

"Did you remember to take your Security ID? They will check during the examination." Margaret asked.

"Yes, but I'm not coming in that way." Madlax answered as she had another plan in mind clutching her bag a little tighter.

Kirika stayed as close to Margaret as she could without arousing suspicion. She had used the exchange-student story again, making sure to throw in lots of gratuitous Japanese for good measure; it worked like a charm.

She and Mireille tried to sneak into the mansion last night, but between the three guards--including one of the women in the photo--it proved difficult to get in without being noticed. So they contented themselves to hiding in the bushes. They had each taken opposite ends of the property, for maximum coverage. Besides trying to figure out the guards' patterns, the night was uneventful--except those strange noises Kirika heard coming from a nearby room. No, not so strange; she knew exactly what the occupants were doing, and it made her look longingly around the perimeter, thinking of how nice it would be to make love to Mireille again.

But that was neither the time nor place. They had their hands full already; and besides, what if they alerted the guards?

Kirika took her seat a couple of rows behind Margaret and pretended to take the exam the professor had handed out. Mireille had decided that she would spend today trying to get into the house, while Kirika would follow Margaret again. Kirika hoped Mireille was faring well.

As the exam time approached the deadline, Madlax grew impatient; noticing Margaret still hadn't finished it.

"Hey, Margaret, how much longer till you're done?" Madlax whispered discreetly.

"I'm almost done. Please don't interrupt me now, or it'll take longer." Margaret replied, stressed out by the pressure.

"Well, it's just that... I need to use the toilet badly." Madlax justified in slight embarrassment and trying to hold a giggle.

"Oh just go ahead Madlax. Wait for me outside. I'll be fine." Margaret giggled as well and dismissed Madlax, trying to focus back on the last question of the exam.

Madlax left and a few minutes later Margaret finished and handed her test to the teacher and left the room as well.

"Hmm... looks like she isn't back yet..." Margaret thought, noticing Madlax's absence.

"I guess I could go wait for her outside the bathroom." She thought, as she walked away from the exam room, and turned around the corner into the toilet's direction. - "Oh wait, on second

thought... she probably wouldn't want me to stray away like that. I might be getting watched or followed even at school. I should stay near the exam room." Margaret realized, turning back suddenly and bumping into someone who was just turning around the corner as well.

Margaret didn't really had time to react and both she and this other short girl fell back as they bumped their heads. Margaret looked at her surprised. She was a short Japanese girl. Margaret was not the best at remembering her classmates, but she was pretty sure she had seen this girl back at the exam room, when the teacher interrogated her and she explained she was an exchange student.

"Hmm... I'm... sorry. I'm so sorry! Are you okay?" Margaret got up hurriedly and asked with great embarrassment, reaching out her hand to help the other girl get up.

"Um, sorry about that," Kirika said, embarrassed that her target just caught her. "Um, I have to go now. I, um, have another class."

"Oh wait! Please wait! Are you sure you're all right. I hurt my head too. I'm really sorry. I can be really clumsy at times. Please don't get angry hmm... I'm Margaret Burton. I heard you saying you were an exchange student, at the exam room, but I didn't get your name." Margaret asked politely, hoping to ease things out with this girl.

Kirika looked at the girl. She seemed so apologetic it would be rude to just blow her off. "Um, watashi wa--my name's Noriko. Noriko Ishikawa," Kirika said, bowing as she introduced herself, for good measure. "Hai. I'm from Japan. I'm new here, so I'm still learning...the...ropes?"

Margaret smiled, relieved that the girl wasn't angry at her. She was never very social, and usually found it hard to approach people, but this girl, being an exchange student from so far away seemed a bit lost and she felt like welcoming her, especially after all the trouble she caused. "Nice to meet you Noriko. Japan, that's really far away! I hope you're enjoying it here. Margaret said with a smile.

"Hai...yes very far away. Yes I have much fun here."

"You said you had another class? I was pretty sure there were no more classes. We only have exams this week. Today was my last, before Summer break. The same one you took! How did it go for you, by the way?"

"It go well thank you very much. No more classes?" Kirika asked still feigning hoping that Margaret would just keep the answers simple and she could go.

Kirika smiled like a tourist. "We be friends' hai? Maybe you show me Na...freeeece, yes?" Kirika asked in feigned broken English.

Margaret was taken by surprise. She didn't had many people openly asking her to be friends like this. She wasn't sure how to react but she felt like she couldn't refuse. Noriko seemed like a

kind person and she thought it might be fun to show her around. "Oh all right! I'll be your friend and I can show you around while you're staying in Nafrece! We can change cell phone numbers if you'd like." Margaret replied with a smile.

"Domo Arigato. Yes give cell phone number." Kirika bowed and exchanged numbers with Margaret and waited for Margaret to say something else...

Meanwhile while Madlax and Margaret were at school, Elenore did some housework and then called her mother.

"Hello?" Meg asked on the other end.

"Hello Mother." Elenore replied.

"How are you today?" Meg asked.

"I'm fine, but I can ask you something." Elenore replied and asked.

"Sure as long it's not something you shouldn't be asking over the phone..." Meg replied referring and reminding her to the fact that she shouldn't speak of Justicar business over the phone.

"All right, I wanted to know if it's okay to bring Margaret with me today."

"Sure, that would be okay. I know Margaret's important to you and she is your sister."

"Funny you should mention that mother, I told Margaret last night. She didn't care if I had the proof or not she accepted me as her sister."

"I'm glad for you honey. I gather she took it well?"

"Well she is upset over father, but I'll let her talk about that if she wants." Elenore replied.

"All right then, I'll be expecting you two and we'll talk when you get here. Bye sweetie." Meg said and then she hung up.

Elenore hung up the phone and headed back to the kitchen.

Vanessa studied the text with a bit of frustration. From what she gathered all three were taken to various sites with the same result. "Does that mean any holy place will do? What if it's the wrong place?" A knock came on her door. "Yes? Who is it?" She asked thankfully for the interruption.

"It's Elenore, do you want some tea?" Elenore asked on the other side.

"Yes please, come in." Vanessa said with relieved smile as Elenore came in.

Elenore sat the tray and herself down and made Vanessa and herself a cup of tea.

"How goes it?" Elenore asked in a curious tone.

"Not well. The artifacts have been taken to various holy sites, but I don't know if they're the right ones?" Vanessa said with a little frustration in her voice.

"Hmmm, maybe you should ask someone who would have an idea; maybe Dr Tudor would have

an insight. It is her specialty after all." Elenore suggested.

Vanessa's eyes lit up as she came to the same revelation. "Why didn't I think of this sooner. I'll have to phase it so she doesn't think we have them."

"Well all this has to do with the supernatural and face it; it's not yours or mine forte." Elenore replied in agreement as she stood up.

"I have to agree with you there on that one. Computers are my specialty and this has nothing to do with them. Hmmm...What's on your mind Elenore?" Vanessa asked in a curious tone noticing that Elenore wanted to ask something.

"I wanted to ask last night...Please forgive me if this sounds a tad blunt but to be honest I've never asked anyone this before." Elenore asked a bit nervously.

"Go on." Vanessa replied probably guessing what Elenore had in mind.

"I've been thinking since last night and I really want to pursue a serious relationship with you, so will you be my partner?" Elenore trying to hide the nervousness in her voice.

Vanessa got up and looked Elenore in the eye and lovingly smiled.

"Yes, I would love to. But there is something you must know." Vanessa replied with tears of joy in her eyes.

"What is it?" Elenore asked a bit thrown off.

"Well I still owe Badgis a dinner from the last time he helped me."

"Why haven't you done so? He is your friend and you do owe him. Do you have feelings for him?" Elenore asked a bit concerned.

"No, only as a friend but I'm more worried that he might have feelings for me." Vanessa replied. Elenore smiled and warmly hugged Vanessa and said; "Just say your taken if he asks and your just repaying him for his help. He seems to be a nice man."

"Well I didn't want you to get jealous..." Vanessa said a bit nervous herself.

Elenore smiled lovingly and said;" I understand. I trust you Vanessa so don't worry."

"Thanks Elenore!" Vanessa happily replied and warmly hugged Elenore in return.

They held each other in a loving embrace for a while and then they let go.

"I have to call Dr. Tudor to get her opinion. Wish me luck." Vanessa said with a warm smile.

"Good Luck!" Elenore replied and gave Vanessa a kiss on the cheek which Vanessa returned.

"Well I still have chores to do before this afternoon. I'll call you when lunch is ready."

Elenore said as she was leaving the room.

"Thanks Elenore." Vanessa replied as she pulled out her cell phone and started dialing.

Madlax emerged from the bathroom rather concerned. She saw a young girl with black hair who seemed familiar for some reason and she kept an eye on her during the entire exam. However; she never got too close or too far trying not to cause a stir. If she is who she feared who she is, then Margaret was in real danger.

Madlax peered down the hall waiting, trying not to be too conspicuous by going to the bathrooms. As she walked out, she saw Margaret with the young girl; this certainly was the girl she saw on the first day on Nafrece! A person who kills so easily is never easily forgotten! Madlax ran quickly but wanted to be discreet and whispered to Margaret's ear "Watch out she's got a gun" as sneakily pulled one from her jacket.

"What? A gun? Are you sure?" Margaret turned her head at Madlax and whispered back in disbelief. She looked back at the other girl and stared at her silently for a few seconds. She tried to read her reaction, but she kept as calm and innocent looking as before. Could Madlax have been mistaken? It was then when Margaret suddenly felt the Torc reacting. No one else could have noticed it, for the Torc could only show this to Margaret. She immediately felt this person was special and that the Torc was reaching out to her. No, more than just a feeling, Margaret knew this!

"Kirika Yuumura! It's you, isn't it? I've been looking for you. Do you have the ring with you?" Margaret asked calmly with a kind smile, happy to have finally found the bearer of the last artifact, as well as the one person who could help them deal with Chloe. It was all too perfect to be true.

Kirika was stunned. How did she know who she was considering Margaret had never met her before? And what did she mean by "looking for you"? What was she talking about? The ring, the very one she tossed away?! On the other hand it did make things easier and perhaps get some of her questions answered.

Dropping the "exchange student" act she addressed Margaret.

"Yes, I'm Yuumura Kirika. I'm sorry for the deception but I had to get to you without anyone suspecting who I really am. It seems we have a mutual enemy Miss Burton, but I am curious why where you looking for me and what about this ring you are talking about?" Kirika waited for Margaret's reaction.

"Well, it's a bit strange... I'm not sure how to explain, but please believe me! There's these three artifacts. I got one and someone I met yesterday has another one, and you should have the last one, the ring!

There are people targeting me because of this. One of them, Chloe, I believe you know her? Either way, if we gather these three artifacts at a sacred place we may ask for a wish. I have something I want to ask, so I will need your help. And if you join us we can help you too! Would you please join us?" Margaret eagerly asked, hoping her simple explanation would be convincing enough.

Kirika didn't what to believe. Three artifacts for a wish? Was the ring she tossed one of them? She decided to hold that information from her for now. But Chloe was a different matter, but it didn't make much sense. Was Altena after Margaret for the artifacts and her sister for the new Noir?

Margaret didn't look the type that Altena would choose for Noir in the first place. She considered Margaret's offer and thought it would help Mireille and her and them as well.

"I don't have the ring you're talking about, sorry." Kirika replied.

"You don't... have it?" Margaret tilted her head to the side, perplexed "That's odd. I was pretty sure that you... hmm, no, I'm pretty sure it's you! Maybe you don't have it yet, but it will come to you, soon enough. I know it." She smiled reassuringly.

As for your request, I think we can help each other out. There is one thing I would like to know, do you have a sister? Chloe's master is interested in her and I would explain more but this place isn't safe. Maybe we should somewhere where we wouldn't be listened in on." Kirika replied calmly.

"A sister? I have three! Madlax here, Laetitia and Elenore. But I believe you mean Elenore. I've heard she was being targeted. Can you please tell me more about it over lunch?" Margaret invited her to join them, as she had previously promised Madlax a pasta meal after the exam.

"We can talk over lunch, thank you." Kirika responded and the trio went to the nearest Italian restaurant for pasta. They sat at a table farthest from the window so they couldn't be as easily and ordered pasta.

"Elenore?" Kirika asked a bit puzzled. Was the maid in the picture really her sister? And the man she gave to the pictures to what was his connection to all this?

"I had pictures of her that Chloe had dropped, but I gave them to her uncle. Does your sister work as a maid for someone else? One of the pictures had her dressed as a maid."

"Hmm... this is a bit complicated. Elenore is actually my half-sister. We only learned about it recently, so she used to work as a maid for me." Margaret said with some reservation, yet feeling she could trust Kirika and should be honest about any questions she asked.

Kirika pondered on what to say about that, but she decided it was really none of her business to comment on another family's business but it did explain why Altena wanted Elenore.

She must've found Elenore was related to Margaret somehow and thought she would be a better candidate than Margaret. A revelation came to Kirika, if Altena knew that both Madlax and Elenore were related then what need would there be for Chloe. Altena might just get rid of her. Chloe must've figured that out so that may be the real reason she wanted to get rid of Madlax, that she did remind Chloe of Mireille.

"You and Elenore might not be the only ones in your family that are being targeted." Kirika said looking at Madlax. Madlax calmly pulled her pistol from her jacket and managing to keep out sight, she noticed acutely Kirika had her hand on one just in case. She wasn't fooled and nor was she and both understood but Margaret was rather clueless to it. As the three young women sat waiting for entrees, Madlax asked "Kirika, I remember you and a young blonde lady

were being shot at a few days ago. Who were they?"

"Those were Soldats trying to kill us. I may have figured out why Chloe wants you dead other than you remind her of Mireille. Altena wants you and your sister Elenore to be the next Noir which why Altena wants us dead as well. As for Chloe, she may think Altena wants her dead so she can replace her with you. If I had to judge from what I've seen so far you two would probably make a formidable duo."

"That's absurd. Neither Elenore nor Madlax would submit to such a plan. Elenore is the last person I could think of becoming a murderer, she's too kind for her own good! And Madlax might be an agent, and she might have killed a lot of people, but she would never let herself become a tool of evil. She is a kind killer." Margaret answered with firm conviction, unsettled by Kirika's words. "What is this Altena person thinking? She must be even more insane than Friday Monday..." She added with uneasiness, at the thought of such an opponent.

"Altena insane... I'll agree to that, she's quite very insane. What sane person would send a child to murder another human being while preaching "Love can kill, but hate can save"? Oh yes Miss Burton, Altena is far more insane than Friday Monday ever could be when he was alive."

"Thank you Margaret for your kind words, oh I'm honored to be rated so highly." Madlax giggled quietly in humor. "But really, I don't want to be part of this plan. So how can we stop Altena, Kirika?" Madlax asked.

Kirika made a short pause and Madlax noticed the pasta was just being served with a rather snooping and attentive waiter.

Kirika waited till the waiter had left and then she answered. "Short of killing her outright...nothing. I don't know where she might be, after our last confrontation with her we thought she was dead. But recent events have proven otherwise. If you what you say about these artifacts is true then we might have a chance."

"It is the truth! Which is why we must gather all three artifacts quickly, I was really hoping you'd have the ring by now..." Margaret said with a hint of disappointment. "Hmm... I don't know if this might help at all, but would you please come to my place later tonight? I was thinking, maybe if you meet Ellis, she might have a clue to where the ring might be. She's better at controlling her artifact than I am... Either way, I must tell the others we found you, and it would help if we kept in touch. Is that okay with you?"

"Actually we were planning to go by there to find why Altena wanted you and your sisters, but it seems that question has been answered. I must go for now, but I will stop by later on tonight. Thank you for your invitation." Kirika left money for her food and left to tell Mireille. But before

she went back to her, she went back to where she dropped the ring and finding it was gone. But if these artifacts were powerful as Margaret said they were then it would no doubt come back to her, it was only a question of when.

Madlax and Margaret bid Kirika farewell with Madlax slightly concerned for Kirika's safety despite knowing she was one of the deadliest persons that ever existed. "That was a pleasant meal, we better get back now and tell the others." Madlax suggested. "Also thank you for the pasta." Madlax told Margaret giving her a little hint to pay the bill.

"You're welcome Madlax! And thank you for being such a great bodyguard!" Margaret replied with a sweet smile as she paid the bill.

As they were walking out the restaurant Margaret remembered she had forgotten to mention the subject of Chloe to Kirika. Hopefully they wouldn't run into Chloe on their way home, but it was still a somewhat urgent matter that she had to bring on later tonight without fail.

"Madlax, what did you think of Kirika? She's nothing like the "Noir" I had imagined... She's almost... like me, in a way... I think we can trust her, don't you agree? I wonder about her partner though..."

"She is nothing like what I imagined either, but she's really deadly I've seen her kill people so calmly and quietly. My senses tell me to trust her Margaret. But my experience tells me never to trust someone or something so soon. I know many who have died that way. "Madlax said cautiously. I don't know about her partner though; she seems a meaner person. She looked down upon my dress sense." Madlax said a little discouragingly.

"Maybe she is slightly jealous of my figure" she smiled jokingly with her hand on her hip.

Margaret giggled at Madlax's remarks, and they kept talking about silly things on their way, till they reached home, this time without any scary people showing up along the way. Margaret got to the door and absentmindedly ringed the bell as usual, feeling bad right after for having forgotten her keys, as she remembered her decision to try not to impose on Elenore any longer.

Elenore answered the door. "Welcome home Margaret and Madlax." She said warmly. "Did you forget your keys again?"

"I didn't want to impose on you." Margaret replied a bit embarrassed that she forgot her keys again.

Elenore smiled warmly. "That's okay; we're family so impose on me. I may not be your maid but I still want to take care of you. That's what families members do, they look out for each other. I'll tell Vanessa your home and we'll leave for mothers whenever you're ready."

"Hmm okay... Thank you Elenore!" Margaret replied with a smile. "I'm ready to go now, I think... Oh wait, there is something! Today, at school, I found Kirika. Kirika Yuumura, the person we wanted to find, because of Chloe. She and her partner are the ones they call "Noir" after all. And she's also the bearer of the last artifact. I can't explain it very well, but I'm sure about all of this. She didn't have the ring with her, but I'm sure it will come to her pretty soon. I changed contacts with her and asked her to come by here tonight. This is good for us, isn't it?" Margaret said enthusiastically.

"That's wonderful! That saves us a great deal of time and hopefully we can find the ring and get this whole business done and over with. I'll go get Vanessa now and we can leave." Elenore said just as enthusiastically then she went to get Vanessa but she couldn't help feel a touch of apprehension; she remembered what her uncle, Madlax and Limelda said about Noir and she wondered if it was all right to have them come to the house. A couple of minutes later both came out the door.

"Okay let's get going I have some great news and I'll tell it on the way to Meg's" Vanessa said as she came out the door. Elenore looked at Madlax and remembered something. "Madlax, do you want to come with us too? After all my mother did raise you even if was for a short time." Elenore asked with a smile.

"I like to join, besides you can use some extra protection." Madlax added using that as an excuse to go see her surrogate mother.

Vanessa said with a smile. "Great! Let's go!" And all four got into the car and drove off. On the way there Elenore asked Vanessa in excited and curious tone.

"So what did Dr Tudor have to say Vanessa?"

"As you all know I've been reading the legends and every time the artifacts were gathered they were brought to a different location every time. I wracked my brain trying to figure out which was the right place. Then Elenore suggested that I call Dr. Tudor and ask her opinion without telling her we have artifacts. I merely asked if we did have them where would we take them."

Vanessa said with a dramatic pause.

"Well where did she say we should take them?" Elenore asked a tiny bit annoyed with Vanessa's dramatic pause.

"She said whoever possessed the Torc would have to choose what the holy place would be. In other words, since Margaret has the Torc it would up to her to choose where to take them. So until we find the ring, you'll have to think where to take them Margaret." Vanessa finished with a smirk noticing Elenore's slight irritation.

"That is good news! Margaret did you hear that?!" Elenore exclaimed.

"Hmm... I get to choose?" Margaret pondered for a while on this matter. "Don't Ellis and Kirika have a saying on this, too? I don't want to be selfish. I guess, if no one minds... Do you think I could make the holy place at my home? It'd be safe and discreet that way... or does it have to be outside?" Margaret suggested, not entirely sure of her possibilities.

"The Torc is the keystone artifact. That means where ever the Torc goes so must they. As the for holy place I guess you could choose it to be your home, considering the bracelet mainly deals with hearth and home or it can be anywhere you consider holy. Hmmm...I never thought to ask either you or Elenore this, but does the house have a chapel or somewhere private religious ceremonies took place?" Vanessa answered and asked both Margaret and Elenore.

Margaret was surprised at the question "Not that I know of...do you know of anything, Elenore?"

Elenore pondered on the question for a bit and then answered. "I know there's nothing like that in the east or the center of the house. If there were anything like that, it would have to be in the west wing where I set up the barricade. We haven't looked over that wing since yesterday. After we get home I suggest we go and do through look over."

"I almost forgot about that, that's where you found those books at. You're right Elenore, after we get back from Meg's we'll do a search of the place, there's a couple unanswered questions still there." Vanessa replied.

"Good idea, I really to want check out that wing."Elenore replied as they pulled up to Meg's. After Vanessa parked the car they walked up to the front door and rang the bell.

Meg opened the door and looked at them all.

"Well I was expecting Elenore, Margaret and Vanessa but I didn't expect you to come along too Madlax." Meg said with a smile then she took a good look at Margaret and froze in her tracks. Tears were welling up in her eyes as she looked at Margaret.

"My God, you really do look like your mother." She said with a smile and tears running down her cheeks and she walked up to Margaret and warmly hugged her.

Margaret was taken aback by such unexpected display of affection. She knew this person had known her parents well, but the circumstances on which they parted weren't the best. She sure wasn't expecting such an emotional response from a person who had never even met her before. After the initial shock and overall awkwardness Margaret hugged Meg back.

"It's... very nice to meet you hmm... Ms. Baker. I'm... very glad, that you were able to reunite with Elenore again... after all these years. It made Elenore very happy so that means a lot to me." Margaret said in a humble tone and a honest smile, unable to hide her shyness."

"It's nice to finally meet you too Margaret. Elenore has told me a great deal about you and you mean a great deal to her as well." Meg said in a warm and friendly tone.

"I believe you already know the whole truth about... my parent's circumstances?" She asked with some reservation "To be honest, I don't really remember my mother that well, but from what I saw on pictures you are right, I do resemble her. Thank you!"

"Yes, I do." Meg said in a sad tone and hugged Margaret. "You probably have some questions and I'll do my best to answer them." "You're quite welcome."

"And hmm... I'm really sorry you were kept away from Elenore for so long. I'm sure everyone committed mistakes... on this matter. But things could have been worked out differently..." - Margaret added, lowering her head slightly in embarrassment.

"Margaret, it's not your fault so don't apologize for things you haven't done okay?" Meg said with a warm and reassuring smile.

"We can't change the past, we only can move on. If anything it's my cross to bear...so don't worry about that Margaret." Meg said looking in Margaret's eyes and then hugging and then letting go. "Let's go inside and I'll introduce you to the wonders of coffee." Meg warmly said motioning the foursome inside.

"Hmm, you're right." Margaret agreed with a smile. "Okay, coffee, that's different! I always have tea, I don't think I ever tried coffee!" And the four of them walked inside and settled in the living room as Meg served them coffee.

"So, you think you could tell me more about my parents? I feel like I don't really know them that well." Margaret tried to ask casually enough, as she sipped through her drink and jumped back slightly in surprise, as she burned her tongue.

"Well what would you like to know? Careful the coffee's hot. " Meg said as she watched Margaret jump back.

" I grew up with your father at the estate and we both went to the same schools together. Your mother I met when Richard and I were in our junior year at high school. He started dating her at the beginning of the school year." Meg answered hoping for more specific questions.

"So you've known him for even longer than my mother. I didn't know that..." Margaret pondered on that information for a while then she remembered that Meg's family had served her family for generations and thought on how to phrase her next question - "Well, I don't mean to be blunt... It must be hard for you as well, to talk about it. But I need to know something, did he ever love my mother for real, or was he in love with you from the start?" Margaret asked awkwardly, hoping it wasn't too inappropriate of a question.

Meg paused and closed her eyes briefly as to find the inner strength and then she thought she heard a voice she hadn't heard in years whisper; "It's okay Meg, just tell her the truth."

With a sad look on her face she replied.

"I really don't want to upset you with the answer but you deserve the truth. He liked Anna but in reality was in love with me. Richard wanted to marry me but I was just the daughter of his servants and not a aristocrat like him so that was out of the question. So he married Anna instead and for awhile I saw a man in my own social class. After I broke up with him due to his abuse, Richard comforted me when I came home that evening with a black eye and well eventually one thing led to another..." Meg collapsed in her chair and began to sob. "I'm so sorry..."

Margaret thought she saw her mother's presence behind Meg. She had a sad look as well, as if she wanted comfort her friend. Due to the Torc Margaret heard her mother speak even though one else could hear; "I know, I forgive you and I'm sorry too. But it broke my heart to learn that my husband was in love with my best friend and sadly I took it out on the one person who I shouldn't have; your daughter..."

"My mother is sorry as well. She didn't mean to take it out on Elenore. But she forgives you, she told me that before! And well, I don't blame you for anything. You were in love with my father before he married my mother. I just wish he hadn't deceived her like that. They should have never gotten together and I... I'm pretty sure my father didn't want me. I guess I always knew, I just never understood why before. I just wanted to clear this out. I'm sorry for bringing you such sad memories." Margaret replied, struggling with her own tears.

"It's all right Margaret you needed to know. It's sad that both you and Elenore had to see this side of Nafrean High Society. Both your father and mother were bound by the rules of that society so they had to marry someone in their social class." Meg said still struggling with her tears as well. "As for Richard not wanting you; that doesn't surprise me considering how he really was. Underneath that genteel exterior he was a very violent man and he let that out when he couldn't get his way. I'm sorry he took his anger out on you." Meg said with tears streaming down her face and then she got up and warmly hugged Margaret.

Madlax drew tears down her cheeks as well, it was saddening although she never knew any of her parents or understood the chains of high society.

"I'm sorry what has happened, I never knew life in rich Nafrece can be so painful." Madlax said in a state of surprise as the tears rolled slowly through her cheek.

"Vanessa, what do you or your family knows about our parents?" Madlax asked.

"Personally I never met your parents and since mine are dead as well I can't ask them either. Since they traveled in the same circles they did it's a good possibility they knew each other or that's what Elenore's grandfather said to me. All this misery has caused by the chains of "traditions" and "expectations" of "High Society". That's why I try to avoid it as much as possible, other than dealing with Margaret who I do care about." Vanessa said sadly looking on the scene with distress.

On another plane; the three Goddesses were watching the scene with interest. "It appears yet another soul tied to the Burton's is making their presence known." Brigid said sadly.

"I find it amusing that she's quick to dole out forgiveness, but she has yet to ask for it for herself considering what she did." Morrigan retorted sarcastically.

"Granted she made your champions early life miserable but I don't see the value of opening old wounds unnecessarily." Rhiannon said looking at Morrigan.

"Well, if she wants forgiveness she'll have to ask for it. Ever since your champion got the Torc her mother's soul has been hovering around silently asking for forgiveness. So I'm going to give it to her." Morrigan said grasping Rhiannon by the hand.

While Meg held Margaret the Torc glowed brightly and soon all of them were in that field of flowers. Margaret regained her balance and she gasped in surprise; standing along with them in the field was Margaret's mother.

"Mother?" Margaret asked wondering why the Torc was doing this not knowing that ring was very close by.

"Anna, is that you?" Meg asked just as confused letting go of Margaret.

"Hello Margaret." Anna said warmly and then she turned to Meg. "Yes it is me Meg. I want to apologize to you. I'm sorry I forced you to stay away from your daughter. I know what I did was wrong but at the time she was a reminder that my husband was unfaithful and my best friend had betrayed me." Anna said in an apologetic tone.

"If I could be forgiven, so can you. Besides you weren't the only one who had a hand in keeping me away from Elenore. So yes Anna I forgive you but there's one other person you need to ask as well and she's here...now?!" Meg said warmly but her voice turned to shock as she saw Elenore not as the adult but as a very angry child covered in the black flames of anger.

"ELENORE!!" Both Margaret and Meg said in unison.

Anna smiled at Margaret and warmly said; "Please Margaret, don't interfere. I need to do this for my penance. There will come another time soon we can talk freely as we are now."

"Okay mother I understand. I love you." Margaret said sadly.

"Don't be sad Margaret and I love you too." Anna replied warmly as she walked towards Elenore.

Anna looked at the child sadly knowing full well who it was as Margaret watched helplessly. "YOU MEAN OLD WOMAN! I HATE YOU! YOU MADE MY LIFE MISRABLE! IT WAS YOU WHO MADE MY GRANDPA NOT LOVE ME! YOU MADE MY MOMMY STAY AWAY!!" The child screamed in anger.

Spectral tears ran down Anna's cheeks and she bent to hug the child. As she did, the child began hitting her and screaming "I HATE YOU!" Anna held her tight as so to stop her from hitting her and then she spoke.

I wanted to say this to you when you died but Margaret had already brought you back to the world of the living before I could. I'm so very sorry.

What I did to you was wrong and no better than what my husband tried to do your sister. I was angry and hurt and you were a reminder that my husband never truly loved me. Yes I made your grandfather do things he didn't want to do but he was bound by those same chains as I was. Your grandfather truly loves for you who are. Please Elenore, let go of this anger."

Anna winced as the flames burned her but they began to die down as she continued to hold her. The flames dissipated and Anna was comforting the child that Elenore once was.

"I wish I could make it up to you, but this might be the only thing I can do." As the child Elenore began to disappear Anna spoke; "Thank you Elenore for loving and watching over Margaret. You're a good big sister."

Then the flames disappeared and then Anna turned to Margaret and said. "In a few days your father will tell you his side of the truth and finally you can close that door...." With that Anna disappeared and Margaret, Elenore, Vanessa, Madlax and Meg found themselves back in the real world. Elenore was trying to wipe the tears from her eyes as well.

"You're welcome." She said not consciously knowing why she said it and leaving everyone else except Margaret a bit confused.

"What just happened?" Vanessa asked confused six ways to Sunday.

"It's okay, Vanessa. The ghosts from the past still watch over us and they try to tell us things, from time to time. Today they wanted us to know that everything is all right now, that all mistakes have been forgiven. The Torc helped me realize this." Margaret clarified, noticing Vanessa's confusion. "I hope we can all leave our guilt and anger behind, so we can finally settle this matter and be at peace with ourselves. I'd really like that." She added with a smile, directing the last part at everyone in the room.

"I would like that too. I got confused when the scene changed and your mother appeared and Elenore was covered in flames and now we're back here. I never realized that the Torc was that powerful.

"Wow! I didn't know the Torc could do that!" Elenore exclaimed and then Elenore said quietly to herself. "Did I hold all that anger in for that long? Maybe I do have a problem."

Meg stood there in deep thought while wiping the tears from her eyes.

"So that was the Torc...? Where have I heard that before? I know I have."

"Oh, so you've been told about the artifacts? Did you remember something? We can use all the information we can get." Margaret asked with great interest.

"Yes, I do, I've heard something mentioned about a Torc a long time ago. Wait here, please." Meg answered and she went a room and a couple of minutes later pulled out an old little chest and put it on the coffee table. Then she put on white gloves and unlocked the chest and opened it.

"What's in there mother?" Elenore asked curiously with great interest.

"This chest was given to me by your Uncle Walter for safekeeping. I haven't looked in here for years. But I think there's something about a Torc in the journal in here. Plus there's something I think you and Margaret should see."

Meg carefully pulled a very old journal from the chest and setting it down on the table carefully flipped through the pages till she found what she was looking for.

"Ah here is. Let read it to you, but I start this journal was once owned by William Baker. This is nearly five hundred years old." Meg said noticing the impatience on everyone's face. "Oh let me read from here."

September 18th 1499,

I procured the item with much dire peril to my personage and gave it to my Lord Peter Burton. My Lord was most pleased with the swiftness of my procurement and wished to grant me reward for my success. I wished nothing for my humble self but only to serve my Lordship but I did request of his Lordship that my son be sent to the finest schools in the land so he too can serve his Lordship far better than my humble self could ever do. His Lordship pondered my request and he smiled and stated with great exuberance that my son and his son and so forth would be granted fine education as long as we served his Lordship's family and he drew up a pact which I signed.

September 21st 1499,

His Lordship bade to accompany him to a remote place far from the city. With his Lordship and I were three maidens one wearing the very Torc I had procured for his Excellency. I asked his Excellency why the maiden wearing the Torc and he answered thus was; tis a special maiden may only wear the Torc of Rhiannon. I know not who this Rhiannon is but what I saw astounded me to the end of my days.

The Torc and then a ring and then a bracelet glowed with bright light, nearly blinding us. When the light dimmed, a woman? An Angel? Appeared before us and bade his Lordship and the three maidens to speak their desires. The maidens wished for wealth and beauty till the end of their days which seemed to sadden the glowing woman. Then his Lordship stated his desire that him and all his descendants for forever more be recognized of noble birth and blood and may none dispute it. This sadden the woman more and she told his Lordship that his desires would be granted but at a price. His Lordship asked what that price may be and she answered thusly; that his blood and the blood of a commoner would mix and the child of that common birth would be seen as of noble blood as well.

His Lordship scoffed and agreed to the price thinking it was a jest made by the woman and with a great flash she disappeared.

"I don't know this recounting would help you girls, other than it would make a great sleeping pill. Never knew our ancestor was such a long winded bastard." Meg said with a chuckle.

"So... that means we can ask for four wishes? But there's a price to be paid for it?" - Margaret sorted out from the narrative.

"Actually five, the three maidens made their wishes and Petey here made two. One was for his family to be recognized still as nobles and other wish was that no one could ever dispute it. My guess from reading this, at the time the Burton's were losing power so Petey more or less wish for his family to keep their power. As for the price you have to admit all the wishes were pretty selfish and I gather that's a no-no. I think the wishes have to be for others in other words; selfless wishes." Meg explained.

"And your calling great grandfather William long winded mother." Elenore joked.

"I see... so if we don't ask for selfish things we'll be fine then? I just want to help Poupee so that won't bring us any trouble, I think. I don't know what Ellis or Kirika want to ask, but we'll warn them about this. We still get two extra wishes, what should we ask for?"

"Hmmm...Maybe wishing for healthy children. That doesn't sound selfish since it wishing that the children are healthy." Elenore said in a guessing tone.

"Okay, who is he and how when is it due?" Meg asked Elenore in a teasing tone.

Elenore's eyes grew wide as saucers and her jaw dropped a bit before she answered;

"NO! I'm.... not pregnant! The only person I'm seeing is Vanessa!" Elenore said an excited but greatly nervous tone pointing at Vanessa and with Meg and Vanessa chuckling.

"Oh! You and Vanessa? I didn't know that, Elenore. When did this happen?" Margaret asked, pleasantly surprised. "Vanessa, do you intend to marry Elenore?" Margaret turned at Vanessa and inquired in a serious tone.

"We just started our relationship not too long ago." Elenore answered still recovering from the ribbing her mother just gave her. Vanessa blushed as she stumbled for answer." Like Elenore said we just started our relationship. As for marriage, it's up to her if she wants to get married." Meg smiled mischievously and said "So when's the big day? So which one of you is going to be the bride or groom here?"

Elenore turned to Meg who was chuckling at the flustered look on Elenore's face.

"Mother!"

Madlax was amused and asked "So can I have the bouquet of flowers?"

"Only if you marry Limelda" Vanessa joked and Madlax gave a slight chuckle as she sipped her lukewarm coffee.

"Is there nothing you wish for Madlax?" Vanessa asked perplexed how little desire Madlax has.

"I don't know maybe a lifetime of pasta..." Madlax pondered as she stared into the reflection of herself in the coffee.

"Anything else?" Vanessa asking in anticipation.

"I wish I can use my gun freely but without having to kill anybody."

Meg looked on with a amused look. She was happy that she had been reunited with her daughter and that she had found someone she cared about. She was also happy that Anna had finally forgiven her and Margaret had no resentment towards her. She could finally be a mother to her daughter and a surrogate one to Margaret. Now only if Elenore could give her a grandchild.

"Oh I see, so Vanessa here going to be the blushing bride. I guess Madlax will be your maid of honor I take it?" Meg said watching both Madlax and Vanessa faces turn six shades of red. She could hear Elenore and Margaret giggling behind her. She turned around and rushed to tightly hug Elenore and in over the top exuberance said; "Oh I'm so happy my baby's getting married! Ooh this is the happiest day in my life!"

Elenore's face turned six shades of red as well with Margaret giggling at the sight.

"Well I'm sure Margaret will be the best woman. Now Margaret, do try to keep the bachelorette party tame will you?" Margaret's face now turned red as well as Meg grinned mischievously. She thought she heard somebody else giggling but she figured that Anna was enjoying watching the kids be embarrassed six ways to Sunday.

Margaret tried to get away from the embarrassment by changing the subject, but she had actually thought of something somewhat important. "Hmm... I was wondering... I don't know about the wish limitations or anything but, what if we asked for Les Soldats and Enfant to disappear? I'm not saying kill them, but just have them disappear as an organization. They'd at least become a lesser threat, and I think that could be helpful not just to us, but to a lot of people, right?" She suggested at everyone.

Meg's expression turned serious and sad. "The problem with that is that it would create a power vacuum, a big one. If Enfant and the Soldats disappeared; the Triads, Hotel Moscow, the Mafia and every other lesser crime syndicate, petty thug and total whack jobs would come out of the woodwork fighting for the top. That would cause more harm and chaos than anything both Enfant and the Soldats could ever do put together. I think having them leave all of you alone would be a better option, I don't think wishing for safety is selfish. I would like to believe these spirits, Goddesses or whatever is behind these artifacts can understand self preservation." The Torc glowed warmly and Margaret had the feeling that Goddess agreed with what Meg had to say.

"Yes, you're right! I hadn't thought of that... asking for safety will be enough. We should be able to include everyone involved in only one wish, I think." Margaret replied, assuming Ellis and Nadie as well as Kirika and her partner would greatly appreciate it.

"We should get back, I have to start making dinner and we're expecting guests this evening." Elenore said.

"Elenore sweetie, can I have a word with you in private?" Meg asked pointing to the kitchen.

"Sure mother." Elenore replied wondering what her mother had to say that couldn't be said in front of everyone else. As they both went into the kitchen Elenore asked; "What is it mother?" Meg sighed and replied. "Look sweetie, I know you didn't know but be careful when you use the phone. You never know who might be listening in.

Meg smiled. "Sweetie, it's okay. You didn't know and Altena is breaking a lot of rules of engagement and etiquette so I rather that both of us be safe than sorry."

"I don't quite understand these "rules" mother." Elenore replied.

"The E&E rules evolved over the centuries of both sides fighting each other. Without them there would a LOT of dead bodies on both sides piling up. Anyway, be careful around Kirika Yuumura and her partner. They're both Noir and extremely dangerous. I don't know how you found out her name so quickly and something tells me I don't want to know. But any case be on your guard but not on your guard if get what I mean sweetie." Meg replied with a bit of worry and concern in her voice.

"I understand mother, but how did you know?" Elenore asked a tad confused.

"Sweetie, I work for N.I. you figure it out. I just want you to be careful that's all." Meg replied

with a knowing smile.

"Alright I'll be careful. We have to get going now." Elenore said hugging her mother.

"I love you sweetie. Always remember that." Meg replied hugging Elenore back.

"I love you too mother." Elenore said letting go of Meg and returning to the living room.

"If everyone's ready to go, I'll warm up the car. See you later and thanks for the coffee...Meg"
Vanessa said as she left.

Back at the Burton home Nadie was looking for Limelda when she saw Ellis with Laetitia watching anime on the television.

"Ellis have you seen Limelda? It's her turn." Nadie asked annoyed.

"She said she was watching the DVD's she borrowed from Elenore and she told me to mind my business when I asked what they were." Ellis replied.

"Don't let her get to you Ellis." Nadie said reassuring tone.

"She refuses to see the truth." Laetitia said cryptically.

"Huh?" Nadie said.

"Oh, you mean now that Vanessa is with Elenore she has Madlax to herself but Madlax's heart says otherwise." Ellis said translating from Laetitia speak.

"How did you get all that from what she said?" Nadie said with a puzzled tone.

"Isn't it obvious?" Ellis replied wondering why Nadie didn't understand what Laetitia said.

Nadie sighed and went off to look for Limelda elsewhere.

Kirika took one last good look around, making sure she wasn't just overlooking the ring. She turned around to go back to the Burton mansion when her cell phone buzzed again.

"K, it's M. I'm @ our spot. I couldn't get in." Kirika ran back to their hideout, wondering what happened. When Kirika returned she filled her partner on what happened with Margaret. Then Mireille explained what happened at the mansion mention how the west wing was almost a fortress compared to the rest of house and how she nearly got caught. After all that they set off to the mansion. Before leaving the hideout, Mireille removed all traces of their presence, like the empty coffee cups, and turned off the lights. "Let's go meet that Margaret person," she said to Kirika. "I am curious about her... You show me the way, since you already know her."

A little while later Kirika and Mireille arrived at the Burton Mansion and enter through the front gate. As they approached the front doors they saw that one of them was opening.

Laetitia opened the front door and looked at the pair coming towards her.

"The last key is here. The door will open very soon."

"The key?" Mireille inquired of the little girl before her, as she and Kirika went inside. "You mean that thing about three artifacts and the ritual that you people told Kirika about? May I ask

who exactly are you?"

"I'm Laetitia Burton and your hands are covered in black. If you're looking for Margaret, she'll be home soon if you wait." Laetitia cryptically replied.

"Tell me something I don't know," Mireille smiled wryly as Laetitia mentioned "black hands". She wasn't really surprised, from what Kirika told her, she gathered that this house just wasn't normal. But as long as nobody here tried to kill them, it was just fine with her... "We'll wait, then. Would you invite us inside? Preferably, a ground floor room with big windows."

Nadie walked up behind Laetitia. "May I ask who are you?" Nadie asked keeping one hand on her pistol but out of sight of Mireille and Kirika. Kirika stepped forward and replied. "I'm Kirika Yuumura and this is my partner Mireille Bouquet. We were invited by Miss Burton to come over this evening."

Nadie removed her hand from her gun. "I see, I was told to expect you two, come in." Nadie replied and she escorted them to the living room.

Elenore, Madlax and Margaret gave warm hugs and said their goodbyes and thanks for the coffee to Meg. Meg waved goodbye as they drove off.

A half hour later they arrived home to see Ellis and Laetitia on the front step sucking on popsicles.

"Margaret, that girl you were expecting is here and she brought a friend with her." Laetitia said.

Ellis nodded. "Nadie's watching them but Limelda won't go near them for some reason."

"Well we were a little late in leaving my mother's house and we were expecting them."

Elenore said as she entered the house and went to the living room and spoke to both of them.

"Hello, I'm Elenore Baker. My sister will be with you shortly, I do hope you didn't have to wait very long." She said to them keeping her guard up but not keeping it up.

Margaret walked in, shortly after, and went to the living room to greet the guests. "Good evening. Nice to see you again Kirika. I'm glad you both arrived. I believe you talked to your friend about all this? It's nice to meet you, I'm Margaret Burton." Margaret greeted, reaching her hand at Kirika's partner.

"Bouquet, Mireille Bouquet," after a moment's hesitation, Mireille accepted the handshake.

She gazed intently upon the girl before her. "So you are the owner of this house, huh. Then let me set the record straight right away: I'm only in this for information. Kirika and I are being hunted and it doesn't sit with us well. You help us find out more, we help you with that ritual of yours, and its business as usual. After that, you never hear from us again. Is that a deal?"

"Hmm... okay. If that's what you both want, it's a deal. About the wish, have you and Kirika decided on anything yet? We just found out we get five wishes. And since we're all being targeted by the same people, I thought of using one to have all our enemies leave us alone forever. There's one thing I must warn you though, we shouldn't ask for selfish things, or

there might be a price to pay, and I'm not sure how prejudicial it might be. So we better play it safe, right?"

"Wishes?" Mireille raised a brow. "Kirika didn't tell me anything about it."

"Oh, she didn't?" Margaret said in a surprised tone as she looked at Kirika. "Well, once we gather all three artifacts, each held by its respective bearer, we gather at a sacred place and we can ask for five wishes. I figure each of us three is entitled to a personal wish, but we still get two extra wishes. The rest is like I told you..." Margaret clarified.

"Miss Bouquet, you said were "in it" for information. What kind of information are you looking for?" Elenore asked in a tone that implied she had an idea what she was talking about while she was looking them over but not looking like she was looking them over.

Nadie was doing the same while leaning on the doorframe...

"Can you try not standing behind my back?" Mireille asked of Nadie over her shoulder. "Makes my trigger finger itch." Standing with her arms folded, she turned back to Margaret: "That metaphysical talk again. Look, I don't believe in genies but if you ask for a wish, I just want a place where I can live with Kirika peacefully. But since I'm not the owner of the artifact, it's not for me to decide, anyway."

Then turning back to Elenore, she replied: "I want information on these Justicars guys and how they're related to Soldats. Also, how to make them stay the hell away from us for a couple of years."

Nadie backed off to the hall and kept an eye on Elenore and Margaret who were the closest targets in case their visitors got itchy trigger fingers.

"The Justicars were formed a few years after the Soldats. Some people in the Soldats didn't like how the Soldats were going about things and decided to break off from them and form the Justicars. In fact it was because of the Justicars that Nafrece was founded in the first place. The Soldats and the Justicars have been fighting each other for nearly a thousand years and answer your the last part of your question the answer is simple; they're not interested in you. As far as they're concerned you're a internal problem for the Soldats and none of their business. I'm sorry to put it so bluntly but that is the truth." Elenore replied giving out the bare bones info to Mireille, hoping that she would be happy enough with that. But Elenore got the gut feeling that Mireille wasn't finished with her questions.

The gut feeling rarely let Elenore down.

"Well, that's a relief but it doesn't change the fact that we've been followed by MIBs ever since we got into this city. Any idea who they may be?"

"Actually we were going to ask you about them. You see the Soldats have taken an interest in my sisters and myself and we don't know the reason why. I can speculate all day but might you have an idea?" Elenore asked with an eyebrow raised.

"Which sisters do you mean?" Mireille asked. "We don't know much ourselves, only that this household has been targeted much in the same way as... mine once was. Kirika and I thought it might all be a ploy to turn some of you into the new Noir."

Mireille looked at all of them with questioning eyes.

"I don't know how much you know about Les Soldats, so I'll keep it short. Immediately after their foundation, they started a tradition known as "Noir", a pair of elite enforcers, assassins, if you will. They went for the opposition heads with perfect success rate but eventually became obsolete and the tradition was abandoned. Some twenty years ago, a branch head of Soldats named Altena initiated a restoration of this tradition and selected several new-born children from Soldats-related families as candidates."

Mireille took a deep breath and continued: "There might have been more test subjects for the project originally but we only know about three: me, Kirika here, and Chloe. I don't know what Soldats did to other families, but mine refused to turn me in and...was wiped out. That is how Soldats do things. A few years ago, Altena pitted us three against each other to test our skills and select the final two who become Noir. I was the weakest among us but... We thought we killed Chloe but she somehow survived. Although we managed to break free, Altena is apparently still at large. The woman is a lunatic, completely delusional. If she thinks it's a good idea to have our heads on a plate, Chloe would do it gladly. And if she wants any two of you to become the new Noir instead of us, I'd think about leaving the country if I were in your position."

"We're not leaving." Margaret stated in a casual tone, convinced that Mireille was greatly exaggerating the danger of their situation, and leaving the country would only delay their actions. "This will all be solved soon. It doesn't really matter what these Soldats are planning, they'll never achieve it." She said rather optimistically.

Margaret turned around and looked at Nadie. "Nadie, you think you could maybe call Ellis here for a moment, please?" She requested. "She might be able to help us find the last artifact, now that Kirika is here." Margaret explained.

Nadie nodded and went to get Ellis.

"Hmm... by the way, Kirika, I forgot to mention it last time we talked. I heard from a friend, who is usually right, that you're probably the only one who could maybe reach out to Chloe and release her from Altena's grasp, now that their bonds have been weakened. You might find this request as unusual as I did, but I've been told there was a slight possibility she could become an ally instead of an enemy, so we shouldn't kill her. Would you... like that too?" Margaret inquired Kirika, trying to learn her feelings on the matter.

"I figured you'd say something like that," Margaret's words unexpectedly made Mireille smile, but she soon tensed up again, when Margaret spoke to Kirika. She looked intently at her partner. However strong the bond between them was, she knew better than anyone that Kirika's connection with Chloe was almost just as powerful once...

Elenore listened intently as Mireille explained what Noir was. "That explains why the Justicars created Duvet; in order to counter Noir. Hmmm interesting. But one thing bothers me though; neither Margaret or my own family are not involved with the Soldats so why target us in the first place. Is this Altena that desperate?" Elenore asked.

"I don't know. All I know is that Margaret has been targeted by Chloe and that yours is not a normal household. I can only draw one conclusion and would very much like to help you avoid our fate," Mireille fell silent for a moment. "It is very painful, that fate. Also, how do you know that your family is not involved with the Soldats? Most groups controlled by them don't know they even exist."

"Let's say our families have very deep roots in the Justicars." Elenore replied.

"I see. Well, if that's case, you still may be some worth to Altena, if she has taken notice of you," Mireille shrugged.

"I don't see why. According to the rules of Engagement and Etiquette she isn't even to bother with us considering we're from Justicar families.

There has to be another reason, unless she's really that mad as you say." Elenore shrugged in return.

Madlax had been listening attentively without saying a word, partly because Mireille hasn't said a word to her, hoping it was not a grudge. She became interested in this long winded history as Elenore and Mireille talked something she wasn't part of but now she will be for she had no choice. It didn't seem like Altena targeted her specifically she pondered which is perplexing to her. "I'm certainly am the most deadly of my sisters why not emphasize me? Margaret has some special gifts but I don't feel it's killing people." she thought.

"Mireille, why is Altena targeting Margaret? She's not good at killing people or holding a gun well?" Madlax asked. "Wait she could kill when she was controlled by Monday" she exclaimed.

"That wasn't the only time, Madlax... Remember, I did kill... father." Margaret replied in a low voice, hoping that would go by unnoticed. "But I don't see how this has anything to do with Altena wanting any of us to become a noir. From what Mireille explained, noir candidates are supposed to be chosen at a young age, and Mireille and Kirika are the living proof that you can't force someone into becoming a Noir, wouldn't you say?" She turned back at Mireille and Kirika for a reaction.

Elenore stood there deep in thought. "There's no doubt to what Mireille said but why the interest? Are the Soldats in that bad of shape that they have go looking in Justicar families? No there has to be something more to this. Something we're missing but what?" Elenore thought to herself.

"I just don't know," Mireille shrugged again. "We didn't know about neither the Justicars, nor your connections with them this morning, so our guess might as well be entirely off. As I said already, I know one thing for sure: Altena is interested in this household and it can't be a good thing by any measure. Think of it as an advance warning."

"We'll take your word for it. But there's something missing that we've might have overlooked. Then again as you said this Altena woman is crazy and who knows what twisted logic runs through her head." Elenore shrugged again.

"I wonder what that twisted logic is?" Madlax thought to herself quietly, drawing parallels of the experiences she had with Monday.

"Mireille, Friday Monday was a villain who believed the essence of mankind was violence and pure desire, what does Altena believe?" Madlax shrugged.

"Monday?" Mireille raised her brow. "That's a stupid name... What did he do to you? As for Altena, she apparently believes in saving the world with hate and violence or something like that. She was planning the so-called Grand Retour, which would have thrown Europe back into Middle Ages in the long term, apparently believing that it's the correct way to go."

"Oh God, that sounded just like that madman Friday's idea for the world. Did they both read from the same book; "Chicken Soup for the Megalomaniacal Nutjob?!" Elenore added

"Who is this Monday you keep talking about?" Mireille sighed.

"I'm sorry, you probably never heard of him, neither did we till eight months ago. Friday Monday was the ringleader of *Enfant*. He had a similar philosophy this *Altena* woman; meaning that mankind was suppressing it's violent urges so to prove his point he engineered the *Gazth-Sonikan* civil war where he had full control of BOTH sides of the conflict. He kidnapped Margaret to use in some weird ritual, but Madlax stopped him in the end." Elenore answered leaving out some details and putting her right hand on the scar on her back.

"*Enfant*, huh," Mireille sounded contemplative. "I heard just enough about those guys to steer the heck clear of them until now. You crossed paths with them before, then? I admire you still being alive in this case... You refer to this Monday person in past tense, and I assume he is dead. But the word underground is that his establishment is still in business to this day. Did you know about that?"

"What? Are you sure about that? That can't be... Me and Madlax... we saw him dead back then! I was sure of it! Maybe there's just someone else taking his place?" - Margaret interjected astonished, not wanting to believe the shocking idea that Friday Monday could still be alive.

Elenore's brow furrowed as she touched the scar on her back and the world turned black. Then she saw a pair of woman dressed in Medieval garb approach from behind a man flanked by two guards. The pair had swords drawn and was ready to strike when a masked woman stepped from the shadows blocking the way to the man. The two guards with the man took him and they ran leaving the masked woman with the pair.

"I see that *Les Soldats* didn't waste any time sending *Noir* out." The masked woman quipped brandishing two swords.

"You must be this "*Duvel*" that the *Justicars* are bragging about, let's see if your good as they say you are."

Elenore saw a flashing of swords. All three women were incredible swordswomen. As the fight kept going the women changed; the clothing at first and then the weapons till only *Duvel* stood alone. Then Mireille and Kirika appeared and *Duvel* shimmered and then she took off the mask and Elenore gasped in surprise; It was her that was wearing the mask. The three stared at each other for a bit and then they nodded to each other and turned and walked away.

Elenore snapped out her flashback not realizing that she wasn't the only one who saw that. Everyone in the house saw that but Limelda got something different; she saw how she got shot in the first place and Limelda learned what her interference had caused and she bowed her head in shame.

"Why...why then are you so damn nice to me? I don't deserve your kindness." Limelda said in her room.

Elenore's knees began to buckle and she began to fall forward and Vanessa rushed and caught her. "This is becoming a habit with you." Vanessa said half jokingly.

Mireille looked a little taken aback.

"Look... Elenore, was it? Get yourself together. I'm here to do business, so please wait until I walk out of that door before collapsing. It's not exactly appropriate in front of outsiders. Now, about the Monday person, I don't know who's in charge of *Enfant* now but they've indeed been lying low since the *Gazth-Sonikan* screw up. I take it, that's when you people killed him, yes? But their infrastructure is still intact: an acquaintance of mine tried to investigate their legacy, I never heard from him again. I sure don't wanna mess with them, and I'm more than well-attended to as I am with *Soldats* and *Justicars* on our tails."

"What was that all about?! Did everyone see that?" Elenore asked greatly confused as Vanessa still held her in her arms. "I don't really know Elenore. But it most likely has to do with the two artifacts interacting with each other. My guess is that since we were talking about the leader of *Enfant* and the *Soldats* they decided to show a vision using the first encounter of *Noir* and *Duvet* as a medium. Why I haven't a clue." Vanessa answered as she let go of Elenore.

"I apologize for that *Miss Bouquet*. As you can see the artifacts do strange things and once we find the third I gather more strange occurrences will happen. As I said before the *Justicars* are not interested in you otherwise they would've attacked you even before you came here." Elenore said in an apologetic tone.

"So that was the first *Noir* and *Duvet*? I wonder why the artifacts want us to see that and why was Elenore wearing the mask?" Margaret asked herself that she got lost in her thoughts until

Kirika finally got back at her on her question about Chloe that she had almost forgotten about asking.

"As far as Chloe is concerned, I doubt that she would betray Altena and become an ally. There are complications..." She answered Margaret knowing with Mireille right beside her that it would raise more drama than she wanted.

"Hmm... I see. That's not as I've been told..." Margaret replied with slight disappointment letting show on her sad expression. "Nakhl told me Chloe's alliance to Altena was weak, that Altena doesn't think of Chloe as more than just a tool, which is why I thought we should help her. I was hoping you could do something, because of your connection to her, but I guess Nakhl was wrong after all..."

"If this person has a plan to get Chloe away from Altena. I would like to hear it, if sounds like a good plan then I'll lend my assistance." Kirika answered.

"A plan? Wasn't Chloe your friend once? Couldn't you just talk to her? I don't think there's much any of us could do..." Margaret pondered, not really sure whether Kirika was interested or even able to help Chloe at all.

"I could try but how Chloe will react is anyone's guess." Kirika answered.

Ellis had come up beside Margaret with a confused look on her face. "Well, since you're here now Ellis, can you please tell us if you feel the presence of the third artifact? It should be close now that all the three of us have gathered." Margaret directed at Ellis in a low tone, unable to keep the enthusiasm from before.

"I'll try." Ellis barely answered and she held out her wrist and concentrated then a confused look settled on her face.

"What's wrong Ellis?" Nadie asked noticing the look on Ellis' face.

"The bracelet told me that the ring is nearby but it couldn't tell where it was." Ellis replied.

"In other words it's making its way here." Elenore interjected.

Kirika sat in silence knowing who the ring was coming for.

"If it's moving... doesn't that mean someone has it already?" Margaret thought out loud and wondered for a while until an alarming thought reached her mind. "Wait, could the enemy have gotten hold of it and be moving towards us to get the other two?"

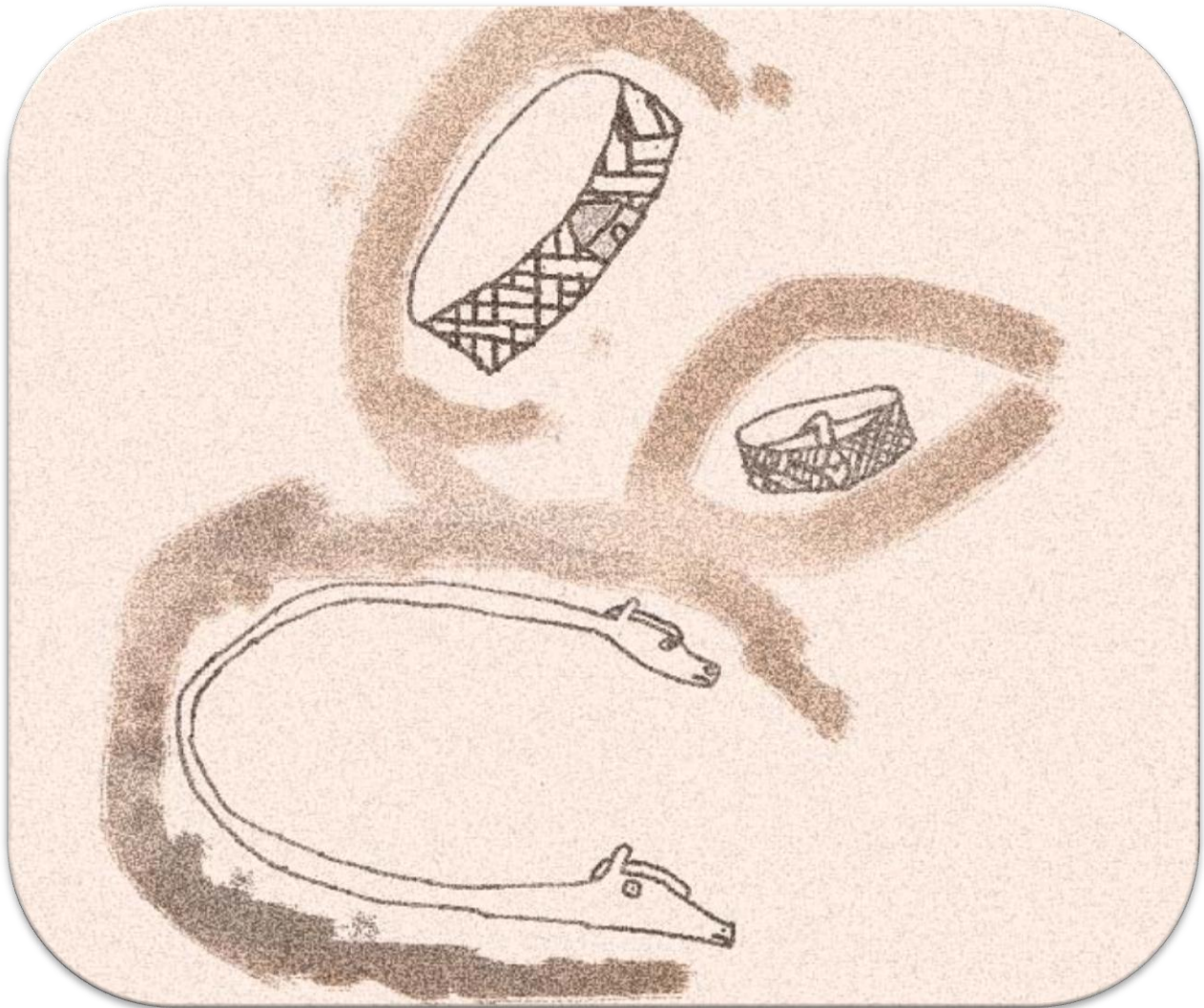
"Let's not jump to conclusions. If the enemy had it they would've been here already and in force. Margaret you still have to determine where to take them." Vanessa said in a calming tone

Meanwhile in another dimension; "You know we could end this now. Why the secrecy Morrigan?" Brigid asked. "And what have they miss out on the rest of the play? Especially when the climax is coming." Morrigan replied.

"Fortunately for you Ellis wasn't concentrating that hard, seems she was a bit confused. I don't suppose that's when you showed that little scene but what did you had in mind when you flashed Elenore's flashback to Limelda?" Brigid retorted.

Morrigan laughed. "I suppose so, but that girl hasn't figured out where to take them yet. As for Limelda Jorg, well let's say I wanted her to know what her interference really cost."

Rhiannon smiled and said. "Don't worry, once she knows your ring is in her grasp she'll know where to go...."



Chapter 10.

The maidens hands blackened with sin...mine stained with blood...could I ever forgive myself...

From the diary of Elenore Baker July 12th 2013

Earlier on the other side of the city in a private clinic Three- Speed was standing in the lobby. He felt uncomfortable in the suit he was wearing being used to more casual clothing. He watched the entrance while adjusting his collar. Then he saw Armitage walk in and to him. Armitage had look of displeasure on his face.

"About time you showed up Armitage. You don't look happy." Three- Speed said as Armitage walked up.

"I had to take care of family business. Plus have some people keeping an eye out just in case Altena decides to send my sister or niece a "calling card". " Armitage replied in disgust at the mentioning of Altena.

"Why is she even bothering? Enfant has been hitting the Soldats pretty hard lately." Three-Speed said with equal disgust.

"God only knows with that woman. Tell me Three- Speed have we become that desperate that we have to use someone like him?" Armitage asked revealing the true source of his displeasure.

"Who knows what the High Council is thinking, we're just the grunts buddy.

We just follow orders." Three-Speed replied sympathizing with Armitage.

"He's a sociopath with a high going rogue potential." Armitage spat.

"According to the lab boys, they got those two under control. I don't know why they didn't let the poor bastard rest in peace." Three-Speed said trying to calm down Armitage.

"We'll see..." Armitage said as an elderly man dressed in a suit and lab coat with a gray goatee walked to them.

"Good day gentlemen. I'm Dr. Tull." The man introduced himself.

"This is Three-Speed and I'm Armitage. We're here to see him." Armitage replied.

"I've been expecting you. Please follow me." Dr Tull said leading the pair through a set of doors to the labs.

As they were walking Armitage spoke. "I've read his profile. Is he even fit to even be out in society Doctor?"

"I can understand your concern Mr. Armitage and we've taken every necessary step in correcting his behavior. Starting by; breaking his former conditioning which was quite extensive before we could even start modifying his behavior. But I think you'll find him quite satisfactory."

Dr Tull replied trying to allay Armitage's concern.

"We'll see..." Armitage replied in return still skeptical as they walked to a room with a table and

two chairs.

An orderly handed Dr Tull a vanilla folder and he looked over and then handed to Armitage who looked it over.

"He's ready when you are Doctor." The orderly said to Dr. Tull.

"Very good, send him in." The doctor replied and orderly left the room and a few minutes later the orderly came back with a blond haired young man in tow.

"Good Afternoon Dr Tull." The young man said with a smile.

"Good Afternoon. These gentlemen have come to see you. This is Mr. Armitage and his associate Three-Speed." Dr Tull replied with a smile.

"Really? Why do they want to see me?" The young man asked.

"They have a very important job for you to do. I know you'll you do your best now please sit down and they'll explain." Dr Tull replied as the young man sat in the chair. Armitage sat in the other chair.

The young man smiled at Armitage and said. "Good Afternoon Mr. Armitage. Dr Tull said you have a very important job for me. I hope I can do it to your satisfaction."

"Good Afternoon L.A...." Armitage replied.

Meanwhile in another part of Europe the coven discussed the situation.

The Elder quieted the room and began to speak.

"From what Blue Eyes has told us there are two major forces after these artifacts. I've also received word that the Justicars might join in the confrontation."

The mention of the Justicars brought some gasps in the room and cries of an alliance with either Enfant or the Soldats the Elder quieted the room again.

"An alliance with either Enfant or the Soldats would bring the other two forces down on us! For now we shall watch..." After the meeting Jodie met with the Elder.

"Your orders Elder?" Jodie asked humbly.

"The forces arrayed against us are far too great for us to handle my child, despite what some members say... For now just watch Ellis and the others and keep us informed."

"Yes Elder." Jodie said and she politely left.

Meg was humming a cheery tune as she collected the cups and placed them on a tray. As she was doing so her phone rang and she picked up. She listened carefully and she gave thanks. Then Meg hung up the phone and went to a room and donned a full suit of body armor. Then she went to cupboard and pulled out her helmet which resembled a kigurumi mask. As she put on the helmet and its electronics activated as the sensors touched her skin. She grabbed a dark beige Kevlar trench coat and put it on and then her weapons just as her front door was being forced open.

"Tsk Tsk. Operating this openly, things must be really going bad for you Altena if you're trying to get rid of me." Duvet said as she shot the first man that came through the door...

When Duvet was just finishing dealing with her "company", as the last of them dropped to the floor she dialed Walter.

"Walter, she sent me company and if she has the balls to hit here it's a good chance she'll be hitting the house soon."

"She or somebody else has the police tied up with crap downtown. Don't worry I got a cleanup crew coming and I'm heading to the house as we speak." Walter replied.

"As soon they get here I'm going to the house. They'll need all the help they can get and call Elenore and warn her or I will. I've failed her before...I'm NOT going let it happen again!" Meg said as she hung. She noticed the familiar faces of the cleanup crew as she packed the SUV with weapons.

"Lock up when you're done, please." She said to the leader of the cleanup crew who smiled and nodded as Meg got in her SUV and she pulled out and then she gunned the gas pedal and took off.

Meanwhile back at Burton Manor; Vanessa had calmed Margaret who was understandably worried.

"Right, I almost forgot about that. We still haven't looked around the West Wing; there might be a suitable place there. Can we go check it now?" Margaret suggested.

"I have the keys. I just need to remove the barricade and unlock the door. We need to be careful though there might be somebody in the West Wing." Elenore replied.

"Well, I have to go. Who wants to come with me?" Margaret inquired to the general crowd.

"I'll go. I'm curious what else is in the West Wing." Elenore stated.

"I'll stay here with Laetitia and our guests." Vanessa said.

"I'll go too. Ellis stay here with Vanessa." Nadie said.

"Yessir." Ellis replied.

"An extra set eyes and ears wouldn't hurt, so I'll come too." Mireille said for she was curious about the West Wing as well. From what she could tell it was much older than the rest of the house. Kirika decided to stay while Mireille satisfied her curiosity.

"I'll come too." Madlax added glancing at Mireille.

"I'll come as well." Limelda said with some sadness in her voice. Everyone turned to see Limelda coming into the room though her face didn't show it but her eyes told a different story and she couldn't really look Elenore in the eye.

Elenore removed the barricade and unlocked the doors. Then she opened the doors with Limelda and Nadie keeping their guns trained on the entrance just in case someone was on the other side.

Elenore opened the doors to dead silence and all six walked down the hall to the warroom. "Interesting place here." Nadie said looking at the room. Mireille was thinking along the same lines but she noticed the place had been updated recently and she did find the electronic map interesting.

Elenore went to the door to the study where they found the books and the glass.

"Somebody cover me, I'm going to open the door." Elenore said as she opened the door.

When Elenore opened the door she found there was no one in there but there were some changes; First off the glass and the bottle were gone and the book with the Burton crest was on a pedestal and on top of it was a note addressed to Elenore.

Elenore picked the note and read;

Elenore dear,

When you done with things please put them back where they belong.

Here is the code to the key pad to the armory downstairs (83953).

Take only what you need and leave the rest alone.

Also in the armory there is a cabinet that you might find interesting.

To open it you'll need this voice pass code "A shame, you seemed to be an honest man"

Sorry for the mess from before.

Love,

Uncle Walter

Elenore had a stunned look on her face. Her uncle had been in this room and had been coming into the house without her noticing. She wondered how long he had been doing it. How long have he and her father and grandfather had been using this wing as a Justicar stronghold she wondered.

Nadie noticed the look on her face and asked; "Is everything all right Elenore?"

"Yes, but after we check upstairs I want to go down the floor beneath this one. I want to check out the armory."

"We have an armory?!" Margaret asked a bit surprised that there was something like that in the house. The only not surprised was Mireille; she figured this place was originally either a keep or fortress that was disguised as a house to throw off suspicion. The warroom and the way they came in were dead giveaways.

"Apparently so." Elenore replied and they went out of room and into the hall and then up the stairs.

Most of the rooms were sleeping quarters or offices till they found the chapel.

They opened the doors and found the room was quite spacious with stained glass windows and an altar with a cross and Burton family crest.

"Will this do Margaret?" Elenore asked.

"I guess... Vanessa was the one who suggested a place like this; it's all the same to me, as long as it's at the estate. But we still have to wait for the last artifact..." Margaret pointed out, a bit discouraged.

Elenore smiled trying to cheer Margaret up.

"We know the artifact is on the move so it's only a matter of time till we get it. At the very least we won't have to go very far at all when get the last one." She said.

"Now that we have the place for the artifacts. I want to go and check this armory out. Do any of you want to come with me?" Elenore asked.

"Why not. But we should go get some bags to carry what we need up." Limelda said nonchalantly and Nadie nodded giving her consent and they waited for Margaret's reaction.

"Hmm... I would like to go too. But who is going to get the bags?" Margaret asked.

I know where they are so I'll go get them." Elenore replied.

"I'll head back with you." Mireille said her curiosity satisfied she didn't want to push her luck just in case. Elenore and Mireille left while the rest headed to the armory.

A few minutes later all five were at the entrance to the armory. There was a sticky note on the door reminding them to take only what they needed.

Elenore looked at the note with the pass code and punched it in and the door unlocked.

Elenore opened the door and the lights automatically came on. What they saw stunned them all. They expected a few weapons in a small room but what they saw instead was along with swords and other medieval weapons was racks filled with military grade pistols and rifles not to mention SMGs in nearly a warehouse sized room.

"How?! How could they get all this stuff by us without us noticing?!" Elenore exclaimed.

"It looks like they're getting ready for a war." Nadie added.

Limelda scanned the room and noticed the service elevator nearby and pointed it out.

"I think that's how. They must've brought this equipment up through the sewers." Limelda said.

"Well let's see what we can use." Elenore said and they went to the room.

As they went around the room they found crates filled with ammo, rocket launchers, and miniguns. Limelda and Nadie helped themselves to pistols and Limelda found a top of the line Winchester 2009 sniper rifle. Elenore looked for the cabinet mentioned in the note.

Madlax was impressed by the assortment of weapons found in this armory. She had never seen a private armory like this, only Three-Speed's could be compared to this one. She saw a nice M-4 assault rifle at the back but that didn't suit her style. She thought about the MP5's along another wall. However deep down she's a P210 girl and helped herself to the pistol rounds and an Uzi. She went deeper into the room and looked at some of the older antique weapons in the armory and found a little 19th century derringer. Picking up with a smile she said jokingly "Margaret this cute little gun suits you, what do you think?"

Margaret looked at the gun on Madlax's hand and pondered on her playful words for a while. "Hmm... you know, maybe I should really take a gun as well. That way I wouldn't be as much of a burden to you and the others, don't you think?" Margaret said casually, not really excited with the idea of having to shoot someone, but having a gun with her could come in handy eventually, she thought.

Elenore looked around the room searching for the cabinet that was mentioned in the note. Near the back of the room she found one cabinet with a voice activation lock on it. She pressed the button on the lock and feminine voice asked "Please say the pass code for activation."

Elenore was hesitant but she said the pass code "A shame, you seemed to be an honest man." and she waited a few second before the lock replied.

"Pass code accepted. Hello Elenore."

Elenore was at first a bit shocked but figured uncle Walter must've set it to accept her voice. She opened the cabinet which unlocked itself and she saw a strange site. Inside a full suit of body armor but not any she had seen. It had a futuristic look to it with the plates on the limbs and it looked a bit bulky. Then noticed Elenore noticed the helmet inside. It looked like a kigurumi mask like the one her mother wore from the description she got from Madlax and Limelda. The moment she looked at the mask her expression changed and as if in a trance looked to see if anyone was around when she saw that no one was she completely undressed and donned the armor. The armor felt snug at first then it conformed to her shape. She had finished putting on the boots when Nadie came up. Nadie noticed Elenore's clothes on the ground.

"So that's what was in that cabinet. Looks good on you. Though I've never seen body armor like that before." She said.

"Thanks. I don't know why but I had to put it on." Looking at herself in the mirror the inside the cabinet door."You're right I do look good in this." She said as she heard the others coming.

"Why would they make something like that? What is it for?" Nadie asked Elenore who was looking at the various ports on the suit.

"I gather this was made for my mother who was the Duvet. She wore body armor and a mask.

Why I haven't a clue. I'm guessing this is an upgrade that she didn't get to wear because she retired." Elenore answered picking up the helmet.

"That's a strange looking helmet. Looks more like a Halloween mask than a helmet." Nadie commented.

"Well, it was for a psychological effect. I guess it unnerved enemies looking at it." Elenore commented back.

"Try it on, see if it unnerves me?" Nadie said jokingly.

"Why not." Elenore and she put on the helmet and she couldn't see out of it.

"How could she see out of this thing?" Elenore said but her voice was muffled by the helmet. Then she heard a feminine but electronic voice.

"Scanning EEG. Please wait. Please do not remove helmet during scan."

"Huh?" Elenore said confused on what was going on.

"Scan complete. EEG recognized. Please state your name."

"Elenore Baker." Elenore replied.

"System processing. Name recognized. Hello Elenore Baker. There is one message for Elenore Baker from Walter Armitage. Do you want to receive message?"

"Yes, please."

A video image flashed on the faceplate and the face of Armitage appeared.

"Hello Elenore. If you are seeing this. It means you've found the suit. This was made for your mother before her retirement. But since there's no more Noir there's no need for Duvet so I had do something with the suit. So I talked with your mother and she agreed to leave it in your care. Why you might ask? Simple, we trust you and we know you wouldn't misuse the suit and your mother wanted you have better protection considering who's on your back at the moment. I know you hadn't any training with guns so the suit's computer can assist you. Okay two more things you should know. One; to activate the suit just say "Duvet suit Activate" after this message, otherwise you're not going to get the helmet off. Two; Just remember we love you very much."

End Message.

"Thanks Uncle Walter. Ahem. "Duvet suit activate."" Elenore said and she waited and then the voice returned.

"Activating systems..."

"Activating helmet sensor system" Elenore could now see out of the helmet and the face of a concerned Nadie who was calling everyone else over.

"Activating MES. Activating DAISI..." A tiny image of a cartoon bunny in a maid's uniform appeared on the face plate.

"Hello Miss. I am Duvet Artificial Intelligence System Interface or DAISI for short. Please wait

while I link with household security system.

"Hello Daisy. Wait! What household security system?" Elenore asked in a state of shock and confusion.

"I was instructed that you might not be aware of the system. This system was installed 14 years ago to boost household and stronghold security." A map of the house appeared with pink dots representing everyone in the house with one standing next to her and 3 coming her way. "Do have any questions Miss?"

"Lots of them. But first how can I talk out of this helmet?" Elenore asked less confused than she was a few seconds ago.

"I will activate the speaker...you may now speak and you will be heard normally unless you wish your voice to be disguised."

"Thank you Daisy." Elenore replied.

"Are you okay Elenore? Who's Daisy?" Nadie asked.

"Yes I am. Thanks Nadie. Daisy is the AI for the suit. Can you hear me okay?" Elenore replied and asked.

"Yeah, but I was worried there for a few seconds." Nadie replied.

"Daisy how can I talk to you without anyone else hearing me speak to you and still talking to other people?" Elenore asked.

"This system is equipped with a monitoring program that knows when wish speak to me or to others Miss. Any other questions Miss?"

"Thanks Daisy. How do I get the helmet off?" Elenore asked.

"Just say Show Helmet off" and you will be able to remove the helmet Miss. When you do remove this helmet please insert SYSLNK earpiece in either of your ears so you may continue to use my functions without the helmet."

"That's good to know. Thank you Daisy. You are very polite and helpful." Elenore said in a complementary way.

"You're welcome Miss and thank you for your kind complement Miss. Miss Margaret is rapidly approaching. Do you wish to remove the helmet now?" DAISI replied.

"Not just yet but thanks." Elenore replied wondering how DAISI knew who Margaret was.

"You're welcome Miss." DAISI replied politely.

Margaret and Madlax noticed the commotion and went to see what was going on. After Madlax left ahead, Margaret thought twice and ended up picking one of the fully loaded small guns exposed and hid it in her pocket. She wasn't expecting to use it, but she could return it anytime later, after all this mess with the artifacts was over, so it didn't make much of a difference, it was just slightly reassuring.

As she approached she noticed Elenore's strange attire that looked like some sort of armor, the helmet was definitely unusual though. It had the smiling face of a girl. Margaret looked intensely at it and blinked in surprise for a few seconds before saying anything.

"Hmm... can you see with that thing on, Elenore? That's definitely odd for a helmet! It's a helmet, right? Are you gonna use it?" Margaret asked, still perplexed at such a bizarre combat suit, as well as impressed at how such a big and well organized place had been laying around for so long without them noticing.

"Yes I can and in back of me as well. Yes, it's a helmet. It's a very unusual helmet but it's quite functional. This suit was meant for my mother, but she retired and my uncle put it here for safekeeping. It might come in handy until this mess with the artifacts is over." Elenore replied.

"Let's see what else is in the cabinet." Elenore said heading back to the cabinet. DAISI had directed her stick one arm in the cabinet after another and when she did she found that two guns were on each side of her arms. She saw the .45 H&K pistols but the other ones alarmed her.

"Daisi, what are these other pistols for? I thought that I would get regular pistols?" Elenore asked DAISI.

"The Justicar fifty caliber pistols are for disabling vehicles, notably wheel hubs and engine blocks Miss." DAISI replied.

"Using that weapon against human targets is ill advised as the ammunition can go through a unarmored human being quite very easily Miss." DAISI said return and then she flashed a map of the property appeared. Elenore could see that twenty two dots were on the eastern edge of the property and moving toward the house. Another group of dots fifteen in all were coming from the north and there was a small group of twelve approaching from the south.

"WARNING! UNAUTHORIZED INTRUDERS APPROACING STRONGHOLD! CONTACTING JUSNET FOR REINFORCEMENTS! PLEASE GO BATTLE STATIONS!" DAISI blared. Over the loudspeaker she directed the group to nearby monitors. The northern group was dressed like ninja's and Elenore heard Nadie swear under breath and asked Elenore to grab a mini gun with a strap. The eastern group looked like professional soldiers and it appeared that Chloe was with this group. The southern group looked like a band of thugs in suits; some packing shotguns.

"Everyone, we have to get back upstairs quickly! We're about to get some intruders!" Elenore yelled as she started racing towards the exit.

"Daisi, where are these intruders coming from?" Elenore asked as she and the group raced up the stairs.

"Intruders are approaching from the north and east is approaching the eastern wing of the house. Forced entry is mostly likely to come from there. The southern group is approaching the center wing. Incoming call from Armitage. Will you answer?" DAISI replied and asked.

"Yes!" Elenore answered and Armitage's voice came over.

"Elenore are you all right?" Armitage asked with concern in his voice.

"For the moment yes but we have intruders attacking the house. Lots of them." Elenore answered.

"I assume you have the suit on. Don't worry the Calvary is coming and so is your mother." Armitage said.

"Thank God. How soon can you get here?" Elenore asked trying not to sound panicked.

"At tops ten minutes, your mother sooner giving the way she's driving at the moment. If need be get everybody to the west wing and pull the emergency switch near the doors. That should delay them till we get there. Just don't do anything stupid okay." Armitage replied.

"Understood and thanks Uncle Walter." Elenore replied.

"You're welcome and stay safe." Armitage answered back.

Meanwhile Chloe and large force of Soldats were fast approaching the house. Apparently Altena had gotten impatient and with the listening devices disabled ordered the attack with the intent of capturing everyone in the house. Chloe smiled this was her chance to kill Madlax while the others distracted and captured the others in the house.

Needless to say, Chloe and the other Soldats had no idea who else was in the house. If they did they might've reconsidered their attack. But they didn't so they pressed on not aware that their presence had been detected and that the Justicars were on their way as well, as well as the other two groups approaching.

Madlax rushed upstairs with a pistol drawn anticipating trouble and she headed to the living room ahead of everyone else. Ellis raced past her as she heard gunfire and broken glass as the lights flickered on and off. A feminine electronic voice blared from hidden speakers "Household generators now active." And Madlax raced to the living room.

A minute earlier; Mireille was about to tell Kirika that they were leaving for the night and coming back in the morning when she saw from the corner of her eye that a large group of heavily armed men in cheap suits were approaching from outside.

"Kirika you see them?" Mireille asked and Kirika nodded. Vanessa was going to ask, but without thinking she grabbed Laetitia who was getting up and they got behind the couch just as some of the men fired at the windows. Bullets shattered the glass as it flew; Kirika grabbed Mireille and pulled out of the way just in time. Vanessa screamed in fright as Laetitia remained strangely calm.

Madlax heard the gunfire and glass and then the scream and she quickened her pace till she was nearly running. "Vanessa, Laetitia, Mireille, Kirika are you all right?" Madlax shouted from the doorway.

“We’re fine, thanks for asking.” Mireille said as she and Kirika were getting up. “We’re okay too Madlax.” Vanessa said behind the couch. They could hear the front doors being bashed in. Madlax drew her other pistol. “Might as well go see who’s at door.” Madlax said sarcastically.

“It would be rude to keep them waiting.” Mireille replied in kind and Madlax turned to Vanessa who was holding Laetitia. “Vanessa get Laetitia and you down to the West Wing, I think Ellis and Margaret are there.”

“All right, be careful Madlax.” Vanessa said as she went to the West Wing with Laetitia in her arms, the pounding growing louder as the doors were about to give way. As Madlax, Kirika and Mireille approached the front hall they took cover in the doorframes. The doors gave and four men armed with shotguns came into the front hall. The trio opened fire the moment the men stepped in and they were gunned down. Madlax was planning to go out and confront them herself and it looked like Kirika had the same idea.

The men outside stepped back as gunfire erupted from the house. Madlax came out guns blazing with Kirika and then Mireille following. At first they were taken by surprise as the trio began gunning them down in rapid succession. They had just reloaded when another group of men in cheap suits attacked with guns blazing. The trio did their best to dodge but the front yard didn’t have any real cover and then they heard it. Some of the men heard it too and turned their just in time to be run over by a SUV. The SUV did a one eighty skid to a stop and a woman in a beige trench coat wearing a familiar kigurumi looking mask came out and started firing on the men.

“About time Duvet, I was wondering what was keeping you.” Madlax joked as now all four turned and started gunning down the remainder of the men. After the last man fell they looked at the scene while they reloaded their guns. Duvet took off her helmet and Mireille noticed the resemblance to Elenore that Duvet had.

Kirika bent down to look at one of the men and made a face. “These men aren’t Soldats.” Kirika said calmly.

Mireille looked at them as well. “These guys are dressed too shoddy to be Soldats.” “They’re Enfants, I recognize a couple of them. Looks like they caught wind of what was going on and decided to make a grab for the artifacts.” Duvet said looking at the men.

“Who are you?” Kirika asked Duvet.

“I’ve heard of you, but didn’t think I would ever meet you. Kirika this is Duvet. A top notch bodyguard but what brings you here?” Mireille asked and then she remembered the back of one of the photos. “Wait, your daughter lives here, doesn’t she.” She added.

"And a pleasure to meet both of you at last Miss Bouquet and Miss Yuumura or should I call you Noir?" Duvet answered. *"Now I see why Altena wanted Elenore; if Elenore has the skills of her mother..."* Mireille thought to herself.

Duvet was going to continue when she heard a voice coming over her earpiece and she waved to the approaching military vehicles.

"Who's that Meg?" Madlax asked a bit worried. Meg smiled and replied. "The Cavalry has just arrived." As they pulled up, Walter approached the women.

"About time you showed Walter." Meg said in mock aggravation.

"Traffic, what's the sitch sis?" Walter asked.

"We took care of these Enfant agents; we still have to deal with the Soldats in the east and those ninjas (?) from the north." Meg answered.

Walter smiled and pointed to the two armored personnel carriers with Vulcan miniguns on the roof coming into the yard and then he turned to Mireille and Kirika. "Nice to see you too again Miss Bouquet and Yuumura san." Then he went to his men. On the street more personnel carriers poured out squads of men and women dressed in military body armor.

"Listen up! We have two groups of bogies coming in from the east and north. Intel says there likely to be Soldats but I'm not ruling out more Enfant plus we have the group from the north dressed like ninjas. I want squads Alpha, Beta, Gamma to follow the carrier that's going north and pin down the ninjas. Squads Delta, Tango, Charlie follow the carrier and take the ones coming in on the east. Squad Echo come with me and Duvet. Remember the protocol. Anyone in the house that doesn't have breasts shoot on sight. Is that understood?!" Armitage shouted.

"YES SIR!" Came to reply from the assembled troops.

"Move out!" Armitage shouted and all moved.

Squads Delta, Tango and Charlie followed behind the carrier as it started going to the east. The carrier's twin Vulcan's began to turn the Soldat reinforcements into Swiss cheese. Chloe cursed to herself and ran into the building where her forces had entered. She could hear gunfire within the house.

"Sir, Delta here. We have confirmation, Wine glass is here." Armitage heard over the radio.

"Okay L.A. looks like to get to save your Ellis." Armitage said.

L.A. smiled. "Ellis..."

Armitage gave him strange look. "Okay hook with Delta squad and take out Chloe. Is that understood?!"

"Yes sir. I will do my best and save Ellis. Ellis..." L.A. responded and he leapt and bounded off. Armitage contacted Delta squad and ordered them to hold position to attack any Soldat that emerged from that direction and to let them know that L.A. was on his way.

"You coming? I got to go help Elenore." Meg shouted at Armitage as she and the others headed indoors. "Squads Helo and Feral stay here and guard our rear! Echo, Move Out!" Armitage yelled.

"Sir, squads Alpha, Beta and Gamma have the bogies pinned down. But a few of them have gotten inside through the East Wing" A radioman reported.

"Good, keep me informed. Echo follow me...ah damn." Armitage said as he saw Duvet racing inside with Madlax, Kirika and Mireille following.

"Elenore can you hear me?"

"Yes, uncle Walter." Elenore replied as Armitage could hear miniguns fire over the radio.

"Your mother and I and some men are coming through the front and I have two squads coming from the east to nail the Soldats from behind and watch it; those ninjas have gotten into the building. Just hang on we're coming." Armitage said.

"Margaret and the others are at the West Wing. Nadie, Limelda and I are fighting these ninjas at the moment" Elenore replied.

"Hang on Sweetie I'm coming!" Duvet said over the radio as she smashed through the remains of the front doors passing Vanessa and Laetitia on the way.

Armitage and Echo squad followed soon after and Armitage assigned two men to watch them and bring them to the West Wing as the rest followed Duvet.

Margaret quickly joined Vanessa, Laetitia and Ellis in the West Wing, noticing Mireille and Kirika had come with Vanessa. She just stood down with the others, trying to stay sheltered till it was all over. If worse came to it, she could use the gun she was hiding, Margaret thought, but hopefully she wouldn't have to come to that... For a few seconds, while contemplating this, Margaret almost regretted having brought a gun, but she dismissed these thoughts immediately, as she hugged Laetitia closely, trying to comfort her in this scary situation, even though she was pretty scared herself.

"I'm sorry to get you two involved in this." Margaret said apologetically to Kirika and Mireille.

"Something like this would've happened sooner or later given that Altena has her sights set on us..." Mireille said in an angry tone but it wasn't directed at Margaret and she knew it. But their attention was diverted by Ellis who started to glow red and she pressed her palms against the walls.

“Ellis are you okay?” Margaret asked concerned and wondering what going on then she heard Ellis’ voice seeming to come from the walls. “I’m okay; the bracelet is helping me help Nadie and the others. I can see everything inside the house.”

“Really? I didn’t know the bracelet could do that.” Margaret said in surprise but she remembered from what she knew that the Goddess of the bracelet was a Goddess of the Home and Hearth.

Elenore, Nadie and Limelda made their way to the east wing chokepoint and took up a defensive position in the only way the attackers could come from. As the first ninja appeared he pointed to Elenore and the ninjas concentrated their fire on Elenore. Elenore struggled to keep from screaming as the bullets rained down on her. (What Elenore didn't realize at the time was that the ring was protecting her otherwise the intense fire would've penetrated the armor eventually.) Then all three glowed red and heard Ellis’ voice coming from the walls. “Don’t worry Nadie. I have you covered.” Nadie smiled as the bullets bounced harmlessly off the red aura and then she squeezed the trigger of the minigun turning the ninjas who unlucky to be standing in the hall into flesh and blood colored confetti. The force of the recoil nearly knocked her off her feet but Elenore braced her till she ran out of ammo. “Sorry for the walls.” Nadie said to Elenore.

“Walls can be replaced, so don’t worry.” Elenore replied as she noticed more ninjas approaching. Elenore tried not to panic and then... she became calm.

"Let me take care of them my looking glass sister." A voice echoed in her head as her other self took control. She aimed and fired while still being pelted with bullets. DAISI guided her aim and the bullet went through the wall and into one of the ninjas. She continued firing, her armor piecing sabot ammo going through wood and drywall as if was butter striking whoever the bullet hit dead. The last three decided to cut their losses and began to retreat while firing. Elenore rushed and shot them dead, one of them she shot their head clear off as it exploded in a splash of blood, bone and brain tissue. As the last man died she could still hear gunfire and other noises from ahead. DAISI informed her that it the ninjas and Soldats were fighting each other as well the Justicars that had the Soldats pinned down.

Elenore snapped back to her and looked at the carnage she had just helped wrought.

"Oh my God...what have I done?" She began to say to herself as she desperately tried to keep herself together.

Duvet took off her helmet and shouted down the hall.

"ELENORE! NADIE! ARE YOU TWO ALLRIGHT?"

Nadie shouted back; "YEAH, WE'RE ALLRIGHT. BUT I DON'T KNOW IF ELENORE IS OKAY. SHE'S JUST STANDING THERE!"

"Hang on we're coming. Is there anymore of them?" Duvet asked as she raced down the hall.

"No but there sounds like a fire fight going on down the hall." Limelda answered.

"I forgot there three of you down here, sorry." As Duvet caught up to Elenore who was trying not to puke in her helmet.

"Hang on sweetie. Take off your helmet." Meg said as she guided Elenore to the nearest bathroom.

"Are you two okay?" Armitage asked Limelda and Nadie.

"Yes." Nadie replied watching Meg get Elenore out of the scene.

"Long time Armitage. Thanks for asking." Limelda replied.

"Yeah long time Limelda." Armitage replied.

"Okay listen up! Echo squad go down the hall and catch the Soldiers in the crossfire. If you see Catboy engaging Wineglass do not engage. I repeat do not engage! Let's go!" Armitage said to Echo squad and they went down the hall and to where the Soldats and ninjas were fighting and started firing on them trying to catch them in the crossfire.

In the bathroom, Elenore got her helmet off and Meg had head by the hair while she puked in the toilet.

After she was done vomiting, she began to cry. "What have I done mother? I've killed. I'm a killer." Meg held her daughter gently and tried to get her to look her in the eye.

"Sweetie you did what you had to do to survive. The first time is always rough; I did the same thing you're doing now. But you have to keep it together for now, for Margaret, for Vanessa and for you." Meg said holding Elenore in her arms.

Elenore tried to keep herself together as thought what would Margaret think of her.

Friday Monday's voice echoed in her mind "She doesn't have the courage to pull the trigger."

"I pulled the trigger and now those men are dead because of me." Elenore said mostly to herself and to the Monday's voice in her head.

"Elenore sweetie, if you didn't pull the trigger you and your friends would've been dead. Margaret and Ellis would've been captured by the Soldats or those ninjas. You're still a good person and no one would think any less of you not even Margaret especially her. I know it's hard taking another person's life. I'm just glad you and Margaret are all right."

"How do you deal with it mother? How do you deal with the fact that you took somebody else's life?" Elenore asked in a melancholy tone.

"This may sound cold but it's a sad but true fact of life living in this world. It's better them than you." Meg answered.

"If being dead taught me anything, it taught me to have better appreciation for life. That's why I find so hard taking anyone else's. I don't really understand it, but I became another person

when I started pulling the trigger." Elenore replied.

"In a fight, you do become another person. We become the person in the looking glass." Meg answered.

Elenore's eyes widened as she heard those words, it was the same words the voice in head called her. Elenore wrote it as coincidence as her mother was trying to help her deal with what just happened. "That sounds like something Laetitia would say." Elenore said with a slight smirk.

"Laetitia? Is that the little girl Margaret brought home with you two?" Meg asked.

"Well, kind of hard really explain but Laetitia was once part of Margaret's psyche. Don't ask me how I don't fully understand it fully myself. I'll introduce you to her later."

"Okay sweetie. Let's go back out there and see if your uncle needs some help."

"Okay mother." As Elenore grabbed her helmet and put it back on.

Nadie and Limelda could still hear gunfire in the distance, but what got their attention was something else. Limelda saw Chloe duck into the stage area and then she was followed by a young blond haired man.

"It must be that Catboy Armitage was talking about. I'll help him out...Nadie...Nadie." Limelda said turning to see a shocked Nadie.

"L.A.?! Alive?! How!? He should be dead? How is it that he's here?" Nadie said to herself and Limelda ran off after Chloe and L.A. with her sniper rifle in hand.

Nadie heard Ellis' voice echo from the walls with a saddened tone. "Nadie, do you see? It was L.A. How can he be alive?"

"I don't know Ellis and something tells me I don't want to know." Nadie replied still stunned.

When she got inside Chloe and L.A. were dodging each other's attacks and then Limelda opened fire on Chloe and soon it became a three way fight as L.A. thought that Limelda was either with the Soldats or Enfant decided to attack her too. Soon their fight spilled out to the hallway and down the hallway the north porch where the trio had more room.

Nadie stood in shock at what she saw and she wondered where Madlax had gone off to?

The pair went back out to the hall and saw Nadie looking like she had just seen a ghost.

"Nadie are all right? You look like you just seen a ghost." Elenore asked with concern.

"I saw someone I thought was dead. But he passed by here going up that hallway." Nadie replied pointing up the hallway leading north. "Limelda went after them, him and a purple haired girl."

Both Meg and Elenore wondered who the purple haired was.

"It probably that Chloe girl that Margaret mentioned." Elenore said innocently.

"Chloe?!" Meg said with surprise and anger in her voice.

"Mother what's wrong?" Elenore asked.

"That purple haired girl was Chloe. Well that proves it, Altena is definitely breaking the rules of E&E."

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

"We get rid of the rest of the Soldats and Walter will do some spin doctoring in case the media gets wind of this." Meg answered.

"What about Limelda?" Nadie asked.

"We can go and see if she needs help." Meg replied.

"If L.A. is there, then Limelda is going to need it." Nadie thought to herself and she raced down the hall following the trail of destruction the trio had left in their wake.

Madlax was drawn to the most intense fire like the fearless mercenary to any sort of combat. She heard and sensed the greatest danger was in the East wing. The bullets wailed and screamed across the rooms. Madlax saw Armitage's team pinned down.

"What is the Intel on the attacking force?" Madlax asked in a hurry.

Armitage smiled as he saw Madlax; "We have what's left the Soldat raiding force but as you can see they have us pinned down. We count ten all together plus at least eight ninjas and looks' they've been going at each other before we arrived. At the moment they're holed up in the room and ninjas the corridor beyond it. We can use high explosive or anti personnel grenades without doing serious damage to the house and us as well. If you have a plan, I'll be happy to hear it." He answered.

Meanwhile Madlax had a cunning idea as she usually does but she needed equipment.

"Armitage, do you have a couple of smoke grenades as well?"

Armitage replied. "Yeah, what do you have in mind?" as he gave her two smoke grenades.

Madlax also took a Anti-Personnel grenade and told Armitage to throw a smoke grenade on her side and fire into the corridor when she threw the anti-personnel grenade down the corridor taking out the ninjas. Madlax snuck behind two men guarding the exit and finished them off professionally as usual, although again she cried on the inside. But time was of the essence and quickly Madlax detonated the other smoke grenade, the explosion ripped from the other side of the corridor. Armitage immediately thru the smoke grenade with his team firing aggressively. The Soldats were anticipating for a charge and were expecting to retreat the other side rather easily. To their surprise they ran into more smoke and Madlax fired and killed another two or three in the bewildering confusion. In utter disarray, the remaining five fled charging back into where Armitage was camped with four of the men screaming in their swift death. A terrible sound it was and the last man looking rather dejected managed a glimpse into Madlax's eyes before he was shot.

Nadie, Elenore and Meg found Limelda lying in a pool of her own blood, the shattered remains of her sniper rifle lying beside her.

"Don't try to move, we'll get help." Elenore said pulling bandages out of a first aid kit that Meg brought along.

"St...op being*cough* so...nice*cough cough* to me." Limelda said coughing up blood.

"Save your energy Miss Jorg. Once I get you stabilized we'll get you to a hospital." Elenore said in a comforting tone.

"Sweetie, I really don't think she's going to make it to a hospital." Meg said over the radio.

Nadie saw the tell tale signs of L.A.'s wire along Limelda's body and some of them were quite deep and then an idea hit her like a bullet. She pressed her hand against the wall and shouted; "Ellis can you hear me?!"

Nadie smiled as she heard Ellis' voice. "Yessir."

"I need you come here quick!" Nadie said and then she turned to Limelda and said. "Limelda hang on for a little longer, help is on the way." Nadie and the rest of them were surprised as the wall glowed red and Ellis stepped from the wall. Elenore was doing the best she could to help Limelda but all she could do was at keep comfortable the best she could.

"What happened to her?" Ellis asked in shock.

"I'll explain later, Ellis can you heal her?" Nadie asked with hurried concern.

"I'll try." Ellis replied and she held out her arms over Limelda. First the bracelet glowed and then Limelda glowed purple and her wounds healed.

"Try to rest Miss Jorg. Thank you Ellis" Elenore said.

"You're welcome Browneyes." Ellis replied with a smile.

"Watch out for those two especially the one with the wire." Limelda said still lying on the ground.

"Ellis, can you please heal our people." Meg asked.

"I can only heal. I can't raise the dead." Ellis replied sadly.

"It's okay. Healing the wounded will be fine and don't worry I'll make sure this stays quiet." Meg said with a wink and she put back on her helmet.

"What about Limelda? We can't leave her here." Elenore asked.

"Sweetie take her to where Margaret is and let her rest there." Meg said picking up Limelda and putting her in Elenore's arms.

Elenore brought to where Vanessa, Margaret and Laetitia and two members of Echo squad where at, Vanessa noticed the tears and blood on Limelda's clothing.

"What happened Elenore?" Vanessa asked in shock.

"Miss Jorg ran into Chloe and some young man while the two were fighting each other and she got caught between and she got badly hurt. Fortunately Ellis healed her but she's out for the

count." Elenore replied gently Limelda down and took off her helmet and collapsed against the wall and sat down with a very melancholy look on her face.

"What's wrong Elenore?" Vanessa asked Elenore with great concern, but she could guess what might have happened.

"I did it...I killed..." Elenore replied a tone that resounded with misery.

Vanessa went to her and held her in her arms. "It's okay Elenore, I love you and I don't think any less of you." Vanessa said noticing the great many bullet craters in her armor.

"So what happened to Chloe and this young man?" Vanessa asked.

"As far as I know they're still in the garden fighting." Elenore replied.

Margaret was relieved to see Elenore was okay, but she stared in shock as Limelda was brought in, in her hopeless condition. She knew this attack would be dangerous, but in a naive sort of way Margaret hoped none of them would get hurt. This had to be stopped quickly. This mysterious attacker seemed to have no sides, and he was responsible for almost killing Limelda, who knows who else, could get hurt by him? From what Elenore just said he was still outside, fighting with Chloe. If she was gonna try and help Chloe, like Nakhl requested, and since Kirika didn't seem inclined to, maybe now would be the best time to do something about it, Margaret concluded.

As soon as everyone around was distracted, Margaret sneaked out and headed outside to the Garden, hoping not to run against anyone else besides Chloe and LA. She took out her gun and tried approaching them with caution, from behind the bushes, until she was close enough to see them going at it. Whatever this person was using it seemed like a scary weapon, as it cut through the trees so easily. No doubt he was trying to kill Chloe. But if he was on our side he wouldn't have attacked Limelda, Margaret thought. As the two of them got close enough, and before LA or Chloe could make any other move, Margaret jumped out of her hiding spot, revealing herself. "You stop that now, the two of you!" Margaret nervously shouted at them, as she pointed her shaking gun in their general direction.

Chloe gave Margaret a contemptible look while keeping her eyes on L.A.

L.A. had no clue who this was, he somewhat remembered Armitage talking about some girl that lived here. But he didn't care the only thoughts on his mind was killing Chloe and getting to Ellis. If he had to kill this girl like he did the woman with the sniper rifle so be it.

Meanwhile Laetitia had noticed that Margaret had gone missing.

"Where did Margaret go?" She asked.

"Hmmm, now that you mention it." Vanessa replied.

Elenore went to action mode and put on her helmet.

"DAISI, locate Margaret now please!" Elenore commanded DAISI.

DAISI linked up with house security and quickly located Margaret.

"Miss Margaret is out in the garden with two others."

"She's out there by herself! What is she thinking?!" Elenore quickly rising to her feet and running to the garden. She stopped thinking about what she had done, right now Margaret needed her. That Chloe woman and the maniac with the wire were out there and she had seen what they did to Limelda. Margaret would be no match for them she thought as she raced to the garden.

"Can't you just go away? Please! Stop it now and go away!" She shouted again, this time directing her words and her gun towards LA, trying to sound more decided than before somehow.

L.A. grew annoyed; this little girl was keeping him from completing his mission and Ellis.

"You won't stop me from having Ellis!" L.A. shouted and he leapt towards her wire ready to slice her in half...

Elenore came out to what was left of the garden and she saw Chloe retreating with a great deal of tears and cuts on her body.

"WHERE'S MARGARET!?" Elenore shouted at Chloe.

Chloe smiled, she recognized Elenore's voice. Maybe if she let her unknown attacker kill Margaret maybe that would drive her to the Soldats.

"I won't tell. Maybe she's dead." Chloe said trying to provoke Elenore.

Elenore grew enraged. "I won't kill you but I'll beat the info out of you." And Elenore and Chloe engaged in furious hand to hand combat. To Chloe it seemed that the angrier Elenore got the stronger and more focused her attacks became. After taking a few very painful kicks from Elenore felt it was time to make a tactical withdrawal. But Elenore continued. "WHERE IS SHE!? TELL ME DAMN YOU! IF SHE DIES, YOU DIE!" Elenore shouted.

That last line shocked Chloe who was accustomed to killing but hearing that from someone who had a strong dislike for killing unnerved her as Elenore continued.

Margaret was taken by sudden panic as she saw L.A. rush at her at amazing speed. She wasn't either expecting nor prepared to respond to this situation. The Torc instinctively reacted to protect Margaret, preventing L.A.'s wire from cutting through her, but receiving the impact from the attack, which sent her back against the wall. As she hit the wall, and before she could think of anything else, Margaret closed her eyes and shot L.A. repeatedly, and kept pressing the trigger long after running out of ammunition, even though L.A. was already laying motionless on the ground.

Elenore heard the gunshots and she tried to move towards them but Chloe blocked her way. Elenore rushed at Chloe and hit her with a flurry of kicks and punches aided by the ring which sent her flying back leaving the impression of the Ring of Morrigan on her face. Chloe wiped the blood from her mouth as she smiled.

"Impressive. No wonder Lady Altena wants you." And she rushed at Elenore only to be surrounded by a murder of crows and ravens. Elenore took advantage of the distraction and rushed to where the gunshots were coming from.

She saw Margaret squeezing the trigger with her eyes closed even though it looked like she was out of ammunition.

"MARGARET!" Elenore shouted as she rushed to her with a speed not even normally possible with the armor.

Elenore grabbed Margaret and the gun. "Margaret are you all right? You can stop shooting, he's...dead." Elenore said in a comforting tone holding her sister not aware that the ring was glowing and visible. Margaret stopped shooting and let go of the gun and opened her eyes as she heard Elenore's voice. "Elenore? Oh Elenore, I was so scared! I thought I was gonna die!" She said between sobs, throwing herself at Elenore's arms, still trembling.

"It's okay I'm here." Elenore said in a comforting and reassuring tone holding Margaret's trembling body in her arms. "What were you doing out here? You could've gotten killed...I don't want to lose you. I'll protect you, so you'll never again have blood on your hands." Elenore asked in a somewhat sad tone and holding Margaret tightly. She looked at the body of L.A. and wondered who he was.

"Was he that person that Nadie was talking about?" Elenore thought to herself not noticing that that the ring had uncloaked itself recognizing Elenore as its bearer.

"I... I just... I heard you saying Chloe and the person who attacked Limelda were fighting outside, in the garden. I didn't come here to kill anyone... I just wanted them to stop and go away... I didn't want him to kill Chloe, NakhI asked me... And I didn't want him to injure anyone else!

He almost killed Limelda! He could have killed you!" Margaret replied between sobs, trying to wipe the tears from her eyes as she looked at Elenore. "I'm sorry... I didn't think this could happen... I did something stupid... again..."

Elenore looked Margaret in the eye. "I'm the one who should apologize. I should've followed Limelda but I was too wrapped up in what I had done I didn't go back and help her. I never wanted you to have blood on your hands again. I'm so sorry Margaret...because of my inaction that you were put in a situation where you had to defend yourself again." Elenore hugged Margaret warmly. "If anyone has to have blood on their hands, it should be me."

"Don't say that, Elenore." Margaret replied in a sad tone, still struggling with her tears. "I don't care... I don't regret it... and neither should you. We all have the right to be alive and safe, and protect ourselves and each other from those who try to harm us! How could I live with myself... if I didn't think this way? I'll always remember I killed my... our father, Elenore."

"I just want all of this to be over and them to leave us alone and at peace, so that none of us has to go through this again." She said, after a moment of silence. "Can we go inside now? I'm cold." Margaret asked in a muffled voice, still holding tight to Elenore and avoiding looking at L.A.'s dead body on the ground.

Elenore felt at a loss for words, she knew she was right. So she did the only she could do; she hugged Margaret.

"Yes, let's go inside. I think the fighting has stopped." Elenore holding tight to Margaret and leading her inside.

"I think it's time I put a stop to this." She thought to herself.

Elenore brought Margaret to where Vanessa and the others were. She noticed that Ellis wasn't among them.

"Thank God you're all right Margaret. You had us worried there. What happened?" Vanessa asked with compassion mixed with concern. "The person who attacked Limelda... I asked him to leave. He attacked me, so I shot him. He won't hurt anyone else again..." Margaret explained vaguely. "I'm sorry; I wanna take a nap now. I can sense Madlax is okay. Will you be okay too, Laetitia?" Margaret asked, as she turned and looked at her little sister tenderly, caressing her cheek.

"I'll be okay. Question is will you be okay? Will they be okay?" Laetitia asked her big sister and looked at her warmly. Margaret pondered on Laetitia's puzzling words for a while and then smiled back. "I hope so Laetitia. I really do." Margaret replied, as she seemed to stare far away into space for a few seconds, before turning away and heading upstairs to her room to take a nap.

"I'm going to go and see if Uncle Walter needs my help. I'll be back in a little while. Please keep watch over Margaret for me." Elenore said as she walked out.

She walked out to the garden and surveyed the damage. The place was in shambles; the once beautiful garden was in ruin and in the middle like a grotesque statue laid L.A.'s dead body with a grimace on his face. She checked the statue of the baby angel and around and breathed a sigh of relief that nothing had happened to it.

She looked at the ring on her finger. "Well you chose me. Now I need your help. I want to speak with the woman who's responsible for all this." Elenore said waving her around at the

carnage. A huge murder of crows and ravens and other blackbirds encircled Elenore and the when murder had flew off into the sky Elenore was nowhere to be seen...

An unseen hand suddenly grasped Chloe's shoulder and yanked her out of the cloud of birds. The firm hand caught her away, and she seemed to fly at an ungodly pace until the sound of gunfire was diminished. Chloe found herself sitting against a hedge, with myself at her side. "I daresay you could've taken care of that yourself," I said. "But there are some things life simply hasn't trained you for, and I wasn't willing to take any chances."

Chloe looked at Nakhl with one eye swollen shut. Between L.A. and Elenore and then that flock of birds Chloe didn't want another fight and she was out of knives and her gun was empty. "You again! Who are you?! What do you want?" Chloe said as she tried to go into a fighting stance but she was too badly hurt.

"Don't try to move," I replied. "Not every warrior you come across is a threat, you know. Though I very nearly agreed to kill you. I went to a great deal of trouble to persuade my mentor that wasn't the right course of action - after lying through my teeth the first time round. Never mind the fact that she only communicates by mail. It's annoying when they're so disconnected with the real world, isn't it?"

"So if you're not going to kill me then what the Hell you want?" Chloe spat as she relaxed her stance. "I want to know what you want. What you really want. Not Altena. Not the Soldats. You."

Chloe forced a bitter laugh. "What I want? What I want. I'll tell you what I want...I want that whore Mireille dead and Kirika would truly be mine at last. I almost had her then that damn freak with the wire and lame assed sniper showed up. Then just when I got rid of them both then Elenore shows up and beats the shit out of me and I'm sure this mark on my face isn't going away any time soon." Chloe pointing to the imprint of the ring on her face. "Besides Kirika and that whore are long gone by now knowing them. So tell me how is you knowing what I want going help me, huh." Chloe spat.

"For starters, when was the last time you told anyone that?" I replied. "But never mind that. We are two of a kind, Miss Chloe. But the shortest distance between two points is not always a line. There was a time when you thought of Mireille quite differently - as a friend worth having, for Kirika's sake. It was not until a few moments before your death that your heart turned to vengeance and your soul to violence. And whose fault was that? Mireille's? No, it was that ritual in which you were all moving as puppets on strings. And you were alone." A tear fell from my eye, and I was not ashamed of it.

"The path on that line," I continued, with the vision of L.A. still fresh in my mind, "can only lead to death. Have you not seen that this very afternoon? He died for a love he could never have - and because I asked Margaret to defend you."

"You asked that little twit to protect me? Should've asked Elenore...heh." still wincing from the blows Elenore had landed. "You asked me what I wanted, so what do you want?" Chloe asked throwing Nahkl's question back at her.

I took a deep breath. The question had taken me aback. After a few moments, I replied. "I want to be left alone. I want my own life. I want to sit down for a while with a scotch and soda and not care about anyone but myself." I paused a moment, contemplating the sheer improbability of the situation. "But I don't suppose you mix drinks," I added with a smile.

"I see you're somebody's puppet too...heh. So what now? What are you going to with me? If I can't have Kirika, then what?" Chloe said with some bitterness in her voice. Nahkl's last comment threw her off a bit. "No, I prefer a good wine myself."

"I don't know, Chloe. But you don't need to be a puppet forever, you know. No human being does."

"That's all fine and well. Do you think they would just let me walk away? Would you think she would? I wouldn't be surprised if this was just a trial for Madlax and Elenore...heh heh." Chloe bitterly chuckled.

"I pity them, if it is," I said sincerely. "We are not children, Chloe. We can think and act...and die...for ourselves. Would you walk away, if I did?"

"And where would we go if I decided to walk away? As long as Altena is alive..."

"Are you telling me it is impossible for her to die?" I looked Chloe fast in the eye. "You have two choices, Chloe. You can play her game with Elenore right up to the very end, like you did before. Or you can refuse. But I can only help you with the latter."

Chloe dreaded the thought of fighting Elenore again. "Suppose I take your offer. What will you do?" "I would gather what aid I can," I said, purposefully, "and kill Altena."

"Easier said than done." Noticing the huge flock of birds coming from the garden into the sky and away from the house. "That's strange...so many birds even for a city this size."

"Damn!" I said, jumping to my feet. "She's gone...all by herself, she's gone!"

"Who's gone? What the hell are you talking about? The only thing I said was about huge flock of birds."

"Elenore. She's playing right into her hands," I said. I quickly etched a simple circle into the soil at my feet, and made some swift etchings into it...after a moment, it began to glow dimly against the bright sun.

"I don't know if this will work," I said, looking over my handiwork anxiously, "but I'm willing to give it a try. Are you coming?" I looked at Chloe questioningly. "Sure, I could use the laugh. What do mean Elenore's playing into Altena's hands? "

"There's no time for explanations," I replied. The circle glowed more brightly now. "Take my hand."

Chloe complied, unsure of what to make of all this. A moment later, they found themselves sitting in a dry plain.

"Honestly, I was skeptical as you are of that one," I said. "But we seem to be somewhere...maybe you could tell me where? And then we'll both laugh, okay?"

"Actually we're not too far from the new Manor, it's this way." Chloe had noticed the huge flock of birds in the sky nearly turning it dark and she pointed in the direction of the Manor.

Meanwhile back at the Burton home; "Ellis do you really need to see his body?" Nadie asked Ellis as they walked toward the garden. "I do. Why did they bring him back to life? Why couldn't they just have left him in peace?" Ellis replied asking no one in particular.

"I..." Meg was starting to say but Ellis interrupted her.

"I don't blame you or your brother for this. Too many people have suffered because of this sick game. Now L.A. is its latest victim and before this day is done more will suffer." Ellis said with sadness in her voice.

They came upon L.A.'s body riddled with bullet holes and with a grimace on his face. Ellis bent down and folded L.A.'s arms over his chest and straightened his body out. Though she couldn't do much for his face. "I'm sorry you had to get involved in this. May you find peace in the next life." Ellis said to L.A.'s lifeless body. Meg had noticed the writing on the statue of the baby angel and went to look at it. As soon as she read it Meg fell to her knees and began to cry. Ellis could hear Meg softly say "Why didn't you tell me about this?" Ellis then turned to Nadie and said; "Could you give a few minutes and I think Meg could some comfort herself right about now." Nadie looked at Meg and saw her and back at Ellis and she nodded and went to Meg.

Ellis got up and stretched her arm with the bracelet and L.A.'s body began to burn. The fire quickly consumed L.A.'s body and with the power of the bracelet nothing else burned till there was nothing of his body but ashes and they were blown away in the wind.

"Now no one can disturb his sleep ever again. Good bye L.A. ." Ellis said as she walked toward the house. Nadie looked at what had been the remains of L.A. for little bit, gave a small prayer and followed Ellis back to the house. Meg stared at the statue cum gravestone and then staggered back to the house.

Ellis, Nadie and Meg went back into the house and went to where Vanessa and Laetitia were. When they got there, they saw Armitage talking with Vanessa with Laetitia looking watching the medic checking a still unconscious Limelda. Meg walked up to the pair who was finishing up their conversation and grabbed Armitage by collar and pushed him against the wall.

“Did know about that too Walter?! Did you know about the baby?” Meg asked with tears flowing down face.

“Know about what? What are you talking about Meg, What baby?” Armitage replied a bit confused and concerned.

Meg told Armitage about the gravestone in the garden and his face turned to shock. “I didn’t know, I swear...”

Vanessa had been listening to the conversation and she was saddened by this. “*You should’ve told her about this Elenore.*” She thought to herself before speaking to Meg and Armitage.

“I can shed some light on this...” Vanessa said to them and for the next few minutes told the group what had happened to Elenore and her child. Meg was devastated, she felt this was the ultimate failure for her as a parent. Ellis cried on Nadie’s shoulder as she looked at Meg sorrowfully. Then Meg turned to Vanessa and asked her; “Where is Elenore?”

Vanessa was a bit confused and then she answered; “She said she was going to see if Walter needed any help. I figured she might’ve been with you since Walter showed up her without and she wasn’t with him. Didn’t you see her?”

“No, I didn’t, hold on let me check something.” Meg put her helmet on and tried to contact Elenore but she got no response.

"Nothing. Where did she go?" Meg said trying not to panic and wondering where Elenore had gone to.

"Good question. I'm more worried that she'll do something because of what happened to Margaret." Vanessa added in a concern tone knowing full well what Elenore was capable of when she was angry. “Where is Margaret now?” Meg asked concerned.

"Margaret went to take a nap, she was pretty upset about what had happened." Vanessa replied.

That just left Laetitia, Mireille, Kirika and me till Walter showed up and we started to discuss how we going spin this to the media if they find out.” Vanessa added.

“Well the media caught wind of this little fight, so Vanessa and I have to go do damage control. As for Elenore, if she’s still wearing the suit just use the tracking device in it and you can use the tilt rotor. Right now Vanessa and I have to calm the natives before they get too restless.”

Armitage said going out the door with Vanessa.

As soon they left Nadie asked Meg. "You mind if I took a shower and Ellis wants to lie down as well?"

"I don't see why not." Meg called asked the medic if Limelda was safe to move and the medic gave the okay which then Meg said. "Can you guide these guys to Limelda's room on your way back to yours?"

"Sure. Come on Ellis." Nadie replied watching a couple of Echo squad put Limelda on a stretcher.

"Yessir." Ellis replied but in a sleepy and saddened tone and she followed Nadie and the men as they left towards the bedrooms.

Meg stood in the front hallway with Laetitia staring at her with a curious but concerned look. Meg noticed Laetitia and bent down to where she had eye contact and spoke in a motherly tone. "Hi, you must be Laetitia. I'm Elenore's mommy. Everything's going to be okay sweetie, the bad guys got chased away." Laetitia smiled at Meg amusedly. She knew that Meg thought she was just an ordinary little girl with a unique origin and she didn't hold it against her seeing that she was Elenore's mother and she was concerned about her.

"Yes I am. I'm sorry but you won't find Elenore around here." Laetitia said in her usual cryptic tone.

Meg smiled warmly and asked. "Don't be sorry for things you didn't do sweetie. Do you know where Elenore went to?"

"She went to where the one who wants to stain her hands black is." Laetitia answered in her usual cryptic fashion.

Meg got confused but she remembered from what Elenore, Madlax and Vanessa had told her about Laetitia and her habit of talking in a cryptic fashion.

"Sweetie, I know you told me where she went, but I need you to be clearer. I'm really worried about Elenore and I'm afraid she might have gone and done something rash."

Laetitia cocked her head and thought that she was being clear but she guessed that Meg didn't quite get the reference and it did concern Elenore.

"She went to the Manor to speak with her." Laetitia said hoping that this time Meg would "get it".

Meg's eyes grew wide as saucers as she put it together.

"How? Never mind that. Thank you sweetie." She called over a female squad member and asked them to keep an eye on her and get her out of the front hall.

"Please, go with this nice lady to the living room okay sweetie." Meg said in a motherly tone.

"Okay, just please don't be hard on her. She means well." Meg watched as Laetitia left the front hallway.

"Just wait till you get home young lady." Meg thought to herself.

"I just hope you make back home..." Meg said in a softer tone while still standing in the hallway.

Meg stood in the hall talking to the pilot of the tilt rotor when she overheard Mireille and Kirika talking.

"This is ridiculous," Mireille ranted. "Is Altena really that desperate for a new Noir? Or to kill us or what? This is insane. Did you see how many Soldats there were?"

Kirika nodded. Not that she'd taken count, but the general chaos gave her an idea.

"They made the Knights of Paris look like a squabble. A squabble Kirika!"

Kirika nodded again. "Now what?"

"That's it, I'm gonna kill her, Kirika. I was going to wait and see what she was up to, but then she went overkill on us. I am not going to take chances with that kind of maniac after us."

"Mireille?" Kirika asked, "Where is the new mansion?"

Mireille shrugged. "Heck if I know, Kirika. Maybe some metaphysical...thing...will show up and give us a sign. Or not."

"I may be able to help." Meg said walking up to the pair.

Mireille turned and replied a bit skeptical. "How so?"

"Elenore has gone off to confront Altena. The suit she's wearing has tracking device and that signal can be traced." Meg replied.

"That's well and good but how does she know where the new mansion is?" Mireille asked still skeptical.

"I just got done talking to the pilot of the tilt rotor that hovering nearby. The signal is three hundred feet in the air and in the middle of a huge flock of ravens. If I had to take a guess I'll have to say it's one of those artifacts. "

Mireille stared at Meg for a bit and then turned to Kirika.

"Is that our sign?" Kirika asked.

"I...it's as good as anything. We might as well follow it."

"Um...Mireille...will you be alright taking on Altena alone?"

"Who said she was going alone. Besides flying beats driving." Meg said.

"Good point. I'll help you save your daughter but Altena is mine." Mireille said.

"Deal, let's get going."

Kirika asked Mireille again, "Are you sure you're gonna be alright?"

"Kirika, I was once a candidate too. I can take care of myself. I'll text you when I'm done."

As Kirika saw Mireille and Meg go outside to the tilt rotor; Kirika decided to go look for Chloe if she was still around the house but she still didn't know how to help Chloe, but Margaret had said Altena's power over her was weakening. Maybe she would run into her on the way or something.

The murder of crows' ravens and other blackbirds settled near some near ruined building on a dry plain in Nafrece. In the middle of them Elenore stood. She scanned the area and saw at least five armed nuns (?) coming towards her. They started shooting at her and Elenore sighed sadly. "More blood on my hands it seems." She said as she readied her guns and started targeting the nuns. The nuns never got within firing range as Elenore's guns took them out before they could due to her guns longer range.

Elenore sadly looked at the scene and then at her hands. Then she started to walk toward the building.

"God forgive me for what I'm about to do." Elenore said to no one in particular and she walked towards the manor scanning for any movement.

She didn't detect anything when she got to the front door and she opened it forcefully with one gun drawn in anticipation of an attack which never came. Elenore noticed that the H & K's were empty so she switched to the fifty caliber guns; at least she knew she had four full clips. She walked, the place had eerie quiet to it and she walked down the hall the ring guiding her to where she need to go and when she got to the door she kicked it in and walked into the room where Altena was sitting next to a chess board.

"Don't you know how to knock?" Altena said to Elenore who had a gun pointed at her.

"I figured since your people don't know how to properly knock, I assumed this was the usual method that Soldats entered a place." Elenore replied in a sarcastic tone.

"Does your mother know you're dressed in her clothes? Little children shouldn't be wearing adults clothing." Altena said mockingly.

"You leave my mother out of this. This has nothing to do with her." Elenore retorted.

"So tell me Elenore, what has your mother done for you? Where was she when your grandfather died? Where was she when you were assaulted and later lost your baby? Where was she when you were shot in Gazth-Sonika? I'll tell you; she was off living her life while she left her poor daughter to fend for herself." Altena retorted.

"I'm not surprised you would know all that considering that stuck your nose in my business. And speaking of my mother that's between her and me. Right now, you and I have are going to have a few words."

"Your right, it doesn't. Now why don't you be a good little girl and put down the guns before you hurt someone. Oh wait you already did haven't you, for someone who's against killing you're being quite the hypocrite. Aren't you my dear Elenore?"

"I wouldn't be here if you didn't bother us in the first place." Elenore snapped back.

"Let me guess, you've come to kill me haven't you my dear Elenore. What would dear Margaret think you then?" Altena asked trying to unnerve Elenore.

"That's none of your business. What Margaret thinks of me is no concern of yours. If I have to become a killer to keep Margaret from having more blood on her hands so be it. I'll do it because I love her." Elenore replied seeing through Altena's ploy and her finger almost squeezing the trigger and then stopping.

Altena smiled. "What's stopping you Elenore? Did you run out of courage to pull the trigger? I guess Friday was right about you all along."

"You know I'm damn sick hearing that and I'm sick of hearing his name!" Elenore said pulling the triggers till she emptied both guns into Altena who looked at Elenore in shock as the bullets entered and exited till she fell down with several large bullet holes in her. Elenore looked sadly at Altena, said a short prayer and left leaving the dead body of Altena behind and she hoped that this mad game that she had gotten her family and friends in would end.

Elenore left the Manor and looked over the horizon. She saw Nakhil and Chloe heading toward the Manor. Elenore thought of going home and finishing a piece of unfinished business. She concentrated and a huge murder of crows, ravens and blackbirds swarmed around her and then the flock flew up into the air and Elenore was gone.

By the time Chloe and Nakhil reached the Manor, Elenore was long gone. There were the bodies of the nuns that remained laying dead in a grotesque near circle. One of the doors of the Manor was ripped from its hinges and the other one silently swinging in the wind. The eerie silence surrounded the pair as they walked in. The silence followed them as they walked down the darkening hall towards Altena's study.

The door was like its cousin in the entrance torn off its hinges. Chloe reached for a weapon but found she had none. Her knives were gone and her gun empty.

"I hope you have a weapon because we going to need it." Chloe said with a little apprehension as they walked into the study. As they walked, they saw the following scene. The fire was burning slowly giving off a near Hellish light as they focused their attention to an overturned chair. There; lying next to an overturned chess board with its pieces scattered and covered in blood was Altena. Not Altena the proud leader of a Soldats faction, but Altena the bullet ridden corpse. There were at least twenty or more gaping bullet holes in her. A lake of slowly moving blood surrounding her slowly cooling body. A look of utter shock and horror was frozen on what remained of her face. As they took in the scene Chloe looked at Nakhil for a word.

"I wonder," Nakhl said calmly, "if this is what Altena wanted."

She plucked a cartridge from the floor. "She wasn't interested in subtlety, was she?

Carnage...vindication...blind rage. Was it simply her love of Margaret that drove her to this? Or something more sinister?" She stopped, realizing she was thinking aloud.

"Please excuse my discourtesy," She added quietly. "We should bury her."

Chloe looked at what had remained of Altena. She was in shock for a few moments as she looked over this scene of brutality. From what she had read about Elenore she knew she was capable of acts of non lethal violence but this shocked even her.

What fury drove her to this? Was it as Nakhl said her love of Margaret that drove her to this.

What did Lady Altena say or do to deserve this kind of carnage. Even though she had held her in a twisted kind of bondage she couldn't help but feel some sort of compassion for her. Chloe pondered to herself.

She nodded accepting her apology. "Yes, at least she deserves that much." Chloe picked up the blood soaked remains of her former mentor and carried them outside and took her to the vineyard. She knew she would've been happy to be buried among the grapes she lovingly tended she thought to her as she gently laid her down and went to fetch a shovel.

An hour later the pair had dug a deep enough grave for her and began covering her with earth.

Chloe made a makeshift marker for grave and placed next to grave and then she looked to Nakhl and asked. "It seems that my strings have been cut, so now what?" She asked looking for an answer.

"I worry for Elenore. It is not like her to act in this way. I don't know if you heard of this, Chloe, but at the end, Altena asked Kirika to kill her - very nearly forced her to - because doing so would give Kirika the license to kill anyone and everyone else - the license of Noir. She saw herself - her nuns - the entire Soldat order... yes Chloe, even you... as so many sacrificial lambs to that ideal. Yet the shock and awe in her face... Chloe, it is as if Elenore surpassed her expectations. And that is what worries me most..."

Nakhl paused, wondering where Elenore was now.

"Again, I am being ignorant of your feelings. This is really no concern of yours, unless you make it to be. You are a free woman, Chloe. You may choose what path you will. As for myself... How do I say this? It would be an honor to be at your side, no matter what path that may be."

Chloe took in Nahkl's words and it frightened a part of her. Lady Altena was willing to sacrifice everyone just for Noir?! And Elenore doing this frightened her as well as I remember her words from the garden. What raging beast had Lady Altena woken up inside of Elenore? Her sister who she had derided wanted to save me, now I wondered who would save her sister? Chloe pondered on her next move as she looked on Altena's grave.

"Since you and Margaret helped me save me from myself. I feel I should return the favor and save someone from themselves. But I don't know how to go about such a task. Will you help me?" She asked Nahkl.

"Of course," Nahkl replied, a bit relieved Chloe had not taken a less selfless course of action. "But...well, the runic circle I draw was something of a one-way ticket, I'm afraid - it never occurred to me that I would require haste on my way back from a mission. If the armory at your manor is as good as the old one, I suggest we re-equip. After that, I suggest we try and find an automobile...Altena had none, but this was a day for guests, I think."

"If the nuns are here then there is a car. It shouldn't be too far from the entrance." Chloe replied. She showed Nahkl where the armory was and they re-equipped. Chloe then gathered what belongings she could and put them in the car which was during Elenore's rampage undamaged which was a miracle in of itself. They got in and drove off back to the Burton home. "Do you have any idea what we're going to do when we get there?" Chloe asked on the way knowing confronting Elenore would be no easy task.

Nahkl pondered this for a moment. The green hills of Nafrece passed swiftly underneath their wheels, like as many eddies in the current of time. It was a surreal moment - Altena dead, and a woman she had considered non-violent - a non-entity in the underworld - the threat that faced her now. Her left hand drifted to the dagger she had found in the armory - a stained but otherwise perfect article that Chloe had used once. She finger ran down the blade, admiring the precision of the channels.

"If you require a weapon," Quanzitta had told her when she had set out for the city, "use whatever you can find. As soon as you carry a weapon, you become a threat. When you become a threat, you become a target."

"Chloe, would you happen to have a dress in that suitcase you dragged downstairs? Something frilly and innocuous?" She gave a noncommittal look, as if to say, "I know where you're going with this, and I'm not sure I like it."

"If I know anything about Elenore, she won't resist the urge to make her friends feel comfortable. I suggest we look as comfortable as possible."

"I do, but what makes you think she'll consider me a friend? She wanted to kill me remember." Chloe replied noticing Nakhl fingering the blade. "It's a good blade, but are you really going to use that on her? Is death the only way to save her?" She asked wondering what Nakhl had in mind.

"I need to test her, Chloe. I need to give her the chance to prove that she is not lost...and I need a contingency plan if she is. Elenore herself - that is, the way she was; the way she ought to be - she is of a peaceful nature, though protective and opinionated. You have Margaret's goodwill, and because of that, she would not in normal circumstances harm you. That in itself would be one barometer. I intend to go into this confrontation unarmed, Chloe. But I don't suggest you follow my example. And in either event, we will need someone who understands the issue better than any of us."

Then the lights on the dashboard flickered and went out. The car slowly came to a full stop. Nakhl could feel someone with the Gift but it was someone who was far stronger than her, Quanzitta or even Friday Monday put together. Time seemed to stop for a moment and Nakhl had found herself without the dagger she was carrying a few moments ago.

Nakhl stepped out the car and towards the front. She noticed Chloe frozen in place with her hands on the steering wheel.

"I have to admit; that's a good trick. You can come out; I can sense you." Nakhl said to the gathering twilight.

"I'm sure you can Nakhl." A young woman stepped out from out of nowhere. Nakhl noticed that the young woman's feature seemed familiar but she was having a hard time placing who she resembled.

"You have my attention, now what do you want." Nakhl said in a confident tone.

"First, drop the attitude. I'm far more powerful than you and to put it quite bluntly I can beat the crap out of you with little effort. Second; you're going to listen carefully what I'm about to say to you. Do I make myself clear?"

"You don't mince words do you? I do understand but I am curious why do you want to speak with me?" Nakhl replied trying to size up the woman.

"No I don't. I don't believe in that cryptic Vorlon crap that you and Laetitia seem to enjoy spouting. Now to business; I want you to forget all about going to the Burton manor tonight especially with Chloe."

“Any particular reason why?” Nakhl asked slightly irritated and the woman grinned and answered.

“I thought it would be obvious but it seems you need a refresher. A few hours ago Chloe led a force of Soldats into the Burton home. Granted majority of the forces have gone back to their HQ but enough remain to turn Chloe into Swiss Cheese. And I wouldn’t count Margaret’s goodwill helping; those guards are on strict orders to shoot first ask questions later. But...if you like turning Chloe into a pink frilly corpse be my guest. But doesn’t that ruin your plans?”

Nakhl thought about it and realized the woman was right; bringing Chloe to the Burton home would definitely get her killed. “Do you know why I want to go there?” Nakhl asked.

“Hmmm...let’s see. You want to see if Elenore Baker has become in your words a “Neo Altena”. What a load of shit. Elenore broke your image of her and you want to punish her for it. If wasn’t for Altena and the others pulling this stunt the artifacts would’ve gone back to sleep for another five hundred years by now. Let me put it perspective for you. Today, Elenore Baker had to take the lives other human beings in order to protect her family and home. An act that made her nauseous. But she had to put it aside when she saw Margaret shaking and crying in the garden next to the person she had to kill in self defense. She came out there to protect Chloe by your request I might add Nakhl. Elenore was angered that Margaret had to have more blood on her hands because of that and the fact it was near her dead child’s grave didn’t make her too happy either, granted the grave is nothing more than a pile of ashes but still, she was her child and it was all she could do as her mother so she and Margaret wouldn't forget her. So Elenore went to confront Altena in order to stop this attack and any further attacks on her family, her friends, and her home. Altena used psychological warfare tactics on her and the result which backfired on her quite spectacularly. Resulting in Elenore in her anger going a bit overboard in her attack. Granted these actions are not in her nature but even you must see that the circumstances forced her to do so. I do understand your concern, Nakhl and I hope my explanation allays your fears. But do take my advice seriously; don’t butt in where you’re not wanted. You have who you wanted, now go elsewhere...”

Nakhl was a bit put off but this woman’s speech but quite impressed never the less. Nakhl could feel eddies of time that swirled around this woman and she wondered if she has come from the future...then it hit Nakhl like a ton of bricks. No wonder this woman seemed familiar...apparently the Gift skipped Elenore and went to her daughter. Though Nakhl was curious about who was the father she knew she wouldn’t have gotten that answer.

"You have told me what I needed to know, please allow us to be on our way. But I do admit I am curious on whom your father is...but I doubt you’ll tell me." Nakhl said a bit more confidently.

The woman smiled. "Trust me, when you do find out. You'll shit a brick. But I suggest you get back into the car before Chloe runs you over. Oh one other thing...you **ever** threaten Elenore I will make sure it will be your last. Do I make myself clear?"

Nakhl nodded and got back into the car. Time began to move again. Chloe looked at Nakhl a bit confused. "What just happened?"

"Let's say I just got a timely warning. But we must change our plans a bit at least for tonight. We will return to my hotel for the time being for some much needed sleep."

Chloe was still bit confused on what had just happened but she was getting tired herself and Nakhl's invite sounded nice. "All right, sounds good to me" Chloe replied as they drove on.

"Well, Miss Baker you made your point clear. You're just as protective and most likely just as opinionated as your mother. I have a feeling you and I will meet again...I didn't know Elenore was into men...strange" Nakhl thought reflectively.

Mireille and Meg arrived at the Manor. As they got off the tilt rotor they noticed how quiet it was when they got up to the building. Then they went into the Manor and put on a pair of gloves. She looked around and found the armory and took ammo and some guns while Meg looked for Elenore. Mireille looked around some more and a found a safe. She used some explosives to open the safe and took first the money and the few gold bars that were there. She noticed a letter in there addressed to Margaret Burton. She looked at it and put it in her purse. She decided to give it to Margaret when she got back to Kirika. She followed Meg out to the vineyard where they found Altena's grave. They noticed the mound of earth with the crude cross bearing Altena's name and Mireille smiled.

"Good riddance..." She said to the mound while Meg sadly looked at the mound and thinking about Elenore.

Then they took what loot they had collected to the tilt rotor and set the place on fire. Mireille smiled as they flew away watching the smoke rising from the Manor...

Chapter 11.

Altena's words gave me something to think about...but despite what had or hadn't happen in the past I still love my mother and I...no we have a chance to start over again...

From the diary Elenore Baker July 14th 2013

Tilt rotor landed in the back of the Burton and Meg and Mireille got out and away from the vehicle. Mireille walked pasted Armitage as the tilt rotor headed back to base. As soon as it had left Armitage approached Meg.

"Did you find her? What happened?" He asked with concern.

"Didn't find Elenore, found Altena though or what was left of her. There were fifty cal jackets all over the place..."

"You're not making much sense Meg, just take a deep breath and start again." Armitage said in a calm tone. Meg explained what Mireille and she found at the Manor. They both figured that she may have run out of ammo for the forty fives and had to use the fifty calibers, but what concerned them was the number of rounds used. Meg promised to have a word with Elenore when she got back. But that also worried them; considering the method of travel she should've been back before them. As she watching the summer sun go down into twilight she looked at the gravestone of her granddaughter with a melancholy looked as she waited for Elenore.

What Meg didn't know was Elenore was closer than she thought...

Sarah Rosalind was walking home from the store. She didn't like being out with had been going on. She had to take the long way around due the fighting at the Burton Manor and it was starting to get dark. As she walked nervously down the street she was grabbed from behind and a knife was put against her throat and she dropped her bag. She could feel the heavy breathing of her assailant against her neck as he whispered with a French accent; "You scream you die..."

He didn't get to finish the rest of his sentence as a gun was up against the back of his head. Sarah heard a woman's voice as her attacker let her go. "Run. Now!" The voice told her and she ran as fast as she could forgetting her bag. (Ironically this was the woman that Elenore and Margaret hired after she was fired for forgetting the bag.)

The man smiled and said. "I don't know who you are but I have diplomatic immunity and I have powerful friends."

"How rude of me, granted it's been years since we saw each other. I was that little girl you assaulted in the graveyard nine years ago."

"Oh, maybe I should've reunited you with your grandpapa. Allow me to correct that mistake" The man said as he spun around trying to slash Elenore with his knife but her body armor stopped it. Elenore had the gun leveled right at his head and she spoke thus before pulling the trigger. "God forgive me for saying this, but I'm glad my baby died than to have **you** for a father."

Elenore pulled the trigger and the man's head exploded in a mass of blood, bone and brains. Then the murder of blackbirds surrounded her again and she was gone.

A few minutes later the flock settled down in the garden and Elenore emerged from the flock and looked at the ash outline where L.A. once was and then she looked where her mother was standing with a look of anger, compassion and concern was her mother.

"Elenore Baker, where in God's name have you been?!" Meg said in angry but concerned tone knowing full well where Elenore had been.

"I had to take care of couple of things mother." Elenore replied noticing her mother's tone.

"Not good enough! I want to know, did you or didn't you go to the Manor?!"

"Yes. Yes I did and I don't regret it. I had to do something about that woman and I did it."

Elenore replied in a very serious tone.

"What did you do?" Meg replied in the same tone.

"She threatened the people I love. She caused Margaret have more blood on her hands."

"WHAT DID YOU DO?!" Meg asked loudly.

"I shot her. I shot her till she was dead and then I left." Elenore replied in an almost cold tone.

Meg looked at her daughter in shock and then in understanding.

Then Meg pointed to the gravestone and asked sadly; "When were you going to tell me about this? To be honest, I don't know if I should be called your mother. I wasn't there when you needed me and I thought you getting shot was bad enough but this..."

Elenore hugged her mother and said; "Mother, I know. As I said before I forgive you and I want us to start over. As for telling you about Margaret I would've told you when the mess was over but it looks like you found out sooner than I planned."

Meg hugged Elenore in return and asked; "You said a couple things, what else did you do?"

Elenore looked her mother in the eye with sadness in them and replied. "I found my baby's father while he was assaulting another woman and I shot him in the head."

Meg held Elenore close to her. She didn't want to comment on that feeling she had no right to and she would've done it herself had she known who the guy was.

"I'm glad you're safe but I'm upset that you went off alone and without telling anyone. Well not quite anyone."

Elenore became a little irritated with the last part of her mother's statement.

"She's beginning to sound like Laetitia. WAIT A SECOND! I've should've known if anyone would've figured out where or I had even left it would be her. But that means Margaret might know too. Elenore thought to herself.

"Do you expect any more attacks tonight mother?" Elenore asked trying to hide her irritation.

"No, not with your uncle and your friend Vanessa doing damage control. I doubt either group will make an attack. The media were here earlier and your uncle told them that terrorists had targeted Margaret for kidnapping and they received a timely tip and were able to defeat the terrorists or that's how the official story goes."

"Thank God for small favors." Elenore said breathing a sigh of relief and actually relaxing a bit.

"Sweetie go inside, take off the suit and I'll have your uncle's tech team take a look at it. It looks like it took a beating and no I'm not going to take it away from you. I figured you earned the right to wear it.

Now go upstairs, take a shower before anyone else sees you." Meg said following Elenore to her room and she waited till Elenore took off the suit. Elenore handed the suit to her mother.

"Other than that lone wolf stunt you pulled I'm proud of you sweetie. You did good now get cleaned up." Meg said with a smile and she left the room.

Elenore took a shower, got dressed and laid on the bed wondering who would come charging through the door first Margaret or Vanessa?

Margaret woke up shortly after Elenore came back, fully aware of where she had been and what she had done. Not only that, she also realized the last artifact had just revealed itself. To think it had been this close and both she and Ellis missed it. It was still odd... why did the artifact decide to accept Elenore? Margaret was pretty sure Kirika was supposed to be the original bearer. In any case, she wanted to address Elenore about all this, so she got up and knocked on her door, hoping she'd still be awake.

Elenore heard the knock on the door and she rose up from the bed. At whoever it was didn't come right in. "Might as well get it over with." She thought to herself as she prepared for another possible chewing out.

"Come in. I'm up." Elenore said and the door opened.

"Elenore, I... I'm sorry to disturb you. You probably want to rest as well. But... Welcome back! I'm so glad you're okay! Margaret walked in and hugged Elenore affectionately. "I knew you'd be fine, somehow, but still... you didn't have to go alone, like that! But I guess it doesn't matter anymore.... Don't ask me how I know these things, I just do... Now that Altena is gone and the last artifact accepted you, do you think we can go ahead with the ritual soon?"

"I'm sorry I went off on my own. I didn't want you to have any more blood on your hands and I didn't want to risk anyone else's life. But you're right we don't have to worry about that woman anymore. I don't know how I got the ring but it accepted me, maybe because I was willing to fight for the people I love. I don't really know, but since Miss Yuumura is here, I should give her the ring. It helped me and now it's my turn of help it get who was destined to go to."

"You think we could leave that for tomorrow? A lot happened today already... I need to sleep on it... I think we all do." Margaret suggested, concerning the ritual, and asked, after a brief pause. "I didn't get to ask you before but, will you be okay, Elenore? About... all that happened... You know I'm okay with it, so please don't dwell on it on my account at least."

"I have to live with the fact that I've killed. It does bother my conscious and part of me wished it never had to come to that but I know if I didn't, you or someone we loved could captured, hurt, or dead. Can I ask you something considering all that's happened today; what do you think of me now?"

"Elenore, I already told you, it doesn't change a thing to me. You just did what you had to do, and I believe it was for the best. I know you don't think any less of me for all the awful things I ever did and say. Why should I feel any different about you? Of course I still love you the same!" Margaret replied reassuringly with a closed eyed smile.

"Thank you Margaret. I love you too." Elenore replied warmly.

"Hmm...Are you hungry now? I think dinner is ready already."

"I'm pretty hungry. Who made dinner?" Elenore asked.

There was knock on the door and Meg stuck her head in.

"Margaret, Elenore dinner's ready. Follow me please." Meg said and she led them both to the dining room. Limelda was seated as she was still unsteady as was Laetitia. Meg led Margaret to a chair at head of the table and Elenore stood to the one next to it. As soon as Margaret sat

everyone sat down and dinner was served. The mood at the table was quiet instead of the usual banter that went around.

After dinner Meg hugged Margaret and Elenore and wished the other's good night as she headed home. Elenore figured her mother was still uncomfortable being here and had only come to protect Margaret and her. Walter had packed up and was rounding up the troops to bring back to HQ. He left Echo squad to keep an eye on the house and the work crews that were at work repairing the damage as quickly as possible. He hugged Elenore, thanked Vanessa for her help and left.

Then Elenore turned her attention to Kirika. "Miss Yuumura, I believe this ring belongs to you." Elenore said as she took off the ring and was about to grab Kirika's hand when Kirika held her hand to accept the ring. Elenore placed the ring on her hand and Kirika put the ring on her ring finger. Margaret looked in confusion at Elenore and then at Kirika.

"Well I guess that's settled then...Kirika, you and your friend are welcome to spend the night here. We have a room available."

Mireille was going to protest but after what she saw today she felt it was futile. "We accept and thank you Miss Burton."

An hour later everyone got ready for bed. Fortunately none of the women had to do patrol. Madlax, Limelda and Nadie breathed a sigh of relief. Elenore had gotten ready for bed and was laying down when Vanessa came from the bathroom and sat next to Elenore with a worried look on her face.

"Vanessa what's wrong?" Elenore asked concerned.

"Funny I was going to ask you the same thing. Fighting the Soldats is one thing but what you did at the Manor scared me Elenore. Please tell me why? I want to hear your words." Vanessa asked with a mixture of sadness and concern as she held Elenore close to her.

"I was angry. I was angry because Margaret had to have more blood on her hands because of that woman. I was angry because our home was attacked. I was angry..."

"Angry about what, Elenore?"

"She brought up my relationship with my mother. She also used that same line that Friday Monday said to me in that field. "I don't have the courage to pull the trigger." For the last eight damn months I've heard that voice repeat that line over and over again, then she had the nerve to throw it in my face...I snapped. I wanted that voice to shut up. I didn't want to hear those words again, not from him, not from anyone else. For an instant as was pulling the trigger I thought I saw her..." Elenore replied with tears slowly falling down her cheeks.

"Who did you see?" Vanessa affectionately holding Elenore.

"I thought I saw Margaret's mother...that's who I thought I saw for a brief second."

Vanessa pondered Elenore's words and she wondered if Elenore was truly losing her mind.

"I don't want to lecture you but I am concerned as a friend and as your partner about your anger issues. I really think you've kept it bottled up for far too long and because what's happened it's starting really come out. Once we get this ritual done, I really think you should get help and I'll be behind you all the way so you won't be alone."

"If I told half of what I knew I would either wind up in an institution or in jail and or dead."

"I'll ask your mother and uncle if they know someone you can freely talk to about this."

"Thank you Vanessa" Elenore replied hugging her before they both settled down for the night.

Madlax was quiet during dinner and had a rather reserved manner about her. There was too much today, just too much for anyone to really notice Madlax's insecurity about this situation. She pushed her head on the light fluffy pillow in her bedroom, unloaded a pistol and cleaned her pistol quietly as the moon tinged slightly with purple. The moon was whispering to her, even though she couldn't understand what it said the tone was clear enough. The loss of Altena created a vacuum, not just among the Soldats but upon the power structure of this world.

Mireille stared out the window into the night sky. This had been one the strangest days of her life; first the vision of the first Noir and Duvet then the attack on the Burton home. Then what she saw at the Manor (though seeing Altena's grave did make her smile briefly.) and that ring. That ring was the one that little girl had dropped a couple days ago. Mireille pinched the bridge of her nose in frustration. All this supernatural nonsense was starting give her a headache.

She turned to Kirika who was lying on the bed staring at the ring on her finger. She had been silent more than usual ever since Elenore put the ring on her finger.

"Rewritten..." Kirika said breaking the silence and Mireille's internal gripe fest.

"What do mean by that?" A surprised Mireille asked.

"Somebody rewrote this. I was supposed to do something else but now I don't have to..." Kirika answered in usual quiet tone.

This was making Mireille's headache worse. "Let's get some sleep then tomorrow we can get this ritual done and over with and get the Hell out of here."

Kirika silently nodded consent as Mireille got into bed and fell asleep soon after.

Kirika stared at the ring and said quietly. "Yes I agree, this is much better than before..."

Then Kirika looked at Mireille and then she went to sleep.

Meanwhile Ellis stared out the window towards the garden.

“Still thinking of L.A.?” Nadie asked Ellis nodded silently.

“Nadie, after I get the bracelet off, I want to leave this place and never come back.” Ellis said sadly.

“Why?” Nadie asked a bit confused at the last part of Ellis’ statement.

“This house...this house. When I touched the walls with the power of the bracelet I saw what had happened here in this house. All of it...the murders, the lies, the evil of this place.”

“Evil? I don’t think...” Nadie was going to say before Ellis interrupted.

“Oh I wasn’t talking about Browneyes or her sisters. A lot bad things happened here before either of them or Meg were born.”

“Okay, I understand now let’s get some sleep. There’s been enough bad things going around here today for either of us to worry about what happened in the past. There’s nothing we can do about it anyway. Now go to bed.” Nadie said partly yawning.

Ellis sadly smiled. “Yessir.” She said as she got into bed with Nadie.

Margaret was fast asleep as usual. Today event’s tired her out and she was glad to go to bed. Now that all three artifacts were here, the Torc would be off and she could return to a normal life. At least she didn’t have to worry anyone attacking or watching the house she thought as her head hit the pillow and she was out like a light.

As she slept her mother’s spirit was watching her from across the room.

Chapter 12.

Now that I look back, July 10th and 11th 2012 were two of the strangest, stressful days of my life. If I had thought my life had changed on July 10th. July 11th changed everything...

Taken from the diary of Elenore Baker July 10th 2013

Vanessa stretched and as she was doing that her right hand pressed against Elenore's right breast. Vanessa gently squeezed and she heard a slight groan of joy coming from Elenore.

"Mmm...That feels nice." Elenore said with eyes still closed but with a slight grin on her face. "As much as I would like lay here all day, breakfast doesn't make itself. Plus my mother is coming this morning." Elenore said opening her eyes and started to rise.

"What do you mean your mother is coming?" Vanessa asked a bit surprised as she opened her eyes.

"I think she still wants to talk about Margaret in the garden." Elenore said sadly as she got of bed.

"I know it's a hard subject to talk about but, you should've told her..." Vanessa replied as she got out the bed and walked over to Elenore who was getting ready to take a shower. She held Elenore's naked body against hers and kissed on the cheek. Elenore looked at Vanessa lovingly and said in the same tone. "Thank you Vanessa. I love you."

"I love you Elenore." Vanessa responded in a loving tone as well. Elenore undressed Vanessa and gently guided her to the shower. Vanessa smiled as she nodded assent and they both into the shower. If anyone had walked into Elenore's room they would've heard giggling and a few more intimate noises coming from there.

When the pair came out of the bathroom they dried each other off. Then they got dressed and kissed each other and left the room.

As the pair entered the living room they saw Laetitia looking bored as she was flipping through channels on the television. They noticed that the windows had been replaced, the bullet holes patched and unseen. In fact the living room looked as if an attack hadn't happened yesterday.

"I'm impressed. Somebody knows how clean up a mess. Good Morning Laetitia how are you today?" Elenore asked.

Laetitia looked at Elenore and briefly smiled. "I wanted to watch my shows but all they're talking about is the attack on this place." She answered with some annoyance. Vanessa peeked out from behind the curtains to look outside. She could see the media swarming around the front gate and the guards Armitage assigned keeping them at bay.

“So much for a quiet morning...” Vanessa said with a sigh.

“The attack on this place was big news so I doubt that our mornings will be quiet for while.”

Elenore said agreeing with Vanessa.

Vanessa watched as the paper boy got searched and then allowed to put the paper on the front step and then he quickly bolted from the scene.

“I’ll go get the paper and deal with the vultures outside. Once more into the breach and let slip the dogs of Chaos.” Vanessa said with a slight but wary grin.

“Isn’t it the “dogs of war”?” Elenore corrected.

“They’re pretty much the same thing.” Vanessa replied.

“How true...” Elenore retorted as she headed to the kitchen.

Vanessa opened the front door amid flash bulbs going off. She did her best to ignore them and picked up the paper. There splashed on the front page; “Young aristocrat’s home attacked! French diplomat murdered!” Her attention was distracted by Meg’s voice.

“Morning Vanessa, I see the vultures are still circling around. Can I come in?” Meg said. Vanessa noticed that she was dressed in a dark skirt suit and wearing sunglasses. Vanessa gave a slight nod and they went with flash bulbs going off.

Meg closed the door behind them and took off her sunglasses.

“Isn’t there something Walter can do about them?” Vanessa asked.”

“He’s working on it. I’ll give it to this afternoon...” Meg said trying to guesstimate.

“Better than nothing I guess, but did someone else get killed yesterday?” Vanessa said pointing to the other part of the headline.

“I guess Elenore didn’t tell you.” Meg said with her voice growing angry with sadness mixed in.

“Tell me what?” Vanessa asked guessing what Meg had to possibly say.

“Elenore shot the piece of shit that...did “it” to her. The bright side of all this; that the media is blaming the terrorists for this. The French are calling him a patriot to his country when they know as much as we do that he’s been the serial rapist we’ve been wanting to get our hands on.” Meg smiled wickedly. “Seems some terrorist didn’t care about politics it seems.”

Vanessa looked at Meg with a serious look. “Speaking of Elenore; She needs some help and I doubt with the things she now knows she can go to a regular therapist. Is there anyone you know that she can talk to?”

Meg put her right hand on Vanessa's shoulder and smiled. "Walter's ahead of you on that one. He's arranged to have a Justicar therapist visit Elenore here. She's quite good, I can vouch for that."

Vanessa smiled at the news. "I'm glad. Maybe she can put it behind her and move on."

"By the way, where is Elenore?" Meg asked.

"Knowing her making breakfast." Vanessa replied.

Meg smiled. "Might as well go there and help." Meg said looking at Vanessa with a mock "Why aren't you helping look." As they went toward the kitchen. Vanessa knocked on the doorframe to let Elenore that there was someone behind her. She turned and smiled.

"Good Morning Mother. I hug you but I'm bit bust at the moment. Vanessa can make sure that everyone gets up. And don't worry about Margaret; I'll get her up."

As soon as Vanessa left Meg offered to help Elenore which she accepted. For awhile there was an awkward silence between them.

"I'm sorry, all I can give you is my sincere apologies. I know I've failed you as a mother and I've been doing some thinking." Meg said in an dejected and apologetic tone breaking the silence.

"About what?" Elenore said in a quiet tone.

"I asked myself; do I deserve to be a part of your life? Do you even want me in your life?"

"Is that it?"

"What?"

Elenore looked her mother sympathically. "If you had just truly abandoned me, we wouldn't be having this conversation right now. I know that were "things" that kept you away but I also know you still loved me. Otherwise you wouldn't be feeling guilty about it. I will admit I'm not entirely happy about what happened but that's out of my hands and I must accept it. But I do accept your apology because I do love you and I do want you in my life."

"Thank you sweetie." Meg put one arm around Elenore and hugged.

"You're welcome." Elenore replied.

"While we still have some time, I need to say a couple of things." Meg said and Elenore bracing herself for whatever heartbreaking revelation her mother was going say.

“Vanessa came to me asked if I knew somebody you could talk to about things. I do know someone and if you want I can help set up an appointment. She’s very good and can talk to her openly.” Meg said with some apprehension.

Elenore noticed the look on her mother’s face and smiled. “Oh I’m glad Vanessa got to ask you. We talking about that last night. I do need help on a few issues but knowing what I know...”

“Don’t worry about that. She’s a Justicar and she’s dealt with issues that had a supernatural aspect to them.” Meg said breathing a sigh of relief.

“Well that’s good. What was the other thing you wanted to talk about?” Elenore asked.

Meg wrapped her arm around Elenore and held her close and spoke. “That man you shot...”

“I have no regrets mother. If I have to I will...”

“They’re blaming it on the Soldats...well they’re calling them terrorists but you get the idea. I’m not condemning you for it...I’ve would’ve shot him if I knew who he was or what he had done. What I’m trying say is...”

“I know mother and thank you.” Elenore kissing her mother on the cheek knowing either her uncle or more likely Morrigan had a hand in that.

When the pair had finished cooking and putting it on trays. Elenore looked at her mother and said with a slight sigh. “I had better go get everyone up. I doubt that Vanessa could wake any of them especially Margaret. Can you keep an on eye on things while I do that.”

“How about I set the table while you do that.” Meg replied.

“I can go for that.” Elenore smiled and off she went.

Mireille tried to resist the urge to sleep in. She could hear the shower running nearby. With her eyes closed she did a quick scan with her hand and she surmised that Kirika was in there as she wasn’t in the bed with her.

She opened her eyes and rose up enough to see the bathroom door opening. Kirika got out of the shower and wrapped a towel around her.

“Good Morning Mireille. Did you sleep well?” Kirika said in a cheerful tone which surprised Mireille.

“You’re a bit chatty and cheerful this morning.” Mireille said trying to ascertain the cause.

"I know but I've been feeling really strange lately. When I'm around Margaret and the others, I feel...at ease, somehow. Like I can just...open up to them. I'm not used to feeling like this. Do you think it's the artifacts? Speaking of which..." Kirika showed Mireille the ring on her finger. "This is one of the artifacts; that ring we found. Remember that..." Kirika looked down for a minute, "...proposal? I was going to use it...as your engagement ring. Then I threw it out, but now it came back. Does this mean I am the true bearer?"

Mireille stared at Kirika for few moments. She pondered for an answer. "I'm no expert on the supernatural but it seems that way. It could be that ring or it could be just the Burtons. They seem to be a easy going bunch. Did you leave me any hot water?" Mireille replied trying to skirt the subject, especially if that subject had to do with the supernatural.

"Yes I did. I'll see you downstairs," Kirika replied as she left for breakfast. In the hall she saw Elenore heading toward her. "Good Morning Miss Yuumura. I hope you slept well." Elenore greeted in a cheerful tone.

"Thank you Miss Baker. I want to apologize." Kirika replied.

"For what Miss Yuumura?" Elenore asked a bit confused.

"If I hadn't had thrown the ring away you've have had bear it and now you have blood on your hands. For that I'm sorry>" Kirika bowed.

Elenore smiled and shook her head. "Miss Yuumura, I thank you for your apology but it isn't necessary. Given yesterday's events; as much as it bothers me I would've still had blood on my hands ring or no ring. Besides the ring helped me and in doing so I helped someone else from suffering a terrible fate. I do appreciate the sentiment."

"I understand and I thank you Miss Baker." Kirika replied bowing again. "Oh, Mireille will be coming down to breakfast when she's done taking freshening up..." Kirika added then stopping. "Is anything the matter?" Elenore asked.

"For some reason I don't know why I felt compelled to call you ane just now." Kirika replied. Elenore raised her eyebrow and then looked at the ring on Kirika's finger and then replied.

"Ane? What does that mean? I'm sorry my Japanese isn't what it should be."

"It means big sister. But as far as I know we're not related." Kirika replied a tad confused.

"I wouldn't worry about it much. My guess it has something to do with the ring, I was thinking of my sister when I had it on. If you don't mind me asking Miss Yuumura, do you have any family?"

“No I don’t...” Kirika replied and Elenore seeing the look in Kirika’s eyes decided to not press the subject.

“I’m sorry I...” Elenore apologized.

“You didn’t know. If you excuse me.” Kirika said as she headed downstairs.

Elenore sadly looked at Kirika as she went the stairs. She felt bad that she unintentionally brought up a sore subject.

Elenore went to wake Madlax, but got no real answer the same with Limelda's room. She could hear noise from Nadie's and Ellis' room and she got an answer saying that they'll be right down. Then she headed towards Margaret’s room when she heard a door opening and Mireille’s voice.

“Miss Baker.”

Elenore turned around and went to Mireille. “Good Morning Miss Bouquet can I help you?”

Mireille pulled an envelope out her purse and handed to Elenore. I found this inside the Manor. It's addressed to your sister. I meant to give this to her or you last night but...”

“Say no more Miss Bouquet, I understand. Thank you. Elenore replied and she opened the envelope and read the certified letter that was inside. As she was reading...“Okay...that confirms what we already knew.” Then she got to another part of the letter and her eyes widened. Then she turned to Mireille and said. “Miss Bouquet, I don’t what Miss Yuumura and your plans are but I would like to ask that you please don’t leave till after until Margaret and I have had a chance to speak with the both of you.”

“May I see that letter please.” Mireille asked and Elenore handed her the letter. Mireille read the letter and as she did so her eyes glanced at Elenore once or twice and then they grew large when she got to the part where Elenore’s eyes grew in surprise. She looked at Elenore in disbelief. “Is this some kind of joke?” Mireille asked handing the letter back to Elenore.

“No, it isn’t Miss Bouquet. This is why the four of us should sit down and talk. I would like some confirmation as well but this is the seal of our family’s lawyer and the legal seal of Nafrece on the letter.” Elenore replied.

Mireille thought a bit. *“I don’t think Altena would waste time forging this especially when she tried to have us killed.”* She looked at Elenore and thought some more. *“Kirika doesn’t resemble Elenore but...”*An image of the photo of Margaret flashed in Mireille’s mind. *“Wait! She resembles Margaret Burton.”* Then Mireille remembered the conversation Kirika and her had at the cybercafé not too long ago.

“Yes, Miss Baker. We can wait.”

"Thank you. If you excuse me, I must go tell Margaret about this. Oh I almost forgot. Please refrain from going outside, it seems the media is still parked outside and..."

"Say no more. I don't want my picture in the paper no more than you do." Mireille said as Elenore headed to Margaret's room.

Elenore went to Margaret's room and then she opened the door and went in. Elenore looked on as she saw her sister sleeping peacefully.

"Margaret it's time to get up."

Margaret let out a slight groan from under the blanket.

"I wanna sleep in today, Elenore. I'll skip breakfast..." Margaret replied half asleep.

Elenore was going to argue that point but after yesterday, she didn't blame her for wanting to sleep in.

"I understand. There's this letter you need to see, but I'll show it to you later." Elenore said and she quietly left the room.

Madlax was still on the verge of sleepiness despite a long night. She awoke and dressed slowly knowing whatever ritual that was about to be performed didn't really concern her. This was going to be a slow day for her. *"All the guns should be silent and the cries of violence should be mellowed by the quiet distractions of daily life."* She thought to herself.

She could barely bother about breakfast as she heard Elenore's voice.

Elenore could hear Madlax stirring as she passed her room then she went to the dining room where her mother had set the table like a old pro and with an very satisfied smile on her face. She turned to Elenore and asked. "Sweetie, what's wrong?"

"Margaret wants sleep in and skip breakfast and I got no answer from Madlax's and Limelda's rooms. Nadie and Ellis are coming and that's about it." Elenore answered.

"Well considering what happened yesterday. I wouldn't blame them for wanting to sleep in today." Meg replied.

"I wanted to, but somebody has to be responsible in this family..." Elenore mumbled under her breath.

Elenore stared at the empty chairs in the dining room and at Margaret's in particular.

"If I don't have a job here, then why am I still doing this?" Elenore thought to herself.

"Maybe I just need more sleep or what I've learned just this morning has knocked me for a loop. Yeah, that's why I feel depressed." Elenore thought to herself.

Vanessa and Laetitia came in the dining room and sat down. Then soon after Mireille and Kirika came in and sat down. All four quiet as they were last night. They heard Limelda and Nadie having a brief conversation before they and Ellis came in and sat down. Elenore looked at Margaret's chair a bit sullenly.

Margaret slept in and out for a few more minutes after Elenore's calling, before her state of mind could focus on the present and their current situation. Elenore's mention of a letter completely slipped her mind, but she remembered that today they could finally get done with the ritual and solve all their problems with the artifacts, Soldats and Enfant. She forced herself out of bed with this thought, unable to stop thinking about the ritual with some eagerness as well as some anxiety. Looking herself in the mirror while getting dressed, Margaret observed the Torc around her neck attentively, glad this was the last day she would have to wake up with it.

After getting ready, Margaret went downstairs and joined the others at the table. "Good morning, everyone. I'm sorry I'm late." She said in a still sleepy voice. "I wanted to sleep in today, but I thought I shouldn't let you waiting any longer, we should get done with the ritual as soon as possible." She added in a somewhat apologetic manner.

"Does anyone know what the ritual is?" Nadie asked and there were more than one blank look around the table.

"Yes I do and it's quite simple actually." Vanessa said confidently.

"Well, since all three are here. We can do it after breakfast and finally get this done and over with." Elenore said.

"Hmm... has everyone decided on their wishes yet? I figure we should maybe settle it now so we'll be ready to ask without hesitation when the time arrives." Margaret brought up the point and proceeded to expose her wishes up for discussion and everyone's approval. "As I mentioned before, I want to use one of the wishes to help Poupee get free from Carrossea so he can have his own existence in this dimension." Then she turned to Elenore. "Elenore if it's okay with you I want to use one of the wishes..." Margaret began to say.

"Margaret, she been dead for over a year and a day. Don't ask me how I know this but I know. But thank you just the same." Elenore interrupted a bit sullen.

Margaret smiled and replied. "I know that too, but what I was going to say was I want to use one of the wishes to have her soul reborn with you as her mother. I'm just trying to think how am I going to word it." A tear ran down Elenore's cheek.

"Thank you Margaret, I accept. I'll help with the wording" Elenore said with a smile.

"Thanks Elenore! Now that makes two wishes. And I think we all agreed before that wishing our enemies to leave us alone forever would solve everyone's problems with whoever is targeting who. Now, Kirika and Ellis, what have you decided on?" Margaret asked curiously, awaiting their reply and input.

"Nadie and I talked about it. We gathered that we were all going our separate ways after this was done. We don't need much and we have no intention of settling down and Europe looks like fun to explore. So as for our wish, we wish good fortune for everyone in the house. So that leaves the last wish." Ellis said.

Kirika thought for a moment. "I would to use my wish to wish Chloe to find happiness somewhere else rather than by stalking me. I think that covers all five wishes." Kirika said.

"Okay, those sound like safe wishes... I guess that settles it then, if everyone here agrees. Could you please explain us the ritual now, Vanessa?" Margaret asked.

"We go to the holy place determined by the wielder of the Torc. The bearer of the bracelet stands on the right side and bearer of the ring stands on the left so that three form a triangle. Then the ritual keeper which is me in this case asks the Torc bearer if this is holy ground. If yes then the Torc bearer says "I unlock the door of balance.". Then I ask the same of the bracelet bearer. If yes , then she says "I unlock the door of peace." Then I do the same with the ring bearer and she says "I unlock the door to war." Then as ritual keeper say that the three doors are open may the Goddess come forth and she's supposed to appear after that." Vanessa explained.

While Vanessa was explaining Madlax slowly strolled through to the breakfast table with Limelda winking rather happily at her. But today she just wanted to indulge a little bit, Madlax gorged on a rash of bacon and toast as everyone was just winding down their quiet and modest breakfast.

She didn't really listen to things about the Torc, it's probably trouble if she intervened. She probably only have to intervene if that dastardly Carrossea and possibly even Friday showed up. She thought quietly; *"Hopefully I could guard quietly and wait for the ceremony to proceed peacefully. Maybe then I can have a date or cook some pasta but if Friday is alive he's a person who really knows how to gatecrash a party."* she thought.

"Feels too easy" she whispered to herself.

"Well... if everyone's ready, should we get going now, then?" Margaret asked a few minutes later, noticing everyone had already finished breakfast.

"Let's get this party started." Vanessa half joked as she led the group to the chapel. They went inside and Vanessa directed them where to stand. Once everyone got into place they began the ritual.

Margaret held out her right hand and spoke the ritual words; "I unlock the door of Balance." And the Torc began to glow.

Vanessa pointed to Ellis who then held out her right hand touching Margaret's and she spoke her part; "I unlock the door of Peace." And the Bracelet began to glow.

Then Vanessa pointed at Kirika who put her right hand top of Margaret's and Ellis' hands and she said; "I unlock the door of War." And the Ring began to glow.

"Now that the three doors are unlocked oh Goddess who is all the Goddesses we bid you come forth!"

All three artifacts at first glowed brightly and then removed themselves where they came together and a huge flash of light and a tall woman with honey blond hair, dark blue eyes and an athletic build appeared. She was wearing all three artifacts and the latest business fashion suit. Everyone in the room could feel a sense of divinity coming from her and all kneeled. She looked what she had on and smiled. She bade them all to rise with a silent gesture and then she spoke.

"Greetings. I'm the Goddess who are all Goddesses. You who gathered the three to summon me can now ask five wishes from me."

The Goddess cleared her throat. ***"Now that all the required words have been spoken. From the looks on your faces you're wondering why the artifacts and the wishes. Well since you got them all in actual record time you deserve the answer. Every five hundred years we check up on humanity and give them a test or two. The artifacts are the first part of the test. Then artifacts tests the bearers and those who brought the artifacts. And the last test has to do with the wishes, but I know you have that figured out. Oh, before we get started, I would like to thank the ritual keeper for her excellent taste in clothing. You have my thanks, now please state your wishes."*** The Goddess spoke.

Margaret looked hesitatingly at Kirika and Ellis who nodded back in approval, so she just proceeded to speak out all the five wishes they had agreed on before.

"The first wish is that you separate Poupee's existence from Carrossea so he can have his own life in this dimension."

The Goddess smiled and Poupee appeared next to Laetitia who glomped onto him in silent glee. ***"Wish granted. Speak the second wish."*** The Goddess spoke.

Margaret hesitated for a moment then she spoke. "For the second wish is for my niece to be reborn to Elenore and her current mate." Margaret said with a smile.

The Goddess looked to the right and nodded and then she looked at Elenore and then at Vanessa. Both Vanessa and Elenore felt a slight tug on their hair. The Goddess held her hand and floating above it were three strands of hair each from Elenore and Vanessa. Then the strands glowed and a pearl formed. Then the Goddess spoke. "***Elenore Baker hold out your hand.***" Elenore held her hand and the pearl floated into hers. "***Swallow it.***" The Goddess commanded and Elenore did so. The Goddess smiled and spoke again. "***In nine months from this day you will give birth to an healthy daughter. The wish has been granted. Speak the third wish.***"

Then Ellis spoke. "I wish that you bring good fortune for everyone in this house." The Goddess smiled and spoke thus; "***Wish granted. All in this house will have good fortune. Speak the fourth wish.***" Everyone in the house glowed briefly and Elenore shivered a bit and put her hand on her tummy.

Kirika then spoke. "I wish that Chloe finds happiness somewhere else rather than by stalking me." The Goddess smiled yet again and spoke. "***Wish granted. Your stalker will find her happiness in another's arms. Speak the final wish.***" Elsewhere Chloe felt a sense of peace. She thought about Kirika but she shrugged her shoulders and wished her happiness as well as she lovingly gazed at NakhI.

"And our final wish is that all our enemies leave us alone forever."

"***Wish Granted.***" The Goddess smiled and a circle of light emanated from the Goddess and all in house had feeling that their enemies would finally leave them be.

"Hmm... well, that is all. I hope I asked it right." - Margaret said in a shy voice, staring humbly at the imposing Goddess before them.

"***Those were the most unselfish wishes I have heard in over three thousand years! Normally I usually nail the wishers with a curse because of greed and/or lust. But since your wishes were unselfish and they harmed no one nobody gets cursed. Well done. Before I go, I'll give you all added blessing on the house and since you've impressed me. If there's anyone on the other side you want to speak to just say their name and they'll come.***" The Goddess spoke with glee in her voice.

The room fell silent as they tried to think of who they wanted to ask to come. Ellis broke the silence as she wanted to talk to Professor Schneider. She was happy to see him even for a brief time. He was happy that Ellis had found happiness and made friends and he wished her well then he left.

Meg chose her father and John Baker appeared before them;

"Elenore. Meg. Good to see you both again."

"Grandfather I need to know one thing. Did you ever truly love me?" Elenore asked teary eyed. John was a bit surprised that she asked that but he understood from what she had learned that question was evitable.

"My dear Elenore, of course I do. I'm sorry that I lied to you but you must understand when I was alive I was still angry with your mother and uncle for now very foolish reasons and as a result you and Margaret suffered because of that. I do apologize and please know I love you regardless."

"Thank you grandfather." Elenore said wiping the tears from her eyes.

"Meg."

"Yes father?"

"Please accept my sincerest apology. I have made some very foolish mistakes concerning you and your brother. Could you please pass my apology on to him as well?"

"Father, I accept your apology but I do admit I'm still a bit upset that you didn't tell me you were dying. I would've watched over Elenore and Margaret and possibly prevented a few tragedies. As for Walter, he forgave you a long time ago. He told me that he was expecting your initial reaction and he blamed on the way your generation thought at the time. I wish you had got to see your other granddaughter Susan. She looks a lot like mother."

John smiled. "That is understandable. Please do watch over them for now on."

Margaret had walked up to the trio and shyly said. "Hello Mr. Baker."

John turn and smiled at Margaret. "Hello Miss Margaret. I'm glad to see you are well. You've grown to be a fine young lady Miss."

"Thank you." Margaret tried to think something else to say that didn't sound trite. "I'm sorry, I wanted to say I miss you but I'm sure that Elenore and her mother miss you more." Margaret said stumbling over her words.

"I know you do Miss and I sincerely appreciate the sentiment but now I must go. Good bye Elenore. Good bye Meg. Good bye Miss Margaret."

"Good bye father."

"Good bye grandfather."

"Good bye Mr. Baker."

After her grandfather left Elenore turned to her mother and asked. "I have a cousin? Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Yes, you have a cousin. You didn't ask. So next time you see your uncle ask him about Susan or wait till he drops her off at my house and then you can see her."

"Okay, how old is she and I thought uncle Walter was gay."

"Susan is five and your uncle is still gay but him and partner wanted a child of their own and well...I'm quite sure you can figure out the rest." Meg said with a smirk.

Elenore looked at Margaret and she knew who she wanted to talk to. From the mist Anna Burton appeared. She looked at Margaret then Meg and then Elenore.

"Mother..."

"Hello, Margaret." Anna said with a smile.

Margaret wanted to hug her but she remember the rule about the living and the dead. Anna noticed the look on Margaret's face. "It's alright Margaret."

"It's not just that. I'm happy to see you but I don't want to see you and Elenore get into a fight or something."

"I'm not planning on getting into a fight with your mother Margaret. But I do have some things to say to her." Elenore interceded.

"Go ahead Elenore, isn't what you summoned me for?"

"Granted you were part of the grief I suffered during my childhood. I summoned you so you and Margaret could talk to each other. Those issues I have to deal with on my own and on my own time. Part of me is still angry, but I want to move on; so in that spirit I forgive you. I'll step over here so you and Margaret can talk privately."

"I understand and thank you Elenore." Anna replied as Elenore stepped away. Anna turned to Meg and asked. "Are you angry at me as well Meg?"

Meg looked at Anna and smiled. "No, you forgave me and that's good enough for me."

Margaret looked at them both and it reminded her of Elenore and herself though they were older. She noticed the silent conversation between and then Meg stepped off to where Elenore was. Then she and her mother began to talk.

While Margaret was talking to Anna. Meg hugged Elenore and said in a caring tone.

"That was very kind and big of you, sweetie."

"Just seeing Margaret's smile is enough for me. I'll deal with my feelings about her another time."

Meg nodded as Margaret finished her conversation with her mother and she faded back into the mist.

Margaret was happy to talk to her mother and then she became suddenly very hesitant about the idea. She knew perfectly well who she'd like to talk to, but she wondered if calling him out would upset Elenore or Meg. She pondered about it very carefully for a few seconds and figured she wouldn't have any other chance to do it. Margaret turned around, looking briefly at Elenore and Meg with a sad expression.

"I'm sorry if this might upset you, but it's very important to me." Margaret apologized in advance and turned back at the Goddess. "I'd like to see my father, Richard Burton." She said in a very serious tone.

Richard Burton walked from the mist and up to Margaret. He noticed Elenore and Meg and looked them both sorrowfully. Then his attention went to Kirika and his eyes widened and he bent his head in shame. "Hello Margaret" He said.

Margaret looked in quiet astonishment as her father walked in and greeted her casually. She was absolutely sure she wanted to see him, and she knew exactly what she wanted to say, but it suddenly became very difficult to articulate her words as she started to feel a knot on her stomach and tears welling up in her eyes. "Father, I... I just... I wanted to say...that I'm really sorry... I'm sorry I shot you! I'm sorry I killed you! I didn't want to, but I had to! You tried to kill me! I know it was Friday Monday's fault, but you couldn't break from it! And I know now that you didn't love my mother and you didn't want me, but still... I would still like your forgiveness. Can you forgive me? Or do you really hate me? Have you ever loved me at all?" Margaret asked with visible emotion, trying to hold back from crying.

Richard Burton looked at Margaret with a mix of sorrow and shame and then he replied.

"Margaret I understand what you had to do. I would've done the same thing in your place. I do forgive for that. As for the rest; that's where it gets complicated. I don't hate you Margaret and believe it or not I do love you. But here's the rub; part of me was upset that you were born as it spoiled my plans. I know it's painful to hear but it's the truth."

"I do believe you father but what plans did you have?" Margaret said with some relief mixed with sadness.

“By seeing Meg here I take it you know that Elenore is your sister. My plan was to have your mother and I adopt Elenore and raise her as our own. Since your mother was at the time good friends with Meg I didn’t see any complications. Then your mother got pregnant with you and Meg’s ex-boyfriend found out and the plan went downhill from there till we have the situation we have now.”

Margaret was a bit stunned but it made sense. She didn’t like how devious her father was but at least he loved her and Elenore. So she decided to forgive him for it.

“Father, did you ever love my mother?” Margaret asked with little bit of apprehension.

“I know it looks like I didn’t but I did, as well as Elenore’s mother and...” Richard looked at Kirika and asked. “May I ask your name...? I’m sorry it seems I’ve forgotten it.”

“Yuumura Kirika, sir. But how could I be your daughter? I’m Japanese.” Kirika answered.

Mireille and Elenore were going to answer that but another interceded.

"After Margaret was born Richard had yet another affair. This time with a Soldat spy in Japan who bore him a daughter who she gave up to Altena to be Noir. I think you all could guess who that could be." The Goddess said looking directly at Kirika.

"Forgive me Megami Sama, but I'm full blooded Japanese." Kirika said humbly.

"No Yuumura Kirika. You may look full blooded but you share the same blood as your sisters here. Now that's been taken care of you may continue." Goddess corrected and then she watched.

“I don’t understand, you say that you loved my mother yet you cheated on her TWICE!! Margaret said sadder that her father had a nonchalant attitude about the whole thing. Then Meg walked up beside her and said.

“Margaret, remember when I talked about the chains of obligation that High Society imposes?”

“Yes, but does that have to do with this?”

“Those chains dictated that your father be married and continue the family line. But unfortunately your father is as it turns out is a “player”.”

“A player?” Margaret asked confused.

Meg put her hand gently on Margaret’s shoulder and explained trying to keep the explanation clean. “A player is a man, who likes a lot of women and starts relationships with them while trying to hide his other relationships from the women he having relations with.”

Margaret thought about what Meg had said and then the light came on. "Oh I see." Then she turned to her father and she was going to say something but she knew what she had done and she felt she didn't the right to judge him. Elenore walked up and asked.

"Father, can I ask you something."

Richard turned to Elenore. "Sure, what do you want to know?"

"Why have me as an maid? Why couldn't you have let my mother take with her?" Elenore asked trying to her emotions.

Richard looked in Elenore's eyes and replied. "You really take after your mother...but to answer your questions; Your sister's mother was infuriated that I had an affair with her friend and to punish her she pulled some strings to make it look like your mother was unfit. Since your grandfather was the only other relative living there he was given custody of you. If it means anything I'm sorry that Anna took it out on you during those early years."

"Thank you father..." Elenore replied and she began to walk away hiding the tears she was shedding in the inside.

Madlax had watched as Margaret, then Kirika and then Elenore exchanged words with their father. She didn't know what to say to him she was going to keep silent then she heard a gentle voice whisper; "Talk with your heart..."

Madlax steeled herself and walked up to her father.

"Father..."

Richard looked at Madlax a bit confused. "I'm sorry young lady, I think you've mistaken me for someone else. As far as I know I have three daughters."

"That's right you don't know...when Margaret shot you the trauma of that act shattered her mind." Madlax began and then Laetitia added; "Since it happened in the sanctuary, those pieces became real. I am the innocence Margaret lost that day and Madlax is the personification of the sin Margaret committed."

Richard Burton looked at Laetitia then at Madlax and then at Margaret then back to Madlax. He looked at the Goddess with a confused and questioning look. She smiled and answered.

"What Madlax and Laetitia have spoken is the truth. They are much your daughters as Margaret is."

Richard was still a tad confused but he accepted what the Goddess had said then he turned to Madlax and asked; “Why call yourself “Madlax”? That’s the code name I used for myself.

“It was the only word I could remember at the time so I took it as my name. I had planned to take the name of the alias I used but that got taken.” Madlax replied with her usual nonchalant attitude.

“May I ask what name did you use as alias and why do you say it’s taken.” Richard asked.

“I used the name Laetitia Luna as an alias. Well since Laetitia is called Laetitia I can’t really call myself that can I?”

“I don’t know but Luna sounds pretty and it seems to suit you. Give it some thought.”

Madlax was going to reply but a young male voice interrupted her.

“Excuse me sir.” And everyone one turned to see Poupee who walked up to Richard.

“Yes young man?”

“I would like to know why you shot me?”

Richard looked at Poupee with some confusion until Margaret explained Poupee’s situation. Richard bent down to Poupee and said in an apologetic tone. “I’m sorry I shot you it wasn’t intentional and I was aiming for someone else. I’m thankful that you looked after Margaret.”

Poupee smiled satisfied with the answer he been given and he went back to beside Laetitia. Richard looked around the room wondering who else was going to speak then he heard Margaret speak. “Thank you father. I wanted to know the truth and now I know it. Before you go I wanted to say a few more things but I think this these will do; I forgive you and I love you. Good bye Father.”

“Good bye Margaret...” Richard Burton got out before he disappeared into the mist.

For the next few seconds everyone in the room wondered who was going to show up next.

Nadie had reservations about talking to the dead, she felt they might be too judgmental so she didn’t ask for anyone. Vanessa had spoken with her parents before and so she didn't choose either. Kirika didn’t know anyone she really wanted to talk to and she was trying to wrap her brain around the fact she now had a family and she wondered how Mireille was going to react considering she was the one who murdered Mireille’s family so long ago.

Kirika's train of thought was interrupted by the Goddess who spoke.

"If no one else wants to speak to those beyond the veil then I must depart. You ladies did well under the circumstances and you should be proud of that. Before I go I will grant you all here a "blessing". Farewell." The Goddess said and the room filled with bright light to the point where everyone had to cover their eyes. When the light had disappeared so had the Goddess.

As soon as the light faded away, Margaret turned to Kirika again, pondering on the Goddess' words, and approached her. "Is that true? Is my father really your father too? But... how?" Margaret asked perplexed and a bit shocked at the idea as well.

"It seems to be the case. As for how, I don't know. I never knew my parents, most of my life was spent with Altena. If there was something that could tell us." Kirika replied.

"There is, Miss Bouquet found a letter addressed to you at that woman's headquarters. She gave it to me. I tried telling you about earlier..." Elenore interjected.

"Really, so that was the letter you wanted me to...see. Do you have it now?" Margaret asked a bit embarrassed.

"Yes I do and I've read it. In the letter it confirms that both Kirika and I am your sister." Elenore answered.

"Elenore, can I read that letter?" Margaret asked holding her hand out.

Elenore handed Margaret the letter and she held it in her hand a bit anxious about what it said.

Madlax wanted to comfort Margaret, knowing what was inside would most likely be unpleasant. "Let's go through this together, Margaret" as she put a sisterly arm around her shoulder.

Margaret looked at Madlax and gave her a faint smile, as she nodded gratefully. As they all moved into the living room, figuring they'd be more comfortable there, and since the ritual was over anyway.

Ellis looked down on the floor a bit till she felt an familiar hand touch her shoulder.

"What's wrong Ellis. I know you wanted to leave but with that media circus out there I don't think it would be smart to leave."

Ellis smiled as she lifted her head to look at Nadie. "I know, but I was thinking of the professor. Part of me misses him, but at least I got to say good bye. Nadie, what are we going to do now?" Ellis asked now that the bracelet had been removed and had been taken away.

"I said we can't leave just yet because of those reporters out there. Other than that I don't know. We could wait and see what happens next I suppose. You know I wonder what happened to Blueeyes? She disappeared and we haven't seen her since. Hope she's okay." Nadie replied. Ellis shrugged. "I guess she's okay."

"Yeah, she'll turn up sooner or later. So let's go to the living room with the others."

"Yessir" Ellis replied and they both headed to the living room but not before Ellis heard the wind slowly pick up speed.

When they got to the living room. Margaret waited till everyone got comfortable and then she opened the letter and began to read;

Margaret,

If you are reading this letter one of the following has occurred; One: You have turned twenty. Two: I am dead and unable to tell you in person. I pondered on if I should tell you or not but after listening to one of your mother's tirades I decided to do so. I don't know if she'll still be the maid by the time you get this letter. Your mother has really been vindictive on her. The truth is that Elenore is your older sister. I don't know if John will be still alive by then or Anna has kicked Elenore out of the house but regardless I WANT you to tell Elenore. You see by Nafrecan law if I claimed her as my daughter (which I have left proof with my lawyer) she gets a share of my fortune. That should go up your mother's ass sideways.

Also I want to let you know you have another sister. She younger than you and she lives in Japan. To make a long story short, I met this woman named Keiko Yuumura, fell in love with her and she had my child. If a young Japanese lady comes to the house named Kirika Yuumura that would be her. As you can tell, my marriage isn't a very happy one. Regardless I still do care for you Margaret.

Signed,

Richard Burton

Kirika sat there processing what she just heard. "I have a father. And sisters. I...have a family."

"Miss Burton...can I call you Margaret? I've never had a family before. Would you mind if I--I mean we--" she said, referring to Mireille, "--stay here a while? I want to know what having sisters is like." She looked at Margaret and then Mireille, seeking approval.

Mireille stood there thinking. "It wasn't like we had anywhere to go. Besides at the least Kirika can know what a family is." She thought to herself.

"I think that depends on Miss Burton if she wants us to stay. Otherwise I've got no problem it."

Margaret had finished the letter. It confirmed what Meg had called him; a “player”. Though she still had a little trouble wrapping her brain around the entire concept. It still saddened her that her father acted this way but now it was time to move on. She just crumpled the letter and put it in her pocket to dispose of it later, turning her attention at Kirika.

"Yes, I'd prefer if you called me just Margaret, Kirika. And I would like you to stay too, I was just about to ask! You're welcome to stay for as long as you want, and that goes for Mireille too, of course!" Margaret replied with some enthusiasm, smiling back at both of them.

Kirika smiled back and bowed. "Arigato, Margaret. I look forward to seeing what having a family is like. You'll treat Mireille the same, right, since she's like family to me? Also, I'm usually much more reserved, but I feel more at ease when talking to you and everyone else here, and the words come more easily. I wonder if the Goddess was trying to prepare me for sudden sisterhood, given the revelation."

Kirika looked over at Madlax. "You look down, Madlax. Is something wrong?"

Madlax turned away from Margaret sadly as she finished reading the letter and then she slowly turned away dejected as Margaret diverged her attention from her. "What's the point of a family if you can't feel any love or bond between them" she spoke to her inner self as she just walked in that cold emotionless pain that she hid inside her violet eyes.

Meg noticed Madlax's dejected look and walked over and wrapped a comforting arm around her. "What's wrong? You can tell me, you know I'll listen." Meg said in a comforting tone.

"I barely know or feel part of this family, Meg. Actually I barely know you or even Limelda or even Vanessa. That felt sad ,but what's worse that my own father barely acknowledged my existence." Madlax spoke with a bit of emotion albeit slowly. Then she paused like a revelation was coming to her.

“You have to admit your origin did throw him for a loop but in the end he did acknowledge you. And in his own way wanted you to move on.” Meg said warmly.

Kirika looked downward for a second before saying, "...Madlax, I know how you feel. I never had a family either. Maybe...we can learn together. And if you want to vent, just know I've been there too."

Margaret got up and approached Madlax, hugging her in a comforting way. She could sense the same insecurity from her as that time right after defeating Friday Monday. She could imagine what she was going through.

"Madlax, I know how you feel about our father. But don't let it bother you any longer. He really isn't worth it. You and Laetitia are part of this family and that won't ever change."

Madlax turned around with a tear in her eye and embraced gently both Kirika and Margaret in her arms. "Thank you the both of you." She stared into both of their eyes with a deep consoling expression as the teardrops continue to drop onto the floor. "Being different doesn't mean you.." she sniffed "have to be alone?"

"I think I'm slowly learning that too," Kirika answered. "It's taken me a long time to see it. Your--our--sisters are pretty accepting. And from what I've seen, enough of us are different enough that we'll stick by each other, even if no one else does."

Elenore was going to add her support when she heard the bell ring.

"I wonder who's ringing the bell?" Elenore asked a bit peeved on whoever's timing.

"Most likely your uncle, he said he was going to show up here." Meg answered.

"Please wait. I'll be right back. I'll see who's at the door."

Elenore went to the door and as she opened it she could feel the wind as it was blowing strongly. She saw her uncle standing there, his hair whipping in the wind. "Hello Uncle Walter. What brings you here today? Is there something wrong?"

"No, I came by to see how you girls were doing. Plus I wanted to speak with Madlax and Limelda."

"Everyone is in the living room."

"Okay, but I need to talk to them privately."

"Why?"

"I came here to offer them a job and I don't want them to be pressured."

"I see. I'll take you to the drawing room and tell them you're here."

Elenore led Walter to the drawing room.

"Very windy out today. Unusual for this time of year." Walter said taking a seat.

"I noticed. Uncle is there something you could do about those reporters out there?"

"I'm working on it, but getting some of them to move is easier said than done." Walter replied.

"Do you want some tea uncle?" Elenore asked.

"When you get the chance, no rush though." Walter replied.

Elenore smiled. "Okay, I'll let them know you're here." And she went back to the living room.

"Who was it Elenore?" Margaret asked.

"It's Uncle Walter. He's here to check on things and he wants to speak with Madlax and Miss Jorg in the drawing room."

"Hmm... come to think about it... we're all a bit "different" here, aren't we Madlax? I guess no one out there is truly entirely normal, so why should we bother? Of course no one has to be alone, unless they want to, I think..." Margaret replied with some awkwardness, but a positive feeling overall.

"Hmm, sorry, Madlax, but I need to excuse myself for a minute." Kirika left and went upstairs to the bathroom she showered in that morning.

Elenore watched on as Margaret did her best to cheer Madlax up and then watched as Kirika left and came back. She was going to remind Madlax but she figured with the way that Madlax was feeling she would ignore her.

Though she did see Limelda head out to the drawing room to talk with her uncle.

Elenore was going to say something Kirika when something...no someone got their attention. There at first was a small flash of light. They wondered if the Goddess had returned but standing in the middle of the room was an eight year old girl who bore a striking resemblance to Elenore and Vanessa.

Mireille had a look of shock on her face. "You're the one who dropped that ring!"

"Oh hi aunt Mireille, I was doing an errand for Lady Morrigan. Can you please wait ,I want to talk to my mommy. Oh this may sound silly but what day and time is it please?"

"Aunt?!" Mireille said with some shock.

"Mommy?!" Elenore said then she realized who the little girl was and she looked at her tummy.

"It's July 11th 2012 and..." Laetitia said and then looking at the clock continued. "it's 10:28 A.M."

The little girls face lit up. "Thanks Aunt Laetitia! I made with a couple minutes to spare. This is going to be so neat!!!"

Elenore went over to the little girl and bent down to her. Elenore could barely hide her emotion as hugged her and the little girl hugged back. "What's going to be neat sweetie?"

"Just look out the window, but you might want to brace yourself a bit." The little girl said leading Elenore to the window. Elenore looked out window at first she could see that the guards and the reporters were having troubling standing. She noticed that it had gotten very dark out and then she looked in the sky and gasped.

"Oh my God what is that?" Elenore looked out the window. She could see in the sky a huge vortex forming. "Everyone come to the windows quickly!! You have to see this!"

Everyone rushed to the windows and were shocked as Elenore was.

“What is that Elenore!?” Margaret asked frightened.

“The future...” Laetitia answered being one of the few in the house that wasn’t surprised.

“It looks like it’s on the outskirts of the city, but it has to be huge to see it from here.” Meg said.

The sky grew even darker and it appeared that things were being sucked into it and then with a shimmer of light what looked like a giant aircraft carrier appeared in the sky. It hung for a few second and then it began to fall. When the ship hit the ground it produced a shock wave that shook the house. Elenore grabbed her daughter as the house shook violently and the lights flickered on and off. She heard Margaret scream as she fell and saw that Madlax had caught her. Ellis had kept Nadie and Vanessa from falling as did Kirika and Mireille did with each other.

Meg raced to the drawing room where she saw Walter on the phone.

“Yes, I saw it. I think everyone did. No I have no idea what it is. I’ll send my men there now sir.”

Walter hung up and he turned to Meg. “I gather you saw. I’m sorry I have to run now.”

“No problem.” She said as Walter rushed out.

Limelda watched as she saw both the guards and the media leave. *“A giant spaceship crashing outside your city is a bit more newsworthy than a gangland attack in the city.”* She thought to herself.

Back in the living room. Elenore held her daughter and looked into her eyes. “Was that you needed me to see sweetie?”

Elsa tilted her head to the side. “No, but it was such historical event I didn’t want you to miss it. I tell you more but it looks like I’m about to bounce through time and space again. What I needed to tell you was Aunt Margaret is going to need you in Roanapur. Oh can I have some of your hair please mommy?”

“Sure.” Elenore said without asking why pulled a few strands of her hair out and handed them to Elsa. The girl began to flicker in and out “Oh Doone. Not now I need to tell her something else.” Elsa said looking at her mother.

“Bye mommy, I love...”

“Wait! I don’t know your name...” Elenore looked at her stomach. “I can see that you’re going to be a handful.” Then she looked up to see Margaret with a confused look and very concerned look on Madlax’s

"Elenore where is Roanapur? And why would I need you there for?" Margaret asked.

Madlax looked at Margaret with some fright. "A better question is; what the hell is going to happen that you have to go to Roanapur of all places?"

"How bad is Roanapur? I've heard that name before..." Vanessa asked.

"Roanapur is in Gazth-Sonika and it's so bad that not even Enfant wanted to touch it." Madlax answered.

The mention of Gazth-Sonika brought a few gasps around the room. But that train of thought got interrupted by Elsa popped back in "You!... Aunt Margaret press the green, green, yellow, blue buttons and don't be mad at mommy she's just really..." The girl popped out.

Meanwhile in the year 2020; "I think she told me a combo of buttons. Laetitia, you were there when Elsa appeared don't you remember the sequence she said." Margaret was looking over yet another weird object she had found and brought home. "I want to get her back before Elenore gets home. Now what was that sequence again." Margaret said trying to decide which buttons to press.

"Green, Green, Yellow, Blue." A voice behind Margaret said.

"Thanks Elenore." Margaret looked in surprise as she turned and saw Elenore standing right behind her.

Back in 2012;

"Well, I'll make some tea before something else happens. Does anyone want some?" Elenore said.

"Yes, thank you. Do you want some, Mireille? By the way, if Chloe visits, please don't attack her. I want her to feel welcome here." Kirika answered.

"Sure, Do you have Earl Gray¹." Mireille answered and asked.

"Yes, I'll make a pot now." Elenore replied.

Margaret turned her attention to Poupee. "I'm sorry if it seemed I was ignoring you but things..."

"It's okay." Poupee responded in an understanding tone.

"You're staying with us too, right Poupee?" Margaret readily assumed, extending the invitation at the young boy, figuring neither would he wish to go live with Carrossea nor would Carrossea be interested in him anyway. Besides, it would be sad to separate him from Laetitia.

¹ To Kavi; PHFFFTT!!!! :P

Poupee smiled and nodded ascent. "Thank you." He said in a soft tone.

A few minutes earlier;

Douglas Rosenberg was having a bad day; First he found out that both Friday Monday and the entire Amazon base had disappeared. No signs of explosions or an attack. It looked like the base and everyone just vanished. Then there was the fiasco at the Burton Manor which he smiled to himself that both the Coven and the Soldats didn't do any better. And to top it all off he got captured by the Coven to most likely be interrogated and then killed. He comforted himself with the fact that it couldn't get any worse.

He was dragged to the main consul chamber where he heard them arguing about the artifacts and how they were going to pursue Ellis again, plus there was the matter of Jodie's apparent disobedience and disappearance.

Then they and he noticed the sky turning dark and they all looked and saw a swirling vortex right above them. They wondered what was causing it.

Meanwhile in a parallel universe;

Two women were staring at a terminal overlooking a another swirling vortex.
"MartAmime just shot Koveras. Boca, how are doing with the vortex generator?"
"Hey Bulmafox. Would you like the good news or the bad news?"
"The good news."
"The good news is that we're not going to sucked into the vortex. Bad news is the vortex is sucking something in. Something big. Something *really* big" Bocayuki replied.
"How big?"
"Oh something the size of...ever see Macross?"
"Yes why?"
"Well picture that ship just twice that size trying to fill this small area. The result is we'll all get squished."
"Isn't there something you can do?"
"Yes I can." Bocayuki pressed a few buttons and a light changed color.
"Well I have good news and bad news."
"What is it?"
"Good news is it isn't coming here. Bad news is it's going to land on top of that guy and that group of people in what I think is France but I can't be too sure."
"Hey wait isn't that the Coven from El Cazador?"

"Yeah it is. Oh well, sucks to be them."

Bocayuki and Bulmafox walked to the edge of the railing and shouted as loud as they could;

"SUCKS TO BE YOU!!!!"

Back in Nafrece the Coven members thought they heard a faint voices saying "Sucks to be you!" Douglas laughed bitterly as a ship twice the size of the SDF dropped on top of them. The ship advanced Nafrece's and the world's technology base by at least five hundred years. It took several years later after they moved the ship to find their remains.

In another of the city at that same time;

Chloe took up the cell phone in her slender hand and opened it, not sure of what she would find. Kirika had never bothered to call her before, and the message was not liable to be a particularly happy one for her.

Listening to the message confirmed her fears. But it did not affect her quite as much as she thought she would be. Instead of rage, she felt an overwhelming sense of peace...

I'm glad that's over, she thought, but she didn't quite understand why. She left the cell phone on the desk, and changed into her usual clothes. She considered leaving the knife-belt in the closet, but she was a little worried housekeeping might find it, so she put it on as an afterthought. She noticed that NakhI was dressed and waiting for by the door.

"Please hurry Chloe. Something of importance is about to happen." NakhI said opening the door. The pair stepped outside onto the porch and looked up at the sky. Chloe was in some shock. "What's going on?" She asked trying to hide her fear.

NakhI smiled and said two words as the ship appeared and fell. "The future..."

As everything around them shook violently the pair kept their balance. Then Chloe looked to the clearing sky. "*What had become of the world?*" She thought to herself. "Everything I cared for is gone, yet somehow...I cannot weep for it..." She said out loud.

"A new moon rising," said a familiar voice behind her. "Once in a lifetime, we must cast off the bonds of our parents, and become something new - at least, that is what Quanzitta wrote to say. In short, I am my own woman..."

"As am I. What now?"

"I watch, and wait, and guide. For over a millennium, my people have guarded the sanctuary, and led the worthy to its embrace. I do not think that will change."

"And what does that entail?"

"A great deal of watching and waiting, let me tell you." Nakhil smiled. "But where and how - for that, we must rely on instinct."

"What might that instinct be telling you now?"

"I think," Nakhil said slowly, "I would like to have some tea."

"And I think I know where we can find a cup or two," Chloe replied.

"Come...unless, of course, you still think Elenore's going to go berserk on you."

"It's not Elenore I'm worried about..." Nakhil thought to herself before replying.

"I think for the sake of tea and good company, we may risk that," said Nakhil jokingly. "Please, lead on."

They walked in silence to the manor, noticing the silence on the streets. It was Chloe who rang the bell. The door opened and Chloe was staring into the barrel of a .45.

"You have a lot of nerve showing up here after yesterday Soldat!" Meg said in a professional tone. Margaret had followed Meg and then she heard Meg talking someone. She looked to see who Meg was talking to. She saw Chloe with a gun pointed at her and Nakhil behind Chloe. Margaret didn't want any more violence not after what happened yesterday.

"Please Miss Baker. Could you put the gun down."

"Margaret, this woman is a Soldat and she was in the attack on this house yesterday."

Chloe slowly raised her hands. "You're right, I did help attack here. Since your daughter shot my master and I'm not well loved by the rest of the Soldats..."

"I see, you planned on defecting before the other Soldats put you down."

"Well I came here for tea and I was invited."

"Please I don't want any violence in this house. There's been enough wouldn't you agree. If Chloe gives you her weapons will put down your gun." Margaret pleaded.

Without taking her eyes off Chloe she said. "Alright. Hand me weapons...slowly."

Chloe slowly took off her knife belt and handed to Meg who then holstered her gun. She frisked Chloe making sure she didn't have any other weapons. "Okay, you're clean. You can come in."

"Thank you Miss Baker. I know you want to protect us but I promised." Margaret said smiling.

Meg couldn't argue with Margaret due to the protocol but that didn't mean she couldn't keep an eye on their newest visitor. They were guided to the kitchen. A kettle whistled merrily on the stove; beside sat a large warm brown betty with a few scoops of fragrant earl gray in it.

"It's as if they were expecting us," said Nakhl. "Please sit down." She filled the pot and brought it over, with two cups. "I don't suppose you take milk, in the manner of Nafrecans? No, me neither."

"Did you see the spaceship? Ouch! That's hot." Margaret asked before burning her tongue on the tea.

"Yes we did, it was quite interesting." Nakhl replied

In the living room Kirika stood up amidst the group. "...I think I hear something, where the tea is. I'll go check it out."

When she entered the room, she saw Chloe, Nakhl and Margaret at the table, sipping tea together.

"Hello Chloe, Nakhl."

Chloe was silent. She remembered distinctly the first and last time they had tea with one another.

"Hello, Miss Yuumura," said Nakhl. "Won't you have some tea? I think your maid has decided to skip chores all of a sudden.

"Thanks." Kirika accepted the offer, poured some tea, and sat down. "Everyone else will be here shortly. Um...I'm glad you came."

"Nakhl, please don't refer to Elenore as the maid. I don't know if you do know or not but she's my sister and it seems silly to have my own sister to be my maid." Margaret said.

"Yes, I would appreciate it as well Miss Nakhl." Elenore said with one eye on Chloe looking on the imprint of the ring that was still there.

"My apologies then." Nakhl apologized.

"This adds to today's weirdness." Nadie said quietly to Ellis as they sat in the living room after they saw Elenore's daughter pop in and out and then Chloe appearing.
"We'll leave after lunch and said good bye to the others. Sound good?" Nadie asked.
Ellis smiled. "Yessir."

Mireille resigned herself to staying.

"At least it's comfortable here. Who was that little girl? Why did she call me aunt? I'm better off not knowing, I'm sure the answer will give me a headache if I tried." She thought to herself.

"Where did Kirika disappeared to?" Mireille asked no one in particular. Nadie shrugged and Ellis sat on the couch. Laetitia pointed towards the kitchen.

"She went to the kitchen to check on the tea." Laetitia said then went back to her silent conversation with Poupee.

Mireille sighed. *"At least I won't be bored."* She thought to herself as she went to the kitchen.

"Well..." said Nakhl, rinsing out the pot in the sink, "I am impressed that we got through an entire pot of tea without passing harsh words - as always, I expect the worst and receive the best."

"I'll pretend to know what that means," muttered Chloe across the table to Kirika, who seemed lost in thought.

"I suppose you and Mireille will be leaving for home soon. I trust you will not be shy on employment now that Margaret has blessed us all with peace. Next time you find yourselves shooting something..." here she pulled out her chair and sat again, "...I trust you will call on Chloe and myself. I do not think I shall venture far from this city in some time - though as for funds, I may end up reading palms for a living."

"Have you ever thought of running a winery?" said Chloe.

"No, I hadn't," Nakhl replied. "But I wouldn't be adverse to it. If we could raise the funds, and advertise for some help... 'wanted, two young women not afraid of getting their hands dirty'."

"That," said Chloe cheerfully, "we already have."

"I came to this city not knowing why I was here," Chloe added after a short silence. "Blind obedience on one hand, violent passion on the other. I see now, there was...no answer in that."

"And now, do you have an answer?" asked Nakhl.

"Perhaps," Chloe replied, "to drink tea with a friend."

"Actually," Kirika said, "Mireille and I will be staying for a while. I just found out I'm related to the Burtons--a goddess and a letter from the Manor told me...you can read it if you want-- and I want to see what it's like to have a family. I've never had one before."

"By the way, might any of the Burtons be interested in this winery of yours? Or Nadie or Ellis?"

"Ahem. Could you kindly please move your conversation to the living room so I can make lunch." Elenore said.

"You mean we, don't you." Meg's voice came from behind which shocked everyone because nobody saw her come up.

Madlax left to her room. Limelda met her half way there and spoke;

"Madlax I was just looking for you. Walter wanted me to relay this to you since he had to go in hurry..."

"What does he want?" Madlax asked.

"To offer you a job."

"What kind of job?" Madlax asked a bit suspicious but curious.

"He's offering a place on Nafrece's elite Anti Terrorist Squad. It's good pay plus hazard plus full medical and dental and some sweet vacation time to boot. Plus Walter is throwing a sign up bonus. I guess we impressed his high ups. I took the offer, it's something I'm good at and I actually get to do some good. Since the end of the civil war I've been looking for something to redeem myself at least in my eyes and keeping this country free of terrorist sounds good to me. Are you going to take the job?" Limelda asked.

Madlax wasn't as keen on Limelda on the job, she paused and Limelda was eager for a response. She was a loner, she didn't work in groups, nor was ever part of an enforcement agency like Limelda. Actually the style of work of Mireille Bouquet did appealed to her more. The quiet tension was starting to annoy Limelda a little but she knew Madlax in a deep breath was not going to hasten any decision. It finally dawned on Madlax as her eyes beamed forward, for the first time in her life she had a choice on her profession, it wasn't she had to do. Just for the sake of living. She honestly loved to shoot but hated to kill, suddenly the memory of teaching Vanessa at the firing range appeared.

"I want you to pass this to Walter" Madlax said.

"What do you want Madlax?" Limelda asked with impatient anticipation.

"I like to teach shooting and" Madlax said.

"And?" Limelda asked.

"A little more time to cook pasta" as she smiled back at the Gazth-Sonikan woman.

Limelda smiled back at Madlax. She expected this kind of answer from Madlax. To her Madlax was the lone she wolf and she wondered if the kind of job Walter was offering actually suited Madlax.

"I'll pass that to Walter, maybe he can help you. He seems to be very well connected."

"Thanks." Madlax said and continued to her room and quietly unloaded the bullet clip off her gun. She pointed it to her head and asked "What were you feeling Madlax?" As she smiled contemplatively. The contemplation and silence was short as the warmth and comfort in her quickly returned. She headed downstairs towards the kitchen and living room hoping for a little conversation and a quick snack.

After Elenore and Meg scooted everyone from the kitchen Meg turned to Elenore and said with a knowing wink and smile.

"Time to work some kitchen magic Baker style, plus I'll teach you ancient Baker secrets." The last part in a old crone voice which got a smirk from Elenore and the pair started to work on making lunch.

After they were done making lunch Meg went to the living room. "Lunch is ready in the dining room." As they filed in they were impressed as Elenore and Meg outdid themselves in preparing the meal. It looked more like a banquet than lunch. When everyone else sat down they sat down and began to eat.

Madlax waited for Margaret to sit and looked at her to check if she's a little more clued today. "Did you notice something is missing from the lunch table today?" Madlax smiled.

Margaret looked around but she couldn't guess what did Madlax meant.

"Hmm... what is missing?" She asked curiously.

"Don't you see there's no pasta!" she giggled as she passed the last piece of fresh salad onto her plate.

Elenore gave Madlax a withering look pointing to the bowl of pasta.

"There's pasta right there. You just didn't notice."

"I wouldn't argue with her, Madlax." Vanessa said with a snicker.

"That's pasta! it's not stringy at all!" Madlax looking rather perplexed.

Vanessa said with a slightly bemused shrug. "You haven't had much pasta other than spaghetti have you? That's macaroni."

Madlax said. "Oh".

Kirika spoke for the first time after everyone got unceremoniously pushed out by Meg and Elenore. "So Chloe, Nakhl, are you going to ask them about the winery, or should I?" Kirika whispered to them.

Chloe looked a little flustered.

"Why don't you, Kirika, if you're willing to," said Nakhl. "You and Margaret are very much alike, you know."

Kirika was taken aback. "W-we are?"

She pondered for a minute, then tapped her glass with a fork and cleared her throat. "Um, excuse me, everyone." When everyone turned to Kirika, she suddenly got nervous. *"Calm down, Kirika. Just remember the courage the artifacts gave you."* "Is anyone interested in working for a winery? Chloe and Nakhl are starting one up, and...well...they want some help.

"Sure, we can sponsor you! And maybe even help a bit, if you want!" Margaret readily offered, pleased with the idea that, besides their previous occupation, those two were willing to give a take at a more honest occupation.

"I can help with getting the permits." Vanessa said and then she looked at Elenore. "As much I don't like putting Elenore on the spot." Elenore rolled her eyes with a smirk. "But considering I'm going to a father I feel that should do the right thing." Vanessa got up, walked over to Elenore got on one knee. "Elenore, will you marry me?"

Tears of joy began to stream down Elenore's face as she looked at Vanessa. "Yes."

"Trust me, when you do find out. You'll shit a brick." Those words echoed in Nakhl's mind as she had just learned who the father was strange as it was may have been. "Congratulations to you to both. But would excuse me for a moment." And Nakhl got up and out of the room.

While everyone else was congratulating Elenore and Vanessa, Kirika suddenly remembered something. "Mireille," she whispered to her partner, "Can I talk to you...alone?" She nodded her head towards the stairs.

"Hmm. What about?" Mireille asked, apprehensive, for when anyone used that line, it was never good. When they got upstairs, to Kirika's room, Kirika said, "Mireille...you said we would talk about the...proposal...once this whole mess is over. Normally, I'd just stay quiet, but the artifacts seem to have given me courage, and I'd prefer not to wait any longer. Mireille, I don't have a ring, but...will you marry me?"

Mireille looked at Kirika and swallowed. Ever since Kirika popped the question out of the blue at the cyber cafe, she'd shoved it to the back of her mind. And why wouldn't she? Soldats and Enfant were after them. But now that their enemies would no longer bother them, Mireille really didn't have an excuse not to think about it.

"Yes, I did say we'd talk about it when this is over. The truth is I'm scared. I'm scared of getting too close to you. I'm--was--scared of commitment. I'm scared of marriage. But most of all, I'm scared to death of living without you. I did it once and I don't want to do it again."

"...Mireille...?"

"What I'm trying to say is...despite my fears...yes I will marry you, Kirika."

Kirika didn't say anything; she just stood there with the biggest grin she ever felt. This was what she was hoping for, more than anything else.

"Kirika." Mireille gave Kirika a long kiss.

When they pulled away, Kirika asked, "So, should we tell them? You know, since we're now family and all."

"If we're going to be living here, I think they should know."

"And Mireille? It might be too soon, seeing as we just moved in...but...well...that night we stalked the mansion..."

"Yes?"

"I heard these two women--I don't know who--making love. And...well..."

"You want us to?" Kirika nodded shyly.

"You're right. It "has" been too long. I'll tell you what. We'll rent a room if we have to; tell them we're sightseeing or something." Kirika smiled again and Mireille walked back downstairs, hand in hand.

Kirika and Mireille back into the dining room. After all the commotion died down, she announced, "um, everyone, I don't know if anyone here cares, but Mireille and I decided to get married."

"Congratulations!" Was the response that everyone in the room cheerfully gave.

"Since everyone is announcing engagements," said Chloe, in a light voice that nonetheless seemed to envelop the room whole, "Nakhl and I thought we should mention ours."

"Wh...what?" Nakhl replied, visibly flustered and Elenore snickering.

"Just kidding," replied Chloe, a hint of a smile on her narrow lips.

"Sh...she made a joke..." Mireille whispered audibly.

"And a very vulgar one, at that," Replied Nakhl with a stern look.

Kirika tried to stifle a laugh. For a minute she thought there would be a triple wedding. Elenore smirked as she saw the look on Nahkl's face.

"Looks like a double wedding after all." Elenore said.

"If Margaret finds a beau in time perhaps we can still have a triple wedding." Meg said somewhat innocently and still ecstatic about hearing about Elenore's wedding.

Margaret congratulated Kirika and Mireille on their surprising announcement, as well as Elenore and Vanessa, though not as surprising from their part. She didn't entirely get whether Chloe was really joking regarding Nakhil or not, but she figured that was just between the two of them anyway.

Meg's comment caught her a bit off guard though. "Oh, I'm not planning on getting married anytime soon..." She replied evasively and slightly embarrassed. Considering Carrossea was the closest thing she ever had to a boyfriend, Margaret was still feeling quite disappointed with the idea of romance.

Meg noticed her embarrassment and wrap one arm around her warmly. "It's okay sweetie. Someday you'll find that special someone. When you do you'll be a happy woman. Provided your sisters don't kill him right off the bat." Meg said warmly with the last part as joke with her eyes looking at Elenore, Kirika and Madlax ,especially Elenore.

"I won't worry about that. Elenore would have his name, age, GPA, and life story the moment Margaret mentions his name." Vanessa said half joking.

"It's my duty to keep track of Margaret's suitors." Elenore said proudly.

"Keep track? The way you do it, you would put a Intelligence Agency to shame." Vanessa countered still half joking.

There were chuckles around the room as Vanessa felt proud that she got one on Elenore at last. Elenore raised an eyebrow and said with a smirk. "Touché." Figuring that she would at least give Vanessa this one after all the ribbing she had been giving her.

Madlax felt happy for Kirika and Mireille and congratulated them sincerely over their new happiness. After Vanessa gave Elenore's rather secret service approach to Margaret's suitors, Madlax smiled "Don't worry about Margaret too much, she's becoming a wiser girl. Isn't that right Margaret?"

"Hmm, I don't know about that... but I'm trying." Margaret replied with an awkward smile.

"Do you feel wiser as well, Madlax?"

"A little since coming to Nafrece, there's a lot of things that are very different here." She smiled.

Elenore was going to comment but Meg put her hand on Elenore's shoulder.

"Let's start on clearing the table." She said.

"Oh okay." Elenore said as she got up and started to help her mother.

In the kitchen, Elenore and Meg were doing the dishes.

"You know you'll have to let her go." Meg said.

"What do mean by that?" Elenore asked a bit confused.

"You going to have to let Margaret make her own choices. Mind you there's nothing wrong from keeping low life's away but one day Margaret will fall in love with a man who might not live up to your expectations."

"It may not be my job anymore, but as her sister I should look out for her."

"I'm not saying that."

"Then what are you saying?"

"What I'm trying to say is; be her big sister not her mother."

"I've done a better job than her "mother" ever did." Elenore thought to herself.

Elenore stopped doing the dishes, stared into sink for a few moments and then spoke.

"Margaret is getting more and more independent and needing me less but I promised grandfather I would take care of her."

"Sweetie, you've done an excellent job and you'll be a great mother to your own child."

Elenore smiled. "I suppose I can ease up a bit."

Meg smiled back. "Don't worry, this time I'll be here to help if you want me to."

"Well of course I want you to. Stop being silly mother, okay." Elenore said.

"All right." Meg said and they returned to washing the dishes.

After they were done. "Thanks for your help mother. I appreciate it." Elenore said happily.

"You're welcome sweetie." Meg said before her cell phone rang. She answered and talked a few minutes and then hung up.

"That was your uncle's husband. It seems he's being called in to help with the ship that crashed earlier. So I have to go and pick up your cousin. You can come along so you can meet her if you want."

"No it's okay. I've got things to do here."

"Well okay sweetie . Stop by the house tomorrow and we'll talk about your wedding. Plus I'll most likely have Susan so you can meet her." Meg gave Elenore a warm hug.

"All right mother, I will. But promise you'll visit us as well." Elenore returned the hug.

"I will sweetie. Bye bye." Meg said as she left.

"I think it's time we got going. Thank you for your hospitality Margaret." Nadie said.

"Where will you go?" Elenore asked.

"Europe is big place and Ellis and me are going to go explore and see where the road takes us. We won't forget any of you. You've become friends in the short time we've known each other. Take care everyone." Nadie replied.

Elenore handed Nadie her e-mail address.

"Keep in touch will you?" Elenore asked.

"Sure. Thanks Elenore." Nadie gave Elenore a hug.

"Good bye Browneyes." Ellis said hugging Elenore and then Margaret and everybody else in the room.

Elenore smiled as Ellis hugged her. "Goodbye Ellis."

When Nadie and Ellis got outside they heard a horn beep and Meg pulled up beside them.

"You two need a lift to the bus station?" Meg asked with a smile.

"Sure, thanks for the lift." Nadie said grateful they didn't have to walk.

"What are friends for?" Meg said as they got in.

After lunch ended and Nadie and Ellis had left, Kirika told her new sister, "Margaret...Mireille and I ...want to see the city today; we're still new here. So we'll be going now. See you tomorrow."

"Oh okay. Have fun you two! See you tomorrow!" Margaret replied.

"So, what do we do now?" Margaret asked to no one in particular.

"Any suggestions?" Elenore asked.

"Can I cook something with you Elenore or you Limelda?" Madlax asked. "Or maybe even Margaret" Madlax joked.

"I promise I won't prepare my food with a gun" Madlax noticing Elenore's displeasure.

Elenore still stared down disparagingly at Madlax and she turned her head downward "Oh my hands, I promise to wash them too" she smiled.

"Oh can I help you, Madlax? I'm not good at all, but I'd like to get better at it so I can be a bit more helpful around here." Margaret readily offered.

"I'd be glad to have you try." Madlax smiled as she scanned the kitchen for utensils. "Be careful of the knives" as she saw a long stainless steel knife. It looked a little worn probably due to some strong and possibly angry cutting. "So can we try to do something in the kitchen, Elenore?" Margaret asked slightly excited.

"Well as long as you don't destroy the kitchen in the process, I guess it's all right. What do you want to make?"

It was pretty clear what they both wanted and they exclaimed "PASTA!"

Elenore smiled at Margaret and Madlax she gave them the "I've should've known" look. Then she looked at Poupee who looked back with silence and a bit of fear.

"Poupee, you haven't spoke much since you were brought here. What would you like to do?"

Elenore said trying to reassure him.

"Well..." Poupee said nervously.

"Poupee! Elenore isn't going to hurt you. You're free now..." Laetitia scolding but loving tone.

"If you knew what he's thought about her. And well I'm a man...and I know you hate men."

Poupee replied.

"Wonder where he got that from." Elenore thought to herself.

Elenore bent down to Poupee's eye level and said in a motherly tone. "Poupee, it's all right. I don't care what that man thinks of me. You were probably the only good thing about him. You're among people who love and care about you now, so don't be frightened. And yes It's true there's some men I dislike a lot, but I don't hate all men. There's a few I like and a couple I love like my grandfather and my uncle Walter and you Poupee. Despite what you may have heard I'm not going to rip your head off okay sweetie. You're a part of this family now."

Elenore gave him a warm reassuring hug.

Limelda went to the kitchen and saw Madlax and Margaret cooking.

"Miss Burton, would be all right if I stayed for few more days while I look for an apartment?"

"Hmm, you can stay here for as long as you'd like. If you want you can even move in. Madlax is moving in, aren't you?" Margaret turned back at Madlax and casually asked, not pondering the implications of her suggestion. "Oh and you can call me Margaret!"

"Thank you Margaret. You and your sisters have been very kind to me. Why I don't know."

"I told you before Miss Jorg. I think you deserved a second chance and you helped protect our home. It wouldn't hurt to show a little gratitude to you for your help." Elenore said coming into the kitchen. Limelda turned to look at Elenore.

"I thank you as well Miss Baker. You can call me Limelda."

"You're welcome Limelda. You can call me Elenore to be fair."

"All right. You're a strong woman Elenore." Limelda said. She stared at Elenore and briefly hugged her without saying a word that she understood what Elenore went through.

The kitchen was quiet, very quiet, or that was what Madlax was thinking while she was in her pasta zone, pressing and kneading the dough and cutting the mixture to fine strings. Margaret did her best, imitating her actions and endeavoring to stay awake.

However the young novice did forget one little thing, turning off the little switch to boil the water. Madlax sensed Limelda quickly through the corner of her eye and happily asked "Do you want to join us?"

"Why not. If you're going to cook pasta, you'll need to turn on the burner." Limelda said flipping on the burner switch. Elenore nodded and went back to the living room.

"Oh right. I completely forgot the most important part." Margaret admitted clumsily. "So, you like to cook as well, Limelda? Are you good at it?"

"I do okay at it. I can bake quite well on the other hand." Limelda said nonchalantly.

Madlax and Limelda worked on the pasta and the various garnishes with vigor. She felt a little sorry for Margaret looking rather perplexed and baffled by the metropolis of cooking utensils and condiments that is Elenore's kitchen. She wanted to make her feel she did something positive even if it was a little token. "Margaret, do you see those shakers, can you find the salt and pepper and add them to the pasta please?" *"Surely she can't get that wrong, right?"* she thought.

"Oh! Hmm... okay, I'll do that!" - Margaret replied with a surprised smile, glad she could be of some help, even if small. She picked the salt and pepper and approached the pot of pasta with determination.

"Okay, now what? How much quantity of each is right?" Margaret thought to herself as she looked back and forth between the pot of pasta and the salt and pepper shakers. *"Should I ask them?"* She looked at Madlax and Limelda who seemed busy with something else *"Hmm... no, I better not. They'll think I'm an useless idiot if I can't do even this by myself. Oh well... how hard can it be?"* Margaret stopped pondering and turned the salt shaker decidedly, letting its content fall for a few seconds.

"Hmm... I wonder if that was too much now... I guess it'll be all right if I throw in the same amount of pepper." She repeated the previous action with the pepper shaker this time, but let fall a few more quantity. "Oh shoot! Now it *was definitely too much!* *Hmm... Oh, I know! I'll just throw in a bit more salt to even it out. There! That should do it!"*

"Okay, it's done Madlax!" Margaret announced enthusiastically, feeling a great sense of achievement for having completed this important task.

While the extra salt and pepper was added, Madlax taste tested the sauce and felt it can use some extra flavoring while she gazed at Limelda. She was obsessively looking at her fresh bread in the oven without another care in the world. to feel *"Another great opportunity for Margaret more confident about her skills"* she thought to herself. *"That way I can start cutting vegetables for the salad, maybe a new dressing this time."* she pondered.

"Margaret, can you add some extra spice to the sauce? It's in the cupboard on the top right hand side" she asked.

"Sure, I think I can do that!" Margaret happily replied as she got the spice bottle from the cupboard. *"Hmm...how much should "extra spice" be?"* She looked at the quantity of sauce and the relatively small bottle of spice by comparison. *"Half of it should be enough "extra spice"..."* Margaret decided as she added half the content while Madlax was busy with something else. "Okay Madlax, it's done, I guess. Anything else I can do?"

"No, thank you for your efforts. You've tried hard today Margaret. Have a little rest" she replied gladly. *"Ok, it's about done"* Madlax thought as she looked at the boiled pasta and the simmering sauce. She had enough faith in Margaret that she didn't taste the pasta or sauce. *"Besides, Elenore will scold me for poor hygiene."* She thought.

Meanwhile in another part of the city; Mireille and Kirika walked into their expensive hotel room. Mireille collapsed onto the bed, dropping her bags on the floor. "Goddd...I feel like I haven't rested in a month."

Kirika smiled. "Well you "are" sleep deprived. Do you want to go to sleep?"

"What? No. I'm not *that* tired," Mireille said quickly, remembering why they were there.

"...Mireille, you do think it was wrong to lie to them?"

"It wasn't a lie; we "did" see the city."

"Mireille, a shopping spree is not sightseeing."

"Besides, it's too soon there. I mean you haven't moved in yet, and I don't even know if I'll be staying there--" Kirika looked worried. "--Instead of a hotel or something."

Kirika lay down beside Mireille and looked at her. "Are you sure you don't want to go to sleep?"

Mireille gently stroked Kirika's face. "I told you I'm fine. Just do me already."

Kirika stifled a laugh as she kissed Mireille. "That's my line." She kissed Mireille again, this time deeper and longer, as if they hadn't kissed in months.

"Wow, it feels like months," Kirika said after they pulled away. "Even though it's only been a few days."

"Well a lot "has" happened..."

She climbed on top of Mireille, removed her jacket, and whispered, "...So are you "sure" you don't wanna go to sleep?"

"Kirika!" Mireille kissed her hard. She pulled her as close as possible and took off her shirt. Kirika smiled and nodded, then took off Mireille's and her own clothes and headed for her favorite place--Mireille's breasts--then decided she was impatient and headed instead to her second-favorite place.

Kirika pulled Mireille to the edge of the bed and knelt on the floor before her. Mireille lay back and closed her eyes as Kirika dove between her legs. She tensed when she felt Kirika's tongue on her. She had forgotten how good it felt for Kirika to make love to her. No...she didn't forget...time just played tricks on her because they hadn't had time to rest. She gripped the sheets and moaned loudly as Kirika continued to work on her, not caring if anyone else could hear. It didn't take Mireille long to push Kirika's head towards herself as she came, screaming, "Oh my god Kirika!"

As Mireille calmed back down, Kirika climbed back awkwardly onto her, with half their bodies hanging off the bed. Mireille scooted up onto the bed, and Kirika, taking the hint, followed. "Feel better now?" Kirika asked as she straddled herself on one of Mireille's thighs. Mireille moaned affirmatively.

Kirika made a small smile as her mouth moved to her favorite place--Mireille's breasts. After a few minutes of worshipping them, she started to grind herself on Mireille's thigh. Pretty soon she forgot about Mireille and started moaning; normally Kirika was quiet, but she was so aroused she couldn't help herself. "Mi..Mireiyu...help me come..."

She got off Mireille's thigh, and Mireille reached for her womanhood, but then Kirika breathed, "Use...use your..tongue..."

Mireille lay Kirika on her back and licked at the juncture between her legs. Almost as soon as she did, Kirika gripped Mireille's head and yelled out her name as she climaxed. But Mireille wasn't done yet. She continued pleasing Kirika with her tongue until she came again.

Mireille moved up to Kirika's eye level and asked, "Do "you" feel better now?"

Kirika smiled as she kissed Mireille and they started again...

Mireille and Kirika lay together in bed, with Mireille holding the younger woman. After a few minutes, said woman spoke. "...So...I'll ask Margaret tomorrow if you can move in,"

"Hmm?" Mireille lifted an eyebrow.

"Yes. You'll soon be as part of the family as I am."

Mireille pondered on that. For close to ten years, her uncle Claude was all the family she had. After he died, all she had left was Kirika. It dawned on her that she'd soon acquire a wife, five in-laws, a...*"what do you call your wife's sister's spouse, anyway?"*, and...whoever that boy was. Mireille sighed.

"Mireille?"

"I'm not used to having that many people in my life, let alone one house. It'll take a lot of getting used to."

"...For me, too," Kirika said, as she pulled her new wife-to-be closer.

At the same time at a command center near the spaceship Badgis leaned back with a well-deserved box of sesame chicken. He still couldn't believe he survived his predicament from a few days ago. He saw Walter and waved him over.

Walter looked around to see if anyone was in earshot and when he saw that no one was he began to speak. "Hey Badgis. What's up?"

"You know those two women I was hired to help a couple days ago."

"Yeah, what about them?"

"Something strange happened after you and they left and I was wondering if it was our people."

"Tell me what happened."

After he promised to get Mireille and Kirika their information, and they left, he and Walter hung out a while, doing small talk. After night fell, Walter decided he'd better be heading home, and left Badgis alone with a growling stomach. Badgis knew he'd be up all night mining his information, and Chinese had always been his comfort food, so he decided to pick some up at the nearest takeout.

He had walked two blocks when someone covered his mouth grabbed him from behind, and pulled a gun to his head.

"Are you Badgis?" The sharply dressed man with black shades whispered. He lowered his hand just enough for Badgis to speak.

"Who wants to know?"

"We have a message for you. We know you're helping Noir."

"Noir who? I-I don't know any Noir."

"Don't play dumb. Look, you will leave them alone. Do not call them, do not mail them, don't even try telepathy. If you do, we'll kill you. Understood?" Badgis nodded, sweat running down his head.

"You know nothing, is that clear?"

Badgis nodded again.

"You never saw me, is that clear? One word...one "breath" to anyone, and you're dead."

Badgis kept on nodding like a bobble headed doll. Then the man shoved him back onto the street. He straightened himself out and decided now was a good time for a trip.

After Walter heard Badgis' story he told him flat out. "It wasn't our people had to be a Soldat or Enfant goon and nine out of ten that joker is probably pushing up daisies by now."

"Whew! Remind me never to help pretty strangers again." He sighed and Walter chuckled.

Elenore went to the living room to see Vanessa reading the paper and Laetitia flipping through the channels and finding most of them were talking about the spaceship. Then she flipped on anime channel just when Westward Sonata was playing.

"Aren't you a little young to watch this?" Elenore asked.

Laetitia looked at Elenore. "No, besides I've seen the DVD version and what they have on the TV is pretty tame." Elenore looked at Laetitia with some aspiration. It was to argue with her when she countered with adult like responses. But fortunately for Elenore the show was interrupted as the anime channel decided to do their take on the spaceship. Elenore smirked as she heard Laetitia sigh deeply.

"Well I guess no Bee Train Fan the series today." Elenore said but then she looked Laetitia and then she said. "I guess we can watch it on DVD."

Laetitia smiled as she went to the DVD rack and pulled out the DVD she wanted and then handed to Elenore who put it the player.

While watching BTF the series Elenore wondered how Madlax and Margaret were doing and would she need to get the antacid ready plus the numbers of the doctor and ambulance on speed dial. After they watched the episode Laetitia wanted to watch Elenore, Vanessa, Laetitia and Poupee went to the dining room to wait for whatever Madlax and Margaret had cooked.

Madlax took the dishes out that she, Limelda and Margaret had been preparing. She took the fine earthenware plates and quickly the pasta was elegantly filled followed by the sauce with a touch of Margaret and grated with a naive touch of confidence Madlax has placed in her. Madlax took the plates and served her friends and family with a great deal of optimism.

"So... how is it?" - Margaret curiously inquired the general crowd about the food's taste, with some anxiety, expecting someone else would give it a try before she did herself.

She wasn't expecting it to be anywhere as good as Elenore's food obviously, but hopefully she wouldn't have messed it up that badly. She had Madlax's supervision after all.

Limelda twirled a bit of pasta with plenty of sauce on it on to her fork, stuck it in her mouth, chewed for about three seconds before reaching for the glass of water.

Her eyes red and tearing. "Too....spicy..." She managed to get out.

Elenore looked at Margaret and Madlax as she dipped her fork into the sauce on her plate and took a tiny taste and her mouth began to burn. She grabbed a piece of bread and ate it. "Madlax or Margaret, how much spice did you put in this?" She asked between bites of bread trying to cool her tongue down.

"Oh? Not much at all. Hmm... just about half of that little bottle. That's not too much, is it?" Margaret answered casually with some surprise.

"Which little bottle?" Elenore asked with some concern as she tried to help Limelda.

"I'm not sure. That one Madlax told me to use. What was it again, Madlax?" Margaret cluelessly asked her unintentional partner in crime, hoping this wouldn't get both of them in trouble.

"Well Madlax? Which one did you tell Margaret to use?" Elenore asked Madlax with a good idea on what Margaret had used.

"Well I wasn't specific but I meant for her to get a little Tabasco or pepper but she got the peri-peri." Madlax replied a little red-faced. "Maybe I'll get some cream or yogurt to cool it off a bit?" she spoke enthusiastically trying to rescue the culinary situation.

Elenore's eyes grew large as saucers. "Peri-peri?! You're supposed to put just a little not half the bottle! This sauce is inedible with this much peri- peri in it. I'll help Limelda here then I'll cook something else to eat." Then she looked at Margaret and smiled. "I know you tried your best, but you should've asked me or Madlax before you put that much in." Elenore took Limelda to the kitchen where she had her eat yogurt.

"Oops! Sorry..." Margaret said in an apologetic tone. "I don't know a thing about spices so I thought that was the appropriate proportion. It was such a small bottle too... Sorry I ruined the meal. I'll just ask next time, whenever I'm not sure. I can help you in the kitchen if you want Elenore!" Margaret readily offered, attempting to compensate for her mistake, as well as feeling bad she end up causing Elenore more trouble because of it.

Elenore couldn't be angry at Margaret, after all Margaret didn't know much about spices and she should've been supervising the pair. "It's all right, I'll make some something quick."

Fortunately Elenore had the ingredients and with them she made a quick chicken stir fry and served it. *"Unless I can teach one of them how to cook, it looks like I'll be doing all the cooking around here as usual."* Elenore thought to herself.

After dinner and dessert everyone (except Chloe and Nakhl who had left way before the meal, though Elenore did notice some earl gray missing but she didn't care as long as Nakhl was gone.) gathered into the living room.

"It's been a eventful day. So...does anyone have ideas?" Elenore asked wondering what would happen next.

After an awkward silence stemming from not wanting to jinx the respite they now had Elenore spoke. "I believe there's a few board games in one of the closets. Any suggestions?" Elenore asked hoping by playing a game would break the tension.

After a few hours playing board games Elenore helped Poupee and Laetitia get ready for bed. Margaret yawned as she passed Elenore in the hall. "I'm going to bed Elenore. It's been a long day and I'm tired. Good night."

"Good night Margaret." Elenore replied as she went back into the living and saw that both Madlax and Limelda had all ready headed for bed happy they didn't have to patrol. Leaving Vanessa checking the news which aired mostly about the spaceship. Vanessa turned off the TV when Elenore came into the room. Then they went to their room and got ready for bed.

When they were ready Elenore turned out the lights and got into bed. Vanessa hugged her and they gave each other a good night kiss.

"It's been a very eventful day today. I'm hoping tomorrow will be far less "exciting"." Vanessa said.

"In the last five days all our lives have changed drastically, who really knows what will happen tomorrow. Right now all I care about is that this day is done and our lives can go back to some sort of normalcy." Elenore replied in a weary tone.

Vanessa was going to reply but she noticed that Elenore had fallen asleep.

She warmly smiled at her and kiss the top of her head and snuggled close to her and went to sleep.

Aftermath

I found these little notes in my diary over the years. All had been written by our daughter Elsa during her" travels". I guess she wanted me to know these events for some reason. Elsa I don't know if you'll get to read this (granted I have no clue on how managing to break through my

security but doesn't matter.) I want you to know that we love you and hope you'll come home soon safe and sound.

*Love,
Mother*

Taken from the diary of Elenore baker August 15th 2026.

With Margaret, Vanessa and her mother cracking the figurative whip. Elenore went into therapy for her PTS as well for her anger issues and some very long overdue rape counseling. Two months later Elenore and Vanessa were married in a small ceremony witnessed by family and friends (Nakhl and Chloe's invitations were "lost in the mail" and everyone figured they would crash it anyway.).

On March 11th 2013 Elenore gave birth to their daughter Elsa Rene-Baker. During Elsa's infancy; Margaret and Elsa took turns waking each other in the middle of the night. Elenore kept saying silently over and over to herself; green, green, yellow, blue every time she saw Elsa till she remember to just write it down.

Vanessa when she wasn't reminding Elenore to go to therapy, tutoring Poupee, preparing for the arrival of their child and getting married worked as an IT specialist at Nafrece Intelligence as well as helping Badgis.

Margaret continued to go to college. Occasionally she would have horrible nightmares which she woke up screaming (and waking up Elsa much to the vexation of Elenore and Vanessa). Other than that Margaret lived what she considered a normal life (unless you count the time she brought home a couple Rosen Maiden dolls, the Book of Clow and few other things)

Elenore began to teach Margaret how to cook (though she couldn't get Vanessa to go near the stove.)

Elenore and Vanessa attended Kirika and Mireille's wedding and then zipped off to theirs. The ceremony was small (attended by family and friends). Both the bride and groom(/bride?) looked beautiful in their gowns. Vanessa tossed the bouquet and what surprised everyone was that Laetitia caught the bouquet. Laetitia just smiled cryptically as usual as she looked at Poupee.

Poupee freed from Carrossea began to come into his own. Though getting him to speak more a few words at time was difficult at first but with Vanessa and the other's patience and love they finally got him to articulate more. Walter became a surrogate father for him. (even as Walter and the others wondered where Poupee originated from...) When he wasn't with Walter or otherwise separated from her by necessity, he never left Laetitia's side.

Chloe and Nakhl ran the winery with occasional help from Kirika. Nakhl and Chloe eventually started a relationship. Vanessa helped Nakhl and Chloe get the proper permits and Elenore did the bookkeeping for the winery till she had her child and after Elsa was born she left the job to her handpicked successor.

Till the day she died Chloe still had the imprint of the ring where Elenore had hit her.

Carrossea walked out of a huge casino in Las Vegas feeling like a million bucks. Despite Margaret's harsh words, he couldn't bring himself to feel apologetic about anything. She had broken the bond between Poupee, Laetitia, and Elenore; Margaret had told him not to come back until he could apologize, and it seemed Friday had forgotten about him. In short, there was nothing tying him down any longer. So he decided to start over and make a fortune, starting in Las Vegas.

Sometime on his way to the United States, he felt Poupee's presence vanish. He had no idea what happened, but he wished Poupee well, then sighed in relief that he was finally out of his hair.

Carrossea had just spent the last month or so gaming the casinos for all they had. He had just come out of this one with a million dollars in hand, his best scam ever. "Now this is how you do it," he chuckled to himself.

He started counting his ill-gotten million. In fact, he was so busy counting he didn't notice the tour bus headed his way...until one second before it ran him over.

"Welcome, ladies and gentleman, to Caesar's Palace," the tour guide announced, as the tourists began pouring out, not noticing the dead body squished under the wheel.

A day later in Nafrece Elenore looked at the story about Carrossea. She nervously looked to see if anyone was around and then decided to go to the east wing stage. While still holding the paper Elenore laughed long and hard. **"Good riddance you miserable bastard!"** She yelled in a somewhat gleeful tone.

Joining with Nafrece's Elite Anti Terrorist unit (code named Echo Squad) was one of the best decisions of Limelda Jorg's life. She rose up the ranks quickly becoming a field commander under Walter. She joined the Justicars as well.

She had her date with Madlax (as well as many more dates with her). Eventually Vanessa truly forgave her and she was invited to Vanessa and Elenore's wedding. During one her undercover operations she ran a floral shop (with cookie baskets as a side business). Needless to say her cookie baskets became popular among the personnel of Nafrece Intelligence and the Justicars. She ran a small side business as a cover.

Taking her father's suggestion, she legally changed her name to Luna. Though some people still called her Madlax. Madlax enjoyed her year, quietly teaching the young squad members and correcting their mistakes slowly but surely. She blushed many times throughout, with so many people flirting with her. The wind then blew quietly, stopping her private reflection at the Burton estate. She was still a quiet and rather shy woman at heart although her dates with Limelda were nothing short of loud and dramatic! Madlax privately enjoyed being shot at by her which Limelda completely understood!

Madlax still lived at the Burton home, visiting Limelda when her missions permit and getting in some rather random practice and fireworks in the process. Quietly smiling at her sisters as she went through her daily routine in the kitchen in between shooting lessons, she learned to make a variety of pasta dishes, fettuccini, gnocchi, ravioli and a bewildering array of sauces. Just in time for the happy reunion. "Pasta?"

After leaving the Burton estate either by sheer luck or the Goddess' blessing Nadie and Ellis ran into a TV producer who was looking for two women for her new travel program. Nadie and Ellis jumped at the chance to travel the world all expenses paid and have fun doing it. Their travels took them to exotic places and had exciting adventures (some of them staged by the TV company, some not). Their show became a huge hit in Nafrece and public broadcasting stations around the world. Though they did return to Nafrece to for Elenore and Vanessa's wedding and they were both made God mothers of Elsa.

Meanwhile, Jodie was in Nice, France, working on a tan, when the paper announcing the Coven's mysterious death came in. She set it aside for later as she applied more lotion. When Jodie finally picked up the paper and curiously read about the mysterious deaths of the Coven and Rosenberg ("What?! Rosenberg was alive?!"). She thought about the passing stranger she met in Nafrece who told her the weather in Southern France was lovely this time of year and suggested Jodie go. She looked up at the sky and wondered if there was a God who was watching out for her. She tried to remember the stranger's name..."What was her name...Elsa wasn't it..."

Mireille moved in with Kirika permanently at the Burtons' mansion and broke the lease on her flat.

A couple months later, they got married in a private civil ceremony, attended by whoever wanted to come. Right afterward, they all headed right over to Elenore and Vanessa's wedding, in a nearby church. Afterward's, no one heard from Mireille and Kirika for a few weeks while they spent most of their honeymoon in their hotel room.

The following year, Kirika officially enrolled in Margaret's university after taking a placement test that allowed her to skip the rest of high school. She decided to major in Art, and started a Japanese tutoring side-business, after a few too many anime fans pestered her to teach them Japanese.

Mireille decided to retire for a while and do nothing but what she pleased; she wasn't quite bored enough to start a business yet, and she wasn't about to take a job answering to anyone else.

Meg continued to go Art class and gave Kirika some pointers. She started to date a colleague in Nafrece Intelligence and a few months later they got married. It took Elenore a little while to warm up to her mother's husband but she eventually accepted him as her step father.

Epilogue 2033

Elenore had finished reading the little notes that Elsa called "Aftermaths". A lot had happened since those days and she remembered the first reunion. The number of attendees had dropped for one reason or another. As she was about to close the book she noticed one more that she

didn't noticed before. She began to read it. She noticed this had an time lock on dating back from 2026.

Hello Mother,

I got your little note in 2026. When you read this it will have been eight years since I've disappeared. I'm sorry I've been gone for so long but there's a very good reason I needed to do so. But I want to tell you in person and that will be very soon. I love you both and I'll be home soon.

Love your daughter,

Elsa.

Elenore closed the book and pondered on Elsa's statement. She gathered she couldn't say very much otherwise given Elsa's habit of being blunt she would've told. Her train of thought was interrupted by Daisy.

"Miss, full consciousness will regained in thirty seconds."

"Daisy please no countdowns."

"Affirmative Miss." Daisy cheerfully said and thirty seconds Elenore woke up.

She found herself on a hospital bed with Vanessa holding her hand.

"Hi there." Vanessa said with a smile and tears.

"Hi." Elenore replied as she smiled back.

"The doctors say you'll be able to leave within the hour. You know it wouldn't hurt for you get some spare bodies."

"I have a spare. It's in storage..."

"I mean an adult body. If you didn't have reset syndrome I would've brought it here."

"I'll put in the order for a couple of spares unless you already have."

"I've gotten predictable haven't I?"

"Yes and I know you're hiding something Vanessa. Come on spit it out."

"I didn't want to alarm you, but when you were still unconscious this huge alien spaceship appeared above the city."

Elenore got up of the bed and to the window and looked out the window.

“Where’s the ship Vanessa? All I see is the night sky.”

“You’re looking at the bottom of the ship.” Vanessa turned on the TV and flipped to a local news channel where they saw a huge ship oddly shaped like a bunny’s head floating over the city.

“That’s not huge! That’s big as the city!! It’s...” Elenore began.

“It’s what Elenore?”

“Oh my God. Could it be?”

“Be what? You’re not make sense.”

“You remember how Elsa when was able to talk she would point to sky and say bunnies. I wonder if she was referring to “that”?” Elenore said pointing to the TV. Then she started to smile.

“Why are you smiling Elenore?” Vanessa asked with a bit of concern.

“It reminded me of that time when the Space Fortress Justice hovered in the sky. Right before it fell.” Elenore lied knowing that mentioning Elsa some more would start another argument.

“You’re right it does. I hope this ship doesn’t land on top of us.”

“I hope so too. I just want to go home and rest.” Elenore half lied.

“We’ll be going soon.”

Elenore looked out the window at the bottom of the ship floating above the city.

“We’ll be home soon...” She thought to herself.

An hour Elenore and Vanessa were at home. Vanessa was watching the news when Sarah came up.

“Miss.”

“Yes Sarah.”

“It’s Miss Elenore. She’s standing in the front hall again...” Vanessa sighed at got up from the couch. She looked at Sarah who had worried look on her face. Vanessa smiled and patted Sarah on the shoulder. “I’ll handle this Sarah.”

“Yes Miss.” Sarah responded as Vanessa went to the front hall. There she saw Elenore standing holding her hands in front of her. Vanessa looked at her partner sadly. She didn’t want to argue with her but the last time Elenore did this she didn’t move for a week. Vanessa what triggered it this time, she guessed the ship floating above the city may’ve something to do with it.

“Elenore, we’ve been through this before. Please come away from there.”

“She’s finally coming home...” Elenore said joyfully. Vanessa got aspirated, walked in front of Elenore. Grabbed her by the arms and shake her. In loud angry and sad tone she said.

“Listen to me Elenore. They’re not coming home! Not Laetitia! Not Margaret! Not Mireille and definitely not Elsa! Stop doing this to yourself! It’s not healthy!” Then they heard the front door open.

“I’m home...” A female voice said from the doorway an Vanessa turn and looked in shock and Elenore beamed.

