

Chapter 38. Epilogue 2033 Requiem for Susan Baker

(July 5th 2033, Nafrece)

In a military cemetery, two women and a little boy were standing in front of Richard and Anna Burton's graves. The little boy looked at the woman with brown hair with blond streaks.

"Why are we here, mum?" The little boy asked with a definite English accent.

"Because this is your great grandpa's grave. And we're here to pay our respects." The little boy's mother answered, also with an English accent.

The little boy looked at the grave and read the name. Then he turned to his mother and asked. "I thought our name was Baker? How come it says Burton? Is that great grand mum with him?"

The little boy's mother sighed and answered. "Yes, our name is Baker. No, that isn't your great grandma, and when you get older I'll tell you the story."

"Gary, let your mum have some peace. Now get over here." The other woman with blue eyes and black hair in a ponytail said, also with an English accent.

Gary went over to the other woman while his mom looked solemnly at the grave.

"Sorry about that, grandpa. He's at that age where he's starting to ask. But since I was in the neighborhood I might as well stop and let you see your great grandson. If mom is up there with you please tell her I love her." The woman said as she laid flowers in front of the tombstone. Then she rejoined Gary and the other woman.

"Where to now?" The dark haired woman asked Gary's mother.

"I'm going to see Margaret first, then...I really don't know if I..." Gary's mother replied.

"We agreed if we went to Nafrece you were going to see your grand mum. If your mum is gone at least she'll know her granddaughter is still alive."

"Got a good point there. Plus, I want Gary to know her."

They all got into their car and drove off.

After a couple of hours driving they reached the graveyard. Getting out of the car and going into the graveyard the trio noticed an old man puttering around, trying to get a gardening bot to cut the grass a certain way. As they went past the old man he spoke to them.

"Well, it's been awhile. Here to see your sister?" The old man asked.

"Hello Mr. Carroll, I thought you retired sir?"

"I can't do as much anymore. Please excuse me." Mr. Carroll said as he started chasing after the bot.

The trio chuckled for a bit as they continued on.

Then they came to a grave with two perma-candles lit in front of it as the original candles melted a long time ago.

Gary's mother walked to the grave while Gary and the other woman stayed back a bit. She put flowers behind the candles and knelt.

"Hello Margaret. It's me, Marigold. I'm sorry I haven't visited in a while. I had a lot of things I needed to take care of. Is she there with you now? I'm sorry mom, I wanted to say I love you but I was too hurt to say so." Marigold said, beginning to cry. Gary went to her and asked. "Why are you crying mum?"

Marigold motioned Gary and she held him close.

"I was hoping one of these days you would be able to see Gary. Your grandson. I'm really sorry, mom." Marigold said crying.

"Susan?" A woman's voice asked from behind.

Gary turned his head and looked at the woman and the back to his mother and then back to the woman.

Marigold let Gary go as she rose and slowly turned around, her heart beating a little quicker.

She fully turned and froze as Meg stood with tears flowing down her face.

"Grandma?" Marigold asked.

"Susan, where have you've been?" Meg asked crying.

"I owe you an explanation, since I can't give it to mom."

"That can wait, I'm happy see you." Meg said. Not waiting for Marigold's explanation, she rushed up and hugged her, crying on her shoulder. Then Marigold cried on Meg's shoulder...

When they got back to Meg's they sat in the living room as Meg went to make coffee.

Marigold pointed out the pictures of her mother, while trying to draw attention away from any picture with Vanessa in it.

Meg came back into the room and sat down. Marigold turned to her waiting for her to speak. Gary was still looking at everything.

"The coffee is brewing. Is that little boy your son? Who is your friend here?" Meg asked when she sat down.

Marigold got up and brought Gary to her. "This is my son Gary. He's an invitro baby like Victoria. And this is my wife Wendy."

"I really wish you would've told your mother this...she would've been happy for you."

"I didn't want *her* to know."

Meg motioned Gary over to her. "Give your grandma a hug, Gary." Meg hugged Gary and he returned it.

"But why didn't you want your mother to know?" Meg asked, putting Gary on her lap.

"I meant Vanessa."

"I see. You're still angry with her. Your mother was angry at your Aunt Margaret's mother for a long time."

"I know and I don't want to talk about her right now."

Meg heard the coffee maker go off and put Gary down. "I'll be right back." Meg said, going to the kitchen.

"You know, your grand mum seems to be a nice lady. If Vanessa was bothering you so much you could've just asked her not to say anything around."

"It goes a little deeper than that."

"How so? Can you please start from the beginning?" Meg said, coming back into the living room with a tray of coffee and biscuits.

Meg served coffee and sat back down, waiting for Marigold's answer.

"After I left home, I went up to Calais and lived there for awhile. I did some waitressing, ironically at one of aunt Nadie's restaurants. I saved enough money to have my name changed and I then I did it."

"To Marigold, right? But why?"

Marigold leaned back on the couch and looked up.

"Why Marigold?" Meg asked, as she noticed she was stalling.

Marigold sat back up and answered. "I hated Susan and everything that was associated with that name. I promised a friend I wouldn't hurt myself again. So I did the next best thing in my mind. When it was officially changed, I had a funeral for Susan Baker. But I wasn't totally free; I hadn't really fully accepted what I was at the time. But at least I could go somewhere else, where no one barely heard of or even cared about Walter Baker. I was also still upset with mom at the time. So I named myself after my favorite fictional character; Marigold. Then I moved to England."

"Then what? What did you do in England?"

"At first I worked at another restaurant of Aunt Nadie's when there was an opening. While I was doing that I went back to school. I also went to therapy and met Wendy at a support group I was going to as well. I was still having a bit of a problem accepting what I was, till we met an "unusual" woman. She helped me see things a little differently. I think she knows mom. I did ask her not to say anything if she saw her. I still didn't want Vanessa knowing where I was."

"A lot of things can happen in ten years. She isn't the same person when you left. But finish your story."

"Wendy and I got married while I was in university. I got a better job and we saved enough money to have Gary, five years ago. That's what I've been doing for the last ten years in a nutshell."

"Alright, may I ask what is it that you do?" Meg asked, as Gary went back to her and he sat on her lap again.

"I work for the BBC. I'm a communications engineer."

"That's good. I'm happy that you're doing well. But why come back to Nafrece?"

"I could've come back sooner, but I thought I had all the time in the world. But when I heard that mom was caught in the blast at the plant I made plans. At first I wanted to just visit the graves and drive by your house. Wendy convinced me otherwise. After I visited Grandpa and Margaret I was coming here to see you. You happened to see me at the graveyard first. Were you coming to talk with great grandpa and ma?"

"Yes, actually, and I heard every word you said..." Meg said with a smile and then the kitchen phone rang.

Sighing and getting Gary off her lap a second time, Meg got up.

"Be right back."

After a few minutes Meg returned. "That was your step grandpa. He's coming home for dinner and hopefully with some news. Are you staying for dinner?" Meg asked in a tone that pretty much said "I will brook no refusal."

Marigold smiled. "Of course grandma. I'm sure grandpa would love to see his grandson."

Meg smiled. "Make yourselves at home and I'll go make dinner." And with that she went to the kitchen with a huge smile on her face.

"Need help grandma?" Marigold asked before Meg disappeared into the kitchen.

"No, sweetie. Just relax and watch some TV."

An hour had passed when Meg heard the front door opening and heard Roy's and someone else's footsteps. She checked the chicken and poked her head to watch.

"Susan?" Three-Speed asked as he saw Marigold getting up.

"Yes, it is grandpa. Oh blo...oof..." Marigold began to say then she noticed Luna right behind him.

"SUSAN!" Luna rushed and glomped into Marigold, rocking her back and forth.

"Nice to see you too, Aunt Luna."

"Where have you been? Your mother is worried about you."

"Roy what's going on?" Meg said, emerging from the kitchen.

"They found Elenore, or what was left of her body. Thankfully she had a reinforced skull and brain case so they've taken her to the hospital."

"Thank God. When can we see her?"

"Tomorrow at the earliest."

"We know she's in good hands. And as for you, young lady, your grandpa and I would like to know where have you been?"

"I would think the accent would be a dead giveaway, Aunt Luna."

"Wait, if you know I'm here, that means she knows I'm here, and she'll pester me to go to her party."

Marigold said in a bit of a panic.

"I still don't understand why you don't like Margaret's parties."

"Can it wait till after dinner, Madlax? And don't you have a kid to go home to and feed?" Roy said with his stomach grumbling.

"Sure, and Limelda is coming with Yotsulax. And they're bringing pasta."

"Why am I not surprised..." Roy said sighed.

The doorbell rang before anyone could answer. "I'll get it grandpa." Marigold said, going to the door.

When she opened the door a friendly voice greeted her.

"Hi. Are you going to let me in?" Margaret said.
"Bloody hell..." Marigold said under her breath.

(July 6th 2033, Nafrece: St. Michaels Hospital 5:30 P.M.)

On the way to the private waiting room, Marigold stopped.
"What's wrong?" Meg asked, wondering what the reason for the sudden stop was.
"I really don't know if I can do this grandma. I'm afraid this will just turn bad."
"You don't really have to say anything. Just hear her out. If she does say anything that hurts, I'll jump down her throat." Meg said, trying to boost Marigold's confidence in this situation.
"Thanks, grandma." Marigold said and they continued down the hall.
Marigold came to the entrance and knocked, even though Vanessa could see it was her.
"Hi. You're looking well." Vanessa said, wondering what Marigold would say.
"Hello. So are you. Look, I'm not here looking for a fight, I'm just here to see my mother. My grandma asked me to hear you out. So, what do you have to say?" Marigold responded, trying not to be confrontational.
"Straight to the point, like your mother. I know we didn't part on the best of circumstances, and I crossed several lines I shouldn't have. I can understand if you never forgive me, but I do want to apologize for what I did. For what it's worth, I'm truly sorry, Susan."
Marigold walked up and sniffed the air near Vanessa, trying to catch the scent of alcohol. "My name is Marigold now, and grandma told me that you've been sober for ten years."
"I understand your skepticism. –Vanessa pulled out a ten year chip and showed it to Marigold. – Your mother, grandmother and aunts helped me earn this. I know it still doesn't condone my behavior."
Vanessa said, putting the chip away.
"Look, I'll tell you this: I can't forget what you did, but I can try to forgive. What you said hurt far worse than any physical punch you could throw. I loved you, and then you turned around and acted like the people who treated me like I was some abomination. Do you have anything else to say?" Marigold said, in a mixed tone of anger, sadness and forgiveness.
"Not really. Thank you for hearing me out though."
"You're welcome. Do you know when my mom is getting out?"
"About two hours from now."
"Thanks." Marigold said and left, passing Meg on her way to the cafeteria.
"Thank you, sweetie." Meg said, as Marigold passed by.
"You're welcome, grandma. Let me know when mom gets out. I'm going to the cafeteria."
"Alright, I'll let you know." Meg said, as she watched Marigold walk down the hall.
Meanwhile, in the waiting room, Vanessa took a deep breath. *"That went a lot better than I thought..."*

(July 6th 2033, Nafrece: St. Michaels Hospital 7:30 P.M.)

Elenore awoke to see Sammy and Vanessa standing over her.
"How do you feel?" Sammy asks in that cheerful voice of hers. Elenore recognized through the tone. She wanted to say something but was holding her tongue.
Elenore got up while they watched her. "I feel okay." She replied.
"Well, that's good. Hate to rush you, but I have to get this room ready for the next patient. So can you please get dressed?" Sammy said, while glancing at the door. Thankfully, Vanessa brought her clothes in with her.
Elenore looked at her and, noticing the look on her face, wondered how bad they were hit.
"What's the situation and how many did we lose?" She asked while getting dressed.

“The portion of the building where the bomb exploded is a total loss. We lost about fifteen people, ten wounded. Those with cybernetic bodies are being restored. Margaret handled the PR beautifully and we have security and Section Ten looking into it.” Vanessa asked, in a distracted tone.

“Are you alright, Vanessa?” Elenore asked.

“I’m sorry. I have a lot on my mind. After you’re done dressing there’s someone that needs to talk to you in the waiting room.” Vanessa said, beginning to back towards the door.

“Who is it?” Elenore asked.

Vanessa acted as if something else got her attention. “Hold on, I think Three-Speed is trying to wave me over. I’ll be right back.”

Elenore continued to get dressed. “I wonder what’s bothering Vanessa. She didn’t tell me who was in the waiting room. It’s probably mom, no doubt.”

When Elenore had finished dressing, Sammy was trying to scoot her out politely.

“Take care Elenore. I would chat, but I’m a bit busy.”

“You take care too, Sammy.” Elenore said, wondering who was in the waiting room.

When Elenore went into the waiting room she froze in surprise.

“Hello, mom.” Marigold said with a smile on her face.

“Oh my God, Susan...” Elenore said, rushing up and hugging her carefully not to accidentally crush her. Marigold hugged her back, while Elenore began to tear up. “Where have you been? I was so worried about you.”

“I know mom. I’ll explain everything but right now I just want to stand here a while and hold you.”

“Me too...” Elenore said, beginning to cry on Marigold’s shoulder. It reminded Marigold of that time twenty years ago when she cried on her mother’s shoulder.

They stood there for at least five minutes, when Marigold felt a slight tug on her sleeve. Looking down, she saw Gary and smiled. Then Elenore noticed him.

“Who is this?” Elenore asked, wondering if the little boy was lost.

“Gary, say hello to your grandma.”

“Hello, grand mum.”

Elenore let go and bent down to Gary and began to hug him. Elenore began to cry in joy as she held him close.

“Why are you crying, grand mum?” Gary asked, wondering if he did something wrong.

“I’m happy, sweetie. To see you and your mommy.” Elenore said to Gary, then lift him up and held him with one arm and hugged Marigold with the other.

Marigold hugged her mother and son for the next few minutes until Gary began to fidget.

Elenore put Gary down and let go. Then she asked. “Where are you staying at?”

“Before I answer that, there are a few other things you need to know.”

“Like what?” Elenore asked, wondering what other surprises Susan had in store.

“You can tell by my and Gary’s accent that we’re living in England.”

“Okay. What else?”

“I’ve legally changed my first name to Marigold. I’ll tell the story when we get back to grandma’s”

“I can guess why you did it, but I’ll wait for now. Is there anything else?”

“I’m a lesbian.”

“Okay, you know I’m one as well. But how did you get Gary?”

“My wife and I had him through invitro fertilization. Before you ask, I was the one who carried him.”

“Wife? How long have you been married?”

“For the last seven years.”

“Why didn’t you tell me? I mean, I missed two of the biggest events in your life. It’s bad enough that I’ve missed a lot of them when you were a little girl... Are you ashamed of me?” Elenore asked in a truly hurt tone.

"No, mom, I'm not. But I don't want to explain it here. I'm sorry, mom. I didn't want to hurt you... Can we go back to grandma's, please?" Marigold asked, beginning to cry.

"Please, Marigold, tell me..." Elenore pleaded.

"Not here, mom. This is the same hospital where I first learned that you were my mother. And we both know what happened that day..."

"Yes, I do. Alright, we'll go to your grandma's. When we do, promise me that you will tell me."

"Yes...but..."

"But what?"

"I just want to talk to you. I still owe grandma, grandpa and Wendy as well."

"Don't worry, that's being handled." Meg interrupted, as she closed her cell phone.

"How so, mom?" Elenore asked, wondering what Meg had done.

"The less you know, the better you sleep." Meg said with a wink. "Now let's go home."