

## Chapter 39. Epilogue 2033: In remembrance of Helianthus

(Burton mansion: July 12<sup>th</sup> 2033 4:00 P.M.)

Margaret could hear Luna, Mireille, and Nadie going at it down the hall. Margaret knew they were friends but they really couldn't express it like other people. She, Kirika and Ellis understood as well as they could hear the subtle joy the three of them got from arguing with each other. That was the reason they never interfered, much to the disconcertment of others.

Chloe, Nakhl and Quanzitta arrived an hour ago and had joined them in the living room after they got settled. Margaret looked through her guest list to see who hadn't arrived yet. She saw that all those who lived outside of Nafrece were here except for Marigold and her wife. She noticed that Elenore hadn't been home since she left the hospital six days ago.

She called the office and found out that she was in the London office. Other than public relations and some finance she had little to do with the corporation, as Elenore and Vanessa ran the day to day stuff. But at least Elenore should've told her that she was going to be in London. Then, looking at the list at Marigold's name it dawned on her: she wanted to be close to her daughter and grandson. She could understand that but it was the not telling that bothered her.

She also noticed that Nadie and Ellis' daughter Jodie wasn't here as well.

"Ellis, can I ask you a question?"

"You just asked me one."

Margaret chuckled at the jest that Ellis made. "I was wondering why your Jodie hasn't arrived?"

"I think she may be at work still. I can call and ask. May I please use your phone?" Ellis replied.

"Sure, go ahead."

"Thank you." Ellis said, as she headed to the phone and began to make a call.

When Ellis had left Kirika spoke. "Miss Burton."

"You can call me Margaret."

Kirika nodded politely. "From what I understand, this party is intended for your family to mark a special occasion. Though I am grateful for the invite, I'm at a loss on why you invited us or what the occasion is."

"Oh, I'm sorry if I haven't explained. The occasion is to mark two major events: the first is the twenty-first anniversary of the events in Gazth-Sonika, the other is for the events in two thousand and twelve, which I believe you and your wife had a part in. Plus you bore the Ring of Morrigan. Also, might I add, you're friends with my sister Elenore, and you have a connection to her. And also considering you helped my family, and for that alone I am grateful." Margaret replied, hoping that the answer would satisfy Kirika.

"Thank you." Kirika said and, then noticed the picture of Elenore smiling with the black eye Mireille gave her. "I thought she had only the picture of us being surprised that Chloe sent us." Kirika said to no one in particular.

Margaret looked at the picture and smiled. "I remember that. She came home with a big smile on her face. I asked her about the black eye and she just said it was a souvenir. That was before Elenore got her cyber body. Speaking of that, I've meaning to ask you about that tea party you invited Elenore to." Chloe smirked at the mention of the tea party.

"What about it, may I ask?" Kirika asked in a calm tone.

"Elenore wouldn't tell me what happened. But she seemed a little more at peace with herself. So what did happen that day?"

"I'm sorry Margaret, we promised each other that what we've said to each other stays with us."

Margaret was a bit disappointed but not surprised. She knew they wanted to close the door on that chapter of their lives. Though she always did wonder how Elenore got the black eye and why she was so happy about it.

Ellis came back into the room and sat back down. "Jodie is with Marigold in London."

"Any reason why?" Margaret asked without skipping a beat.

"She said she was going to make sure that Marigold came to the party."

"Oh, okay. That makes sense. They've been friends for a long time." Margaret said, satisfied that her query had produced fruit.

Then Sarah came into the room. Though she started as the replacement maid, she then became Elenore's personal assistant, after Elenore got her cyber body. By then, Margaret hired another maid and a butler. Margaret suspected that Sarah was Elenore's eyes and ears when she wasn't home, plus something else.

"Miss Margaret." Sarah said to get Margaret's attention.

"Yes, Sarah. What is it?"

"I have received a message from Miss Elenore."

"And?" Margaret asked a bit irritated, she didn't like when Elenore didn't just tell her things.

"She instructed me to inform you that her tasks in London are nearly complete and that she will be home tonight. She also sends her regrets that it will be late at night when she arrives, so she asks that no one stay up on her account, and sends her love." Sarah said in a professional tone.

*"That's not the way you talk to Elenore..."* Margaret thought to herself.

"Is that all?" Margaret asked, wondering if there was more.

"I'm sorry Miss, but that was the entirety of the message."

"Very well, thank you Sarah."

"Will there be anything else, Miss Margaret?"

Margaret thought a bit and then replied. "A fresh pot of tea would be nice. Oh Sarah..."

"Yes, Miss?"

"What makes you happy?"

"Happy, Miss?"

"Yes, what makes you happy?"

Sarah thought a bit and then answered. "Waking Miss Elenore in the morning, brushing her hair, making her breakfast, seeing her off to work, cleaning the house, doing the laundry, going grocery shopping and making dinner. It's all I need. Those things are all I need to be happy." Sarah said it in the same tone Elenore said to Margaret over twenty years ago and Margaret noticed it.

*"You're in love with her. Aren't you, Sarah? I wonder if Elenore knows. And it all still sounds boring as it did back then."* Margaret thought to herself.

"Thank you Sarah, that will be all." Margaret said with a bowed head and Sarah left, wondering why Margaret had asked that question.

Nakhl and Quanzitta looked at Margaret and knew what she was thinking about.

"Are you all right, Margaret?" Chloe asked.

"I'm all right, I was just remembering something. Please, there's nothing to worry about. Thank you for your concern. I'm fine, I assure you." Margaret said hastily, hoping to draw away attention from what had just happened.

Sarah braced herself as she approached the room where Luna, Mireille and Nadie were having a lively "discussion" and went in.

"Yes, Sarah?" Luna said, as Sarah came into the room.

"Please pardon the interruption. Does the Miss require another pot of tea?"

Luna smiled. "Yes, plus another plate of cookies, please." Luna said, with Mireille and Nadie glancing at her.

"Of course, Miss."

"Umm Sarah..."

"Is something bothering you?"

"No, Miss."

"Oh okay. When did Elenore say she'll come home?"

Sarah was a bit surprised at first, but quickly regained her composure.

"Miss Elenore did not specify a time other than it would be late at night."

"Oh okay. Thanks."

"Will there be anything else, Miss Luna?"

"Umm...not really. By the way, those aren't boring at all if they make you happy. And I'm sure Elenore appreciates it."

"Thank you, Miss." Sarah left confused, wondering how Luna heard that conversation as the trio resumed their discussion.

Sarah got to the kitchen and put on two pots of water on the stove for tea. Thankfully the west wing's kitchen was being used for cooking, otherwise the room would've been crowded.

As she sat at the table she accessed her cyber brain and looked at the message Elenore sent.

*Hello Darling,*

*I've completed arrangements here in London, plus taken care of a few issues. If you get a call from the London Police please write down anything they say. I think I've figured where Laetitia has been lately.*

*Please don't mention this to Margaret or Luna just yet, let me do that. Just tell Margaret that I'm done and coming home, though it will be late at night. I don't want anyone staying up on my account.*

*Marigold is staying with my mom till the party starts.*

*I'm sorry that you have to be my eyes and ears while I'm not there. I've missed you and I hope to see you soon. Give everyone my love.*

*Yours truly,*

*Elenore*

Sarah put her hands over heart and hugged herself as she read it. Margaret turned her head towards the direction of the kitchen and a part of her was filled with dread. Over twenty years ago Elenore had left almost to never return. Was she planning to do so again? That question filled Margaret's mind as she sat there.

"You will just have to see." Quanzitta cryptically said, before taking a sip of tea.

"I guess so..." Margaret said in return.

(Burton mansion: July 13<sup>th</sup> 2033 2:00 A.M.)

Elenore came into the front hall. There, standing in her uniform, was Sarah. She had that look on her face that Elenore had once given to Margaret and Vanessa. Elenore smiled and put down her suitcase. Then she walked over to Sarah.

"I never get tired of that look. How have you been waiting here?" Elenore asked with that same look.

"Since eleven o'clock."

"You didn't have to stay up."

"I know, but I wanted to be the first to see your face when you came home."

"I missed you too." Elenore said opening her arms wide and then embracing Sarah.

They kissed each other passionately for a few moments before they let go.

"I'm sorry that you had to be my eyes and ears here while I was out."

"I don't mind at all. So please don't worry."

"Alright, so has been going on here?"

"Miss Margaret hired a security force to chase the paparazzi that she tends to attract. So far they've done a splendid job. Miss Luna and Limelda are staying here as well the Olivera's and the Bouquets. Also Miss Chloe and Nakhil with Miss Quanzitta are here having arrived earlier today. As expected, Miss Luna, Mireille and Nadie are having their lively discussions again. Miss Vanessa sent word that she and Victor will be at the party tomorrow. Mr. Doone is also expected to arrive later today."

"In other words: the usual chaos around here."

"Yes. Though Miss Margaret asked me a rather odd question earlier."

"About what?"

"What makes me happy?"

"That's an odd question. So how did you answer?"

"I told her that enjoyed waking you in the morning, brushing your hair, making your breakfast, seeing you off to work, cleaning the house, doing the laundry, going grocery shopping and making dinner. It's all I need. Those things are all I need to be happy."

"That's beautiful. So what was Margaret's reaction?" Elenore said remembering she gave a similar speech to Margaret many years ago.

"At first she was about to cry. Then she just sent me off."

"I have the feeling that Margaret either knows or suspects about us."

"What do we do?"

"We'll figure something out and I really doubt Margaret will say anything other than a few questions."

"The pictures of the place you found in London are very lovely."

"Thanks. It's small, near Marigold, and has a nice view."

Meanwhile, as Elenore and Sarah talked, Margaret was close by listening in. She didn't notice Luna creeping up behind her.

Luna smiled as she got close to Margaret and whispered. "What are you doing?"

Margaret almost yelped in surprise but she put her hand over her mouth. Then she made the quiet sign with her finger on her lips.

Whispering, Margaret said to Luna. "I knew it. I knew they were having an affair."

Still whispering, Luna replied. "So? Neither of them are married. So what's the big deal? It's nice to see Elenore with somebody."

"That's not the point."

"Are you going into that "class" thing again? Good grief, you go out with Carrossea."

"No, something else. Remember when Elenore moved out the first time. It was right after my birthday and she's planning to do it again."

"Again, so what?"

"She might not come back."

"Are you saying she'll die?"

"No. She won't come back to the mansion. This is her home too."

"Maybe she doesn't think that this is her home anymore. Have you ever considered that? To be honest, this is more your home than hers."

"I'm going to ask her..."

"Don't jump down her throat about it. Just ask calmly."

"Alright..."

"That sounds wonder..." Sarah began when Elenore put her finger on Sarah's lips and Sarah realized as Elenore did they were being listened.

"We're being listened. Let's see if I can do this in one jump." Elenore said going up five stairs and using her cybernetic strength leapt on to the landing on the second floor, surprising both Luna and Margaret.

"Oh, just the two people I wanted to talk to."

"Hi Elenore. It's not what it looks like..." Luna said, with a "hand caught in the cookie jar" look.

"As you can see, I'm home. I was going to wait till morning but I might as well do it now. Laetitia's alive and she's been in London and Nafrece recently."

Margaret put her question on hold as Elenore told them the news.

"Where? When? Who saw her?" Margaret asked.

"Marigold told me that she saw her on the London subway a couple times. So I went first to the police then the transit police."

"Why?"

"Laetitia can hide in plain sight with people but she can't do it to a camera."

"The Gift doesn't work on cameras because they're not a threat."

"Exactly."

"So now we know she's still alive and she relatively nearby. We can't just ask the police to keep a look out for her."

"Again, we don't need to. It's amazing what camera's pick up these days. She crossed into Nafrece from Calais a few days ago. So the police will bring her here if they find her which I highly doubt."

"Do you think she's coming here?"

"I wouldn't be surprised. Thanks for the update. Was that also the reason you went to London?" Luna asked, knowing that Elenore knew that they were listening.

"It was one of the reasons."

"Tell me, Elenore..." Margaret said staring at Elenore intently.

"Tell you what, Margaret?"

"Are you moving away again?"

"Yes, I am."

"Why? This is your home too."

"It stopped being my home a long time ago. I'll continue to visit when I'm in Nafrece, but I do have my reasons."

"What are they?" Margaret pleaded.

"I want to be near Marigold and my grandson. I found out the reasons why she didn't tell me she had gotten married or given birth: first off, I was still married to Vanessa, the other was that she was afraid of the media circus you tend to attract, Margaret. She got bullied mercilessly by other children and adults when she lived here. So if I went to see her, knowing you, you would tag along, and so would "they" and they'd give her grief once again. I don't want her to suffer anymore than she already has. Maybe this time I'll be there when she has another child."

Margaret understood why Marigold didn't want to return, but she had a problem on understanding why Elenore wanted to leave.

"Any other reasons and when are you planning on leaving? After my birthday, again? Like you did twenty- one years ago?"

"Yes, I do, and I think you know."

"About you and Sarah...yes, I do."

"Then you should realize that given the way Nafrecean society is that they would rip Sarah apart in the media. I love her too much for that, so after a day or two after your birthday we'll leave for London. It doesn't mean I'll never come back. I just won't be here as often."

"Does your mother know?" Margaret asked.

“Yes, she does. She’s happy for us, and plus it gives her an excuse to go to England.”

Luna chuckled as she remembered a funny story Meg told her about London.

Margaret chuckled a tiny bit as well but for a different reason.

“I’m just afraid I’ll never see you again. But you’re right...this is more my home than it’s yours. I remembered your promise that you would stay with me forever. But we didn’t know what we know now. A part of me wants you to stay, but I want you to be happy as well, Elenore.”

“I want you to be happy as well, Margaret.”

“I don’t know about any of you but I’m heading back to bed. Good night.”

“Good night, Luna.” Both Margaret and Elenore said.

“I might as well go too. I have a lot to sleep on. Good night, Elenore.”

“Good night, Margaret.” Elenore said, as they hugged each other and Margaret went off to bed.

Sarah came up soon after with Elenore’s suitcase.

“Let’s go to our bed, Sarah.”

“Is that wise?”

“I don’t know about you, but I’m tired of hiding our relationship from everyone. We all deserve to be happy.”

“Thank you for thinking of me. I’m sorry.”

“About what?”

“That I’m one of the reasons you’re moving out.”

“To be honest, it was bound to happen sooner or later and I rather do it on my own terms, with the person I love. So don’t be sorry about that. As for anyone else...to quote Luna “So what?””

“That’s a good enough reason for me.” Sarah said, as she carried Elenore’s suitcase to her room with Elenore holding her hand.