

Elena DiFiori

Mother – Adriana Francesca DiFiori (nee Cambra)

Father – Demetrius DiFiori (deceased)

Stepfather – Davide Baixa (took on DiFiori name when he married Adriana)

Brother – Vittorio DiFiori, four years younger.

Elena is the older of two children born to Adriana and Demetrius DiFiori – minor cousins to a major trading family in Vodacce. Of course, with family lines the way they are in Vodacce, *everyone* has important cousins. In this case, Elena's great-uncle Silvio was the family's biggest name.

Elena was a bit of a conundrum as witchery rarely occurred in her family. Elena's great-grandmother Francesca was a Fate witch of some accomplishments, but she was the first witch in the DiFiori line for over a century – and Francesca had despaired of anyone following her path until the birth of Elena. Francesca, of course, immediately knew of Elena's talents but died before Elena was six years old. Had Francesca been able to survive just a few more years, Elena's life would have been rather different.

Adriana didn't quite know how to raise Elena – she was alternately intimidated and amused by the idea of being the mother of a witch. Unfortunately, she couldn't hide her trepidation from her daughter and – like bossy children will – Elena did her best to manipulate her mother via her weakness. Early on, Elena learned the efficacy of gazing into the middle-distance and frowning...

The arrival of Elena's brother, Vittorio, did not ease matters. Adriana and Demetrius doted on their – thankfully mundane – son, the heir that Demetrius wanted. Elena did not appreciate the haste with which Adriana transferred her affection, and she became even more sullen and willful.

Fortunately, Francesca was still alive – albeit very frail – and for one vital year, Francesca took Elena in hand. With a combination of family love and sheer intimidation, managed to break the worst of Elena's bad habits, as well as indoctrinate her with the implications of growing up as a witch. Adriana was relieved when Elena returned from her long stay with Francesca much changed for the better, but Elena's long absence also managed to sever Elena's remaining filial feelings towards her mother. Adriana barely noticed this, as she continued to focus on Vittorio – and her attempts to give Demetrius more sons, all of which were doomed to failure.

Elena adored her father – as little girls will – but she didn't see much of him. Demetrius' commitment to the family's wool business took most of his time – particularly once he decided to expand the business into creating the finished felt and tweed for market. Elena remembers him as a giant (of course) with a friendly smile and a ready hug, on the rare times they saw each other. Of course, he had a lot of time for Vittorio, also, but Elena was always ready to forgive her father.

Demetrius died when Elena was eleven years old, carried off by some nameless fever that almost killed Adriana, also. Adriana was forced to sell the fulling-mill to cover monies lost during their illness, which hurt the family pride, but the DiFioris were able to continue without accepting Silvio's sympathetic offer of help. Elena never learned why, but Adriana was always very reluctant to accept help from her uncle – at times muttering darkly about baited hooks.

Adriana, to no-one's surprise except Elena's, took over Demetrius' business and worked it efficiently, although she lacked Demetrius innate understanding of the intricacies, and the DiFioris survived, if not quite as prosperously as before. Elena and Vittorio's lives were essentially unchanged, although they did not go out to family balls as much as before and they were both forced to give up certain expensive habits they had acquired. This relatively-lean period was educational for Elena, as it was the first time she had to consider the value of money.

The next five years were essentially peaceful. Elena was coming into her birthright – to her mother's ill-disguised alarm – but Elena remembered the cautions of her grandmother and kept such things to herself, as best she could. There were times when Adriana asked Elena to *look* at someone but, while still young, Elena's vision was erratic, and one mishap cost Adriana a small fortune in credibility. To Elena's relief, Adriana ceased asking Elena for her assistance once the family holdings were more secure. The fulling mill was re-purchased shortly after Elena's fifteenth birthday.

When Elena was seventeen, Adriana married Davide Baixa. Davide came from a once-great family that had been disgraced by his father when he proved himself a coward in a duel. Davide suffered from guilt by association and his marriage prospects were ruined – despite the Baixa's own fortune in the gem and jewelry trade. Davide was young, but he was resourceful and his back was against the wall. As his (now-deceased) father's only son, he had an obligation to continue the family line, so he went looking for a wife. Adriana, although a little old for his taste – thirty-five to his twenty-one – was the distaff side of a good family, had proven she had sensible business acumen and – and this was a

clincher – she had already given birth to a healthy son. Of Adriana’s miscarriages following Vittorio’s birth, he knew nothing, and Adriana intended to keep it that way.

Adriana admired Davide’s quick mind – and that young body and pretty face didn’t hurt either. He brought a sizable fortune that could only benefit the family, and he was very willing to take on Adriana’s name – in an attempt to distance himself from his disgraced father. Adriana, on the other hand, was not perturbed by the scandal attached to the Baixa clan and was quick to tell all observers that the son does not always take after the father – after all, look how different she and Elena were.

Elena liked Davide, too. Her society was rather limited – especially now that she had come into her own as a witch – and she enjoyed his company. Davide knew when it was proper to lay on the charm, and he thoroughly charmed Elena and her little brother – to Adriana’s delight.

Davide encouraged Adriana to give up the woolen trade and move into fine cloth – silk and linen – which nicely coincided with his own interests in the luxury-goods trade. Although Davide was motivated by old-fashioned greed, it proved to be profitable venture for the family and the DiFioris were fully re-established as they had been in Elena’s childhood – and more. This only made Adriana admire Davide all the more.

Unfortunately, the bloom came off the marriage rather quickly. Adriana – to everyone’s delight – became pregnant immediately after the wedding, but lost the child in the second trimester. The next two years nearly killed Adriana with another two miscarriages in quick succession – one was sadly close to term when he was lost. Davide quickly became disaffected.

However, Davide was practical enough to realize that he could not leave Adriana, not if he wanted to keep what little good reputation he had won so far, so he gritted his teeth and sent extra prayers to Theus for a son and his wife’s health – in that order. Fortunately, Davide did not collapse into bitterness or blame Adriana for their lack of a son. Instead, he chose to immerse himself in work and other domestic chores.

Elena had grown to know Davide quite well and she had never considered him a father-figure – he was far too close to her in age for him to have any paternal authority. Unfortunately, this fostered some very foolish notions in Elena’s head and she quickly developed an unreasoning crush on her stepfather. At first, Elena was able to admit that it was folly and a passing fancy and so she resolved to stay away from Davide for the meantime. She was sure that she would outgrow her feelings in short order. As a witch, she was used to unrequited crushes because who was going to flirt with a woman who could hold your fate in her grasp? She was certain that this momentary flutter would blow over.

Despite his business acumen, Davide was rather clueless in matters of the heart. After all, his feelings for Adriana had been strictly business like at first, before warming into affection (and decaying into disappointment). Davide feared that Elena had taken to avoiding him out of personal dislike and he genuinely did not want an enemy in the family at such a tenuous time. Davide set out to spend *more* time with his stepdaughter and lavished *more* charm upon her, in the hope of re-winning her friendship. This only fanned the flames of Elena’s daydreams even further.

It was shortly after Davide’s set out to make friends with Elena that she lost her head entirely and she tried to seduce her stepfather. It wasn’t the most subtle plan ever conceived – an intimate dinner and a lot of wine – but Elena felt that luck would be on her side, especially given the fraying of the threads between her stepfather and Adriana. In fact, Elena wasn’t too sure if she really wanted to succeed – even in her addled state, she knew what the consequences of a liaison would be – but she wasn’t clear-headed enough to call off the attempt.

What Elena couldn’t anticipate was a maid coming into her chambers an hour earlier than usual and finding Elena and Davide asleep together in Elena’s bed.

There was no keeping it from Adriana at this point. Elena was not as consumed with remorse as one might expect, and Davide was forming plans of his own. Although relations between Adriana and Elena cooled to downright frosty, they both took care of paying off (and intimidating) the maid to ensure her silence, and then Elena was sent to Uncle Silvio – the public reason being that it was time for Adriana to be introduced to Vodacce society.

Unfortunately, the rift between Davide and Adriana had widened beyond repair. The attention of a pretty young thing – disregarding the incestuous context – had slapped Davide with the realization that he was potentially wasting his life with Adriana. Less than a year after Elena’s departure, Davide tried to divorce Adriana, citing the lack of children as a reason for dissolution. However, the supervising cleric – who had an ear to the ground in the right places, and a vengeful turn to his sanctimonious mind – told Davide that, since he had given up his family name when joining the DiFiori’s, Vittorio was all the heir he needed.

Davide tried to take his medicine – as he so clearly recognized the cleric’s decision – but his will snapped a few months later. Just as Elena was celebrating her twenty-first birthday in her uncle’s house, Davide took all the money he could carry – a significant, but not disastrous amount – and abandoned Adriana one summer night.

Elena regretted how events had turned out but being privy to the threads of fate had made her phlegmatic about such things. She felt far more remorse at the affect of Davide’s abandonment on her mother’s health, than over the fact that she had played no small part in it, herself. Adriana began a slow decline that is showing every sign of coming to an end as Elena enters her twenty-fourth year – but Elena is not yet aware that her mother’s end is near.

Elena enjoyed visiting with Silvio's family in the regional capital. Her situation as a witch enabled her to observe courtly politics from a unique perspective – no-one dared involve her, as they feared her gaze, but nor could they exclude her from their conversation, should she drift over. Elena socialized as much as she could – mostly with her many cousins – but she couldn't help but develop an outsider's perspective on politics and love.

Elena learned that certain behavior was expected of her and she took to emulating that behavior. It was easier to accomplish her few goals by acting according to archetype- whereas when she tried to be the outgoing youngster she had been, everyone would assume she was lying and had some ulterior motive in mind. She was disappointed about that but - rather than try to change the multitude - she changed herself. Her slightly impish sense of humor remains, as can be noticed by any observer astute enough – and brave enough – to watch her closely.

Silvio's wife, Tania, approached Elena two years after she joined the family to suggest a rather radical notion. Despite attempts to the contrary, the story of Elena and Davide was finally leaking out and making the rounds. Silvio was confident that Elena could be trusted now that she was older – hadn't he made a few silly conquests in his youth? – But he certainly did *not* want a fate-witch who felt she was being slighted grumping around the house. Tania suggested to Elena that she travel for a while – as long as she liked, in fact. Tania could see – better than her husband – that Elena had a taste for company – and certainly a little adventure – and a fate-witch could easily look after herself, even in the wilds of Thea...

Elena was intrigued by the notion. She was getting a little weary of Vodacce, admittedly. Elena had lately shaken off the unwanted attentions of a undisguised gold-digger who thought Elena's craving of company had rendered her witless and she was thinking of going somewhere – anywhere – else, herself. Vittorio was eighteen and - fortunately - showing every sign of having inherited his father's acumen (along with Davide's abandoned assets). Elena could leave Vodacce in good conscience and she knew that a sigh of relief would probably follow her.

In a moment of rare greed – albeit borne of self-preservation – Elena asked both Vittorio and Silvio to provide her with an allowance while she traveled. She asked them each separately of the other and thus managed to obtain herself a much better financial situation than she would have had, otherwise. Elena is gambling on the still-undefined hostility between her family and Silvio's to ensure that neither of them learn of the swindle – and on her Uncle's indulgence if they do.

So Elena set out to see the world or – as she laughingly put it – seek her fortune. Montaigne was the closest opportunity for an interesting experience and intrigue, so she immediately set out for its sunny southern coast, with a vague intention to drift towards the capital. Elena liked the more even-keeled (when compared to the Vodacce) Montaigne disposition, but, as usual, the populace were more inclined to scramble out of her way than give her the time of day. Her only recourse was to establish herself in a provincial court and allow the natives to stare at her until their curiosity diminished. It was wearying but bearable, if she didn't move around too often.

A profitable sideline was using her perceptive powers to the benefit of the local nobility and merchant class. *Does he really love me? Will my partner break his word?* Elena considered such work as distasteful, but there were times when her money was a little tighter than she liked. She preferred to save rather than spend, and donate rather than save and she wasn't about to take up that other traditional female past-time, even if that was a viable option.

Romance proved to be a thorny problem for Elena, as no man wishes to take on a lover that might consume his soul as a post-coital snack – or so the legends would have it. There was one interesting encounter involving an adventurous Castillian, a private locale and a blindfold, but it wasn't anything Elena wanted to establish as a habit. After a few botched encounters – which never went beyond verbal flirtation – Elena resigned herself to the fact that only Vodacce men had the spirit and courage to pursue a Vodacce woman and, instead, took up the habit of reading torrid Avalonian romances (translated into Montaigne, of course).

Following a nasty encounter with a town priest – he was calling for Elena to be burned as a witch and Elena rather cattily responded by mentioning certain threads she saw between him and several members of his choir – Elena left Bordeaux and headed for Versailles. She had a few letters of introduction and intended to see the royal court at least once before deciding whether to return to Vodacce or to go on to Avalon.

It took several months of persuasion, bullying and outright bribery, but Elena DiFiori finally won an invitation to the king's court – and promptly fell in with an unlikely gang of adventurers.