Chapter Nine

 As Kynard took a seat in Phoebe’s Dreamcatcher, he leaned back and closed his eyes, quietly contacting Erivelle: “Erivelle, I’m afraid my walk is going to take much longer than expected. I met with Phoebe, and she’s-“

 Erivelle had filled a bowl of pot roast for herself and had been eating while talking to Perrine: “What? You’re with Superintendent Phoebe! You go, Kynard!”

 “What about you and Perrine?”

 “Don’t worry about us! I’ll head out later tonight, and Perrine can lock the door behind me. Just have fun with Phoebe!”

 “Alright, thank you. I’ll see you tomorrow, then.”

 Phoebe smiled as the car began to drive away from Starlight and towards Route 6: “Have you ever been to the Grand Filaderri? It’s a nice place that my family frequents. I think my grandfather owns it? I’m not sure, but I know it’s owned by my family.”

 Kynard opened his eyes, watching Phoebe as she drove: “Your family owns a lot of things in the city, don’t they?”

 “More than you can imagine… For example, the Citadelio? The entire city district? That’s our land. We built it at the end of the Second Era, and it’s been ours ever since.”

 “Then, nobody there actually owns their homes?”

 Phoebe shrugged: “They sign 100-year leases, and then we automatically renew them if the owner hasn’t, you know, become an enemy of the state. We’ve only had to revoke the lease once, and even then, that family left willingly. In fact, it was their idea to leave at all.”

 “Who was it?”

 “The Conarbye Clan. They left in the early 1800’s because they didn’t approve of the Southern Isles Campaign. It’s a shame, really… They were our friends during the end of the Second Era, and then they stayed with us up until that campaign. So that was… around 700 years, I think. And then… Well, Monogenerie happened. Over time, we stopped seeing as many boys being born, and then the Science Department figured out why. Mayor Pritchard, my grandfather, panicked and passed the Southern Son Act in 1896. It helped with the gender imbalance, sure, but it further eroded our relations with the Conarbye Clan.”

 “Why is that?”

 “Because it legalized the importation of male slaves for domestic use, specifically from the Southern Isles, the same place we had colonized in the late 1600’s and early 1700’s. The Conarbye Matriarch at the time didn’t like that at all, and tensions rose between us for two years after the law was passed. And then one day, my family decided it would be best if we left. Mom took my sisters and I, and Dad followed behind. My family knew the Conarbye Clan would attack us, so we did the best we could to make sure we left without being noticed.”

 “Did it work?”

 Phoebe shook her head and frowned: “No, they knew what we were doing… The Citadelio had protected us, but what my parents didn’t realize was that the security gate leading out was the most dangerous part. The Conarbye Clan knew where it was, and they knew that was our only way out. So, they waited there, waiting for us to leave. And once we did, they struck.”

 The car arrived at the security gate to the Citadelio, and Kynard immediately saw what Phoebe meant. There was a single road leading in and out of the district, and there were multiple streets facing the entrance. It wouldn’t have been difficult to use those buildings as cover while watching the entrance. He tried to imagine what it must have been like to escape like this, and for a brief moment, he felt a chill run through his body as he imagined three heavily armored vehicles driving out, one at a time: “Albatross, Blackbird, and Canary…”

 Phoebe had finished waving at the guard and turned to look at Kynard: “What?”

 “Nothing, I’m just thinking out loud.”

 “Oh… Well, like I was saying, they followed us all the way out of the city and into the Northern Forest. We had set up a roadblock near the Old Maxol Manor, and Dad pulled over there to help stop the Conarbye Clan from following us. From there, Mom took us all the way to the base of North Peak, to this strange cave. We went inside, and it mysteriously took us out of here. Out of Revertianni. Out of the universe…”

 The car drove down the same road that led to The Midnight Cat, but instead continued along the road while Phoebe finished her story: “That cave took us to the world of Miradis, and we spent the next 20 years there, waiting. My sisters and I all grew up, not knowing what had happened to Dad. We knew he wouldn’t be coming with us, but Mom heard about the fighting and refused to tell us if he was OK.”

 “What happened to him?”

 Phoebe frowned, slowing down as she pulled over to a small parking lot behind a restaurant: “He died. He got into a duel with Meissan, the current Conarbye Matriarch, and she killed him. My sisters and I figured out a few years after we moved to Miradis, when I was old enough to have that conversation with my older sister, Hannah. She had overheard Mom talking about it to King Carranov, the leader of the Miradian Knights. They were the ones who had taken us in and were protecting us. It was Carranov who had received the news and passed it on to Mom. And, well… you know the rest.” The engine stopped, and Phoebe stepped out of the car: “Come on, let’s go have dinner.”

 Kynard was expecting the Grand Filaderri to be fancy and opulent. After all, it was owned by the royal family and known for being the best restaurant in the Capitalle. But instead of being met with a luxurious restaurant, he found himself walking into a quiet, family-style restaurant. There was a single waitress standing at the entrance, and Kynard could hear a radio playing in the kitchen. Every once in a while, he could see two cooks working, along with a single dishwasher. All of the employees were women, something that Kynard was slowly getting used to, especially now that he learned more about Monogenerie and its damaging impact on the Capitalle.

 Phoebe walked up to the waitress and smiled: “Hey, Brandy! Is our table available?”

 Brandy looked off to the corner of the restaurant and nodded: “You need me to pull the VIP access rope for you?”

 “Nah, I’ll do it myself. By the way, this is Kynard, the Head of Security at the Colierri!”

 Brandy looked at Kynard and nodded: “Welcome, Kynard. I’m Brandy, one of the waitresses here at the Grand Filaderri.”

 “Where are the others?”

 Brandy shrugged: “Lara’s off today. My guess is she’s at the bar near her place? I dunno. But, don’t worry about her. Go have a seat at the family table, and I’ll bring you a menu. I assume you know what you’re getting, Phoebe?”

 Phoebe nodded, quickly leading Kynard to a table in the back of the restaurant: “We had a table set up to be used only by the Maxol Family, up in the VIP area. Not much of my family comes here nowadays, on account of the Gangster Wars. For the most part, it’s pretty much my table now. Come, I’ll show you!”

 The VIP area was a small, raised section of the restaurant that was blocked off by a velvet rope. Phoebe immediately opened it up and led Kynard up, showing him one of the tables: “This is my family’s table. You want me to get you anything?”

 Kynard took a seat and shrugged: “Brandy’s bringing me a menu, isn’t she? We can just wait for-“

 “Nah, don’t worry! Hold on, I’ll go get us a bottle!”

 As Phoebe turned to make her way to the wine cooler, Kynard turned and watched her: “Won’t we get in trouble?”

 Phoebe opened the cooler, carefully picking out a bottle: “Why would we? My family owns the restaurant, remember? And besides, Brandy doesn’t mind!”

 In fact, Brandy already knew what Phoebe was planning and brought two wine glasses along with the menu for Kynard: “A bottle of Mithie Vont, as usual. Kynard, would you like a glass of water along with the drink?”

 Kynard nodded, quietly taking the menu and opening it up. Phoebe poured the drinks herself, and Brandy went back to the kitchen to prepare a glass of water for Kynard. Kynard stared at everything on the menu and frowned: “I don’t know what I’m in the mood for…”

 “Oh, then don’t worry about it! I know just what to order for us!”

 Brandy returned with a glass of water for Kynard, and then Phoebe took his menu: “He doesn’t know what to order, so I say we get an apple fluff for the two of us.”

 “One apple fluff plate? OK, you got it!” Brandy took the menu and went back to the kitchen, Kynard watching Phoebe as she handed him a glass of Mithie Vont: “What’s an apple fluff?”

 Phoebe smiled, quickly taking her own glass and sipping it: “Oh, I never get tired of Mithie Vont! It’s my favorite drink!”

 Kynard looked at his own glass, noticing it had a slight pear scent to it: “What is it?”

 “It’s club soda, pear syrup, and two shots of vodka. Try it, it’s good!”

 Kynard took a sip, immediately feeling a buzzing or static in his head: “Woah… is it normal for it to make my head feel fuzzy?”

 Phoebe laughed: “After one sip!? Kynard, you’re a lightweight! And to answer your question, an apple fluff is my favorite dessert in the whole world! You’ll see it, and then you’ll understand why I love it so much!”

 Brandy returned with a large plate, and the more Kynard looked at the apple fluff, the more confused he was: “What… *is* that?”

 Brandy placed the plate in the center of the table and then handed both of them a knife and a fork: “I see this is your first time having an apple fluff, but it’s pretty easy to enjoy. There’s three layers in total. The bottom layer is a squishy rice cake made of rice flour, the filling is an apple pudding, and the top layer, the one that’s visible, is marshmallow. To eat it, you cut a little slice off and eat it. We also make Little Fluffies, which are the same thing but miniature in size. Those, you just pick up and eat in two bites.”

 Phoebe cut off a little slice for herself, revealing the rich, cream yellow filling inside: “Usually I just get one or two Little Fluffies, but since you’re trying it for the first time, I figured we should share a big one!”

 Kynard smiled, taking another sip of his drink before trying the apple fluff for himself. As he took his first bite, he was shocked by how cold the dessert was, but Phoebe didn’t mind at all: “It’s served chilled so the filling can be thicker.”

 “It’s good, I like it.”

 It took them about half an hour to finish most of the apple fluff, and then Phoebe had the leftovers be put in a takeout box. The same, however, couldn’t be said about the Mithie Vont. Before Kynard knew it, he and Phoebe had finished the entire bottle: “How did we drink it all?”

 Phoebe shrugged: “I guess you really liked it. You drank more than I did!”

 Brandy returned with the bill, and Phoebe immediately paid for them: “Don’t worry, Kynard. Dinner’s on me.”

 Kynard wanted to ask if Phoebe was sure, but instead he felt his head get heavier from all the drinking. Phoebe looked at him and smiled: “Are you alright?”

 Kynard slowly got up, trying to maintain his balance: “I’m fine, I’m fiiiiiiiine!”

 Phoebe laughed, getting up as well and moving to help Kynard walk: “Don’t worry, I got you! Just stay close to me, OK?”

 The two of them slowly made their way out of the Grand Filaderri, and then they returned to Phoebe’s Dreamcatcher. Kynard fell into his seat, slowly putting his seat belt back on while Phoebe calmly climbed into her own seat: “OK, let’s take you home. Thanks for coming to dinner with me, Kynard.”

 “No problem!”

 As the car’s engine roared to life, Phoebe turned on the radio for some soft music, only to hear an announcement instead: “…ring you news from the Citadelio gate. Following recent events at the Science Department, the Citadelio gate will remain closed for the rest of the night. The Captain of the Citadelio offers his sincerest apologies for the lockdown, but that the gate will reopen in the morning.”

 Phoebe frowned: “Oh… Kynard, it looks like you’re stuck in the Citadelio for tonight.”

 “…what?”

 “Yeah, that’s what the lady on the radio said.”

 “Then what will I do?”

 Phoebe smiled, starting to drive: “Don’t worry, you can stay at my place! We have a bunch of guest rooms where you can spend the night.”

 Kynard made another secret call to Erivelle: “Erivelle! Are you still at my place?”

 “Uh… yeah, I was about to leave. What’s up?”

 “I can’t leave the Citadelio.”

 “…what do you mean you can’t leave the Citadelio? Did something happen?”

 “The lady on the radio said the gate is closed because something happened at the Science Department. So, I’m calling to ask if you can pass that info on to Perrine.”

 “In that case, can I crash at your place? It’s nicer than my dorm.”

 “Huh? Stay out of my bedroom, but yeah you can spend the night there.”

 “Cool, thanks!”

 Kynard looked up and saw that Phoebe was driving into the underground parking beneath Maxol Manor: “OK, we’re here!”

 As Phoebe’s Dreamcatcher pulled into a parking spot, two security guards approached the car, helping both Phoebe and Kynard climb out. Phoebe smiled and took the guard’s hand: “This is Kynard, one of my coworkers. We were on our way out of the Citadelio so I could take him home, but then we heard the notice that we’re on lockdown. He’ll need a room tonight.”

 One of the two guards nodded and opened the elevator for them: “Mayor Seinna will want to meet him.”

 “That’s fine. Who else is here right now?”

 The other guard spoke up: “Hannah is here tonight. Lucy is at the Science Department right now, and Annie is at the precinct.”

 Kynard could feel his face brighten, realizing he would be meeting Phoebe’s mother, Mayor Seinna Maxol. He looked around, trying to find a way out as he spoke to himself in his mind: “I’m screwed… Where’s Lucy? I need her help right now…”

 Lucy Maxol was still in the Science Department, currently on the phone with her older sister, Police Chief Annie Maxol: “He was here a minute ago, and then gone in the next. I need you to come and open an investigation.”

 Half an hour later, Chief Annie arrived at the Science Department and met with her sister: “Tell me exactly what happened.”

 Lucy was sitting at Iselbonne’s desk, and Annie could tell from her puffy eyes that she had been crying: “Well… Iselbonne was working here, in his office, and I had offered to get him a coffee. After all, he’s been so busy getting everything ready for the Silent Sailors to arrive and he still has more work to do… But when I got back, he was gone…”

 Annie looked down at the ground, immediately noticing the broken glass leading out of the window: “I see… Who else has access to his office?”

 “The Bilerro Boys, Messer Pureau, a few lower level employees… But, I’m not sure any of them would have a motive to kidnap Iselbonne. And besides, everybody else is accounted for, having left for the day long ago or still upstairs.”

 Annie frowned: “Get me the surveillance tapes. We need to figure out who kidnapped Mikael Iselbonne.”

 Lucy began to cry again, but quickly composed herself and got to work pulling the surveillance tapes. Annie continued to examine Iselbonne’s office and sighed: “I hope you’re ready, Lucy. Because if we don’t find Iselbonne, then you just became the new Head of the Science Department…”