

II: Waste of Love

*We are introduced to a new figure
As well as parts of the Commonwealth
Political tensions and cloak and dagger ensue*

Breakfast was quite again, just like every single meal had been the past eleven days or so, but Callum Moore wasn't counting. He sat at the table and eyed the egg he skewered on his fork; he raised an eyebrow and bit into it. He did love eggs when it came down to it and Mrs. Ashgar always did a great job preparing them no matter the form.

After savoring each morsel of the mouthful he glanced across the table. His mother had been sitting in their great dining room before he had gotten there, but he might as well have been alone, well apart from Shatter who was standing close to the servants' entrance with a silver coffee pot in his gloved hands. His mother was staring down at her coffee cup, her face completely expressionless. She had been the type of matriarch who always saw things from its most positive perspective and in the beginning she hadn't worried too much, it would be fair to say that Callum was more concerned than her, but as the weeks passed and it became increasingly clear that something was amiss she became increasingly introverted and silent, until she has ceased speaking at all. Every now and then Callum had stopped outside his parent's bedroom and thought he could hear silent sobbing behind the fake wood doors.

He turned to Shatter and waved him over. The butler, whose eyes always seemed to be closed and inattentive, quickly and smoothly moved towards him with the coffee.

'Will that be all Master Callum?' he said in the distinct patois of a rudo. From what Callum knew Shatter was Liberian and Anglican and had grown up in the slums off of Venus, before becoming a man servant.

'No thank you Shatter' he replied. 'Do you know if my Father is about?'

'His Lordship is still in, but I believe he is in his quarters getting dressed for the day.' Shatter returned to his post, still clutching the coffee pot. He snapped to an even more rigid attention as the two ornate "wooden doors" that acted as the main entrance to the dining room opened and Callum's father walked in.

Sir Oliver Moore fifth Earl of New Crawford was a tall man, he probably would have been even if he hadn't been raised in the artificial gravity of the Caledonia I/P/I State. His skin was the translucent paleness of one who has never worked in the manmade sunlight and his hair was jet-black combed back with a pompadour up top, his moustache neatly groomed with a curl at each end. His gate was as stiff and cold as the rest of his countenance, which came as a sharp contrast to the tender kiss he placed on his wife's cheek. She reacted by twitching her left eye, but she kept her emotionless stare at her coffee cup. Sir Oliver pulled out the chair next to her and sat down. Shatter jumped into service mode and brought forth both coffee and a breakfast plate composed of eggs and meats, he was shoed off when he tried to place a napkin in the earl's lap.

‘Good morning Father’ Callum said as he swallowed the last bit of egg in his mouth. His father nodded as a reply, but said nothing. Not much of a talker at the best of times, his father had gone almost as silent as his mother these past weeks. ‘Are you off to work to the Palace today?’ Callum continued, well aware that he was. His father was wearing his dark blue suit and white waist coat, the official dress of the Caledonia nobles in the Protectorate Parliament, only the Lord Protector was allowed to wear a black suit.

Sir Oliver grabbed a piece of bread and spread something on it. He nodded again without a sound. Callum sighed and motioned to Shatter that he could grab his dishes and the servant did. He took out a bottle from a drawer situated in the table and squirted some disinfectant in his hands, water was being rationed in the Commonwealth again and those who could afford it reserved it for coffee, tea or other forms of indulgent drinks.

‘Father, I’ve been thinking’ Callum knew that this always caught the lord’s attention and so it did. ‘Kat’s been gone for a fortnight now and so far nothing has been done to find her.’

His mother blinked and woke from her trance at the mention of his sister’s name, she stared at him and his father turned and raised an eyebrow.

Callum cleared his throat and continued; ‘So I was thinking that I could do a bit of investigating myself, well not completely myself. Ryan is most likely keen to join me, although I haven’t asked him...’ his right leg was shaking with nervousness and he was beginning to stammer. ‘We have the resources and I feel that time is running out, I do miss her...’

‘Enough!’ Lord Moore’s voice wasn’t loud, but sharp as a razor cutting through the air and clipping Callum in mid ramble. ‘I will not have you talking nonsense, Callum’ he rose. ‘You will get that foolish notion out of your head and you will under no circumstances contact that delinquent Ryan Lafferty. The matter will be dealt with in a quiet and clandestine manner. We can ill afford a public affair at this time.’

‘But I could be just as cl...’

‘There will be no more discussion when it comes to your sister’ Lord Moore put his hand on his wife’s shoulder. ‘Can you not see that this is upsetting your mother?’

‘I get that, but I can’t see that anyone is doing anything to find her and...’

‘I said enough Callum; this will be the end of it!’

‘Lord Wilcox has arrived Sir’ announced Murphy, the other butler of the house. He had arrived through the servant’s entrance and seemed unfazed that he had interrupted the family dispute.

‘I must take my leave; Wilcox has asked that we journey together to the Protectorate today. Remember, this conversation will not be revisited’ Lord Moore downed the coffee and left the room.

The announcement of Lord Terrence Wilcox coming to their home made Callum suspicious. On one hand Lord Wilcox was the head of the New Model Army, the elite wing of the Commonwealth army and with his father being a member of the Security Council the fact that the two of them would have something to talk about might not be so strange. On the other

hand Wilcox was an Anglican and Moore Manor would be quite out of the way for him, just for the two of them to travel to the Protectorate. This was enough to make Callum itch to find out what was really going on. As soon as his father had left he excused himself, kissed his mother's cheek in haste and snuck out from the dining room.

He moved slowly through the red carpeted corridor and down the large staircase that lead to the big outer doors of the manor. His father walked, as he always did, slow and with purpose so Callum saw him turn to the receiving room off of the entrance hall.

Callum snuck into the servants' walkspace that ran parallel to all the rooms to keep them out of sight most of the time. He and Kat had played hide and seek when they were little in those spaces to the despair of the help and rage of their parents. He tiptoed towards a small hatch on the wall and opened it, revealing a small window. It was actually a two-way mirror in which the servants could peer through so not to walk in on any private affairs. It had always puzzled Callum that it was an easy way for the help to spy on their Masters. Of course if they knew what was good for them they wouldn't even think of it. He pressed a button next to the glass and the sound from the room came through a tiny speaker by his head.

There was Lord Wilcox, dressed in a red suit and white waistcoat, on his lapel he wore a black enamel pin shaped like a wolf's head, the symbol of the NMA. He had a short and neatly trimmed beard and his hair was parted and slicked down to the sides. He looked at Lord Moore for a few minutes in silence before he rose in greeting.

'Lord Wilcox' Lord Moore said in his emotionless voice. 'How good of you to pass this way before Parliament.'

'I felt I had no other choice Lord Moore' Wilcox' voice was rough, like the words that came out of his mouth were sandpaper. A lifetime of Vaping, Callum thought to himself, his grandfather had sounded very similar after a lifetime of nicotine use.

'I was eager to get an update from you before the Security Council presents to the Protectorate and Lord Protector McKenzie' Lord Moore motioned Wilcox to sit and then sat himself. 'How has the mission progressed?'

'Our Agent has made an initial contact with the appropriate people and it has advanced from there. That is all I know at the moment.' Lord Wilcox brought a long silver tube from inside his jacket and lifted it to his mouth.

'Can we trust that these channels that you have used are trustworthy? This may, under no circumstances come back to the Commonwealth.'

'I am well aware of this Sir Oliver' Wilcox blew vapor above his head in just as a sarcastic tone as his speech. 'Can one ever really trust the rudos? Yet I do trust our agent implicitly he is one of the foremost men amongst the Diggers.'

Callum shivered when he heard the name; The Diggers where the secret police of the elite military division that was the New Model Army. Even though their existence was well known they were highly clandestine and if they were on your trail you were in serious trouble. Like most offices in the Commonwealth the name was taken from history, but only applied to the division without much thought to what it meant, mostly because nobody really knew anymore.

'And the witness? Where do we stand there?' Moore enquired.

‘Adil Singh is unfortunately being kept from us’ Wilcox let another puff of nicotine infused vapor escape his lips. ‘According to my sources she is being hidden by her family, maybe somewhere around Luna. Maybe we should put some pressure on her father.’

‘That would not be advisable and you know it. We cannot come into conflict with the Singh’s, they are too powerful and control much of starch industry that this nation has, Mr. Singh is far too unpredictable and him hiding his daughter is a sign of it.’

Wilcox nodded and then picked up his Term; he looked up at Lord Moore and nodded again. The men rose and Callum’s father opened the doors.

‘So then we do know what we are presenting to the Protectorate?’

‘I believe so’ Wilcox let his Term and Vapo vanish into his jacket. ‘The Security Council can stand united in this mission and I will keep the rest of you posted on the development.’

‘Excellent, at least we shall not seem toothless here. Most of us are having our positions tested by The Young Lions, led by that insufferable Lord Griffiths.’

‘Don’t worry Sir Oliver, Griffiths and his faction of cubs will get what’s coming to them soon enough.’

Callum turned off the speaker as the two Lords shut the door behind them. He crossed his arms and furrowed his brow in deep thought. So the Security Council had been charged with finding out what had happened to the children of St. Odo of Canterbury and this had been kept from the public, why? It was even so under the radar that the Protectorate weren’t even part of the initial planning; Diggers were involved, but not quite. Some kind of outside agent, untraceable persons and then there was this Adil Singh, where had he heard that name before. Right, it was that girl from when he was at St. Odo. The one who had messed around with Paddy McIntosh, but left him hanging without explanation, he had been destroyed after that. This was way too interesting to let lie. If he could get a hold of Adil and crack this mystery his father would see what an asset he could be and maybe his mother would get some peace.

He stepped out from the walkspace and lifted his own Term from his vest. He tapped an image and it sent a contact request.

‘What?’ said a drowsy voice on the other end.

‘Ry’ Callum heard the excitement in his voice. ‘Interested in solving a mystery?’