

***The Citadel***  
***Selen***  
***41 ABY***

*Knock knock knock.*

Cole heard a shuffle behind the door, a sudden rush of movement before a scabble of footsteps.

He had no idea why Zuza was in a back corner of the Citadel, why her guards weren't here but he'd heard that she was near and well.. It was as good of a time as any for this conversation. Probably. They'd survived the war, he'd survived his own stupidity no thanks to himself. She deserved this. They'd been at odds for years now.

And if nothing else, during the spar they'd shared in the dead of night on the Voidbreaker weeks before the war he'd almost killed her. That was the real goal here, to at least admit his failures so she knew.

Zuza opened the door, brown eyes going from excited to tense in the matter of a moment. She glanced past him and Cole answered the question he could see forming in her mind.

"I just asked one of the guards down the hall, they saw you come in here this morning. Is this a good time?"

"Yeah. Yeah sure." Zuza still looked uneasy or worried maybe but she stepped aside. He stepped in.

It was barely more than a closet but there were a few chairs and a table.

"Don't you have an office?" Cole found himself asking, looking around at the scantily decorated room. There were some papers scattered around, deactivated holoprojectors and data pads.

"Yeah but these guards keep standing outside it and I dunno, they keep following me around. I just needed to focus on my own."

Did she know they were *her* guards? No. Not worth asking. Cole just shook his head as she leaned on the desk. It took that moment, just trying to gather himself together.

Though, that was hard when she kept looking up at him like that. Wrinkles at the corners of her eyes, meeting his. It wasn't pity. He knew she didn't pity him but she'd always put too much of herself into caring for him. Even all these years later it seemed she hadn't stopped.

“Cole?”

“I wanted to apologise.” She frowned but Cole raised his hand, “No. I overstepped. We agreed to terms for the spar and I broke them. I should have apologised afterwards but- No. I should have apologised already. And I’m sorry. For all of it.”

Zuza stared up at him for a few long moments. He watched her open her mouth a few times before she stepped forward. Despite knowing what was coming, Cole still felt himself tense as her arms wrapped around him. If Zuza noticed she didn’t care to pull away but it gave him the moment he needed to return the hug.

She stepped back, not quite meeting his eye now, “You didn’t need to. You... I shouldn’t have challenged you. You... Ya weren’t doin’ well. Were you?”

Cole shook his head.

So she continued, “I didn’t think so. I’m glad you’re better. Or at least... you are better right?”

Cole was quiet for a long few moments, contemplating the words before slowly raising his shoulders into a shrug, “Better than I was that day? Yes. I’m working on it otherwise. It doesn’t excuse my actions. I.. Well. We know what could have happened.”

Zuza nodded, fidgeting with her fingers. It was suddenly far too quiet.

He looked around the room again, taking more note of the details of the room rather than if there was anyone *in* it. His eyebrows drew together, looking her over once again. The Battleteam leader still seemed thin.

“What.. are you doing in here?”

“Uh- Secret stuff.” Zuza glanced round and suddenly shifted as if hiding most of the papers *now* would make up for them being painfully visible the rest of the time. At least the electronics weren’t turned on or he’d absolutely know more than he should. She swayed slightly in place as she came to a stop. “Paperwork, mostly though. If I stay up in my office, people come by or there’s things outside or I just.. Wanna go. Change of scenery helps? Mostly.”

Cole nodded slowly, “Right.”

“Sometimes. I’ve been trying to focus better, this is important. I’ve been working on this *all* morning.”

“Morning?” The mercenary frowned, glancing toward the clock on the wall. 17:24.  
“Have you eaten yet? Today. Or.. left this room at all?”

Zuza’s hands stopped fidgeting, her gaze turning toward the floor. Whatever this secret stuff was, it wasn’t good for her. She always stopped eating properly when she got stressed.

Cole sighed, trying to not overly react, “Karking suns Zuza. Let’s go.”

She smiled sheepishly. Before long the pair set off to get her very belated breakfast.

It was a step in the right direction for them.