

“Welcome to the Council.”

Erinyes sat in her new office on Arx, staring into the half-full glass of tsiraki in her hand. The only sounds in the mostly-empty room were the humming of the computer terminal and the clinking of ice against the glass.

It had all seemed like a joke—the message from the Grand Master’s office, the ride in the luxurious Kalevalan yacht from Kasiya to Arx, even taking a knee at the throne room in the Dark Ascent. Those had all happened before. They were familiar. Then Dacien said those four words.

“Welcome to the Council.”

*This is your life now*, was what he’d *really* said. This was no quick trip to Arx for a one-off meeting or an excursion to peddle Taldryan-produced wares. There was no scheduled return flight. This was her new job: representing the Brotherhood. Not just as one of its agents, like under Cotelin or as an Envoy, but as one of its leaders and most powerful figures. A diplomat. A visible symbol.

Erinyes sipped from her glass. The fizz of the tonic water against her face and the smell of the Kasiyan spiceberry were comfortingly familiar. The alcohol helped too, of course, though she’d need a lot more of it to really calm her nerves.

She’d never had more than a passing interest in being on the Council. A position like that had its perks, but it was also a huge responsibility. Erinyes wasn’t the type to take on responsibilities lightly, and was more than willing to simply vanish if the burden became too heavy. She’d only stepped up to lead Taldryan because she cared about the Clan—a loyalty she didn’t feel for the Brotherhood at large.

But then she’d gotten the summons from the Grand Master. Not a message, but a *summons*. She’d shown up mainly to try to convince Dacien that appointing her as the Brotherhood’s public face was a goofy idea. In hindsight, she should’ve known better than to try to talk him out of it. The man had been Justicar, after all. He was used to weighing facts and needs, and if he’d concluded that Erinyes was the best person for the job, there was little she could’ve done to sway him. And so, she walked out of that meeting as the Brotherhood’s chief diplomat and publicist.

Then, sitting in her silent new office trying to interrogate the knot in her stomach, another word popped into her mind.

*Politician.*

Erinyes’ upper lip curled in disgust as more words came to mind. *Ass-kisser. Sycophant. Spineless.*

She slammed back the rest of her drink. Politicians were some of the most detestable creatures in the galaxy. Not because of their pursuit of power, but because they spent so much time twisting themselves into knots to gain others’ approval.

Images of another time flashed into her mind. The fawning, the demurring, the suffocation. Calculating every word and action by what would most endear her to a patron. The outward cordialness and inner rage. They were all things she had eagerly left behind when she joined the Brotherhood. The Code of the Sith promised the Force would free her—free her from ever having to give a kark about what anyone else thought again.

And now, with four words, Dacien had thrown those chains back on her.