

Word Count: 2822 Words

Black Apartment

The Pride of Corellia, Port Ol'val

1806 Hours

The Onderonian rubbed his temples, wisps of smoke trailing from smoldering end of the cigarette between his index and the middle finger of his right hand. The weeks following the forged alliance between the Odanites and the Shadow Clan had been somewhat calm, though just as busy as it had been before the battle. The week of leave had helped, though it had been made worse with the amount of work piled on following his return. Strategos had stepped down whilst he was away and returned to members greeting him as 'Lord Quaestor'.

Celevon took a drag off of his cigarette, inhaling deeply as he turned his stare to the ceiling. A plume of smoke shot in that direction as he exhaled, watching it disappear into the air vent. His daughter was spending a few weeks with her grandmother and grandfather, as their five day survivalist trip had renewed the ten year old's adventurous spirit. At Alyssa's urging, the *Shadicar* had undergone a series of tests to answer some questions about his past. It would be even longer than a few weeks to gain answers to her questions, though his contacts in the Dajorra Intelligence Agency would be using his DNA to see if he had any living blood relatives beyond his daughter.

The man who had raised the Quaestor had married Xathia's biological mother several years prior, giving Alyssa grandparents (who happily volunteered to take the girl on outings and take care of her for weeks at a time when she grew bored) an excuse to spend time with her despite the travel.

A faint smile curved the lips of the silver eyed male at the thought of his eclectic 'family'. A soldier turned mercenary (J'akked - his original mentor), a self-exiled Jedi Knight (Sapphyre - Alyssa's maternal grandmother), a fiery Mandalorian Gunslinger (Jade) and a Demolitions Expert who offers sage advice whilst being a tea connoisseur (Thorfinn). And, of course, there was his daughter.

The Prelate had also sent both Jade and Thorfinn on a scouting mission to get the two Fades out of his hair for several nights. The two of them tended towards being overprotective despite him having saved their lives on more than one occasion each. If he were being completely honest and upfront, Celevon would admit that he preferred the rare isolation.

The Onderonian sighed when he realized his cigarette had turned into a long, cylindrical ash. Celevon retrieved another cigarette and lit it when loud knocking came at the door to the apartment. Glancing at the clock with a frown, he stood and exhaled smoke.

No one was supposed to arrive for an hour at the very least.

A slight smile curved his lips as his mercurial gaze fixed upon two of his friends: Atyiru Caesura Entar and Turel Sorenn. Even if he and Turel were currently having relationship issues, he was happy to see the other man. His smile dimmed as he saw the worried expressions on both of their faces, "Please, do come in."

As soon as the Quaestor of Galeres and the Shadow Lady stepped across the doorway, Celevon shut the door behind them. "Is something the matter, my friends?"

"Oh, like you wouldn't believe," Turel sighed, rubbing his temples. "Atty, you explain. Do you happen to have any whiskey on the premises, Cel?"

"Indeed. The shelf above the cooking unit. You will find glasses there as well." Celevon turned his gaze on the Miraluka. "What is the issue? And how did you find me?"

"Well... how we found you was easy. We asked the Summit Guard and heard one of the safehouses was in use. The others who use them normally are still on leave," Atyiru trailed off, looking uncomfortable for a moment before she visibly steeled herself. "We're here because we need your help."

It was then that the Onderonian noticed the bundled blanket within the Consul's arms. Celevon remained frozen in place as she shifted some of the material away with elegant fingers, revealing the face of a Humanoid child. The sight of messy black hair and pale skin forced the Prelate to speak.

"That child isn't mine! I swear, if-"

"Oh, hush. We know the baby isn't yours," the Miraluka scowled in annoyance as Sorenn's loud laughter drifted in from the kitchen. "This is what we need help with... Or, rather, we need help with *him*."

Atyiru moved the toddler in her arms to emphasise the statement, moving subtly enough to not wake the child. The former Knight Commander returned to the main room at that point, still

chuckling. A glass full of ice and whiskey swirled in his hand before he took a sip. “You would think people claim you’re the father of their child fairly often to inspire that reaction, Cel.”

“Shut up, Turel. It’s only happened twice. And only one time was it true.” Before the former Odanite could come up with a response to that, the *Shadicar* focused his attention on the Shadow Lady. “What’s the situation? And why do you need my help?”

“I’ve been in talks with the Heir Apparent of the Shogunate on Eldar-”

“Kichiro? Shogun Hitoshi’s only son?” Ceevon questioned sharply.

“Yes, him... How did you-”

“I was one of the people that made the agreement with Shogun Hitoshi four years ago, which gave Galeres ownership of a large portion of the Sapphire Quarter. It’s also the same agreement that gave us the Eldarian Rangers. Kichiro gave me this in exchange for teaching him the Way of the Blade,” the Onderonian explained, adjusting the hilt of his katana.

“That information would have been useful,” Atyiru muttered under her breath. “Anyway, Hitoshi is terminally ill and will be appointing Kichiro as the new Shogun within a matter of weeks. My talks have been on the subject of continuing, if not expanding Arcona’s alliance with the Shogunate. There was some disagreement-”

“What she is slowly getting to is this: The Arconae decided to take matters into their own hands and kidnap Kichiro’s son-”

“**WHAT?!**”

“Kichiro and Hitoshi have issued a bounty for his retrieval. Our talks have been halted completely. The rival family-” Turel was interrupted by the Miraluka interjecting the name of said rival family.

“The Ochida’s.”

“Yes, them. The Ochida’s have placed a bounty on that brat. They want him dead, since some kind of accident rendered Kichiro sterile two years ago. Basically, if this brat dies, the Feng dynasty ends. Not to mention the fact that the brat’s nanny is rumored to be on the hunt to find him,” Turel explained before draining his glass. “By all accounts, a very deranged Trandoshan female.”

Celevon, completely forgetting about the cigarette that smoldered in the ashtray, quickly lit another. "Give me a minute, please. There should be materials in the pantry to make him something to eat." Without waiting for a response, he walked out of the back door to relax his mind.

Atyiru and Turel shared a look. Within five minutes, the Onderonian returned and saw that the baby still had yet to be fed. The two shared another confused look as Celevon walked directly to the kitchen.

"Thirteen months... thirteen months. Ah, there we go," the *Shadicar* muttered as he grabbed a yellow fruit. A splash of milk and the interior of the fruit was quickly mashed in a bowl. He then grabbed a small spoon and walked back into the room. Celevon quickly noticed the strange looks directed at him. "What? Ryuji needs to eat."

"I... think we're more confused over the fact that you've memorized what to feed a young toddler. I seem to recall you telling me that you didn't know you were a parent when Alyssa was only five or six..."

Sadness was clear in the Prelate's eyes before he wiped all expression clear from his features. "Xathia was six months along with our son when she miscarried during the Crusade. Alyssa doesn't know. Next subject." The Onderonian's tone was brusque, clearly showing he did not want to discuss the matter further.

"Ryuji?" Atyiru questioned after a moment of awkward silence. Turel had a pronounced frown, as Celevon rarely discussed his deceased wife. Even Alyssa never spoke of her mother in fond tones.

"That's the name of the little one in your arms. I visit Kichiro every few months, so I should be able to realign the alliance talks along with returning Ryuji without undue bloodshed. First, I'm going to feed him," the Onderonian explained, taking the slowly-waking child from Atyiru's arms. "Which Arconae was it that kidnapped him?"

"We don't know. Everyone that I asked claimed they had no clue what was going on... In all honesty, this sounds like something Cethgus would have done."

"That would make more sense... I'll phrase it right. Kichiro will be more concerned with the safe return of his son," Celevon replied absently, smiling as cinnamon eyes opened to stare blearily up at him. "Hello there, little dragon. Ouch!" He carefully removed his hair from the grip of the

toddler and put it into a ponytail with one hand. “Nice grip. You must get that from your mother. Your father dropped his sword a lot when I taught him.”

The baby cooed, grabbing at the spoon.

The surprising change in character of the Assassin was thankfully interrupted by a knock on the door, which made the former Knight-Commander jump and reach for the slugthrower at his side.

Celevon gave them a bemused look at the second knock. “One you plan on answering the door? I’m a bit busy here...” To put words to actions, he held up a spoonful of the mashed banana. The baby made happy sounds as the fruit was digested.

Turel relaxed the grip of his firearm and swung the door open as the third knock began. He surreptitiously glanced left and right before focusing on the petite female. The skin, hair and eyes told him she was a Zeltron. “May I help you, Miss?”

“Uh... yeah. Is Romulus here by chance? Koekie needs him for something.”

Concealing his confusion, the Galerian Quaestor quickly replied. “Sorry. You just missed him. Shall I inform him you stopped by?”

“Damn. Uh, no. That won’t be necessary. I’ll just... let Koekie know to try to find him later. Thanks.” With that, the female walked away.

With an even deeper frown, Turel shut the door and turned to face his lover. “So... we have a fight and you shack up with a Zeltron? She’s pretty, if a bit young. I’m guessing you’re ‘Romulus’?”

Atyiru sighed, clearly debating if grabbing a drink was worth it.

“What? That was Jhera? I’m not sleeping with her. Never have, despite her efforts otherwise. She’s K’tana’s second in command. K’tana uses the alias Koekie to run one of the lesser gangs here. Romulus is one of the cover aliases I created,” Celevon explained, burying his annoyance deep within himself.

“Then how does she know exactly where to find you when none of us had a clue?”

The Onderonian withheld a sigh as he fed the baby the last spoonful of the mashed banana. Really, the former Knight-Commander had some serious jealousy issues that the Prelate could

not understand - they had agreed to an open relationship in the beginning, after all. "This apartment is part of my cover. Romulus uses this apartment as a meeting place; no one knows where he actually lives."

"And just what does Romulus do for these gangs?" Atyiru asked curiously, having previously avoided the twisted system used to run Port Ol'val.

"Mostly blackmarket goods. Unregistered firearms, various weapons. He makes contact with spice runners and things of that nature. This district of Ol'val was a heavy source of Red Eye before it became a problem," Celevon shrugged. "Now, if you will excuse me. I'm going to make a call to arrange this little one's return."

With that said, the Onderonian picked up the toddler and walked off to the other room. The Miraluka waited until Celevon was out of hearing range before turning to the former Gangster.

"I take it the two of you are fighting?"

Turel growled under his breath. "The man is frustrating to no end. We agreed to an open relationship in the beginning yes... but he doesn't understand the concept of monogamy whatsoever. Apparently, when he and Xathia were married, they always had separate partners or brought another into their bed. I also dislike the fact that he's so secretive about everything... I swear, getting him to give a thorough answer is like pulling teeth."

"So... that would explain the argument I overheard where you claimed he had commitment issues. As for the secrecy... to be fair, consider his line of work. He's been doing wet work for the past twelve years. From what I understand, his paranoia at the thought of betrayal has only increased in those years."

"I know. It's just frustrating."

"It also doesn't help matters when you accuse him of sleeping with someone who comes to the door for a meeting," the Consul gently reproached. "Yes, he's promiscuous. Constantly fighting him on the subject is not going to convince him to agree; you're only going to wind up pushing him away. You have to accept that he doesn't believe in monogamy and discuss the subject at length. All I'm saying here: Accept him for who he is. If you want him to change himself to what you want, you're dooming yourself to disappointment and the relationship itself will have been a waste of time."

"How did you get so wise? I can't get him to speak as openly with me as he does with you..."

“That’s simple. I don’t judge him based on the mistakes of his past, just as he does the same with me. Note how neither of us said a single bad thing about you after he drug you home from that alley in Nar Shaddaa. You had so much spice and other recreational drugs in your system that we had to wait for it to flush out so I could treat you. Both Celevon and I reached that low point and came back from it.”

“He never told me that... What was he addicted to?”

“A psychoactive plant that grows wild on Dxun and Onderon. It’s leaves can be dried and smoked or eaten,” Celevon explained as he walked back into the room, bouncing Ryujin on his hip. “It serves to heighten your mood, induce relaxation and works as an appetite stimulant. However, the side-effects are a decrease in short-term memory, impaired motor skills, dry mouth and heightened feelings of anxiety or paranoia. It also makes the whites of your eyes turn red... It can and does dehydrate you.”

“I think I tried that right before you found me...” Turel murmured.

“You did. I could smell it on your clothes. You can probably smell it on me right now. I keep a stash for use in case of emergencies. I’m no longer addicted or dependant upon the substance.”

“How did the call go?” Atyiru asked, abruptly changing the subject.

“Kichiru is willing to reopen the talks with you as soon as Ryujin is safely returned. He is much more relaxed now that I’ve explained that a Rogue aspect of our Clan was behind the kidnapping of his son. I highly suggest we take care of this immediately. Everything else can wait. Jade and Thorfinn are on their way to the Spaceport, and I suggest we make our way there.”

“Don’t you two need to talk?” the Miraluka questioned gently.

“No. There’s nothing to discuss, especially until he apologizes for attempting to bring my daughter into the argument on why I need to settle down. I’m guessing that was never brought up in the reason why the fight ended with me kicking him out?”

“No... He never mentioned that part,” Atyiru slowly replied, her eyebrows showing a definite glare as she turned towards Turel.

The former Gangster winced. “Let’s get this brat returned so we can go back to our lives.”

“I’m glad you agree,” Celevon commented in an aloof manner before smiling down at the toddler in his arms, bouncing Ryujin. “Want to go for a fly, little dragon?”

The baby squealed, which caused Turel to cover his ears.

“Why do you call him ‘little dragon?’” the Consul asked in a curious manner as they shut the door behind them, walking towards the Port.

“Ryujin is the deity in their beliefs that acts as their god of the oceans. He is depicted in art as a dragon that can take on Human form,” Celevon explained absently as he once again tried to free his hair from the child’s grasp. “The shrine in front of the Palace on Eldar, the blue dragon. That’s Ryujin. From what I understand, the name literally translates to ‘Dragon God’ in their tongue.”

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