

Seeing Double

Marick Arconae

#10214

Towering twin doors of old, carved oak opened into an ornately decorated central ballroom that could probably have held up to a hundred guests. The Governor-General's estate had spared no expense in its grandiose design. Then again, it was not very original either. The colors were vibrant, and screamed for attention; rich shades of burgundy carpets with with crimson tapestries trimmed with silver and gold tassels. The decor looked to have been taken out of a generic holonet catalogue. I was willing to give the designer the benefit of the doubt with knowing more things about fashionable estate design than I did. Those were just the surface details that passed through my attention.

On each end of the ballroom, a wide and winding set of stairs rose up towards the mezzanine. The sun shone through a long stretch of a transparisteel window on the far side of the mezzanine, the natural light casting casual shadows around the mansion. Every corner, ventilation shaft, fire escape: noted. The emergency alarm system, the position of each security camera and their rotations: noted.

These were the details I committed to memory as I followed the Governor-General and listened with half an ear to the man explaining how the supply routes were back to normal after the events that transpired prior to the Great Jedi War.

It was not a hard act to follow. I had had these conversations many times as Shadow Lord. The real struggle, for my all my talents in the art of subterfuge, was dealing with the particular disguise I had chosen.

"Wouldn't you agree, Shadow Lady?"

Years of training as an Assassin nudged me to respond as I painfully became aware of needing to answer to that title. I felt a small part of my dignity die that day.

The things we do for love.

"Oh yes, I certainly agree!" I said excitedly, pitching my voice two octaves higher as if my vocal cords were bouncing on their toes. I forced myself to flash a smile, bobbed my head, the long braid of my stark-white wig swaying as the rest of my disguise held true.

~ I do not sound like that!~ I remember Atyiru's voice cutting in through the ear-piece communicator I was wearing.

~ Well, I mean...maybe just a little bit~ A second voice, male and laced with sass chimed in. It was good having Turel back.

"I should dare say, my lady, that you do seem taller than I last recall," the Governor-General said in passing as he led us up the stairs to continue the tour.

"Shhh," I whispered in conspiratorial tone. "It's the heels!" I let my teeth show as I beamed a smile and wiggled one of my feet. Of course, I wasn't wearing heels. I was wearing flat-bottom shoes and was projecting the image of high-platform boots with a stiletto heel.

When I had told Atyiru I'd do anything protect her, this honestly had never crossed my mind.

The female variation of the Invicta robes were easy enough to adjust to since they were nearly identical to my own. With the exception of the breastplate. Which had actual breast on it. I pushed the depressing thought into the deeper part of my mind and focused. The fabric clung as close to my figure as possible, which was not an issue as I'm not overly bulky. I still had to warp my image to match Atyiru's lithe frame.

As the Governor-General continued to speak, I noticed something change in the air. The security cameras started to pan away from the corridor we were about to enter. The guards that had been at rapt attention moments before each found an excuse to look the other way. One started checking messages on his datapad, and the other went to inspect the orientation of one of the many paintings.

My muscles tensed. I coiled the Force within me and smothered it, masking my signature as best as possible from that of an Elder.

The Assassin was hoping for a clean, quick kill. Silent as a shadow, he materialized into semi-translucent view, slashing with a slender blade at my neckline.

Atyiru could have easily sensed the attack. The pacifist was a better fighter than many gave her credit for. The point here was not to simply thwart the attack, though.

I leaned away from the swinging blade at the last possible moment. I could feel the *swish* of air as it missed my jugular by a hair's breadth. Instinct took control as my body reacted, left hand reaching out to grab hold of the Assassin's wrist as my right hand jabbed into the back of his elbow. The sickening sound of bone cracking was accompanied by a surprised shriek of agony as the joint hyperextended in the wrong direction and *popped*. In the same flowing motion, I rode the Assassin down to the ground, face first. I kept control of his fractured arm and pinned it behind his back as I leaned my knee between his shoulder blades.

"Threat neutralized," I said outloud.

The Governor-General was staring at me, his jaw hanging low and eyes wide and round. Realizing I was still maintaining my disguise, I flashed him a friendly grin and flicked my head to let my long white-hair rest over the opposite shoulder.

~ You were recording that, right?~

~ Duh.~

I sighed mentally.