**“Guilty Pleasure”**

By Braecen Kaeth (4520)

*Strands of Fate: Can’t Wait To Get A Mouthful*

**The Citadel**

**Dajorra System**

He snuck from the mess hall with alarming speed. His feet touching down in rapid succession as he sprinted from the kitchen back towards his quarters. He stretched his sphere of responsibility out in the Force and sought potential hazards; he sensed that his quickest path was blocked by a group of Journeymen. He cursed under his breath and redirected towards a path with only one person between him and his moment of realized glory.

As he passed through the halls of The Citadel, he couldn’t help but wonder what would happen if someone of import – Atyiru, Arcia, or Sashar – were to come across him. They would probably think no less of him, but it would eventually make its way into mainstream Arcona comedy. Much like Kordath’s misadventure in Arcia’s bed, it would all be laid bare. He shuddered at the thought of the Ryn in Arcia’s clutches. *Poor guy,* he thought.

He angled left, then right, before pausing behind an alcove to let a droid pass by. He had to hurry. Time was of import. It would be so much easier to hide until the individual passed him by, but he could sense that the individual he would pass on route to his quarters was moving slowly, deliberately. He would have no choice but to attempt duplicity, discretion, or threaten the individual’s life. It was his problem alone to work out. No one else need know of it.

As Braecen turned the corner he froze. Before him stood the Neti, Ood Bnar. The Adept raised a hand in greeting, but the tree did not reciprocate. Cautiously, he moved towards the Praetor. Each footfall done with care as to not alert the other of his approach. As he neared, he could hear the faint sound of snoring. Braecen sighed with relief. His secret would be spared, but only if he could navigate around the slumbering hardwood.

He paused only for a moment to consider the best course of action. He could not sneak behind the tree – there simply was not enough space in the corridor to accommodate such a path. He would have to attempt to saddle through by the front of the tree. He moved in that direction, his progress paused only whenever the tree rustled or swayed. With extreme prejudice, he placed his feet on certain spots on the floor to avoid brushing against the tree.

He was halfway when the Neti sneezed. Scaring himself awake, Ood lurched backwards before opening his eyes widely. He was confused, disoriented, and distraught with all that had happened in such a short period of time for his sense to process. “Braecen?” he inquired. The Adept froze. The Neti’s eyes grew wider. “Ice cream?” The Adept turned red with embarrassment. “You are the ice cream thief that Atyiru has been searching for?”

Cursing, Braecen pointed at the Neti. “Listen here, tree, I know about it all. Now you know my secrets and I know yours. Let us make a gentlemen’s pact to keep one another’s secrets.”

Ood was caught off-guard. No one knew about how he had been making seedlings lately. Or so he thought. Braecen watched as the Neti processed the offer and his own bewilderment in a micro-second. Unsure, but unwilling to bet on it, he agreed.

“Done.”

“Deal.”

“But…”

“Yes, Ood?”

“Why do you need all five tubs of ice cream?”

“Stop judging me!” Braecen screamed before he bolted for his quarters.

Ood blinked several times in rapid succession. “I really have to stop leaving the Shadow Academy to visit the Clan.”