

Atra Ventus #11708
Don't I Know You Entry

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Hope and Reality



The Arconan Citadel was far larger than the reports would have one believe. Then again, how much stock could one put into words on a screen? There was so much to be lost in the translation, leaving only a vague representation of the truth. That truth stared the delegates from the Dark Council in the face as the sheer sense of scale pressed in upon them. Of all the possible meeting places, the Citadel would have been the one most deserving of the intended soiree. There would be no party, however, as the realities of the Brotherhood didn't always cooperate. Instead, a more personal meeting had been arranged.

Three cloaked forms made their way into the main hall, flanked on all sides by guards. The woman in the lead of the trio had her hood lowered, allowing her red velvet locks to flow freely down to the small of her back. Her bangs fell heavily across her face, shrouding the right side entirely while contrasting her near porcelain flesh. What remained visible could be referred to as regal, if not for the perpetual glare creasing the skin around her forehead and eyes. Her crystalline blue gaze was shrouded by a smoky black accent while dark crimson stained her lips. The rest of her form remained hidden beneath her cloak, save for her thigh-high boots slipping out from the folds with each echoing step.

The woman's companions stood like giants behind her, remaining hidden beneath their hoods and masks. The pair made up her security detail, having been allowed their light weaponry as a show of good faith. The masks mattered little to the members of the Brotherhood with the ways of the Force rendering such objects moot in the grand scheme of things. Even with their faces hidden, their intentions would be clear.

"My Lady," the guard at the front spoke clearly, bringing the small group to a stop at the Shadow Throne, "may I present the envoy from the Dark Council."

The Arconan Consul, Atyiru, shifted her weight upon the throne and crossed one tanned leg across the other. Her white and turquoise clothing, with its gold trim, provided a stark contrast to the darkness that surrounded her. No wonder she was so often referred to as a beacon of light within the darkness. Her silvery hair was twisted into a ponytail that fell almost to the floor, impossibly long even contained as it was. A smile was clear upon her lips and she nodded in response to the man who spoke. Her blindfolded gaze seemed to look towards the source of the sound, rather than directly at the guard himself. "Thank you," she responded warmly — and genuinely.

The Miraluka turned her head towards the delegate, her pointed ears that betrayed her mixed heritage seeming to twitch ever so slightly while the other woman shifted from foot to foot. "What fortune is it that has brought you to my door..." Atyiru's voice trailed off with the question incomplete, prompting the other for her name.

"We have a matter to discuss, Consul," the envoy stated flatly. There was a tinge of a growl to her words, as if the red-haired woman were on edge. "One ill-suited to an audience."

The Shadow Lady's smile faltered ever so slightly, a tinge of disappointment in response to the obvious rudeness on display. There was a heavy pause between the women while the envoy attempted to maintain what 'eye contact' she could with the sightless Consul — even while the way Atyiru appeared to be looking *through* her unsettled the Human. Atyiru's shoulders shifted with a silent sigh before she acquiesced. "Leave us please," the Consul declared to the assembled guards.

Too well trained to question a direct command, especially one worded so pleasantly, the Arconan guards gave a salute of acknowledgement and filed out of sight. The Council's envoy waited several breaths as she glanced around to make sure they were truly alone. "Now then," she began, "this is what's going to—"

The Arconan Consul's hand rose to interrupt the other woman mid-sentence. Her head tilted curiously to the side as her smile took on a somewhat amused quality. "I think that's quite enough of that now," Atyiru remarked. "Your manners aside, I'd much rather speak to the actual envoy. Wouldn't you agree?"

A flash of anger emanated from the envoy, her visible eye widening in momentary shock before it narrowed with rage. "How dare you?!" she shouted as she crouched into an aggressive stance. The envoy's cloak billowed out as her right arm was raised, sparks of Force energy surging dangerously between her raised fingertips. The woman's lips were curled into a sneer that nearly ruined the pale beauty of her features with its ugly nature.

The tallest of the guards reached out with a black-gloved hand and placed it on the envoy's shoulder. "Control yourself, Adalinde," he stated with a calm yet commanding voice.

The woman snapped her head around to glare at the masked man, as if ready to lash out at him instead. She wasn't so lost to the anger, however, that logic failed her. Taking a deep breath in through her flaring nostrils, Adalinde quieted her anger once more and bowed her head ever so slightly before pushing his hand from its resting place. "This was not the plan," she hissed quietly.

"Is it ever?" he replied with his words lilting ever so slightly but still noticeably. "Go."

Adalinde's emotions bristled but she didn't say anything further, though she cast a nasty glare towards the Shadow Lady before marching past the other guard and making her way back the way they had come with the guard in tow. Her boots spoke what she didn't place into words, as they clacked harshly against the floor with what could only be described as angry steps. As the pair left, the remaining guard turned towards where Atyiru was still sitting — and smiling. He reached up towards his hood with one gloved hand and one that was completely bare, pushing back the fabric to reveal messy black hair tied into a loose ponytail. With his gloved hand, the man grabbed his mask and pulled it free.

The man let the mask fall to the ground as his gold-flaked grey eyes stared towards the Shadow Lady. His tightly trimmed black beard framed his face without gracing his upper lip. His

skin wasn't the deathly pallor one would expect of an Umbaran, but closer to the Human side of the color spectrum. "Hello, Atra," the Consul stated cheerily as she pressed her chin against her clasped hands.

"Atyiru," the Praetor to the Voice responded with a nod and a complete disregard for title. It was just the way of things for the genetically altered Umbaran, and luckily it didn't bother the Arconan Consul. The greeting formed about the sum of their familiarity. Atyiru knew Atra through his official role amongst Marick's staff at the Combat Center, but only at a superficial level. Likewise, the ex-Sadowan knew her by reputation only.

With a sudden burst of energy, Atyiru hopped from the throne and danced towards the true envoy with her arms clasped behind her back. The distance between them quickly closed towards what would be considered an invasion of personal space if not for the notable difference in their heights. "What's this all about then?" she asked with her smile still firmly in place.

"You know quite well, I think," Atra responded evenly. His eyes followed her movements — as Atyiru was rarely still now that she was in motion — but never bothered to seek eye contact with her sightless visage. Not like she could reciprocate it.

"Hm," the Consul mused with a fingertip pressed to her bottom lip, "I can't say that I do!"

"The rumors of your clan's involvement with the Resistance."

She paused with her back to him. "Right... those." Atyiru gave a short laugh as she turned to face the Praetor again before continuing. "You may not have noticed," she began while raising a hand to wave in front of her face, "I'm a bit of an 'Undesirable' myself. So why would I bring further risk to this clan by defying the Dark Council?"

"Here I thought the whole 'blindfold' thing was just for show," Atra replied dryly with his arms folded across his chest. "The 'why' is what I want to know."

"Are you here to torture me, Inquisitor?"

Atyiru's response was sudden and sharp. Neither spoke for a time as Atyiru's words were processed. They were carefully chosen, and held a level of subtext that had to be granted its due respect. Finally, Atra broke the silence with a faint sigh. "I'm not here on orders," the Praetor stated. "Is there somewhere we could sit... talk?"

The Shadow Lady measured the looming Umbaran carefully. She had nothing but faith to trust him on, and far too many reasons not to. With a single command she could have him removed from her presence and a measure of safety returned to the day, or even a threat removed entirely through a command she would rather not give. However, no option save cooperation would bring about a favorable outcome. Besides... she might learn something of value in the exchange. "We can speak in my office then." The Miraluka motioned for Atra to follow before making her way towards a side entrance in the throne room.

As he followed, Atra was struck by the most peculiar sense. He watched Atyiru moving through the dark halls of the Arconan Citadel, a living and breathing counter-balance to those who had preceded her. She exuded light, where only darkness had previously held sway. It was a point driven further home by just how much Arcona had changed under her care. His grey-gold eyes shifted to his gloved hand, curling his prosthetic fist into a tight black ball. The Praetor knew his own reality to be something quite different.

"After you!" The Consul's sing-song voice broke Atra from his thoughts. She motioned again towards the open door leading into her office. The Praetor took a deep breath, cementing his sense of control over his own being, then entered the room.

There are those who would say that one could learn much about a person simply by looking around the spaces in which they spent their time. Atra had no need for such conjecture, and merely maintained focus upon the desk and chairs at the focal point of the room. He stood next to what he assumed would be his seat, shifting his gaze to watch as the Consul followed behind him. Atyiru's hand waved slightly as she passed through the opening. The door responded by shutting prematurely, spurred on by an unseen force. She almost skipped over to her chair on the opposite side of the desk, glancing in the general direction of the Praetor before taking her seat. Atra mirrored the motion by settling into his own seat.

"You ask a... difficult question, Atra," Atyiru spoke with a softness that seemed at odds with her ever-present smile. Her gloved fingers slipped together as she pressed them forward against the desk and tapped the first knuckle on her index finger idly. "So I'm going to ask you something first. What do you hope to gain here?"

Atra straightened a touch within his seat, shifting his weight to the side and resting his chin against his hand. His eyes glanced away from the Consul as he was momentarily unable to meet her gaze, despite there not being one to meet. "I want to know if you see it." His lilting words were muttered and barely audible, but the subtle faltering of Atyiru's curved lips belied their reception. Conviction broke through Atra's otherwise perfectly still features in an instant that shattered his emotionless visage. His eyebrows narrowed while his grey-gold eyes fixed on the point where the Miraluka's eyes would have been. "You stand in a sea of shadows waiting with a smile for the daggers to fall," he intoned.

Atyiru tilted her head to the side, offering the Praetor's words the silent respect their weight demanded. Her chest rose softly before a long breath slipped past her barely parted lips. "Yes," the Consul replied. "I see it."

"And yet you do not falter?" he asked.

"Of course not!" Atyiru exclaimed, pressing her hands quickly to her chest and leaning forward intently. "How could I afford to?"

"Then you are foolish."

"No," she replied with a shake of her head, leaning back against her chair. "This is what is needed of me."

"That's what I don't understand." Atra sighed, shifting again in his seat. He searched her face for some sort of tell. Any crack in her armor he could cling to and peel away to show her his truth. "This Brotherhood cannot be swayed by the light of one *foolish* girl."

"Is it foolish to stand high and uphold the convictions that define you? To see so much hurt, such sorrow and darkness, and hope to be the one to mend it?"

"It will consume you if you try."

"That may be so, but I'll know that I tried!" Atyiru sighed again before continuing with a low voice. "They are all so broken, in need of balance even if it is forced upon them. So I do what I must. I show them the smiles they've forgotten. The laughter they can no longer hear. All the gatherings, the light I thrust upon them, are all the parts of themselves that they've lost!"

"Your light blinds you to their nature," the Praetor replied and slouched down slightly. "The very power they wield is the source of their imbalance."

"What would you do then, since your eyes aren't blind?"

"I'd kill them all."

A pregnant pause filled the air between the two. Their viewpoints couldn't be further apart, yet unknowingly aimed towards the same goal. Where one saw futility, the other saw potential. The unchanging march of the mighty against the indomitable power of the spirit.

"All they know is their own power and it intoxicates them without question. They use it as a crutch to bend others to benefit their own desires," Atra growled quietly. "They perpetuate abuse, like a plague, and it consumes them and all they touch."

The Praetor's gaze had dropped once more, lost in his own thoughts and the silent echo of his inner torment. Words danced on his tongue and spun like a hurricane in his mind that he couldn't manage to quiet. When his face turned up once more he found Atyiru all but leaning across the desk with her eyeless stare looking through him with a curious expression. "So that's it," she stated quietly. The Consul moved back into her seat and murmured under her breath. "How do you stand it?"

"I don't," he replied flatly to her half question. "There will be no peace so long as this power exists."

"Then change those who wield it," Atyiru countered.

"They won't change."

"That's why you need to **be** that change!"

Atra rose to his feet and growled, another crack in his facade. "What I *am* is what is *needed*." He raised his gloved hand like a claw towards his face, staring down at it. "I face the ugly truth that hides in both the light and the dark."

"Do you hate yourself so much?" the Miraluka asked.

The question gave the Praetor pause once more, sucking the air from his lungs and drawing him back into his icy core. It seemed so innocuous, yet poignant all the same. He knew the answer without having to think. It greeted him in the mirror every morning. Atra couldn't run from it anymore than he could flee the flow of time. Yet he continued to push it back, away from his thoughts. He knew exactly what he was and the dark path he had no other choice but to walk. The Umbaran spun about and stalked towards the door to the room, pausing for a moment as he reached for the control panel. He had requested the meeting, and Atyiru had been more agreeable than he could have expected going into it. She deserved at least a measure of the truth.

"With everything I am," Atra stated quietly before slipping out of sight.

The Arconan Consul watched him leave, remaining stationary at her desk. A bead of sweat dripped across her brow as a lone testament to the intensity of their exchange. The previously unnoticed stress seemed to sap the strength from her muscles and caused her to sink low into her chair. "Well I don't," she replied to the empty room.

The Brotherhood was an unforgiving place, especially towards the most minor of missteps. With a measure of luck their conversation would not be counted among those, for both their sakes.

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