Corvus listened intently as she proposed her offer. A’dartia expected at least some reaction, but he gave nothing away. She was even more surprised when he accepted.

She had learned little about the Aleena Jedi - she had been recommended other, more well-known names. And yet she had only heard Corvus’ name once, softly muttered with respect from one of his brethren. His lack of reknown indicated that he was either incompetent, unassuming, or quietly effective. A’dartia had attended enough balls to be able to competently read people. She had watched, and been at the heart of, some of the greatest court intrigues this century. Corvus wasn’t a fool, or a lackwit. His eyes hid a sharp intellect, and his manners made him that much more suited to the job.

*Yes,* she thought to herself. *He will do nicely.*

‘Good, good,’ she said to him. ‘I am meeting with the Lord tomorrow night. Meet me here at precisely 5 o’clock.’ She turned to leave.

Corvus stood from the piles of books that had been his makeshift-seat. ‘Excuse me, Lady Etlina. You haven’t told me how I must retrieve the deed.’

She glanced back at him, ‘I leave that to your expert opinion. I will be attempting to negotiate either way, so do as you wish. But remember: I want my deed back.’

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Lord Yalisti Keldra’s dining hall was immense, lavishly decorated, and spoke of a certain level of materialism Corvus was uncomfortable with. Portraits and tapestries lined his walls, grand marble pillars lining the hall. A’dartia was not the sole invitee, neither. Keldra had saw fit to make the negotiation into a secondary objective of the evening: he’d decided to have a party. From her expression, his employer didn’t appreciate the gesture.

At least fifty well-dressed individuals graced the Lord’s hall. The younger one’s had frills and plumped sleeves, and high collars, whilst others wore a long and flowing gowns and tunics. All were of rich, deep colour.

What Corvus had noticed most, however, was the line of armed guards they walked past to get in. No weapons were allowed in - standard negotiation procedure, but Corvus had other methods. Stealing the deed would be risky - escape questionable, and Lord Keldra would immediately know who to blame. Negotiation it would have to be.

A’dartia put on an emotionless mask, and started schmoozing her way forward. She drifted from group to group, making introductions and putting on fake smiles. Despite the slow pace, Corvus got the feeling that A’dartia was rushing forward to speak with Keldra. He then got the distinct feeling that events like this could be terribly slow. Eventually, she made it to Keldra and his admirers. As she approached, wearing a slight frown, the other nobles surrounding the Lord started making their excuses and drifting away, until the two were alone.

‘My lord, thank you for accepting us into your household,’ she said. ‘But I suggest that we begin our negotiations soon.’

Keldra grinned a fake smile, ‘Of course, my Lady. But, this ball was called to celebrate the dealings between our Houses - at least let us celebrate first. But before that, please introduce me to your friend here.’

They both turned toward Corvus. He stepped forward, ‘Lord Keldra, I am Corvus Corax, emissary of Clan Odan-Urr. I hope to both witness and ease the dealings of the deed.’

His stiff grin relaxed, seeming to become genuine. ‘Welcome, Corvus, to my humble abode! I’d like to speak to you about your Clan.’ His eyes tightened slightly around the edges, as if hoping that Corvus grasped his meaning. He would have to speak to the Lord, if only to discern his true meaning.

Keldra turned back to A’dartia, ‘My lady, how are your stock doing?’

As the conversation drifted to mere small-talk, Corvus felt that he was free to wander. He wandered the hall, and managed to attract a number of nobles who were curious about the newcomers. He answered their questions with direct, true answers. He had no desire to begin any intrigue.

By the time dinner was announced, he had drifted towards the kitchen door. He took his chance and slipped through behind one of the servants. The servant glanced behind him, but didn’t stop. ‘Sir, you should be in the great hall.’

Corvus smiled as he followed, ‘Ah, but I am no Lord. I am but a Clansman, not worthy of such aristocracy. I am the guest of Lady A’dartia, but she has given me leave to eat where I am most comfortable.’

The servant nodded rigidly, ‘Okay, sir. The servants eat in the guards’ room. It’s that way.’

Corvus followed and entered into the room. He grabbed a chunk of bread, cut himself a knob of cheese, and took a bowl of broth. Sitting down alongside guards, he started talking. If there was something that Corvus knew from experience, the guards’ room is the hive of rumour and gossip. This one was no exception. He learned who was promiscuous, who was rumoured to have been bedded by who, and some juicy tidbits about the credibility of Lord Fourhorn’s heir. But none would speak against Lord Keldra, and it was out of loyalty and respect, rather than fear. Despite his lavishly decorated hall and seemingly materialistic mindset, Keldra had the respect of his servants and a genuine interest in Odan-Urr. There was some deception here - some inconsistency in Keldra’s public and private image. But it didn’t seem suspicious - merely intriguing.

As he rose to return to the hall, a young maiden entered, clad simply in a leather tunic and woollen shirt. It resembled closely the native attire of the Quorahi city-states. And yet, she had the respect of the room.

‘Master Corax,’ she said. ‘Please, my husband wishes to see you now.’

The Aleena stood and followed, already thinking he knew the identity of her husband.

She led him through a long corridor then up some stairs. After entering through some plain wooden doors, she revealed the truly modest study of Lord Keldra.

He was gestured to sit down before the plain desk, both the Lord and his wife waiting for Corvus to speak.

‘Why the deception?’ he said.

‘The Quorahi are a controversial people. Modern society would not take well by me taking one as my wife. It is still expected that marriage is a political and strategic alliance. Half the party-goers downstairs are bachelors vying for my favour. A’dartia is one of those that I’ve seen consorting closely. If I negotiate with her alone, I’ll be suspected of courting her. Our vast age differences would be quite the scandal.’

‘If you’ve worked closely with her in the past, why do you have her deed?’

‘We had a falling out. I only have the deed as a mistake, really - I wanted to buy a lot of things and appear materialistic for my facade, but didn’t pay all that much attention.’

‘So you’ll be willing just to return it?’

‘Of course not. I’m not a fool. She’s worried about it, which means it’s important. Can you tell me why you’re here?’

Corvus took the change in subject in his stride, ‘Lady A’dartia wants to learn more of our Clan, so that she may make an informed decision in the vote.’

‘Lady A’dartia prefers to witness an action rather than talk with words. You’re here to do something, not purge her ignorance.’

‘Perhaps. But, I assure you, my small stature is no opposition to your guards. They seem quite the intimidating folk. If anything, my role here would be to facilitate just negotiations.’

‘You’re hired to get the deed back?’

‘I am an emissary, not some common sell-sword!’ Corvus appeared to take offense, uncomfortable at how accurate Keldra’s thoughts were. ‘If you think that Clan Odan-Urr is just another faction of mercenaries, please think again!’

Keldra obviously thought that Corvus was being sincerely angry, ‘Please, I think nothing of the sort! None were more encaptured in tales of Jedi than I. Throughout my childhood, I listened to scores of stories of just and valiant Jedi. But please, I am intrigued by your appearance here today? Why have you graced us with your presence?’

The Aleena decided to continue his simply affronted facade, ‘So you think that we’re chivalrous knights of fairy tales? Sir, we are complex - we are as chivalrous as we are all Jedi. We are merely a group of people who plead asylum. Ignorance breeds fear, and fear brings hatred. As lovely as they are, sir, your childhood tales hurt our cause. Unfortunately, we hardly reach the standards of the Jedi Order. But we still stand for the same thing. We still stand for rightful justice, but for those whom we disappoint with some of our more questionable members, we lose support. At this point, we ask for refuge, not for rightful peacekeeping. We are battered and we are broken. I come to develop connections, to build support for a sodden nation. We appeal to the Empire, and the Quorahi. I am here to meet you. I am here to say ‘We can benefit you. But please give us a chance to rebuild first.’ Please, I *am* here to help Lady A’dartia, but I am also here to make friends.’

Corvus stopped. The Lord and his wife both seemed to be digesting his diatribe. ‘I’m sorry.’ the Jedi conceded. ‘I go too far. It seems I have some build-up tension I forgot about.’

The Lord gave a slight nod, ‘No, you are right. I don’t truly know your Clan. But I would be glad to learn. Please, accept a formal invitation to teach me of your culture. Before the vote, that is.’

‘Gladly. Have you spoken with Lady A’dartia about her deed?’

‘Not yet. Shall we begin negotiations?’

‘Let’s.’

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Lady A’dartia took her place, taking in the fact that Keldra now showed some respect to the small Jedi seated opposite him.

‘I want my deed, Keldra.’

‘Can you give me what I want?’

‘You paid at auction for something that was stolen from me. That’s little better than buying contraband on the black market. I will pay 10% of what you paid, as a donation because of the inconvenience.’

‘How thoughtful,’ Keldra’s voice dripped with sarcasm. ‘And where is my benefit in this?’

Corvus butted in, ‘Perhaps we should not be asking about our own benefits, but take a compromise, and risk a rebuke. You’re going to have to trust one another, but perhaps if you both gain and you both offer something, it will do some good?’

And so the negotiations continued. They continued to argue and bargain, with nearly no resolution. To both of their chagrin, a deal was struck. Both gave and both received. Corvus judged it fair. A’dartia would receive her deed and a 2% share in Keldra’s profits, and Keldra would receive 75% of the auction price of the deed, and 10% of the profits that the deed led to.

As the Aleena left the Manor, he was called over by Keldra’s wife.

‘Thank you for what you said in there. I think he really will listen to you. You seem quite the odd man, if you mind my saying. You have earned respect from both nobles and servants. You have my curiosity. Treat it well, and it may benefit you in the future.’

She left then.

*What an odd and eventful evening,* Corvus thought to himself.