

There Can Be Only One

“Ahh, today is so *nice!*” the bubbly Zeltron girl said, throwing a little skip into her step to punctuate the observation. “C’mon Riqa! Where’s your spirit? The sun is shining, the birds are singing, there’s music in the air...!”

“Yeah yeah, keep your shorts on,” Qyreia said with amiably-feigned annoyance.

“You *sure* that’s what you want?” the taller girl replied with a wink.

“*Reia,*” the shorter of the pair chided, “need I remind you that not only am I dating Berren, but we are in *public?*”

“Oh, I don’t think he’d mind,” Reia said, stepping closer to put an arm around her companion’s waist. “I know *I* wouldn’t.”

You’re going to drive me mad, I swear, Qyreia thought as they made their way toward the local shopping center. Just as her friend said though, it was a beautiful day: clear skies, hardly a cloud in the sky, and just enough of a breeze to stay comfortable under the late morning sun. More importantly though, there was no more school for almost a week. No more exams, no more early wakeups, and no more drama – at least for a little while. That last part alone was enough to put the young Arronen’s mind at ease.

Unless Reia had her way, of course. She was lanky, standing a full head taller than Qyreia, with brilliant azure hair cut short at the chin that she liked to toss about when she walked or was goofing around. Dressed in a tank top and loose shorts, she was prepared for the weather, not that the world’s heat ever became truly unbearable. The young woman was also Qyreia’s first real kiss – among other things – some two years prior, and had never quite let the flames settle between them despite the waxing and waning of relationships with others. The “thrill of Zeltros” as some liked to call it – the constant state of passion that the planet’s inhabitants always sought. Considering that Reia was her oldest and closest friend, Qyreia withstood the barrage of not-so-subtle temptations with amusement.

“Oi! Riqa, Reia, we’re over here!”

Coming up on the shopping center, the duo could see their friends waiting. Morine, her dark midnight blue hair tied back in a low ponytail that reached past her waist, looked aggravated; a dark expression when contrasted with her bright yellow sundress. *Well, she did invite us out here for lunch. She’s probably hungry.* Next to her was Ourin, the second tallest of the group, with loose hair down to her shoulders that tumbled in very intentional ways around the curvature of her bone structure. Despite being the most appearance-conscious when it came to hair or makeup, her clothes were roughly torn in various places; none of the colors particularly matching.

“Ourin, I see you decided to dress up today,” Reia said sarcastically, eliciting a laugh from the target.

“Only for you, my dear.” She eyed Qyreia coyly. “Well, maybe not *just* for you.”

The teasing had become a part of everyday life among the group after Qyreia had made the little “discovery” about her dual attraction to both sexes. Of course, Reia had helped in the discovery, but it gave her other friends some amiable ammunition for some good-humored flirtation.

Morine was having none of the shenanigans. “Food now, before I start biting you *all*.”

“Careful,” Reia said as they made their way inside, “I might like it.”

“You’re too skinny. Wouldn’t be worth more than soup bones.”

“Ooh, I like that one,” Qyreia said, smiling as Reia blew a raspberry her way. “So, what’s the menu today?”

“New place just opened up. Supposed to serve Endorian chicken, and I’ve had a craving for poultry lately.”

“Mmm. Wonder if they’ve got it in curry.”

“You’ll eat *anything* if it’s a curry, Riqqa,” Reia joked. “Try something new for a change.”

“Not my fault that it’s my favorite food.” Qyreia looked downward pitifully. “Why’re you always pickin’ on me?”

“Alright, enough you two,” Ourin interjected. “We’re here to have fun, remember? So Reia, lay off of Qyreia for a bit; and Riqqa, stop playing the victim. You’re too cute for your own good when you get that pouty look on your face.”

“Yes ma’am!” Qyreia instantly bounded back from her morose expression with a crooked grin, tongue dangling from her closed lips, and crossed eyes that made for quite the image when paired with the excessively flamboyant salute. The laughter that followed was worth the sting of the overzealous self-induced smack to the forehead.

Save for the occasional offworlder, the shopping center was a bustling sea of red skin and blue hair in all manner of shades and tints; not including the occasional Zeltron with dyed hair. Weaving through the morass was quite the feat for the quartet, somehow keeping together the entire way to the restaurant. Their destination was thankfully in its pre-lunch lull – relative to the norm for Zeltros – and the four girls were able to get a table with ease. The waiter was prompt to take their orders, returning with appetizers and drinks, before promptly scuttling off again to attend another table.

“Well the service is good,” Morine said, finally satiated somewhat by the pre-meal snacks.

“*And* they have chicken curry,” Qyreia said dreamily.

“*You* have a one-track mind,” Reia teased, ruffling the smaller girl’s hair.

“Speaking of,” Ourin half-whispered like some conspirator, “how’s things with Berren going?”

The young Arronen blushed a slightly deeper shade of red mid-pull on her drink’s straw. “F-fine. We’re fine. Things are good.”

“Just fine?”

“Yup.”

“So have you two...” Reia wiggled her eyebrows for effect. “...y’know?”

Qyreia coughed as her drink lodged itself in the wrong pipe. “Tha-... *That* is none of your business.”

“Yep. They did it.”

“Totally.”

“You *both* owe me twenty creds,” Reia said triumphantly.

“What the... You were taking *bets*?!” Clearly upset by the revelation, her friends tried to console her, despite the honest truth.

“It’s nothing against you, Riqua. You two have been dating for a bit now...”

“...And all *three* of us know how googly-eyed you are for him.”

“Also I saw the holopics of his butt on your computer,” Reia added as a parting shot, drawing a murderous expression from her friend that simply turned to embarrassment.

“You guys are butts. All of you. I don’t know why we hang out.”

“Because you love us,” Ourin said as she wrapped an arm around Qyreia’s shoulders.

“Plus you’re the only one that’s really devoted to the whole *monogamy* thing,” Reia added.

“That’s not true,” Morine said, chewing thoughtfully on the appetizer garnish. “I don’t think it’s such a bad idea.” She turned to Reia, “Besides, wasn’t that the reason that *your* relationship didn’t work out?”

The taller Zeltron looked back and forth nervously between Morine and Qyreia, only to be temporarily saved by the timely arrival of their lunch. “Food’s here.” All three of the others eyed her warily, prompting her to finally answer despite the food piled on her fork. “Okay, *yes* it was the reason, and I’ve apologized enough already. Besides, it was two years ago and I’m pretty sure that we’re still friends and she’s moved on.”

A tinge of sadness seemed to fill the closing of the sentence, palpable as much in her voice as in the air, only to be replaced by joy – feigned or otherwise – when the food finally reached her tongue. *Wasn’t totally your fault*, Qyreia thought as she tested her curry. Everyone’s spirits seemed to rise once they had something in their stomachs, to say nothing for how good it tasted going down.

The conversation shifted away from romance for a time, moving to school and the odd jobs that the four had picked up for their pocket money. Morine was already well on her way to a career in the fashion industry, her artistic and imaginative talents carrying her far for one so young. Ourin was still in limbo for long-term employment, but she was as book-smart as she was street-smart, making a career as a scientist or doctor viable options; for now, she was content working as a dancer and de-facto model for Morine’s creations. Reia had no thrilling ideas in mind for work in the future. She loved the party scene too much – or just enough for Zeltros – that being a musician or DJ at a club was high on her list. Being a professional consort was also an option, but not “one of the Hutt-humpers” as she liked to phrase it; a term that Qyreia had taken to using herself, despite the negative connotation.

Qyreia had no lofty aspirations for the moment. She was wholly content with her job as a shop attendant not far from her family home. That it had several perfect spots for secret on-the-job *rendezvous* with her significant other was also a plus. A simple, content life was all she wanted, even if life on Zeltros made it difficult at times.

Lunch concluded with some interesting desserts that had been picked out more by their pictures than their names, leaving the three girls satiated and happy. They spent the early afternoon window shopping, the more serious topics gone from their minds as they ogled the latest fashions, hologram emitters, and even giggled past some of the more risqué shops. As their interest dwindled, so too did the group's numbers. Ourin left first, citing chores at home that needed doing; then Morine, who had a date later in the evening, leaving Reia and Qyreia to themselves. Lacking anything further to do, and little money on hand after lunch, they decided to walk home together; an easy task, since Reia lived only a block away from the Arronen household.

They went down several streets and through a handful of back alleys, knowing the route well enough that they likely could have done it blindfolded. The pair had been using it since they were little kids, going to and from school or the shops at the center of town. As they grew older, some of the tighter alleyways had been home to their youthful experimentations.

"Hey, Qyreia," her friend said quietly, pausing in one of the cramped shortcuts.

"What's up? Not often you use my actual name."

"Listen... I'm sorry about what I said earlier. I've got nothing against your choices. I just..." She took the shorter girl's hands in hers. "I miss what we had, y'know?"

"Um, Reia..."

Despite the start, Qyreia didn't know what to say afterward, suddenly finding herself distracted by the skip in her heartbeat and the look in her friend's eyes. Their feet moved almost automatically, the smaller Zeltron gradually backed against the wall, Reia pressing ever closer. Qyreia knew what was coming; it was no surprise when the taller girl leaned down to interlock their lips in a kiss that was anything but *friendly*.

Losing herself in the heat of the moment, the young Arronen returned the brief but intense embrace. Tugging at the other girl's clothes revealed that there was nothing underneath, and she wondered if this had been part of some elaborate plan all along.

"So," Reia said when they finally parted, "better than Berren?"

"Mm... *Berren!*" In a flash, Qyreia shoved her friend away, quickly fixing her disheveled hair and clothes. "Dammit Reia, what the hell?!"

"I just thought..."

"What? That my wanting to only be with one person was some sort of *joke*?! We broke things off for a *reason*, in case you forgot. You weren't willing to be with just me, and me alone; and I respected that. That's *your* choice. But... trying to sabotage me? On purpose?"

"It was a spontaneous thing, Qyreia. I wasn't thinking; I'm sorry."

She shook her head, a faint scowl on her face. *Twice in one day? I don't think so.* "I... think we need some time apart. I still love you like my best friend..." *Maybe more.* "...but I can't have my cake and eat it too." Swallowing back her frustrations and anger, Qyreia turned for home. "Please don't follow me, Reia. I'll call you when I'm ready to talk."

"I... I'll be waiting," she said back sorrowfully, her emotions riding on the wind as much as the pheromones that had filled Qyreia's head only moments before.

The walk home was a lonely one. Neighbors and other familiar faces could feel Qyreia's torrent of emotion through their unique Zeltron biology. Several tried to intercept, some even walking out from inside their homes, to try and cheer the girl up, only to be politely refused and passed by. *I just need to get home; clear my head a bit.* Once the house was in sight, her brisk walk became almost a run, slowing only when she finally reached the door.

"Mom, dad, I'm home!" Setting her shoes aside in the entryway, the house sounded oddly quiet. "Hellooo?"

Rather than her parents stepping out from the living room, a different familiar face came forth. "Hey there."

"Berren! What're you doing here? Where're my parents?"

"They left about ten minutes ago. Something about going out for dinner."

"Oh yeah, this is their date night," she said, relaxing a little as the recollection kicked in. "So... what about you?"

"I didn't know it was their date night either," Berren chuckled.

"Ha ha, very funny," Qyreia said, laying the sarcasm on thick.

"I came to see you," he said smoothly, stepping close to wrap his arms around her. A quick kiss settled the angst. "Something wrong? You seem flustered. You *feel* flustered."

The young Arronen knew he wasn't merely referring to her shaking nerves. "That's one way to put it. I'm glad you're here, though. I need you all to myself for a bit."

"As opposed to sharing me?" Berren said, a coy grin creeping across his face.

"When it comes to you? I don't share." She tightened her hold around his waist for emphasis. Berren just chuckled.

"You sound like a kid who doesn't want to play nice with the other children."

"Really? You think *now* is a good time for snarky commentary?" Qyreia pulled away somewhat to look the other Zeltron in the eyes. "You're not the only one that can feel the other's emotions. What are you hiding?"

"I'm not hiding anything..."

"Berren..."

"I just think we could both broaden our horizons here..."

"*Broaden our horizons?!?*"

"Well, we both know that Reia is still infatuated with you, so I thought that getting you two together might, I dunno, spark something."

"Wait... so today...?"

"Ah, so she *did* kiss you! I was starting to wonder if she had gotten up the courage."

The slap that careened into his face nearly sent Berren sprawling to the floor. When he looked up, Qyreia was standing over him, barely-contained tears hidden behind a stern expression. "You two *planned* this?"

“I just pushed her in the right direction,” he said, far too relaxed for Qyreia’s liking.

“Why?!”

“Because I thought that if I could get you two back together, you might start acting like a normal Zeltron again.”

She recoiled, not out of fear, but disappointment. “Y-you can’t be serious. This was so that you wouldn’t have to be stuck with *one girl?!?*”

“Or boy. Take your pick. Please, calm down. It’s not that big a deal...”

“It is to me, you kriffing bastard!” Qyreia made to kick her now-ex-boyfriend, still on the ground as he was, but stopped short as reason took control over her emotions. Her head hung, downcast, before taking a step toward the door and wrenching it open. “Get out.”

For a brief moment, Berren looked like he was going to attempt to plead his case once more, only to reconsider upon recognizing the waves of utter, disappointment-tinged rage that filled the air. No amount of cooing or pheromones was going to save him at this point. He stood, put his shoes on, and paused just shy of the threshold.

“You know, I don’t get it.” His voice was calm; far too at ease with the situation. *Ever the Zeltron, trying to stay happy.* “We had such a good thing going. I just wanted to make it better.”

“You *knew* that I didn’t want that. You *knew*, and yet you did it *anyway*. Tell me how you thought that would make things *better*.” His silence told her that he had no answer. “Leave.”

So he left, speaking not another word to her. Once out of sight and sound, Qyreia huddled onto the couch, clutching her legs to her chest, and cried. She cried until her voice cracked and her eyes were swollen from the sting of the dried salt. It was some three hours before her parents finally came home and saw the state of their daughter. Their consolations and counsel did little to ease the hurt of the betrayal, but at least she had someone there for her.

“I just don’t get it, mom,” she said after her she had showered and calmed down somewhat. “Why can’t they just accept that I just want the one person? It’s worked out for you and dad.”

“Your father and I are a special case, hon. Most of us just don’t know how to handle that one-lover mentality; it seems counterintuitive to what they see as best in life – what brings the most pleasure.”

“But I’m not happy. Berren... he’s probably off borking some bimbo right now.”

“Qyreia,” her mother chided.

“Sorry.”

“Don’t be, hon. Just know that you picked a different route, and it’s not an easy one when everyone around you disagrees with that choice. They won’t be angry over it, but they also won’t understand.”

Then maybe I need to go someplace where they will understand...