

"A hundred thousand, that's my final offer!" The Toydarian grunted, slamming his fist on the table so hard that the delicate object he was trading for almost fell off. Sweat was beading down his green skin, beady eyes staring vehemently at the trader opposite him who seemed, despite his calm demeanor, to be equally exhausted by the extended bartering.

The man furrowed his brow, considering the offer and the worth of the object in his possession. An unassuming trinket, little more than a metal cylinder not much longer than two and a half palm widths and wrapped in brown leather which had by now begun to unravel due to age. A hundred thousand unmarked credits for it would have been a scavenger's wet dream, but he knew better. It was not often that such a legendary object was for sale and though the tale he'd spun about its origin was mostly fiction, he knew it held some pedigree. They all did.

Even the simple training sabers of the Old Jedi Order from before the Clone Wars were revered objects for collectors, but this one had clearly belonged to someone more prominent. Some who had put it through its paces. The marks of heavy use, in addition to those from the ravages of time, adorned the lightsaber's surface and though it no longer worked, he'd made sure to check, it was still a priceless artifact. Well, at least worth a hundred grand.

"Well?" The Toydarian grunted, agitated by his opponent's hesitation. The pudgy little ball of green skin and bad attitude, Raoul Kar'Dannaa, was a petty lieutenant for the Hutts. Ran the local slave trade, he'd heard, and apparently, an avid collector of all things exotic. Over the course of their hours-long bartering he'd made note of several other items of equal or near-equal rarity as the one he was trying to sell to him. Most of them curios and oddities from ages past, but some of them were more... tangible.

He'd especially liked the purple Twi'lek slave who'd brought them refreshments, even if he was certain Kar'Dannaa had only had her appear in order to distract him. However, like the drinks she'd brought, the girl was nowhere to be seen and all he was left with was the sweating, annoyed Toydarian that had begun reeking strongly of something sour. He suspected a side effects of the narcotics the man no doubt used, judging by the shisha stashed away in a far corner of the room.

Rubbing his temples as a wave of nausea threatened to rise up, the trader finally nodded and resigned to his defeat. Despite his size and build, the Toydarian was as hard as they came. In hindsight, it shouldn't have come as a surprise considering his occupation, but it still had struck him as odd how focused the flying gas ball could become once the issue of money and rare items was brought to the table.

"Fine, a hundred thousand and it's yours. I expect payment up front." The man sighed, mentally and physically worn out by the extended negotiations as he slumped back into his chair.

"Superb!" Raoul exclaimed, his narrow face flaring into a wide grin that flashed some of his discolored dentistry from behind his fat snub trunk. "I will have the money in your hands at once." He chuckled, rubbing his webbed hands together with glee.

Turning his head to the side to address the doorway, he barked a sharp order in Huttese, the voice coming out of the small creature so forceful it made even the seasoned trader jump. A few moments later the purple-skinned Twi'lek returned with a platter on which she carried a pair of slender silver goblets filled to the brim with what looked to be expensive, but not too expensive, liquor.

As the girl bent over the table to serve the drinks, the Toydarian could no longer restrain his greedy hands and he too moved in to grab the lightsaber for a closer inspection.

As he flapped closer, his wing came dangerously close to slapping the girl in the lekku, held prominently on display by the uncomfortable headdress she was forced to wear. Moving aside with surprising, almost preternatural grace, she avoided being hit but at the same time spilled one of the glasses as some of the liquid within splashed on the table with a few drops landing on the saber itself.

Before the trader had a moment to even think about it, the Twi'lek had scrambled away, cowering in fear as a tirade of apologies blurted from her mouth. "I'm so sorry, master. I didn't mean to! It was an accident! Please, I will make it up to you, I swear!" She whimpered, but to seemingly no avail as the Toydarian had already unfurled a neurowhip from his belt, the sharp business end crackling with electricity.

"You worthless *Schutta!*" He spat venomously, bringing the weapon down on the girl's lekku and drawing such a scream from her that the trader, despite being no stranger to violence, felt sickened and only survival instinct kept him from showing weakness by turning away.

Raoul whipped her thrice more, reducing the girl into a sobbing mess as red welts appeared on her lekku that by now were twitching and spasming from the neural shock on their own, seemingly out of control while the Toydarian kept spewing a tirade of insults and threats at her. Finally gathering enough courage to stop the senseless torture, the trader spoke up.

"Raoul! Stop! I'm a busy man, so let the girl go and get me my money. You can finish that *after* I've been paid."

The Toydarian's beady eyes were full of rage as he turned his attention back to his trading partner, but a quick glance at the saber was enough to make him snap out of his state. "Very well..." He muttered as he put the whip away and let the Twi'lek scramble to her feet.

"I expect you to make this up to me later tonight, Tali. I am in the mood for celebration. Now, get out of my sight you worthless *Schutta...*" He addressed the slave who whimpered something incomprehensible before slinking away like a whipped dog.

The trader felt the previous wave of sickness grow ever stronger as he saw the way the girl limped away, body still shivering from the neural aftershocks to her system. Did Raoul not know what whipping the girl's lekku could do to her? A quick glance at the man assured him that he did, but preferred to do so anyway.

"Apologies, she is a klutz. Had I a chance to renegotiate her purchase, I'd pay a fraction of what I did. Not a bad deal, mind you. I never make bad deals. But an overpriced one." The Toydarian explained as he snaked his hand over to the fuller glass, the one on the trader's side of the table, and picked it up.

"To fruitful negotiations! And let us hope I will not feel the need to renegotiate down the line." He chuckled in what he might have meant as a barbed joke, but which after the scene he'd just shown came across as a barely veiled threat.

As he picked up the half-full glass, the trader pondered if that hadn't been the intent all along as he put on a strained smile and drank the liquid. Cheaper than he'd expected, bloody Toydarian.

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A shiver ran down her spine as Tali stood barefoot on the brushed steel deck of the Toydarian's yacht, her form scantily clad in an elegant sheer outfit that left little to the imagination and offered almost no protection from the cool ambient air. On the other side of the door she could hear the Toydarian revel in the joy of his new possession, his eager breathing bringing unpleasant memories rushing back into her mind of when he'd heard him equally... aroused.

Biting back the bile that had risen into her throat, the Twi'lek opened the door and put on a face that was equal parts submissive and sultry, one which she'd learned agitated the Toydarian the least. At first, it seemed he did not even realize her presence, too giddy as he was in pawing the bauble he'd paid a small fortune for. To her eyes it was nothing but a worthless curio, but it seemed he thought otherwise.

She did not know how to proceed, rarely having had the trouble of being ignored when dressed in such a scandalous way as she was now, but the moment of hesitation was swiftly over as Raoul put aside the weapon on a nightstand next to his bed and landed on his back in a pose which beckoned her to proceed. She knew from painful experience that he did not want to tell her what to do when it came to pleasure. Though he was not above punishing her if she did something wrong. The painful stinging of the neuro whip still fresh in her lekku, Tali bowed down and approached him meekly, preparing for another distasteful experience she would try and bury somewhere deep where she might hopefully forget it.

As the Twi'lek approached, Raoul's smile widened. He had taken a high dose of his favorite herbal substances and the lightsaber now in his possession was to become a focal point of his growing collection. In time, he imagined, others would come to realize his greatness and when his rivals came to negotiate, he would humble them with a display of such taste and wealth as to put them on the back foot.

But for now, he was going to humble something rather different with a taste of his private collection.

"You really messed up today, didn't you, Tali?" He spoke softly, though each syllable dripped with malice. "Messed up big-time."

He relished the fear in her eyes with an almost predatory delight as she stuttered something in that ridiculous Twi'leki accent of hers. He did not even care to pay attention to her excuses and apologies. Worthless words from a worthless piece of meat.

"You'll make it up to me now, won't you, Tali?" He leered with a smarmy grin as he extended his webbed feet towards her lekku. He could see the hesitation, the fear, the revulsion in her eyes and he drank deep of every second of it as he grabbed her lekku where he'd whipped her earlier, the clawed tips of his toes and the rough bottoms of his feet grating against her tender skin as he pulled her face towards his groin, sensing the faintest shiver run through her as he assumed control of his pleasure slave.

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Tali stared blankly at the starship wall. She knew she could taste him in her mouth, but if she did not think about it she knew she could ignore it. He'd left his mark on and inside her, in many places, but she pushed all that aside and tried to let the moment pass. Like so many others before it, it would, in time, let go and be pushed back into the amorphous mass of memories that was her past. For her to cling to any semblance of sanity she was forced to live in the now and consign all her memories into a nebulous past which she never delved on.

As she lay there on the cold floor at the foot end of his bed, seemingly asleep, she picked up the flapping of wings and the faint rustle of Raoul getting up. She followed his movements by sound, hearing him grab the object from his nightstand and then hovering over to one of the display cases in his bed chambers.

A moment of curiosity and bravery, sparked by seemingly little more than a whim, caused her to gently raise her head over the lip of the bed and peek at her master as he placed the object into the display case and tapped in the code to lock it.

He never did that when a servant was around. Not even in the same room. He was paranoid to a fault, but this time, this time he'd made a mistake.

Pulling her head back as swiftly as she dared without making a sound, she tried to push the code into memory, visualizing how his claw had moved on the panel and what keys he had pressed. Her heart was beating fast, her racing pulse drumming in her head so loud she was sure he could hear when he hovered back to bed. This could be her only chance.

She waited. Immobile and barely daring to draw breath, she waited.

Minutes turned into hours and grew into several until she finally dared to make her move, the loud snoring of the Toydarian a firm enough reassurance that he was soundly asleep. Gingerly pushing herself up to her feet, Tali tiptoed across the cold floor without a sound, only daring to breathe once she was standing beside the display case.

Hands sweating profusely, she felt a tremor of adrenaline run through her as she calmed her breath as best she could. Closing her eyes, she recalled the pattern she'd observed and then repeated it on the keypad. Her finger resting above the affirmation key, she paused and reconsidered.

If she had the code wrong, the alarm would go off and she would be flogged. Bad. Possibly to death. She had only one chance at this and she knew it. Dared she go through with it? Was her life truly that bad to risk her life on this venture?

The faintest whimper escaped her lips, so muted he could not possibly have heard it, but an ill-timed snort made her jump. No. She couldn't. She could not take the risk. She was too afraid...

She began to pull back her finger when a whisper sounded in the air that made her almost squeal.

*"Do it."* The feminine voice was soft, little more than a distant whisper, yet held a sharpness of command to it that made her freeze in her tracks.

*"Set us free and we will set you free."* The voice continued, sounding exhausted and beginning to fade towards the end of the sentence.

Tali peered around her shoulder, expecting to see someone standing in the corner of the room, but could see no-one. A few more moments passed as she listened to the Toydarian rustling in his sleep until finally she closed her eyes and pressed the key.

The locks opened with a soft click and the case lid popped open. Heart pounding in her chest, Tali reached into the case and wrapped her delicate fingers around the object within. The cold steel and old leather felt unfamiliar in the palm of her hand and the weight of the object, though equally odd, was somehow reassuring.

Sensing a wave of calmness run through her as she grasped the object more firmly, she took it out and slipped away from his quarters.

The trip to the escape pods had been perilous and wrought with near heart-attack inducing moments of avoiding detection by the yacht's guards, but her exit was now in sight. The prized object still in hand, she observed the guard standing in front of the escape pod, stationed there to prevent exactly what she was attempting to do.

Closing her eyes, she ran her fingers down the length of the object's cool surface, somehow drawing strength and comfort from it before picking up a cup from a nearby table and tossing it down the corridor she'd come from. The sound of the clattering cup roused the guard's attention and as she'd predicted, caused him to shuffle his way over to see what had caused it.

The sound of him clicking off the safety from his blaster almost made her whimper as he passed by so close she could smell him, but thankfully he was not as perceptive. The moment he'd passed, she slipped back into the corridor and headed towards the escape pod as fast as she dared.

She had almost made her way to the pod when the guard suddenly glanced around his shoulder and spotted her. Pivoting around with a sharp yell, he raised his blaster at her.

Had she not repressed her past so thoroughly, she could have seen her life flash before her eyes and despaired, but now all she could do was squeeze her hands into fists as she waited for the blaster bolt to strike her. As she did so, her finger depressed a small stud on the cylinder's side and with a spark of life, the lightsaber flared to life.

A bright yellow beam of plasma emerged in front of her eyes, causing both Tali and the guard to stare at it in shock. He opened fire without a second thought, Tali instinctively shifting the blade down in a vain effort to stop the bolt from striking her.

With more luck than skill and perhaps a hint of guidance from a source she could not pinpoint, her blade intercepted the bolt just as it was about to strike her, the crimson flash reflecting off the yellow beam and hurtling back at the guard before he even realized what had happened. The bolt struck him squarely in the gut, dropping him to the floor as the blaster in his hands clattered on the steel decking.

*"Run! Now!"* The ephemeral voice commanded in her mind and she had no will to resist. Instinctively slashing the blade across a few of the closest consoles to cause some extra trouble for the ship's crew, she entered the escape pod and pulled the lever to launch. The hatch slamming shut behind her, the pod shot out of the yacht's side and careened towards the planet below.

As the retro thrusters began adjusting her angle of approach, Tali pressed against the small viewport to see small flashes inside the yacht as smoke began leaking out from its exhaust vents. Apparently, the damage she'd caused had not been easily contained.

Finally letting out a deep sigh, she nestled into the seat for re-entry and glanced at the weapon in her lap. What had she gotten herself into?