

The Road of Dreams to Come

Pale blue filled the nearly cloudless sky above Arcona's Citadel. Somehow, despite all of the other small fiascos that seemed to have piled up over the past few days, this at least seemed to be going right. Judging by the furious traffic in the halls, it felt like half the Clan was involved, even though the ceremony was in reality a generally small affair. Then again, when someone uses the courtyard plateau as the venue, attention is the first thing that should have been expected.

Qyreia's attention was wholly on the image in the mirror, glaring right back at her.

"Hookay. Calm down Q. You can do this." Her eyes darted around the refresher counter. "Lee! Have you seen my earrings?!"

The little Pantoran peeked her head into the doorway, her own pale lavender hair only half-done in what looked to be some compromise between a messy bun and ponytail. "You don't even have pierced ears."

"They're *clip-ons*! Have you *seen* them?!"

"No, but I'll keep my eyes open." She looked the Zeltron up and down, admiring the dress. "You look good."

A grimace soured her features, wanting to believe the Pantoran and knowing that she did indeed look good, but somehow still managing a sliver of self-deprecation. "You think so?" She ran her red fingers through the short blue-hued hair. "Kind wish I'd have grown it out a bit for this."

Leeadra chuckled, "I don't think I can imagine you with long hair."

"You've seen my pictures at home. It was halfway down my back in those days." Qyreia spied a flash of silver in the corner of the counter and her hand shot out to snatch it up. "Aha! Found you, you little kriffers!"

"Earrings?"

"Mhm," she nodded, gingerly clipping the jewelry to her earlobes. The pinching sensation wasn't particularly pleasant, but the silver and sapphire went well with the color of her hair and the white of her dress. *Holy druk, I'm getting married.*

Getting to this point had been one rollercoaster after another — if it wasn't emotions, then it was blasters and lightsabers — and the realization felt as cathartic as it was worrying. If the Zeltron had been hard on herself before, it was only about to get worse. The bad came with plenty of good though. Keira was as devoted a partner as anyone could ask for; patient, kind, and with the innocent lovability of a well-intentioned child. Thankfully, the mercenary thought, that innocence stopped when it came to more adult-oriented activities. This was a good thing they were doing. It had to be.

Keira had never come off as a particularly superstitious person, but her research when it came to the big day told her very explicitly that the couple shouldn't see each other before the big event. Thanks to that, Qyreia had to be careful about where she went in relation to her half-Umbaran lover, who was feeling far giddier than she was nervous, enjoying the private room that they'd rented for her preparations.

“Are you sure you want to go through with this?” Atra asked soberly while Adaline helped the younger Force user with her preparations.

“Father,” she practically sang, “I’ve never been more sure, and no amount of your angst will dissuade me.”

“Oooh, she gotchu Spookybutt,” Lux chuckled deviously, accepting a subtle high-five from the bride-to-be. “So whatcha doing for your honeymoon, oh ye Daughter of Spookybutt?”

Keira looked ponderously into the mirror. “I don’t know, honestly. With Q being in a position of authority, I’m not sure she’ll even have time.”

“She ‘ad better find ze time,” Adalinde chided in her thick accent. “No bride should ‘ave to go wizout ze festivities after ze wedding.”

“*She* is a bride too,” Keira corrected, sticking her tongue out playfully. “We’ll manage something. My Red Qek always manages *something*.”

“All the more reason,” Ada intoned, finishing the extravagances for Keira’s hair that she had been toiling over. “Zere. All finished with ze ‘air.”

The half-breed woman looked amiably at the handiwork of her father’s cohorts, still in-progress though it was. Her usual ponytail was lowered, secured nearer the base of her neck to better accommodate the glittering accoutrements that crowned her raven scalp. It made an excellent base for her veil, which Ada gently threaded into the array.

As the sheer fabric cascaded over the bare skin of her shoulders offered by the sleeveless, silky dress, her eyes fell to the tattoo on her arm that had been such a surprise to her Zeltron lover. Stylized blue markings crawled across the upper arm and over her shoulder, broken only by a lone red marking that mirrored its partner. These were her bonds — a tattoo that could only grow as more people entered her life, as Leeadra explained it — but it was the red one that tugged at her chest and made her heart beat with an ever-growing intensity.

Can’t get misty-eyed now, she thought as she ran a hand over the ink. *Plenty of time for that after the ceremony... or during. Damn the holonet and its conflicting sources.* The red-headed Force user who was assembling her attire watched curiously and offered to cover it up.

“No Ada, it’s fine. Good memories, that’s all.”

Memories. Things that I didn’t have before. Now I have father and Sildrin; Ada and Lux; Leeadra and... and Q. Keira pulled back from the mirror and twirled slowly, eventually stopping to face Atra in his seat, his half-Sephi lover seated in the cushioned seat next to him.

“How do I look?”

You look like your mother, he wanted to say, but with the others present, the Combat Master suppressed the urge. “You look fantastic. I just wish you were going to someone better than...”

“Swearjar?” Lux injected with a chuckle.

“Yes, Swearjar.”

“Please don’t start any trouble today, father.” The woman, who if not for the death of her genetic donor would still be a four year old girl, knelt beside the infamous brooder. “I love you. Please be happy for me.”

Once again, Atra felt he had so much to say, but the present company had him biting his tongue. “I... love you too.” He nudged at her arms, “Now get up before you get that dress dirty. I don’t think we can get it cleaned with only a couple hours before the ceremony.”

While Keira continued her personal preparations, the rest of the Citadel was busied with business that was anything but official Clan business. Atyiru made sure of that. If there was anyone that could remotely be happier than the couple, it was the ever-bubbly Consul who took such personal pride in the celebration.

It was not without warrant that she felt this way. Ever since her Zeltron Quaestor had mentioned the idea in passing, the Miraluka had been planning and scheming. Between the decorations and the catering, she’d also taken particular care to invite and arrange transport for the mercenary’s family on Zeltros. Whatever she had expected from the home-grown Zeltrons, she could clearly see — in her own fashion — how Qyreia had turned out the way she did. At least when it came to polite company: the parents didn’t swear *nearly* as much.

“Ohhh, I’m so excited!” she hiccupped excitedly. “Bleu, did you get the reception party set?”

“Aye, it’s all there. Down to tha frilly little napkins.” The Ryn wasn’t entirely sure how he’d been suckered into the preparations, but it seemed par for the course where his luck was concerned. “At least there’ll be plenty o’ drink.”

“I wish Qybbles would have let me invite more people though!”

“S’alright luv. Very private person for a Zeltron, that one. Nae very many folk in her ‘inner circle,’ as it were.”

“How do you like the decorations?” Atyiru asked, casting her head upward in mimicry of her eyeballed companion.

“S’nice. I’m nae sure how ye manage to put this stuff together when ye can’t bloody see, though.”

“*Magic*,” she said, fluttering her fingers down in a flourish for emphasis.

However she had managed it, the preparations were about as complete as they could be. Both brides were in hiding for formality’s sake, even though it would be Keira that did the big walk down the aisle. Meanwhile, there were still plenty of guests milling about the plateau courtyard, conversing and sharing random stories about the couple and about themselves. A handful of Zeltrons — old friends of Qyreia’s — were entertaining some of the more amiable associates of the former Long family — now the Krays Syndicate — of which Keira was a part. A group of well-dressed merchants and spacers spoke amiably with the Arronen parents, regaling them with stories about their well-traveled daughter.

A warm breeze flitted across the assemblage, carrying with it the scent of the flowering trees that had been placed as gentle sentinels at the plateau’s edge. Several scattered blossoms flitted overhead and across several people’s faces, producing an amusement beyond even what had already been extant.

They look so happy, Qyreia thought as she looked at the throng from her hiding place, further into the structure. Leeadra had gone to finish her own preparations and would be ushering people to their seats before taking her place as the maid of honor. As the mutual friend

of both parties, *whose* maid of honor was up for some speculation. This, however, left the mercenary very alone in her thoughts.

“I hope we’re that happy,” she mused soberly.

“I hope that this isn’t how you’re going to act when it comes time for the ceremony proper.”

Qyreia knew Atra’s voice well enough to not even feel the need to turn and look at the approaching Force user. “Startin’ to wonder when you’d swing by with your infinite wisdom.”

“I’ve been busy attending to your *fiancée*, who is far more excited than you sound.”

“I’m excited, just... nervous.”

“Let me be perfectly clear, Swearjar,” he said as he leaned against the wall, borrowing Lux’s vocabulary for the occasion. “You marry her and you are solely responsible for her safety. If she gets so much as a papercut, you will feel it ten-fold. Do you understand?”

“For every over-protective threat you make, Imma call you ‘dad.’” Her gray-blue gaze peered at him mischievously. “So, you were saying?”

Atra growled slightly under his breath, clearly wanting to cement his meaning but not wanting to break his daughter’s trust. Instead, he moved to saunter off into the crowd of other guests.

“Hey,” Qyreia called after him, eliciting a brief if lazy halt. “Much as you might not think so, I’ll make sure she stays happy... and safe.”

Melodramatics dispensed with, the Force user left the Zeltron to her lonesome. With her preparations finished, she watched quietly from her corner as time passed. Guests were shown to their seats, Leeadra took her place in the initial entourage just behind Qyreia and her family, while Keira’s group remained just out of sight.

Then the music started playing and Qyreia took her first step.

A gust of wind sent a whirlwind of pale petals cascading across the courtyard, fluttering over the Zeltron’s face while a few stuck in her hair, and she couldn’t help but smile and laugh a little. The gentle pressure of her parents’ hands on her shoulders kept her walking, but she could already see the glimmer of tears subtly collecting on her lashes. A scattering of congratulations were whispered as she passed, tugs at her arm pausing her march at intervals to offer an amiable greeting or thanks. As much as she could though, her attention stuck to the dais and Atyiru, standing proudly in the center.

Once at the front, Qyreia seated her parents with hugs so tight that she felt like the tears would be squeezed out of her. She then took her place by the Consul, her Pantoran friend just behind her.

No amount of imagining or preparation stifled her smile when she saw, after several long moments of anticipation, Keira Viru walking up the aisle. Her red hand couldn’t cover the loving awe in her smile, nor could the half-Umbaran’s veil hide her own mirth. Not even Atra’s formal posture and expression managed to sour the stunning image as he walked his daughter arm-in-arm toward the place of ceremony. When she finally stepped into place their eyes met and a quiet laugh passed between them as the happiness overflowed for a moment. Atra

departed to his seat after embracing his daughter tenderly, leaving them alone with their eccentric officiator.

“There is so much that could be said about these two lovely people here,” Atyiru began, surprisingly formal compared to what many were used to. “I can’t tell you about their love. None of us were present for the worst moments or the best moments. Yet despite every hurdle and obstacle, they’ve managed to come here to embrace and cement their love in marriage. You two have prepared your own vows?” Qyreia nodded, Keira responding in kind though her motions were muted beneath the veil. “Qybbles, you go first.”

She smiled at the nickname and anticipation in the Shadow Lady’s voice. “Ahem... Keira. I... I can’t believe we’re here. It seems like only yesterday that we met and I started our relationship by annoying the snot out of you.” Keira chuckled a little, eyes glittering expectantly. “You have made me do things in our short time together that I never would have imagined doing before, even if you never asked me to do it. I was gone the instant I saw you.” She thumbed the mark of her Black Guard tattoo on her forearm nervously.

“We don’t do anything easy. We’ve bled and cried and screamed, but... no one’s ever stuck around for me like you. So... for what it’s worth, I swear that I will never stop being your guard — your shield against the universe whenever it tries to hurt you. I will never stop loving you, even if it hurts to do so.” She sniffed against the tears that had already started to roll gently over her cheeks. “And... and I promise I’ll n-never try to take this away from you, because I know what this means to you.”

Keira’s hand reached out to run her thumb over the Zeltron’s fingers. Atty turned her head toward the other Force user. “And you Keira?”

The raven-haired woman nodded, not releasing her lover’s hand. “You have given me life where I had nothing before. Your stubborn attitude made me respect you, and your pathetic expression whenever you looked defeated melted me like a sad puppy.” Qyreia laughed pathetically as the woman continued. “You’ve given me experiences that I didn’t even know existed before I met you. You’ve frustrated me to no end and at the same time made me love you, even when I had nothing to measure against what ‘love’ is.

“That is all I need with you, and that is what I will give. I will love you and stand by you, whether it’s a date to a new winery,” she smiled at the reference to their first date, “or fighting side by side. I can’t imagine my life without you, so that’s why I trapped you here today.” That made Qyreia outright laugh, and their officiant was no more immune. “I love you, Qyreia... my Red Qek.”

“Now for my favorite part,” Atyiru said, motioning for the rings. “Qyreia Arronen, do you take Keira Viru as your wife?”

She nodded, pushing the shimmering blue hair from her face. “I do.”

The Consul turned to the pale woman as the ring was placed on her finger. “And Keira Viru, do you take Qyreia Arronen as your wife?”

“I do,” she replied as she placed the band on her lover’s red finger.

“Then I pronounce you married! Now kiss!”

Qyreia Arronen, #14369

They both stepped forward, the world seeming to slow around them even as the audience stood from their seats and applauded. A quiet “I love you” was whispered between them before Qyreia effortlessly slipped the veil aside to kiss Keira — her wife. The warm breeze and shining sun warmed their skin while their hearts burned, butterfly kisses from the blossoms tickling them but hardly offering a distraction to the engrossed pair.

“You know, those tattoos match up pretty well,” Keira noted quietly, looking at the Zeltron’s forearm flush with her own marking.

“Never noticed that.” Qyreia’s gray-and-blue eyes glanced sideward to the expectant crowd. “I guess we should be going that way?”

“I suppose.” She took the mercenary’s arm and turned down the aisle. “I love you, *Mrs. Arronen.*”

“I love you too, *Mrs. Arronen-Viru.*” She chuckled as they passed through the throng. “That’s a mouthful.” A glance at the Force user made her smile sheepishly. “Totally worth it though.”