

Alethia sashayed towards him, the clicking of her heels almost - but not quite - drowned out by the various conversations. "Spare a cigarra?" He fumbled in his pockets for the case, then held it open, his own smoke jutting from the corner of his mouth. The woman's piercing blue eyes never left his as she deftly plucked one from the case before leaning in close, so very close, her lips at one end of her cigarra as the other end met his. Her eyes closed and she breathed deep. The fire at the end of his cigarra flared and spread to hers. Alethia slowly pulled away, leaving a hazy trail of smoke as she returned to her full height. She smirked, her eyes slowly running down the length of the man's body before snapping back up to meet his. "Prow. Neat. And a tequila for my friend."

With that, she turned slowly and clicked back to the small table where Aura had been watching the proceedings with amusement. The man's eyes didn't leave her until she sat down. Their ability to turn heads aside, the two women seemed to have little in common. Ta'var, toned and athletic from a lifetime of combat training, had coordinated her hair, nails, lipstick, and dress to a neon blue shade that would have looked ridiculous on anyone other than a Zeltron. The dress, cut to show off her arms, midriff, and other assets, was tasteful but hardly conservative. In contrast, Alethia wore a white button-down blouse, a black pencil skirt, and her hair up; Blade liked to think of the look as "sexy librarian" but decided not to voice that opinion.

Neither fit in with the normal clientele of the Quorahi bar in the bowels of Voraskel City, it didn't phase either of them. Being conspicuous without being shot at was an uncommon pleasure of late.

"Eye contact and invasion of personal space. Two free drinks, no cleavage required. Do you smoke, darling?"

"No," the Zeltron answered, chuckling to herself as the man frantically waved down the bartender. "I should hang out with super spies more often."

"Enjoy it while you can," Archenksova smiled ruefully, grinding the cigarra to death in the nearest ashtray. "People tend to get less sociable with me after each council meeting."

"Oh?" Concern washed over Aurora's face.

"No need to spoil the surprise." Alethia mirrored her companion's look of genuine concern, leaning in a bit and imbuing her with a note of gravity. "How are you coping?"

Ta'var sighed and stared off into the space for a moment before answering. "Alright, I guess? Master Vorsa has been spending a lot of time meditating with me. I've been trying to let go of my feelings but..." She trailed off.

"Listen to me," the Human said, placing her hand on Aura's for emphasis. "First, it wasn't your fault. It was theirs. *Never* forget that." The Zeltron nodded, her eyes glimmering with unshed tears.

"Second, we've all been through it. We had New Tython shot out from under us. I escaped Alderaan by dumb luck, or 'the will of the Force' or whatever you like." Alethia paused, smiling up at the waiter as she dropped off two glasses at their table.

"You must have been just a girl," Blade commented softly, staring into her rancor tequila.

"I was almost thirty, actually — long story — by my point is that we survived. We're still here. You're not alone." Archenksova let that settle in for a moment before continuing. "The Jedi will tell you that they don't have passions or attachments. That's a load of druk. Watch Vorsa and Sorenn. You'll see." She took a long sip of her prow. "Anyway, we didn't come here to talk politics. We came here to gossip and oogle. See anything you fancy?"

---

"Alethia, I think that's just the pheromones and the liquor talking," Aurora said, squeezing her companion's arm, steadying her in her stool, and slowly rotating her away from scruffy spacer at the bar who was well below her standards.

"I'm a *lady*, Ta'var," the Human slurred, jabbing at the Zeltron with an accusatory finger. "That means I hold my — wait, what 'pheromones?'"

"I'm a Zeltron?" *Does she seriously not know how this works?*

"And I'm a natural brunette, darling. What pheromones?"

Blade braced herself. She'd always known that one day she'd have to have this talk with Zoe, but she hadn't expected to have a trial run with her SeNet handler. "We — my species produces pheromones that... give humanoids certain... urges... um—"

"Oh, thank the stars!" Alethia said a bit too loudly, smacking her palm down on the table hard enough to rattle the small mountain of empty glassware stacked between them. "I thought it was just because I hadn't gotten laid in thirty years!"

"Wait, what?"

"What was I *supposed* to do? Jump on Drachen? Stephens? Sorenn's married! Which, come to think of it..."

"No, honey, I get that part," Aura interrupted, hoping against hope to regain control of this trainwreck of a conversation. "You said you were from Alderaan? Earlier?"

"Oh, that. Mostly I grew up on Coruscant, but my mother was Alderaanian. ISB had me posted there until everything went to hell."

"ISB?"

"Imperial Security. White jackets, IT-Os?"

"Like, *Empire* Imperial Security?" Ta'var waved down a waitress. She was going to need another shot or three. "How old are you?"

"The kriffers blew up my planet, with all of my things on it, and then the damned rebellion blew up the DS-1, and the next thing I know I have some numb-choob Lt. Colonel telling me that I get the honor of getting shoved into a freezer until they need me again, and *of course* they ran the whole karking Empire straight into the ground within three years. Three years, Ta'var! I've had *boyfriends* that have lasted longer than three fraking years!" Alethia was starting to draw stares and murmurs from the rest of the bar.

"Check, please!"