

Stronger Together

A Submission to the Competition:
Counterpoints



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Late 29 ABY

Reiden had been spinning out of control after the death of his master Dante a couple months earlier. But he had finally begun to feel like he had hit the bottom at last. It would be a hard climb out of the abyss he had landed in, but he would figure a way out somehow. He felt like there was sadness still tugging at him, but it wasn't as severe as it had once been. He had decided to remain on Coruscant for the time being, taking jobs when he could to support himself during his stay there.

After turning in a bounty one night, he found himself in a local bar that had become his favorite haunt during his stay in the city. That night, however, he was back to his old habit of drinking to numb the pain. The large room was full of people, and everyone was chattering idly. The constant hum of conversation was starting to get to him, however.

Reiden set his glass down on the bar, perhaps more heavily than he had intended. He turned to the bartender and gave him a nod, "I'll take another, please."

"Sure, pal. Give me a minute and I'll pour you one," the bartender replied.

Reiden watched as the man helped a couple other patrons with their orders first. But he didn't mind. Everyone deserved a chance to get a drink, and he had just finished one of his own. He'd let them take priority for the moment. When the bartender returned with a fresh glass of rum, Reiden passed him some credits and mumbled, "Thanks."

He took a sip of his rum and gave another look around the interior of the bar. Everyone else seemed practically oblivious to his presence. That was fine. Reiden wasn't trying to attract attention; yet anyone that bothered to look around the establishment would likely be able to spot that something was up with him. He put on a smile for safe measure and relaxed a little more.

Come on, Reiden, get it together, he told himself. *You're still doing better than you were a couple weeks ago.* He closed his eyes and listened to the music playing throughout the building. It may not have been his first choice, but he wasn't in charge of that. Although he had to admit that it had a catchy beat to it.

"Hey there," said a smooth voice coming from beside him. "What are you having, is it any good?"

Reiden glanced over and spotted a woman sitting at the bar. She must have arrived while he was immersing himself in the music drifting through the room. Her appearance was rather striking. She had long, wavy amethyst hair that reached to the middle of her back, and her skin was a slight pinkish hue. Her eyes were a soft cerulean blue in color and she had pointed ears. She flashed him a smile that threw him off guard, though he wasn't sure why.

“Oh, I’m just having some rum. It may not be the best, but I’ve had plenty worse,” he replied with a laugh, feeling himself return the smile before he even realized it was happening.

“Rum’s always been a favorite of mine,” the woman said.

Reiden grabbed the bartender’s attention, “I’ll have another glass for the lady here.” He placed credits on the bar for the man.

“Ah, thank you,” the woman said as she reached over with a slender arm and picked up the glass that was set down on the bar. She lifted the glass to her lips and took a sip of the amber colored liquor. Her mouth curled up into a smile. “That is some good rum.”

“That it is,” Reiden said simply as he took another drink.

“My name’s Lyra. What’s yours?” she asked.

“I’m Reiden. It’s nice to meet you, Lyra,” Reiden replied with a smile.

“So what brings you here tonight?”

“Well, it’s sort of become my usual place to go when I want a drink. To tell the truth, I’ve actually caused a bit of trouble at some other establishments. Not intentionally, mind you. Sometimes people just rubbed me the wrong way and then wouldn’t leave me alone,” he admitted, rubbing his neck sheepishly.

“Oh my,” Lyra said, feigning shock. Her features changed to something more serious, “I couldn’t help but notice that you looked a little down a moment ago... Is something wrong?”

Reiden sighed softly, “Ah, it’s nothing, really. Just a part of life, but I’m on the rebound now.”

“What happened?” she probed carefully.

He took a long pull of his drink and set it down. “A man that was my...mentor, I guess you could say, died a couple months ago. He was killed, actually. I, uh, haven’t exactly been dealing with it very well.”

“I’m so sorry, Reiden,” she said, her face softening as she laid her hand on his.

“Thanks,” he said with a warm smile. “But really, I’m doing better with it now though, got most of it out of my system before now. However, my actions have consequences, which is why I’ve stuck to this bar. I haven’t caused any problems here.”

After that exchange, the two spent what seemed like hours talking. They shared stories of their travels and what early life was like for them, among various other topics. They ordered another

round of drinks and continued talking. Lyra revealed that she had a hybrid heritage, half Sephi and half Zeltron. This surprised Reiden, but it certainly helped to explain her pointed ears and slightly pinkish skin tone. She told him all about how she had come from Zeltros originally, but had traveled a lot since her Zeltron father had been involved in negotiating various business deals. This traveling had influenced her later in life, having worked across the galaxy herself.

Reiden told her about his childhood and growing up on Corellia. He mentioned his parents dying when he was still young, but he left out the fact that they had been murdered, and that he had witnessed it himself. That wouldn't be a good thing to bring up so early on. He even told her about living on his own on Corellia and how he had made friends with a Nautolan boy around his age named Morenn. As with his parents, Reiden left out how Morenn had betrayed him and that Reiden accidentally killed him in a struggle. He told her about meeting Kadain a couple years later and how he had helped teach Reiden how to survive on his own if he had to, even becoming almost like a surrogate family for him.

Reiden seemed to feel at ease around her, which was unusual given that they had only just met. He was typically more guarded, especially since he held so many secrets that would do well to stay hidden from his new friend. But he didn't mind. It was as if he could see a light in the darkness that had surrounded him since Dante was killed. He wasn't sure what made him feel this way, but he didn't mind. It was a refreshing change from the way he had been feeling and the emotions that had been swirling within him.

Before they knew it, the bartender was shouting out to the patrons that it was time for last call. Reiden didn't know exactly how long he had been sitting there talking to Lyra, but he didn't care. He had enjoyed their time together, having some fun for the first time in a while now. He almost didn't want the night to end.

"Well, I guess it's about that time then, isn't it?" Reiden said.

"Yeah, it would seem that way," the woman said as she brushed her hair behind her pointed ear. "Thanks for the drinks, Reiden. I had a lot of fun tonight."

"Sure thing Lyra, it's no problem. I had fun, too," he replied.

"Maybe our paths will cross again some time," she said with a warm smile. She leaned over and kissed his cheek lightly before standing up.

Reiden sat there, a bit surprised before he managed to say, "Yeah, I'd like that very much." He smiled at her as she turned and walked out the door. He picked up his glass and downed the remaining contents. He listened to the music some more before leaving a few minutes later.

Over the next few weeks, Reiden and Lyra would meet in the bar for drinks. Other times they would go out for lunch or dinner together. They grew close in a short amount of time, enjoying each other's company.

What had once been a dark pit of despair for Reiden was now something much more bearable. He still felt the occasional pang of guilt or sadness over Dante's death, but it no longer plagued him as it had before. For the first time in a long time, there was some light in Reiden's life. He had been in a bad place before he met Lyra, but ever since that first night, his life had never been the same. And he didn't mind; he liked it that way. He swore to himself that he would do everything in his power to keep that bright spot around, protect it at all costs. This was one thing that he never wanted to lose.

Reiden had been in a weak state, he had felt sorry for himself. But after meeting Lyra, he had discovered a newfound strength dwelling within. She had brought him back from the edge. She had helped him to emerge from the ordeal stronger than he had been before. Some might say that she would become a liability sooner or later. But Reiden would have disagreed. She helped him to be better, and he was going to continue being better, stronger, for as long as Lyra was around.