“I’m not mad, I’m just disappointed.”

Koliss balled his hands into fists in anger. They quickly relaxed though as he tried once again to refocus on where he was and what he had to do. He raised his head as high as he could, his restraints working to keep him unmoving as he answered.

“I really feel like I should be saying that to you, all things considered.”

He winced at the blow against the back of his head. It wasn’t as bad as it could be but it still could be a whole lot better. He was thankful that there was only one person ‘talking’ with him now. At least it was someone he knew and cared about, or used to know.

“You’ve got quite a mouth on you. Is that something you picked up being a freelance doctor?”

“I picked up quite a lot in my travels. Mostly it involved finding the signs that you were about to be betrayed.”

Koliss grunted as he felt something heavy strike him in the sternum. It stung a lot worse than he figured it should. Although the strike felt like it was held back.

“I didn’t betray anyone Koliss, you came here of your own free will remember?” Koliss felt his anger tick up another level. This wasn’t how this mission was supposed to go.

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“Do you know vhat this is supposed to be about?”

“No.”

Tali resisted the urge to sigh, but simply turned back to face the large central console in a contemplative silence. Grot was usually one for few words anyway and he would have mentioned if he had any knowledge of what this meeting was about. They were the only two there however, even though this meeting was supposedly of ‘immediate importance’ that their leader Lucine Vasano had called for them to meet with her on the bridge of the *Voidbreaker* as soon as they could.

After a few more minutes of awkward silence, their red-haired sith captain appeared as graceful and collected as ever. Although her face held no trace of a smile as she quickly went to work on bringing up something on the central console. It appeared to be some kind of holo call recording that had a lot of interference in it.

“I’m sure you both curious as to why I asked you both to drop everything to come here.” Lucine spoke quickly, drawing Grot’s and Tali’s attention.

“I assume you are both up to speed about the reports of high profile murders we were tasked with looking into?”

Both Tali and Grot nodded. Neither of them had heard much. They had heard something along the lines that there was a string of suspicious murders of captains of industries and important members of local politics that were occurring in Arcona’s back yard of the Calaron sector. The Arcona Summit had tasked Voidbreaker with investigating what they could about these murders.

“We had little to go on with that issue until our resident doctor Welcott brought a piece of information to my attention. Information from a source he trusted, but one that ultimately would require him to go dark and solo in order to properly track it. This was also to avoid losing the trail whoever is perpetrating these murders.”

Grot regarded the plan in careful thought. It was certainly a risk, but it could be one worth the risk if the human had managed to track down his quarry on his own. Tali was not as excited at the prospect of this information and she felt a slight dread begin to rise at what Lucine was implying.

“That was two weeks ago. I assumed the lack of contact was due to the doctor being heavily involved in his tracking. That is until one of our high power communication stations received this missive only a day ago.”

Lucine pressed a button, allowing the center console to light up as a blurry holo video began to play for Grot and Tali to see.

“C-*zztbrrrrrkkk-*ll times, no-*zzzsttttbrrkkzzztt-*mn you come on, come on... Finally!”

A blurry and washed out image was activated and shown to be spinning dangerously. It ultimately came to settle on a once recognizable face that has been thoroughly beaten, bruised, and bloodied. What looked to be his normal attire was ripped and disintegrating in odd places.

“Doctor Koliss Welcott, professional clan contractor BTVB 14834, please transfer this message to Lucine Vasano aboard the *Voidbreaker* immediately.”

There was a pause; the man seemed to be collecting his breath. The dark blue face seemed to hold a great amount of pain and not just the physical kind if the look in his eyes could be counted on.

“I don’t have much time,” Koliss continued speaking, “so let’s start with the obvious. Those rumors we heard? All true; or at least I hope they are and I haven’t been black bagged and beaten with ‘hard hitting questions’ all for a misunderstanding.”

 Koliss stopped again; a groaning was quite audible as the man’s face disappeared from view.

Tali wished she could reach out and slug him, but she had to settle for the mental image as she felt her lekku tense up. The doctor was clearly not okay and she could not imagine what had happened to him in the short time he had been gone. They had just managed some kind of reconnection, and now there he was looking like he was on the verge of death. None of it sat right with her.

Grot regarded the transmission with a certain stoicism he had earned in his many hunts. He really did not know much of this Human, but he looked as if he had gone through a rather vicious hunt himself and remained standing. That alone would warrant recognition of his skill. Now the question was if this matter would bring any amount of points to his own tally.

Koliss appeared again; this time he spoke with much greater strain. “I don’t know where I am, only my last known location. I know that whoever grabbed me still has a front set-up there; managed to get at least that much. Murders are related, all tie back to this group, some kind of training-.”

The screams of blaster fire cut off Koliss as the image began to shake violently and muffled shouts could be heard approaching quickly.

“Look for the pillars of light and the multi-colored top!” Koliss spoke quickly and sounded as if he was sprinting. “That’s whe-URGH.” A loud grunt followed a flash of light; the holo-vid went spinning and landed almost perfectly to see Koliss who had apparently been knocked unconscious. There was the sight of figures moving in before the holo cut off abruptly.

Lucine switched off the holo-viewer and directed her gaze at her two crew members.

“This only proves that the murders we were following to be a part of some sort of conspiracy. We must learn what Dr, Welcott knows if we are to have any hope of stemming the threat. This development also represents a grave threat, not only to us, but to the Clan as well. The good doctor has very reliable inside knowledge of Voidbreaker and Arcona. That information cannot be allowed to be torn from him.”

 Lucine also lamented the possible loss of one that was able to serve as an intellectual challenge, but she would not allow the image as leader of the Voidbreaker to betray any personal connection to this mission.

“You both will go to Norval II where the doctor last reported in, you will follow his path, and you will recover him and the new information he possesses about the murders and who exactly is perpetrating them.”

Tali and Grot shared a look for a few moments, before turning back to Lucine and offering only a single nod. They were ready for this next mission.

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“That was really stupid of you Koliss, then again it was kind of impressive all things considered. Good to see you keeping up to task with your skillset.”

Their conversation was much lighter than their previous one. It was almost like old times. It was ruined by the fact that he had no idea who he was talking to anymore, despite the fact that she wore the same face.

“What can I say, I’m full of surprises. The galaxy has a way of imprinting you to keep a trick or two up your sleeve.” Koliss forced a slight grin. The cloth over his eyes stopped him from focusing his look.

“Tricks’ is it? Good to know, so let’s figure out what kind of trick you have in store. Who is it that you called?”

“Called who? I just wanted some fresh air. Kind of comes with being strung up like a fresh kill.”

“You know how much I hate it when you lie to me Kol, so why not just tell me.”

“I told you before, I caught wind you were around and I wanted to see you again. Call me sentimental, but I definitely wasn’t expecting this kind of welcome.”

A light chuckle echoed in the small room. “Really now; Despite the fact that you weren’t supposed to know I was here? Or was it the fact that you came to ‘see me’ with survival supplies, multiple blasters, and heavy comms equipment?”

Each word seemed to be emphasized by a metallic rattle or fabric being shaken and disrupted. It seemed they kept his equipment in the same room. Not like he’d managed to get out of these restraints or the new cell they locked him in. It was just like her to want to show off. She was prideful and enjoyed the position of power. Koliss didn’t know if he should be worried or proud.

“The galaxy is a dangerous place. You can’t ever be too careful you know.”

Another good natured chuckle echoed, followed closely by a sharp crackling of electricity. Koliss felt his smirk disappear quickly.

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“This… is not vhat I expected.” The lack of a response from her Trandoshan companion was expected, but she figured that he must be baffled as much as she was.

They had set upon Koliss’ trail with fervor and quickly managed to work out where the doctor had followed the trail of rumors to a particular site. They had found nothing but an empty field and no clue as to what could have been there before. Grot’s talent for tracking and Tali’s ability to persuade even the most abrasive individuals eventually lead them to a name – Taronne. What had thrown them off in their search was that this person, and where Koliss had disappeared, had been some kind of traveling galactic circus. Neither Tali nor Grot talked about it, assuming that their information could be a trick or simple mis remembrance. Koliss wouldn’t have been investigating a circus… right?

Yet as they stood at the edge of a very large clearing as a massive amount of people were filtering in to a gate to what seemed to be exactly a galactic circus. There was a series of mechanical rides with screaming passengers. The scent of strange foodstuffs wafted heavily through the air. There was a strange, almost too-cheerful music playing, and the centerpiece of it all appeared to a flashing multi-colored big top tent.  Large spotlights combed the sky to add to an all to eye-sore of a scene.

“Pillars of light and a multi-colored top….” Grot spoke slowly, as if he was still trying to process this strange development. “He was not wrong. If this *is* what he saw.”

“Vhy the frack wouldt any murderers hide out in a circus? Ve have no evidence that the murder attempts are even partially connectedt.” Tali did admit that Koliss could be quite literal in describing something he saw, but looking at this rather… friendly place with what looked like families enjoying themselves seemed like too much of a disconnect.

“It is strange, but I suspect that is their intention.” Grot himself didn’t particularly like this place. The smells and sounds were literally violating to his senses, and he could already tell that he was drawing some strange stares. He wanted to find this Human doctor and get out of there, sooner rather than later.

“This is where the trail has led us; we might as well check this lead and move on if there is nothing here.” Grot spoke sensibly and Tali was quick to agree. They set off towards the entrance to this ‘circus’ with the hope that their prize did in fact lie somewhere inside. They were both quick to note the sign of ‘The Starlight Cirque and Taronne’s Terrific Traveling Troupe present: The Grandest Show in all the Stars!’

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“Goodness, you aren’t kidding about the noise. How many walls are between us and them and I can still make out the words.”

“Right? It’s ridiculous. I don’t understand how they manage to fight off the tinnitus working in there.”

The two of them shared a mirth filled look. Koliss was at least glad for the chance to be in a more relaxed posture. He figured she had something to with it.

“Really, from an outside perspective, it’s really a nice set-up. All things considered.”

“No need to be deferent Kol, it doesn’t suit you.”

Koliss could swear he saw a bit of remorse when she said that, but he still wasn’t sure he was talking with at this point. He decided to try and hammer that point.

“Well I think you can hardly blame me, I’m really on the wrong end of the deal here. Even if you-“

“Stop Kol, please just stop.”

 Koliss didn’t know what to make of being interrupted. Still there was that same remorseful look. The two exchanged a knowing look before she spoke in a much softer tone of voice.

“You really tracked me down all the way here just to see me?”

Koliss felt a slight twitch in the back of his mind. He didn’t end up where he was because he wanted to find her; it was more of a happy accident turned tragedy. Koliss bounced between whether he should be honest in at least that regard.

“Of course I did Jor, why wouldn’t I want to see you.”

It was technically correct; he did want to see her again. Just not under any circumstances like this. His only mission now was to try and get her away from there. She stared at for a few more moments before standing and entering his cell, reaching out for something. In moments Koliss was released from his shackles, which his muscles screamed in thanks for. There was also the raw skin and pock marks of wounds he had gained. Still he ignored all of this and rose to his feet.

This was the closest they had been since they had so rudely run into one another, they had quickly realized who the other was, and she had been quick to knock him out. They slid their arms around one another in a familiar hug.

“Thank you.” It really was all that Koliss wanted to say.

“Don’t be silly Kol, that’s what family’s for.”

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“Are you sure this is the best course of action?”

Tali’s lightsaber ignited and in moments had sliced the metal door to ribbons.

Grot stared for a moment “Very well, I will defer to you.” Both stepped in through the new entrance way to see what they had found.

Tali and Grot had moved as quietly as they could through the darkened back hallways. In the background a voice that echoed with an electric tone and the cheers of a large crowd drowned out any slight sounds the two made. They were apparently lucky to arrive in the middle of a show. They quickly managed to find temporary structures that connected to the main tent and were apparently quite extensive themselves. The hallways also were quite deserted besides the odd staff member that rushed by and made no attempt to look for either of the two intruders where they hid.

Tali was having more trouble than she was used to in trying to use the Force. She had tried to use her Force sense to see if she could find the familiar signature of Koliss, but found it impossible to do so. There was so much life and emotion that permeated throughout these grounds that she couldn’t hear herself think even when not focusing on the Force.

They had moved quickly enough despite the odd detour, coming across mostly storage space and dressing areas. However they had finally found something interesting, a small metal building with an actual security lock. More important was that Tali finally felt a small sliver of Koliss’ presence in the Force through the door. With time being a factor and no real way to slice the door electronically, Tali stepped up to do so physically.

They stepped through and found a sight that was quite out of place. The room, with sparring dummies with weapon marks and the smell of blaster scorch marks became immediately apparent as a training room.

The second most identifiable aspect of the room was the surprisingly large number of individuals that had stopped whatever they were doing to stare at the Twi’lek and Trandoshan. Their garb was uniformed: black masks and hoods covered their faces while leather armoring hid most of the figures discernible features. The vibroblades and blasters they carried all looked quite real. Their combat ready stances spoke that they knew how to use them too.

The third most apparent part of the room, obvious to Tali, was she was now sure she felt Koliss’ presence, just beyond another closed off door and through most of the masked warriors.

“He’s here.” Tali whispered. Grot nodded as he rested his hand on his slugthrower.

“And I suspect these ones are the reason he is there in the first place.” Tali felt her saber still ignited as she refocused on the large group that now turned their weapons towards herself and Grot. It would seem there would be no discussion from this silent group.

Tali grimaced slightly but finally spoke up, hoping to avoid a fight. “You have a friendt of ours. We have come for him.”

 A blaster shot that Tali reflected with her lightsaber was her only response. In a moment a number of melee fighters were upon her and she moved to defend herself. The next second, Grot had opened fire with his weapons. They were now truly stuck in for a tough fight.

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The sound of blasters and battle cries sounding through the door had startled both of them. Koliss could have sworn he had heard a lightsaber activation as well.

“Well, that makes things complicated.” She shifted down and roughly threw his equipment pack at him suddenly.

“Hopefully we can hide out here until whatever that is blows over. Just in case it doesn’t, you up for using those blasters of yours?”

Koliss had gingerly slid his pack to the ground as he grabbed both of his blaster pistols. He grimaced again as he could feel the raw skin and blisters stinging from holding the grips. He finally put on a haughty smirk.

“Please, do you really have to ask?”

She smiled at him. Koliss could see it was a truthful one and he liked how it looked framed on her face. It made what he was about to do even worse.

She turned back to a monitor and console and began working on something.

“Excellent *brother dearest*,” she used that waspish accent they found so strangely funny. That sinking feeling in Koliss’ stomach plunged even further. “Let’s take a looksee and see what we have in store for us.”

She had activated a security camera of some kind and Koliss could clearly make it out even standing behind her. The sight of a large Trandoshan shaking off what looked to be a ludicrious amount of blaster fire and a Twi’lek wielding a lightsaber against multiple opponents was both comforting and chilling. It meant that he had to do this now or he would never get the chance again.

‘*Jorda, you won’t forgive me for this, so I won’t ask for your forgiveness.*’

Koliss raised one of his blaster pistols up. She never saw it coming.

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**“STOP! CEASE THIS!”**

The training room that was before a cacophony of battle fell instantly silent. Tali could see her combatants were quite afraid. Before they had been the image of calmness when they fought; now they looked quite scared for their lives. All of them stared in a single direction. Tali slowly turned to see what they were so focused on.

A single dark robed induvial stood in the doorway Tali had created. Despite being held at weapon-point by Grot, the figure seemed to radiate a sense of leadership. As if she might be willing to listen what they had to say. It looked… human, though that may not be right. The figure was completely bald and had an intricate and striking set of what Tali guessed were tattoos. They ran along the left side of their face, from their chin up to their scalp. The right side was completely bare of any marking. The figure was currently taking turns at looking between her and Grot almost in exasperation.

“I apologize for the lack of manners my family has shown to you.” The figure spoke with a flat baritone, further confusing Tali and Grot as to identifying any kind of identity for this individual.

“I of course would ask why you have decided to… intrude into our private areas, but I can only assume there has been a misunderstanding.” Grot and Tali said nothing, not exactly knowing what this sudden shift in atmosphere really meant. The masked fighters seemed not interested in speaking up. Finally a gravelly tone broke the silence.

“My apologies Taronne, they have come after me.”

There was a sudden shifting of vision to see a rather beaten and tiered looking human, wielding two heavy blaster pistols and was carrying a similarly dressed figure to match the masked warriors. Grot never took his eyes off of the strange bald figure, but Tali’s recognition was all that was needed.

“Koliss..!?” She was quite surprised after all. She had expected they would be pulling the poor human nearly dead from a small cell. Instead he was apparently able to stand and walk freely, although he did look worse off than she remembered from his holo, and had somehow armed himself.

Koliss offered a small nod to Tali but quickly turned his attention back to the now named Taronne.

“I may have been able to get a message out the last time I broke free. I regret not informing you, but I guess it just slipped my mind.”

Taronne smiled at the comment. Grot felt an intense urge to hit this Taronne with his vibroblade. This figure reeked of something that was off. Tali simply looked back and forth almost in disbelief at this strange exchange.

“Yes well, it always pays to have friends know where you are I suppose.” Taronne spoke in a relaxed manner while taking the time to survey the damaged training room as he spoke. “I don’t suppose that they will be leaving here without you, right doctor?”

 “You would be right Taronne.” Koliss started limping forward towards Grot and Tali, the figure on his shoulders soon turned into a human woman. She had no mask, but her armor was the exact match of the other warriors. Tali could not help but wonder who exactly this person was that Koliss carried her so; with a high level of care.

Taronne addressed Koliss, seemingly forgetting the rather large Trandoshan that was still trying to threaten them.

“Well, then I suppose it’ll be best to let you go then. You know that you could have left at any time doctor. It was you who decided to be obstinate about sharing what you knew.”

“Your price was too high, and I had to stay.” Koliss motioned for Grot and Tali to follow. “Glad you came, let’s get going.”

“You also presume to take away one of our family from us?”

Before anyone knew it, Koliss had pressed one of his heavy blaster straight into the throat of Taronne’s face. The warriors reacted almost with abject horror if their body language was to be believed. Grot and Tali soon took the initiative of leaving the room. Koliss was slowly rotating his position and Taronne’s in order to back out of the room himself.

It was in passing Taronne that Tali felt a rather large force presence emanating from Taronne. It was quite shocking to think that she only just felt it. It was gone as soon as it rose however as she backed away quickly.

“She was my family long before she was yours. She needs help and I intend to help her get it.” Koliss spoke with a forceful tone while he seemed to enjoy pressing his blaster against Taronne’s head.

“You presume to help her then.” Taronne spoke with no surprise in his voice. He was entirely too calm for Koliss’ taste. Taronne nodded again. “I doubt it doctor, but she will get the help she needs, one way or the other.”

Koliss, Tali, and Grot continued backing down the hallway. Their weapons remained pointed at Taronne and the gathering of warriors that quickly surrounded him as they left.

“A word of caution my guests,” Taronne spoke very slightly louder as they got further away, “the next time you find myself in any of my family’s homes, our separation may not be any more cordial than this.”

“Buddy you have no idea how much I hope that’s true.” Koliss shouted with as much vitriol as he could muster in his state. No one made any attempts to follow them. Taronne simply smiled as he watched them depart.

They quickly beat feat out of the grounds and back to the Lekmaster 5000.

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“This is quite… vorrying.”

Tali, Grot, and Koliss, along with Koliss’ prisoner, were squeezed into the helm area of the Lekmaster. They had made the jump to hyperspace with no one attempting to follow that they could see. Tali had demanded answers right away, and Koliss wasted no time in producing a series of images and videos that painted a nasty picture.

Videos of very large amounts of toxins and poisons, detailed plans of government and business buildings, and the names of many people in a series of documents describing some kind of contract that had been accepted. The only name she could see that was not a victim was the name Taronne.

“It was pure dumb luck really.” Koliss spoke softly as he was busy trying to manage his various wounds. “I thought I had hit a wall when I went to that place, but I felt like I should snoop a bit and managed to work my way into a back area. Quite a number of stuff I didn’t catch: storage areas with all kinds of nasty bits, an actual military style barracks, a training area like you two shot up.” He quickly offered a nod at Grot, who barely responded as he kept his eyes trained on the human woman Koliss had brought along.

“So, these…. vhoever they are, are responsible for the murders ve caught sight of.” Tali had stopped looking over the evidence, turning instead to focus on checking a few of the Lekmaster’s systems.

“I’d bet my last credit on it. A large number of those names on those papers matched up with the names of the murder victims that we’ve heard about. Even a few we haven’t heard of.”

“Now explain why you brought this one.” Koliss turned to Grot, who motioned his head to the figure that was still out cold. The doctor took a few moments and sighed heavily. He leaned back in his chair.

“Right, I guess that brooks an explanation. So Tali and uh…Grot, let me introduce you to Jorda… my sister.” Koliss gulped audibly. Grot had no reaction other than to turn his gaze back to the woman. Tali meanwhile had visibly frozen in her seat.

“S-sister?” Tali stumbled slightly out. Koliss opened his mouth to respond, before snapping it shut and dashing over to Jorda. Tali and Grot managed to make out a few whispers which soon become noticeable as two. It would seem Jorda had woken up. It was then a shock when Jorda had slammed her hands around Koliss’ throat. The two siblings quickly became involved in fighting each other.

Grot moved quickly to grab the woman, but was stopped in his tracks by a wild eyed Koliss.

DON’T! Don’t you dare! Let me handle it!”

His words were gasped out, but he punctuated his sentence by breaking Jorda’s look on his throat and wrapping her into an arm-bar as he dragged her back into the commons area. The sounds of pitched fighting, clanging metal, and muffled shouts continued on.

Grot, who was not that invested in breaking the woman if the doctor wanted to deal with it himself, settled back into his seat. Tali herself was perplexed. She did want to go back there and stop whatever was happening. Then again, she could feel the rolling emotions off of the both of them and she really did not feel it that wise to step in between all of that.

“Are human family relationships that violent?”

Tali was surprised by Grot’s question, but spoke quickly to answer.

“Vell, no I vouldt guess not; they have probably just hadt a long day and need to sort out their-“

Tali twitched as a loud echoing clang seemed to shake the hull of the Lekmaster. Whatever had happened, the sounds of fighting and shouting had stopped.

“…-differences.” Tali finished with an exasperated breath.

Grot simply grunted and decided to pull out his slug thrower for some cleaning.

It was going to be a long way back to the *Voidbreaker*.