

Generic Upscale Cantina

Selen

37 ABY

“... and though I’ve been able to mostly route the shipments past the Collective raiders, it has played havoc on delivery schedules. Burning hotter to make promised deadlines is killing my fuel budget. Perhaps there could be a way to negotiate some leaner fuel bills, as a valued and important customer...” Yumni Ha’s long-winded segway was cut off by a protesting hand as her Nautolan counterpart sighed and rubbed his temples.

“You’re good at what you’re doing, I’ll give you that much Yumni, but can we please discuss anything else than business for once?” Hasan sighed. “I thought we could enjoy this lovely day without stifling discussions about the war and its logistics and, you know, cut loose. Surely you’ve been hankering for a breather as well?”

The pale Kaminoan stared at the blue-hued Nautolan with a gaze that told him she most definitely had not. Suspring, Hasan ran a hand through his head tendrils, casually savoring the finer dimensions of his tea’s scent as he did so and leaned in closer while other patrons happily enjoyed their brunches in the pleasantly sunlit diner.

“Listen, I can appreciate a woman who knows what she wants, but talking business all the time isn’t going to make you many friends around Selen. And before you object, I know you’re here to make credits and not friends, and so are we all, but sometimes you need to think long-term. We’re all people, at the end of the day, and sometimes we want to just... relax and have a good time. Nobody enjoys a stick in the mud,” Hasan explained with mild exasperation.

Yumni considered his words, but it seemed he wasn’t being fully candid with her. Indeed, he seemed to be building up to something, so she gestured for him to continue.

“What I’m getting at is,” Hasan began, struggling to find the words that wouldn’t insult his opposite number. Despite her dry and factual personality, he couldn’t deny that ALaS Co hadn’t grown to be a fairly major customer to his refueling business and insulting her might jeopardize that relationship. “People around here appreciate someone who can cut loose and be a little, you know, *daring*.”

“*Daring*?” Yumni repeated, the intonation so flat it almost sounded like a statement.

“Yes, daring. You know, that you might be fun at parties. Not just good at your job, but interesting to negotiate with.”

“Are you saying I’m uninteresting?” Yumni inquired, her tone of voice betraying no emotion.

“N-no, no, well a little. I mean, don’t take this the wrong way but, you haven’t exactly shown to be a person of whimsy,” Hasan struggled.

“Whimsy is not a word I would associate with running a shipping company, nor would I want any partners of mine to be *whimsical*. Sounds like a non-deductible liability to me.”

It was Hasan’s time to stare at her like he hadn’t quite understood what she meant. “That was a joke, Hasan,” she graciously clarified with a soft sigh. “Ugh, perhaps you’re right. It’s not like my attempts at obtaining meetings with some of the more prodigious customers hasn’t been *challenging*.”

Hasan tried his best not to smirk.

“Fine, what would I need to do to show that I am, as you say, *whimsical*?” the Kaminoan relented, leaning back in her seat and sipping some green tea. It tasted faintly of home.

“Well...” Hasan hadn’t exactly planned things this far as he’d assumed the Kaminoan to have stormed off or stonewalled the conversation long ago. “Perhaps you could play a prank?”

The female’s cocked a demure eyebrow. “Prank? Are we free-range children all of a sudden, or seasoned professionals?”

“Ugh, that might have come off wrong, but what I meant is...” he pulled out a datapad and opened a stored page. “We’ve got a special day coming up where it’s considered acceptable to prank others. Don’t ask me why, but it seems this is rather popular among the higher echelons. Maybe they’re just so rich and bored that playing practical jokes on each other is how they get off.” Hasan shrugged. “At any rate, if you can pull off a prank on one of the higher-ups, that would make for quite a story.”

Yumni was feeling far more reserved about this whole ordeal than the suddenly excited Nautolan. Clearly, he found this tradition far more alluring than he had led on. Still, she had to admit he might have a point and, as much as it pained her to divert her precious attention away from matters of running the Arconan Logistics and Shipping Company, it would have to be considered an investment in time.

“Very well, so a prank –,” Yumni began

“Yes,” Hasan nodded.

“– played upon a higher up.”

“Yes, the higher the better.”

“And this will give me a story I can tell at gatherings and help me get better deals?”

“Precisely!”

“Arcona is a strange culture,” the Kaminoan stated with a soft sigh.

"I'm glad you came around, Yumni, I'm sure this will be a wise move from your part," Hasan smiled with a nod. "Now, where were we?"

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"I can't believe you actually got her to agree to that!" Diy Grivna chuckled. "Oh man, I can't wait to see her cock it up." The Kiffar could hardly contain herself. Hasan had actually managed it!

"It took some convincing, but I appealed to her sense of business expediency. Seemed to do the trick," the Nautolan smirked, beaming with pride at his accomplishment.

"Any idea what she's planning? I wanna be there to see it."

"No the faintest. That woman's mind is as dry and inscrutable as the Tatoinean desert," Hasan sighed. "Which is ironic."

"How so?"

"Kamino's a water world."

Diy gave the smirking Nautolan a look that would have dried up the seas of Glee Anselm.

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Yumni brushed an imperceptible speck of dust off her formal robe and laid the hand back upon the other in her lap. Her unblinking gaze continued to drill into the receptionist outside the Consul's office, a dead stare that crept her out in more ways than she cared to admit.

The poor Zeltron didn't know what to do. She was under strict orders to not let anyone in as the Consul was once again recovering from one of his all-nighters. But this Kaminoan was nothing if not determined. So far, she'd sat in the lobby and patiently waiting for her turn for two hours, moving only to adjust her outfit. And not for one second had her gaze left her alone.

She knew she'd get into trouble for it, if the Consul happened to remember, of course, but she just couldn't stand it anymore. She had to get rid of her!

"T-the Consul will see you now, miss Ha," the Zeltron finally stuttered, deciding she'd rather roll the dice with the pervy Consul than bear one more second of the Kaminoan's unblinking gaze. Without a further word, Yumni stood up and walked up to the Consul's chambers, the secretary buzzing her in with a sense of relief.

She stepped into a wide, cool space, shrouded in near-perpetual darkness where only a handful of bale torches provided scant illumination. The air held the damp scent of ancient stone and the faint trails of chemical smoke. Somewhere in the distance, a man was snoring.

Pacing forth with long, gliding strides, Yumni approached the dark shape of a basalt throne upon which a curled-up ball of fluff lay, snoring and twitching, several bottles of what reeked of strong spirits scattered about its immediate vicinity. It was obvious to her that this was the famed Consul even before the Ryn choked on his own bile and let out a melodic chortle through his nose that was distinctly off-key.

“Consul Bleu,” her greeting was more of a statement than question. “I thank you for your time as this matter is of extreme importance.”

The Ryn stirred, annoyed by the voice and turning to the other side while clasp something that looked like a jacket around his head in a futile and childish effort of keeping the sounds from his ears.

“I am grateful for your continued patronage of our operation, however, a certain development has occurred which requires your attention,” she continued unabated, the Ryn letting out pained groans in what must have been the throes of a stellar hangover.

“As you are surely aware, we have been shuttling certain *private cargo* of your Consulship for some time now, making sure the contents are handled with diplomatic immunity and bypassing any unsavory border inspections. And if I may say so, we have been rather successful in our efforts. However, it appears that due to the nature of this cargo, our ships have suffered some... unforeseen complications.”

Kordath groaned, annoyed by the Kaminoan’s persistence and the weak will of his secretary. What was a blessing at other times turned out to be rather aggravating when he actually wanted her to have a will to say No. Groggily clawing his way to a more upright position, the half-naked Ryn stared at her with his fur matted and clumped and jutting out in haphazard directions. His right eye blinked, followed half a second later by the left.

“Whaa...?” he croaked, shutting up a second later as he felt bile rising up to his mouth.

“To put it bluntly, our vessels have shown signs of *shipphylis*,” Yumni paused to gauge his reaction. The Ryn was taking his time to process. Finally, he arrived at some semblance of response.

“Nah, ain’t me. I had meself tested,” he groaned, mouth dry and longing for water – or more booze.

“I said, *shipphylis*, not the common venereal disease.”

“Huh? Wazzat? I dunnae recall hearin’ ‘bout it.”

“How familiar are you with the intricacies of hyperdrive technology?”

“Uh, it be tha thing that make stars turn stripey an’...” the Consul tried to control the contents of his stomach, the mere mention of space travel enough to upset his already unstable gut.

For a member of a largely space-faring species, he took poorly to the endeavor. Heck, he'd even purposefully had the windows of his personal shuttle painted black so he wouldn't have to suffer staring into the cold void beyond.

"I'll take that as a 'no'," Yumni pressed on, clearing her throat with a distinctly academic tone that Kordath dreaded.

"Please nae lectures inna mornin'," he whimpered.

"The current time is thirty seven minutes past two in the afternoon," the pale Kaminoan replied without a glance at her chrono.

"It was a... ugh, *nevermind*," Kordath grunted and waved his hand dismissively. "Whadda ya want?"

"Thirty-seven thousand credits..."

"Done! Pick up tha check by the Zeltron wi'v tha cute butt on yer way out," the Consul interjected with a sense of relief.

"... for the retrofits and another fifteen for the delousing..."

"Agreed!"

"... and a further two thousand, seven hundred and fifteen credits for administrative work and overhead."

"You done?"

"Yes," Yumni nodded.

"If I pay yer... uh..." Kordath struggled, his brain as slick as cold porridge and recoiling in horror in the face of basic arithmetics.

"Fifty-four thousand seven-hundred and fifteen credits, plus interest."

"Yeah, *that*, you'll leave me be?"

"Correct," Yumni nodded. "And, you will be able to continue sending further deliveries without anyone ever mentioning this embarrassing issue again."

Kordath gave an unfocused look at the sharply dressed woman and considered the creeping suspicion he was being taken for a ride, but the pounding headache would not relent and at that point in time, fifty four thousand and change seemed like a small price to pay for some peace and quiet.

Sliding his clammy hand over to the comms controls, he told the receptionist to pay the woman whatever it was she was asking and make sure that *no-one* bothered him again. It had already been a terribly busy Tuesday for him.

Offering a politely professional smile, the Kaminoan turned around and left, leaving the ball of shivering Consul to consider his life-choices.

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“You *what?!*” Hasan almost spat out the imported bitter he’d been sipping, choking on the beverage and clearing his throat.

“What? Did you not tell me to prank a higher up and the higher the better? No-one’s above the Consul, so why aim for anything less,” Yumni replied coolly, nursing a plain beer in a tall glass.

“I, I guess I did, didn’t I?” Hasan chuckled nervously, glancing over his shoulder as if expecting the Consul’s guard about to arrest him for collusion with this madwoman. “So, what did you do to him?”

“I told him his shipments of *private entertainment* had given my vessel shipphylis.”

“And he bought that?!” Hasan blurted, hardly able to believe what he was hearing.

“Yes, and paid me a fair sum to remove the problem as well,” Yumni replied, allowing herself the faintest hints of smugness.

“Wow, how did he react when you told him there was no issue?”

“Excuse me?” Yumni blinked, slightly perplexed.

“You – did tell him, right? That it was just a prank, right?” Hasan chittered, newfound nervousness rising again.

“Oh,” Yumni fell silent for a moment, before offering a rare smile. “Of course I did.”

“Oh phew,” Hasan sighed, visibly deflating with relief. “You got me there, Yumni... You got me there...”

The Kaminoan simply looked away and sipped her beer in silence.