

Frackin' Red, We're all Dead

Waking up in a strange place was almost becoming the norm, it seemed. Wherever Qyreia was, she knew it wasn't her bed by the hard wooden surface beneath her, flaking splinters poking through her clothing as added reminder. *Goddammit, where the hell am I this time? I wasn't flying anywhere, so I didn't crash.* The low whistle of the breeze passing by a window reached her ears, and the urge to open her eyes grew. *I'm really, REALLY not gonna like what I see, am I?*

She opened her eyes to a dark hall, moonlight penetrating the broken and begrimed windows of the long hall in which she found herself. From the walls jutted ancient-looking lamps that sputtered with greasy black smoke, coiling up to the ceiling where the heated air wafted through gently waving cobwebs that hung like curtains.

Nope. I was right. Frack this crap.

Standing revealed no injuries or particular damage to her person or effects. Much to her chagrin though, her blasters were nowhere to be found. Only her knife, safely tucked away in her boot, remained in its proper place. It was a small reassurance that did nothing to calm the sound of the Zeltron's heartbeat pounding in her own ears, such was the silence that was only broken by the sound of the wind moaning once again.

Qyreia cleared her throat quietly, contemplating calling out versus staying silent. Neither option seemed to have any good outcomes in her mind. Calling out might alert some ethereal evil to her location, but it might also beckon a friendly face; one that, in silence, might react with violent surprise if the red woman turned a corner unexpectedly. *Damned if you do, damned if you don't, I guess.*

"Hello?" Her voice was timid and hardly above a whisper. She swallowed back her fear and cleared her throat. "Hellooo?"

Only the wind replied, the house — more aptly a mansion — groaning as the largely wooden construction shifted naturally with the changing temperatures. *I really don't like this,* her inner monologue whimpered. Taking a step forward seemed like a titanic task. The second step felt no less difficult. Walking down the hall was a gruelling event that saw Qyreia hunched over, her shoulders curled inward protectively while her legs wobbled precariously between being ready to crouch for the knife or sprinting away. She kept the windows to her left and the wall to her right as she walked steadily down the hall that, in the dim light, seemed to have no end. A cursory glance out the window revealed that she was on what looked like the third floor of the massive structure. Rather than a lawn at the base though, the building gave way to stone foundation that bouldered out briefly before falling away in a steep cliff.

“So much for getting out of here the easy way,” she muttered to herself. In the lonely hall, her voice seemed far louder than it was, and remembering the situation almost made her flinch at its punctuated finish. The first door she came across — a heavy wooden thing with wrought iron hinges and a large ring handle — was seemingly locked. No discernible sound came from within, so she passed by almost thankfully. The second door, however, was unlocked.

Grey-and-blue eyes darted left and right to check the surroundings again, one hand ready to reach down for the knife in a heartbeat. Her breathing sounded like a windstorm in her ears, but it was hardly a butterfly’s wings flapping in the quiet air. Biting her lip, she pushed the door open slowly.

Nothing was inside; nothing of particular note, at any rate. It was a simple bedroom and office: a bookcase filled with old tomes, a worn desk with shuttered cabinets, a bed, and a couple lamps. None of the books, upon closer inspection, were especially hair-raising either. Several volumes of fiction were interspersed with poetry and history books, and all on different topics. Qyreia had expected grotesque surgical articles or grimoires of the paranormal. She was mercifully relieved by the reality.

“Goddamn, if Keira could see me now, she’d be laughing her choobies off.” The thought of her lover’s mockery at her own fear had a calming effect as she perused the books’ contents. So many nights had been spent together on the sofa, watching horror flicks on the holonet, that her own phobia seemed ridiculous. A horror junkie scared of haunted houses.

That didn’t stop Qyreia from nearly jumping out of her skin when a loud *thump* echoed from down the hall. *Well kids, it’s been fun, but I need to get the frackin’ hell out of here!* Another crash came from the depths of the hall as she stepped out of the room and, while she couldn’t see anything in the distant gloom, she could hear movement coming steadily closer to her location.

Nope! NopenopenopenopeNOPE! As quietly as she could manage, she turned away from the noise and ran, looking for any sort of stairwell and checking for any level ground she might be able to climb down to. *I’ve seen this kind of crap before, and I refuse to be the bimbo who hangs around to look for clues!*

A stairway came into view first, and she turned down its steps like a desert traveller who just found a spring of water. “Frack this crap. Frack it, frack its family, and frack its bantha.”

Somewhere behind her, she could hear the sounds growing closer, accompanied by heavy footsteps and an otherworldly moan that she had never heard uttered by any creature in her long travels of the galaxy. Whatever it was, she didn’t want to meet it or even care to find out what “it” was. There were many things she would be brave for; especially when properly armed. This was not one of them.

The footsteps faded in and out, but the noise of crashing bookstands and small tables coupled fitfully with slamming doors and shattering glass. Qyreia reached what she was sure was the ground level and looked for a window or a door leading outside, but only found more halls and grandioses rooms. Any attempts at stealth before were long since behind, opting instead for total speed — something that the lithe Zeltron had in abundance. She ran through a library whose books shuddered and fluttered with unseen energy. In any other place, she would have blamed a Force user. Not today.

More and more winding halls allowed the specter ever closer, prompting the merc to keep running. Bolting through yet another door, she found herself in the mansion's kitchen...

...and a dead end.

"Nooo nonononono." A pair of oily lamps provided the sole source of artificial light, assisted only by a tiny window embedded into the wall, well out of reach of the Zeltron's hands. The cacophony continued, and Qyreia was reminded of her pursuer. Running back to the door, she bolted it shut. Then she braced it with one of the heavy wooden tables.

...a cabinet on top of it wouldn't hurt.

...that refrigerator wasn't doing anyone any good either.

...maybe another table.

Sweating but pleased with her work, she listened to the noises grow louder and louder until they were right outside the door, hammering away at the thick, heavy wood, but not even managing to rattle the interior door handle for its efforts. A ghastly shriek pierced the walls and made the foundation of the home itself seem unsteady, followed by long minutes of banging and scratching noises. Qyreia even let herself smile as her barricade held fast.

"Suck it, *schutta*," she sputtered between heavy breaths, a smile working across her lips.

Turning her attention to the window — her only means of escape — the mercenary looked around for stable footing. All the tables were currently occupied at the door, and there was no countertop or other furnishing underneath the small opening. The raking, raging sounds continued outside the locked passageway as she contemplated how to tear out the sink or other items that were embedded into the tiled walls. It was while she was considering stacking chairs into an ad hoc stairway that the noises suddenly and unexpectedly stopped. All was silent again. *That's never a good sign.*

Surveying her immediate surroundings offered nothing. The door was still shut; that much she had going for her. In the dim light though, it was hard for her to see the drawer that

slowly slid itself open. It was only the jingling sound of collected cutlery that caught her attention at the last possible moment, just before the image of a large knife entered her vision.

Whether it was the “will of the Force”, an act of some god, or just a combination of dumb luck and skill, the Zeltron bent backward and narrowly avoided the projectile. The knife careened into the grout and other materials behind it, embedding the blade all the way to the handle. Before another such missile could escape its confines, Qyreia dashed to the drawer in a matter of strides and kicked it shut. For safety purposes, she tied it to the faucet with a pair of sturdy rags to hold it shut.

“Not today, choobhole. Won’t say where I learned that knot, but you won’t be undoing it anytime soon.”

Qyreia inspected the other drawers, but there was nothing of particular worry amongst their contents, so she returned her attention to escape. The resuming screech from outside the door seemed to mean that she had dashed the homicidal efforts of the phantasm. *Just a bit longer and I’m outta here.* Rather than perching chairs together, cursory inspection of the knife in the wall revealed it was very solidly buried, creating a stable handle that the Zeltron was more than willing to use. It brought her to perfect level with the small window.

The thing was able to swing open, but she broke it off the hinges for good measure and tossed it well beyond her immediate range of sight. After that, the only difficult thing was squeezing through. Her leather jacket proved too bulky, even for its small size, so she balled it up and threw it out the window to flop onto the ground outside — a promising sound given her earlier observations. Freed from her most constraining clothing article, the merc angled and plied her way through the window that was just barely smaller than her shoulders. She wriggled and slid, even popping a few buttons from her shirt and the one atop her pants, but she made it outside, dropping with what might be called “grace” to the rocky lawn below.

Outside. Frack yeah, she thought as she collected her jacket. She could even see what she assumed was the front gate off to one side. “Frack this crap, I’m out! Toodle-oo, you haunted pile of poodoo!”

Just as she was reaching the gate, she heard a scream from one of the upper floors’ windows; a scream more akin to a young woman than the creature that had pursued her earlier. Reluctantly she turned, indeed spying a rather attractive female specimen in a revealing nightgown who was hammering at the window with her fists.

“Help me! Please, help me!”

In a blur of shadow, she let out a final scream before being torn from the window, her voice still echoing as it faded into the interior of the home.

“...Nope. Nooope. Frack you, lady. You dead. Nope.”

And so Qyreia left the haunted house, not quite sure where she was, but it seemed anywhere was better than there.