

Woopsie Daisy

“Curious how you’ve not moved out of this place yet, Red.” Kordath looked around the apartment, cramped as it was with not only the pair of them, but also his stalwart Fade who sat quietly nearby in a cushioned seat that, with anyone else, would be comfortable and spacious. Only Strong could somehow make it seem so uncomfortably small. “Won’t deny that it’s cozy though.”

“Indeed Miss Arronen,” Strong said in his standard polite bombast. “This is quite the lovely home you’ve made for yourself.”

“You sure I can’t offer you something to drink, Mr. Stres’armis? I could...”

“Alas! I cannot imbibe such fare, lest this sculpture of physical form,” he exclaimed as he flexed to a point where the other two were certain his shirt would burst off, “be marred by it’s touch.” His back cracked loudly as he stretched out — a result of his slouching in the comparatively small seat — and he settled back with a muted look of discomfort. “Some tea would be lovely though, if I might trouble you.”

Qyreia chuckled and rose for the kitchen. “No trouble at all.”

The Ryn watched the sway of her hips as she walked away, catching himself only after he heard some grunt from his bodyguard, who was still flexing gratuitously. “Strong.”

“Yes Master Bleu?”

“You can stop with the muscle show. She’s gone.”

“Of course, Master Bleu.”

It was a bit odd to be invited over so frequently of late. More and more, the Zeltron seemed to be taking Kordath out for drinks, or dinner, or the most horrible occasions: an early morning jog. Given how often she’d threatened to lop off his tail during their brief tenure together as the Galerian leadership, it sometimes seemed like the only real link they had was with Shay’ira. *But now Zuji has ‘er, and you’re stuck with me.* The bittersweet amusement pulled a quiet growl from his throat that was easily muted by another drink of his beer. Things were better, but they still weren’t as good as he would have liked.

Before he could mentally wander deeper into the morass of his emotional mire, Qyreia reappeared with a kettle and cup for Strong, who thanked her profusely and complemented her brewing. “Dinner’s almost ready. Kord, you want another?”

He shook his head, swirling the half bottle he was still nursing. The Zeltron merc disappeared only momentarily before coming back out with three deep plates filled half with rice

and half with what he could only guess was the curry that was apparently so famous in the Arronen household; or at least, that was what Keira said on his last visit. Samplings of leftovers had been enough incentive to arrange a dinner date of sorts.

It smelled pleasant — heady, savory, if a bit sharp with some spice he couldn't pick out — and even Strong seemed excited. *It's a shame Bly's outside playing guard dog, but eh. His loss.* Bachelor-esque though he was, Kordath knew how to cook well enough to satisfy himself. Still, there was always something about a home-cooked meal made by someone *else* that just seemed to make things all the better. Food always tastes better off someone else's plate, as the saying went. The Quaestor had hardly sat down to open her beer than the Ryn was shoveling the first large spoonful into his mouth, reddish orange sauce trapping itself in his white mustache.

"Enjoy," Qyreia said happily upon seeing him eating so heartily, toasting with her bottle. Strong nodded in appreciation and was about to dig in when they both heard a loud cough and choking rattle.

The sinews of the Shadow Lord's neck stood out from beneath the fine grayish fuzz that covered his skin, and his eyes were wide and bloodshot as he suddenly found himself unable to breath. A sputter of air trapped in his cheeks sent a weak spray of rice onto the floor and caf table. He didn't recall breathing any food, and yet his throat wasn't allowing any air to pass. It took only the slightest glance to Strong for the big man to bolt upright from his seat.

"BLY!"

"What's going on?" the human and Zeltron asked simultaneously as the former entered, the latter's voice sounding as surprised as it was worried.

"Miss Arronen," Strong said as he hefted the diminutive Ryn in his arms, "I am going to ask that you remain here with Captain Bly while I take Master Bleu to the hospital."

As polite as the words were, the Chiss' tone was frosted over with ice. Before she could even get a word in edgewise, Strong was out the door and Bly stood nearby, blaster pistol in hand. The weapon wasn't pointed at her, but Qyreia knew that any odd movements would change that circumstance in a heartbeat. They had only cursory acquaintance between them, so any and all smalltalk was infeasible. Any questions posited to the leader of the Consul's personal guard were met with cautious silence. Neither of them knew what was happening, so silence would suffice.

Well over an hour passed, the food congealing in their vessels and on the floor where it had fallen, before any news or communication was passed on. Two members of the Guard arrived at the door, stuncuffs in hand.

“Qyreia Arronen, by order of the Shadow Scion, you are under arrest for the attempted murder of Shadow Lord Kordath Bleu.”

“*What?!*”

“It would be best you come along quietly,” Bly insisted as the Guards moved to detain the Zeltron.

“He choked on some goddamn *food!* How does that become an *assassination* charge?!”

“I am as curious as you are,” Bly’s tone hardened somewhat, his pistol-hand raising slightly. “I will only say this once: please don’t resist.”

Qyreia sneered. Her weapons were nowhere within reach, she was outnumbered, and up against people that would definitely beat her in a fist fight; no matter how many gonads she might cave in with her shin. “This is frackin’ bantha crap, and you know it Bly.” With a resigned and indignant sigh, she extended her arms with wrists close together. “Get it over with.”

The guard with the cuffs snatched at her arm, twisting it behind her back roughly and drawing a pained yelp from the red woman. Bly halted it instantly. “That won’t be necessary. I don’t think she’ll run.”

Less than a minute later, Qyreia left her apartment in the custody of Bly and the two guards, hands mercifully manacled in front instead of behind. It didn’t stop any of the strange looks she received. Too many people on the Citadel knew who the red-skinned woman with the blue hair was, so this sight was an oddity among oddities. Given the tight confines though, there wasn’t much that could be done to reduce the visibility of the group, much to Bly’s chagrin. The situation was not helped when the guards turned the group toward the throne room and not the detention center.

Seeing Terran Koul standing beside the Serpentine Throne seemed answer enough.

“Don’t suppose you’ve got a good lawyer, Terran.”

“Counsel will be provided, Qyreia Arronen. Don’t you worry.”

“I meant for *you*, schutta-for-brains. The hell do you mean having me arrested?! Kord an’ me are friends! Why would I try to kill him?!”

“And yet the few times I’ve seen you together,” the Force user said, waving the guards away, “you were hostile to the point of threatening insurrection. It’s only a stone’s throw from

assassination of the person you see as hindering the reconstruction efforts — even if he’s the one heading the effort.”

“Oh *god*, are you still on about that? I argued with *Atty* over that snot too! You gonna say I offed her too?”

“And yet no one else was tainted by the food that caused such a reaction in our Consul.”

“No one else *ate* the damn stuff.”

“Because your target was already down. Unfortunately for you, he survived.”

Qyreia bit back the scathing retorts that were flowing through her head like a flood, gritting her teeth together while the taller human stared down at her. She pursed her lips. “Take me to my cell. I need to talk to my defense counsel.”

“We’ll have someone sent to you.”

“I’ve already got someone in mind, Terran. Thanks.”

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Blue fingers tapped rhythmically together, barely gracing the Pantoran’s lips as she considered the situation presented to her. Her golden eyes flitted up toward her friend and former Master, back at the evidence file, and then back at her own hands.

“Have you even gotten to talk to Kord yet?”

“No,” she replied exasperatedly. “Supposedly he’s still in a shock-induced coma.”

Leedra sighed, a headache of frustration already developing. “And you didn’t use any crazy ingredients in your curry? Nothing out of the ordinary?” She wasn’t about to ask the merc if she’d actually *tried* to poison the Consul of Arcona. To say nothing for how silly the given motive was, she knew Qyreia would have found it much easier to just shoot the lecherous Ryn from a distance.

“I had to do some grocery shopping, but I got all the same ingredients.”

“If I were to get you a datapad, could you write out those ingredients for me?”

“Not in exact amounts, but yeah.”

Bringing Leedra into the fray had been a calculated move on Qyreia’s part. She knew about the Pantoran’s past as a police cadet and her fire for finding the truth. With a charge of treason being leveled against her, the mercenary Quaestor wasn’t about to leave this in the hands

of some uncaring detective or state-appointed lawyer. Her former apprentice would get it done. She had to.

Just as asked, the red woman listed all her ingredients for the recipe and answered a few inconsequential questions before Leeadra left the interrogation room. While the Zeltron was taken back to her quiet cell, the Force user made fast speed to the Arronen apartment which was already crawling with security personnel. While not quite the regular to the Citadel like her Master was, the Pantoran was still an Arconan of some authority. A little light *suggestion* didn't hurt either as she maneuvered her way through the cordon to gain entry to the supposed crime scene.

She found the place just as it had been left. The rice had dried out in scattered piles of hardened grains, the sauce crusting over with a slight brownish hue on the edges of the ruddy orange color. Leeadra didn't waste a single second, taking snapshots of the apartment with her datapad, bagging samples of the cooked foodstuffs, and making careful note of the ingredients still arranged on the kitchen counter, as though the cooking was just getting started.

"How are you such a neat-freak, Q?" A light smile touched her features as she perused the various containers. "Lessee... local brand of tomato paste; good for the local economy. Generic variants of garlic, cooking oils, and butter. Even the salt and pep..." She paused. "...-per?"

She picked up the shaker which held the black pepper and peered at the label. '*Sea Bream' Calamari black pepper. I didn't even know Mon Cal could grow this kind of plant, much less that they sold it commercially.* Taking some more pictures and a generous sampling, the amateur detective looked around for some time longer before leaving with her various pieces of evidence in hand. She didn't intend to hold on to it long.

"I need this analyzed," she told the forensic chemist at the justice department labs; a location she was familiar with on an academic level. "Supposed to be some sort of black pepper from Mon Calamari."

The tech looked at the label on the datapad image and at the baggie of black flakes. "That *is* a bit odd. Why exactly do you need this?"

"Attempted murder case."

That made the scientist balk. "Shoould I actually be looking at this?"

"Given it could be the only non-circumstantial evidence in the case, definitely."

Police officer or not, Leeadra had the air of one, and that was enough to convince the lab tech to put the stuff through the electron spectrometer, which fed the chemical and atomic data

into the attached scanner. She ran tests on the other materials for good measure, but both of their breaths seemed to be bated for the results on the pepper.

“It... looks like normal black pepper.”

Leeadra’s expression dropped. “Damn. I was really hoping...”

“I’m sorry. Maybe there’ll be something on one of the other compounds here.” She eyed the screen, thinking of some conciliatory comment. “At least if it’s all circumstantial, this person stands a decent chance in court.”

“That’s *if* it actually makes it to a real court. I’m sure you know the type.”

“Ah... yes, unfortunately.” The tech paused again, staring at the screen, until her eyes scrunched. “Wait a minute. This was *black* pepper, right?”

“Yeah?”

“So why does it have capsaicin in it?”

“Can you explain this in Basic? Capsaicin?”

She swung her chair around to a separate computer terminal, typing in some keywords, glancing back at the chemical readout from time to time. “Capsaicin is what makes peppers — and many other sauces and foods — spicy. It’s technically toxic, though not usually enough to debilitate someone except in high concentrations, resulting in a chemical burn that is effectively your tissue reacting to the ‘spicy flavor’, in a manner of speaking.”

There’s no way Kord went down because this stuff was just too spicy for his taste buds.
“What sort of symptoms would they present?”

“Some swelling, but nothing lethal unless they were allergic. *However,*” she added as she slid another chemical onto the display, “if you add *this* little guy here, you get capsaicin-safrolide. Safrole can be a mild carcinogen and liver function inhibitor in high enough concentrations. This chemical bond can be particularly nasty. You got a datapad? I can transfer the info to you.”

“Please do.”

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Kordath looked like he should be dead. Bloodshot, jaundiced eyes stood out from his pale pallor and tired-looking flesh, and his back hunched severely as he held his blanket over him. He didn’t look particularly happy to be in the same room as his accused would-be assassin,

but he didn't look much like anything except miserable. He was at least afforded a comfortable chair in an office of the hospital's recovery wing while Terran stood nearby with Captain Bly and Strong. Standing across from him was Qyreia, her hands cuffed and two additional guards behind her.

"Ah'm gonna assume you've got somethin' ta say?" the Ryn said as lucidly as he could. His head was pounding and the word seemed to be spinning. Coherent speech was hardly a priority for his body.

"I didn't try to kill you, Kord. You know me better than that."

"An' I'd believe yeh, but there ain't much ta help yer case."

"Lee said she had something. Just wait."

"And wait no longer," Leeadra said with an official air as she entered. Moving around the room, she passed datapads to Terran, Kordath, and Strong, the latter sharing his view with Bly. "Qyreia is innocent of attempted murder."

Kordath looked wearily at his datapad. *Oh great. More reports to read.* "Can ye give me the footnotes version?"

"Says it was a chemical compound called capsaicin-safrolide," Terran said inquisitively. "Found in the black pepper that you ate. Which would imply that Miss Arronen *did* try to poison you."

"Ah! Not so fast! There's two primary keys you're missing here. Aside from the half-baked motive, we — and by *we* I mean *I* — only *just* discovered the cause. For those curious, the chemical compound that I'll call 'CS' was found in the oils produced by the pepper as it was cooked. Upon ingestion, the high concentration of capsacin severely inflamed our wonderful Consul's throat, which caused the choking. Trace amounts of the safrole in the CS then worked its way into Mister Bleu's liver, which I think we can all say with some certainty is already compromised." She mimicked drinking with her hand, eliciting some hushed chuckles, including from the prisoner.

"Again, this is the method. It doesn't prove the Quaestor's innocence."

"That's where the origin comes into play," the detective proclaimed. "See, Raspberry here uses a lot of black pepper in her curry recipe — not surprising — so she tends to buy it rather frequently. Turns out the local market just got this Sea Bream brand of black pepper in stock, which comes from Mon Calamari. To say nothing for biology differences, it's safe to

assume there wasn't a whole lot of testing of a spice that came from an *ocean world*. Q-ball here didn't know that though, and so just bought a shaker of the stuff on a whim.

“Put two and two together, and you've got the fixin's for some really bad accidental food poisoning.”

Terran's eyes searched the room while Kord managed to shakily pick up the dataslate. “So you dinnae try ta poison me?”

“*No* you hairy blue moron. I may threaten to cut off your tail from time to time, but it'd take some serious doing to piss me off *that* much.” She knelt down so she was eye to eye with him; a movement that made the guards anxious, but they were dismissed with a wave. “But really though, you better get control of that thing if you ever hang around me in the kitchen where I've got knives.”

Somehow, Kordath managed a chuckle. “Alrigh' Red. I b'lieve ya.” He looked toward the guards. “What're ya waitin' fer? Uncuff 'er already.”

Qyreia shot an appreciative glance to her apprentice. “Thanks Blueberry.”

“Anytime, you stupid merc.”