

“It’s been a minute, hasn’t it?”

Red fingers ran across the clean walls of the Citadel apartment that had been hers as Quaestor of House Galeres. That was only a mere three months ago, and yet it seemed such a distant memory. *That’s what happens when they go and have a war without you, I guess.*

There were... *mixed* feelings about her return, for those who were aware. Kordath, in the throes of moving out of the Consul’s seat, still had time to send a Skitters droid to follow her. He knew it was well-received when the signal for the droid died, like so many before it. Leeadra knee of course. Satsi was also aware, but there had been no formal or informal messaging between the two. Only Aldaric remained, and even then, only because of his position as the sitting Quaestor of the House the Zeltron was returning to.

The soft steps of her fiancée brought Qyreia out of her quiet pensiveness.

“Remee’s coming up with the boxes now.”

“Mkay.”

Keira’s brow quirked curiously. “Are you alright? I don’t know how to qualify this feeling coming off you.”

The months back on Zeltros has gotten the mercenary used to comments like that. Her former reservations about her Zeltron abilities all but gone. “Just some nostalgia, that’s all.”

“*Beedeet-roo breeuw*,” the droid called through the open doorway.

“Come on in, Remster. Doorway’s clear.”

The R3 unit chimed in affirmation and scuttled inside, carefully towing a hover-dolly stacked high with boxes held in place by a low-yield energy barrier. The bed and sofa - the only large furniture they had - would come on the second and final trip. *And she should be by any second now.*

“Why am I doing this again?!”

There she is. “Sergeant Jelenko! Come on in!”

The long-haired Selenian slowly hailed in the second hover-dolly, laden with the big furniture. She was sweating only slightly more than the dolly seemed to be struggling to stay hovering.

“Why’m I even doing this again? I don’t work for you anymore!”

“Which means you’re doing it out of the kindness of your heart, Jen.” Qyreia stepped up to help pull the thing in the rest of the way, just barely squeezing through the narrow gap left by the droid’s load. Once in place, they both let go as the batteries promptly died, dropping the whole thing to the floor with a wheezing mechanical whine.

The Selenian wiped her brow. “What a piece of junk.” She eyed the Zeltron, who was failing at trying to look innocent. “You got the cheapest ones you could find, didn’t you?”

Qyreia’s lips tightened as she rolled her eyes guiltily. “Maybe?”

Jennel huffed, frustrated but beyond a point where she gave a kark. She looked at Keira for some help in restoring sanity, to which the Force user only rolled her own eyes before stepping up.

“Remee, can you work some repairs on this thing and get it recharged?” She was familiar enough with the droid to recognize an affirmative chirp. “Alright. I’ll get these then.”

With a wave of her hand, the Force user lifted the bed mattress and floated it over toward the bedroom while the exhausted Selenian watched in mixed wonder and tired annoyance. As part of the Dajorra Defense Force, she was at least vaguely aware of those her former boss liked to call “space wizards,” but she’d never actually seen the Force in action before. Ignoring that though, that meant the half-Umbaran could have helped *the whole time*.

“I hate you both.”

“No you don’t,” Qyreia said with a knowing grin.

“I so do.”

“You sticking around for beers after?”

“...”

~*~*~*~

“I still hate you both,” Jennel said even as the *pop-hiss* of her bottle being opened rang through the half-unpacked furnishings. She took the drink just as willingly. “Thanks.”

“Sure thing,” the Zeltron said as she plopped onto the sofa between Keira and the Selenian.

As the sensation of relaxation set in, silence took over the room, interrupted only by the whirring movements of the droid in the next room, busying itself with unpacking.

Sergeant Jelenko seemed especially silent, her face a mix of contented fatigue and ponderous malaise. Even relaxing, the Zeltron could feel on the empathic ether that something was off. Knowing what she did of recent events in the Brotherhood, she was hesitant to even ask.

The situation wasn't helped by the growing heat in the room. Or was it all the furniture they'd moved? It was hard to tell.

"Is it hot in here," she asked, holding the cold bottle to the bare skin where her clavicles met, "or is it just me?"

"AC's out," Jelenko huffed, all too aware of the situation.

While her old boss might've left, she was still a member of the DDF. In the Zeltron's absence, she'd been transferred to the Citadel, getting the logistics for the returning Arconans and Expeditionary Forces sorted. It was hardly a glamorous job, but it was the one she had.

"Nothing like a mountain castle on a subtropic island with *zero* central air."

"I'll be sure to keep that in mind the next time you *jump ship*."

That piqued Qyreia's curiosity; even Keira offered a quirked brow. "You got something to say, Sergeant?"

Using the rank stymied some of the fire in the Selenian, even if that wasn't the merc's intent. However one looked at it, in the grand scheme, the Arconans outranked the military in just about every aspect. It was as much a part of their public facade as it was a control mechanism: put enough pips on the rank board, and even a subjugated army will show deference. Jelenko had gotten comfortable working with the Zeltron though.

"Frack you, that's what."

"Oh?"

Keira feigned a slap on the soldier's arm. "Mine. No touchy."

Jennel just rolled her eyes. "Listen ma'am... Arronen... whatever the frack it is you go by. You left and everything just kinda... I dunno. *Sagged* is one way to put it. Then the war hit us in the tits all over again, and now we're back to offloading body bags from a fight no one down here understands."

A long sigh passed from the Zeltron's nose, a thoughtful, hurt expression in her eyes. "That's kinda why I left." She drank from her bottle, letting that sink in with the Selenian.

“W-what about your mom and being sick and...?”

“I mean *yeah*, there was that too but... I dunno. I was so fed up with the drama and the backstabbing and all the *god-damn-fighting*. I needed to clear my head.”

It was awkward having this conversation with Keira present. Then again, the ex-Quaestor knew that the Force user was well aware of all the circumstances involved in her departure. It was an expected symptom, what with being in a relationship. *And engaged. Don't forget that.* The thought was a brief reprieve from the heaviness of the conversation, but she could feel Keira's hand nudging hers to continue just as much as the anticipation in the air.

“I didn't mean to ditch you or anyone, Jen. That's not what I wanted.”

“Doesn't stop the body bags from comin' in,” the Selenian replied with a swig of her beer. “You know, there's a lot of folk in the military wondering what we're actually doing all this for. In case you haven't noticed, being associated with you... er, your *group* doesn't really come with a whole helluva lot of benefits.”

“That's... a reasonable if disconcerting point.”

“Jus' sayin'.”

“You're getting rather relaxed, Sergeant Jelenko,” Keira noted with a chuckle. “About time.”

The Selenian returned the laugh. “Yeah. Must be the heat. And the booze.” She paused, mulling over some internal dialogue before setting the beer down and began removing her tank top.

“WoahwoahWOAH!” Qyreia firmly yanked the hands and fabric back down.

“What? Isn't this where we start the frisky business?”

“The... wha?”

“Yeah. Word was you were into ladies, and then when I told Tameike that I was helping you out today, she said...”

“*Stop.*” The Zeltron put her hands firmly on Jelenko's shoulders. *Why am I not surprised that Satsi is somehow involved?* “It is *very* hot in here, but let's not take off our clothes, yeah? How about a walk? Fresh air and such.”

The droid beeped affirmatively in the background. Somewhere in the vents, she could have sworn she heard what sounded like frustrated mechanical skittering. *Time to reinstall the EM security system.* Somehow, despite the angst and confusion already

slamming them in the face, it wasn't altogether unpleasant. It felt... right. This was Arcona after all.