

The thing was, she didn't do much bounty hunting.

People tended to assume she'd be good at it; doubtless it was why she'd been handed the dossier and bounty fob at all. And it made sense, that they did. Her skill set lended to it. She could be anyone, to anyone, for as long as it took to get what she wanted, or she could just blast her way in and break bones until whoever she was pointed at was a bloodied pulp in her hands.

But therein lied the issue. Manipulation, seduction, subterfuge? Fine. Capture, intimidation, enforcement, murder? Beautiful.

Babysitting? Not so much. More likely she'd snap and beat a target to death before day one was up, if left to her own devices.

So, her current problem.

"You want me to be your what?"

"My conscience," Satsi answered, testing the sharpness of the edge on her Sith dagger. It was habitual, even though the thing never dulled; damn sparkfinger magic. "Since I don't have one, but closest thing seems to always karking pop up around you."

Across the table, Zujenia sighed. The hybrid was only just back from her honeymoon, and Satsi actually hated to bother her — a working example of her claim, right there — but the half-Ryn coming along was almost a guarantee of reigning in Satsi's habits. The next best option would have been her daughter, and no way in hell was Satsi bringing the toddler along on a mission, no matter *how* cute she was. Way too dangerous. Anybody who brought a baby into gunfights was frakking insane.

"I don't know, Satsi...We just got away from all this. And Shay needs me, Kord needs me, my mother..."

"I know, girl, m'sorry, I wouldn't be askin', just...I'd just have you on comms except..." The Human muttered to herself, low.

"What was that?"

Satsi sighed, tensed. "I said, I wouldn't ask you to actually *come* if I didn't need someone to put me down if I get caught. It's Coruscant, Spots. I can't go back there. I can't get caught there. I won't. And if I can't get to my gun, then..."

"SATSII!" shrieked the hybrid, as expected, and the scarred ex-gangster did flinch then.
"ABSOLUTELY NOT! Forget this mission! Give it to someone else! Stay here. What about Uji and Sammy?"

"Don't you dare," Satsi snapped back. "Look, I know, okay, just— this Manu frakker is supposed to have Collective ties and nevermind all the info they're hoping he'll have on the Deputy and those bastard's plans, that means he might know something *that could help* with our *problem*. You read Marick's last update."

It was a little dumb, to talk about it that way in the privacy of their own Citadel quarters, but the years had made them both cautious and paranoid, guarding this particular secret at all costs. The half-Ryn's distressed expression twisted, closer to a frown and a pout and tears all at once before settling in grim calm.

"I...you think so?"

"It's a chance. And he's a weak link." Satsi sighed, hard. Looked aside. Stood up. "You know what? Yer right, Spotsie. I can't be askin' you this. Might be good for the conscience part, sure, but...I can't put shooting me in the head on you. I know who to ask for THAT. Besides, with him along, maybe we won't even need to be worried. Pretty sure we can hold our own"

"...what do you mean?"

The Human's smile wasn't a smile at all, all too wide to show all her teeth and violent and mean.

"I gotta call Pretty Boy back."

-x-

Marick answered on the first ring, accepted on the third sentence of her explanation with only one word.

"Yes." A beat. "Ace will take us. Two hours."

The comm line cut. Satsi snorted, smiled again and gripped her pistol to keep her hand from shaking.

-x-

"You're bringing the dogs?"

The Hapan didn't so much as blink at her as he stepped up the boarding ramp of his ship, the *Encanis*, nodding to his pilot buddy.

"They are Cythraul."

"Yeah, yeah, I know— and Atty's has the big teeth and I seen him tear somebody to pieces, sure, but that one?" She pointed at the tiny, three-legged puffball that bounced after the Master Assassin on pink toes about the size of beans.

"Her name is Fela. She stays with me."

"...ooookay." The Human dropped into her own seat across from the former Voice and buckled her harness. All her weapons were sharpened, oiled, and strapped in their holsters all over her; his were all hidden, but doubtless there. The little fluffy pendant was the only color on him besides the black of his long shadecloak, besides every little flash of those mildly freaky blue eyes. "Sure. Her funeral."

"No one will touch her while I am here." His tone was flat as it always was, but she was made to listen and hear what people hid, and the sheer, icy-steel vehemence in there would've rivaled her own for her daughter or partner. He wouldn't burn worlds first; he just wouldn't allow any harm to happen. The end. Then, his lilting vowels got a degree warmer, and his lips actually twitched upwards, almost a smile, and even not knowing him that well, Satsi was floored. "She could take down a few ankles though."

Huh. Having her back must be good for him. Satsi could understand that. She'd been there. Been through the kind of loss that just made a person *not* anymore and left behind a body that still moved. Had it, by the closest thing she could think of as a miracle, brought back. Felt her heart beat again. Maybe Marick had that now too.

She hoped so. He wasn't awful. Pretty okay, actually. Could probably use something nice. She wanted them to have nice.

"I'll believe it when I see it," the woman said eventually, as they lifted into the atmosphere over Selen. "She'll stay out of the way? I don't wanna shoot her on accident, and I've got grenades."

"They are both as intelligent as you or I. They know better."

"Uh, huh, okay...Just don't want you shanking me before you actually have to."

He blinked that blink of his at her. Tilted his chin in a nod. She didn't like the way he stared like he knew exactly what she was looking for underneath the scathing.

"If I must," was all he said, before they lapsed into silence, and creped out or not, she was grateful for the reassurance and grateful to him. Marick was her kind of practical.

They didn't speak the rest of the flight, and he didn't say a damn thing about how much tenser she grew every second they got closer to her homeworld, or make any move to stop her from scratching bloody grooves in her arms, or try to do anything when she clenched her eyes shut to stave off red eyes and sibilant whispers.

He just sat, still, and waited. Ivoshar growled a bit, but mostly was relaxed, entertaining the wiggling marshmallow of a puppy that Marick had brought along. The little dog startled once at an engine shuddering, and somehow, she got the sense that the bigger of the two looked like he would tear it out and toss it out the viewport with his teeth when Fela hid in his furry chest.

"Less than an hour to approach," the pilot called over eventually, and Satsi pulled a nail — the actual nail — out of her bicep and started checking all her weapons again. Marick blinked blinked.

"Thank you, Acaelus," he murmured, then turned to her. "Are you ready?"

"Sure, frakkin' grand," the gangster spat. She kicked out the little medpac under the seat, wrapped up her hurt finger. "Let's go see how the old place is doin'. I'm feelin' like *burning something to the ground.*"

Marick, once again, only nodded.

The ship hit atmo all too soon, and the neon filled the viewscreen, and the smog in the air became too thick that even millions of air filters couldn't have stopped it, and then they were there.

Coruscant.

Again.

"Frak me," Satsi whispered, and disembarked.

-X-

So, day one, she didn't beat the guy to death.

No, day one, everything was on fire.

It was *great*.

Well, great to her. Not so great to the citizenry and the Collective agents and the CorSec forces around, because she knew from experience what setting fires on any level of the ecumenopolis was like, nevermind the lower or mid ones, but still. It was essentially turning on an oven,

hundreds of thousands of bodies trapped in a cramped box of durasteel, the lifts to other levels bursting to overflowing, people crushed to death in front of them until the cables snapped under overbearing weight. People trampled in the streets. Suffocating in their tenements and in the needle-thin alleyways from the smoke or the toxins or the lack of oxygen as it burned up to fuel the fire and everyone panicking used it up too. Fire suppression systems varied by sector and floor; some worked, some were nonexistent, some had been scheduled for repair by the maintenance droids for literal centuries. The queue for work orders got long when it was an entire planet of a city and when all food, water, chemicals, and materials had to be imported.

Satsi, thankfully, had a mask. More meant for her gas grenades, but equally suited to this. Marick just...wasn't breathing. Freaky frakking sparkfinger powers, walking around and functioning perfectly fine when *his chest didn't move*. But whatever. It was more a concern for the cythraul and for their bounty. Ivoshar prowled along ahead, able to wriggle between people or leap over them and walk on top of bodies and shoulders, but Fela was tucked securely in Marick's cloak and he wasn't letting her down for a moment. Probably would've left her on the ship, if not for the fact that there was the risk of it being seized and "inspected" at any given moment by the gang-paid authorities or the gangers themselves.

"We're close," Satsi had to shout to the assassin, above the din of fire-alarm klaxons and screaming people. Maybe she shouldn't have set the blaze, but, too late now. It was a good distraction, as arsonry always had been, but maybe too good. Chaos got messy. If Manu had been killed already, this was all for nothing. "Fob says he's in that building up ahead."

The little tracker blinked at her, dim in the smoke. A fleeing woman nearly knocked it out of her hand, but Satsi shoved her away, hard. She hit the ground and didn't get back up again.

Marick nodded.

They advanced out of the roiling blackened clouds, out of the crowds of screaming bodies, impassive and focused and deadly. The hulking alien wolf between them snarled and snapped. The doors were all already open; maybe from people running. Security was clear. Marick, with just a few heartbeats to focus now inside, murmured about only detecting three living beings in the offices.

Up the stairs; lifts were locked. Down a hall. Ghosting to a stop outside a door, sealed. They paused, locked stares. Nodded. Marick disappeared from view, shimmering out of existence under a cloak of the Force. Satsi wound up her leg, pivoted off the floor, spinning from her planted foot, up her knee, her hip, her whole body. Kicked in.

Ivoshar dove forward with a howling snarl, and blastershots went off.

She charged, shooting while she moved and barreling into the first figure she spotted moving. Her body collided with more metal than flesh— one of the Technocratic cyborg freaks. They hit

the ground, but only for a moment, because then the damn machine-man was rolling her, trying to throw her across the room. She kicked and fought, heard snarling and spitting, heard a warbling shriek of terror.

Then Marick's soft tones.

"Call them off."

Satsi pistoned a knee into some fleshy remaining bit of the Technocrat's diaphragm, knowing better than to try for pain. Pain didn't stop these things, but they still needed air, and staggering them worked. Her enemy jolted, stilled long enough for her to roll away and vault to her feet with a bunching of her abdominals and toss of her legs. When she stood again, she spotted the Hapan standing behind a figure who matched the fob's description and image of their target: a fat, sallow, flabby Twi'lek man, green but growing paler by the second as his beady little eyes sunken in the dough of his face fixed on the lightsaber in front of it.

The black-core, violet-rimmed blade hummed at his throat. Or, at the rolls of it.

"I-I can't, th-they don— don't respond to me, p-please!" he wheezed, and no sooner was Satsi's leg being yanked out from under her by a crushing metal claw around her ankle. She screamed and hit the floor, but didn't stop moving, arms instinctively slashing at exposed wires and at the slip of a throat with her drawn short saber. The plasma, thankfully, could cut through even the metal collar that protected whatever had once been the Technocrat's neck, and it fizzled and made sick, suctioning wet noises while it died, bearing all its weight down on her. The pressure on her snapped ankle increased, and she bit through her tongue choking it back.

"Unfortunate," was all Marick said, before his spare lightsaber activated, whirled into the air by an invisible hand, and spun across the office, neatly parting the other soldier in two. Both halves dropped. "Can you move?"

"Just...FINE," the Human barked, spitting a mouthful of blood that just pooled in her mask and dribbled down her chin and the faceplate. Getting her hands under the chestplate of her opponent, she shoved with all her might, rolling him off her enough so that she could sit up and pry the vice off her foot. The pressure relief was immense. Didn't look like it had gone through her armor; just crushed it inward some. She pushed herself up, tested her weight on it. Not broken after all, or not through and through; she would walk. She had to. Refused not to.

Pain was pain. She was pain. She'd endured worse.

"I can splint that."

"I'll be fine, let's just move. Fire's coming."

Marick watched her a moment, nodded again. Called back his saber and deactivated the first, both disappearing once more. He had no need of them, really, not with the way the Twi'lek was looking at them both and at the wolf snarling at him. He held himself tall, chin rolls lifted pridefully, but the fear in his piss-brown eyes was too real to hide.

"Alright, frakker, you're coming with us," she said. "You can walk, or the mutt can rip out your tendons and I can carry you. Your choice."

"Don't you touch me, charlatan, I'll walk!" Manu cried, putting up puffy hands, decked out in rings that looked like they were strangling sausages. "You heathens, do you know who I am, you'll *pay* for this—"

She punched him in the mouth. He dropped like a sack of rocks.

"...oops."

Marick just blinked.

"Guess I get to carry him."

Blink blink.

And— a snort?

Maybe she was imagining it.

Satsi bent to gather the Twi'lek up in an over-the-shoulder carry, not relishing the idea of hauling his weight on a hurt ankle, but before she could, little Fela wriggled out of Marick's chest where she'd been sheltered, hopped down, and jumped on top of the unconscious man. She sniffed twice, circled a bit, sniffed again, and...squatted.

The Human guffawed. "...seriously?"

"She is a good judge of character."

"Yeah but that kark is gonna get on me now."

"Terrible."

"Did Atty know how much of a sarcastic frak you were?"

His expressionless face might have softened a millimeter.

"She taught me. Let us get moving."

Satsi did carry Manu, mess and all. Ivoshar followed, and Fela went back in Marick's arms. It was a pain, navigating back out of the madness the fire had started, but marginally easier thanks to the general lack of movement; too many corpses, too little air. Her mask was having trouble now, and she tasted smoke, the world getting a little thinner and fuzzier as they went. But Satsi knew these levels, had crawled them as a child on their streets and ruled them when she grew up, and she managed to lead them to an access vent for the droids before she got too close to passing out. It was overly hot, not insulated for organics, and didn't have circulation, but it could take them to the next floor up, and there, everything might as well have been right as rarking rain.

Coruscant at its finest.

They stopped for a break then. Satsi gasped and gagged and spat up black gunk. The Hapan handed her a little cloth to wipe her mouth of from one of many little pockets in his cloak. The ex-gangster engaged the adrenal injector in her armor to make it the last stretch while Marick wordlessly kept watch, and they kept going.

Manu came to about halfway back to the port where they'd last seen the *Encanis*. Satsi punched him again because she felt like it.

They reached the ship before the night cycle hit, not that one could tell, on Coruscant. The planet never slept, always lit, so long as there was electricity in the sector to keep all its lights burning and blinding. She didn't unwind from her clenched state when they boarded. Not when they lifted off. Not when they left atmo and not when they jumped to hyperdrive.

She couldn't.

Not, until that was, the adrenaline finally crashed, and then, and only then, did she slump back into her seat and drop like a stone into darkness punctuated by red eyes and laughter.

-X-

Marick didn't comment or blink when she woke up screaming sixteen hours later, still en route to Dajorra. He blinked at her. Handed her a canteen. She drank gratefully, while he murmured about having checked her wound for infection, kept it clean. She thanked him. Shifted.

Realized a second later there was a puffball sleeping in her lap, unwilling to be dislodged even by her thrashing and shrieking. Satsi stared at the cythraul a minute, not sure what to do with an animal. Any animal bigger than her rats, really.

The look in Marick's eyes suggested that anything other than not moving was totally unacceptable, so she stayed put. Handed the water back.

"Almost there?" she asked, glancing at their captive briefly. Manu was awake, cuffed and strapped into a seat, Ivoshar sitting in front of him menacingly. He still looked arrogant, but it was really ineffective against a warhound and two so-called Elders.

"Yes."

"What do you people even want from me? If it was going to be business, you should have approached me as clients. I won't tell you a damn thing now," the Twi'lek huffed.

"You are wrong," Marick intoned, calm and deadly. "We have questions. You will answer."

Just that simple, like fact. Satsi smiled again.

"Answer him," she added, cracked her knuckles, not caring how undone the image would be by the pup sprawled over her. "Or you answer to me. And oh, sugah, would I love option two. Please be bad. For me, that'd be so *good*. Just you wait til we get you settled at home, mmm."

Manu paled.

No, bounty hunting really wasn't her thing. She needed help for that. But this?

Oh, this would be just fine.

-X-