Just a Party, Right?

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This was the place, and the time was drawing near. Takhadura extended his arm, which Silvas shifted onto from his shoulder. The Kaleesh whispered a scouting command to his shriek-hawk,. The bird quietly complied, flying upward with only a moment’s hesitation to register his words. Silvas’ silhouette vanished into the open night sky, and Takha drew his rifle.

Through his scope, it became evident that there was a lot more going on than was obvious to the naked eye. People danced to hip music. Food and drink were plentiful. Artistic performances brought cheers and applause out from the ambience of the crowd. Just about everything a person would expect from a public party. It made for a good cover.

With a closer look, Takhadura could see a defense set up around the elite among the guests. These people wore suits and dresses and carried drinks of their own, but they stood roughly even distances from each other, their heads repeatedly checked their surroundings and their allies. They were expecting something. Perhaps they’d been tipped off. Perhaps they were just being cautious. Either way, Takha couldn’t be too cautious, himself.

The venue’s open ceiling provided a good view from his position. Though, his perch in this tower seemed almost a little too easy to get to. Whether that meant the location had or hadn’t slipped past their radar, Takha didn’t want to find out. This would have to be quick.

The Kaleesh took a deep breath, reaffirming his continued concentration on concealing his presence within the Force. His benefactor for this job had been vague, but he knew they suspected Force-users were somehow at play, here. All the more reason not to stick around, Takha figured.

Between the faces he was spotting, none of them quite stood out, just yet. After about a minute, Takhadura re-opened his other eye to peer at the job details on his holo-lens. Plenty of faces to choose from this Sevarian Principate, on top of the local leaders listed. Any one of them would do, so long has he disrupted the trade discussions allegedly happening.

When Takha re-focused on his scope, he began picking out the defenders in the crowd once again. More of them were clustered in one area than in the rest. With his search filtered down, he was finally able to spot one familiar face. The man in his sights turned and spoke with another face from his list. Others were close by.

*Gotcha.*

All he needed now was a clean shot. Plenty of time to pick which target seemed the most worthwhile. Within moments, however, Takhadura spotted the crowned jewel of the bunch: The beautiful red-haired lady, Lucine Vasano, leading figure among allegedly this entire sector. His benefactor was offering a massive bonus if her death was confirmed on this job. Takha didn’t want to ask the for deeper reasons as to why, but that kind of payout was certainly a strong incentive to keep a closer watch on her than the others.

The crowd did make it difficult. Lots of others came and went from her side as the minutes ticked by. Takha wasn’t skilled enough at reading human lips to guess what she was saying, but he could only assume it was leading into these trade negotiations. As for the others coming and going, it was difficult to fully guess their part. A Zabrak girl came and went, some Togorian tagging along beside her. A furred man of some kind, too large for his own good, stopped to have a word. Though, one did peak his interest - a Kaleesh who drew near the lady.

Takhadura’s curiosity got the better of him for a moment. This man’s identity was a mystery, but his mask bore a design akin to a clan Takha was all too familiar with. What one of them would be doing here, he wasn’t sure. His fingertips shifted ever so slightly to keep this other Kaleesh in the rifle’s sights for just a few seconds. That was when he spotted her.

*...Ldodessi?*

Whoever this other Kaleesh was, he’d approached another, one who Takhadura knew in person. How in all the galaxy she’d ended up here was beyond him, but there she was, a guest in this place. No, more than a guest - as he watched, it became apparent she was one of the people on lookout. She was with them.

Suddenly, the job didn’t seem so clear. Feeling his own frustration settling in, Takha gently adjusted his sights back to that red-headed woman. She was talking with the Principate people, again. Certainly it was about their trade deals, but that matter suddenly had Takha’s attention. Ldodessi was one of the only people in the galaxy he trusted, and if she was allied with these people… Well, he couldn’t just take a shot and leave, at this point, no matter how many credits one bullet would get him. He had to know more.

It occurred to him at that moment that he had an opening. Vasano’s surrounding peers had dispersed enough to create a clean, open space around her. The sights were lined up. He only had to pull the trigger.

Just a quick clench of his finger. Simple as that, and he’d be out of this place.

But he waited. Vasano stepped elsewhere, crowding the shot again.

His brow furrowed, and his held breath released. *Blast it.* A part of him wished he hadn’t seen Ldodessi there. It had been so much simpler a minute ago.

Determined, Takha closed his eyes and opened his senses, at least what he could manage without dropping his concealment. Patiently, he waited as he gathered information. He could feel the life from the party, but probing deeper, there were indeed many among the crowd who were tense. More than that, much of the tension coincided with strong links in the Force. He’d not felt such a concentration in connectivity for a long time. To say the least, it was more than he had unexpected, but still not what he was looking for.

With some time, he finally honed in on Ldodessi’s presence. She, too, was tense. Something troubled her. Perhaps Takha was right in assuming someone was onto him. She and the others may have been searching for someone like him, now.

On that thought, his senses detected that, indeed, something was heading his way. Loosely so, but with a feeling of intent he’d felt too often. He was now their prey. His time was short.

Takha rubbed a knuckle against his eye. *How to go about this…?*

The Kaleesh reaffirmed his grip on his rifle and focused once more on the matter of his bounty. They were all filing themselves toward the edge of the crowd, moving under a ceiling. Likely getting some privacy in a quiet room. Or maybe safety.

It was now or never.

Takhadura sighed. *...I can’t believe this.* His finger lifted from the trigger.

As if she knew, the red-haired woman in his sights did the unthinkable. From so far away, she looked directly at him. Not at the night sky, nor the tower where he hid, but at him. A confident grin spread across her face, and she turned to walk indoors with the rest of his targets.

*...Son of a schutta.* Only so many Force-users could see through concealment. There was no telling how long she’d known he was there, or what she could have quietly set in motion since. It was time to leave.

Sure enough, the presence Takha had sensed on approach felt nearer. The Kaleesh whistled a short but specific pattern, calling Silvas back to him. He quickly slung his rifle, and had just enough time to draw his pistol before a door burst open behind him. That Zabrak girl from before rushed in, with what could have only been a lightsaber hilt in hand. Her Togorian friend leapt forward from behind, bringing forth a riot shield and pointing the end of a blaster out beside it.

“Stand down,” the Togorian calmly requested.

Before he could respond, Takha felt a presence invading his mind. That Zabrak girl must have been a bold one. Considering her friend had a bulletproof shield, perhaps she didn’t need to be afraid.

*I’ve done no harm,* Takha pushed to the front of his thoughts for her to see. *Let me leave and I won’t have to*. He pointed his pistol skyward to make the point.

Her face loosened. Evidently, she was easy to convince, but both still stood at the ready. The silent seconds between them seemed to drag on.

“What’s the plan, Sera?” The Togorian eventually whispered at the inaction.

They briefly exchanged glances, just when Silvas flew in from behind Takha. The shriek-hawk rushed straight toward them, fluttering in circles at their heads and flailing his talons. Takha hadn’t commanded it, but he damn sure acted on it.

As the two were momentarily occupied by the mess of feathers between them, Takha summoned a shroud of darkness where he stood. It wasn’t much, but the Kaleesh made the most of it. He pulled his grappling line from his bag, hooked it on the balcony behind him, and leapt over the side, leaving his light-absorbing field to fade on its own. By the time he reached the lower rooftops surrounding the tower, Silvas was out and flying down to rejoin him, thankfully in one piece.

It didn’t take long to reach the ground from there. His speeder was hidden nearby. They were long gone within a minute.

“Reckless bastard,” Takhadura muttered to Silvas as they fled. Despite their escape, the Kaleesh figured his night might be long from over. He’d needed those credits, badly; perhaps, though, he could try an alternative plan. And, against his better judgement, he had questions to satisfy.

Takhadura concentrated once more on his senses, honing in on the one person in this city he knew.

*...Hey there. It’s been a while.* He knew Ldodessi wouldn’t be able to respond telepathically, but if she at least listened and followed along, that was good enough. *...Look, it’s complicated, but can we meet up, quietly? I think I’m lost. I need to talk. I have an idea where we can go…*