
Breach of Contract

The chill of autumn air blew on the wind. That same chill caught his face as it whipped through the cabin of the vehicle. A whirling of crisp air, filled with the scent of smoke and decaying leaves danced around him for but a moment. His finger prodded the toggle and the window blocked the path of the cold air as it closed. Thran's green eyes watched intently as the seal of weatherstripping conformed to the shape of the transparisteel window. Once the foam's shape stabilized, his fingers tapped at the toggle again. His eyes followed the window downward on its repeated descent. The whistle of the wind filled the cabin once again.

"Are you listening to me?" Emily's tone was short. She was agitated.

"Nope," Thran sighed, fiddling with the console adjacent to him.

"I said... are you listening to me?" she snipped.

She folded the gilded compact of cosmetics, snapping it shut to make a point of her irritation. Emily tapped the console at her side, locking the window controls. She cleared her throat. He sighed. The window closed. Thran sunk back into the seat, cocking his head towards the outside. He felt as a caged bird, as if a whole new world of freedom existed just beyond his immediate reach.

"Why must you insist on ignoring me? I am just trying to tell you how upset you've made me... I've told you countless times how important this evening was to me," She chirped, frustratedly sorting the personal effects in her clutch.

"I'm ignoring you because you're just going to scold me. I am a grown man. I don't need that," Thran replied, craning his head towards the world outside the speeder.

"A grown man? Ha! Your behavior could have fooled me," Emily laughed.

"I did behave," He asserted.

"You call insulting and utterly embarrassing the son of the CEO of Evigen, to the man's face while his father watched, mind you, behaving? And starting a drinking competition among the accounting staff, that is behaving too? What about the fire, Thran?" She turned towards him, pressing her handbag to her chest.

"It's not an insult if it's true. He is a little shitstain. And those stuffy bastards needed to cut loose. The fire...I mean, whoo, that got out of hand quickly." He said with a smirk.

"People could have died! It makes a bad impression, Thran. I am trying to complete a multi-trillion credit acquisition and you seem intent on setting everything on fire. I mean that literally, this time. Why must you be like this?" She snipped, throwing her hands up in exasperation.

"Boredom, mostly," His response was full of the unconcerned honesty of a truly bored man.

"Oh, for kark's sake. Grown men don't try to scuttle business ventures for fun. They pick up...las-golf or polo. Not arson." She said as she rolled her eyes. His indignance burned her like a red-hot coal.

“Well, certainly not the boring ones you associate with. I bet you’d like golf. Birds of a feather and all that,” He replied, poking once again at toggle for the window

“What? What does that mean? Are you saying I am boring? I am not boring,” She was defensive in her response.

“Yes. You are,” He replied, picking at something imaginary in his teeth.

“No, I am not,” She huffed in response

“Unlock the window,” He poked again at the window toggle.

“No. I need you to listen to me,” She replied, rotating in her seat to face him.

“I don’t listen to boring people. Ask Kevin. I never listen to him and he is very boring. Unlock the window, *please*,” He said as he reached over to release this window lock only to catch her hand as it knocked his away.

“I am not boring! You live in this delusional world where you think that everything and everyone is there to maintain your attention. This entire galaxy doesn’t operate on the premise of what makes you happy. People in the real universe have obligations. They have jobs. They have to work. If there isn’t flashing lights and loud noises, you’re not interested. Grow up. You’re nearly forty and you act like you’re four. For ten minutes, just pretend like you give a shit about anything I’m doing,” Her words flowed from her lips with vigor and venom.

“What you’re doing? What exactly have *you* done? You think you built this company? Who owns the patent rights? Who gathered the capital for organization? Who orchestrated all the cheap labor? Who authorized construction of the factories? Who established the commodities exchange to get the raw materials? Who established tradelines outside of the system? You? No, wait... that was *me*. Don’t sit here and act like you’ve done more for the company than I have. You’re just warming a seat while I plan the moves. You’re where you are because I say so,” Ever the master duelist, his riposte of words was just as pointed as his lightsaber. He leaned over again, attempted to deactivate the window lock and caught her hand again as it slapped his away.

“It’s always about you, isn’t it? You can’t bear to give someone else credit. You would rather die than admit that without me your stupid plans would fail. Without my, and I quote ‘masterful management and extraordinary executive function’, there would be no plan. Anyone who’s ever accomplished anything owes that result to your good graces? Do you realize how INSANE you sound? If I’d let you, you’d spend your days lounging around by the pool getting fatter than you’ve already gotten, reminiscing about an Empire that you weren’t even a karking part of just because your father turned a wrench once, whining that someone stole a stupid-snarking-dusty-ass-piece-of-shit lightsaber,” Her voice increased in volume with each phrase and she didn’t pause to breathe as she unloaded her frustration upon him

“Fat? The brix I am!? My Father was a hero! Yours was a war-profiteer. I have a mind to...No...wait...a piece of shit Lightsaber? You watch your mouth. All big talk from a lucky little secretary, who is treading into dangerously deep water.” He sat up at the implied insult.

“You’re an asshole,” She said plainly.

“I am simply reminding you, my *darling* wife, that your state in life is directly corelated to your proximity and involvement in *my* plans. Without me, you’d be somewhere in the Core, miserable beyond belief, answering holocalls for a frackin’ fat old dentist, sharing wine and tears with a bunch of vapid housewives by night, and laying your head down on a tear-soaked pillow. Really, you should be thanking me.” He said with a grin as he leaned over again to try to deactivate the mechanism that locked the window controls.

“I already am,” Emily half-sighed.

“What? You’ve got a weird way to show thanks.” he said,

“I am already miserable. You are insufferable. You are cruel and then kind. It’s like living in a broken phase inducer. In streaks you’re fine and everything is going well, then you’re wildly unpredictable. I don’t know if your charge is positive or negative most of the time. The only time I can tolerate you is when you’re not around. I will not walk on eggshells with you anymore, Thran,” She paused, breathed in deeply through her nose, and stopped his hand as it crept towards the window control again.

“We have been in this together, for fourteen years, and not once have you looked at me as an equal. I am your *karking wife*. I have been at your side longer than anyone else, cheering you on. Where is *my* cheerleader?” the executive pressed her hand to her heart, stressing her discontent and plight.

“Who was there when you got run off the throne? Me. Who was there after you got dropped from the Rog franchise? Me. Who was there through detox and rehab? Me. Who helped you through going back to Bakura? Me. Where was Angelo? Where was...ugh...*Rayne*. Where was Jasmin? Oh, right...You sent her off to boarding school, so that you didn’t have to face being a father. Do you really think any of them give a shit about you? About your success? You sit here and say that I would be nowhere without you. Where would you be? Think about Thran...Really think. Could you have done any of this without me? When you sit here and tell me that I’d be nowhere without you? Take a look inside yourself, mister wannabe warlord. Maybe, for half of a microsecond, you could consider how someone else feels?” Emily said with tears of half-rage and half-sadness in her eyes.

“Hrm? You done?” He said, as he poked again at the space between two teeth with his finger.

“You weren’t listening to a word I said. Typical...I really hate you,” She said. She turned away and simultaneously toggled the window control. A chilled autumn wind filled the cabin as the window opened.



“Thran!” Emily called out, “Are you ready? We’re going to be late!”

She paced the polished black stone floors of the foyer. The train of her extravagant gown nearly knotted on itself with each about-face. She picked at the unadorned single piece bodice nervously. Emily stopped at irregular intervals along her sentinel’s march to check her chrono. The Investor’s Gala was perhaps the most media examined event in Seraph’s business world. On the heels of a year that boasted record profits for Sal-Mal Repulsor, her position as chief executive officer would place her in a position that would provide bountiful publicity moments. She was also up for an award. Beyond that, she had always found to be a virtue of the utmost worth.

Her weary pacing was broken mid-stride as the clatter and crash of metal tins echoed in the dining area just through the corridor to her left. Like a lurcher hound, she sprang into action to investigate the sound. The click-clack of her designer shoes quickened as she made her way down the corridor.

“I swear, to the entirety of the Force, if you are not ready, Thran...I will *karking murder* you,” She called out into the room as she entered.

He was coated in a dusty layer of dried mud and adorned with a chaotic scattering of straws of hay. The pungent smell of dirty snow and oil radiated from him. His green eyes turned up at her when she entered. Clutched in his hands was a tin of chocolate digestive biscuits and a puzzled look ran across his face.

“Huh. You look nice. Going out with the gals again or somefin?” he asked with a mouthful of biscuit.

“What...the...fark...” Emily said as she leaned on a tall backed chair, with a sudden shortness of breath.

“They are biscuits. You know...cookies. Want one?” Thran replied, offering the tin as evidence of his claim that they were indeed biscuits.

“Why are you not ready!?” She shouted.

“Ready...for?” his narrowed eyes indicated he was not on the same page as her.

“The Investor’s Gala. We needed to be there half an hour ago. You’re covered in...shit. I...I can’t. I can’t even with you,” The flummoxed executive gasped.

“Oh, yeah. That. Not going,” The Sith replied, as he tucked into another nibble of cookie.

“What? Yes, you are. Go. Get ready. NOW!” She screamed.

“Ummm...Nah,” he said, chewing. “Kark, I need some milk. Do we have milk? Where do we even keep milk? Is that a cupboard thing or like...in a drawer somewhere?” he spoke, half to himself.

“NOW THRAN! GO GET READY NOW!” Emily roared.

“Counteroffer...No,” he said, as he away from her aimed towards the sitting room.

“I am telling you that you need to get ready, this instant,” She said, as she righted herself and walked over intent on pushing him towards the refresher.

“Where’d you get the dress? It’s nice. Koron Delci? Right? Gotta be. With the whole business glam thing it’s trying. You know, I’m fancy but don’t look at me too much, thing. Must’ve been expensive. Sheesh,” He said, pointing over at an object in the distance. “Hey, is that a Twi’lek Kalikori? Cool. When’d we get that?” He instantly moved towards it, dodging her attempt to herd him.

Emily gave chase. She grabbed his shoulder and attempted to spin him around. His frame was larger than hers and it resisted at first. With her dedicated attempt, she was able to turn him about. She panted with frustration.

“What are you doing? Why aren’t you ready? Oh...For...You STINK!” she paused and rubbed her temples.

“Where’d you get the dress?” he asked, as he stared at her whilst digging in the tin for another treat.

“What? I don’t know...I bought it...God...Damn it Thran, we do *not* have time for this,” Emily said flustered.

“Time for...what?” he inquired, waiving a bitten biscuit in a small circle.

“You. Stop this. You know exactly what we don’t have time for. Go get ready. *Now*. God...you karking stink,” She replied sharply as she took a step back.

“I have more important things to do. There’s this show about a womprat that can cook. I’ve gotta see that. Seriously, though...Nice dress” Thran replied as he stole another bite of chocolate cookie.

“More important?! Womprat?!...This is the biggest event of the year! If I am not there to represent my company, it’s a huge opportunity lost,” She said.

“There you go with that again,” He said, rolling his eyes.

“Please, Thran...,” she pled.

“How about we cut a deal...You tell me where you got the dress and I will...something something, whatever,” He replied, gesturing wildly.

“What? God...I don’t know, I bought it,” She said, flustered by his seeming lack of interest in complying with her demands.

“Oh...Really? When?” he said.

“I don’t know. What difference does it make?” She replied.

“I just wanted to know if there was a sale or something,” His smirk brought more anger to Emily’s face.

“Please, Thran. Go get ready. If we can leave in the next twenty minutes, we’ll still make the awards ceremony. It takes you an hour to get ready. Please. Please hurry,” she begged.

“Awards? Don’t bother. You lost. Gil Shih from MagTek won ‘Executive of the Year’. Good dude. Did you know they like...send orphans to school...for free? Wild,” He said as he chomped another bite of cookie.

“What? The awards aren’t for another hour. How did Gil Shih win?” she shook her head in confusion.

“Oh. Yeah...that... I paid the Commerce Bureau and loaded the vote against you. Vizier of the Caperion system and all that,” He chuckled.

“You...what?” Emily stammered until the thought landed under her. “Oh...my... *You did*...You psychopath! Why?” she choked on the words.

“Felt like it,” Thran replied, free of the yoke of guilt.

“You...Son of a kath-hound. You’ve actually done it. You’ve made a complete mockery of me. I’ll never be able to show face at a consortium meeting without this being in the minutes. You’ve...ruined my reputation.” tears began welling in her eyes and her fists were balled up in rage.

“Yes. That. I’ve done exactly that,” He said with a devilish smile, lazily floating towards the nearby seating area. He sat in a plush chair and grabbed the remote control for the holo-projector. The screen clicked on. She stormed towards him.

“Is this because you don’t want to be accused on nepotism? Or is this about the coaxium pricing freeze?” she asked. She searched her thoughts for a logical explanation.

“It’s just weird,” He said, as if responding to her.

“Yes. It *is* weird. It is weird that my own Husband would seem so dead set on sabotaging every single monumental accomplishment I’ve ever made,” She replied, as she rested her hand on her hip.

“No. Like...It’s too early for holiday sales. And you’re like waaaaay too cheap to pay full price and like, you have that dress. It’s weird,” He said between clanging rattles as he rifled through the biscuit tin.

“What? Are you still on about the dress? You’re frezzing crazed. You have finally fried your last brain cell. Explains why you spend all that time in the stables with that STUPID FRACKING TAUNTAUN. Finally found someone that’s on your intellectual level,” She said, defensively.

He sprung up and aimed a finger at her face. “YOU LEAVE TERRENCE OUT OF THIS! HE’S JUST A BOY! HE’S INNOCENT!” he roared.

“Oh, shut UP! You’ve never taken anything seriously ever. You would rather spend your evenings getting tongued up by a Tauntaun than do anything that I ask, regardless of how important it is. You have never been serious about this marriage, Thran. You just expect that I meet your needs,” Emily’s voice was already going hoarse.

“Well, you’ve fallen way short of those expectations. You meet my needs? That’s so strange, you hardly meet them at all. By my recollection, the last time we shared a bed... Well, I don’t recollect. Been ages. What’s worse, last time we were remotely happy together in the same star system was... I don’t know, probably never. Wish I had Kevin back then, would’ve brokered me a better deal. Hard to have a joyous marriage with a soulless harpy!” He laughed.

“The FREG did you just say to me?” she snipped.

“SOULLESS HARPY. CAWWWW! CAWWWW! That’s you, that’s what you sound like. Like a big ol’ bird. Bird-lady. Bird-lady hybrid, thing,” Thran chuckled, his own joke hit him clean in the funny bone.

“Kark you. I do not sound like that. A better deal? What the frizz do you mean by that?” She yelled.

“Oh... I am sorry, have you forgotten? Maybe you’ve just gotten too big for your britches. This whole thing... This whole marriage. This life you live and all the benefits therein is a BUSINESS arrangement. The way I see it you’re in major kriffing breach of contract,” The Sith said, tempering his anger.

“Wwwhat?” she stammered.

“B-U-S” he spelled “Y-wait-I” he continued.

“How dare you!” Emily said, aghast.

“How dare I? How dare I? You don’t get to stand here as if you’re innocent. We both know you’re not. I know you didn’t buy that dress. So where’d you get it?” He asked, knowing the answer already.

“What? What does that have to do with anything? And how, pray tell, do you know that?” She said, suddenly aware that he’d been leading her to this point. She was firmly in his crosshairs.

“Because I froze all of your personal accounts two months ago... You’ve been spending company money for over a year and you tried to cover it up. The whole Evigen acquisition is to cover the losses, buying your misdoings in paperwork. Wooo. A lot of money lost there, Em. I mean it was a really really amateur cover upjob. But, I suppose I should’ve expected that from you. Did you think I wouldn’t have found out? Or perhaps... you were just too busy going to Kiliam Daivik’s bed chamber and forgot you had TWO betrayals to cover up. I will give the shitstain this much. Good taste. It’s a nice dress. I bet you don’t love him either, he’s just another pad for a sad little girl’s ego. He doesn’t love you. It’s a rich prick’s bragging right.” He said directly.

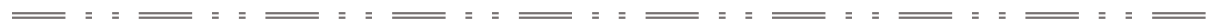
“Thran...” she stuttered, searching for words to mount a defense.

“Oh, spare me the explanations and the veil of krayt tears. I don’t care about Daivik. Like I told his father, the man is an utter shitstain. Just proves that you’re authentic coreslime. As for, you and I? No hurt feelings. This is business. You know, deals go south sometimes. Wait... Did you think that I have only had eyes for you this whole time? Were you trying to get back at me? HA! Did you think I was in this for love? HA!” He turned towards the window, chuckling to himself.

“How can you say that? We’ve been together for fourteen years. Do I mean nothing to you?” She pleaded, hoping to find compassion that yet lingered in his heart. She did not.

“Stop with the wingeing... I’m bored of it. You might have found my mercy if you came to me before. But you didn’t. You thought you could hide it all from me. ALL that money. Is that what people in love do? Steal? Tsk. Tsk. All that money shipped off to private accounts on Muunilist. You got greedy. Did you honestly think that Aldon Ronith and the distinguished Zeluus Shorv wouldn’t have notified me? I made them sickeningly rich. Nooo, that’s right... You actually thought that you had brokered a phony deal with the Banking Guild and we went on the lam. Fleeing from the banks? Even Emperor Palpatine feared the banks. You thought YOU could just waltz away? You are as naïve as

you are soulless. The deal was real. The investments were sound. I put it together myself. And if you knew half as much about business as you claim, you'd've known that too. But you didn't because you're the one who's delusional. You thought I'd fell in love with you? You're like a 7...maybe like an 8 when I've been drinking and that is *generous*. You're boring as Osik. I don't think you've fun a day in your life. We are *not* compatible. Newsflash. You're here because it was a good publicity move for me. You're the CEO of Sal-Mal because I said so. At least in the public if you're tied to a booming company, we make sense. Without that it doesn't make a lick of sense. You're no trophy wife, you're a commoner...that makes me more relatable, more marketable. You're a poppet and I've been pulling the strings the whole time. You exist because I allow it. You succeed when *I* say so. You're an amateur among professionals. You're a tiny little fish in an ocean of sharks. Chomp chomp little fishy. And then...And then you chose to bite the hand that feeds you. Tried to take my meal...Now, you're trapped here, nowhere to run, nowhere to go. You are not in charge. You never have been. Welcome to reality,". He looked back over his shoulder. She was in tears; shock, terror, anger, all welled up in her eyes. He smiled.



The constant whirring of the turbolift was the only sound. A soft beep sounded between levels and rang out every half second. Thran adjusted the shopping bags in his hand. As the lift moved closer towards the penthouse suite, his discomfort with having to carry his own goods faded. His focus settled on an object, several hundred meters off still, locked away in a box in his wardrobe. The power that radiated from the trinket was as dark as the core of a blackhole and its pull on his mind was just as strong. It was the key to bringing his big plan to fruition. He could not think of anything else.

Emily stood next to him, as silent as a stone statue. They had not spoken in six weeks. A slight smirk came over her lips. She'd not forgiven him for all the venom and ill he'd dropped on her. She wanted to get even. The shopping trip had distracted him for long enough for her to lay a trap of her own.

Upward and upward, the lift carried them. The crinkling of the bags and a clearing of throats was the only sign they were aware of each other. The silence was deafening. Salvation from the torture came with a gentle whir and soft hiss as the turbolift came to a stop. The doors opened.

The penthouse was adorned in the height of Seraph's popular design. Cold stone floors met sterile white walls that bore the weight of an eclectic collection of art. The foyer was an open space, with tall ceilings and a crystal chandelier. It was a grand entryway, for certain, though it felt better suited for a commercial office space than a residence. There was no warmth in this home.

He stepped out of the lift before her. Any sense of chivalry he possessed had died long ago and what remained of basic common courtesy between them had followed it to the grave after their last argument. She pushed passed him into the penthouse. Emily was practically sprinting towards the corridor that led off to the living area. He raised an eyebrow at the light bodycheck. Thran followed a few steps behind, casually examining the bags he carried, mind still focused on the hidden prize he'd retrieved from a dank tomb on a Sith world.

"I have a surprise for you," Emily called out from ahead.

"What?" he replied.

He heard her breathe before he saw her. The hair on the back of his neck stood up on end. The source of all his childhood torment and the object of a hatred deeper than Bakura's vast seas reclined in his home. It had been over two years since he had last seen her. On their last meeting, Thran had condemned his cursed sister to captivity; Gem was to never leave the rain-soaked soil of their homeworld. She had been stripped of all family titles and privileges.

He had made it impossible for her to leave. To do so was expressly against his command. Thran marked it as her penance for his suffering under her watch. Yet, here she was.

Thran cursed himself. His focus on the artifact he'd been studying had blinded him to her presence. Its all-consuming darkness had drawn him so far in, he had been caught surprised. The feeling was as unwelcomed as his eldest sister was. Only one person would the means and the motivation to execute such a personal attack. He'd never spoken her name aloud among his Imperial company and even the Sith he associated with would count this among the most grievous of treachery. Kamjin was too old and blind to take this shot. The Jades only committed treachery at the end of a blade. This was personal. This was the conclusion of a domestic powerplay that had been going on for years. She had used the nuclear option. He clenched his jaw.

He could overlook the marital infidelity and perhaps he could forgive the financial infidelity, but there had always been one thing that was unforgivable: Gem. Emily's pride had been crushed to paste in their last tiff. This treachery was personal. It was unforgivable. It was not rage that gripped him, but rather a mechanically cold computation of her fate. There is but one penalty for treason.

"Gem! Girly! I am so glad you came!" Emily squealed with delight. She looked directly into Thran's eyes with a smirk. She thought she had finally bested him.

"Em!" came the raspy voice of Shir'ciri Kast.

The two women embraced, sharing alternating kisses on the cheek. Like squawking birds, they chirped and chattered a moment. Thran stood silently staring. His eyes narrowed on Gem. His eyes snapped to Emily. She opened her mouth to speak. It was too late. He was on her. His hand gripped her shoulder, spinning her about to face him.

The wailing roar of his lightsaber filled the room. Thran stepped forward, pressing the hilt forward until the emitter shroud rested against her breast. Emily's mouth opened, gasping for air. Her hand tried to claw at his face, but all the strength of vitality had already departed. His attack was precise, quick, and instantly lethal. Her blue eyes went lifeless. She collapsed into a pile on the floor; dead.

"NOOO! WHAT HAVE YOU D-" Gem's voice cut short under her crushed windpipe.

Pools and eddies of dark energy became a sudden violent torrent. His hand jutted forwards, hooked in a two fingered clutch. Gem's feet kicked under her, finding no purchase on the black stone floor. She gripped at her throat. The whites of her eyes filled with the pink-red haze of broken blood vessels. His wrist flicked. The older woman's limp body tumbled through the air, crashing through a ceramic urn and crumpling into a heap on the floor. The shattered vase was scattered as naught but shards of blue-grey pottery across the cold ebony stone flooring.

"What the...hell..." came a small voice.

Thran righted himself. His lightsaber's burning orange blade snap-hissed to silence. The chaos that erupted was over as soon as it had begun. He glanced over his shoulder and he could see the teal streaks in her hair. The Vizier turned to her, slipping his blade back into its hidden pocket. He tugged at his tunic, letting it lay flat once again. His fingers traced the collar, ensuring that they too were lying flat. He was calm and collected.

"Papa...what the kark happened?" she asked.

"There is but one penalty for treason, my dear," Thran replied.

Jasmine's eyes darted between him, her aunt, and her step-mother. Fear gripped her firmly as she divined his emotional state. She had seen rage from him before. She had seen frustration. She had seen all manner of feeling and emotion pouring off him. In this moment, she felt nothing. It scared her. He had not raised defenses against her mental probing. She took a step back.

“What is *she* doing here?” Jasmine asked as she pointed a finger at the unconscious Gem.

“Yes, that is certainly a good question isn’t it? Call Kevin. Have him fix this...” Thran said, pointing to Emily’s corpse.

“Yes, papa,” Jasmine replied. “What happened?”

“Your step-mother thought it wise to challenge me. Her pride, it seems, made her forget her station in life. I thought I had settled that and reminded her of her place, but you’ll find that often a cornered animal will do desperate and dangerous things, with no regard for self-preservation. So, she thought it wise to bite the hand that feeds and when an animal bites, you must put it down. There is no saving it,” Thran’s icy reply froze Jasmine in place.

“Yes, papa,” The girl said, turning her eyes downward.

“Look. Here. Look at me. You understand, my darling. Don’t you? There is but one penalty for treason. Death. Remember...Call Kevin. Then you are to take Gem back to Bakura. Do you understand?” He stared directly into his daughter’s eyes.

“Yes, papa,” She swallowed hard.

“There’s a good girl. She needed to go. Besides, she was mean to Terrance...and we can’t have that can we?” He said with a smile as he strode out of the room.