The Quality of Compassion

***Anzati, Lower Atmosphere***

***Late 38 ABY***

The lower stratosphere of Anzati was a deep purple, uncommonly so for the season. Looking out the port window of his Skipray Blastboat, Captain Vrell sighed. He was tired, and needed to feed. The intercom buzzed to life for a solid ten seconds before he answered.

“Red One, come in, this is Red Leader,” said Vrell.

“Sir, we have intercepted a shuttle attempting to leave without authorization from the northern Sierra quadrant. You will need to come take a look at this…I am sending the cargo manifest for the vessel now,” replied the Anzat pilot.

“Odd…wait…truly? Red One, bring Alpha and Bravo flight in for support. Escort the shuttle to the nearest star port…I will be calling in some favors on this one,” said Captain Vrell.

Vrell looked at his display and saw where all of his pilots were and could ping the unknown vessel. His eyes opened wide and his mouth dropped when he saw the next display.

“Stand down Red Leader, Red One. I am commandeering the shuttle and its occupants. Requesting Anzati Fleet support to the capital immediately,” came the unknown signature.

Captain Vrell knew the voice. The Guardian. The Off-Worlder. “Master Toss…understood. I would complain of the gross breach of protocol but what would that accomplish…”

***Vrratelli Garrison***

***6 Hours Later***

The stone cell was small. Too small. Toss looked around with indignation and disgust at his people’s avarice. “No wonder we are hated by every civilized society in the galaxy,” said Master Toss to no one in particular.

The Jedi Master was tired of his duty, being the Watchman for the Anzati System was a thankless job. Very few ever ventured to this place and fewer still ever left. His people were seen as monsters at best, evil at worst. Toss had left as a boy and luckily had been able to feed on criminals and the true monsters since he became a Jedi Knight in the service of the New Republic. He was a weary man, as no other Jedi wanted his position and he knew he would be a solitary man here on his home world.

Toss looked to his left and saw the two soldiers followed by Captain Vrell. The officer snorted when he saw the Jedi and was visibly hostile. Master Toss did not need to read any of the men’s’ minds, they perceived him as a traitor to his people.

“When do the Elders want this mockery to begin…” trailed Toss.

“You would be wise to watch your tone. Have you no respect for your own kind or do you fancy yourself better than us, Off-Worlder?” snarled the captain.

“Very well…now is better than ever…while I still have time. I will have it known to Coruscant I wanted no part of this. The prisoner needs to be questioned by the Grand Council,” stated the Anzat Jedi.

“Huh, no matter. You are a servant of the Republic. The Senator wants this rabble destroyed now. That was the order and we are here to ensure you carry it out,” retorted Captain Vrell.

Master Toss was visibly shaken. The officer was right; he had no control in the matter. Since the Vong Wars the New Republic was on a very tenuous footing and the Jedi were eyed with ever increasing suspicion. He would have to sentence the prisoner to death…but just maybe he could gain a semblance of balance.

“Very well. Summon the cooks,” Toss trailed off as tears welled in his eyes.

***Later That Day…***

The stone cell seemed smaller than before to Master Toss. He eyed his prisoner with curiosity and sadness. Stealing holocrons was a capital offense on Anzati. The fact that the prisoner appeared to be a Dark Jedi only complicated matters.

The prisoner smiled a wide grin of a man who simply could not grasp the severity of his current circumstances. “He must think he will face a swift death,” thought Master Toss.

“I see your saber, and I felt you a long time ago. When I was taken you reached out to me to comfort me. Why?” asked Zagro Fenn.

“My friend,” Toss shook his head, “My friend, I am sorry for the current state you are in. If it was up to me I would be taking you to Coruscant presently as a guest but sadly I am a servant to my masters as are you. I will not mix words, you are an enemy of the state and I cannot allow you to leave this chamber alive.”

The handsome Hapan betrayed no signs of distress or concern. “Then make it quick. I have told you all I intent to. I came here to learn as much as possible from your ancient libraries. I am a historian and a student. I have committed no crime of your laws…”began Zenn, cut off by his interrogator.

“Zagro, it is more complicated than that. You are a member of a Dark Jedi organization that can only but be an enemy of the Republic. The Anzat, you may know, do not take kindly to anyone learning of their race. We have a code, however, we will not kill you ourselves. No, you will willingly die for your transgressions,” calmly stated Toss.

The Hapan said nothing as the two soldiers placed their talon like fingers on his temples. Toss nodded and the soldiers began to draw the life sustaining soup from his brain matter. Zagro gasped but betrayed no signs of discomfort.

“Fenn, you will rapidly loss your wits and die. This is the way. These men will absorb your memories and essence and I will know your soul and use it against you,” slowly stated Toss. “But…truth will set you free. I am not your friend but I beg you let your worries go. I can help in that one very palpable way.”

The soldiers fed. The blood slowly dripped as the two soldiers pulled the brain matter from Zagro Fenn’s skull. Toss could feel the overwhelming confusion and fear on the Hapan Krath Protector.

“Fenn, let it go…I can already read your soul…The Battle of the Mists…Kara Denielo…tell me about her?” asked Toss.

“No…please…kill me I beg you. Do not toy with me so,” replied the visibly shaken and confused Krath.

The soldiers drank deeper and deeper. A deep purple hue came over the Krath’s cheeks. “Zagro, please, tell me and let it go once and for all,” said Toss in the tone of a caring father and not an adversary.

“Jedi…I have failed. I was once an officer and a good one at that. I was prideful and conceited. My vanity led me astray and my men perished to a man.”

Toss looked away as the soldiers stopped feeding for a moment. Deep rivulets of blood pooled down the Hapan’s face. “Zagro…who was Kara?” asked Toss.

“She…was my friend. She was my alternate…she was….more…” Zagro trailed off as his eyes rolled to the back of his head. Toss looked at the soldiers with disgust. “Leave us now or I will resign my duties and drain you both!” barked Toss. The soldiers slowly left the room and called in Captain Vrell to witness the ongoing interrogation.

Master Toss walked over to the restrained Zagro Fenn, still chained to the wall and bleeding visibly from the skull and the arms where the shackles met the heavy chain. Igniting his yellow blade, the Jedi Master sliced the arm braces loose and caressed the Hapan in his arms and began to feed gently the life giving brain soup. Zagro passed out into a delirious sleep and a faint smile crossed his face

***5 Minutes Later…***

Zagro awoke in his chambers of the Imperial Winter Palace on Juddeca. It had all been a dream. The Hapan laughed and rubbed his throbbing temples. The Protector knew he needed to cut down on his ale intake and continue treatment for his Andros synthetic addiction.

Gingerly walking to his panoramic view of Othmen City far below Zagro appreciated the view for as long as he dared. “It was all a dream,” he stated. Taking one more look out the window he saw her. The beautiful blonde hair, the green eyes, the porcelain skin and the firm body he knew far better than he should have. “Kara!”

The woman was there. It was a fact as sure as day to Fenn. He rushed to her and held her hands as he fell to his knees. “How?” asked Zagro.

“Lieutenant…don’t shed tears for me. I am dead. Have been for 6 years now at least,” stated the beautiful woman.

“Kara…but how…I never found your body?” asked Fenn.

“Lieutenant, why did you leave us? You took the shuttles and the transports and all of the soldiers and left me with no defensive forces and the support staff. We fought Vong warriors and Mutalisk abominations with blasters and repair parts,” slowly spoke the apparition.

“I had to Kara. Once we took out their last depot we could go home. Together…you and I,” trailed Zagro Fenn.

“Lieutenant, you had other officers to lead that sortie. You did not need to take all of the 712th with you. Reinforcements were enroute. We could have simply waited. Do you know what happened to us?” asked the heavenly angelic, demonic ghost.

Zagro reeled on the ground and curled up on himself, holding the boot of his lost love. “Kara…it was horrible. The entrails of the men were torn out. The women were even worse…we never found you what did they do to you? For the Force I am glad we killed them to a man once we found them!” demanded Zagro.

“Sir, Zagro, do you want to know?” asked Kara. Fenn’s head was aflame and his conscious was being eroded at the seams, searing pain around his eyelids. The tears that freely rolled down could not assuage the fierce burning.

The ghoul kicked her leg free from the Krath’s grasp and paced the room slowly. “First, first, they mutilated the men. The women…they forced the few men remaining to dishonor us like our ancestors once did. Those who refused were forced to pull out their own organs. The many did as commanded. It was wicked. At least they got some fading pleasure before the vibrostaff hiss took their lives,” calmly replied the beautiful ghost.

“Say no more…please say no more. The thought of this happening to you…” Fenn trailed off.

“No sir, they left me alone. As the commanding officer in your absence they let me watch every scream. Every pierce and puncture and penetration I was forced to watch. When they finished the last Hapan they left. You see Zagro? They simply left me.”

“No…Kara…where were you? I looked for weeks through the bodies…” tears and sobs restrained Fenn’s words.

The ghoul now let tears roll down her translucent face. “I walked away Zagro. I walked and walked. I could not take my own life. I did not deserve that honor. Watching those men and women butchered, mutilated, and dishonored in such a way. I walked. For days and weeks until I fell and died.”

Zagro pounded his fists and wailed like a wild beast. “Make it stop, please make it stop. Make. It. Stop.”

The soft hands that caressed him were not the woman’s, but a man who betrayed nothing but compassion and visceral sadness. Opening his eyes Zagro was once more in his stone cocoon that he dreamed to never leave.

Looking up at the Anzat Jedi’s bulging eyes Fenn pleaded for mercy. “End it. I beg. Kill me.”

Tears now freely left the Master’s eyes. “Zagro Fenn, your time is at an end. You have suffered and you have sinned. And now you shall never leave this room. You are no more,” Toss looked away as he drank the soup of Fenn.

When it was over Captain Vrell looked on with approval. “Then it is done. I am impressed. We would have drained him, as is our right as Anzat. You…went further. Darker perhaps?” asked the captain.

Rising to his feet, and lightly releasing the Krath, the Master spoke. “Vrell, if I ever see you again I will kill you. I do not want your soup. I will run you through and let your soldiers feast on your brains. This I promise.” Toss cradled his prisoner and carried him out of the room. “Zagro Fenn is no more.”

***2 Weeks Later…***

“Delos…it is time for my soup,” said Master Toss. The Watchman stated matter of fact to his attendant. Toss was not fully reticent to the idea of having a domestic attached to his household. He was still seen as an abomination to his xenophobic brethren.

“Sir, your soup is not ready, you fed not but four hours ago,” stated the servant.

Master Toss sighed visibly shaken by the statement. This was not his biding. The Anzat looked at his servant and smiled. “Delos, friend, it is not my will that commands this. The Elders have spoken. I have vouchsafed this commandment and must abide by their ruling as must we all.”

“Master…I worry. For your sake alone, I worry. A soup mare is a holy bond in these new times. Yet, the broth is troubling to us both. Send this fiend away I beg of you,” beseeched the attendant.

The Jedi studied the latest dispatch from the Jedi Temple on Coruscant. It was a condemnation of his actions and that of the behavior of his people. Toss was not perturbed, his people were never understood and very little was tolerated of their physiological requirements.

“Delos, I know. I take the blame fully in convincing the Elders of this course of action. It is my burden to bear only. Bring me my soup…” Toss trailed off.

Entering the room came the Hapan. Former Hapan. The once promising youth was no more than a child now. “Swordsman, swordsman, swordsman. Come play with me today?” asked the ghostly white individual.

“Yes Zag, I will play with you today and eat…from this day to the end of my days,” a single tear trailed down the Anzat Master’s cheek as he said these words. “To the end of our days.”