

Dedicated Distraction

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Dedicated Distraction

by [AnInformant](#)

Summary

Dash attempts to get more answers out of Cari as the Defender heads toward The Wheel.

Notes

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Dash had asked Venka to clear his quarters on the Century Hawk, which was gone, so he had to invite her to his new accommodations on the Defender, of course, to perform a similar sweep. He'd left a fresh bottle of the Merenzane Gold conspicuously on a high shelf behind his desk, hoping she'd blush and ask for some, but if she noticed it she gave no indication. She had left, looking like she wanted to say something else, but when he'd asked her to speak her mind she had simply said, "No...it's nothing."

Nevertheless, he was satisfied that the space was private and impenetrable, save for his own re-deployed microphone-cameras after Venka's departure. Perfect for a few timely chats. Whitey was still deservedly agitated over Dash's stunt following the interrogation, but it was unlikely he had anything else to say. Maarek had acted strangely on Lothal, but his indiscretion could wait, seeing as he'd appropriated this incredible ship, now humming along toward The Wheel in search of a fresh lightspeed engine.

Hacarita, on the other hand, had been maddeningly opaque while trying to seem direct - it had taken him several hours the night prior, mulling over her absolute dominance of the narrative,

before he felt ready to make another attempt to find out why she'd been such a willing participant in Whitey's idiotic half-plan. He'd summoned her with a stilted message expressing his urgency, so she wouldn't have time for any more practiced speeches. She'd clearly had too long to think about it after delivering the Century Hawk on a silver platter to their adversary.

A pleasant chime indicated her arrival, quicker than he would have supposed, and he prepared a scathing address to take control of the situation early. "Enter," he beckoned, pretending to be engrossed in a stack of tablets on the desk in front of him.

His admonishment died in his throat, though, when he saw the Chiss mercenary for how she really looked for the first time. And dressed in *that*. He hadn't pegged her for any hallmarks of outright femininity like the carmine silk robe draped elegantly over her lean but powerful frame, making her blood-red eyes glow like the HKs he'd gleefully used to threaten Whitey. It was no less intimidating than when she was covered neck-to-toe in armor and a human facsimile.

Her raven hair dripped tantalizingly down her arm where she'd pulled it to the side, freshly washed. The cold blue of her skin made her look like a dark goddess sent to the mortal plane to devour men's souls while licking their blood off her fingers. How dare she use her unusual beauty to beguile him - that was *his* move, dammit.

"If this is a, uh...bad time..." he stammered, taking a large gulp of water as he swiped the tablets back into a drawer.

She smiled demurely; it was a trick Dash himself had practiced in the mirror for exactly this type of situation and he resented greatly being on the other side of it. "Well I *was* retiring to bed when I got your page," she said eventually.

His eloquence had fled with all the reasons he'd summoned her as he desperately tried to keep his eyes on her face. "You could have... *changed*."

She smirked. "Your exact words were, 'Come to my quarters immediately. I don't want to hear any excuses'."

Yikes. He *had* said that. He collected himself while trying not to imagine long blue legs wrapped around his waist.

"I take it you like this," she said, picking up on his reaction instantly and toying with the hem of the robe riding dangerously high on her thigh. "I'd be happy to lend it to Venka." Luckily, she didn't seem to expect a response.

Without breaking eye contact, she stepped forward silently and reached over his shoulder, close enough for him to smell mint and vanilla from whatever soap she had used, and he was certain she'd be able to hear the hammering of his heart as it fought to extract itself from his ribcage.

Instead of grabbing his neck and sinking her teeth into his flesh, a flash of gold swept through his peripheral vision as she pilfered the liquor he'd left out from behind him.

"Do you mind?" she asked, but the pounding in his ears made it sound like she was underwater.

A good idea, actually; a few pulls of that would soften the buzz of his nerves too. "Not at all. Help yourself to anything." Maybe that was a poor choice of words. He was shifting a tray from under his desk with glasses when she extracted the crystal stopper and tilted the bottle into her mouth.

"Mm...haven't had the good stuff in more than a few years. Tastes better stolen, doesn't it?"

“Sorry to disappoint; this was procured legitimately.”

“Not by me.” Another generous swig passed her lips before he clinked the glasses on the stonework between them with a little more force than necessary. She flitted her eyes down to them and licked her lips. Whether or not the gesture was a conscious effort was unclear; he hated not knowing. “Oops,” she said, without remorse. “I’m used to drinking with Whitey.”

Finally, a direction he could work with. “You two seem to have gotten close.”

“Sure,” she admitted casually.

“Close enough to conspire with each other to release an Imperial fugitive.” He’d reclaimed the commanding quality of his voice, at least. He really wished, though, that she’d reacted more strongly to the accusation.

“He was out for most of it. We’ll get the Century Hawk back, at least.”

That was certainly news. He filed it away. “*Close enough*,” he started again, “to, apparently, attempt to absolve him of responsibility.”

Her eyes saddened a bit, though they were still difficult to read without a well-defined pupil. “It’s the easiest thing in the galaxy to convince somebody to do what they already want to do.”

Dash knew that intimately - it was one of the first sales tactics his father had relayed to his children. He had no doubt that Whitey would have eaten up the chaos their moves were sure to generate, made even more exciting for him by the fact it was the stupidest possible place and time to do so.

“No more skirting around the issue,” he said darkly, gripping his drink though he hadn’t so much as taken a sip. “What *really* happened, Hacarita?”

“Cari,” she whispered.

“Excuse me?”

“Call me Cari. Even the abbreviation of my name reminds me too much of what I left behind.”

An easy concession, but a surprising request. “And what was that, Cari?”

She leaned back, uncrossing and re-crossing her legs, then twisted the tail of the belt of the robe around an index finger while averting her eyes. “You would know it well, I’d think. Social standing and family name are pinnacles of importance for the Chiss. I had a ticket out of a lower caste once I tested extremely favorably for the Third Sight. The work was lonely, though. I was a little girl on ships full of soldiers in their thirties.”

His one question had generated dozens of others being minced between the teeth of gears turning in his mind, but he tried to show understanding. “My father tried to arrange a marriage with the daughter of a much-better-connected merchant when I was fifteen - the fact that she was six didn’t seem to concern anyone but me, because it was supposed to be just fine a decade later.”

“I feel that,” she laughed. “I was supposed to be Mitth’acarit’arung after my service ended, but I didn’t resent it, necessarily. I was gaining a sister in the process, so the man, whoever he was, was incidental.”

“You never met the person you were betrothed to?” They had more in common than he’d thought.

“Didn’t think it was important. Still don’t. Nobody was allowed to have children until after their twentieth summer, anyway.”

“I admit I don’t know much about Chiss customs.”

“That’s surprising. Your Cheunh is fantastic.”

Is that the first compliment she’d ever given him? If she was still trying to butter him up with words more carefully-chosen than her usual abrasive demeanor afforded, it was working. The self-deprecating truth would suit him this time, though. “I know a few phrases in most languages, mostly standard greetings, ordering drinks, and, er...giving compliments.”

“So you can say ‘Hello’, ‘Give me a beer’, and then hit on someone.”

There she was! He snorted uncouthly and finally enjoyed a sip of his drink. “When you put it like *that*...”

“Well? Don’t leave me hanging. Dazzle me, Captain.”

He cleared his throat and decided to play along, gesturing theatrically. “{ Your warrior’s heart thrums with purpose beneath an imposing armor, its virtuosity matched only by the beauty in your eyes illuminated by the brilliance of two moons, a beacon of strength in the vast expanse of the universe. }

He’d chosen a line from a love poem by a Csillan author, that he’d been forced to endure reading for his higher education. Dash didn’t know what she’d expected, but it definitely wasn’t *that*, because her breath had caught in her throat and a soft purple bloomed along her cheekbones. He wished he knew precisely what he was saying - he’d memorized the words and the inflection but not the intent. Still, it served its purpose. “Tell me about the Third Sight,” he ordered, but gently.

There was no resistance this time. “It’s what the Chiss use to navigate dangerous space. It always felt like intuition to me, even though there’s no way I could have known since I didn’t understand any of the ship’s diagnostics.”

“And what would your Jedi call it?”

“The Force,” she said, and then reconsidered. “One aspect of it, anyway. His expression was telepathic, *influence*...and telekinetic. I hadn’t felt the itch of it until we got close to the ion cannon on Lothal. I don’t know which Maarek is experiencing.”

Oh, great. “Maarek is affected by this...” he wanted to say hokey hallucinogen, but thought better of it, “...this hysteria as well?”

“Quite strongly, wouldn’t you suppose? It inspired him to steal a ship with a fucking Jedi warrior on it. I was quite content to avoid it until...”

“Until Whitey disengaged the carbonite,” he interrupted, sighing. He couldn’t help but notice that her slight garment had dipped over the edge of her shoulder, exposing the shadow of her collarbone. “Did he manipulate you?” he asked, distracted.

“Whitey wouldn’t...”

“Not him.”

She stared him down and nodded.

“You said it yourself...easiest thing in the galaxy,” he echoed her previous words, swirling the liquid in his hand, “to get you to do what you already wanted to.”

“I think we’re beyond pointless denials, so I won’t bother.”

It was simpler that way - whether or not he believed the practical applications of such religious fervor, the Jedi had definitely demonstrated his talent for it. He was going to have a permanent divet in his perfect nose from all the bridge-pinching he was doing.

She chuckled then, previous tension fading away. “Can I prescribe you something for stress, Captain?”

He lifted his eyes back up out of his palm and smiled at her, flicking the glass beside him where it rang with the timbre of fine crystal. “All set on that front, *Doctor*.”

“Not the best choice for your liver.”

“Hypocrite.”

“Just because I’m a hypocrite doesn’t mean I’m wrong.” She was smirking again, and his nervous system shot a burst of electricity to pool in his abdomen. “Your decision-making is being affected. Everyone notices. I’ve been goading Venka for months to take care of you, but she’s a nervous wreck.”

She couldn’t *possibly* be insinuating what she was definitely insinuating, made more obvious as she prowled on her hands and knees over the desk and ended up straddling his lap in the armless chair. She ran a reverent thumb along his temple and leaned forward.

“What about Whitey?” he managed to ask as her lips connected with his jaw. A long tongue curled under his ear and he let out a sound that was dangerously close to a moan, now desperately aware that his pants were too small.

“I can’t sleep with him,” Cari said as if it was obvious. “I really like him.”

“And you hate me!?” Maybe he didn’t understand women at all.

“Hate is such a strong word. I like the way you look.”

At least that feeling was mutual. “It’s inappropriate.” He grabbed her wrists to stop her from reaching inside his uniform shirt and she leaned back, eyes heated as she canted her hips, undeterred. His response was a proper moan, this time.

“I don’t see how,” she intoned. “I’m not enlisted. Your fondness for *Venka* is *inappropriate*. I still endorse it though, emphatically. You haven’t exactly been subtle about Serathiss, either.”

He ignored the first statement and focused on the second. “That’s a favorable tactical position.”

“Mm, yes Captain, I’m sure you’re considering all sorts of *tactical positions* while she bats her pretty eyelashes at you.” Cari did the same, running her tongue in a circle around her dark blue lips, *assuredly* on purpose this time.

Dash’s libido tried desperately to justify why this wasn’t a terrible idea, while what was left of the logical part of his brain insisted that she was using her body to manipulate him in the same way the Jedi had used his mind to do the same to her.

“Tell me to leave and I will never mention it again,” she whispered, right next to his ear, her hair against his cheek leaving a damp, fragrant imprint in its wake. He felt goosebumps raise pleasurably along his neck and across his chest as she finally freed him of his shirt. “But if you fuck me, we’ll both feel much better.”

His hands seemed to move on their own to settle on her hips. The softness was in stark contrast to her usual brutish, violent approach to a negotiation. Dash could play that game too, better than her.

“Do you know what I think?” he responded with reciprocal ferocity, pulling the knot at her waist apart so her robe pooled in his lap. She seemed unashamed by nudity, though whether it was a personality trait or a cultural thing he couldn’t say. He pulled her forward roughly, then, kissing her bare sternum while his other hand gripped a large handful of hair at the base of her scalp, yanking her head back. She whimpered, a surprisingly vulnerable sound even given his next accusation. He pulled back for a moment; he was looking up at her, but he had the upper hand. “I think you act assertive and confident on a battlefield, but when it comes to things like *this*...” He lifted her up from his seated position, pinning her on her back on the cold marble of the desk and wrapping a hand with moderate force around her neck. “...you just want to be held down so you don’t have to think.”

He tightened a thumb against her jugular; his own neck would be broken in an instant if she’d decided it was something she didn’t approve of. The fact that he was still alive was telling, mostly that his gamble had been worth the risk. “...but I have to ask, Cari - are you controlling me like your new Jedi friend?” Hallucinogen or no, that wasn’t going to fly.

“No,” she said shakily, strained, swallowing so that the lump rolled across his palm. “I wouldn’t even know how.”

More evidence he was right, then. Dash usually had exceptional intuition when it came to what women wanted in bed. “Then stay,” he allowed, closing the distance between their lips so he could taste her smartass mouth properly. As usual, the reality was much better than his imagination.

He noticed her rummaging in an access panel in the wall in the early hours of the morning, in near-complete darkness. He wondered how she could possibly navigate the delicate screws and levers in the low light before remembering her species had impeccable nightvision.

Cari had been right about everything so far, so he was unsurprised when he did, indeed, feel much better. Better enough not to care too much when she retrieved something and pocketed it in the robe she’d re-donned. “Come back,” he muttered. “It’s cold.”

She re-affixed the panel quietly and crawled behind him, dragging her nails soothingly across his shoulder blades, and he hummed. “Go back to sleep, Dash.”

“I give the orders around here, Chiss,” he prodded good-naturedly, turning halfway and draping an arm across her waist to pull her closer. The outline of the stolen item pressed into his hand, thumb-sized and rectangular, but he pretended not to have felt it. Whatever she had taken, the gall to seduce him to get to it was worthy of his admiration and respect - it’s something *he* would do, after all, especially given the other obvious, tangible benefits. He wondered how long it would take Venka to make a copy...

“Don’t,” she implored, just above a whisper, sliding her hand down his torso as a very, very effective distraction. “I’ll share, eventually.”

How could she possibly have known what he was thinking? He lost his concentration again before

he could ask her about what she had attempted to conceal.

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