

Good Copy (2)

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by [AnInformant](#)

Summary

Cari trusts General Wolen with a sensitive (and possibly incriminating) account of the interaction with her crewmate claiming to be Maarek Stele.

Pt. 2

The outreach to General Wolen was more perilous. She had tried before leaving the corvette, but Serathiss was ubiquitous after the fugitive had escaped and Sosh'acari had attempted not to make eye contact with any of them.

He had gripped her arm and nodded, an invitation to talk, as they were departing to the Defender; Captain Madell was behind her, watchful, as the others marched onto the ship oblivious. She glanced back at him, for permission? No. She would have to build that connection by other means; the Captain had already covered for her, believing that the oath she had taken was in good faith. To his benefit, it was.

Her association with Wolen, for better or worse, was more fortified. She could trust him since before he had been appointed to General, but had never discussed with him the most formative element of her identity as a Chiss military operative. Empire assets, for whatever reason, had been conditioned to believe that the Sight was an ancient religion, despite the Chiss' continuous use of it and the Jedi's elimination not long prior.

Indoctrination, especially in the Imperial Military, was all-encompassing. Her own had also been quite thorough, though on a different world, and the exposure to the different flavors of it as an Agent had led her to question almost everything, especially after the betrayal by her own people. *One man* among them, her logic protested, and she conceded the point.

Even with that extraordinary event, Sosh'acari realized she'd had no idea what the definition of 'all-encompassing' really was until Maarek Stele had inadvertently ransacked her brain for her own memories of the Sight.

Whatever the Empire had done to that man...to those men, strange manifestation of dissociative identity that it was, was beyond anything she could comprehend as a physician or an Ozyly-Esehembo. She had never been gifted with the Second Sight, she thought, until the overlap with Maarek had revealed it.

Chiss rankings were divisive and severe. One of the things she had never questioned was the presence of two Sights beyond the first, which was just her normal dumb fucking eyeballs of course. How could she characterize Lokanth's extended expressions? Could his telekinetic abilities be a Fourth?

More information was on the table. Lokanth had pointed her toward a drive of archives hidden on his ship - the damn thing was in the conference room permuted into the Captain's makeshift quarters. She could probably make up some bullshit to tear off the wall panels that he would accept, but where was the fun in that?

"I want to speak with General Wolen," she requested a few days later, from an advantageous posture of course, since she was half-naked and unconcealed. Dash was in no position to mount a serious opposition.

"I don't see why not. You've known him longer than any of us."

She shouldn't have doubted that he'd read her entire file. If she wasn't enjoying herself so much, the followup would have been more demanding. "A secure channel," she breathed, snapping apart the last buckles of her armor.

"That goes without saying."

"...and alone," she finished, eyes closed, and she could practically sense the shrug even though his shoulders didn't move.

"I'll tell Venka the *secure, private channel* is for me. It's technically the truth."

"Technically true!" she gasped dramatically. "The best kind of true."

"The easiest deception is absolute sincerity."

She had complete faith in this particular communications link. A call to the embassy (or tourism bureau, as it were) would never have passed muster under Venka's scrutiny, but a routine check-in by the Captain with one of their taskmasters? Easy.

Dash may have been listening, though she genuinely believed him when he said he'd step away. She almost wished he *was* eavesdropping, so that he would take her assertions about Maarek seriously.

"General," she addressed when he emerged on the screen. She had to consider carefully who was watching him, too.

"Agent Hacarita," he smiled. "I'm pleased to see you embracing your given name and appearance."

"I can't say I've made much progress with ISB."

“That is no longer your mission, at least not exclusively. I have been waiting for you to engage me about the unfortunate escape of your carbonite-clad passenger. You’re the only witness, if Daro Madell’s account is accurate.”

“It is,” she said. “I wanted to provide additional detail that may be relevant to your investigation.”

“Why didn’t you tell your commanding officer?”

“I tried. Whatever veil you and the Imperial Military have pulled over their eyes is immensely effective.”

His posture stiffened, and he leaned back. “And to what does that pertain?”

“Wolen, I have known you for twenty years. I have done everything you’ve demanded, and more.”

“I’ve never told you *how* to do your job, just what your jobs *are*.”

Given her less-than-enthusiastic approach to social stakeouts, her introduction of honeypot mechanisms was something he had begrudgingly handwaved when her too-forward conversational approach had been ineffective. Sitting at a bar, bending slightly, silent, was more powerful as a Chiss or human woman than Wolen’s most eloquent male asset. The gender-ambiguous Twilek he had recruited for Eye-Eye had more luck than any of the rest of them, though.

He followed up stiffly, “What I did not tell you was to release a Jedi.”

At least he admitted to knowing what the man was. “I didn’t need telling. How horrified were you, really? I imagine the look on your face to help me drift off to sleep.”

“This isn’t a *joke*, Sosh’acari.”

“Do I strike you as though I’m in a joking mood? Ever?” She stared him down for a few moments but his expression was concealed by his grey beard and the diversion of his eyes. “I didn’t contact you to talk about *him*. I want to ask about Karn von Richthofen.”

He hardened even more. “What about him?”

“I want to know why he’s claiming to be Maarek Steele.”

“How do you know that name?”

“He was famous, right?”

“You were a child on Csilla with no exposure to proto-Empire propaganda.”

“I was a Navigator aboard the Tell’andra’n for the Chiss Expansionary Defense Force.” He was silent. “News to you, yes?”

“Yes.”

“It was news to me that Maarek Steele is still flying for the Empire, *on the other side of the galaxy*.” The research to that effect had been easy. That man, who did in fact vaguely resemble Karn though he was older, had been absolutely everywhere for years; he was famous for death-defying stunts not unlike the Century Hawk Maneuver.

“He shouldn’t be talking about that.”

“He can’t *help* it. He has no idea what he’s doing. He has extraordinary intuition for piloting that you of course knew about, but did you even stop to comprehend *why*?”

“It didn’t matter why! How many deadly situations has he avoided for you?”

“For this crew? I read the 417th mission reports *you gave me* and it didn’t give me the slightest insight into what he was *really* capable of.”

“What do you want me to do with this information, Hacarita?”

“I *want* you to *acknowledge* what you have failed to disclose to Dash and his contingent. I want you to *tell* them about the Sight...the Force...whatever you Imperials want to fucking call it, because it is affecting them as it affects all living things, whether they want it to or not.”

“What did the Jedi tell you?”

“That’s your response!? *I* am telling you now that I guided whole fleets through the Chaos, that I fought with a man of the supposedly-exterminated Jedi order, that one of your own appointments to Madell’s team invaded my mind and revealed his very-detached elimination of an entire unit of Imperial soldiers on Scarif, and you want to know about the curtailed conversation I had with an ancient fugitive *after I tried to kill him* before he made off with the Century Hawk?”

“Did he tell you to look for anything else? Did he tell you how to open the holocron?”

“Wolen, you know I will tell you what I’m thinking. The Jedi has resources I can’t comprehend.”

“I don’t blame you for wanting to use that to your advantage. I would ask you to assist the Empire in decoding the message he left behind, as an act of good faith.”

Had what she’d pilfered from Dash’s quarters been enough for such an effort on a device encoded to the Sight? It wasn’t the holocron, which her crewmate had handed directly to Serathiss, but it was still valuable. “I can probably open it, eventually. So can Maarek, one of them anyway. I think you’re forgetting that Dash and his crew were listed as Imperial fugitives themselves well before this.”

“I am not forgetting. I’m in a regrettable position myself. Your attestation to the ability to extract the information from the cube may be an effective bargaining chip, if it comes to that.”

She exhaled, rubbing her neck, wishing she had been drinking more before this. “You asked me to support Dash. I will. I *am*.”

“Hacarita,” he said softly, reaching out as if he was wishing they had been conversing in person so he could grip her shoulder reassuringly. He had, many times in the past, when she had returned from a mission empty-handed or leaving an unintended trail of bodies, telling her that she had done the right thing under the circumstances. “The man at the embassy that you have been reluctant to discuss with me, which is unlike you...” It was...she had told him nearly everything else, but both her own will and that of the satellite Chiss spy agency were reluctant to disclose too much detail about her early career. He was stumbling over his words a bit, which was quite honestly unlike *him* as well. “...you know I trust your judgment in the field. You did the right thing, at the embassy. Your revenge was justified and, if my timing is right, well overdue.”

To hear it said out loud was pure vindication, but she metered her response since he really couldn’t possibly understand. She may be more forthcoming with this conversation, and the circumstances of the kill certainly logically pointed to vengeance, but he still did not have enough context to make that claim. “I already know that. What do you want me to do now?”

“Embrace that sentiment. The Jedi, and the Rebellion, will dissuade you from acting on those feelings, but if your attunement to the Fo...the *Sight*, is returning, then you owe it to yourself and the allies of your people to use it for the good of the Empire.”

If he had said, ‘*for good*’, it would have been more comforting. Whatever moral relativism she’d adopted to dissociate from the rightness or wrongness of her body count was in turmoil, fighting with itself.

If she was right, maybe Maarek was too.

“Of course. I feel much better now,” she lied.

He’d known her long enough to be able to tell. “You do not need to do that. I know you’re angry; you’re entitled to it. What Karn did was unacceptable. If he can’t be controlled, he can’t be trusted.”

Could *she* be controlled? “Serathiss trusts him.”

“She recognizes his utility. So must you.”

“I will recommend he be grounded.”

“It would be suspicious if you didn’t, after what happened.”

That was a fair assessment. Wolen still had her back, even amid her transgressions, like he always had.

Still...Lokanth could have killed her with the lightwhip when she had foolishly handed it to him. He could have lied about the drive in the conference room, or not told her about it at all. He could have taken the Century Hawk anywhere in the galaxy; yet it was at Point Nadir as she had requested. How she knew for certain she couldn’t say.

“Can you contact him?” Wolen asked after a long silence.

Both she and Lokanth had eliminated that possibility, at least in the short term. “I cannot.”

Maybe the information about the stolen ship she should still keep to herself. She hadn’t even told Dash, not directly, but Maarek had certainly absorbed enough of her uncanny sense to know the real reason she and Whitey were demanding the detour even with contraband.

“Be careful, Hacarita. I know you are not one for deeper personal attachments, but please consider that I care about you. You deserve to claim your rightful place in returning law and order to the galaxy that only the Empire can bring...and to take back what was taken from you.”

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