

Forsiveness

by Jeanne DeVore

Tarrant looked up to see Dayna standing in the doorway watching him. Before he could say anything, a pained expression crossed her face and she ran from the room.

"That's it!" he snarled, slamming his fist onto the table in front of him. He took off after her.

This had been going on for days -- ever since their return from Virn. She refused to talk to him, refused to stay in the same room with him, but sometimes he would be working and sense her presence. She watched him at a distance, always with that same injured look on her face.

Tarrant caught up with Dayna in the armory. She was sitting at the work table, back to the door, head in her hands. He stood in the doorway and watched her for a moment before he spoke.

"Are we going to spend the rest of our lives avoiding each other?" he asked quietly.

He startled her and she jumped, spinning around in her chair. Then she regained her wounded animal look and muttered, "Go away, Tarrant." She turned back to the table.

Tarrant knew she couldn't get away from him this time -- there was only one way out of the armory and he was standing in it. He folded his arms across his chest and leaned against the door frame.

"No matter what you might think of me, Dayna, we do have to work together every day. I'd say that means that eventually, we ought to try talking to each other again."

"I'm not avoiding you," she said in a small voice, refusing to turn around.

"Oh, of course not," he agreed.

The ensuing silence was heavy -- Dayna absently toying with a probe on the work table, Tarrant holding up the door frame. Finally she turned around and faced him. Her eyes were rimmed with tears.

"Tarrant, how could you?"

The pilot sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose, trying to ignore the tension headache that had been there ever since Virn.

"I can't explain it, Dayna -- you wouldn't understand even if I could."

"Try," she ordered flatly. She folded her arms across her chest and stood up straight, her tigress eyes flashing angrily.

He took a deep breath and began: "When I first saw her, I tried to contact Avon -- I wanted to give her to him, and you. But my communicator wasn't working. So I told her I was going to blow her head off instead. But then I realized she was looking for the same thing we were and she could be useful. I didn't know what extra knowledge she might have that we didn't.

"As it turned out, it was a good thing I didn't kill her then, because if I had, the sand would have killed me. She became my insurance policy."

"And afterwards?" Dayna asked, her voice sharp as a blade.

"Afterwards I -- I couldn't kill her," Tarrant said quietly. A disparaging sound came from Dayna, but he went on. "I know that's what you hate me for -- falling victim to Servalan's charms. But you have to look at it from my point of view as well."

"Do I?"

He slammed a hand against the door post. "At least give me the courtesy of listening to what I have to say!"

"Very well. Go on." Her flat tone was icy -- Avon could be no colder.

"We'd found out what the sand was and what it wanted of us. We were trapped there, together. I couldn't see any way out and neither could she. She was scared, Dayna. I never thought it was possible of her, but she was really scared. She thought she would die there. And so did I. Call it making the best of a bad situation."

"But you know what she is -- what she's done!"

"Yes, I do. I know it very well."

"Then how could you have forgotten --"

"I didn't forget. Not at all. The whole time I was down there, I knew exactly what I was dealing with. It was like being locked in a cage with a panther -- very beautiful, very deadly. I knew exactly what she'd done and what she was capable of."

"Even when you made love to her --" Dayna's words dripped venom through the pain. Tarrant looked at her -- then looked away.

"Even then. But I learned something about her, Dayna. I saw a side of her that no one else has ever seen. Not even Avon. I saw the part of her that can be vulnerable -- that can care. That can cry. I saw the humanity in her that I never realized/ as there.

"I told Avon I didn't believe what she said about Don Keller. But I do. All of her actions, from the minute we got to the base, confirmed that she was telling the truth. When we found Keller's body, the look on her face -- I don't know the whole story, she didn't tell me. But she was very young; she loved him, he left her and she was hurt. I think that she became what she did as a defense -- to keep from ever being hurt again.

"I can't deny all the evil things she's done, Dayna -- I know what she is. But I also know that she's a human being -- who loves and loses just like everybody else.

"I can't explain what happened any better than that, Dayna," he said with a sigh. He raked a hand through his curls and stared at the floor. "I don't expect you to understand -- I'm not sure I understand it myself. But I thought you should know how I feel about it. I can't change what happened -- I can't even guarantee that in the same circumstances it wouldn't happen the same way again. But if what happened with Servalan and me on Virn comes between us staying friends, then I'm very sorry. Because I never meant to hurt you; your friendship means a lot of me and I'd hate to lose it because of this."

Tarrant gazed at Dayna briefly. "I've said all I can," he concluded and turned to leave the room.

Dayna watched him go. She stood still for a moment, a myriad of emotions flickering across her face. Then she sprang into action and ran in to the corridor after him.

"Tarrant! Tarrant, wait!"

He was halfway down the corridor, but stopped where he was. "Yes?" he asked quietly, standing with his back to her.

"Tarrant --" Dayna began tentatively as she walked toward him, "I -- I can't forgive you for what you did -- she killed my father and I'll never forget it. You had the chance to kill my greatest enemy and you didn't do it. I can't forgive that, and I can't forget it.

"But I didn't want this to come between us either. I -- I still want you as a friend, if that's possible. I like you too much to think of you as an enemy."

Tarrant turned around and looked at her. She still had that wounded animal look

in her eyes, but there was also a look of -- concern? Compassion? He smiled.

"I accept that. I'll try not to let you down again." He extended his hand. "Friends?"

She clasped his hand in return. "Friends."

He held her hand for a moment, then laughed and pulled her into a bearhug. It took her by surprise, but then she laughed and hugged him back. They just stood there for a moment, arms around each other.

It would never be the way it was. Any hopes either of them may have still harbored for something more than friendship died in the sand on Virn. From now on, whenever they looked at each other, there would be something unresolved between them -- something that could never be gotten around. Something always there. A wedge made up of disappointment and misguided ideals, of wanting and failure. More than trust had been lost on Virn. And they both knew it.

But it hurt less to pretend it wasn't so. Reluctantly, Tarrant and Dayna broke from their extended hug and gazed at each other. Then, burying the pain they each felt, they linked arms and headed back down the corridor.

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