

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Vader arrives.

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Time had lost all meaning for Asajj Ventress. It might have been hours, it might have been days, it might even have been weeks. All she knows is that she can't stop. If she stops, Sev'rance dies.

What should have been her greatest moment of triumph had rapidly evolved into horror when Dooku, seeing no way out for himself, had proven petty enough to strike a fatal blow against Sev'rance with the last of his strength. Asajj might have felt derision for the man who had once seemed to loom over her like an impossible titan... if she wasn't too busy feeling concern for the woman she'd come to love with all her heart.

As things stood, Sev'rance's life had been draining from her faster than Asajj could possibly imagine. She'd been dying right before her eyes and Asajj had no choice but to act swiftly. She'd reached out to the Force and *begged* it for succor, even as she'd given herself over.

And... something had answered. The Force had connected her and Sev'rance together. Holding the blue-skinned woman's hands in her own, squeezing them with every bit of strength she has, Asajj had fueled Sev'rance's survival with her own life force.

She'd been doing that ever since, for however long it had been. In the interim, Asajj was only aware of a few things. First, she was aware that Grievous and his fleet had left. This made sense, there was nothing more for him to do on Dathomir and plenty more for him to do out in the greater galaxy to ensure their plans continued.

Second, she was aware that several Nightsisters, including Talzin herself, had been by multiple times to provide Asajj with more power. If not for them, Asajj

would probably have died along with Sev'rance at this point. For that, she was grateful. At the same time though, part of her couldn't help but whine that they weren't doing more.

Third... her Master was on his way. That, more than anything, was what kept Asajj going. Even if a little voice in the back of her head kept saying a Sith Lord would never understand her love for Sev'rance, Asajj nevertheless held out hope that Lord Vader would help her in some way. That he would prove to be different from the likes of Count Dooku, as he'd proven to be different in so many other ways.

Truthfully, Asajj hadn't realized it until that moment, when she'd seen the light start to leave Sev'rance's red eyes... but she doesn't want to live in a universe without the other woman. She'd truly had no idea how deep her love for the blue-skinned alien ran until now... but there was no denying it, all the same.

She-

"Darth Shar."

So lost in everything, Asajj doesn't even feel her Master's approach. Suddenly though, he's by her side and his presence slides over hers like a thick blanket, causing her to gasp and shudder. Looking up at the hooded figure that is Darth Vader, Asajj's lower lip wobbles.

"M-Master... please... help me save her."

There's a pause as Lord Vader considers the situation for a moment, staring down at Sev'rance. And then... he pulls back his hood. Asajj's eyes widen in disbelief as she beholds the visage of Anakin Skywalker. For a moment she doesn't know if she's seeing things or not, if maybe she's hallucinating. But no... no... it's him.

In any other circumstances, Asajj might have properly freaked out over this revelation. The idea of her Master being Anakin Skywalker would have broken her brain. Reconciling the image of Darth Vader, who saved her from Dooku,

with the Jedi Knight that she'd crossed blades with multiple times over the beginning of the Clone Wars... would have been impossible.

But in these circumstances, Asajj simply doesn't have the bandwidth to care all that much. She's too focused on Sev'rance's survival. She's too tired to throw a fit. In the end, she simply accepts this new truth into her world view without complaint or comment and remains completely and utterly focused on the current.

"Please... can you help her?"

Lord Vader kneels down beside the bed where the Nightsisters have moved her and Sev'rance. He reaches out to the wound in Sev'rance's gut. Asajj holds her breath for a moment in anticipation... only for him to shake his head.

"I cannot."

Crushing despair begins to overtake her, only for him to continue on a moment later.

"But you can."

Confused, Asajj furrows her brow, even as she continues to cling to Sev'rance with all her might.

"I... I don't understand. I'm doing everything I can, Master."

Vader simply nods.

"Yes. You've hit your limits... and the Nightsisters have been able to do enough to keep you going but nothing more. I'm here now though. I cannot save Sev'rance. I cannot help her. But I can help you finish what you unknowingly started."

Vader's hand moves from Sev'rance... to Asajj's shoulder. A ragged gasp ripples out of Asajj's lips as she feels his strength suddenly flowing through their Master-Apprentice Bond, into her.

"You've connected yourself to her. You know what you desire. Take my power and make the Force do the rest."

That's right. She'd begged the Force before, offering herself up to try to save Sev'rance initially... but the Force had not agreed. Not entirely. It had left them in this stasis of sorts, stuck between life and death. Because at the end of the day, Asajj didn't have enough power to push it through.

... Until now.

Gritting her teeth, using the power from her Master, Asajj growls as she pushes the Force into compliance. She wasn't asking anymore. She wasn't begging. She was demanding, commanding, and asserting. And with Lord Vader's backing, she could make something happen.

Power flows through Asajj into Sev'rance and the wound in the blue-skinned woman's gut finally begins to properly mend. Until, within mere moments... its like it was never there at all.

When the work is finally done, Asajj finds she can't quite stop on her own. Its too much power and she's barely handling it as is. Fortunately, Lord Vader is there to cut her off, ending the flow from his side so that it ultimately comes to a finish. However... the bond between her and Sev'rance remains. That, Asajj can tell, will be harder if not impossible to untangle. And yet... does she really mind?

Trembling as she looks down at Sev'rance's sleeping features, now peaceful and now longer scrunched up in constant pain, Asajj lets out a shuddering breath. Finally, she pulls her hands free of the other woman's and slowly sits up, looking to Lord Vader... to Anakin Skywalker.

What was real? Who was this man in front of her? No... Asajj knew one thing for sure. Regardless of who he truly was, he was still her Master. And with this act, he had more than earned her undying loyalty, no matter what came next.

“Master. Thank you for coming... you have my eternal gratitude.”

Lord Vader smiles and Asajj doesn't know how to feel about it, all things considered.

“You've done well, Darth Shar. You did everything I asked of you. You earned this much of me.”

Asajj bites her lower lip at that. Once again, Darth Vader proves himself to be a very different sort of Sith. Count Dooku would not have come like this. He would not have helped her with something he would likely have deemed weakness. No matter what she did for him, no matter how much she accomplished.

“You don't think I'm... weak? For loving her this much?”

The question spills out before she can really second guess herself. But once she's said it, Asajj can't really regret asking it. Because... she needs to know. She needs the reassurances.

Lord Vader hums, looking down at Sev'rance again.

“Love... love is not weakness. The Banite Sith may have believed it was, but that was ultimately their downfall. They would have you believe that love has no place in the Dark. They were wrong. Love is the greatest emotion that you can fuel the Dark Side with. Love is powerful enough to ignite the stars themselves.”

She wasn't expecting such an impassioned defense of love from a Sith Lord. His words take her breath away, even as she feels them resonate with her very soul. He's right, Asajj realizes. He's completely and utterly right. Dooku and his Master had lost because they didn't understand the true strength of their enemies. And now, even Dooku's finally act of spite has been reversed by her love for Sev'rance and her Master's power.

A smile spreads across her face as tears glisten in her eyes. And Asajj finds herself letting out a small little laugh, prompting Lord Vader to arch a brow at her.

“Something funny, my Apprentice?”

Still smiling, Asajj nods.

“Yes Master. Count Dooku lived like he was always so much better than all of us. He acted as though he were one of the most important men in the galaxy. But when his end finally came, he revealed his true self... a craven, spiteful thug who struck out and tried to cause as much pain and suffering as he could in his final moments.”

Looking down at Sev'rance's restful expression, letting herself fully feel the surety that the other woman is going to be alright, Asajj giggles rather girlishly.

“And yet... even in that, he was proven a failure. His last act amongst the living has been completely erased.”

In response, Vader chuckles.

“Well said Darth Shar. Well said indeed.”

Asajj preens a bit under his praise. Though... she can't help but point out the obvious now that everything is taken care of.

“You're Anakin Skywalker. You've always been Anakin Skywalker.”

Darth Vader tilts his head in acknowledgment.

“I was born Anakin Skywalker, yes. However... I have not been Anakin Skywalker in quite some time.”

Narrowing her eyes, Asajj finds that she has no anger over this revelation. It's impossible to be furious with her Master, not when he's given her the very stars themselves. And yet... her curiosity is impossible to completely suppress.

"How? You must have been laughing at me internally every time we fought..."

But Vader shakes his head.

"No. The Anakin Skywalker you fought at the advent of the Clone Wars was the real deal. I am not him anymore... because the Force saw fit to show me a vision of the future. Of my future... as Darth Vader."

Asajj's eyes widen, but she doesn't dare interrupt as her Master continues on.

"I would have become Sidious' apprentice after killing Dooku in our next encounter near the end of the wars. And I would have spent the next twenty years as his enforcer while he ruled the galaxy as Emperor."

Lord Vader shrugs, even as Asajj processes that revelation.

"I saw all of this. I felt all of this. It was as though I lived every moment, Shar. And when I had internalized everything, I knew two things to be absolutely true. First, I was Darth Vader... and Anakin Skywalker was no more. And second, I was not going to let Sidious shackle me ever again."

She feels the weight of his words in the Force itself, a promise that was backed by all of his immense power... a promise fulfilled given that he'd come here from killing Darth Sidious. The Banite Sith were gone now... and the Sith Lord in front of her, while apparently trained by them in a future that would never be... was something else entirely.

A million questions race through Asajj's mind of course. She wants to ask things like what happened to her or Sev'rance in his vision. But then she remembers the vision from the holocron and finally understands where that bit of foresight regarding the fate of the Nightsisters had come from. That was to be her fate,

bringing about the death and destruction of her people here on Dathomir simply by seeking shelter among them.

In the end, Asajj holds her tongue. She doesn't need to know more. She doesn't necessarily want to know more. Thinking about a future that would never come to pass now felt rather meaningless, all things considered. After all, it was far more important to consider the present and the future that would be... a future where she and Sev'rance would be together. A future Asajj was actually excited to see.

As if on cue, Sev'rance begins to stir a moment later, prompting Asajj to jolt and look down at her beloved as the other woman starts to open her eyes. A broad smile spreads unbidden across Asajj's face as their eyes meet and after a moment, Sev'rance begins to smile too.

"I will leave you two alone. It is far past time I had a conversation with Mother Talzin, after all."

Blinking, Asajj looks up to see Lord Vader moving towards the door.

"A-Ah... yes Master, of course."

As he departs, she turns her attention back to Sev'rance... only to see the blue-skinned woman looking after the Sith Lord with a baffled expression on her face. Only once he's completely gone does Sev'rance look back to Asajj.

"Was that... was that Anakin Skywalker?"

Asajj can't help but laugh at that, before lunging forward and seizing Sev'rance in a tight, crushing embrace. She'd almost lost her... and she would do everything in her power to make sure such a thing never happened again.

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A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!

