

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

A/N: Vader makes a decision. Asajj makes a friend.

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Vader frowns as he contemplates Padme's concerns. Was there any truth to Sidious' theories? Could someone on the Jedi High Council have Fallen? Well... technically, they already had. Shaak Ti was a member of the Jedi Council, sent to Kamino to watch over the clones and look after Jedi Interests.

And she had Fallen. Vader had witnessed and experienced her Darkness firsthand. With that in mind, it was entirely possible that another member of the Jedi Council had also Fallen, though it seemed unlikely. And yet... there were enough changes to the timeline already that he knew he couldn't rely on 'unlikely'. No, they had to operate under the assumption that anything was possible at this point.

Letting out a rough exhale, Vader looks down at his wife. Padme had... surprised him with Sabe. And not entirely in a good way at first because... it was a reminder that this Padme, as much as he had fallen into an easy sort of love with her, as much as he remembered their shared experiences from this timeline thanks to melding with his younger self... was a lot darker than the other Padme.

To be fair, it wasn't like Vader of all people had any room to complain about darkness. However, he did have a line. One simple hard line. Slavery.

He'd been forced by Palpatine to condone it in the original timeline. Once Sidious had his hooks in him, Vader hadn't even tried to stop it. He'd led the assault on Kashyyyk himself, for instance. But now he had a second chance. And while he had no intentions of ever being a Jedi again, he also had no intentions of letting slavery proliferate. He would stamp it out wherever he found it, that was a promise.

Fortunately, his first read of things between Padme and Sabe wasn't... correct. The more time went on, the more it became obvious that Sabe was enthusiastically consenting to all of this. Sure, Vader could tell that Padme's former handmaiden wasn't in love with him, but she also didn't mind being shared between him and his wife. Just so long as she got to stay by Padme's side.

Healthy? Safe? No, but then what was these days? They were living in the shadow of war, with Banite Sith controlling both sides. Until Sidious and Dooku were both dead, Vader would not be able to rest easy.

That said, Padme was right. The Jedi did have to be investigated further, if only to make sure Vader got to any Fallen Jedi Masters before Sidious could sink his claws into them. But ultimately HE was the Jedi Knight here so...

"I will look into it."

Padme blinks at his decision, furrowing her brow slightly. But Vader just continues on.

"You must continue your work in the Senate. Give whatever token effort is necessary to make Sidious think that you're investigating the Temple, but I want your focus to be on building up your power block."

His wife slowly nods, shivering slightly before smiling at him.

"I will. And... I might have another surprise for you sooner rather than later. Would you like that? Did you enjoy Sabe?"

Vader hums... before slowly nodding. He could tell that this was important to this version of Padme. She hungered for control after living under Sidious thumb all her life. However...

"I did. I enjoyed how much she wanted to please you and I. If you can recreate that... enthusiasm, I am sure I will enjoy your 'surprises'."

Padme grins wickedly, before abruptly sliding down Vader's chest and nestling herself between his legs. She takes his cock, which her fingers have been wrapped around all this time, into her mouth right there on the spot, moaning as she begins to dutifully suck him off and swirl her tongue this way and that.

Vader grunts, before letting out a pleased rumble as he runs a hand through his wife's hair. It would seem he was in for an interesting time if Padme had anything to say about it... then again, he couldn't exactly blame her, not when he'd already fucked Ahsoka and Shaak Ti with barely any provocation.

It was fine though. More than fine... it was perfect.

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"Ventress. What do you want?"

Asajj smiles as she turns to face the other woman, a Pantoran with blue skin and narrowed eyes.

"Tann. Good to see you recognize a summons when it comes. I would have hated to have to track you down myself."

Sev'rance Tann's jaw clenches at that, her hands turning into fists at her sides. The Dark Acolyte looks like she's ready to fight right then and there... but she holds herself back. She controls herself. Asajj watches this with some interest, considering the woman for a second.

Other than Tann's species, that being a near-human native to the moon Pantora, she honestly doesn't know where the other woman came from, truth be told. Dooku had already had Tann and a handful of other Dark Acolytes circling him when he'd first found and recruited Asajj. They were all jockeying for his approval... and for any scraps of power that he would give them.

Of course, none of them were as strong as she was. None of them were as naturally gifted. When Dooku had brought her back with him and made him her apprentice, Tann and the rest of the Dark Acolytes in his orbit had effectively

been pushed to the sides. They were officially nothing more than servants with no chance of advancement until she either fucked up or died.

One might imagine that Asajj would have to deal with a lot of assassination attempts because of that fact. Treachery was the way of the Sith, after all.

... But they were all so weak and fearful, in the end. She'd sparred with many of them, Tann included, and put the fear of herself into them. Her aggression, her ferocity, her rage. They couldn't keep up with her and none of them had the balls to actually make a play for her position or her life.

To be fair to Sev'rance Tann, she'd taken the whole situation better than most of the Dark Acolytes. Rather than wallowing in her inadequacies and fears and weakness, she'd gone ahead and pivoted, finding other ways to make herself... useful.

That's why her response to Asajj isn't all that surprising.

"You did not summon me. You requested my presence and I agreed to come speak with you. You are not my superior, we are both Commanders in the Confederacy, Ventress."

She's technically not wrong. But she's not right either. See, they were both Commanders yes. But Tann had only gained that rank when she realized she would never be made Dooku's Apprentice. She'd had to work her ass off to earn the title of Commander and from what Asajj had heard, Sev'rance was striving for more than just that too. One day soon, she might even have a higher rank than Asajj herself.

... But it wouldn't matter. How could it when Asajj had literally been given the rank of Commander specifically because she'd obtained the very apprenticeship that Tann had failed to earn? Everything Tann had worked so hard for, Asajj had been handed on a silver platter.

Because she was better than her. Because she was stronger than her. But of course, even now Sev'rance Tann refused to be looked down upon. Even with

her chances of becoming Dooku's apprentice reduced to ash, she still had her pride.

"Hm? Commanders? Confederacy? What do either of those things matter, Tann? We aren't soldiers. We're Sith. Or at least... one of us is."

The Pantoran's jaw clenches and Asajj grins. A moment later and her curved hilts are in her hands, flicked outwards as her red lightsabers come alive with a familiar snap-hiss. Sev'rance stiffens up, but she doesn't back away. She has some spine to her at least.

"What is the meaning of this, Ventress?"

"Let's have a spar Tann. You and I, just like old times."

Narrowed eyes grow even more narrow at that, Tann's lips becoming more and more pursed. The Dark Acolyte does in fact have her own saber attached to her waist. She might not wear it everywhere, but she would have been a fool to come to this meeting without it and they both know that much.

"... To what end? So you can say that your emotions got the better of you and you didn't mean to kill me?"

Asajj lets out a laugh at that, before rolling her eyes and shaking her head.

"You really think I need an excuse, Tann? If I killed you right here and now, nobody else would even notice you were gone."

That tips the other woman over the edge. Sev'rance Tann might have fairly good control for a Dark Side Force User, but she was still a Dark Acolyte at the end of the day. And Asajj had been purposefully pushing her buttons since this meeting began.

With a roar, the blue-skinned woman's saber snaps into her hands and she launches herself forward with a heavy overhead swing. Asajj catches it on her

own red blades of course, grinning wickedly through the crimson glow that covers both of their faces.

“Good. Let me see what you’re really made of, Tann.”

From there... it’s exactly what Asajj said it would be. A spar. And no, it’s not some trick or trap to give her an excuse to maim or kill the Pantoran woman. She can see the moment where Sev’rance realizes this, her brow starting to furrow as they continue to exchange blows.

Until finally, they break apart and Tann stops for a moment, panting a little bit already.

“What... what is this? Did you just call me out here to humiliate me? To beat me down and make you feel better about yourself?”

Asajj scoffs and shakes her head again.

“Does that feel like what’s happening here, Tann?”

This time she’s the one who engages, launching herself forward and forcing Sev’rance to defend herself. Their sabers clash over and over again... but it’s obvious who is in control here. Asajj has this completely on lock, just like she always has when its come to their matches.

Only, this time there’s a key difference and though it takes her sometime, Sev’rance eventually figures it out. Asajj has to hold in the urge to laugh when she finally sees understanding followed by a crushing sort of despair spread across the other woman’s face.

A few more passes... and Tann’s lightsaber switches off as she drops to her knees, her legs giving out on her and her strength and stamina failing her. Asajj is panting too by that point to be fair, and also covered in a thin sheen of sweat.

... But she could keep going for a lot longer than this and they both know it. Still, as she stands before Tann, the Dark Acolyte closes her eyes and bows her head.

“Congratulations, Lady Ventress. On finding your control. Lord Dooku must be proud.”

Sev’rance Tann’s voice sounds outright dead as she kneels there. Because here... here was the one thing that she had thought she still had over Asajj. Control. It was the last bit of pride that the Pantoran Acolyte had left, the last thing she could cling to or point at and say ‘I may not be as strong, but at least I’m not some feral beast who lets the Dark Side control her’.

Because that was all Asajj had been before Kamino and her new Master. Before the holocron her mysterious Master had given her. In truth, that was all Dooku wanted her to be. He wouldn’t be proud to learn Asajj had learned to control herself. He would be worried. Because the more she could control herself, the harder it made for him to control her in turn.

Smiling crookedly, Ventress shuts off her sabers, letting them slip back onto her belt. Then, she offers a hand out. Tann jolts when she sees, her red eyes widening in disbelief as she stares for a moment before scowling furiously.

“What is this? What’s your game, Ventress?”

... Honestly fair. Asajj wouldn’t have accepted her own hand in these circumstances either. Still...

“Dooku doesn’t know.”

Tann jolts but Asajj just grins wickedly.

“And if you think he’d really be pleased to see me finally able to control my Darkness... you really haven’t been paying attention, Tann.”

Silence falls... before finally, the Pantoran woman reaches up and accepts Asajj's hand. She allows herself to be dragged to her feet, her lips thinning as she repeats herself with more emphasis.

"What IS this, Ventress?"

"An opportunity. To be more than Dooku would have of us. He may call me Apprentice and you Acolyte, but he leads us both around by the nose all the same. You were just smarter than me, which is why he sidelined you and made you feel small... weak... helpless."

Sev'rance Tann flinches at each of those words, before gritting her teeth.

"... What sort of opportunity are you offering me here?"

Asajj just grins wider. Hook, line, and sinker.

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As Vader approaches the Jedi Temple, he considers for a moment what the best way to go about this might be. The entirety of Coruscant was blanketed in the Dark Side, after all. Between him and Sidious, their presence practically suffocated the Jedi Order's Light, let alone the Darkness of any others.

On the one hand, there WAS a Dark Side Nexus beneath the temple that Vader could use to refine his search. On the other hand, using it might alert Sidious if he wasn't careful, so was it really worth the risk...

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A/N: Remember to go back and VOTE!