

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

A/N: The end of a (very short lived) era.

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How had it come to this? That's the thought running through her mind as Clone Soldiers in bright white armor come streaming into the Confederate Parliamentary Building.

Mina Bonteri, Senior Senator for her home planet of Onderon as well as the wider Japrael Sector, sits in her chair, back ramrod straight, and watches as it all comes crashing down around her. A decade of work. Of hard choices and harder circumstances. Had it all been for nothing? For it to lead to this was...

She was a career politician. She had been Onderon's Senator for over two decades now, representing it first in the Galactic Republic's Senate and then in more recent times, the Confederacy of Independent Systems Parliament.

Over time, she'd become disillusioned with the Republic. The sheer bureaucracy that the millennia-old institution was bogged down by, combined with the focus on the Core above all else, had left her utterly dissatisfied and looking for a different option.

Count Dooku of Serenno had provided that 'different option'. His political vision had been crystal clear, at least to Mina. If they could not count on good governance from the Core-Focused Republic, then why continue to be a part of it? Why not form their own government that could focus on their part of the galaxy?

It didn't even need to come to bloodshed. The Republic was a massive beast, but it only continued to limp on out of sheer inertia. Seceding from it *should* have been simple. Peaceful, even.

Unfortunately, the Jedi and the Republic had forced their hands, or at least that was what Mina had initially believed. The travesty that had taken place on Geonosis, the unprovoked attack by the Republic on a seceding world... and the sudden reveal of a hidden army commissioned by the Jedi to keep them from leaving.

By all rights, they'd had the moral high ground as the war started, hundreds upon hundreds of systems flocking to join their cause in the aftermath of that first strike. When the Confederate Parliament had met for the first time, there were over a thousand member worlds, albeit with many Senators hologramming in rather than being physically present on Raxus Secundus, where the Parliamentary Building was located.

Mina had made sure she was one of those physically present, however. And she'd been proud, standing tall and holding her head high, to see what they'd managed in such a short amount of time.

... That was perhaps the last time Mina Bonteri could say she'd felt pride in her work and what they'd accomplished. It had ultimately all been downhill from there for her.

Even with the Republic's brazen assault on Geonosis, even with everyone drawing up battlelines for war, Mina had been convinced that a peaceful secession could still be achieved. She and her aides had done the math and come to a simple conclusion... even with their hidden clone army, the Republic didn't have the forces to defeat them so long as the Confederacy continued producing battle droids nonstop and stationed them along every major hyperspace lane in order to fortify and defend their territory.

It should have been an overwhelming defeat for the Republic, a war that lasted mere weeks... if not days. They should have been able to force the Republic to the negotiating table almost immediately, finding a way to create legitimacy for the Confederacy of Independent Systems through *diplomacy*, rather than bloodshed.

... That hadn't happened. Instead, the Confederacy's Military had acted without proper oversight by Parliament. They had even done the unthinkable and began attacking and conquering Republic worlds that had not chosen to secede and join them willingly.

As weeks had turned into months, things had become increasingly messy, until any moral high ground they'd had at the start of the war had been completely wiped away. Further, despite the fact that there were only a couple million clones ready, the Republic was somehow able to hold its own against the Confederacy, which Mina could only assume was a result of the droid manufacturers being unwilling to open their purse strings enough.

And of course, on a more personal level, Mina's faction within the Parliament had become increasingly diminished. She had championed the idea of a peaceful secession from the very start, leading a Peace-focused part of the Confederate Parliament. In the opening days of the war, they had plenty of members joining their faction despite the Republic's unprovoked attack on Geonosis. But as time went on and things become muddier and muddier, senators had been peeled off by the Parliament's other factions.

On an even more personal level than that, Mina had recently lost her husband to this damn war. Just a month ago, he'd been killed in the line of duty, another casualty in a war that hadn't, that *shouldn't* have happened.

... And now here they were, any and all choices taken out of their hands by circumstances out of their control. The Confederacy of Independent Systems was dead... it just didn't know it yet.

Once the clone troopers line every wall of the Parliament, the large doors leading into the chamber open again... and admit the woman of the hour herself, Empress Padme Amidalla of Naboo. She strides down the hall flanked by the Hero Without Fear, Jedi Master Anakin Skywalker, and followed by a group of aides as well as more clones.

When Mina had first heard the news that her old protégé had declared herself Empress and turned the Galactic Republic into an Empire, she'd laughed in

disbelief. It couldn't be real, she'd told herself. There was simply no way that someone like Padme, a true believer in democracy, would give up on it altogether like this.

Except... further reports had confirmed that it was real. That she had really done that. Mina hadn't known what to think then, but she hadn't really had a chance to truly come to terms with it before all of the other news started filtering in.

Count Dooku was dead. So was the Executive Separatist Council. And General Grievous had control over the entirety of the Confederacy's Military, all the droid armies answering to him and only him.

That first bit of news was enough to despair. The second, perhaps a little less so. Mina didn't necessarily wish death upon the Executive Council, but she certainly didn't have anything good to say about them after months and months of war. They were the ones holding the purse strings after all. They were the ones responsible for manufacturing the droid armies that were giving the Confederacy a chance against the Republic in the first place.

They'd held power and influence far above what the Parliament could call upon. And ultimately, they'd squandered it, refusing to commit the resources needed to protect their member worlds and make the war too costly for the Republic to continue fighting.

But hearing that General Grievous was in complete control of the droid armies... now *that* was horrifying. The cyborg was a monster and even those in the Confederacy knew that. He was also an unchecked monster, answering only to Count Dooku. With the Count dead and the General in charge, Mina had feared the war with the Republic, now the Empire, would only get worse. More blood would be shed. More innocent lives would be lost. All at the claws of that mad alien cyborg.

... And yet, that hadn't happened. Instead, Grievous had simply abandoned them all. The last report Mina had heard was that he'd started launching attack on the Hutts of all things, and there was apparently a manifesto from the cyborg floating around. Something about a 'crusade against slavery'.

Of course, what this meant for the Confederacy was simple enough and rather bluntly made clear in what was happening in the Parliamentary Building right this very moment. They were screwed.

No droids, no army. No army, no chance of a fight. As evident by the fact that they were all watching the enemy head of state make her way to the center of the room to talk to them all now. As Padme arrives and moves up the stairs to the dais where Count Dooku would normally preside from, there's plenty of shifting and shuffling around... but nobody says a word. Perhaps they all know the same thing Mina does... there's no coming back from this.

An enemy fleet holds complete system control over Raxus Secundus right now. What few biological forces they can call upon would have been no match and so when the chance to surrender was offered, the Parliament had voted near-unanimously to accept.

This? This was just... theater now.

Padme sweeps her gaze back and forth across them all rather imperiously and Mina feels a shiver run down her spine. In that moment... her former protégé certainly feels like an Empress. One would imagine with the likes of Anakin Skywalker standing beside her that her short height would be accentuated, but instead his presence only seems to amplify hers. She feels larger than life as the faintest hints of a smile touch at the corners of her mouth.

"Greetings, Senators of the Confederacy. As you likely all know by this point, I come before you not as a Senator, nor even as Acting Supreme Chancellor... but as Empress of the Galactic Empire."

Mina licks her lips, a nervous tick she fails to quell. They all knew where this was going... but of course, Padme had to build up to it.

"I'm sure many of you wonder why I've come here today. I'm sure some of you fear that I have come to punish you. That I have come to render judgment upon you."

Padme's face becomes like stone as she sweeps her gaze around the room.

"And that is the case... for a few of your colleagues. Not all of you were innocent. Some of you were in fact quite complicit."

She doesn't fail to notice the words that Padme is choosing to use. As such, Mina isn't surprised when Padme's smile returns, this time broad and honestly infectious.

"But you may all rejoice, because those of your colleagues complicit in the atrocities committed against the galaxy have already been arrested. If you are here in this room now... you are innocent of their crimes."

A masterful stroke. The relief that washes over the room is palpable and even Mina, who understands exactly what Padme is doing, is not immune to feeling it. In one single moment, she's separated them from those who have already been taken and locked away... or worse.

Of course, it helps that looking around the room, it's not immediately obvious that any are missing. Those who have been taken into custody number in the dozens. It makes it so much easier to Other them... to imagine it as just a few bad eggs.

"That said, as of this moment... the Confederacy of Independent Systems has come to an end. While many of you seceded with the best of intentions, you were led astray by the man who brought you to this point... Count Dooku. He, with those on the Executive Council, used you all as puppets, as a smokescreen to perpetuate a war that they started. I should know... the Battle of Geonosis happened because of me."

Mina couldn't say exactly where she was expecting this conversation to go, but the last thing she thought she would see the new Galactic Empress do is turn away from them all and strip half-naked right there on the spot. Her grandiose robes were apparently made with this maneuver in mind, because quite

suddenly, her back is bared to all of them... and so are the three massive scars etched across her flesh.

Padme lets them all gaze upon her disfigurement for a handful of moments before redressing herself and turning back around. If they hadn't all seen her half-undressed, it would be impossible to tell afterwards, that's how seamless her dress appears to be.

"I was taken prisoner along with my Jedi Protectors in the days leading up to that terrible battle. Poggle the Lesser, ruler of Geonosis, sought to have us executed in an arena. It was a nexu who delivered these scars to me. And yet... still I fought. Because I knew what I'm sure all of you now know. Dooku and his cronies could not be allowed to destroy our galaxy."

Mina inhales sharply. Padme has successfully reframed everything with one gesture. And now...

"I offer you all an open hand, to come and join with me and my new Empire. We have done away with the bloated bureaucracy and corruption that drove you into Dooku's grasping claws in the first place. We have found a new path forward, one that I invite you all to walk with us."

Sweeping her gaze from side to side, Padme smiles widely.

"Gone is the Republic. Gone too is the Confederacy. Long live the Empire."

Mina isn't surprised when many of her fellow Senators start to come up on their feet, giving a standing ovation. In the end, she and everyone else stand and join them. How can they not? How can she not?

One thing is certain... Mina has made enough mistakes in the past decade. Now she only cares about one thing... ensuring that Onderon prospers in this new Galactic Empire.

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