

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

A/N: Talzin is suspicious!

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She brings the girl to the Fortress, of course. Even if it's a trap, it is better dealt with in the heart of Nightsister Power than anywhere else. Besides, the Mother Talzin outside of the village was merely a projection... and after what the lost child claimed, she needed to get a more personal, up close view of this... Asajj Ventress.

Admittedly, Talzin could have probably guessed that her effort to seed alternatives in case the worst came to pass would ultimately be waylaid by her enemies. She'd long since come to realize that Darth Sidious' gift for foresight far surpassed her own... and indeed, was perhaps one of the strongest in the entire galaxy.

Even still, trading the girl away had been a long shot from the start. There was every likelihood that she wouldn't survive to adulthood, or that she would be so broken and useless by the time Talzin needed her that all the purpose she could serve was as a replacement body in case Talzin's original was destroyed.

This though... to be discovered first by a Jedi and then by a Sith and then co-opted by another Sith entirely... the Force truly did work in mysterious ways, didn't it?

Eventually, Ventress is escorted to the heart of her power, to the Innermost Sanctum of the Fortress where Talzin awaits her in the flesh. Ready for whatever might come, she immediately reengages the younger woman the moment they stand before each other.

"Explain your earlier words further. Tell me more of this... Darth Vader."

A shudder runs through Ventress at that. Though it's not of fear... but rather reverence.

"Lord Vader... he is Darkness Incarnate. He came upon me while I was working for Count Dooku, Sidious' Apprentice. He took pity on me, seeing me for what I was... a fool who had been tricked into eating scraps off the dinner table and treating it like a feast. He freed me from my shackles, showing me another way to embrace the Dark Side in the process... and I've been serving him ever since."

Another Sith Order. It sounded too good to be true. How long now had Talzin been dealing with Darth Sidious and his machinations? Too long. Far too long. Their first meeting had been... amicable enough. Any meeting between two practitioners of the Dark Side was always going to be fraught, but she had been unafraid of him then. After all, he was a mere Sith... she was a Nightsister. He used the Force... but she knew more about magic and sorcery than he could ever hope to imagine.

Unfortunately, she'd allowed herself to be... drawn in by his charisma at first. He'd been effusive in his praise, awed by her power, and she... she had been taken in by him. It wasn't until later, much later, that she'd come to realize she'd been had.

By that point, it was too late in a number of ways. She'd already given him her most promising son, Maul, to train and reshape into a Sith. She'd already given him too much in general, truth be told. And ever since, she'd begun to maneuver against him, confident that someone of his ilk would not just leave her and her people alone. No, one way when he was most sure of his power, he would come for them.

And yet... to believe that there was another Sith out there who called himself Master, who set himself as Sidious' equal... it definitely stretched the bounds of credulity.

"How does this Vader manage to hide from Sidious' sight? How does he remain undetected, even as Sidious war rages across the galaxy?"

For a moment the girl hesitates and it's clear she doesn't know the actual answer. But then she smirks smugly, as if she's figured it out.

"He's more in tune with the Dark Side than Sidious or Dooku could ever hope to be. They're focused on the mundane, on reality itself... fighting the war, preparing to destroy the Jedi. They're so focused on that crumbling, rotted edifice to the Light Side that they don't see my Master in the shadows, always behind them, always waiting for the right moment to strike."

Talzin stares at Ventress. She stares hard. It's... clear that the younger woman believes her own words. Her pride in her Master is strong. This Darth Vader has somehow proven himself to Ventress repeatedly to have fortified her loyalty to him this much. How exactly he's done so is still up for debate, but even still... there's a ring of truth to her explanation.

The Jedi Order is dying. Has been dying for longer than Talzin has even been alive, in fact. It's clear as day to one as steeped in the Dark Sorceries as she is. The Dark Side has gained ground over the past several centuries, but only in recent decades has it become truly ascendant over the Light Side.

The same remnants of Light Side influence that Talzin can sense on Ventress now are mirrored across much of the galaxy... everywhere she stretches her senses, she feels the Dark triumph over the Light, reigning supreme over an ever-dimming universe.

There's just one problem with all of that... the Darkness is mostly controlled by Sidious. It is his power that is ascendant. It is his strength that dominates the Dark looming over the galaxy like a predator about to snap its jaws shut.

She's done what she can where she could to offset his influence, of course. And yet, she's found herself penned in time and time again. Like a prey animal being led to slaughter. Talzin would never let it show, never let even her fellow Nightsisters know... but she's getting desperate. She has been for quite a while.

That's why she's so hesitant to trust this. Because it seems far too good to be true. Even if she can feel that the Darkness shrouding Asajj Ventress now is not Sidious', she can't be absolutely certain that he hasn't simply figured out a way to mask his presence.

More than that, even if this Lord Vader and his Sith Order are real, how can he possibly hope to stand against the Banite Sith? Well... he probably can't. Not without allies anyways. Which would certainly explain the girl's presence.

"... What does your Master want from the Nightsisters? What does he desire of us?"

If he intends to simply use them as fodder against Sidious and Dooku, Talzin will not allow that. Her people are her to spend... and no one else's.

"It's as I said before... Lord Vader desires an alliance between you and him. It really is as simple as that. He intends to destroy Darth Sidious and the Banite Order... and institute his own Empire over the galaxy. Dathomir could have a place of privilege in that Empire, the Nightsisters would have access to more worlds and resources than you know what to do with!"

Ah, and finally they get to the heart of the matter. It wasn't simply about stopping Sidious or ruining his plans... it was about implementing his own. This Vader still intended to throw down the Galactic Republic and Jedi Order, to replace them with his Empire and whatever else. The Nightsisters might have a place in that new order... or they might not.

Of course, the difference was... if Sidious got his way, then Talzin was confident that the Nightsisters would have no place in his vision of the galaxy. Unfortunately, he saw her and her people as too much of a threat to his power to ever let them continue to exist. He would destroy them if given half the chance, of that she was confident.

This Vader on the other hand... if he was telling the truth, he might actually be offering a way forward for her people. Not just a way for them to survive, but a way to thrive in this... new galaxy he was envisioning. And if he was lying...

well, treachery was the way of the Sith. Talzin would be prepared for the turn to come.

She still didn't fully believe that Darth Vader had the power necessary to fully topple Darth Sidious. However, her and Vader's power combined might just be enough to do the trick. And afterwards... well, they would see where they stood with one another, wouldn't they?

"... Very well. I will agree to this alliance on a preliminary level."

The girl's eyes narrow at that, her lips pulling into a frown.

"What does that mean, exactly?"

Smiling, Talzin chuckles.

"Surely your Master does not expect me to properly ally with him without at least one face to face meeting? I am interested, don't get me wrong... but if he wants to use my Nightsisters for anything, he's going to have to come to Dathomir and speak to me himself."

Ventress hesitates for a moment, looking rather unhappy about that. So Talzin throws her a bone.

"In the meantime though, you will be treated as a guest of honor and we will talk further about what a proper alliance between us would look like. As well... I will personally instruct you in the ways of our people, lost child. You will learn what it means to be a true Nightsister."

That, she can tell, gets the girl's attention. Her eyes light up, though she still looks a little guarded.

"I'm not sure I can ever be a Nightsister... I am Darth Shar, Apprentice to Darth Vader. My path is with the Sith... for better or worse."

Despite the seeming rejection, Talzin actually approves of her words. It's refreshing to see someone so steeped in the Dark be so brutally honest with her. Especially since the girl is right... she is Sith now and there's no going back. Perhaps when she was merely Count Dooku's stooge she could have been turned away from the path, but no... Talzin can feel it in the Force. Vader's claim on Ventress is much, much stronger than any of her previous Masters.

"That's quite alright. I shall teach you anyways... you can consider it an early show of faith regarding our coming alliance. I do want this to work, girl... but it will rely on your Master to come and finish things himself."

Ventress doesn't look happy, but she does begin to nod in agreement... only to pause, a gasp leaving her lips as Talzin feels something shift in the Force. Immediately, the Nightsister Matriarch is on edge, eyes narrowing as she straightens up and takes a step back.

"What was that?"

For a moment, the girl clearly doesn't want to explain... but slowly, she reaches behind her back and pulls forth something unexpected. Talzin's eyes widen at the sight of the Sith Holocron that she reveals. The urge to immediately take it is strong... but she restrains herself, even as Asajj fiddles with it for a moment.

"This... this is my Master's Holocron. He gave it to me right after recruiting me and I've been using it to train ever since. His last message to me was clear... once I secured an alliance with the Nightsisters, the last restrictions on the Holocron would unlock and I would be able to use the rest of its teachings. I suppose... I suppose this is evidence that you really do wish to make this alliance work, if it could sense your sincerity."

Talzin blinks slowly, staring at the Sith Holocron. It's not the first one she's ever come across of course... however, the others were all ancient. Thousands of years old, on average. This is the first time she's heard of a Modern Sith making a Holocron... or at least, the first time she's had one in front of her.

She wants it. She wants it badly. But if it was advanced enough to detect her sincerity as Ventress said, then it might be advanced enough to detect treachery as well. If she were to take it by force, she might lose access to it. However...

“May I study it, child? I am curious to see what a Sith like your Master has left for you.”

Asking for it like this... well, that's different isn't it? Of course, as expected, Ventress looks extremely hesitant. On a logical level, Talzin can't blame her. She would have immediately rejected the request were she in the girl's place. The fact that Ventress doesn't... well. She can use that.

“It would also help me to know what sort of things I should teach you of our people's ways. There are some sorceries that you might be better suited for than others... depending on what you've learned so far.”

As Ventress continues to hesitate, Talzin's irritation begins to grow. By all that is Dark, she wants to get her hands on that Holocron... but she can't take it by force, she knows that much. She needs the girl to agree... she needs the girl to hand it over willingly...

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