

Control

PROLOGUE

"Mr. Zul is okay, Mr. Ya-ir said it was just Force Exhaustion and I believe a young lady named Melissa is with him at the moment. He also got shot by someone who was under the Song but was healed very quickly afterwards." Anders heard a frustrated sigh escape from Evelyn. "Mr. Zul was ... he strongly believed that a ritual would somehow cleanse the caxquettes. And it did work. For now."

"Force exhaustion? He is usually able to refill his reserves without issue..." Anders sighed. "I warned him about going to Selen. He is incredibly powerful for his age, more so than most will ever realise, but with youth comes recklessness. Still, I appreciate the update regarding his condition, Evelyn. Thank you."

There was a slight pause, a tiny amount of hesitation in the hybrid woman from shock of him using her first name if nothing else. "I will inform Mr. Ya-ir to please have Mr. Zul to contact you with more information when he is able. I must go. Many are still missing. You are welcome.... Anders."

CHAPTER 1: LIES

Hyperspace

42 ABY

It was a pity. He had been so satisfied. It would have been so easy. It *could* have been so easy to leave it there and Anders would have played the perfect part of the fool. Alas, that all went down the drain the moment that the High Inquisitor learned the full severity of Draca's condition and the events that led to it. Of course, he had his suspicions that the full truth had not been revealed to him, if for no other reason than he had yet to hear from the boy himself. However, he had *trusted* Evelyn on her word that he was fine for no other reason than respect for their unwanted marriage to one another. Anders was many things, perhaps many horrible, derogatory things, but he always prided himself as a gentleman.

Trusting her had been a grievous error on his part.

Amongst Arconans, the Taldryan Vice-Chancellor had garnered quite the negative reputation. Perhaps he was even considered nefarious. Some might say, a *Mind Frakker*. He believed that was the vulgar use of language that had been used to describe him. Not that it usually bothered him. If they could not find a more apt way to describe him other than the words used by low-lives, thieves, and *scum*, then they were simply not worth his time, nor effort. However, as the reports came in from the front lines on Selen, the well of anger inside him stirred like a burning star. He finally read the damage the young Jedi in his care had truly taken.

He had been *lied* to. Draca's injuries were worse than he was led to believe. So much worse.

This alone would have been enough to stoke the burning coals of the Sith's ire. Yet, it was not the true source of the bubbling rage that dwelled within his soul. As he read the reports from the Taldryan forces on Selen, the Chiss discovered that Draca's very teammates had tried to kill him. *Him. His boy*, betrayed by the very people he trusted likely for no other reason than to get a shot in at Anders via someone he cared for. One of those very traitors had been Evelyn herself. From what he understood, the young Zabrak had also been under the effects of the caxquettes Song, but he had aimed to neutralise instead of harm. The others had attempted nothing short of point-blank murder, which said a lot to him about their character.

The more he read, the more he felt like daggers had been plunged into his back. Anders had believed that he and Evelyn were, at the very least, amicable. Apparently, he had been mistaken. He made a promise then and there that Emere Galo would be lucky to form a coherent sentence from her lips by the time this *Mind Frakker* was done with her. She had better cherish what little time she had left with a fully functioning brain. For the crime she had committed, justice would be served.

Anders had already made his intentions on the matter clear to Zuza;

“I am on my way to Selen to make my own assessment on Draca's condition. If I am not satisfied with what I find, those responsible will be on the receiving end of a wrath so fierce that not even the Force itself will be able to stop it.”

He had cut the connection before there was any chance of a rebuttal from the new Arconan Shadow Lady, or any of her contingent. Whatever friendship Anders maintained with the Zuza was likely fractured like broken glass. He silently enjoyed the idea of the Arcona Consul trying to make heads and tails of it all. On any other day, he would have relished the opportunity for a verbal back and forth. He often

enjoyed a decent challenge, the opportunity to defeat those who foolishly believe in imperfect ideals.

Not today. He was not in the mood. Far from it.

Speaking of fractured, Cassandra was likely going to be most displeased when she discovered her Vice-Chancellor had abandoned his post, but then, when had he ever given half a damn about what she thought? She, herself, had ventured to Selen as a gesture of good faith to aid in the *Arconan Crisis*, and she was going no matter what her second-in-command suggested on the matter. She'd been opposed to Anders since the moment he'd set foot on Kasiya, regardless of his intentions or objectives. For now, the Chiss had left the Taldryan Republic in Meleu's capable hands since Tir'eivra had also ventured to Selen for who knew what reason. Likely personal history or unfinished business, if Anders had to guess the intentions of his fellow Sith.

His instincts were usually never wrong. They were selfish. All of them. He couldn't trust them. None of them. They were on their own. The only ones Anders knew he could trust were himself and the boy currently resting in a hospital bed. He'd happily watch Selen burn if it meant ensuring Draca's safety. He didn't owe anyone else anything.

“Sir, we will be arriving in the Dajorran System shortly.”

If one wanted to find the most generic, plain looking individual in the galaxy, then one needn't look further than the Republic Navy Officer who spoke to Anders just now. He was Human, young-ish, perhaps in his late twenties or early thirties, give or take, and possessed blue eyes like a clear sea on a sunny day. He also had the kind of face that was instantly forgettable to most. It was the kind that the moment anything even remotely different took anyone's attention away, they would instantly forget about him. Just one face in a navy of many faces. BUDD-E, the lite BD-Unit droid perched upon Anders' shoulder, tilted its cranium as it too inspected the Human.

“What is your name?” Anders clasped his hands in front of him.

judging by the slight squint in his eyes, the Taldryan Navy Officer seemed perplexed by the question, likely because no-one in the upper echelons of Taldryan leadership bothered, nor cared to ask him of such details.

“Lieutenant Christopher Landseer, sir,” He saluted, an action drilled into him by so many years of military training that it was second-nature to him.

“And what think you of this journey to Selen, Mr. Landseer?” the Sith inquired with a raised brow.

A quick glance into the Human's mind told Anders everything he needed to know, but he was curious as to what his answer would be.

“I am honoured to serve you, Vice-Chancellor, in whatever endeavour necessary.”

Spoken like a true soldier to his superior; scripted and predictable.

“That is not what I asked,” Anders’ tone inflected, then added a hint of compassion. “You have my permission to speak freely, Lieutenant.”

Landseer seemed to contemplate it, the blonde-haired man's pursing like the words coming out of his mouth would be slurs of the most abhorrent nature.

“I miss my family,” He finally answered. “I'm a new father, sir. Got a newborn daughter and wife back at home.”

“You did not want to be here,” Anders spoke what the Lieutenant was trying to say with his words.

“No, sir. I haven't even had my paternity leave yet.”

Finally, the truth as Anders say it in the Human's mind. It took a few turns to get there, but such honesty should, in the Chiss’ opinion, be rewarded.

He was generous like that.

“Then upon our return to the Caelus System, you will be granted extended leave to be with your family. No hard-working man should be separated from his newborn child for such a length of time.”

Anders watched as the Human's eyes shot open with an expression wider than that of an expanding star. Landseer stammered his words for a moment before swallowing the lump in his throat. That was what the Chiss was looking for, the feeling of appreciation. Something that *he* understood compared to the rest of his peers.

“I.. I don't know what to say. Thank you, sir,” Landseer bowed.

“You are more than welcome,” Anders gestured towards the front of the shuttle. “Now, in return, I wish to be completely undisturbed until we reach the planet surface. Can you do that for me?”

“Absolutely, Vice-Chancellor, sir!” The Navy Officer gave a curt nod and another sharp salute, this time with vigour and no attempt at hiding the wide smile on his face. “And thank you again!”

Anders understood better than most that you were more likely to get what you wanted from people if you offered something they desired in return. The galaxy was self-centred, full of leeches that would sooner drain everything around them dry and leave it to rot. Every small gesture, no matter how small, mattered in the grand scheme of correcting the universe.

BUDD-E gave the Human a mechanical wave of one of its legs. The durasteel door to the Upsilon Shuttle hissed shut, leaving Anders alone with nothing more than the gentle sound of the ship's engines in his ears and near darkness. The only light was the flashing red of the support systems. There were no windows and thus, no distractions. He closed his eyes, concentrating the swirling mass of the dark side within him, refining it like the pointed tip of an ancient sword.

Contrary to what most believed in the galaxy, the Sith meditated just as much, if not more so, than the Jedi. However, that was where that particular similarity started and ended. Where a Jedi's meditation brought with it a sense of tranquillity, peace, and serene calmness, a Sith's was wild, chaotic, like rivers of lava flowing down the Mustafar landscape, setting ablaze anything that dared cross it.

Anders was going to take his time to ferment his power, letting the pressure build like a balloon about to burst. When the time was right, he'd unleash his fury upon those who deserved it. Like he'd said to Zuza, no-one was free from his ire.

As the Sith Code stated; *Peace is a lie.*

CHAPTER 2: LANDSEER

Selen
Dajorran System
42 ABY

Selen's atmosphere, once bright and beautiful like a sparkling rainbow, had become blackened like a rotting heart. Ash and soot tainted the air as debris buffeted the Upsilon Shuttle with the pitter-patter of dirt, mud, and rock assaulting the once pristine outer shell of the ship.

It made navigation a nightmare, as Anders was made acutely aware by the klaxons blaring throughout the shuttle. It broke the Sith from his dark ruminations, his iris' burning a deep amber created from pure malice amidst the natural red tone of his eyes. He growled like an angered predator as he rose to his feet, the little droid at his side beeping lowly as it slowly followed the seething Sith into the cockpit.

When the durasteel doors opened, Anders wasted no time in waltzing inside like he owned the place, which, being the Vice-Chancellor, he might as well had.

“What Is the meaning of this interruption, Landseer!?” He spat with venom lacing his every word.

Yet, as the words left his mouth, his inquisitor instincts kicked his instincts into gear as he inspected his immediate surroundings. Anders was far from an expert pilot, hence his desire to have one ferry him from Kasiya to Selen, but even he could tell when the droid brain in the shuttle had been disabled. His heart sank into his gut when he saw the terminals flash their warning of an impending collision with a nearby mountain range.

“Landseer! What do you think you are doing!?” Anders' throat hurt from the volume he shouted at.

The Human had yet to respond. Had he gone deaf!?

“Landseer!”

“Shut up!” the Human snapped back at him.

Seemingly doing nothing about their impending doom, Anders clasped a hand on the Lieutenant's shoulder, but the moment he made contact, Landseer brushed it off with a harshness he hadn't expected. The Chiss didn't know what flabbergasted him more, the impending crash, or the Human's stubborn denial in answering him.

“What has gotten into you!?”

He was about to grab Landseer again when a sudden surge of the Force ricocheted inside Anders' psyche, warning him of the incoming danger. The Human spun inside his seat and faced the Sith, grasping hold of a blaster strapped to his hip. His face was no longer plain, but placid, monotone, and eyes that were completely glossed over with what looked like a thick grey cloud.

Anders would recognise the effects of mind-control anywhere he saw it. As Landseer's blaster was poised at the Chiss' head and his fingers began to press on

the trigger, the Sith deftly grabbed the curved hilt lightsaber strapped to his belt. The bloodied hue of a black-core lightsaber blade sliced through the Human's hand, severing it from his body. Outside of the sudden gasp of the lost appendage, the reaction was almost droid-like in nature, unfeeling and uncaring.

The loss of the weapon prompted the Sith forward with confidence, and he pressed his hand against the Human's pale forehead and closed his eyes.

The dark side was, indeed, a pathway to many abilities some considered to be unnatural. Anders' suspicions of what was happening were confirmed when he weaved the intricate threads of the Force through Landseer's mindscape.

His mind was not currently his own.

The High Inquisitor pushed further, deeper, caring little for how uncomfortable the Human might be as he writhed in his chair, thrashing like a wild animal. The visage of a woman perhaps no taller than Zuza herself appeared deep within Landseer's subconscious. Just who was she? She was an Anzat, if Anders had to guess from the features of the species that he could see. She had to command great power to be able to take control of a pilot from such a distance, wherever she was.

The two dark side entities seemed to glare at one another for a moment. This Anzat, simply gazed through Anders like he was an exquisite art piece on display in a Naboo museum. For whatever reason, her hold on Landseer was not as complete as she would have perhaps liked. Perhaps it really was the distance? Or maybe she was linked to several minds at once and had to split her power between them?

Whatever it was could be contemplated later. There were more pressing issues right now.

Like *survival*.

'This one does not belong to you!'

Anders relayed the message, and could swear he then saw the Anzat *smile* at him as he forcefully removed her from Landseer's mindscape. What an enigma she was, one that would need to be deciphered if they made it out alive.

The Sith was brought back to the flashing carnage in the cockpit by the sudden blood-curdling wail of Landseer. The Human placed his one remaining hand to his head, which now had veins protruding from it like they were about to explode. He held his hand-less arm out in front of him, *shaking, trembling*, then *screamed* an ungodly wail.

Anders spun him in his seat towards the terminals and windows. "Pull us up!"

Landseer gasped and with his one hand, pulling on the lever to attempt to level the ship. It was far too little too late as the Upsilon Shuttle scraped through trees and foliage. A hard shudder sent BUDD-E screeching from one side of the cockpit to the other as Anders fell into the opposite seat.

"I can't!" the pilot exclaimed. "Brace for impa-"

CHAPTER 3: WILLPOWER

Selen

Dajorran System

42 ABY

When he came to, the first thing Anders noticed was the distinct lack of noise. It was almost silent, save for the whooshing of air on the outside of the shuttle. Secondarily, he took note that he was still in the ship's cockpit, if the flashing lights of the terminals and consoles were of any indication. Lastly, he realised he was laying in a pool of thick, red liquid that did not necessarily belong to him. A quick run of his fingers through the murky substance confirmed to the High Inquisitor that it was, in fact, *blood*.

His eyes peered over to the pilot's seat, and nothing in the Force could have prepared him for the scene before him. When the crash occurred, part of the durasteel chassis that held the shuttle together had collapsed in on itself, loosening a large beam which had impaled Landseer through his heart and one of his lungs. The beam had torn straight through him and out the other side of the seat, creating a tunnel for which the blood to pool onto him. Landseer's face was locked in a horrified expression of fear and anguish, his eyes lifeless, his skin peeling, his lips turning a deeper shade of blue with every second that passed.

The Chiss, the lone survivor, took a moment to lament the loss with a heavy sigh and a lowering of his head. There was a wife who was now a widow and a daughter without a father.

Justice.

A silent promise made, one Anders had every intention of keeping if he could, but that meant escaping his current predicament. He struggled to move under the

collapsed structure of the cockpit, and it was likely only thanks to the cortosis in his armour that he had remained relatively unharmed except for the few bumps to his head that had rendered him unconscious.

Time was but an illusion in that state. He briefly wondered how long he might have been out for, or about the possibility of a concussion, given the pounding in his head. Those were concerns for later. He attempted to shuffle out of the debris, but his lanky frame was admittedly quite large in the confined space. The Sith then heard a rumbling next to him, a small droid's rectangular shaped cranium appearing in his peripheral vision.

“Buddy?”

The little droid squirmed out of some wreckage. Upon hearing its given name, it jolted upright, spun its head to face the Chiss, and nuzzled its head into his shoulder. It beeped incessantly in Anders' ear.

“Yes, Buddy. I am relatively fine. What about you? Did you sustain any damage?”

BUDD-E beeped again and shook its head, prompting Anders to pat it gently.

“Very good. I am glad to hear it. Now, I need you to go find help.”

The little droid protested for a moment.

“I am perfectly capable of freeing myself, thank you very much. It means little if we have no idea of our bearings. Arcona forces as well as Taldryan's, along with select troops from Clans Naga Sadow and Odan-Urr. Search the perimeter and return in fifteen minutes, preferably with aid.”

BUDD-E was always a good companion. Unlike most sentient beings, it never questioned Anders' judgement and was loyal to him without question, like a loyal hound. Sure, it had its opinions on matters, like right now as it hesitated to leave him. Nonetheless, it did as instructed and left the wreckage to, hopefully, find help.

The Taldryan Vice-Chancellor made a feeble attempt to push the steel that was restricting his movements, but made no progress. Clearly, physical might would not be enough. He connected himself to the dark side, willing the debris to move under his power.

Sure enough, the Force had not abandoned him, and he was able to free himself with relative ease as steel ground against steel. Finally able to stand to his full height again, Anders carefully manoeuvred his way out the back of the shuttle, the ramp itself having separated from the ship in the crash. The Sith clasped his hand

around the exit and pulled himself into the dark, corrupted landscape of the Arcona homeworld. The leaves had fallen off the trees and the ground had become covered in rock, soot, and who knew what else. He could practically *taste* the dirt in the air as a crimson light tainted the sky.

'No doubt Tir'eivra is enjoying the scenery.'

Anders couldn't help the thought. The new Kasiya Governor did indeed relish in chaos as much as she could. Though, what irked the Chiss the most about his current situation was the *heat*. He'd barely been out of the shuttle for more than a minute and he could already feel the sweat forming on his face. It was so unsanitary. He *much* preferred colder climates. It was always easier to dress more to keep warm than to cool off unless you were an undignified lout.

A ruffling in the nearby branches caught his attention and he craned his head towards it, seeing the sight of several troopers emerge from what little remained of the surrounding foliage. These weren't just *any* troops either. These were Taldryan Republic Army soldiers, five of them, if the crescent upon their armour was anything to go by.

Anders wasn't foolish. If the events on the shuttle had taught him anything, it was that he wasn't out of danger yet. He said not a word. If they weren't under the effect of mind control, then they should recognise him.

"Good afternoon," He said, testing them. "Status report."

The Sith's eyes narrowed, his heart pounding in his chest with each beat. The troops raised their blaster rifles in time for the warning from the Force to penetrate Anders' subconscious faster than a slugthrower pellet. He stretched out towards the metal ramp that was dislodged several feet away from him. The ten foot long piece of metal shot in front of him with just intention and thought, protecting him from the rain of blaster fire that descended upon him in all its green plasma fury. Like rain on a stormy day, it battered against the durasteel with incessant and rapid pings.

Anders grimaced, biting his bottom lip. He didn't need the Force to guess they were likely moving around his makeshift barrier. The Sith slowly retreated back inside the crashed shuttle, ducking his head under the durasteel. It would provide ample cover for a moment.

A valuable moment. A moment he sorely needed.

He released his hold on the ramp, allowing it to fall unceremoniously into the dirt with a mighty thud. The Sith manipulated the tendrils of the Force like threaded

silk, connecting himself to the minds of the soldiers around him. Telepathically, he released a loud, high pitched *screeching* in their minds as if sharp nails were dragging down a chalkboard.

The distraction did as intended. The soldiers lowered their blasters and pressed a hand to the side of their helmets, gasping and groaning at the ringing in their heads. Knowing he would not get another opportunity, Anders seized his moment. Crimson eyes ablaze with pure dark side hatred, he stepped back out of the shuttle. Lightning streamed out of the fingertips of both his hands, flashing bright against the darkened background, hissing like a coiled viper striking at its prey. The blast of electricity collided with the first soldier, then spread to the other four of the contingent, enveloping their bodies in fabricated agony.

The Sith could *feel* them burn. He could smell their flesh cooking under their armour and it fueled the bloodlust of the dark side in his veins. Anders was not about to take any chances for his own survival. Why should he? This was *war*. Removing the manipulation from several minds at once was out of the question and a luxury he did not have the time for. As the troops dropped to their knees, he summoned his curved hilt to his hand, the black blade snapping into a crimson, bloody hue.

Before his opposition had a chance to capitalise, he moved with Force-enhanced speed like a spectre of doom. With a flick of his wrist, one by one, the soldiers were cut down. the Sith taking note of their demise as the Force left their bodies. This was nothing more than a mercy.

Through death, they were freed.

The very last soldier attempted to raise their weapon to defend themselves, only to have their neck have an intimate meeting with the Sith's lightsaber blade. The trooper's head dropped into the scattered ash, leaving an imprint in the ground.

'Through victory, my chains are broken.'

Another ruffling in the foliage immediately snapped the Sith to attention. He pointed his lightsaber blade in the direction of the noise.

"Reveal yourselves or die."

The first to step through was not someone Anders expected to see so soon; a Echani-Shaevalian hybrid woman of average height. She possessed radiant silver hair and luminous emerald eyes. She also just so happened to be Anders' unwilling, detestable wife. She had BUDD-E perched on her shoulder like a bird, the little droid waving to him upon its photoreceptors spotting him.

“Miss. Wyvern,” the Sith stated. He kept his lightsaber raised, one hand behind his back as he straightened his posture. “Or perhaps Mrs. Anderson is more appropriate.”

She blinked, seemingly perturbed by the informal use of her name for the first moment and resisting the flush of anger in her cheeks the next. The silver-haired woman no doubt thought they had made some progress with one another in regards to mutual respect.

As far as Anders was concerned, that went down the sarlacc pit the moment she lied to him about Draca.

“Lower your weapon,” Evelyn said, her tone a mixture of an order and a request. “We are not under Tiexsema's control.”

Tiexsema, the Chiss assumed, must have been the Anzat. The Arconan was quickly flanked by Selenian forces, each carrying a blaster rifle of their own. Realising he was increasingly outnumbered, the Sith relented, deactivating his weapon and placing the hilt back on his belt.

“Very well,” his eyes narrowed on Evelyn, his tone dark and cold like the chilled winds of Hoth. “You and I have much to discuss.”

CHAPTER 4: EVELYN

Selen Front Line Camp

Dajorran System

42 ABY

The walk back to the front line camp was taken in relative quiet. Whatever questions were directed at Anders, whether it was about the reasonings for his arrival or the corpses he was found beside, he responded with not a word. He chose, instead, to utilise silence. It did speak a thousand words for him.

Specifically, he was far from pleased.

Once he was assigned a tent, he was placed in it with BUDD-E and left alone for a short time, the little droid inspecting their confined space with a morbid curiosity. No doubt the Selenian forces outside separated themselves from him on purpose,

lest they find themselves on the receiving end of any mental infringement from Anders. It felt more like a kind of beige cage rather than a tent. At least they had the courtesy to give him a chair.

When the flaps to the entrance opened, Anders' so-called wife graced him with her presence, her lips creasing into a thin line on her face as she attempted, and failed, to look as neutral to him as possible. She didn't say a word as she slowly approached and retrieved a cotton swab from a pack she had in her hand, dousing it in what must have been cleansing alcohol of some kind. Before the Chiss could protest, she placed the swab against his cheek. He immediately recoiled from the burning sensation.

“What do you think you are doing!?” his tone had a certain snap and bite to it, like a wounded hound on the defensive.

Evelyn frowned. “I am no medic, but even I know that blood is supposed to be on the inside of the body.”

Blood? *He* was bleeding?

That had been a possibility. He hadn't yet taken the time to inspect the damage he had personally taken and had assumed any blood he was covered in belonged to Landseer. When Evelyn attempted to swab his cheek again, he slapped her hand away from him as if she was attempting to poison him.

“I did not ask for your help,” He didn't dignify his actions with a reason.

“It will get infected,” the silver-haired woman stood her ground and folded her arms across her chest.

“I will take my chances, thank you very much.”

The Sith heard her take a sharp intake of air. Oh, how easy it was to get under her skin.

“What is wrong?” Evelyn asked, scrunching her face. “You seemed so cordial when we last spoke.”

Finally, for the first time since she had walked into the tent, Anders looked her in the eyes. “That was before I discovered the truth.”

“Truth?” The look of confusion on the hybrid's face only served to anger the Chiss further. “What truth?”

“The truth as to the nature of the injuries Draca received. I read the report from the front lines. *You* were partially responsible.”

There it was. The utter shock of being found out. Evelyn's jaw lowered, her mouth hung open, and her pupils dilated as if Anders had revealed the most ghastly news in the entire universe to her.

She closed her mouth, coughing to clear her throat. It gave her a chance for her face to return to that placid, neutral state. Though, there was a tension there now, the smallest hint of anger behind those glimmering orbs in her eyes.

“That... you cannot blame me for that,” Evelyn's tone was low, perhaps lower than she anticipated. “The Song took control of me and my actions. I was not myself.”

“Neither was Draca, and yet, he saw to incapacitate rather than kill. The same courtesy was not granted to him,” the Sith scoffed derivatively at her. “It tells me a lot about *you*, as well as the Arconans of this world. You act all pleasant with one another, but when an outsider attempts to interrupt the status-quo, they are turned upon like they are fresh meat to a pack of vicious wolves. I should know, Draca and I experienced this once before in Arconan company and it appears history has repeated itself.”

The memory of the meeting with Bril, Minnow, and their contingent before the blizzard struck Port Kasiya flashed through his mind. An unpleasant experience that Anders had assumed was a one-time occurrence; yet another mistake he had made.

Rather than justify his ramblings with a response, Evelyn remained quiet for a moment. Finally, despite the indignation coursing through her veins, she answered him.

“You cannot damn an entire Clan of people based on the actions of a few individuals. You underestimate me and you underestimate them. Regardless of what happened, you are not the easiest person to get along with. You have a reputation and not a good one, either. I doubt you are entirely innocent.”

Anders shrugged. “Maybe, maybe not.”

Evelyn sighed. “For what it is worth, I am sorry. Tell me what I can do to make it up to you.”

Now it appeared she was attempting to take the moral high ground, a feeble attempt at being the bigger, perhaps *better* individual. It was a pity that Anders cared not for such triviality.

“Tell me the location of Emere Galo,” this time, it was the Chiss’ turn to fold his arms across his chest. He spoke the demand with a tone that suggested he was not willing to negotiate any further on the matter.

“Absolutely not,” Evelyn snapped back with a finality that surprised Anders. “I will not surrender someone to you like they are a wanted criminal when they have done nothing wrong. In case you have not noticed, we are in the middle of a war. Tiexsema has awoken, is turning everyone against one another. The air is becoming more like poison by the second and-”

“I do not care,” the Chiss interrupted her with every amount of disinterest and disrespect he could muster. “I am here to retrieve Draca and punish those responsible for his injuries. Nothing more.”

The hybrid shook her head. “Just like you do not care that you murdered your own soldiers in cold blood.”

“They attacked me,” He glared at her with the cold intensity of a glacier. “If I could have saved them, I would have.”

“And yet, you did not,” Evelyn replied. “You, of all people, know perhaps better than anyone else how this mind control works. Do you know how to break it?”

“I do,” Anders responded bluntly. “Not that I am willing to divulge that information.”

The Arconan scoffed. “Then where is your justice? You cannot be seriously willing to let this go without interfering?”

“I can and I will,” the Chiss rose from his seat. “As far as I am concerned, this is justice. Little more than what is deserved. You may think I am evil if you wish, but I. Do. Not. Care. This planet had its fate sealed when the people upon it decided to wrong me.”

Evelyn didn't respond immediately. She stared at him, appalled at the words he spoke. She hung her head low and lightly chuckled to herself. “I honestly thought you were better than this. Maybe, just maybe, I half expected there to be a heart inside of you. I have seen Draca, the boy you raised. He is a wonderful young man. Like you said, he had the capability of killing both myself and Emere and chose not too, even under the influence of the Song. I thought you would share that mercy, but I guess not. You are nothing but a black-hearted monster!”

Her accent changed. For the first time, Anders saw a glimpse of the woman underneath the facade she had created for herself; the former mercenary in all her glory.

A small grin graced his face. "Hurling insults at me now? I am sure Aketa would be very proud of you."

Anders felt the immediate threat through the Force the moment the last word left his lips. This time, however, unlike when they were wed, he made no effort to evade. The resulting slap echoed throughout the tent and startled BUDD-E. The Sith felt the heat of each finger upon his cheek like they were little hornet stingers. His grin vanished, his lips forming a frown as he snapped his head back towards her.

"Did that feel good? Did that feel cathartic?" Anders quickly took a step closer to her. "You could have simply left it, but no, just like your Clan brethren, you *have* to try and get the final word in. So be it. You will *never* be free of me. There will be no divorce, no separation, no chance of freedom. You will spend the rest of your miserable existence tied to me, under my control! That is *your* justice, *Mrs. Anderson.*"

The silver-haired woman's hands balled into fists. If looks could kill, the Chiss would have dropped dead there and then. She trembled, veins protruding as her fists turned white.

"You cannot do that," she said. "I will not allow it."

Anders leaned in ever so slightly, daring her to strike him again. "Now it is you who is underestimating me."

The ground suddenly shook beneath their feet, a tremor like an earthquake. Another eruption? No. It was an *explosion*. It caused both Evelyn and Anders to wobble on their feet, the former landing in the latter's arms.

"Get off of me!" the Arconan forced herself out of his grasp.

A Selenian Commander burst through the drapes, sweat dripping from their brow, their pale, Human face stricken with panic.

"Lieutenant!" the Commander inhaled hoarse breaths. "We're being attacked!"

The danger was made apparent when a spear plunged through the side of the tent, impaling the Commander through his heart. He collapsed to the ground, motionless, blood spurting from the open wound.

BUDD-E screeched like a startled feline, hopping up onto Anders' shoulder for protection. Evelyn glanced at the Chiss, then ran outside without a word to face their attackers.

'Foolish woman. She is going to get herself killed.'

Staying here, however, was not any better. In fact, the limited space was constrictive and counterproductive. With a brisk few steps, Anders stepped outside to see what carnage there was to behold.

CHAPTER 5: RESOLVE

Selen Front Line Camp

Dajorran System

42 ABY

And what a sight it was. The dark side truly felt at home here.

Blaster fire of various colours soared in every direction. Grenades of various sizes and effects dotted the landscape in blasts and flashes. Lightsabers hummed as they sliced through flesh and bone.

The one question living rent-free in the Chiss' mind was where the hell had Evelyn disappeared to?

Anders drew upon his curved hilt with a clear intention via the Force, summoning it to his hand. The lightsaber snapped out of the hilt in all its crimson-hued glory as he heard an all too familiar hiss come from behind him. The *hissing* of plasma, the activation of a weapon typical to the Jedi and Sith. He spun to block an attack from a Cerulean lightsaber.

A Jedi. An Oddanite, if the Chiss had to guess. There were few Jedi in Arcona and the few that existed were hardly fit for a battlefield. Then again, neither was Anders, if he were honest with himself. He was powerful, sure, but he was an elite duelist, not a soldier. He specialised in manipulations of the mind and the thrill of an elite duelist in a one-on-one confrontation. He was *not* a hardened warrior bred for the battlefield!

The Jedi pushed hard against Anders, expending little effort in forcing the Sith on the backfoot. He was mightily strong, this Jedi, both physically and with the Force. The Sith's eyes shot open as wide as saucers when he heard the hum of a second lightsaber blade from his flank, catching the emerald colour of the weapon in his peripheral Vision. He parried, swung, and narrowly avoided getting decapitated by the first Oddanite's blue blade.

The two Jedi stood side by side. A Master and Apprentice judging by the age difference between them. The older of them, the Jedi with the blue lightsaber, was an Iktotchi male sporting an average sized, yet muscular build. The second, the much younger palawan by comparison, was a Togrutan female, slim and slender with a slightly shorter than average height. She couldn't be any older than her early twenties.

The one detail they shared in common was their eyes. They were grey and clouded over.

“Surrender,” the deep, booming voice of the aged Iktotchi resonated even over the sound of chaos around them.

“Our Master wishes to see you,” the Togruta added, her voice smooth as silk, hypnotic and trance-like.

Their *Master*? Apparently, Tiexsema had taken an interest in him. It was almost comical that the Anzat had attempted to kill him *twice* with hypnotised soldiers. How pitifully weak these Jedi were to allow themselves to be controlled in such a manner. What in the name of the Force were they teaching their prospective recruits at the Praxeum?

Anders brought his lightsaber vertically to his body, the red glow from the black-core blade illuminating his face amidst the darkened atmosphere.

“If you attack me, you will die.”

The two Jedi took the challenge to heart, the smaller and younger Togruta lunging forward first with an acrobatic twist in her body that was only possible with the Force. She struck once, twice, then a third time vertically, horizontally, then vertically again, each time parried by Anders' deft foot movements and deflection with his blade.

The Iktotchi moved forward like an unstoppable bulldozer. His strength was key to his style, and whilst Anders was preoccupied with the Togruta, he struck with a power that when it hit the Sith's lightsaber, drove it towards the ground and sent tremors up his arm.

It was a near perfect demonstration of the partnership between the Apprentice's Ataru and the Master's Djem So style. Against any other opponent, it might have been impossible to overcome.

Anders, however, was no ordinary opponent. He prided himself on his skills as a duelist.

The Chiss backpedalled, retreating in amidst the trees to force the two Jedi to chase after him. Just as he expected, the Togruta apprentice was much faster than her bulkier Master and closed the distance seconds before the Iktotchi could regain sight of them.

Whilst she was fast, she certainly lacked the proper experience to realise she was at a tactical disadvantage facing him alone. The burnt wood surrounding her limited the space she required to utilise the required acrobatics of her form, just as Anders had intended. A brief exchange, the clash and hiss of their lightsabers was all that was needed for him to pinpoint the weakness in her erratic, sporadic style. He almost scoffed. Draca was so much better at Ataru than her in such extremes that it wasn't even funny.

“I am unimpressed,” Anders confessed. “I have trained a Jedi in Ataru...”

Anders flicked his wrist to catch her firearm with his blade. He followed up with a vicious stab through her sternum. “And he is much better at it than you.”

Her eyes almost immediately lost the cloudiness in them, returning to a normal blue tint before they rolled into the back of her head.

“Liana!”

The Iktotchi was just in time to watch his apprentice fall to the ground, lifeless and dead.

“You...” He growled between clenched teeth. “You will pay for what you've done.”

“That is not very *Jedi* of you. Your apprentice had potential. It is a pity you failed to give her adequate training,” Anders wagged a finger mockingly. “Do you still wish to bring me before your *Master*?”

The Iktotchi surged forward like an acklay intending to destroy the Sith in front of him. Unfortunately for the Jedi, Anders knew better than to engage in a contest of brute strength.

The moment the Jedi raised his weapon above his head, the Sith unleashed the power of the dark side built up within him. Sparks erupted from Anders' fingertips and struck the Jedi in his heart. The electricity flashed, coiling around the Jedi's bones like webbed torture. The Chiss ceased his torrent of lightning and cut into the adjacent tree beside him with his lightsaber. With a raised hand, he guided the massive trunk down on top of the Iktotchi Jedi, which, injured and debilitated, crushed him under its massive weight. The Iktotchi let out a raspy breath before he too fell silent.

More enemies emerged out of the sea of flashing lights and dismal sounds. One approached the Sith, dagger in hand. Then another attacked him, and then another.

BUDD-E whined in his ear, warning him. Yet, no attack reached him. Blaster fire erupted from behind him. It never struck Anders, but his attackers. The little droid chirped happily upon seeing Evelyn along with a contingency of friendly troops. Or, at the very least, troops that weren't going to shoot him here and now.

To say the Sith was stunned was an understatement. He was practically flabbergasted. The big question in his mind was why did she save him? Did she develop some sort of attachment to him? Or is it part of some moral and ethical obligation?

Curse that woman! At least the clearing was free of hostiles for the moment.

“Captain Wyvern!”

A military officer approached, soot smearing his Human face.

“Yes, Cadet Silwest? What is it?” Evelyn responded.

“We are getting attacked at all sides. We've suffered heavy casualties. We're awaiting your orders, ma'am.”

Anders could have sworn he heard a slur being mumbled out of her throat. She paced on the spot for a moment, taking yet another glance at him. Was she looking for advice? The Chiss was many things, but an army General? That, he was not.

“Tell the camp Mr. Anderson is free to go. And... And...”

She bit her bottom lip.

“Tell them to sound a retreat,” Anders finally said.

Her eyes opened wide. She clearly wasn't expecting him to provide any input.

“It is me they are after. Tiexsema wishes to speak with me and I can at the very least buy you some time by obliging her,” He continued.

“Are you serious!?” Evelyn asked.

To emphasise his point, Anders pried BUDD-E from his shoulder and placed it on Evelyn's. “Take care of Buddy. I want him back and unscathed.”

“But...”

“First you want my help and now you argue with me when I offer it!” Anders admonished. “If you are going to go, go now! Their reinforcements will be arriving soon!”

Footsteps and voices were heard approaching. The silver-haired Arconan, Captain of this group looked between the Cader, Anders, and the little droid on her shoulder, attempting to ignore the protests it was beeping in her ear.

“Buddy, behave,” Anders scolded. “Evelyn here will look after you. Will you not?”

Her eyes widened at the use of her first name again, but then she steeled herself, returning a small nod. Evelyn then did something Anders was not prepared for. She approached him, wrapping her arms around his waist and under his cloak, pressing *something* to his back.

“I will. Goodbye, Anders... Be careful.”

Stunned by the sudden show of affection, Anders did not react until she released him and disappeared amidst the dead forest with the Cadet in tow. The Sith wasn't left alone for long. More cultists swarmed on his location, a group of fifteen, perhaps even twenty of various species and weaponry circled him with animal monstrosities of a dark design giving him no avenue of escape. He actually applauded their efficiency in this regard.

The Chiss raised his lightsaber for a split second, then deactivated it. He carefully put the hilt back on his belt and placed his hands behind his back.

He flashed the group a smile. “Very well. I surrender.”

CHAPTER 6: TIEXSEMA

Selen

Dajorran System

42 ABY

The walk up the volcano was pretty much as Anders had expected. It was hot, humid, and involved climbing a steep slope. By Bogan's wrath, how he *hated* the heat. It was a reminder of just how much he hated sweating, the raw stench of body odour and the muck that came with it. The toxic fumes spewed by the volcano made breathing a challenge the further up they climbed, and it was only via the Force that the Chiss was able to subside its effects.

Nevertheless, he grit his teeth. There was no other choice but to deal with the hand he was dealt. He could, at the very least, use the time to contemplate the actions that had led to his current set of circumstances. Yet, no matter what angle or perspective he looked at it from, one question burned at the forefront of his mind...

Why did he save Evelyn?

He didn't have to. Of course he didn't. Why should he have done it? She had lied to him, assaulted him, and led herself, and her troops into a dangerous environment that had nothing to do with him. The Sith should have left her and everyone else there to the mercy of the drones now escorting him to his fate.

So, why? Why did he do it? Why would he, a *Sith*, sacrifice his sense of self-preservation for her?

He did it because despite everything, Evelyn was still his wife, and therefore, his responsibility. That included her safety. As much as he was reluctant to admit it, there was a part of him, deep down in his supposedly blackened heart that cared. Contrary to popular belief, Anders had a soul buried under the mass of darkness that surrounded him.

He could almost hear the derivative scoff from his old Master. Part of the training involved in being a Sith Apprentice required the complete breaking of one's individuality. They were to be broken spiritually, emotionally, sometimes even physically and rebuilt into whatever twisted abomination their Master desired. He could practically recall Darth Lenora's every word from every lesson she ever taught him, how his code of conduct would ultimately be his undoing. He hated to admit it, but in this scenario, she might have been correct.

A lack of morals and ethics were usually involved when it came to Lenora, and his Master had tried every torturous trick in the book to break him, to make him just like her. Though, this *Apprentice* took great pride in the fact that Lenora had never managed to *completely* destroy him. Not really. There was a part of him that always remained, that latched on for survival like a boat in a storm and it was the part that valued justice above all else. It made Anders, in his own opinion, a very different kind of Sith compared to most others. A better kind of Sith. An improved Sith.

He silently hoped Darth Lenora continued to rot in whatever circle of Hell there was reserved for her. She deserved no less.

A tunnel emerged in the side of the volcano, possibly the only crevice free from the magma above and the lava flowing down the sides of the rock. Once inside, the cave brought a much needed reprieve from the unbearable heat outside. A product of the Force, no doubt, but one that the Sith gladly welcomed with deep breaths into his lungs. A short passage opened into a large antechamber filled to the brim with a collection of runes and literature smearing the walls in languages so old not even Anders recognised them all. Pillars held the structure in place as a small set of stairs led up to the large ritual circle that remained as the chamber's centrepiece. Cultists of all shapes and sizes wore long cloaks and hoods, flanked by an assortment of twisted creatures abominable in design. The cultists chanted a sinister song, the kind that made the Chiss feel like he was being marched to his execution.

Torchlights illuminated the relatively young looking features of a small Anzat woman with long, flowing hair standing in the centre. She cocked her head to the side, a wide smile formed on her thin lips.

“Tiexsema, I presume?” Anders kept his hands behind his back as he was brought before her.

At least, he did, until he was forced onto his knees before her. It was likely the only way she would *ever* have the height advantage over him otherwise.

Tiexsema took one hand and slowly cupped Anders' cheek. “I have been looking forward to meeting you. Yes, you. Oh, this is going to be so much fun.”

She dug a sharp nail into his cheek, slowly, methodically dragging it down his cheek as it tore into his skin. He grimaced, closing his eyes. It felt like he was being cut by a vibroknife. He felt the blood trickle down his face, dripping from his jaw and onto the floor.

When she removed her hand, Anders opened his eyes. “Do you treat all your guests like this? Or am I special?”

“Oh, you are special,” Tiexsema grinned manically at him. “So very, very special.”

A click of her fingers summoned her minions to take the Chiss’ lightsaber from his belt. Once the weapon was placed in her hand, the Anzat inspected it like it was the galaxy’s most interesting trinket.

“Charmed,” Anders resisted the urge to insult her. In truth, his heart was pounding in his chest.

This woman was an unknown entity and that alone made her unpredictable. There was no information in the Inquisitorius database about these *Old Gods*. One wrong move, and she might try to kill him without a second thought. Her unpredictability made her dangerous.

“Your name?” Tiexsema asked, though received no answer after a short pause. “Come now, find it rude that you know of me, and yet, I know nothing of you.”

“I am High Inquisitor Anderson, Golden Envoy of the Brotherhood and Vice-Chancellor of the Taldryan Republic,” the Taldryanite perched himself up as best he could.

If he was to be the subject of her whim, he would do so with dignity.

“Such accolades!” the Anzat circled him. “Titles bestowed upon you by mere mortals. Yet, what does a title mean when one comes face-to-face with a god?”

Tiexsema spread her arms wide like an eagle about to take flight. Anders met her piercing gaze with one of her own.

“And tell me, Tiexsema. What is a god to a nonbeliever?”

She cackled manically, her voice echoing throughout the makeshift temple.

“You,” she pointed at his face, her fingertips inches from his forehead. “I *like* you.”

Somehow, Anders got the impression that wasn't a good position to be in.

Tiexsema released a deep groan. “You see, I've been asleep for a very, *very* long time. My powers, whilst great, granted to me by Mother Alla'su herself, are *stirring*. You made that very apparent to me, dear Inquisitor, when you broke that pilot from my grasp.”

“A pilot that met his end because of your actions.” Anders hissed at her like a cornered snake. He wanted nothing more than to enact justice. The dark side demanded it.

“A necessary sacrifice. One that has benefited me greatly. You are powerful, oh yes, very much so. My brother was too, but he was impure. That, I will not deny...” her eyes flashed an amber hue, slitting like a reptile as she dropped the Chiss’ lightsaber. Her teeth appeared like fangs in her mouth as she licked her lips. “You have a power that I will make mine!”

She clasped her hands around the sides of Anders’ skull. She wasn't strong, at least not physically. Yet, it felt like his brain was being crushed by a vice attempting to compress his head into paste. His internal organs felt like they were on fire. He wanted to scream, but no sounds came out of his mouth. Black veins protruded from his skin. He could feel both his life and the Force within him being syphoned from like a sponge. He felt the cold, numbing emptiness begin to consume him, the cultists chanting away to the victory of their Master. The High Inquisitor tried to pry himself from her grasp, but to no avail. He became weaker and she became stronger with each second that passed.

“That's it. Hush now...” Tiexsema cooed, rubbing the temples of his head with her thumbs. “It will all be over soon.”

Loud rumblings suddenly roared from the outside with such volume that it was heard over the sound of the chanting. The ground shook with a violence that suddenly and sharply dislodged Anders from the Anzat's grasp. Blaster fire erupted within the temple, lightsabers humming from the elite of four separate Clans that had converged on one location.

Reinforcements had arrived, engaging in combat with the Old God's followers right on her doorstep.

“WHAT IS THIS!?!” Tiexsema seethed. She began to channel the dark side within herself, chanting a soothing melody intended to bring everyone in the temple under her control.

The Chiss seized the opportunity whilst the Anzat was distracted. With every ounce of strength he had remaining, he lunged forward, this time wrapping *his* hands around *her* head, cutting her off.

“NO!” she attempted to claw into his face, arms, wrists, *anything* that could cause him to release her. “LET GO OF ME! DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHO I AM!?”

The Taldryan Vice-Chancellor's eyes possessed the typical amber rings of corruption, the dark side manifesting within him. She had syphoned him, yes, but his power was a very, very deep well. He spoke, uttering two words that signalled her doom.

“My turn.”

The Inquisitor, the *Mind Frakker*, as he was so well known to be. There was a reason he had that reputation. Anders dug the tendrils of the dark side into her very soul. Digging, entrenching into the core of her being as he brought the latent, dormant memories from thousands of years to the surface. This was only right. For Landseer. For *justice*.

“No... what are you doing... STOP!”

Yet, Anders did not stop. Her protests only drove him further like a Karkarodon that smelt blood in the water. He didn't just bring her emotions, her memories, her *trauma* to the surface, he amplified them, twisting them around her heartstrings, forcing her to relive each agonising moment as if it was happening in real time. Eventually, she could take no more and released a hellacious, blood-curdling scream that broke whatever control she held on her minions.

Tiexsema collapsed, her grip on the minds of thousands erased in a fleeting moment. The fighting behind them had ceased as comrades were reunited, embracing in both relief and triumph. With ragged breaths, blood staining his face and armour, the Chiss stumbled up to his full height and summoned his lightsaber back to his hand and clipped it carefully back on his belt. He stood over the Anzat's shivering body as she mumbled incoherently to herself.

“Anders!”

The sound of a familiar voice turned him on the spot. The silver-haired Arcona was there with BUDD-E in tow on her shoulder. The little droid leapt from Evelyn to Anders, landing in his arms and nestling into the Sith's chest.

“Yes, Buddy. I am fine. It is good to see you too...”

Anders locked eyes with the Arconan and took several steps forward, descending down the few steps to stand directly in front of her. He reached a hand behind his back, retrieving a small spherical tracking beacon, the very device she had strapped to his back.

“What took you so long?” He returned it to Evelyn, a small smile appearing on his face.

CHAPTER 7: DECISIONS

Estle City Medical Ward

Selen

42 ABY

Evelyn just wanted to *sit*. Was that really so much to ask? The events of the last twenty-four hours had really taken their toll on her, more so than she had realised. Her legs felt like jelly. Anders had received medical treatment, or at least as much as he was willing to take so long as she was there. Their relationship, if it could even be called that, had gone through the proverbial ringer.

Somehow, the plan had worked. At least she could be satisfied with that. The mind control was broken and Tiexsema was in custody. It wouldn't be long until Alla'su was found, though there was still Emere to worry about. She had no illusions that Anders was hellbent on exacting revenge whenever possible. She'd made her plea. Surprisingly, he'd actually listened to her. There was little else she could do except wait. Emere was well protected, but against someone like Anders, who knew if it would be enough?

At least the Sith was in no condition to act. for now, anyways.

Evelyn rubbed her eyes and released a yawn. They'd all been given a reprieve from the attacks. She planned to make damn well sure she took advantage of the fact. Who knew that a simple bed could feel like the most luxurious piece of furniture in the galaxy?

“Miss. Wyvern?”

The hybrid woman had barely placed her hand on the terminal before she heard her name. She internally cursed whatever foul deity dared interrupt her allocated time with her mattress.

A forced smile made its way onto her lips as she turned to address the young Jedi.

“Mr. Zul. I am glad to see you are out of your bed.”

Draca smiled back, bowing his head ever so slightly out of courtesy and respect. “I would have been out sooner, but Melissa insisted that I rest.”

Evelyn had to chuckle at the sheepish expression on Draca's face. "Regardless, I was just about to get some rest."

"Just Draca is fine, ma'am. This won't take long. I promise."

Evelyn repressed the laugh that threatened to escape her lungs. Aketa used to cause such a fuss over her whenever she was hurt or sick. Those memories almost felt like a lifetime ago now.

Regardless, there was a part of her that still felt guilty of what happened with Draca. Yes, they had both been a victim of the Song, but Anders' words had cut deep. The very least she could do was hear the Jedi out, so she gestured for him to continue.

"I just wanted to say thank you for looking after Anders. He promised that he wouldn't go after Miss. Galo."

He did? That was definitely surprising, but a much welcomed relief nonetheless. Somehow, despite everything, Evelyn knew the High Inquisitor was as good as his word.

"He also asked me to give you this," Draca held out an envelope. "I have no idea what's in it. He wouldn't tell me when I asked."

Evelyn bit her lower lip and gingerly took the envelope out of Draca's hand. Her mind whirled with the possibilities of what could be contained within, especially from *Anders* of all people.

"Thank you," The Arconan said.

"Your welcome," Draca smiled and turned to leave.

"Mr. Zul?"

He paused and turned to face her, speaking with a reassuring tone. "Just Draca is fine. You don't need to be sorry. You weren't yourself and neither was I. Neither of us are to blame," the young Jedi then left Evelyn to her thoughts.

She blinked. Did Draca possess the same mind-reading abilities that his parental figure did? Or could he just feel her guilt through the Force?

Either way, this envelope had gained her intrigue. The durasteel doors opened into a small room sectioned off from the rest of the hospital wing. Evelyn had intended

to head straight to bed, maybe grab a shower first, but no, she had to satiate her curiosity.

She made her way over to a nearby desk, taking a seat and opening the piece of paper in her hands. Her eyes almost leapt out of her skull when she read the contents. Her heart leapt in her chest as a lump formed in her throat.

There was no way... were these real? Why would he? What did he have to do...

These were divorce papers! And Anders' signature was already printed on the bottom, a space available for her to sign her own!

"You will never be free of me. There will be no divorce, no separation, no chance of freedom."

So much for that.

Evelyn leaned back in her seat. This was it. Her chance to be free and rid of him forever. She grabbed the pen, touching its tip to the paper in front of her. All it would take is a little swish of her pen and her life would be her own again.

Yet, she hesitated. She was a mix of emotions that whirled together like a tornado in her core. She was relieved, confused, and most shocking of all to herself, genuinely upset. Her heart felt heavy as the knowledge of being alone once again once she signed those papers hit her with the full force of an artillery shell. She missed being married. She missed having someone to care for, and having someone care for her. There was seldom a more precious and wonderful experience in the entire galaxy.

Evelyn took a deep breath through her nostrils. Slowly, and methodically, she wrote her name under her current Husband's signature.

Not for much longer.

She folded the piece of paper and kept it close. The Arconan readied herself for sleep. There was still a war to fight. She needed to be fighting fit. Evelyn went to bed that night lighter than she'd felt in recent months, dreaming sweet dreams of blue.

=END=

