

"Frak..." Tali muttered as the low fuel alarm flared to life in the cockpit of her Y-wing fighter, the astromech confirming the alert as genuine and advising her to land on a nearby planet. The flight from the slaver base had been a hurried one and the blaster bolt she'd taken to the fuel cell certainly hadn't helped matters much.

Out in the fringe, she realized her chances were pretty slim. Hopefully she could find some fuel on this remote world and then limp her way back to civilization, but if not. Dying stranded on a forsaken planet somewhere in the middle of nowhere seemed like a very unfitting end for her slaver-hunting career, the Twi'lek decreed, and made a mental note to always pack extra fuel from now on if she made it back alive.

The ship gently shuddering as it descended through the atmosphere, Tali letting the astromech do most of the flying as she readied herself for what was to come, the nimble Y-wing landed softly near what looked to be a settlement. Though there was no recorded life on this world, nor much of a record of the world existing at all, Tali hoped against hope that this was merely a result of a careless or lazy cartographer than her optimism at reading the garbled sensor returns.

The ship's sensors decreeing the planet's air breathable, Tali opened the canopy and climbed out, letting the astromech unit go about fixing the hole in the fuel cell. With her lightsaber at her belt and the protective thermal cloak on her shoulders, Tali made her way to the ridge's edge and peeked down with a pair of binoculars at the village below.

At this distance, the image wasn't sharp enough to make out much, but what little she could see beyond the rounded shapes of huts gave her confidence. Dark shapes, walking about in seemingly undisturbed daily routines, wandered about the village, carrying objects and conversing with each other. Civilization.

There was something about these shapes that struck her as odd, though. There was something about their headdresses that seemed peculiar, long dangling sleeves of cloth which sometimes appeared to almost move on their own. Her right lek rubbing her chin as she pondered this phenomenon, Tali decided to take a closer look.

Gingerly making her way down the canyon side, sliding down the loose rock face amidst the tumbling stones. Touching down on a small lip halfway to the bottom, she followed a narrow path onto the sandy plane at the base and cautiously approached the simple village. The closer she got, the clearer the inhabitants became and as she got a clearer picture of them, she realized there was something eerily familiar about them, especially their heads.

The locals seemed to have noticed her as she walked towards their settlement, a pair of sentries standing atop slender towers at the edges of the village clearly taking an interest in her, though showing no hostility. Taking this as a good sign, Tali pressed onward, sand crunching beneath her tread as she entered the village and laid her eyes upon the first local.

As the water bearing woman rounded the corner, a wide pot balanced atop her head, Tali was shocked stiff as she realized just why the people had looked somehow familiar. Emerging from the sides of her head like a pair of tentacles, the woman's lekku were robust and pink, their bases holding snugly onto the specially formed pot and helping to keep it stable.

For a long moment Tali simply stood stunned, mouth gently agape as she gawked at the second Twi'lek in the galaxy. As far as she knew, and as far as anyone she knew, knew, she had been the only one of her kind.

The woman seemed a tad uncomfortable with Tali's steering and moved to slip past her. Her lekku shifting in a sudden pattern of motions that Tali had not been prepared for, the woman gave an annoyed grunt and pushed past the stunned Jedi. Before she had a chance to say anything, the woman had already passed and left the stunned newcomer in her odd attire to her own devices. Recovering only after the pink Twi'lek had departed, Tali shook her head and rounded the corner after her, but she had already disappeared from view. The next thing she felt was a gentle tugging sensation on her pant leg and a soft chirpy voice calling out to her. "Hey, miss. I haven't seen you around before. Who are you?"

Turning to look down by her side, Tali saw a the small yellow-skinned Twi'lek boy looking up at her with radiant green eyes shining with innocent glee. She was lost at the whole situation, feeling a need to lie down for a bit as she took half a pace backwards to get her own against the wall of a building before managing to respond more out of reflex than anything.

"T-Tali. My name is Tali Sroka." She managed, head spinning slightly as she tried to process all of this. "W-who are you?" She inquired in turn.

"I'm Pib'leni!" The boy chirped with a beaming smile. "But everyone calls me Pib." He stretched out his right lek, holding it tip-down and extended halfway towards her with a slightly expectant look on his face, leaving Tali blinking in confusion.

"Erm... What are you doing?" She blurted, pointing at his lek.

The boy blinked twice in confusion looking like he hadn't understood the question. "Umm, introducing myself? Or don't you do lekshakes where you come from?"

"Lek... shakes?" Tali repeated, confusion radiating from her.

"Yeah, lekshakes. Shake my lek, That's how we greet!" Pib'leni explained, nudging slightly forward and poking his lek at her.

"O-ok...?" The Jedi stuttered, reaching out to touch his lek and giving in a soft shake with her right hand. The boy, however, did not seem to react pleasantly, giving a sharp yelp and retracting his lek quickly.

"Aaaaah! What are you doing?! Not with your hand!!! Mooooom! The stranger's touching my lekkuuuu!" The boy wailed, turning around and bolting away with the startled and even more confused Tali following in his wake while trying to calm him down.

"N-no! I didn't mean to! P-please, stop! I just don't know what lekshakes are andt..." She rounded a corner after the fleeing Pib'leni before skidding to a halt as what must have been over a dozen rather peeved looking Twi'leks in all colors stood in a wide line to block her passage. A moment of panic passed as she momentarily considered drawing her saber, but managing to talk herself out from escalating the situation any further. The townsfolk seemed unarmed, after all.

"Who are you? And what are you doing in our town?" An older male Twi'lek demanded, stepping forward from the crowd. His skin was a greyed blue, his lekku thick and imposing, though scarred and heavily grooved by time, yet his form was still strong and commanding. "We don't take kindly to strangers who come and touch our children's lekku..." He added with a not-so-veiled threat.

Raising her hands in objection and showing she meant no harm, Tali stood her ground and tried to focus on talking herself out of the mess she was in rather than be overwhelmed by the fact the known Twi'lek population of the galaxy had increased by over 20 000 % within the last five minutes.

"Erm, look. I mean no harm andt it vas all an honest mistake." She stated defensively, though the man did not seem to be any more placated than before. "Uh, how about ve start from the beginning? My name is..."

"Tali Sroka! Her name is Tali Sroka!" Pib'leni cried out from somewhere amidst the crowd, his yellow lekku glinting betwixt brown bantha-leather pants and skirts before darting out of sight once more.

"Erm, yes. My name is Tali Sroka andt my ship ran out of fuel, so I hadt to make an emergency landing on your planet. I mean you no harm andt I vas just looking for fuel when I ran into Pib'leni over..." She tried to spy the yellow devil in the crowd, squinting her eyes and even drawing upon her connection with the Force to sense his overexcited aura before pointing at him. "...there andt he triedt to introduce himself to me. I... haven't been around, eh, people like myself that much andt I vas not aware of the customs regarding lekshakes, as he calledt them. My apologies, if I offendedt anyone, but it vas my first lekshake andt I sorta blew it, didn't I?" She admitted, scratching the back of her head with a nervous chuckle.

The man glanced over his shoulder at the crowd and Pib'leni's inquisitive face that had once again peeked out from behind his mother's skirt, the boy seemingly intrigued to see what was to happen. "Harumph, I suppose we can forgive a stranger not being accustomed to our ways on the first try." He muttered. "My name is Shorra Khan and I am the village elder of our settlement. I cannot say I am pleased to meet you, but I extend my lek in greeting nonetheless."

As he said so, his right lek moved forward like Pib'leni's had and remained hovering halfway between them. Tali stared at the offered appendage for a moment, the muscles of her arm gently spasming as instincts told her to greet him with her hand, before she gingerly managed to extend her own lek and touch the tip of his with her own. The motion of the man's lek was swift and surprising, Tali letting out a soft gasp as she felt it gently coil around hers and give it a mild squeeze. Looking her in the eyes, Shorra nodded and smiled to himself before letting go, Tali's lek sliding limpy back to her chest. "Ah! There we go! You learn fast. I like that in a person." The elder spoke with a more jovial tone. "Come, Tali Sroka, let us sit down properly and we can discuss this whole matter of your impromptu visit." He stated, gesturing eagerly towards a nearby hut as the rest of the crowd seemed to visibly relax and some even offering curious or friendly smiles in greeting.

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"So you're saying that We, as in our village, are the last Twi'leks in the galaxy?" Shorra asked, gesturing with his pipe around the gathered inside the village hall.

"Yes, as far as the rest of the galaxy knew... I vas the last of my kindt." Tali replied, having just gone through the laborious effort of telling the villagers about her travels and how she got here. There was a round of murmurs and gasps of disbelief as the crowd tried to digest the news. "So you can understandt my shock when I encounteredt you all. I... honestly hadt hadt no idea there couldt be more of... vell, me aroundt." She admitted.

"That is most peculiar indeed..." Shorra mused, puffing his pipe and remaining silent for a long while. "This will require a while to consider. Seems like exposing ourselves to the galaxy at large might be

potentially dangerous if done in haste and without forethought. You mentioned you fought slavers. I'm sure they would find our people very intriguing targets, if we are all that is left. I would not wish to risk that."

Tali nodded and made a stilted gesture with her lekku which she'd learned meant something akin to humble acceptance. "I agree. I will not tell anyone about your existence, but unless I get back to my people, someone will come looking for me and I cannot guarantee that if they find me, they can keep their mouth shut as well as I can."

There was another round of murmurs from the crowd as Tali looked about herself, feeling a bit anxious about what it all might mean. Surely they could not consider keeping her here, right? Shorra ran a hand down his lek and let out some grumbling noises as he clearly was deep in contemplation before patting out some ashes from his long and slender pipe upon the desk in front of him. "We will do what we can to aid you, Tali Sroka. Let it not be said that Twi'leks do not aid those in need. However, we kindly ask you to keep our presence a secret until such a time as we choose to make it public."

Tali nodded, turning the motion into a deep bow as her left lek mimicked the gesture, albeit crudely. "O-of course, sir. I would never do anything to harm my kin. My brothers and sisters in lekku." She stated adamantly, earning herself a few nods of approval from the gathered.

"I never doubted that." Shorra agreed as he stood up and began to make his way towards the doorway. "We do not have the fuel you seek, but our planet is rich in natural deposits of flammable gasses. A few spacers have used it to fuel their ships, although collecting it might take some time. We will aid you in this endeavor, but while we do, would you care to stay as a guest? I'm sure there is much we could learn from each other."

Her amber eyes lit up with excitement at the prospect, the tips of her lekku rising ever so slightly as a beaming smile spread upon her lips. "O-of course! That sounds wonderful! I will put my astromech to work at once." She chirped enthusiastically, the old Twi'lek offering a gentle smile in return as they walked out into the pleasant evening with Pib'leni following behind them at a not-quite respectful distance.

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The goodbyes had been hard and heartfelt. Even in just the four days it had taken for them to refuel her Y-wing enough for her to get back home safely, she had become endeared by the locals. Their culture spoke to her and the language they used, based on the motions and positions of their lekku, fascinated her. Pib'leni had openly wept when she had boarded her ship for departure, though he had been much less distressed after she shared a piece of candy from the glove compartment with him as a souvenir. Although she suspected that particular treat had by now been eaten.

As the astromech beeped a confirmation of the hyperspace jump being calculated, Tali leaned back in her seat and pushed the throttle to maximum, engaging the drive core and shooting the ship back towards Ol'val. As the stars turned into streaks around her, the flashing of lights making the cockpit windows darken automatically to compensate, the Twi'lek suddenly realized something. What was her purpose in life now? If she was no longer responsible for trying to keep her race alive? Or was it even more important than ever that she married a Twi'lek male and got as many children as she could? Oh dear, Koliss was going to have a heart attack when he learned about this...