

The strobing lights and pounding beats of the freshest disco tunes coursed through Tali's body and mind as she swayed through the dancefloor towards the bar counter. The long-awaited day off couldn't have come at a better time as she had yearned for a chance to let loose and blow off some steam. Unfortunately, Koliss Welcott and Lucine Vasano had been otherwise engaged, but going clubbing, even if alone, was still a worthwhile venture for her.

Dancing through the throng of bodies swaying to the music's beat, neatly side-stepping a rather enthusiastic Togruta who's back-lek almost slapped her in the face, Tali made her way up to the bar counter and placed her order for a shot. As she stood there, leaning against the counter, she suddenly felt like someone was watching her. As she turned her head to the right and then left, she did not see anyone looking at her, yet the nagging feeling remained.

The bartender placed a small glass in front of her as Tali extended her credit chit, for once containing more than a hundred credits after a good month's sales at *Your Lekku and You*. As she returned back to her beverage after the brief monetary transaction, something must have snagged upon its lip as the next thing she knew the glass had tumbled over and spilled its contents over a hooded stranger sitting next to her.

Clad from head to toe in a simple dark-grey cloak, the person did not say a word, their features so obscured Tali could not even at first tell whether they were male or female. Reflexively trying to sense something from them, expecting anger or frustration and meeting them with a wave of calmness, she was surprised to not sense much of anything, though after another split-second's recollection, she was no longer sure if the place had even been occupied when she placed her order.

Nevertheless, she'd messed up and knew how to react, hoping that this unfortunate accident wouldn't taint the rest of her evening. "Umh, excuse me, I did not see you there." Tali muttered apologetically, reaching for some napkins to wipe off the spilled drink. As she moved her hand over to the stranger's lap, she snatched her wrist with a speed that left the Twi'lek startled and shocked. Despite her Jedi reflexes, she had not seen that coming.

Panic momentarily flaring, she looked at the stranger a bit closer as she turned her hooded head towards her. Pale blue lek-tips peeked out from beneath the hood and a sudden caress of soothing Force energy brushed against her mind, easing her off her distress. Stunned by all that was happening, Tali could not get a word out of her mouth as the stranger calmly gestured for her to take a seat.

Although she knew it might have been a terrible decision, something about this stranger soothed her spirit and with her curiosity picked, Tali decided to indulge her. Sitting down beside the robed woman, the stranger let go of her wrist while the tips of her lekku gestured an apology. Nodding courtly and gesturing understanding, Tali leaned slightly to the side to try and sneak a glance at the stranger's face, but found the shadows somehow 'clinging' to her features. She was a Twi'lek and her blue skin was obvious, but beyond those few clues she had no idea with whom she was sitting.

"Apologies." The woman suddenly spoke softly. "For spilling your drink."

Tali blinked in mild perplexion at the words. Surely it was she, who should be apologizing. "Shouldn't I be apologizing? I didn't spill those drinks, you know." She replied as politely as she could, hoping not to anger the stranger.

A soft chuckle emanated from within the shadows of her hooded face. "No, you did not." The woman replied softly before gently raising her hand towards the far counter where a pair of shots awaited a patron to pick them up. Smoothly, without spilling a drop, the two glasses suddenly raced across the counter towards her, halting in front of the surprised Twi'lek.

"Y-you... y-you're...?" Tali stuttered, but was cut off by the woman's soft, yet stern voice.

"Yes, the same as you."

"H-how didt you...?" She began, but once again the stranger answered her before she could finish.

"I've become quite apt at sensing others, in case they might be a threat. Let's just say I learned the hard way." She chuckled to herself.

Tali nodded slowly, feigning understanding as she gingerly extended her own Force senses to scout out her aura. Even so close, knowing what she was, Tali found it extremely difficult to sense anything and despite having witnessed her powers, she almost made herself believe she had been mistaken, so good was her ability to hide her presence.

"If you wish to sense me, you need but to ask, but in return I would like to know your name." The stranger spoke suddenly, her tone hinting at amusement as the younger Twi'lek obviously tried to hide what she had been doing.

Having already grown tired of being interrupted mid-sentence, Tali eschewed the obvious question of disbelief and simply shook her head in resignation. "I am Tali. Tali Sroka." She replied, almost instantly sensing a sudden flash of energy beside her as the stranger lowered her guards enough to let her inspect her. The sheer strength of her will and presence within the living Force was shocking, Tali barely managing to stay her tongue as she withdrew her probing mind and seemed to have grown a bit pale.

"What am I?" The stranger voiced the question Tali had been thinking. "I am akin to your master. No, not the one who trained you, but the one who found you. The one who gave you that weapon." She pointed at the banged up, leather-wrapped lightsaber hanging on the inside of her jacket.

Completely perplexed, Tali furrowed her brow and opened her mouth to speak, but couldn't even form a coherent question, much to the obvious amusement of the stranger. "Don't worry, it will all become clear in time. Now, the reason I so rudely caught your attention was that I have not enjoyed the company of someone like myself in... a long time." She admitted. "And to be honest, it is one of the things I truly miss."

"Vell, erm, wouldt you like to spendt the evening vith me, then?" Tali suggested politely, feeling like not offering might have been a very rude thing to do.

"I would be delighted." The mysterious woman said, picking up one of the two glasses and raising it up in a toast. Tali, not wishing to insult, replied in kind, tapping the brim of her own against hers before swallowing the shot in one go. It promised to be another interesting night.

"Andt then, when they vere almost on me, I hadt my droidt begin take-off procedures." Tali explained excitedly, the fifth drink of the evening halfway empty in her hands as she recounted the time she'd eluded a trio of Inquisitors on Selen. "They ran right past me, heading for my ship, andt I managed to slip past them into a civilian liner. But, I vasn't in the clear yet. The Inquisitor I'd, eh, distractedt earlier..."

"You mean, kissed on the mouth?" The stranger pointed out, the slender straw of her Pink Lekku disappearing into the shrouded darkness of her hooded features.

"Erm, yes, that one." Tali admitted with a faint blush. "She came looking for me inside the ship. Luckily, there vere many other passengers onboardt, so I couldt hide andt using up vhat energy I hadt left, I made the Flight Attendant say I vasn't there andt to ask her to leave." She giggled. "She bought it, hook line andt... erm..."

"Sinker?" The stranger suggested.

"Yes, that. Andt so I managedt to get back to Ol'val." She finished her tale with a beaming smile.

"These... Inquisitors. I've heard much of them. They work for this, Pravus, character, yes?" The stranger stated, catching the purple Twi'lek slightly off guard as she'd hoped for some praise or comment on her clever survival.

"Yes, they do. Andt Pravus is the vorst of the vorst. Not keen on us non-humans at all. Vants us all deadt or driven away..." Tali replied bitterly, gnawing on the tip of her straw. "He is THE vorst."

The stranger gave an amused grunt at the comment, leaning back in a more relaxed pose. "Oh, I don't think he surely is THE worst. I've met people far more insidious."

"Oh no, trust me, he is THE vorst. Vhat couldt be vorse than racial segregation?" Tali bit back.

The stranger was silent for a moment, clearly in thought, before replying. "Well, let's just say that for now, this Pravus is a pale shadow of the man I speak of. The one who sent almost tore the galaxy in half and who betrayed me and my friends..."

Tali blinked, twice. Despite the several drinks under her fashionable belt, her mind seemed to be working surprisingly well and even with only those words to go on, she began to piece together a puzzle about who this mysterious stranger might be.

Her mind in overdrive, she tapped into her rather basic knowledge of galactic history along with what she knew of the Jedi Order and the Sith, until she came to a startling conclusion, but one she felt she needed to verify before making any rash claims. Clearing her throat, Tali tried to be as nonchalant as possible as she continued.

"Vell, maybe you do get a point there. Though wouldn't it be rather booring to live in a vorldt vith only humans? Vhere's the lovely diversity in a mono-race culture? It vouldt almost be like living vith clones..."

The young Twi'lek's attempts to get a reaction from her were, in the stranger's mind, adorably primitive and had she not been beyond such emotions and been able to read the woman's intentions almost like an open book, she might have fallen for it. Still, she had shown a deal of smarts and perhaps she could be trusted with her secret.

Feigning anger and playing her part, the blue-hued Twi'lek growled. "Hmph, damn clones. Nothing comes close to that, believe you me. Backstabbing tools..." She muttered.

That was all the confirmation Tali needed to hear and she gasped in shock as realization struck her. Lowering her voice so as to try and maintain some sort of privacy, she leaned in closer towards her and whispered. "Are you... a Jedi Master?"

The stranger allowed herself a soft chuckle, her lekku moving in a gesture of affirmation. "I am, or I were, depending on how you think of it." She admitted, her hands moving up to the sides of her hood and slowly peeling it back as the thus-far perpetual darkness shrouding her features vanished. Looking back at her was a blue-hued Twi'lek woman with hazel brown eyes and naturally vibrant red lips. Her lekku were wrapped in brown leather and peeking out from the collar of her cloak seemed to be a shirt or tunic of the same. "My name is Aayla Secura, Jedi Master and former commander of the 327th Star Corps of the Grand Army of the Republic."

Tali was, again, left speechless as she stared at her fellow Twi'lek, the other woman slightly older than herself, though still in prime physical shape. Despite the obvious power she held, without her hood on the woman looked almost demure and an awkward attempt at a smile only added to the effect.

Realizing she was staring, Tali swiftly regained what little of her composure that she could and offered her hand in greeting. "T-Tali Sroka, pleasedt to meet you, Miss Secura."

The Jedi Master looked at her hand for a moment in puzzlement before shaking it with her own. "I know, Miss Sroka, though the pleasure is mine."

Another moment of awkward silence passed before Tali fully regained her senses. "Vell then, vouldt you care to tell me something about yourself, perhaps? Since I already toldt you about my exploits." She suggested.

Aayla looked apprehensive for a moment, but the shining golden eyes of the young and still relatively naïve Twi'lek were hard to resist. She reminded her of herself in so many ways. "Very well then, Tali. Let me tell you something about my past. Have you ever heard of what really happened in the Clone Wars...?"

What seemed like mere minutes, but in truth was several hours passed until finally the club owner announced closing time. The number of empty glasses on their table had multiplied and the two tipsy Twi'leks were giggling like a pair of school girls over Aayla's recounting of her fling with Kit Fisto.

Despite having drunk as many if not more cocktails as she had, Tali was rather envious of how gracefully Aayla moved as they crossed the dance floor and headed outside. As they crossed a nearby alleyway, Secura suddenly touched Tali's shoulder with her lek and motioned for them to enter. Though a bit hesitant to go to such a place in her condition, Tali followed until they were out of immediate eye and earshot of the other late-night pedestrians.

"I've enjoyed my time, Tali Sroka, but I am weary and it is time for me to go." Aayla smiled, her shape growing visibly paler and less corporeal.

"B-but..." Tali stuttered, unsure of what to say, though feeling that this moment was too precious to end.

“Do not worry about me, young Jedi. You have many adventures yet ahead of you, and when the time comes for you to become one with the Force, yet more await. Go now and give my greetings to your... master then next time she deigns it worthy to speak to you. I’m sure she would appreciate knowing one of her old foes is still around.” The blue Jedi Master chuckled as she began to fade away ever faster.

Tali could do little more than stand in place, staring at her as her shape grew transparent, her cloak disappearing entirely and body turning transparent. As it did, Tali suddenly realized a further reason for her secrecy as she gasped in shock at the form that was uncovered. Her back was mangled, torn apart by what looked like dozens of blaster bolts, flesh boiled and charred into a hideous mess which mercifully was fading as fast as she was.

Aayla turned her eyes to her fellow Twi’leks and shook her head. “We all must suffer for our failures, Tali. Never let blind trust lead you to betrayal. Choose your allies carefully.” She whispered as the last of her presence faded into oblivion, the gentle comforting aura dancing on the very edges of Tali’s consciousness before it too dimmed down and grew cold.

Standing alone in the darkened alley, Tali swallowed thin air, right hand clutching her left lek over her heart, gently fidgeting with the tip. “Goodbye, Master Secura. I will do my best to make you proudt.”