

# Hugs for the Lonely

By Aura Ta'var  
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Aura busily moved around the house, tidying up the place as best she could. More often than not she found yet another one of Zoe's toys lying around, mostly hidden under a piece of furniture. She even moved each object meticulously back to its place. The Zeltron wanted to impress her dinner guest, but moreover she wanted the place to be fully clean for once. A toddler made that impossible usually, but thankfully her attention was kept elsewhere by a godsend of a nanny droid, who was currently going through each and every one of Zoe's shirts to ensure her daughter loved her 'fancy dinner' outfit.

Aura herself was wearing a casual stay-at-home version of her Jedi-like robes, swapping out the boots for slip on flats and her outer tunic for a v-neck, sleeveless top. Zoe on the other hand had thrown a fit about her outfit, which was why she was currently changing — yet again. Eventually, her daughter came out with a spring in her step, her pride evident. She was wearing a bright orange and yellow dress and jumped around the kitchen barefoot.

"Hey, no playing in the kitchen! I am cutting the sushi. Go wait on the couch for Alethia."

The toddler jumped on the couch, watching her mother from a distance.

"When is mommy's friend coming?"

"Soon."

As soon as the words escaped Aura's mouth, the door chime went off, sending Zoe running towards the door. Aura put down her knife and joined her daughter as she opened the door. A woman with silver hair and ice-blue eyes was standing on the other side, wearing her usual knee-length skirt and overly-conservative top.

"Welcome mommy's friend! Hi. My name is Zoe." The small zeltron gave Alethia's leg an impromptu hug.

Aura smiled as Alethia got over her initial shock. "Welcome. Glad you could make it." Aura gave Alethia a hug as well, burying the woman under yet another hug.

"Thank you for inviting me. I am looking forward to the 'sushi'."

Aura couldn't tell if it was sarcasm or she was being serious, but it didn't matter. Alethia had come. Over the last week Aura had been working with Alethia rather closely on official business. She got to see first hand how lonely the woman really was. On the outside she appeared just

like everyone else but the Force didn't lie. Alethia was lonely. As such, Aura hoped this dinner would be one of many.

"So, you two going to let me in or just hug me?"

"Why not both?" teased Aura as she let her go. "Zoe, could you show Alethia to the dinner table and sit down nicely next to her?"

"Yay, follow me!"

Aura shut the front door and followed the pair into the kitchen, finishing cutting up the last roll. She could already hear her daughter start to tell Alethia about her day. Aura chuckled to herself, put the sushi boat on the table, and went to grab drinks. By the time she had returned with two glasses of wine and a glass of water, Zoe was already starting to ask Alethia question after question. Aurora put down the drinks in front of everyone and joined them at the table.

"Zoe. Give Alethia some time to answer your questions."

"But!" The toddler started to protest but was silenced with a look. "Fine..." Zoe sighed and waited for an answer.

Alethia grabbed her drink, taking a sip before responding. "Yes. I work with your mom, but I'm not a Jedi."

Aura proceeded to make Zoe a plate of sushi puffs, all of the centers filled with raw salmon. She put a salad next to it and then put the entire meal in front of her child. "Eat up."

"Do you want some?" offered Zoe as she looked at Archenksova.

"I'll grab mine own, but thank you. Eat up."

"Okay," replied Zoe before she shifted her attention to her food.

The two women loaded up their plates and then breathed a sigh of relief. Aura loaded up her plate with rice and salmon, while Alethia tried a bit of everything. The day's stress melted away as they drank wine, joked around with occasional additions from Zoe, and satiated themselves with food.

"Not bad, Aura. Not bad. The wine paired well with it."

"Thank you. This was quite good. Did you hear about the new rumor on Kias?"

"There are a few. Which ones?" Alethia leaned closer.

“Did you hear about the new Mar Sul rumor? They say that a new woman is flirting with him. They even held hands.”

“Oooo, he has a girlfriend,” chimed in Zoe.

Alethia rolled her eyes. “That won’t get a reaction out of me, Ta’var. And even if it was a rumor, it isn’t true.”

“Oh, how do you know?”

“I just do. Now that we’ve got the pre-requisite inquiry into my love life out of the way, how about you? I heard you have your eye on a pretty boy. A Zeltron even.”

“Well... maybe,” smirked Aura.

“Oh no you don’t. Out with it. I need details.” Alethia demanded, relishing the reversal of roles.

Aura sighed before throwing Archenksova a bone. “Well his name is Teikhos and he is a Jedi that has been around Kiasl lately. He is rather handsome for a Zeltron. You’d know this if you went to the party last Sunday.”

“Rather handsome, hmm? I was told you watched him most of the night. And you call me a stalker.”

“Yes. You you are. If Mar knew what lengths you go to...” said Aura with an empty threat. She would never actually sell the woman out and Alethia knew it.

“You could but you won’t. I know you too well.” Alethia winked.

The Zeltron shook merely her head. She didn’t start an intel-fight with the leader of Odan-Urr’s intelligence unit. “And your source was wrong. I was watching him the whole night. You should fire him. He didn’t even observe the dress code. Some agent.”

“Mommy, is a boyfriend like a daddy?” Zoe asked, strangely quiet.

Aura reached out to the Force and felt her daughter’s despair, sadness and unease. It was a topic that didn’t come up often, but the fact remained that Zoe missed her grandparents — who till recently she knew of as her parents. She also noticed the fact that she no longer had a father.

"No. A boyfriend is a friend that is a boy."

"Oh. But what about a daddy? I don't have one," pouted Zoe.

Aura tried not to look annoyed at Alethia, who didn't know the landmine she had set off. To her credit, Alethia stayed quiet.

"Well, a boyfriend can become a daddy. How about that?"

"Will you still spend time with me if we get a daddy?" asked Zoe, fear of loneliness threatening to make her cry.

"Of course, love. You are my favorite. If you get a daddy, then you just get someone else to play with you." Aura got up and picked Zoe up into a tight hug. Her daughter buried her face into her mother's shoulder and clung to her. Alethia poured guilt and her own sadness into the Force. "How about we all watch Jedi Patrol together. You can explain it to Alethia while we cuddle. And then we can all make pretty drawings."

Archenksova paused in surprise, but recovered quickly. "What do you say, Zoe?"

"Okay." The toddler Zeltron sniffled and followed her mother to the couch, Alethia not far behind. Aura turned on a Jedi Patrol marathon and sat on the couch, her lap quickly filled by her overly concerned daughter. Alethia sat next to them, reclining back.

Zoe clinged to her mother as she explained how the Jedi dogs saved the day from the evil bad guys, who conveniently happened to be Sith. After an episode or two, Zoe sat in between the two women, leaning against Alethia from time to time to make a point. Archenksova patiently waited it out, prompting the toddler to keep talking by asking her a few questions every now and again. The intricacies of saving the day lasted for about an hour, but by the end of it Aura was pretty sure Alethia had been properly punished.

"Zoe, let's make some pretty pictures now. We can all make one for each other," offered Aura.

"Yeah, that sounds fun," replied Zoe cheerfully enough.

"Go get your crayons and some paper while mommy cleans off the table."

Zoe zipped off to her room while the two women cleaned off the table. Alethia took the opportunity to speak to her one on one. "I'm sorry. I didn't know."

"Well, it was going to happen eventually. Don't worry about it. Besides, you are making up for it now." Aura winked.

Zoe brought her supplies to the table and the trio proceeded to draw pictures for each other, idle chitchat keeping them busy as they colored. Aura finished Alethia's early and smirked as she showed her friend a picture of Alethia making out with Mar.

"It's a nice likeness. Make it a reality?"

Alethia stared her down and made a last minute addition to her picture.

"Funny. I drew the same thing," replied Alethia, showing Aura a picture with a glorious middle finger.

Aura smirked and then Zoe turned it into a full blown laugh.

"Mommy, is that a picture of Alethia hugging someone?"

Alethia simply shook her head, holding back her own smile. "You're a bad influence, you know that?"

"Thank you." Aura smiled. "Zoe, this is a picture for you." Aura passed over a drawing of her hugging Zoe with her grandparents.

"Mommy. I love it."

"Here you go, Zoe." Alethia passed over her drawing to Zoe as well. It was a picture of Zoe watching Jedi Patrol with her mother and Alethia.

"This is the best ever. I love them!" Zoe looked like she wanted to cry again, but the Force told Aura that her daughter was quite happy. "Now it's my turn. Here you go mommy. Here you go, Alethia."

Aura's picture had three Zeltrons in it, one of them a 'daddy'. Both were hugging the child Zeltron, who she assumed was Zoe. The message was clear and Aura couldn't help but smirk.

"It's lovely, hunny. Thank you."

Alethia's picture was a group of people laughing under the sun. There was the Ta'var family, Alethia and Mar cuddling — the cuddling appeared to be a last minute addition stylized after her mother's drawing — and several others seated around her. Everyone was playing with her. Aura mentally kicked herself for giving her daughter the means to draw cuddling. Alethia was speechless.

"We are all playing together."

“Thank you, Zoe. It’s so beautiful. Can I keep this?”

“Yes! Take mommy’s too. They are both for you.”

Aura smiled.

They drew a few more pictures but eventually it was time for Alethia to go home. As the pair of Zeltrons walked her to the front door — both pictures in hand — they hugged her again and wished her goodnight, Alethia couldn’t help but feel happy. It was a good night.

“Come back and play again!” Zoe called after her.

“See you soon!” replied Alethia.