

"So you're the infamous rebels."

The elderly woman resting on the bench turned her gaze from the stars out the viewport to look back at Satsi. She was Human, but old, with pale skin and dark eyes and hair that has lost its color but none of its luster, steel and skillfully woven into a tight bun.

"Infamous has a certain implication to it," the woman said at length as the more scarred of the two approached, coming to a stop just behind her shoulder and looking out into the glimmering black.

"What, you want something more heroic? Your politics never did anything for me. I lived on Coruscant, actually. For the start of your little toy government and the end of it and all the kark in between and after."

"The people had a choice," argued the general, though argue was perhaps the wrong word. She had a grace about her and a perfunctory manner that bespoke years and years of diplomacy; and, moreover, of *winning* at it without ruining a single nail. "The Republic wasn't always perfect, no, but it gave the chance at something the Empire had otherwise stolen."

"Please. The only difference between a republic and a dictatorship is that only one of them lies to you when they take all you've got and leave you in the dirt."

"That seems like quite the justification for a dictator. And, given the way your people conduct themselves, the presence of your soldiers, and your refusal to admit us aground with your citizenry, I doubt that title is one your are unfamiliar with. But long past is the time to be choosy about our allies. We can't afford to decline any aid."

Instead of snapping back, Satsi gave an appreciative, pointed smile.

"No, lady, you can't. Sithspit, there's hardly enough of you to fill a shuttle. Rebellion my ass." She shook her head. "You're lucky you got Kord to deal with. He'll fix you up and tell you to get the hell out. Atyiru would have recruited you. And me..."

"You?"

"I would've shot you out of the frakking sky. Unknown vessels showing up in our space doesn't usually work out for us. Strike first, strike hard, no mercy."

"You remind me suddenly of the man my son wishes he could be."

"That a compliment?"

"No. A warning."

Satsi's smile was still dagger-like. "Bitch," she commented, but it was almost good-natured. "I'm Satsi, by the way. Formerly in charge around here, when we had a war on, but now I'm just back to work."

"I am General Organa, but also Leia. You're a mercenary?" Her sharp fingers, adorned by simple but heavy jewelry, gestured at the patch on Satsi's combat suit, a spectral figure.

"Sort of."

Leia almost snorted, but repressed it, as if it were too much a display of emotion. The general let the conversation fall off and resumed watching the stars, and Satsi resumed watching her. She was an old beauty, a creature of silk over steel. Her skin might have sagged and her back might have slumped and she might have been thick instead of curvy and lithe, but her splendor was all still there: the structure of her facial bones, the glittering metal of her stare, and air with which she moved and spoke. She was strong, and she was gorgeous, and she was deadly. Of that, Satsi had no doubt.

*Atty was the same way...steel in her bones...*

She envied her the same way she had the Miraluka, a bit. But the green-bile, bitter sting at the back of her throat was a familiar one, and she swallowed it quickly.

But there was something else to Leia. Something raw. The woman was good at hiding it but Satsi's job for twenty-five years has been to notice people and things about them and she sees it still. She's pretty sure, though, that it's only because she *recognizes* it; otherwise, Leia really would be that good.

You can't hide what you already know, though, and Satsi knows that microexpression, knows the tightening around Leia's eyes and the hollowness in her gaze and the too-heavy tilt of her head.

She knows staring out at the stars and wishing more than goddamn anything that she wasn't alone doing it.

The bottoms of her feet ached with phantom fire, and her gut twisted. Screaming, her own, was distant in her ears, and so was the smell of burning and a red and silver smile too sharp to every do anything but cut, *cut, cut* her to pieces.

"You lost someone," Satsi observed after a minute to collect herself. A minute picturing Uji and Sammy and how the toddler had brought a bug inside that morning and told them it was named Bug and was her puppy now. "Someone you've never really been without."

The old woman's eyes turned to her with only the slightest stretch around them; she wasn't shocked, exactly. More like...more like something she had been waiting for had finally arrived. She looked *expectant*. Expectant, and so very, very sad.

"How did you know?" she asked, and Satsi got the feeling the question was a test all its own.

The scarred woman shrugged, moving to sit down beside the aged general. "It's easy to recognize, when you've lived it every damned day. I lost mine once too. My brother. Twins."

"Mine as well. His name was Luke."

Satsi looked at her sharply, but still she seemed to be the only one surprised. Leia just stared with tears darkening her eyes. Her age-thinned lips trembled as if she wanted to speak but just *couldn't*.

And Satsi finds herself talking.

"It kills you, it does. There's who you were before, and then there's after, and that you, the one that had them, they die too. There was a me that had Uji, and there was a me without him. And nothing else had changed, yeah, around me? Except that everything had. I had. There wasn't a frakking *world*, any kind of goddamn existence, that didn't have him irrevocably in it, part of it, until suddenly there was. Life was over, life as I knew it. He died, and I frakking died with him." She paused, sighed, ran a hand through her hair. "But this...body, it was still alive, and this person that had lost him was still alive, and she had to figure out how to frakking live. She had to figure it out because she was the only goddamn one who'd remember him or care that he was gone and she couldn't stand for there to be a world without his memory too. So she found a frakking way. And now here she is. Here I am."

Leia was crying now, silently, like a damn had broken but there wasn't anything left in her to really gush out. She was too old to really cry, too tired to really scream. Her pain was just as bright as any but she couldn't contain it, couldn't do much else but finally let it leak slowly out.

Well, clearly Satsi was already feeling frakking charitable. She'd cry *for* the old sarlacc.

"The really annoying thing is, there's no practice for grief. Not like this. You can have lost hundreds of others or have all the blood on your hands and be okay but then there's this one, *this one*, and you're not okay. You're so frakking far from okay you're in another Galaxy. You're torn the frak apart and bleeding out and ain't nothing gonna make it stop. You mentioned a son. I failed my daughter. Couldn't protect her. Not even long enough to be born. Failed my brother. Seems like he's the one always saving me, and then he was gone. I've lost *everyone*. But I'm still here and I don't always know why." The words were halting, difficult. Her throat closed around them, and old pain, old but no more dull, stabbed in her chest. It wasn't that it wasn't so sharp anymore; it was that she had long grown accustomed to living with the sting. "I don't know

why I had to keep frakking living and it wasn't frakking fair, it wasn't fair how bad I wanted to die but still wanted to frakking live. Just had to. Had to keep going. No matter what sick sithspit I endure, I still keep going and I don't even know why."

Frak, her voice cracked. When had this become one of her breakdowns?! There'd been no trigger, no frakking reason. She wasn't even feeling the anxiety, the terror. Just the urge to *hug* the damn fancy crone beside her.

"I don't know why I'm telling you this," sighed Satsi, wiping her nose and eyes in her sleeve, and then her eyes widened, then narrowed. Her entire demeanor changed, coiling with the stillness of a body about to do violence. A knife was in her grip just as suddenly. "Are you messing with my mind?" she asked softly, dangerously.

Leia responded with a tired, if cool, look, sharp and without patience. She was busy mopping up her wrinkles with a kerchief that had to be Alderranian silk, *damn*.

"No, Miss Satsi. I have the Force, as my father had it before me, but I am not practiced as my brother was. I am no Jedi." The lines of her elderly face softened, and her expression went swimmy again. It was like Satsi had let something free in her. "But they are not dead. They never will be. We have hope."

"Sure, yeah, hope. That's a great reason."

"It's certainly better than not knowing of one."

Satsi's lips pressed into a line nearly as thin as her slitted glare.

Leia huffed, actually huffed, then shook her head. "Satsi...I want to thank you. Not merely for the aid of your...clan? But for your personal care. When you must lead, such as we do, it is simply never the time for grieving. It's not pragmatic. But perhaps I needed to hear these things. I always have been stubborn, and Luke was always insisting I lighten up some. Stupid farm boy."

Her tone grew sweet and fond. Satsi shrugged uncomfortably and stood up.

"Didn't do it for you. Didn't really mean to do it at all. I'm just here to tell you we'll have your ship patched up in another day and to shoot you in the head if you try anything stupid."

"Well, you have delivered your message. Surely you have somewhere else to be."

If that wasn't a dismissal when she heard one. Too bad.

"Nope. Still going to watch you. But I might get a caf first, patrol the wing, smack the ass of that hothead moron you've got piloting."

Leia actually chuckled. It was dry and used but she did it. Satsi rolled her eyes.

"Please don't give Mister Dameron any more reason to be impulsive."

"Lady, he's a guy. Them and their dicks are the definition of impulsive. Why do you think us sisters are the ones still alive to suffer?"

Apparently black humor isn't the general's thing. A stern frown creases her previously relaxing face, and all the walls and steel and stone are back up, just like that. She adjusted the panel of her robe and smoothed away nonexistent dust.

"You can go, Satsi."

"Not my boss, ya old hauler."

Satsi pivoted for the door, but stopped, a thought occurring. She said over her shoulder, "You and your baby sparky, uh, Jay? Kay? You'd best be careful out there, especially if your angle is to recruit and train new Users. There's this group out there, call themselves the Collective. They're dangerous, and they'll kill you, us, and any of your kind if they can. I'll get a data packet about them added to your drives for you."

Leia didn't look happy at all to hear about *another* threat to the glorified two-cred street gang she was calling a rebellion, but she took it in stride, nodding. Then, she turned back to the stars.

And Satsi, Satsi turned back to her own, stepping out of the room and nodding to the Arconan guardsman posted at it. He nodded back, and they both moved on.

Idly, as she made her way to the mess hall and composed a short message to her twin on her datapad, she wondered what the big deal was. Legendary Organa and the big bad rebels and the big scary First Order. The fate of the Galaxy. Yeah, right. As if you and the guy shanking you for your bread in an alley weren't already deciding that shit.

Oh well, thought the gangster, shoving away her memories and picturing happier, alive faces — tired smiles, rare laughs, long sighs. This was enough. She had enough to fight for here, and that was hard enough to do as is.

Satsi pictured her daughter, her smiling daughter, and maybe felt something that was maybe hope flare brightly in her chest, chasing away the impossibly heavy shadows.

It was enough.