

Learning to Ski Again

White. White almost as far as the eye could see, broken only by the odd shades of pale blue that rested in the shadows of the snow drifts, and the sharp dark gray of the rocky face of the nearby mountain. A steady but light snowfall drifted from the intermittently clear skies, speckling the view like shimmering motes of pale dust. *Frack it looks cold out there.*

“Are you actually going to go do anything?” Keira asked, taking a seat in the cushy armchair next to the sweated Zeltron.

“I’m good for now,” she replied, sipping at her mug of hot chocolate.

It had been *suggested* that they take a vacation. *Very firmly* suggested. Of late, Qyreia had a habit of causing drama behind closed doors with too many people. Atyiru and her were effectively on an unofficial restraining order. Things were a little too hot on Selen after a recent raid on a local drug ring. Xenna was becoming a *close friend* way too quickly. A *very* close friend. And as per usual, being able to talk about *any* of this in depth with *anyone* was just not happening, and that was driving the Zeltron insane. Being around Keira at home was starting to get awkward. Not for the Force user, though. Just for Qyreia.

So it was decided they’d go on vacation, whether the mercenary wanted to or not.

Of course, that also meant she didn’t get to decide the venue, which is how they ended up on some frozen backwater moon repurposed as a winter resort. *I hate the fracking cold.* That was why Qyreia had thus far spent their first day inside the lounge of their allotted lodge, staring out the window at the landscape, wearing the stupid-looking sweater that came with their reservation, drinking hot cocoa.

“And what about later?”

“That’s future-me’s problem.”

Keira sighed, reclining in her seat, seemingly bored with watching the snowfall outside. “What is your *current* problem?” They both look at each other, the Zeltron’s expression somewhat hurt. “I know you well enough to know if something is bothering you.”

The Zeltron sunk into her own seat, thumbs running nervously over her mug. “What’s going on with us?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean... pursuing other people.”

Keira's face sunk slightly. "Oh."

"I know it's supposed to be a 'we don't talk about it' thing, but... I need to talk about it with someone, and you're the only person I can think of to talk to about it."

They both watched an elderly human couple pass by and waited until they were back out of hearing range.

"I'm okay with that," the half-Umbaran said hesitantly. If the details got too on-the-nose, there was plenty of room to disengage.

Qyreia sipped at her drink, swallowing far harder than she needed to for the pittance ingested. "I uh... I did the thing." She felt dirty saying it, despite how very clear her mind had been at the time it happened. Seeing Keira bristle at even this level of detail made her stomach churn. "And I... I don't like how I feel about it."

Keira remained silent. Her expression bespoke anger at the sudden hypocrisy, at war with her learned instinct of compassion for the Zeltron.

"Like... *frack*, I..." She sniffed, not crying, but the Force user could tell she was fighting. "I don't know what's happened to me. This *isn't me*." Her gray-blue eyes hovered hesitantly Keira. "Is it?"

Her fiancée's expression was one torn between hurt and care, manifesting in a strange neutral middle ground. "That's something you have to decide for yourself."

"Karkin' hell, d'you think I would be asking if I didn't already try?!"

The sudden outburst drew some looks from the other patrons, and they were both reminded of where they were. Qyreia stood from her seat and briskly walked through the bay doors that opened before her, Keira following if a little reluctantly out onto the broad snow-covered deck. Keira was at least wearing her winter boots. Qyreia was in her slippers from their room in the ankle deep snow.

"I've *tried*, alright?"

The sudden outburst broke the wintry quietude, leaving the same in its wake, steeped in a sober undertone that made the barren white landscape seem all the more stark. In her shoulders were the telltale shudders of suppressed tears as she gripped the railing with pink-knuckled voracity. *Usually takes her a few drinks to get this wishy-washy.*

"I've *tried*," Qyreia continued, a tremble in her voice. "I... I don't want to do this anymore. This... *agreement* thing."

“Alright.” Keira wasn’t necessarily happy with the sudden change of heart. Not that she intended to dabble outside their relationship. The hypocrisy of the sudden shift though sat poorly with her.

“And...” Qyreia swallowed back a very aggressive lump in her throat. “I get it if you... n-need to even the sc-score... or s-something.”

The Zeltron was on the cusp of saying something else — likely something over-dramatic or something else that would draw a modicum of ire from the Force user. Instead, she heaved her face over the side of the railing and lurched a stream of half-digested hot cocoa into the pristine snow below. In an instant, Keira was by her side, grabbing the mug from her clenched fist and rubbing her shoulder, trying to calm her Red Qek.

“How many mimosas did you have with breakfast?” Keira joked. The amusement was lost on the red woman, teary-eyed and still shuddering, evidently not from the cold.

She spat out some chocolate-rich bile. “I haven’t had anything but water and juice and...” She pointed to the brown stain below. “...that.”

A small amount of surprise showed briefly in Keira’s eyes. “Oh.”

“J-just... lemme know when it’s done,” Qyreia muttered, leaning into Keira’s arms.

“Q... Frack. It’s done.” She tilted the Zeltron’s head toward her. “I’m not keeping score. If it’s done and over... well, then it’s over with.”

Qyreia pressed herself close to the pale woman, replete in her own ugly complimentary sweater. “You’re mad at me though.”

“Frustrated,” Keira conceded. She ran her hands through the Zeltron’s blue hair, longer now than when they’d met, glittering with little stars of snowflakes, damp where they melted under her hand. “I still love you, alright? That hasn’t changed.”

Despite her ever present self-doubt, the mercenary couldn’t help but feel a little guilty relief, even happiness, in her fiancée’s acquiescence. The uneasiness and distress had been building up ever since she’d come home from her *rendezvous*, then coming to this vacation. She’d worried so much, making herself sick over the ideas of the Force user walking off with someone to *get even*. And she would know. And she would have to sit there, not there, knowing what was happening, but having to let it happen because that’s what was due.

Now, with only a sentence from Keira, that worry was gone. The ruinous pain in her chest and gut still remained, the imagery still running on repeat in her head, but the worry itself was dissipated. It was a coldly reassuring feeling.

“I love you too,” she squeaked back, trying furiously not to cry, failing in fits and spurts. “I don’t deserve you.”

“You let me decide that.” Keira cradled the Zeltron’s head against her chest, rocking her gently. A light chuckle hummed in her throat as she thought about similar previous encounters like this.

“What?”

“Oh just... thinking.” She looked her Zeltron in the eyes. “Normally I’d expect something like this at the *end* of the vacation. The climax of some dramatic escapade.”

Qyreia sighed, tinged with a modicum of frustration of the apparent amusement at her pain. “Okay, you’re cut off from the holo-fiction sites for a while. This isn’t some story.”

“Alright, alright, fine.” She kissed Qyreia’s forehead. “So, how do you feel about starting over on this vacation thing?”

“I still hate the cold,” the merc grumbled.

“And yet you’re out here in the snow with only your slippers.”

“Yeah, about that... I can’t really feel my feet much anymore. We should probably go inside.”

Keira couldn’t help laughing then. Even the Zeltron managed a wry grin as she hobbled, with some assistance from her Force user fiancée, back inside. It took some time before they were warmed up enough to reasonably discuss partaking in the outdoor activities. By then, the sun was high in the sky, and the slopes of the predominant mountain in their patch of the resort moon was dotted with skiers, snowboarders, sledders, hikers, and mountaineers. With some goading and prodding, the half-breed was able to convince Qyreia to don her cold weather apparel and head outside.

She looked like a marshmallow with cherry filling. While not as thickly or egregiously dressed as some of the children of the families that flitted by on skis and boards, the Zeltron was still very much well-bundled. The sight was enough to make Keira once again burst out laughing.

“Frack you,” Qyreia grumbled. “I told you I don’t like the cold.”

“How did you ever survive with Leeadra — a *Pantoran* — as your apprentice?”

“Very carefully. And she can verify: me and cold don’t get along.”

“Well, once we get moving, you shouldn’t be too cold for long.”

“Right... How do I do that?”

When the opportunity for this vacation had come up, she had prepared; done research. While she didn't have any muscle memory to speak of, she knew all the principles of skiing and snowboarding and sledding. Qyreia, jerking in no particular direction as she tried to get herself to go forward, was a sad predicament to watch. Its pathetic nature didn't stop the Force user from laughing anew.

Qyreia growled angrily. “How the frack do you do this?!” Some parents skiing by with their children directed the little ones away upon hearing the profanity. *I should probably watch my mouth a little when kids are around.*

“Focus on keeping the skis straight.” Keira mimed it as best she could, a little awkward as she had chosen a snowboard. “Push off with your poles, knees bent just a little to lower your center of gravity.”

The Zeltron followed the instruction with some success, albeit at a frustratingly slow pace. By comparison, the Force user started off awkwardly, but adapted quickly, and was soon sliding over the well-tread snow of the mountain's base. Gradually, meter by gruelling meter, they made their way toward the bunny hill. Then came the embarrassing display of grabbing the cable that would take them to the top of the relatively small rise of snow. Keira was unsteady for a moment, but soon straightened out her board and ascended with only some minor jitters. Qyreia, but contrast, started out fairly well. She was even smiling for a moment, hitting the halfway mark and still going strong.

Then she hit a divot in the snow. Her skis crossed as she overcompensated.

All of a sudden she was face-down in the snow, skis and feet angled inward.

Too stubborn to accept defeat, she tried to right herself, only to fall again. Once more she attempted to recover. Once more she was eating packed snow. Eventually, she maintained a semblance of dignity solely through maintaining her tenacious hold on the cable, ignoring the onlookers' laughter as she was bodily dragged, face-down, the rest of the way to the top of the little hill.

Keira at least had the decency to help her up, despite the grimace of pity and amusement on her face. “Are you alright?”

“Fine,” Qyreia grumbled, brushing the snow off of her, the poles hung by her wrists flailing slightly with each movement.

“Haven't you ever done this before?”

“Once. When I was like... *eight*. It’s only been... over twenty years.” She was suddenly reminded about her recent birthday. “Frack, I forgot I’m thirty.”

“Old lady,” Keira teased.

“Shaddup.”

“Oooh, or what? You gonna tell me to get off your snow lawn?”

“Imma put this stick where the *sun don’t shine!*” the Zeltron barked back, walking awkwardly after the half-breed and shaking her ski pole angrily in the air. The antic nearly cost her another tumble, but she caught herself just in time.

Recognizing the growing frustration, and knowing there was likely still some leftover from earlier, Keira dropped the mockery and glided over to the merc. With a hand on her shoulder, the Force user gripped and directed Qyreia’s arms and legs into the proper positions.

“Keep your knees bent. Straight skis go fast; angle in slightly to slow down.” She nudged the skis with her free boot to show roughly how it should look. “Think ISD and Y-Wing: ISDs are triangular and slow, Y-Wings have the parallel nacelles and are fast. Well, faster than the ISDs.”

“I *get it*.” Qyreia shuffled in place, a little embarrassed at first, and even more so as she practiced the positions. “Y-Wing... ISD... Y-Wing... ISD...”

“There you go,” Keira said, almost too gently. “Ready to give this a shot?”

“At least it’s just a *little* hill.”

That gave the Force user a laugh. “Not too steep either.”

Rolling her eyes and shoulders — one for her frustration and the other to get limber in case she fell again — she pushed her way forward with her poles. For a moment, the mercenary hovered on the edge of the decline. Keira, feet locked into her board, slid by and started down the hill without a second thought. *She looks way too good at that for her first time*, the Zeltron thought, almost certain that she was using the Force to help her along.

“Karkin’ cheater,” she muttered as she leaned forward and started her way down.

But she didn’t fall. And they did it again, and Qyreia only almost-tripped on the cable ride up, but didn’t fall on the downslope. Then again, and no falling. Again. Again. Then she tried turning, and she accidentally spun around and fell, but even she laughed, if not harder than Keira was. Back up the hill to try again. This time she didn’t spin and fall, only teetering a little before righting herself, though not necessarily ending up where she wanted to. Another ride up and she was able to make a couple turns.

Then she could turn when she wanted, where she wanted. Keira was well and ready for the bigger slopes, but Qyreia told her to try it without her space magic and went back up the bunny hill.

“Are you ready yet?” Keira asked, proud of her confident Zeltron but very clearly bored.

“Ready for some *food*,” Qyreia replied. “I’m hungry.”

“How are you hungry? We only just started.”

“You mean other than the hyper metabolism and all the physical activity?” She threw a finger back toward the lodge. “Got a brown splotch in the snow to explain the rest.”

Keira wanted to object, but her raised finger only slouched in acquiescence. “Fair.”

The Zeltron patted her lover’s shoulder with a gloved hand. “I promise, after food, we’ll come back out and you can tackle all the big hills you like.”

“I can live with that.” As they started making their way back, Keira looked to the merc. “How’re you doing?”

“Oh, gonna be sore tomorrow. I can already tell.”

“And about the other thing?”

Qyreia grimaced. “I’m trying not to think about it. Like you said: it’s over and done.”