

A Rekindling Adventure

“Do you need help with your suit?” Keira called from the refresher just as she was finishing with her own, pulling the long strap that hung from the zipper over her shoulder to cinch it all the way up the back of her neck.

“No, I got it.”

The Force user stepped out into their bedroom — like most hotels, the dominant living space, though their private bungalow offered plenty more space and varied rooms — to see her fiancée fidgeting with her hair, a hairband dangling from between her teeth and the back of her wetsuit splayed open, revealing a sliver of her bare shoulders. With the backdrop of pale light through the sheer curtains of the bay window, the brief moment seemed almost picturesque. It was the sort of image that reminded Keira far too overtly how beautiful she thought her Red Qek was.

“I can’t believe your hair is long enough for a ponytail now,” she said, stepping up behind the Zeltron to zip her up too, noting more acutely the lack of swimsuit beneath the wetsuit. “I also can’t believe you’re not wearing something *underneath* this.”

“I’ve got a bottom on.” A red hand went to the hair tie, twisting it several times around the bunched handful gathered at the back of her head. One blue band still hung in her face, though it was hard to tell if it was a stylistic choice or accidental.

Keira liked it regardless. “Better hope that water’s not cold,” she teased, reaching around to the Zeltron’s front for a squeeze.

The effort was deftly swatted away. “Behave,” Qyreia chided playfully as she turned in place to look the half-Umbaran in the eyes. She offered a consolation kiss, at least. “This thing was enough of a schutta to put *on*. And our lessons are supposed to start soon.”

“I know.” Keira’s soft voice was a good distraction from her fingers as she finished zipping up the Zeltron.

Qyreia had ranted and raved about this whole idea of a Clan-funded vacation. She still didn’t trust Lucine since the whole stowaway-Strong incident, but things like this never seemed to come without some sort of hitch or catch. Ever. Hell, *Galeres* couldn’t have a social event without someone fracking someone else in a refresher, or starting a fight, or destroying something; and rumors about Qel Droma’s antics were worse. And there was a general invitation to check out ancient ruins on the island, where SIMASS was working. *Nothing* good could come of that. Something was up.

At least that’s what the mercenary was swearing up and down. Admittedly though, it was also a good opportunity for them both: a way to get out of the apartment, away from their hobbies and insular lifestyle. Even if they didn’t spend any social time with the others — which the Force user knew they invariably would despite Qyreia swearing to

the contrary — it was still an *experience*; something new for Keira to pursue and try firsthand. Even in their Naga Sadow days, with tropical Aeotheran at their fingertips, they never managed any sort of beach vacation. Though, that was also what was probably the height of the Zeltron's avoidance for showing skin.

Now she wore dresses and bikinis and bared her shoulders every so often. They could go out and enjoy themselves instead of the red woman looking over her shoulder every ten minutes because someone said something untoward. That also meant she had taken to using her "iron shin" a lot less on those same people.

Even as Keira liked it, part of Qyreia hated it. Not because change was inherently bad. It's that it caused so much unintentional drama with it. Before her brief hiatus from the Brotherhood, she was a one-woman show, completely monogamous, and suffered an almost inordinate amount of teasing for it that bordered on harassment. After her break, and so much exposure among her people, she had a sort of break in that teetotalling mindset. It led to a dalliance that, for its casual nature, had turned into something that was likely to break what she already had into pieces.

Weaning herself off of Xenna was a rough, even ongoing process. The human hadn't given up, even if Qyreia was steadily distancing herself.

But here she was, on vacation with her fiancée. Sun, sand, sweat, and sweet drinks awaited them.

And today, surfing was also on the menu. The beach was far enough away that they were sure to avoid the majority of Arconans, if not all of them. The Qel Dromans always had a habit of travelling in packs, and the Galerians didn't often go anywhere if they didn't have to. And between the loners sticking to their rooms or the bar, and the socialites pulling everyone into every single competition, game, or otherwise socially compromising situation they could, the odds were good that the couple would be on their own.

On their own or not, they were regretting wearing their wetsuits for the somewhat lengthy walk to the appointed beach. The day was sunny and hot on its own, and the garments were made as much for buoyancy as much as insulation.

There were pleasant moments though, walking under the shade of the trees that overhung the path, stealing the occasional kiss off one another's cheek. Never anything that would make them late. But they could enjoy each other's company, even if they were merely listening to their footfalls and the intermittent sounds of wildlife.

"Think this'll be a wash? I didn't check the wave levels today."

"I could always *make* some waves," Keira said deviously, wiggling her fingers in the same way the Zeltron did whenever they were talking about "space magic," as she liked to call it.

Qyreia's head tilted, listening, while a pleased smirk tugged at the corner of her lips. "I think we'll be okay."

Sure enough, as the wooded path opened up before them, with a flash of old stonework between the tree trunks and ferns, the couple found themselves on a broad expanse of fine white sand. It was still relatively early in the day, so there weren't many people occupying the steady stream of respectably sized waves. Interspersed along the back of the beach, outward the forest side, were several neatly constructed shacks that, for their size and purposes, seemed to share the finer construction of the resort's various other buildings. Some were food-and-drink bars, while the rest were there for activities out on the water.

Their target was fairly easy to spot: the one with all of the surf boards stacked up outside. And inside. *Frack, they're everywhere*, Qyreia mused as they approached, noting how the plethora of equipment still seemed to be neatly arrayed despite its prolific numbers.

They weren't even at the exterior window before they heard a voice addressing them.

"Are you the nine o'clock lessons?"

"Yes we... *are*."

Keira gave the Zeltron a strange look until she saw *why* her tone had shifted so much. The Selenian that had walked out of the employees' door was half a head taller than either of the women, wearing tropical swim trunks that didn't detract a single iota from his exceptionally lean yet muscular form. The dark striping that worked over him like some sort of elaborate tribal tattoo mixed well with the sun-tanned skin that, given his golden mop of hair, suggested he was one of the Selenians that was naturally much paler. A dash of scruff on his chin and upper lip completed the picture.

The Force user nudged the Zeltron out of the momentary lapse in conscious thought, bringing her back to reality. "What?"

This new face smiled, chuckling quietly. "Well then, I'm Sehf Nedrin, and I'll be your instructor today. Feel free to call me Sehf, if you're comfortable with that."

"A pleasure to meet you, Sehf," Keira said, appropriating some proper manners. "I'm Keira."

"So *you* must be Qyreia, the one who made the reservation."

"That's me!"

He appraised them both, looking them up and down, but in a way that was less discerning their visual appeal, and more their physical potential. "Well, you both look

pretty well kitted out. Suits fit alright? Sometimes they can bunch up funny if they're not at that sweet spot."

Qyreia looked at the pale woman next to her with a coy look of *I told you so*. "I'm good."

"Me too," Keira said, a little sigh in her voice from the Zeltron's already potent antics.

"Great." He approached the wall and stretched out his hand as if showcasing the wares. "Take your pick of board and we'll get started. They're all longboards suited for beginners, so it's really more about aesthetics."

"I *like* the aesthetics," the Zeltron mouthed quietly to Keira while their instructor stepped away to grab his own equipment.

The half-breed shook her head while she perused the boards. "You're impossible."

"Am I wrong though?"

Keira rolled her eyes but allowed herself the faintest of lip-bites. "Okay, no, but try to focus on the *surfing*?"

"If I can keep my eyes off you, maybe." Qyreia kissed her cheek, a neon green board in her arms. "That wetsuit looks good on your butt."

That earned her another eye-roll, but one accompanied by a smile and a slight flush in the Force user's face. Keira snatched up a white board slashed with red, the latter color choice collecting even more coy glances from the Zeltron even as their instructor reappeared, his chest covered by a rather minimal wetsuit shirt, and toting a large yellow board.

The same sort of yellow as Qyreia's suit. Keira noticed that. The Zeltron seemed to have resumed inwardly drooling.

"Alright, let's head toward the water," Sehf said, padding easily along toward the waterline.

Meanwhile, the women behind him spent several awkward moments repositioning their grips on the boards in an effort to avoid looking like complete idiots. Keira managed to mimic Sehf's form quickly enough. Qyreia, on the other hand, after nearly tripping over the board and narrowly avoiding falling forward, resigned herself to toting the thing over her head. They shared several secret wry expressions between them, jolting awkwardly back to the situation at hand only when the teacher stopped and spun around.

"Okay, when you get in," he said, backing slowly into the rolling water, "you should try to get about waist deep or so before getting on the board." He motioned them to

follow along. “And when you mount the board, use your hands and arms to each side to maintain balance and weight distribution while you *slide* on. Don’t try to just hop up.”

“Right...” *He makes it sound so easy*, Qyreia thought, thankful at least that she understood the words coming out of his mouth. She was still working out the weight distribution piece when she heard a smooth, subtle splash. When she looked back, she saw Keira already on her board and easing herself to a sitting position. *You utter mother fracker.*

Keira seemed to catch the gist of the Zeltron’s expression and shot a quick and sneaky raspberry while Sehlf wasn’t looking.

“Do you want any he-?”

“I got it,” Qyreia nearly growled. Her arms wobbled slightly and the board dipped toward her in the water, but she managed to throw a leg over and slide her body onto it. She shot a return raspberry at the pale woman while Sehlf mounted his own board, not even sliding on as they did, but sitting straight up, facing the back of the board toward them.

“Okay. Now I want both of you to just lean to one side and fall off the board into the water.” Both women appeared a little confused by this. “Practice makes perfect, and you don’t want to have to figure this out when the water is moving a lot more.”

There was some light internal grumbling, but they did as they were told: first Qyreia, then Keira. The warm, clear water enveloped them comfortably, and it seemed almost a shame when they came back to the surface. Not that it was especially easy to stay underwater. Once their downward motion had stopped, the wetsuits’ inherent buoyancy brought them back up almost as quickly as their own sweeping hand motions through the water.

“Good. Now, re-mount your boards, but this time do it without pushing off the sand. Like you’re swimming alongside the board.”

Qyreia bubbled the water, quietly growling at this repetition. Keira chuckled quietly to herself over it, only to see how the instructor seemed to take his own quiet amusement from the frustration. So she did as they were told, nearly flawlessly executing the maneuver. That turned his attention away from the Zeltron and over to her. All part of the plan. Qyreia was *hers* after all.

What she didn’t account for was the mercenary’s competitiveness. Such a display only made her get serious, repeating the mounting procedure much better than the previous iteration, her grin as smug as ever despite her balance still being a bit on the wobbly side.

“Okay,” Sehlf said. “Again.”

And again.

And again.

And motherfracking *again*.

Neither of them had worn watches, but it very much seemed like this guy was burning up their lesson time with just getting on and off the board. Off and on, off and on. Facing out into the ocean, with the waves rolling as they were, the pair hardly noticed that they were gradually getting further and further away from shore, until they were surrounded by oddly calm waters.

“Alright ladies, good work. We’re at the barrier shoals, as you can see.” He motioned out to the band of dark coral and rocks that served to break the larger waves before reaching the shoreline, leaving only smaller rolling ones to carry on to the sand. “So now we’re going to paddle out to the waves. Fortunately they’re not big today, so you’ll get all the fun of surfing without any of the danger.”

Qyreia breathed a sigh of relief that only seemed to make Keira chuckle more.

“Using the same balancing principles as when you’re getting *onto* the board, you’re going to push up with your arms,” he said, demonstrating as he spoke, “and stand up on your feet.”

“A lot of the videos show people kneeling or crouching on their boards though?” Keira asked.

“Yes. The lower your center of gravity, the easier it is to maintain balance. But,” he cautioned as she crouched low to grab the edges of his board, “a lot of people get too used to that and then have a hard time trying to maneuver the board, or get so nervous that they just rock themselves off.”

So with the roll of larger swells under them, it was back to the mindless repetition. The Force user, definitively the faster learner of the two, was at least able to reach the crouch with relative ease. A little touch of *space magic* didn’t hurt in the balance department when she took to standing fully upright. She wasn’t sure what made Qyreia fume and flush more: that Keira was making it look so easy, or that their instructor so readily praised her for it. The angry muttering made it all the funnier.

“Stupid Keira, I can do this too, just you watch...”

But yet again, as she tried to stand, the board shook viciously under her hands and her feet.

Sehf paddled over alongside her. “Would you like some help?”

Qyreia’s face burned, not helped by the sun that was now so pointedly blazing overhead. “Sure. Fine.”

“Alright, just sit down,” the Selenian instructed calmly. No sooner had he brought her butt back down than he, in a flawless motion, swung his leg up and over her board so that he was suddenly sitting behind her. “Now, let’s get you standing, shall we?”

“How did you...?”

“Just lots and lots of practice,” he said, smiling far too pleasantly for someone in his position. “Now, let’s try this again.”

Again, he says. She rolled her eyes and started to ease herself back up onto the balls of her feet. That was when the board started to wobble. Only now it was... less.

“Huh.”

“My weight on the board is helping to keep it steady. It’s a good learning aid.”

“Yeah.” That was when she also noticed his hands on her waist, thumbs stretched out on her lower back. *Oh hi.* “So now...”

“Try to stand.” His hands slid across the bottom of her ribs and to her arms, then down to her hands. “Remember that these are just here as a launching platform. As you stand higher, the balance should transfer to your feet, legs, and hips.”

Qyreia was full on lip-biting now, her face ruddy in full view of Keira, who watched in mild disdain. She focused her thoughts on the Zeltron, reaching out through the Force and their familiarity of years. *“Remember what I said about focusing on the surfing?”*

“I’m just having some fun.”

“That’s good to hear,” Sehf said.

Qyreia paused. *Frack. I said that aloud.* Her eyes narrowed on Keira’s smug expression. Burning with fresh determination, she shakily stood, still hunched over, but finally releasing her hands from the board’s edge. “Haha! I did it!”

“Good job!” Sehf looked down at her ankle and rolled his eyes. “If you’ll sit back down, we can put your leash on.”

“My *what?!?*”

Qyreia’s face burned hotter, and her balance shook afresh, nearly toppling her over into the water, only to be caught by the Selenian and eased back down to the board again with their bodies pressed against each other. Her chest was all aflutter when she realized his arms were wrapped around her. For safety reasons, of course.

“Are you alright?”

“I am now.”

“What’s this about leashes?” Keira said sternly, breaking up the enamored hold.

Sehf’s eyes went to the pale woman and her ankles. “Ah, you as well.” His hand dove into the water toward the back of Qyreia’s board and fished out a long band with a strap at one end, while the other connected to the back of the board. “*This* is called a leash. It keeps you attached to the board so you don’t lose it if you fall off.”

“Ohhh.”

“Would you like some help since I’m already here?”

Qyreia’s gaze went to Keira, who was busy mockingly mimicking their instructor’s words while she sat and attached her own leash, pulling a chuckle from the Zeltron. *Wow, she is frackin’ jealous.* But the offer was there, and trying to attach on her own might be awkward with him sitting there.

“I can do it,” she said, much calmer now and less competitive.

That caught Keira’s attention. While Sehf took to his board again, they exchanged a pleasant look that conveyed more than all the sass that had transpired in the last half hour.

Once they were locked in, and standing balance was mutually achieved, they were tasked with paddling out and getting a feel for the waves while still laying on the board. Then crouching, even standing as they grew more and more comfortable with it. For every aspect that seemed to drag on and on from the instructor, it built subtly and swiftly into the actual thing they’d come here to do. While Keira was quick to learn, the Zeltron was persistent, constantly paddling out ahead into the waves. She fell off — they both did — but got back up and out.

And they were surfing.

To the Zeltron, it was almost like flying, strafing left or right as she adjusted her balance while she cruised along the admittedly short wave crests. Before long, they were plying the waves together. At times Sehf would come up alongside and offer guidance on the spot, or wait until after they’d rolled off the wave or, at times, the board itself. But they were surfing: a new experience for the ever-hungering Keira, and a new freedom for Qyreia. Only their grumbling stomachs could tear them away from the surf, though the high angle of the sun showed how long they had been at it.

“The boards are yours all day,” Sehf said as they walked toward the shack from the waterline. “If you want to hold a reservation on them, just let the front desk know, or call us direct.”

“Thank you, Sehf,” Keira said. Judging by Qyreia’s elation that permeated the air, they would definitely be coming back. “I get the feeling we’ll be taking you up on that offer.”

The Zeltron's nodding was confirmation enough.

"Alright. I'll just keep these two reserved then." He offered a polite nod to the red woman. "Miss Qyreia, you did excellent today."

Before she could demure and flirt, Keira grabbed her arm and started dragging her away, saying something about food. "Bye Seh! Thanks again! We'll see you later!"

Keira's pace was swift as she dragged the Zeltron back onto the sandy path to the main lodging area. Just as on their way to the beach, the trees and ground-level foliage enveloped them to either side. Only after they'd passed the old stonework again did the half-breed slow down.

"Hahh," Qyreia sighed, almost panted as she caught her breath. "What was all that about-*mph*!?"

The kiss was sudden. Needy. Keira's hands held the Zeltron's face in place and pulling her in, pressing the embrace deep between the red woman's lips. Once the initial shock wore off, Qyreia wrapped her arms around the Force user, holding her tight in the impromptu embrace. It was a good while before they separated, prompted as much by their own waning intensity as the sounds of people making their way down the path. Once the Selenian couple passed and disappeared from sight, they both breathed an amused sigh of relief.

"You," Keira said firmly as she pulled the Zeltron tightly against her, nose to nose, "are *mine*."

"Is that what this is about?" Qyreia breathed, still mentally absorbed in the woman.

"I admitted he was hot, and I am okay with all the flirting. But *you*," she kissed her again, hard but brief, "you are mine."

Qyreia bit her lip, feeling a tingle of a fire she hadn't felt for quite a while as she looked into Keira's eyes. "Okay."