

The bellows hissed, and the flames of the forge flared, bright yellow, blinding to the eye in the dark of Iridonia's night. The structure was sandstone, crude-seeming, but perfected by millennia of tribal smiths; warmth washed from it in waves, baking the sand around it like the brightest afternoon sun. The metal being turned within heated rapidly, shedding dross in a flurry with blazing flakes.

Sera watched it all with wide eyes, standing as close behind the smith as she could without scorching herself. She wasn't protected, like he was, by layers of hide and rubber. Nor was it generally wise to let any nine year old near an empty forge, anyways; especially not one with her record. But, all of that was fine; Koren would watch out for her. He always had. He always did.

After a few seconds, once the bar had reached an even, blazing-cherry coloration, Koren withdrew it, placed it over the small black bulk of the anvil, and began hammering away. He used a small, hand-held hydraulic hammer, a tool of his own design. It was a mix of new and old technology, easily carried along with the tribe. Koren had made many like it. Things to help their tribe hunt, travel, survive. He'd repaired a Skyhopper for their use, bolstered their supply of weaponry, augmented their stores of preserved food. The elders spoke of him becoming chief, one day.

Sera knew that he didn't want that, though. No; Koren only wanted to fly. Dross flew from the glowing wedge in a storm of fiery flakes, hissing as they burned into the sand. Without even being told, Sera stepped backwards, away from the new hazard; but she never looked away from the work.

"What are you doing?" Her voice was small, but curious, and glowing with excitement. Watching her brother work was one of her greatest joys, closely matched by watching him fly...and only topped by doing her own hunting and fighting, of course.

"Well...you already saw me fold the bar. Now, I'm straightening it, putting a point on, and starting the bevel...see, here..." Light taps with the autohammer on the bar's edge tamped the metal down tighter; already, Sera could see where the grinder would go along the tapered border, honing it down to an unbelievably sharp edge. "...now: can you tell me what it's made out of?" The older zabrak looked down at his sister with a quirked grin, met immediately by a roll of her bright blue eyes.

"Metal?" She refused to give in to her brother's dorkass games. He'd long since despaired of throwing books her way, but he still tried his best with the trivia. So, she did her best to vex him in turn, in whatever toying way she could.

Of course, she remembered almost all of the trivia. Worked hard to memorize it. But she didn't need to tell him that.

"Right on the mark, little *Katka*," he joked, mussing a hand affectionately through her short shock of red-brown hair, an action greeted by flailing retaliation, "But, it's better than that. Here in the tribes, we need to forge quickly; just as we need to move quickly. So, we use a special alloy, of rhodium and alum; nothing heats, folds, bonds, cools, and tempers quicker - all of it can be done in a day- and very little can claim to be stronger or keep a sharper edge." From here, his expression grew more serious. "It isn't perfect, though. The bonds that the two metals make during folding are so tight, they become inseparable after tempering; you can't reforge the bar, or do anything to remake the weapon if it breaks. You only get one chance. After that, the bond is too strong for its own good. It can't let go; it won't let itself." Slowly, he raised the hammer once more into the air, and brought it down...

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...and the metal bent in its wake, curving smoothly around the bend of her saber's hilt. Dozens and dozens of pieces of metal and wood floated in the air, the disassembled component's of Sera's saber hovering silently. The Zabrak had been at work for hours, repairing the damage that had been done to her weapon on Arx. One would think that wildlife wouldn't be able to manage much against a lightsaber, but between the Roggwart's flames, the grime of the marsh that she and Ruka had fought the Sand Panther through, and the little stint of cave diving that she had done with Alaisy...

Suffice it to say, the weapon was a little battered, and very, very waterlogged. It had hardly been working upon her return to Selen. So, getting it back into working order was her first priority. She knew the perfect spot as well; a secluded grove, deep within the forests outside of Estle City. At the height of spring, the woods were practically singing with new life, a song that reverberated through the Force. Sera could feel it keenly. She wasn't a crafter, really. Not at all like Ziggy, or Qyreia, or even her own master.

"In theory the construction is simple, yes. A handle, a crystal, a focus. But no, a lightsaber is not like 'any old sword thingie.' Feel it. Feel the Force in it. Andt forget what you know..."

Tali's voice echoed in Sera's mind, almost as if her master was sitting right behind her. The Zabrak smiled at the memory, pulling at the emotions that flowed through it, harnessing them. The image in her mind sharpened, and the spare bits of metal flitting through the air around her shifted, bending to match it. It was the same zabraki alloy that Koren had used to forge her dagger. Strong, its bonds unbreakable. As one, the pieces began to move together, forming up around a single, glowing gem, washing her face over with the golden glow...

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...of thousands of sparks, dancing away from the sanding belt as it was pressed against the now-gleaming blade. Not much time had passed since shape had been hammered out, but already the weapon was mostly done; now, Koren was simply putting in the edge. It was difficult, to grind a cutting-taper into the hard zabraki alloy, especially when it had been folded. But, this

forgemaster, as young as he was, knew exactly what he was doing. At just the right speed and angle, the ultra-fine grinder -the only tool in the tribe's forging ensemble that had to be imported from the cities- gave every weapon a cutting edge and needle point that matched the slicing power of any vibroblade. They could even clash against mando-iron and cortosis, without chipping or dulling...although the ability to withstand the heat of a lightsaber was beyond their capability.

Stepping back from the grinder, Koren examined the blade closely, wiping over the fuller with his gauntleted hand. Then, sighing in satisfaction, he plunged it back into the forge, to heat it to fully even glow. Pulling his gauntlets off, followed by his heavy mask, he turned back to his sister with a grin. Soot, metal dust, and sweat had built up around his goggles into a dark-black black mask, covering his face like ridiculous war paint.

"How do I look?"

"Like a bantha's asshole," Sera responded with a keen, bright grin. Then, she feigned confusion, one hand rising to her scratch at her chin in the same, slow manner of their grandmother. "They *might* make your marks look a little better...actually, no. Nope. Sorry. Still look like bantha butt. Maybe if you put the mask back on?"

Koren chuckled, wiping some of the soot from his face with the back of his glove. Sera could only grin back, her pointed teeth shining in the dark of the Iridonian night. Stepping back, the older zabrak fell heavily into the sand, sitting crosslegged as he pulled the beginnings of the dagger's handle from his pocket. He'd already turned the wood into a general shape on the lathe. Now, he began to etch it, preparing it for the heat-treated blade.

"Just **how** did I end up with such a little shit of a sister. Who taught you that kind of language? Oh...wait." Grinning, Koren cut gouges into the handle, grooves to catch upon her hand; it was already fitted to her grip, with room to grow as the years passed. Straight, with a deep indent, it fit perfectly into her fingers, as if...

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...the metal had been molded there, perfectly formed, without groove, hinge, or joint. The saber was still a skeleton, of course; the central components, beginning to whirl to life, and the crystal, glowing warmly in the center. She hadn't replaced the wood panelling yet, or replaced the grip. For now, it was enough to study the framework. The glow of the crystal. The curved hook of the hilt, designed to match her favorite one-handed grip.

It was a good weapon. Well made. Tali had taught her well; in some things, Sera was a good learner. But she still wasn't sure if she deserved it.

Karran, burned and bleeding on the Nesolat. The dead and dying in her arms, tortured by monsters on Atolli. Ziggy, shaking with hurt and pain and sorrow, devastated by what had been

done to her. What she had been made to do. Ruka, his life hanging by a thread, *glad* that he was going to die, rather than her.

How could she be worthy?

"I do not doubt your strength, little huntress. Show me. Show me what you can do. Show me that you already deserve it."

Karran, on Illum. She had fought him to claim her crystal. Beaten him, too...saber or not. And he had cheered her on. Pushed her forward. Congratulated her...for never doubting. Even with him gone, disappeared from her life, she smiled at the words. They would be useful, for when she found him again.

Slowly, the remainder of the metal and wood components flitted into place, fastening without need of screws or a sautering iron. As she reached out and took it, the shape was totally natural, matched flawlessly to her hand. A good weapon. A great weapon. Yet, still...not quite perfect. There was one aspect missing.

At her feet, a coil of good, thick leather began to unspool, floating up to the hilt...

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...and wrapping around, in a smooth, circular rhythm. Once wrapped around the handle, Koren began to tap it in, heating the leather to mold it into the grooves and ridges of the hilt until it was smooth, dark, and glossy. Smiling as he worked, Koren's eyes flitted up, meeting Sera's curious gaze. "The grip might really be the most important part; though it might not seem that way. Y'know...what else are you going to hold it with? Without it, the blade is useless... or even more dangerous. The grip makes it *yours*, and yours alone. So...take care of it, alright?"

With a last tap of the hammer, the grip was finally pressed in...and the dagger was completed. Sera hardly even noticed, she was so focused; only when Koren actually handed her the blade did it all set in. Smiling broadly, and releasing a small squeal of glee, the younger Zabrak reached to take the weapon...but her brother pulled it away at the last second, wagging it at her with a warm smile.

"One last thing, *Katka*. You remember everything, right?" With one finger, he tapped on each part of the weapon. "The metal; the bond makes it strong, but can break it can break itself easily. The blade; sharper, only because it was beat upon, ground down, and tempered. And, the grip; to keep it all in check." Sliding his hand over to the handle, he took it in his grip...and leveled the point at one of Sera's hearts.

"This is the last one. This thing; it's just a dagger, really. Just a tool. The only thing that makes it dangerous, that makes it deadly...is you." Turning the blade into her hand, with the pointed now pressed against *his* heart, Koren gave her a smile, folding her fingers around the grip.

"Now...you're a little shit. But you're a *good* little shit. Better than me. With this dagger, I would do things that you wouldn't...for my family, for my tribe. But you...you need to follow your own hearts. And just as they tell you not to stab the shit out of me right now, you should **never** use it against someone else, when they're telling you not to. The dagger is a tool; you're the one that makes it good or bad. Light or dark."

Smiling, he pulled back from her, leaving the dagger in her wide-eyed grip. She couldn't find the words; thankfully, she didn't need to. Standing, he bent to tousle her hair, the smile never leaving his features.

"Promise me. When the time comes, let your hearts guide your way."

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Sera knotted her saber's leather grip at the end, tapping it into the saber's butte and packing the belt-ring on over it. The grip was re-done, the circuitry dried and tested, every piece put perfectly in its place. Slowly, she slid her hand down to the activation button, and gently depressed it.

The golden blade burst to life before her, burning with vibrant life. Sera could hear them in its hum. Every voice. Every word.

Life -light- is all around us. Everywhere you look. Trust yourself. Trust your senses. And you will find it.

Sera raised her saber, and stepped nimbly to her feet, eyes shut tight.

There are no problems; only solutions. Remember that, Serry?

One foot slid forward, pushing soil and grass as she found her balance. She brought her saber around, in fluid, beautiful motion. Kata after kata, one movement flowing into the other. As she danced along, her dagger flew into her free hand, silvery blade flashing in the light of her saber's glow.

Karran in her arms. His head on her shoulder. Their palms clasped together. A promise, hanging in silence.

Diy, emerald hair splaying over warm, steaming water. A question in her gaze. A question that Sera could finally answer.

Eilen under the moonlight, the surf rushing around her. Smiling. Taking a step towards her. And a step towards accepting herself.

Her head on Ziggy's shoulder, the vibrant expanse of the arbory on Ol'val spread before them. Words, echoing, healing.

Ruka in a hospital bed, lavender eyes pained...but, for once, without fear. Without worry. Without questioning whether he had been good enough.

Koren, his soft, small smile like the sun, washed in the glow of his forge.

Start...with yourself. It's all you need to be.

You don't need to be anyone, or anything else...but you.

It's okay to not be okay.

You're enough, Serami.

Our blood and ink. Our Honor.

Together.

Sera came to rest with a sigh...and a smile. Slowly, she straightened up, rolling her shoulders as she extinguished her saber, and let the forest's false twilight fall over her again, darkness and shadow shrouding her frame. But she didn't worry.

Doubt was an evil thing. Fed by grief and fear and shame, it grew around her, within her, just as it did with everyone that she knew and trusted and loved. It could be a frightfully tenacious creature.

But, Sera was even more so. Her doubt didn't stand a chance...especially when she had her friends, her family, her memory, to guide her. The darkness was strong. But as long as she had them, the light would always burn within her.

And her hearts would always guide her way.