A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away…

**At the scene of Mason and Talia Conrat’s death.**

Elaine Conrat, their eight year-old daughter, was sitting on the floor, with puddles from her own tears on the ground, staring at the lifeless bodies of her parents as a squad of stormtroopers rush into the house with their commanding officer not far behind them.

The commander briefly looked at the scene. “Bring this child as well,” he commanded. A pair of stormtroopers immediately grabbed the girl by her arms and pulled her to her feet as she began screaming and wailing.

“Let me go! I want my parents! Let go of me!” she cried and began to sob as the stormtroopers walked her out of the building, following their commanding officer. The rest of the stormtroopers stayed behind to clean up the scene inside the house.

Once they were outside, Elaine saw her unconscious brother being dragged away by two other stormtroopers. “Ellac! ELLAC! Ellac, wake up!” she cried out once more.

“Silence her!” the officer exclaimed as the troopers handling the girl injected her with an anesthetic.

Six hours have passed since she was taken from her home. “Mmgh…” Elaine let out a groan as she awoke with puffy, red eyes. She was in an interrogation room yet she was alone. She knew the only Imperial facility nearby was only a few blocks away from her house.

She glanced around the room to try and figure out her surroundings. After remembering what had happened, she immediately became filled with concern and questions. “Where’s Ellac? Where’s my brother?! Where are my parents?!” she cried, hoping it was all a bad dream.

After a brief moment of silence, a voice came through the speaker. “He woke up then killed all the guards assigned to him and ran. He abandoned you,” the voice said but she couldn’t believe it to be true.“He wouldn’t. He cares about me. He’s my brother!” she said in denial.

“Just tell us what happened before we found you, and you can go too.” The voice replied.

She struggled to recall what exactly happened but it was foggy in her head. “M-My Fa…Father… He hit my mother… I was looking at her as she fell… an-and then father was on the floor too…? I don’t remember!” She struggled to get the sentence out before tears began to flow rapidly down her cheeks.

“You don’t remember? Think harder. How did they die?” the voice said. “How did you get that mark on your face?” Elaine touched her face with her hand and caused the deep bruise on her cheek to ache. “I-I don’t remember… I-I can’t…” She couldn’t finish the sentence.

“Did they hit you and you got angry? Did you kill them?” the voice accused her.

“W-What? No! I would never kill anyone!” She exclaimed. “Not even if they harmed you?” the voice asked. Elaine pondered the question for a moment before responding. “No… No! I wouldn’t!”she said. “Very well. We’ll see if you’re more cooperative after a little time in the chair.”

She turned when she heard the door to the room open. Walking through the door was a single stormtrooper coming to transfer her to the torture room. When the trooper got close enough, she kicked his kneecap as hard as she could and made it buckle backwards then she proceeded to sprint through the open door. “Aagh!!” the trooper screamed. “Sound the alarm, she’s getting away!”

Desperately trying to find an exit, she ran down one of the two hallways she saw to see another pair of stormtroopers. “Stop!” they said as they began to chase her. Elaine immediately turned around and ran down the opposite hallway to run into three more troopers who were pursuing her. Now cornered with stormtroopers behind and to the sides of her, she noticed the ventilation shaft above her.

She climbed on a small window sill then the bars covering the window and jumped off, grabbing the ventilation shaft ledge. She wasn’t very strong, however all the acrobatics Elaine did for fun came in handy as she just barely managed to pull herself up before the troops could grab her.

Crawling through the shafts, she looked for any way out she could find. Turn after turn, it felt like she was going nowhere until she saw a bit of light above her head and heard the pleasant sound of birds chirping as they flew above the compound.

She had an idea that she knew had a low probability of succeeding. She couldn’t just walk up the wall since there was a thin blade spinning at the top, so she began to unlace one of the boots she had been wearing and threw it as high as she could. The first try missed and the boot fell back down. She caught the boot and tried again. Luckily, the second try was able to get caught in blade and jam it.

Elaine took a deep breath and pressed her back to the wall and put her feet of the opposite side.

“That’s cold!” she gasped as her single barefoot touched the chilled metal. She began climbing until she reached the top and climbed out.

Now on the roof of the building, she carefully looked over the edge to see how high up she was. She checked every side of the building as she watched the stormtroopers run frantically along the ground, trying to find her. Checking the last side, she saw a small lake not far from the base of the building.

She began to breathe heavily as she heard the stormtroopers shooting up grappling cables to climb up. The thought occurred to her that she could jump, there was just one problem… She didn’t know how to swim. She didn’t want to jump but she knew she had to. *I could die if I jump… but who knows what they’ll do to me here!* she thought, taking a few steps backwards to get a running start.

She started to cry again from the fear of jumping. She turned around to see a stormtrooper climb over the edge of the roof. She didn’t think as she began running and jumped off the roof of the building, towards the lake.

Elaine closed her eyes really tight and took a big, deep breath just before she crashed into the water, causing a huge splash. As she rapidly sank through the water, she hit a sharp rock that cut a deep gash into the top, outer side of her right arm. Feeling the searing pain, she screamed. Instead of making a sound, she let out a lot of air as she flailed around in the water, trying to reach the surface.

Struggling to reach the surface while the air in her body decreased, she was almost to the top when she began to blackout. Just before she passed out, she saw a silhouette of a beast swimming towards her.

About an hour later, Elaine woke up in a forest as she coughed up the remaining water that was lingering in her lungs. She slowly pushed herself up, wincing from the deep wound on her arm. She looked around and set her back against a tree. *Where am I and how did I get here?* she thought. *The last thing I remember was drowning. How did I survive?*

She jolted from her thoughts when she heard a tree branch snap on the ground. She began frantically searching all around her, looking for whatever made the sound. After a moment of silence, she leaned her head back against the tree and closed her eyes as she held her injured arm.

*I want to go home.* She frowned teared up at the thought of going home. *That’s right… there’s nothing there to return to…* She began to cry and sniffle.

She became alarmed when a limp object was placed on her leg. She shot her head up and opened her eyes to see a young cat-like beast. She immediately backed away from the creature and began to breathe heavily. The nexu slowly walked closer to Elaine as she held her arms in front of her face in defense.

Instead of being aggressive, the nexu began to clean the wound on her arm. She flinched as the feline made contact with her skin, she grimaced from the pain. “Y-You don’t want to eat me?” the girl said, frightened. The nexu let out a soft, passive, quiet growl in response to her question.

“Ok, I’ll take that as a no then,” she said as she exhaled in relief. She noticed some scars and fresh cuts on the creature.“…You’re like me. Are you alone now too…?” she asked, knowing she wouldn’t get a response.

Elaine began to cry thinking about how her brother abandoned her, leaving her with no one. The nexu snuggled its side up beside her as she sobbed, eventually falling asleep.

**The Next Morning.**

Waking up, she felt the warmth of the side of the beast as the girl let out a big yawn.

Elaine watched as the beast’s body rose and fell from its slow, rhythmic breathing.

She noticed several scars and a few relatively fresh cuts on its body where the fur could no longer grow due to the damage.

*How did it get these injuries?* she thought. Almost on cue, the feline awoke with a big yawn and a small whine. Elaine got a little nervous, not knowing if the attitude of the beast had changed.

*Please don’t eat me. Please don’t eat me. Please don’t eat me,* she pleaded in her head.

Before either of them had time to try to understand each other, Elaine’s stomach growled surprisingly loud. The nexu looked at the girl then stood up and started walking off.

When it noticed she was not following, it stopped and looked at her once more for a moment, then began to walk again.

*I think it wants me to follow it? But what if it’s a trap? What if it’s just leading me to more of them so it can just kill me and eat my corpse? How do I know I can trust it?* She began to question the beast and herself. *Ya know what? Whatever. I’ll just follow it carefully.* She stood up and began following the beast.

About fifteen minutes later, they arrived at the edge of town. Crouching down, she could smell the smoky fragrance of meat that a man at one of the local stalls was cooking. Her stomach growled again, the nexu taking notice. The beast started creeping behind the man, taking a large piece of meat while he wasn’t looking. The feline brought the piece meat back to the girl and dropped it on her lap.

“You can’t just take this! It’s stealing!” she said in a loud whisper. The nexu tilted its head in confusion.

The girl’s stomach growled yet again, but this time it had a hint of pain in it. “Ugggghhhhh fiiiinnnee. I don’t see another option of me getting food, seeing as I don’t have money.” She picked up the meat and took a big bite when she noticed the nexu beginning to drool a little while it watched her eat the meat.

Elaine quickly ate half of it then set the other half on the ground for the nexu. “You can have half of it. After all, I wouldn’t even have it if it weren’t for you. Thank you,” she said. The nexu ate the meat with little hesitation, letting out a purr of satisfaction afterwards.

Elaine, having a large sense of curiosity, examined the creature. She took note of its fur, teeth, and four eyes, among other features such as its gender. “Huh, so you’re a male?” She tilted her head, the creature mirroring her movements.

She noticed the injuries on the creature once more. She reached her hand out to examine them closer. The nexu growled and took a defensive stance. She immediately withdrew her hand. “It’s ok! It’s ok! No need for that. Ok so you’re not a fan of touching. Noted. I’m not either, my dad hit me a lot… before he.. before he…” she began to cry when the sight of her parents, cold on the floor came rushing back to her mind.

The nexu almost immediately relaxed and got closer to the girl. Elaine wiped her tears. “I’m sorry…” she sniffled, wiping her nose with her hand. “I know how it feels to be beaten,” she said, realizing the injuries on the nexu came from trappers and blackmarket sellers.

“We’re both alone… I would like it if you stayed with me though… you don’t have to…” she said, knowing the beast would probably just disappear one day. As if responding to the girl, the nexu licked the girl’s face. The nexu started walking back into the forest and Elaine immediately followed it this time.

Half an hour later, they arrived at a small, shallow cave with matted down grass in it, almost like it was a nest for something. The nexu walked into the cave and laid on the bed of grass. “This is your home? Can I stay here too? I don’t have a home anymore… nobody to return to…” she said. The nexu let out a soft puff of air as it fell asleep. Elaine decided to lay in the cave with it, only against the wall, not touching the beast.

**Eleven Years Later**

“Come on, Cal!” Elaine called her feline companion, dodging blaster bolts while running to the hunk of metal that she called a ship. Had it really been eleven years since they met in the woods that day? What had they been up to? How did they end up in this situation?

Elaine was nineteen now, and her nexu… well let’s just say she doesn’t know how old he is, but if she had to guess, she’d say he was around fourteen years old.

Over time, Elaine had forgotten the details of her parents’ death. She knew they died, but not how.

She had been on the hunt for her brother, Ellac, since the incident but has had zero luck without transportation.

Elaine had picked up gambling— sabaac, the long lost game of pazaak, and pod racing - in the last few months, trying to gain credits so she could buy a ship. As time passed, she had drawn the attention of a few powerful crime lords in particular. The Hutts.

She joined the Hutts about a year ago, soon becoming a bounty hunter afterwards. However she only brought the bounties in alive. She had felt some sort of draw to… well she didn’t know what. She had noticed she’s a little different than everyone else, she just didn’t know why.

Elaine’s unwillingness to kill didn’t go over too well with the Hutts when they gave her an order for an assassination. True to her ethics, she refused. They did not react kindly to the defiance from Elaine. She tried to leave, but they refused to let her. Elaine, refusing to stay, turned and started walking out of the door when the Hutts tasked the remaining bounty hunters and guards to kill her before she could take off.

Elaine knew something like this would happen if she defied them but she did it anyway. The hunters and guards chased her out of the building, shooting blaster bolts at her.

“Come on, Cal!” she called her feline companion, dodging blaster bolts while running to the hunk of metal she called a ship. “Don’t let her take off!” A guard shouted to the others as they took aim with any explosives they had at her ship.

“No no no no NO! Calle, they’re gonna blow our ship!” she said. Just before she reached her spacecraft, it exploded. “Ah, womp rats!” Elaine yelled angrily. As the guards took aim at her, she looked around for an escape route.

Seeing a steep, jagged path of stones, Elaine and her nexu began and stumble down with great haste. Her pursers tried to follow, however the ones that climbed down, slipped and fell onto the sharp points of rock below them. Elaine had also slipped a few times, but managed to catch herself, suffering a few cuts and scrapes on her body.

After a few moments, the hunters and guards lost sight of their target and returned inside the palace.

Now on stable, solid ground, Elaine and Calle hastily made their way to the nearest town. Once they arrived, she was able to afford a Sheathipede-class transport shuttle so she proceeded to purchase it.

Elaine and Calle boarded the aircraft. “Well this is a piece of junk,” she looked at Calle,“but I guess it’ll have to do for now until we can scrape together enough credits for that Kom’rk-class fighter we saw.” She sighed and sat down in the pilots seat.

She opened the holomap. “I was thinking Seraph. It’s got some great scenery, plus, word has it that there’s some pretty good cantinas there and I could really use a drink for once.” She looked at her companion. “What do you think?” The nexu responded with a small growl of approval that almost sounded like the meow of a Loth cat but deeper. “Seraph it is,” Elaine said, setting the coordinates and- taking off, leaving Ferrix.

Decelerating out of hyperspace, Elaine could see Seraph, a planet with a large mass of water and two large primary continents of land. “Well, here we are Calle. Seraph,” she said, taking the ship into the atmosphere of the lively planet. After landing just outside of town, Elaine exited the ship. She turned around when she heard the sound of her companion following her. “No Calle, you stay here and guard the ship. I won’t be too long,” she said, the nexu sitting down with a huff.

Elaine had left the ship in the hands, or rather paws, of her nexu and entered the nearest cantina.

She sat down at the bar. “I don’t usually drink, -just give me what-ever you suggest,” she said to the man behind the counter.

The man nodded to the girl and gave her a glass filled with an orange liquid. Elaine looked at the drink in suspicion then lifted her head back up to the man. “What is this?” she asked.

“Jawa Juice. You better pay up,” he replied sternly.

“Ah, right, sorry.” She fumbled in her pockets for some credits. “How much?” she questioned.

“23.47 credits.” He responded. Elaine gave him exact change for the drink then watched as the man walked away.

Letting out a sigh of relief, Elaine calmly listened to the music that was being played as she drank her drink to try and forget that she had a bounty of one hundred-fifty credits on her head.

After a few hours later and a few more drinks, Elaine stumbled out of the cantina and into a dimly-lit alleyway next to it. She put her hand on her head as she leaned against the wall.“Agh, which way was my ship again? Was it left or was it behind me?” she asked herself.

A light blue light softly illuminated the wall across from her. “Yeah, that’s her alright. She’s gonna get us a fortune,” a mysterious voice said, joined by maniacal laughter others. Elaine pushed off the wall and looked around to see a couple of silhouettes standing in front of the flickering light.

Due to how intoxicated Elaine was, she couldn’t focus on the figures and as a result, she saw six of them when there were only three. A fourth figure lurked around the corner with a drink in hand, observing the whole thing, however they never engaged. The figure was wearing what appeared to be Mandolorian armor.

“Look, I’m not in the mood to deal with some idiots looking to get what they think will be some easy credits. I recommend you beat it,” she said, wobbling backwards but catching herself from falling over.

“Hahaha!!” one of the bounty hunters laughed and pointed at Elaine while looking at his partners, then looked back at Elaine and began to slowly walk closer with a knife in hand. “Is that supposed to scare us?”

The other two bounty hunters began to walk closer to Elaine as well. “I’m only going to say it one time. Back. Off.” She said in frustration.

“What are you gonna do? The way I see it, there’s one helpless little girl against three bounty hunters. This looks like an easy win to me,” the leader stated.

“I said… BACK OFF!” she shouted, pushing her arms forward with great force behind the motion. Almost like a powerful gust of wind had pushed them, the bounty hunters suddenly tumbled backwards, slamming into the wall.

“Agh! W-What kind of freak a-are you?!” one of the bounty hunters asked, trembling and clutching his broken shoulder.

“Come on, let’s get out of here! No amount of credits is worth this!” another one exclaimed while helping his partners up, they fled the scene with great haste.

Elaine looked at her hands as she wobbled once more, “Was… Was that me? Did I just do that?” she asked herself just before falling unconscious, colliding with the pavement. The mysterious figure in Mandolorian armor made his way around the corner and picked up the girl’s unconscious body, carrying her over his shoulder with one arm securing her there.

Half an hour later, Elaine awoke on her ship, the Mandalorian leaning against the entrance of the spacecraft with crossed arms. Calle was continuously growling in a low pitch while pacing back and forth between Elaine and the man.

Elaine clutched at her head, feeling a small amount of dried blood on her scalp. “Ugh… what happened…?” she asked herself, unaware of the Mandalorian’s presence.

“You passed out,” Suddenly becoming aware of the man’s presence, Elaine was startled, jumping.

“Who are you? Are you a bounty hunter trying to turn me in? How did I get on my ship?” she spoke frantically.

“If I was a bounty hunter, don’t you think you would be on **my** ship?” he replied.

“That’s true…” she considered after a moment. “So, if you’re not after my bounty, what do you want with me?” she asked. “I’m here to offer you protection,” the man said.

Elaine raised one of her eyebrows at the man. “Protection?” she laughed sarcastically. “Yeah right, I can take care of myself.” She rolled her eyes, stood up and brushed herself off only to then stumble and clutch at her head, wincing from the pounding headache she acquired.

“Sure you can, and that’s why I found you unconscious in an alleyway,” he said as he began to walk away from the vehicle.

-Elaine considered his offer for a brief moment before sighing. “Stay here, Calle,” she said before chasing after the man. The nexu obeyed its master and sat down with a huff.

-“Wait!” She exclaimed, stopping just behind him. “Wait… I’ve… I’ve changed my mind. You’re right, I need help and I’ve got nowhere to go...” she said with a hint of sorrow in her voice.

The Mandalorian stopped and turned to face the girl. “Good,” he said as he began walking back onto her ship. He opened her holomap and pointed at a location on the planet. “Take us here.”

“Excuse me? Us? Don’t you have your own ship?” she asked with a sassy tone.

“You fly or I leave,” he replied.

-Elaine sighed and sat in the pilot’s seat,“Fine… Calle, don’t eat him,” she said. “*He probably wouldn’t taste good anyway*,” she mumbled under her breath, rolling her eyes as she began to take off. Leaving Meraxis, they headed for what would be the biggest change in Elaine’s life…

**Half an hour later**

“Land here,” The Mandalorian said. Elaine followed his directions. After she landed, the two of them, with Calle in tow, headed along a beach towards an aesthetically pleasing and magnificent pyramid-like structure.

“What is this place? Who exactly are you?” she asked in awestruck wonder.

“**This** is the Monolith. **I** am Sykes,” he answered. “Here, you will learn how to control your power.”

She looked at him, confused. “What power?”

“You are Force Sensitive. You will learn how to bend it to your will,” he answered.

“What’s the Force?” she asked.

“Enough questions. You will learn soon enough, Elaine,” he spoke sternly.

*How does he know my name? I don’t recall telling him that.* She thought to herself.

They entered the premises of the structure. Sykes had led Elaine to what appeared to be a training room. They walked past the duelists to a man in exquisite, golden armor. The man looked like he was in his thirties when in fact he was middle aged. He had copper highlights in his shortly cut hair. Elaine could tell that he was high in rank in whatever this place was.

“Who is this?” the man asked, looking at Elaine.

“Elaine Conrat,” Sykes replied.

“Conrat?” The man gave an intrigued look to Sykes. Sykes didn’t respond with words, but with a simple nod. “Why did you bring her here?” the man asked.

“Why did I bring Ellac here?” Sykes asked rhetorically.

*Ellac? No, surely they mean a different one. There’s no way it’s the same person.* Elaine thought as she pondered if they could mean her brother.

The elder sighed. “Is she even gifted?” he asked.

“She has potential,” Sykes answered.

“Can you stop being all cryptic and tell me what’s going on? What is this place? Potential for what?” Elaine asked in annoyance.

“Another implement for your belt?” the man asked, ignoring Elaine.

“Yes,” Sykes replied briefly.

“I am not a possession! Tell me what’s going on and who you are or I’m out of here!” Elaine chimed in with frustration.

“Where are my manners? My name is Kamjin. I am the Emperor of Clan Scholae Palatinae,” the man answered. Elaine knew he must have had rank but she didn’t expect it to be **that** high.

“What are you even a clan of?” she asked.

“Sith,” Sykes answered the girl.

Elaine stood silent for a moment as she looked at the duelists. After observing them, she faced Kamjin and Sykes.

*I don’t have much of a choice… it’s either this or get hunted by the Hutts. At least here I can learn something,* she thought. “Okay,” she said plainly.

“Okay what?” Kamjin asked.

“Okay, I’ll join your clan. Teach me to be stronger and how to control the Force,” she said, standing up straight.

“Excellent!” Kamjin replied as a woman holding a tray with some sort of food walked into the room, stopping next the emperor himself. Kamjin picked up a cookie, taking a small bite of the sweet dessert.

He picked up a second one and offered it to Elaine. “Cookie?” he asked.

“Uhh… sure,” she replied in confusion, taking the cookie from the man.

“If you are anything like your brother, you’ll fit in nicely here,” Kamjin stated.

“You know my brother?” Elaine urgently asked, the anxiousness clear as day on her face.

“I know more than that. What if I said I could tell you where he is?” Kamjin said, teasing at the girl.

“You know where Ellac is? Where? I need to find him!” the girl said with impatience.

“All in good time, but first you must become stronger. Only then will I share your brother’s whereabouts,” Kamjin replied.

“When do I start?” Elaine said in more of a statement than a question. She was eager to find her brother after all these years, but at what cost?

Kamjin appointed Sykes as Elaine’s master and they began training the next day.

**Five months later**

It had been a while since Elaine joined the clan. She had grown stronger in both knowledge and strength, passing many trials. Now she was ready to come before Kamjin once again, wanting to know where should could find her brother.

 Elaine kneeled on one knee before her Emperor with her head bowed. “Kamjin, if you deem me ready, please, tell me where my brother is.” She hoped that he would not turn her away like the many times before.

“You are ready to learn his location, however, I have to warn you, he might not be as you remember him. Even still, a deal is a deal,” he said before pausing for a moment. “He is on a planet called Antei. You’ll find him at the ruins of the Dark Hall.”

Elaine stood up and bowed. “Thank you, Kamjin,” she said before exiting the room. After leaving the room, she ran to her ship. After boarding the vessel, she noticed Calle lying there on the floor in a restful sleep. She sat down in the pilot’s seat and set the coordinates for the ruined planet of Antei.

After setting her course, she began to ascend and make her way towards the planet she so anxiously awaited to arrive at. “I’m finally going to see my brother after eleven years, Calle,” she said, feeling an eager pit in her stomach. Calle tilted his head slightly to the side as he listened to his master speak.

“Will he even recognize me? What if he doesn’t know who I am…?” she said fearfully.

After a while, she had finally arrived at her destination. “Kamjin said he would be at the Dark Hall. That should be riiiiggghhhttt… here!” she said, spotting the ruins. She descended and landed on the ash covered ground of the barren planet. Outside of the window, she spotted a figure in a black cloak with their back turned towards her, the pit in her stomach deepening.

“…That must be him,” she said shakily, looking at Calle then back at the figure outside. “Come on. No point in sitting here,” she spoke again, standing up and exiting the vehicle with her nexu companion not far behind. She walked towards the figure, stretching her fingers and wiping her hands on her pants to remove the sweat from her palms.

Plumes of smoke billowed in the distance as she approached the man staring out at the flames that scorched the temple grounds. Tilting her head slightly, she stopped a few feet from the hooded figure she had traveled all this way to find. On her cheeks, she could feel the heat from the inferno below as it traveled with the blowing breeze. “Ellac?” Elaine said, trying to mask the subtle tremor in her voice.

She watched anxiously as the edges of the man’s hood flapped in the wind as he turned to meet her blue and green eyes. His face was scarred and he wore an eyepatch on one side of his face. His lone green eye glared back at her as he lifted the hood from his head, a metal hand reflecting the fiery light of the surrounding fires.

“Who the hell are you?”

……

**To Be Continued…**