

Lily

Karufu Highlands

Kasiya

41 ABY

Anders had warned Cassandra about this, but did she listen? Of course not. Why would she? She was the *Supreme Chancellor*, after all. She knew what was best for the Republic and all the people within it. These wargames were a security risk. He had told her as such, but did she listen? Of course not. Why should she listen to the *Spymaster of the OSI*?

The Chiss let out a heavy sigh as he perched himself against one of the many trees within the forest. He had decided to leave BUDD-E with Draca back in Port Kasiya for its own safety, a decision that had left Anders alone with his thoughts. This kidnapping was no mere coincidence. Anders knew it, Cassandra knew it...

Anyone with half a brain cell knew it.

There were so many more useful ways he could be spending his time instead of participating in this poor excuse for a mock war. He could be scouring the Taldryan database for potential threats, or even better, recruits to bring under his wing. The idea of forming his own small-scale Inquisitorius within the Clan appealed to him on many levels.

Alas, he was here, on a cold night with the full moon shining down upon him from above. A gentle breeze wafted past, bringing relief from the heat of battle earlier in the day. At least not everyone in the Clan was as painfully blind as its leader. When the child was kidnapped, some continued to fight as if the event meant *anything* outside of bragging rights.

It appalled Anders. He found himself resisting the urge to spread *Force Lightning* among his fellow Taldryanites, both ally and foe.

A girl had been kidnapped.

A child.

Children didn't deserve that kind of cruelty...

Chiss Ascendancy
Wild Space
20 ABY

"Mil'astratrophis has died from multiple organ failure. Time is three, twenty-four PM."

Anders watched as the ghostly white sheet was draped over his one and only friend. Five years. That's how long they had been together. They studied together, read together, and learned together. They were taught the concept of service and duty from the moment they could speak. They understood the concept of death and all that it entailed.

Yet, they rarely experienced it first-hand.

Anders felt a numbing chill overtake him, the likes of which he had never felt before in his ten years of life. It rooted him in place as tears welled in his eyes. He tried to will his legs to move, but he was paralysed.

"Mila... no..."

Just that morning they had eaten breakfast together, though she said she wasn't hungry. She point blank refused to practise their Third Sight. Her skin had turned a lighter shade of sky-blue, and her lips were cracked. Something was wrong. Very wrong.

Why didn't Anders see it sooner? Why didn't he say anything?

"Zenod'ande'rson, come along, child. This is no place for you now..."

The tears were in full flow now, like a river bursting through the dam. He choked, gasping as the air became hard to breathe. He tried to speak as he was gently escorted away by his carer, yet nothing but audible whimpers left his mouth.

"The child is dead, yes?"

"Unfortunately. A pity too, good Sky-walkers are difficult to find. Wild Space is annoying to navigate without them as tools."

Anders stopped in the hallway, eager to overhear the conversation the two medical professionals were having. They were both males, and he recognised the voices as the ones who oversaw Mila's care whilst she was sick. Sky-walkers, that's what they were,

he and Mila. They were children gifted with the Force that could navigate the Ascendancy Fleet through Wild Space.

"There will always be more. They are like insects multiplying in the dirt."

"Zenod'ande'rson?" Anders' carer placed a hand on his shoulder.

"We made the right decision. Medicating her would have been a valuable waste of resources when we can simply request a new Sky-walker. The Force is a parasite that deserves to be eradicated from our people."

"It is impure. I do agree."

Anders clenched his fists. He ground his teeth together, beginning to tremble as a wave of boiling anger rose within him. He came to one conclusion;

They didn't medicate her...

On purpose...

The carer shook Anders gently. "Anders, come. This is not a conversation for you to listen in on."

He didn't respond, his facial expression going blank. He stopped crying, forcing those feelings of rage and anger into the pit of his stomach as he walked forward.

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Those who enacted cruelty upon them deserved the most *agonising* form of justice Anders could deliver, the mere thought making his blood boil like the lava rivers of Mustafar. He was more than prepared to march inside himself and execute the Gammorreans. He could smell their putrid slime from the outside of the fort, if it could even be called that. It was little more than a collection of fallen trees set in place to make a barricade. It was primitive, hardly worth the effort of construction.

A shimmer of light out in front of him caught his attention. He turned to face it as the silhouette of an exotically exquisite Pantoran-Twi'lek hybrid began to

materialise before his eyes. She was panting, sweating, and cradling a bundle in her arms like it would explode if she dropped it.

Anders scoffed. "Took you long enough."

"Not gonna lie, that sucked," she said, catching her breath. "It stank in there, but I did it! I found her!"

"Lenoka, be quiet!" Anders scolded the young hybrid, but took a step forward to look at the bundle.

Sure enough, a toddler Human girl, wrapped in pink linen, was sound asleep without a care in the world.

Lily.

Good. She seemed unharmed, but...

"She's dirty," Anders noted.

"Better dirty than dead," Lenoka shrugged. "I gotta thank you for asking me to help. I've been a little aimless since Appius left, ya know? I needed something focus me."

She took what Anders said into consideration as she licked her thumb and wiped a small patch of soot off of Lily's face. The little girl seemed to fidget slightly, but thankfully remained asleep. What was she thinking walking into the forest like that on her own? She couldn't have been any older than four, maybe five years old at most.

"Let me take a closer look," Anders reached out and took her from Lenoka before she could protest. The little girl pursed her lips.

It wasn't often the Inquisitor felt his heart ache, but how could it not when he held something so precious and innocent? All she wanted to do was help her ailing father...

He placed the back of his hand on her forehead.

"She's got a fever," he said. He also took note of her weight. She was lighter than she should have been. She likely hadn't been fed in the days since her disappearance.

'Those filthy animals...'

They were little better than savages.

"Then we better get back to the village and hand her back to her mother so she can get medical attention," Lenoka placed her hands on her hips.

"Absolutely not."

Lenoka went slack-jawed. "Excuse me?"

"The child..."

"She has a *name*," Lenoka spat at him. "Use it."

Anders stared daggers into Lenoka. If looks could kill, she would have been six-feet in the ground. Who did this *amateur* think she was talking to him like that?

"*Lily*," the Chiss growled out through grounded teeth. "She is safer with me at the OSI headquarters until this farce of an event is over."

"Anders..." Lenoka shook her head. "We don't know Lily. There might be some underlying medical condition we don't know about..."

The Sith felt himself stiffen.

"She needs to get back to the one person who can take care of her best, and that's her mother. Where is your speeder bike? I could have sworn it was parked over there."

Lenoka pointed in a semi-vague direction further into the forest away from the fort.

"I moved it," Anders said as he approached behind her. "*Over there.*"

Lenoka instinctively turned to face the direction he pointed in without questioning his words. She felt like soothing silk had wrapped around her mind, a waterfall of honey drowning her most basic instincts.

Snap-hiss!

A small splatter of blood hit the grass. Indescribable agony pained her as a crimson-coloured lightsaber blade pierced her abdomen. She went wide-eyed and gasped for breath.

"Y-You..."

Anders retracted his weapon, placing it back on his belt. Lenoka collapsed to the ground, folding into a foetal position, clutching her wound.

"My dear, I do not agree with you," Anders towered over her. "You've proven yourself to be useful up until now, though your conviction is lacking. I have no further use for someone who cannot see the bigger picture of what is best for Lily."

Lenoka turned her head to face him, holding the tears in her eyes as she opened her mouth to speak, though no words were formed. All she could manage were pained groans.

Anders decided not to indulge her. He had no more use for her, so why stick around? Besides, she did have a point. The child... *Lily*... needed medical attention. The sooner she retrieved it, the better.

He wouldn't let Lily die.

Not on his watch, regardless of the shambolic behaviour of his Taldryan clanmates. He knew what was best. His instincts, as an Inquisitor, were usually right.

There was just one more loose end that needed tying up. Anders retrieved his holoprojector, the visage of a heavily scarred, leathery-faced Weequay woman, Yorm Galm, the Regional Head of the OSI, appearing in front of him.

"Splymaster Anderson," she held her hands behind her back and gave him a light bow. "What is your bidding, sir?"

"I have encountered a fort of Gamorreans on the outskirts of a village in the northeastern quadrant of the Karufr Highlands. I want it destroyed immediately."

Yorm bit her lower lip. "Are... are you sure? Surveillance suggests the Gamorreans have not acted on Taldryan territory until now. Perhaps negotiations would-"

"Ms Galm, are you questioning my orders?"

The Weequay stiffened under Anders' gaze. "Of course not, sir. I will have a squadron of bombers deployed shortly."

Anders gave a satisfactory nod. "Excellent. This is for the good of the Republic."

"For the Republic..."

Yorm's visage disappeared, allowing Anders to proceed to his speeder bike. He hopped on, making sure his grip on Lily was secure before revving the engine. He left the area with the toddler, leaving Lenoka to her fate amidst the increasing sound of TIEs above...

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