

Fanatical Publishing's

Weekly Review

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AND NOW, a word from the publisher:

Hello folks, Jochannon here; first let me say thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy, and please feel free to share it with your friends, re-post it to your profile, spread it around; the more people who get to read it, the better!

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If you want to contribute, I'd love to see your work, send it to me at the aforementioned e-mail address with: 'category(prose, fanfic, poetry), STORY TITLE, Author's Name' in the subject line.

You can include the text of your story in the body of the email, attached as an RTF, you can put in a link to your story on some webpage. Please include a cover letter about you, your work, or whatever; include any links you want, and cover art if you have any.

Do you have any questions or comments? If you do, I'd to hear them; write to me at the aforementioned e-mail address.

I'm bad at stopping these things, so I'll just say again: thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy!

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ORIGINAL LITERATURE

LET'S PLAY DETECTIVE?

CHAPTER 2

FaerieBox
of <http://FaerieBox.deviantart.com>

We climbed down the stairs the following morning, to have our breakfast. And, besides, more important, to investigate. I was quite nervous, but there was some feeling inside me that was creepily similar to excitement – which I didn't like at all, in these circumstances. My twin sister, though, looked as comfortable as a duck on water. And in no moral arguments with herself.

“My love, don't let yourself get disheveled.” she said to me, with a disapproving look. “You shouldn't let the stress get into your mind. You know it's me who'll be in charge of things here.”

She stopped me in the middle of the hall and reached out for my hair. Her skilled hands started to quickly comb my hair, while she talked.

“You won't need to worry a bit, I promise. I will not allow you to be the one in trouble with Mommy this time, if she finds us out, nice? Let younger sister take care of you, just once.”

I think my hair was now in a way more to her like. She held me at arm-length, turned me to see the back, and then gave me a nod.

“Better this way.” she began to walk again, a few paces in front of me “You know, you have to tend your appearance better, dear. You have such a nice black hair.”

“Oh! My hair is identical to yours!” I replied.

“Yeah, but it looks prettier in you.” she retorted. “Your face is a little tip more rounded and softer than mine. Must be your innocent way of thinking. You're still a good, politically correct girl, in spite of me.

I rolled my eyes. But she didn't notice, because she was already with her back turned to me, nimbly raising her fingers to the knob of the breakfast room's door.

The loud voices were the first things to catch our senses, when she opened it, with me right at her heels. Then, second sense: vision, as we halted where we were.

Our mother and aunt Daisy were standing on a corner, very close to each other. It was her voice I'd heard – our aunt's. And the two seemed to be having an argument.

They stopped as soon as we'd entered, because Mom saw us and glanced over her sister's left shoulder, with a worried hesitant face. Aunt Daisy immediately caught her expression, and briskly turned

back, also seeing us.

Her blue eyes fixed on us both for a moment. We just stared at her, too surprised. She blushed, with was a light rosy covering her marble cheeks. Then she suddenly hurried and left the room through the other door, before we could truly realize that her composure had dropped a grade.

Mom bit her lip, but only watched Aunt go. We let our door open, and slowly went to where she stood.

“Good morning, Mommy.” sister said.

She smiled at us, in a weary, still worried way. I perceived a quick wondering glance to our faces. Was she trying to hide something? Notwithstanding, she replied tenderly.

“Good morning, Lili. Good morning, Carrie.”

“There’s anything wrong with auntie, Mom?” I asked, gazing at the farther, closed door.

“Oh, no, sweethearts. It’s nothing for you to worry about.”

Notice that she’d said ‘sweethearts’. She and Dad, of course, were the ones most used here to the way we behaved. Almost the same person, me and Sis. I asked things for her, and she did it for me too. Or we just worked together, interchanging so that it gave an illusion of a real conversation, not an interrogatory.

This time, though, none of us got very pleased with the answer. I hadn’t realized yet about the weakest flank of our planning. Which was, why they would tell things to two teenage girls? Beginning with Mommy, and even she didn’t let anything get out of her mouth.

However, sister had already made up her mind. She didn’t give up, and I followed her, through all of the day. Uncle Jack avoided us, as usual, and we avoided Maxwell for now, nonetheless we tried hard and managed to have some chats with the others, slowly, throughout the day, crossing names out of our secret-informant’s list (so secret, indeed, that not even they knew they were our informants. Needless to say that the name of the list was sister’s idea. Don’t blame me for her poor jokes.).

First was Dad, but wasn’t hard to discover that he knew even less than us. Then we managed to get uncle Henry alone... It ended up in a hour-length talk about businesses, with us pretending we were interested and my sister struggling to not yawn and curl in a ball to sleep right there.

What we could take out of this? That our uncle was innately boring?

Anyway, by the afternoon we were already starting to feel frustrated. The detectives in the books are pretty more patient. But then, came the end of the afternoon, and the tea. And all changed from water to wine.

I’m serious. Always beware teatime women’s conversation.

I was pushing myself, trying to do a cute needle-work of red and black hearts. Mom was knitting a sweater on another chair, and keeping a watchful eye at me. Especially at my pierced fingertips. I think it wouldn't be nice if I bled to death on that white intertwined fabric.

But I really wasn't good at it. I stabbed myself again with that little silvered needle, and quickly withdrew my hand, putting my index finger in my mouth. I gave up for a while, with a sad look at the cute drawing on the paper, the one I supposedly was following.

I slipped my eyes around me. Aunt Daisy was sipping at a hot cup of tea, resting her body on a soft armchair. Mom knitting. And Sister. She was reading a book – her last one, so soon she would really turn out into an irritated monster.

I let myself watch her for a moment, I'm not sure why. And I saw her shake her head in a really strange way, without taking her eyes out of the written lines. I frowned, wondering if she had water inside her ear.

But she gave me a brief glance after doing that. I stared at her. She shook her head again, more emphatically, looking to her left.

Oh. I suddenly understood. It was my turn.

"The weather is so nice today, isn't it, auntie?" I called, as if looking for someone to speak with "I think I couldn't bear a minute more of rain."

"Yes." Aunt Daisy gazed lazily through the window. She seemed perfectly calm by now. "But I'm afraid it won't last too long. The weather is quite rainy here, this time of the year."

"But it is nice, the rain." Mom joined the talk, distracted "We used to just sit here, sipping hot chocolate and sewing, or reading books."

Alice looked at me, surprised. Aunt Daisy could sew? We really doubted that. So, she used to do the second choice. Look what eerie thing. Here we were, I sewing and my twin reading.

Sister discreetly put her book aside, a little fearful that we ended up like them. She cleared her throat, gently.

"But it wasn't a little lonely here, Mommy? It's such an isolated place..."

I thought about the little town down the mountain. Sister's question was sound. It was a pretty small village, could had been another girl of their age living there, at that time? And, even so, it was a good walk till reach the first houses... Must've been a really lonely childhood.

Mom's brows twisted a little, her forehead frowning so slightly – which gave her a look as if she would cry, but meant that she'd some worry about a situation or how she or someone would answer something. She also lost a point on her yellow sweater, and somehow

managed to let it run till almost the bottom, opening a scar on the beautiful squared pattern.

“Oh... I made a mistake here.” she held out the sweater to see it better, and picked up a needle. She took a long time to finally answer Alice’s question “Well, dear... We didn’t care so much about it, that time. The world wasn’t so small and hurried.”

Aunt Daisy froze looking at her, still holding her teacup by the little wing. It was a quite curious, long glance. And finally, she said, correcting:

“It was nice enough to us, sometimes. And horrible.”

Mom’s big, soft-brown eyes lifted from her sweater. My attention fled from one to the other, in quick glances.

“What do you mean, auntie?” Alice asked, frowning in such an innocent way.

Aunt Daisy filled her teacup while answering. I realized one more time how her small blue eyes looked something between sulky and cold. She was a lady, and a stern one, yes. But the kind who doesn’t like lies. Enough to contradict Mother in front of us. She would be a nice informant. And was a scary one, too.

“I mean that your grandfather was a good husband and friend, but a really bad father, since he couldn’t choose how his kids would be born.” was what she said.

“Daisy... You shouldn’t talk like this about dead people.”

“Why not?” she replied at Mom “Dying doesn’t make a person perfect, Maggie. And we both know our dear father wasn’t quite a nice, or honest person.”

Oh, no... It would *not* boil again now, would it? Their argument from the morning. A tension had surged on the air, accompanied by a fearful silence...

My sister closed her book, producing a premeditated loud noise, so that everyone within the room looked at her. She complained aloud:

“Carrie! I’ve already read this book! I just remembered the end – and it’s so boring when this happens. We have to find me another one!”

What she was really saying, of course, was: we need to talk (flee), and right now. My heart racing, I cautiously caught the embroidery on my lap and changed it for the low little table at my side. Then I got up to my feet, brushing a piece of thread from my blouse, trying to not cover our true hastiness.

Sister chained her right arm with my left one, and set off on a brisk pace, carrying her book. Mom called, informing us that she thought we could already go into the library. We thanked her, and closed the door after us. We walked until we’d reached the gloomy corner of the corridor, before Alice turned to me, with an

astonished/excited face.

“What the heck was that?!” she exclaimed, giving me a large grin.

“Well” I replied “I think we’ve found our first clue. There’s something we don’t know about them. *A lot* of ‘somethings’, in fact.”

“Yeah...” she freed my arm, and folded hers, raising her hand to tap her forefinger on her cheek “Do you think they have some childhood trauma?” she asked me “Do you have any idea about what she meant?”

I shook my head. Aunt Daisy’s words were a mystery to me.

“I do.”

Two hands suddenly fell over our shoulders, and we were pulled back to behind the elbow of the corridor. Our eyes first widened from fear, but then we discovered ourselves staring at Zia’s hot, caramel pretty face.

“Zia!” sister cried, hurt at her heart “Were you *eavesdropping* us?!”

Zia made an impatient gesture, as if she was scaring away a fly. In this case, the fly was Alice’s question.

“Of course I wasn’t eavesdropping *you*, misses. Just the room. Who do you think that makes the tea appear there? It certainly doesn’t puff there from a magical smoke!”

Oh. I understood. It was the old story about the maids and butlers. I realized that she surely must know much more than anyone else there!

“Oh.” sister also tottered.

Zia nodded, confirming. I made a half-step front and held her white, clean sleeve.

“What were you going to tell us, Zia?”

“Nothing. Just an advice, for you two to be more sensible.” she answered, crossing her arms “I don’t want your family to fall apart, misses. And that’s what gonna happen, if that stupid man can’t find the criminal and you two don’t hold your tongue a little. You’re quite troubling critters, misses!”

Yeah, I think she was perfectly right. We attract trouble, just like a magnet attracts iron. (And by stupid man she was referring to the inspector Sheppard? Sister liked to hear that.)

But sister wasn’t worried about her arch-enemy now. She pressed Zia:

“And what about Grandfather? You said you knew!”

Her expression suddenly changed from upset to a sadder one. Her clear brown eyes were very gentle and shiny, and she shook her head.

“Oh, dears. Haven’t you ever noticed? Of course not. Mr. John was a *funny, clever* man.” she emphasized. “But he wasn’t really a nice

person. It's this. No one is perfect. Must've been horrible, for a child, I can just wonder. You wouldn't see because he was so fond of you two, of course – you were the apples of his eyes! He would never harm you, in any way.”

Zia's last words bit deep into my chest. I think... that Grandpa really loved us.

I sensed more than saw the tears forming on my twin's green eyes. She retorted nothing. Till now, we hadn't really comprehended on our own skin how death can be an open, painful scar. It's said that people in shock, or in hard situations, like war, often don't feel the pain of a wound right after they're hurt. Same way, somehow we'd been too busy on our thoughts about the murder, and that was the first time that full grief had reached us.

We heard the small silver bell ringing. That was an old house, which still had this kind of thing. Zia slowly stepped back, against her will. I watched her face for a moment, a sob choking inside my throat. It was a true caring look, the one on her eyes.

Then, she was gone, with a hurried rush of fabric. She'd left us standing there, alone in the dark.

I immediately turned to sister. I could almost feel her pain in my own heart. I looked carefully at her for a couple seconds, and asked, very quietly:

“Alice? Are you fine?”

She covered her face with the sleeve of her thin jumper jacket. After the rains, the air had turned a little chillier, especially inside the house. I was also wearing a thin sweater.

I thought I'd heard her sniffing. But she simply dried her eyes on her sleeve, with a slow, single movement of her arm, and replied, without even glance at me:

“I'm fine. Let's go.”

She retraced a few steps and chose a way. Oh, dear God. She was really sad. I stood there for a second, then raced after her.

Nonetheless, we didn't go much farther. Soon, we began to hear muffled musical notes. Sister glanced back at me, somewhat surprised. We changed direction, following the song. A piano song, we could perceive.

We crept inside the room that had the piano, trying to be the most silent we could. And we managed to enter really unnoticed.

Our cousin had her back to us, as she played the piano. Her body swayed slightly on the song's rhythm, her fingers taking a soft melody out of the high-pitched keys on the right side of the keyboard. While we were quiet, listening, she struck a couple wrong notes that hurt my ears. However, forgetting these mistakes, she played well enough. A little hesitantly, maybe. Sister caught her breath.

“Annie! I didn't know you could play the piano!” she exclaimed

as if she'd just entered the room, walking with loud steps to Anne's side.

Anne gave a jerk, and twisted on the stool to look at us, wide, beautiful blue eyes. She immediately lowered her gaze, though.

"Yes, I do..."

"This is a pretty song." sister came closer of her, to peer at the music sheet. Too closer. I even noticed Anne's body stiffening from unease. "What's the name?"

"It's... just a children song."

I discreetly pulled Alice away of Anne, opening a space to myself, which I didn't use fully. I could see that our cousin was only beginning her lessons. The song was pretty simple. A lullaby.

"It's quite lovely." I commented, with a smile.

Anne gazed away, but also smiled, very softly.

"Thank you."

My thoughts were already far ahead than my tongue, though. If we could cross Anne out of our prime talk's list, there was only uncle Jack left – and unfortunately, Maxwell, because we couldn't just jump him, but let's forget it. And Anne was also the one who'd first found the body. She might tell us something very important.

Sister seemed to read my thoughts. Or was me, reading hers, without realize it?

"We're going to catch some books. Don't you wanna come with us, Annie?" my twin invited. "Then we can go back together for the tea!"

Absolute dread flickered in Anne's face. Sister covered her mouth, quickly.

"Oh, sorry, Annie! You won't wanna go to the library." Alice pretended to hesitate, biting the corner of her lower lip, and leaned forward, talking in a secrecy whisper: "Was it scary, like in the TV? Please tell us, Annie!"

"Alice!" I slapped her on her arm.

"Ouch!"

My twin sister rubbed her wounded arm, sending me an injured glare. I apologized to Anne, and she slowly muttered something like 'no problem'.

I still had hope that she would tell us something. But she remained perfectly immobile, her head bowed, and didn't say anything.

"Well..." I tried "Do you wanna have tea with us? Please, Annie." I held out my hand "Let's still be friends."

Annie looked up at me, in bewildered amazement. But she slowly lifted her hand from her lap, and held mine. I felt a little like an evil person for don't being totally sincere with her. 'Friends' is quite a strong word to me. I didn't know her good enough to that. In fact,

sister is my only real friend. And we weren't especially fond of Annie.

For a moment, I pitied her. No one deserves being cheated as this, so I really tried to be nice. However, anyway, that was the end of it, despite my efforts.

"Thank you, but..." she avoided my eyes "... I'm not really hungry."

So I sat by her side, and just chatted for a while. No results. It was hard to make her speak. But at last she wouldn't be scared of us.

Later, on our room, Alice began to laugh at me because of this.

"Really, Carrie! I would never imagine that you were such a good actress! You seemed so sincerely kind!"

I kept staring at my embroidery. And I didn't care about piercing my fingers, deep, when she said that.

"Shut up, you wicked thing." I just mumbled.

Sister stared at me. Then she hugged her knees, glancing down at her bare toes.

"Sorry. You know I didn't mean that. I'm not really that evil. It's just that... You seem always to be so much more a good person than me. I don't have a heart. So is better that you be the nice one, not me."

I gazed at her, surprised. A younger-sister's-love confession?

"You're nice too, Alice." I denied, sincerely. But next, I smirked: "You're just a wicked little witch."

She threw her pillow at me.

ONE LAST SALUE

Marshall McCarthy
of <http://marshallnormanmccarthy.wordpress.com/>,
and <http://mnmccarthy.deviantart.com/>

Bates knew by the way she walked - hips sashaying and eyes hunting - that trouble followed the woman in the black gown. From the bar, neat-whiskey tilted in his hand, he watched her pass by the other louts filling the tables and chairs in Buntin's Refuge. Her face was rigid in confidence, but he noticed how she clutched her handbag as if it was her lifeline.

To his surprise - and grinning delight - the woman in black sidled up to the bar, beside him and ordered a drink.

'Rum, spiced and on the rocks. And another rye? for my friend.' Without looking, she waved to Bates.

Smirking, he downed the last of his drink and slid the cup back to the old barkeep. 'Much obliged, Miss?'

'Evelyn,' she glanced at him and Bates was warned by azure eyes.

'Evelyn?'

Those eyes narrowed on him and the warning deepened. 'Really?' she turned to her drink, sipped it with delicate purpose. 'I was told you were an old hand at this; you should know that names have power.'

'Well, thank you all the same, Evelyn,' he winked. 'Curious though, how'd you know that I was drinking rye, and not that southern garbage?'

Her mousey face turned to him and she considered him pointedly. 'Never mind that,' she countered, glancing around the roadhouse. 'I'm told you can handle a pistol.'

He was intrigued now. 'Got a problem?'

'Many,' she sipped at her drink, thinking. 'Unfortunately only one that can be settled with a bullet. But,' she took another sip and chanced another glance around the roadhouse. 'I'd rather not discuss it in such a public forum.' She settled a meaningful look on him.

Snatching his hat from the bar-top, Bates settled it atop his head. 'Come on, I've got a room.' He grinned past the wide brim, winking once more.

And once more it passed by without the bat of an eyelash or the crook of a smile. 'Very nice.'

Damn, this one's as dry the grave. Right. Well, here's to trouble.

* * * *

The room Bates paid for amounted to only slightly more than a closet and mattress, but he did what he could to make his guest comfortable. He let her have the bed while he stood with his back to the door.

‘So, what can I help you with?’ He studied her face from above crossed arms.

She looked worn-out, burned-out, now that they were alone. ‘I need you to kill a dragon.’

‘What?’

Evelyn sighed. ‘I don’t how much clearer I can explain it to you. There is a dragon, and I need you to kill it. Do I have to spell this out for you?’

Bates bit back a filthy retort, chewing it into a grimace. ‘No ma’am, that’s just fine,’ he assured her through gritted teeth. ‘Just not something you hear every day is all.’ He wiped at the sudden sweat beading on his brow. ‘Look,’ he pushed away from the door, searching the tiny room for the right words. ‘I don’t know what Dudley told you about me, but let me put rumours to rest: I ain’t never took on a dragon, and I don’t know that I’d be any good to you if I did. My Colt can’t pierce its hide.’ He shrugged.

Something devious crossed pouty lips. ‘No,’ she reached into her handbag and pulled out a weapon of shining steel and polished ivory. ‘But mine can. I just need a man who can shoot the damn thing.’

She held the pistol out to him as if it would bite. Before it slipped from her fingers, Bates took it, revering its touch. A gentle tremor worked its way from his hand, up his arm and into his chest, his heart. ‘Mother Mary; what is this?’

‘Salvation...’

His gaze pulled down from Evelyn’s face, tracking the lamplight caught in the pistol’s steel. The reflection seemed to dance, as if he could see the magic that was promised. Enough to take out a dragon. Hell, if it can take out one of those bastards... Bates needed this gun, always had and he felt that need echoed in the weapon’s vibrations. He lifted eyes to his client’s face, gauging her. It was no good in her hands, she said as much already...

‘When do we leave?’

‘We don’t,’ Evelyn stood and before she continued a sound like screeching thunder ripped the air outside the roadhouse.

‘It followed you?’

‘Remember Bates,’ trouble crooked a grin, ‘you’ve just the six shots.’ Evelyn winked and was gone. Vanished. Poof!

‘Just your fucking luck, Bates...’ He scooped his hat back onto his head and turned in the moment the roof was sheared off by the dragon’s wintery breath. And there she was, big as the sky and

twice as angry as all hell.

Rising from his crouch, Bates sped towards the window. Glass smashed as he threw his body out. Hitting the ground in a roll he was glad for his first floor suite.

The dragon's call filled the air, spooking man and beast. Patrons poured from the roadhouse even as horses peeled away from the stables. But Bates' old nag charged right for him, either out of loyalty or looking to pay him back for the harsh tones he too often used on her.

Bates hoped it was the former, reached out for the beast's mane and hurled himself onto her back. 'Go go go go!' he needlessly urged the terrified animal. Glancing over his shoulder he saw the great lizard swinging around, and he swore it looked right at him.

Hurry up Nancy, before she heads us off at Malcolm's Ridge.

But the dragon's speed was superior, and icy death flowed from between man-tall teeth. He turned back to the plains ahead and spurred his mount, desperate for more speed as cold bit at his back.

Nancy screamed and bucked when the dragon's breath caught her hindquarters. Below him she fell away and Bates hit the ground hard, cursing as the shadow of the dragon passed overhead.

'Jesus,' he barked, seeing Nancy's body, frozen and broken in half. Organs and intestines, rimmed with frost, spilled out from her, glittering in the sun like morbid jewels. Bates swallowed a wad of vomit.

The dragon's roar – a triumphant call – stole his attention. It sailed over the plains, between him and the spine of the ridge, a mile away. Numb hands fumbled at Evelyn's pistol as he watched the beast gliding towards him, bellowing a goodbye.

Standing, Bates felt awareness become distant.

One last pass, one last salute.

One last roar from the dragon's maw. Without thought, without worry, without haste, Bates squeezed the trigger before the dragon cried out – in surprise – and fell from the sky. He watched it crash onto the dusty plains, skidding to a stop twenty paces removed, amazed. One clean shot.

'Not bad,' Bates said, admiring the six-shooter before putting it away and winked at the dragon's corpse.

Five more shots. He turned to the pink horizon. Got to be five more dragons out there.

LORE OF THE ENDELMENT

Zaac Rayaken Shero

Summery - This is a short sample of my first book. It has to do with a male protagonist that, after so long of dealing with his world, has had enough of his father's ways. In an attempt to stop the king, the prince goes and seeks help from those who are thought to be enemies of his father. Along his journey, he is reminded of a fairytale that somehow haunts him... Maybe this fairytale might have some truth.

Prologue

"Grampa," a 7 year old child called out as he readied for bed, "Tell me a story."

Grampa chuckled, then knelt down near the right side of the child's bed and said, "Very well! What would you like?"

"Tell me one about him again!"

"HIM?" The child nodded his head, then Grampa asked, "Are the tales about him your favorites?" The child quickly nodded again as he smiled, then Grampa said, "But he's not a hero."

"That's okay, Grampa! I don't mind! There's always a good ending!"

"Okay, okay." Grampa cleared his throat a bit, then said, "Our tale begins on a bright and beautiful day, with clear skies and a gentle breeze. A peaceful legion, ruled by a great King and his Adviser, have just discovered two new magical items."

"Rekaren Enzar and Rokardric Geiken, huh?"

"Yes. However, there were also two engraved stones that were broken from each other. One said 'Power of Illume'. The other said 'Power of Darkness'. For nearly three days the King, his Adviser and a few of the followers, examined these items, finding only a small few could wield the magical creations of the Gods. One being the King's best of warriors!" Grampa leaned slightly towards the child and continued, "But one night, just like tonight, a dark storm blew in from the south. But this... was not any normal storm. It was a blackened cloud, filled with vile energy and hateful thunder as it struck with heartless rage!"

"It was Shadow!" the child said, "Wasn't it?!"

"Correct! Shadow's storm flew over to shroud the land! He got the King's followers to tremble in fear with his awesome might! As Shadow hovered above, he called out in a dark and twisted voice, 'I challenge this world's greatest fighter to stand before me! If not, I shall destroy all of what you have created!" Grampa then motioned away from the child as he continued, "But the King and his best warrior, no matter what fearsome powers Shadow had, stood courageously against his authority! Yet they knew they had to make

a decision. Trusting him, the King called for his warrior to combat against Shadow's evil! As the warrior stepped forth to fight, Shadow formed a physical body from the angry clouds and stood against him. Once he had—

The child quickly sat up and asked, "Is he still that evil fox, Grampa?! The King of Darkness?!"

Grampa smiled as he replied, "Of course! But don't worry!" He then stood up and motioned to place the covers back onto his grandson. As the child laid back down, Grampa said, "Now just relax and let me continue with the story." He pulled a wooden chair over to sit down, then continued, "Shadow, in his massively tall nine-tailed fox form, towered over the mighty warrior. He stared down with his hateful and vicious fire-red eyes as he said 'If you can best me, I shall leave. If you cannot, you shall become my slave!' Since the warrior was only planning to serve his great King and no other, he felt he could not lose! The two clashed brilliantly against each other! They fought valiantly as the storm hovered above, lighting up the area with every strike they gave! But alas, the brave warrior could not stand against Shadow's fearsome powers. He was defeated, yet not destroyed. Once having bested his foe, Shadow commanded his new servant to bring forth his greatest and lost creation of destruction."

"You're not telling him another one of those dumb fairytales again, are you?" a man asked, standing at the child's bedroom doorway.

The child quickly sat up to look over at the man and barked, "Go away, big brother! Grampa's trying to tell a story!"

"Hmph. Whatever."

Grampa glanced over to watch as the man walked away, then he turned back to his grandson. As the child laid back down, Grampa said, "That wasn't very nice."

"Big brother's a jerk!"

"Alright then, alright. Let's just forget about him for now."

The child glanced up at Grampa and said, "Please continue with the story, Grampa."

Grampa smiled and continued, "When the King found even his greatest of fighters was defeated by Shadow, he turned to his Adviser to figure out what to do with the two magical items. The Adviser suggested that they switch the two before the warrior could reach the inner sanctum, in hopes that using the wrong item might destroy Shadow. Fooled by the King and his Adviser's antics, the possessed warrior took the wrong weapon and scurried off from the castle. He was forced to call forth a blackened blade, capable of destroying anything in its path, and rampage the Kingdom. He became the Ender of All Elements within the land; The Endelment! An unstoppable monster!"

"Then what happened, Grampa?"

"Then... something changed. Having nearly conquered the Kingdom, the warrior was broken free from Shadow's vile grasp. The sword he held was no longer a tool of death. It was now as it should have been... a key!"

"A key, Grampa?"

"Yes! But not just any ordinary key. This key called forth yet another

powerful being! Someone who could stand against Shadow's might! However, it had to act as if it was Shadow's magical weapon to fool him. So that the one it called forth may have a chance in defeating the King of Darkness. When all seemed lost, a ray of hope shined from just within the magical instrument. Before Shadow could stop her coming, Light took hold of the warrior's body and for a small time changed it into her true form. Light was a magnificent creature, whose aura shined through Shadow's Darkness. The Queen of Illume!"

"Wow!"

"Having seen enough of what Shadow had done to a race of beautiful mortals, Light used her powers and forced the dark one back into his horrid realm, where she hoped he was to never be seen again. But even having been banished, Shadow's last words were 'I shall return!' Once gone, Light vanished from sight as well, having to take the warrior to her realm. The Kingdom was safe once more. So long as the King kept the weapons hidden and apart from each other, they had nothing to fear. And so, waiting until Shadow might bring forth his evil once more, the King told his warriors to keep only one by their side, hiding the other as if it never existed. They hoped that this act would be final and may one day bring peace to their world. The End."

As Grampa motioned to exit his grandson's room, the child called out, "Grampa!"

He stopped and turned to face the child as he asked, "Yes?"

"What if Shadow really does come back?"

Grampa chuckled as he motioned back to sit near the child's bedside and replied, "If that were to happen, I want you to promise me something. Can you do that?" The child nodded his head, then Grampa continued, "If the Darkness does ever appear, this you must remember. There is a time in life when you will have to make an impossible choice, even if that choice... can only be led by hope. Never give up. Never give in. Promise me that." The child nodded his head one last time, then turned onto his left side as he fell asleep. Grampa stood up to motion out, smiling as he said, "Goodnight, Ray."

Chapter

Noon on some goddamn Monday... I hate Mondays!

I was sitting at a table outside a fast food restaurant that didn't have one of those plastic umbrellas set up to protect you from the weather. 'Course, I didn't care. The rain felt good pattering against my body. Soothes the soul.

I sat with my right foot on my left knee and my back to the entrance of the restaurant. I was pondering about something Grampa Jhijecu Shero had said to me long ago, before he disappeared. All I had with me was a small cup filled with soda from the restaurant and my loyal servant, Wolf, who sat at my right side.

She was a light skinned Arctic Wolf Alykenz with her heart set only on serving and worshipping me, which I thought was a bit weird

since I allowed her freedom when she was given to me by Father. It was harsh, but I meant it.

Her wolf ears were slightly bigger than normal and three times sharper at hearing. Her magenta eyes could see three times greater than normal wolves, while they had a great shine to them. Her nose looked Cexan, but she could smell much better than any ordinary wolf. Her teeth and jaw muscles were as strong as a wolf's, with her fangs being as sharp as a razor. Trust me, I know! For some reason, she painted her claws magenta, which sparkled slightly. But as pretty as they were, she could tear through steel like thin paper with them. Once again, trust me, I know! And, of course, she had a cute fluffy tail to show off that was as long as her smooth legs.

However, at the time that we were on Earth, Wolf needed to be incognito. So I asked her to turn herself into her alternate full wolf form, where she had an inch and a half width magenta dog collar around her neck. The collar had a platinum dog tag on it that was an inch and a half around and said 'Wolf' on both sides in cursive.

Sitting in the rain, irritated at the fact that she was both getting wet and in her full animal form, Wolf asked, "My Lord? Why is it when we go to fast food restaurants you only get a small soda, when you can easily get an eight or 24 pack of canned soda at one of the markets around here?"

I looked over to see Wolf keep herself facing out towards the road that led up to the restaurant, speaking to me with a blank expression and had her ears bent down as if upset. She hated sitting in the rain, but she felt it necessary not to ask me to sit somewhere else.

"Not only that, but you don't even think to get any kind of food."

"Why?" I asked as I went to stare out into the street with her, every now and then watching a car go by, "You hungry?"

Wolf shook herself a bit to get some of the rain off, then said, "It just seems a little... overrated. Plus, you know I don't like having to look like this, I feel... exposed."

"Exposed? How so?"

"Indecent, My Lord."

I glanced over at her, confused, where I noticed that she had placed her tail in between her legs. After I realized what she meant, I said, "Oh... Well, right now..." I looked around to see if there were any Humans nearby, then I continued to watch out towards the road as I said, "There isn't anybody around, only a few of them looking at us from inside the restaurant. So you can run over to the car and get your hat to cover your ears."

"Another thing, My Lord. Right now, we could be warm and dry if we were in the car, or possibly in the restaurant. But instead, you

wish to be out here.”

“Is that a bad thing?” I asked with a slight smile, glancing back over at her, “You know they won't let you in there like that.”

Wolf looked over at me for a few seconds, still very irritated, then she turned back towards the road as she sighed. Depressed, she replied, “No, My Lord. Never mind.”

It was obvious that Wolf was upset at the fact that she had to stay outside with me, knowing that I loved this so-called “bad weather”. Yet she really could do what she wants, so I had no idea why she was still staying with me. She also knew that whenever the weather was like this, I tend to stay outside all day. But I felt bad for making her sit outside with me, which I'm sure was what she wanted. Even so, I decided to forget about staying out and see how I could make her happy. She deserved it.

“Come on, Wolf.” I said, gently petting her head with my right hand, “What do you want to do?”

She sniggled as she gave a light smirk, then asked, “Did I make you feel bad, My Lord?”

Just then, I thought, (DAMN, she did it again! I hate it when she pulls off crap like that, just to make me feel bad! Oh well...).

Without expressing what I thought, I calmly replied, “A little.”

Wolf sniggled some more and said, “Good.” She then quickly jumped down and walked behind me as she said, “I'll meet you in the car.” When I turned to see her walking away, she said, “I want to go to the library for a bit.”

With that, I thought, (Damn it! I knew today was going to be a bad day—I just knew it! Of all the places, it had to be a library! Why doesn't she observe Humans the way I do?! Just watch them as they live their lives! She doesn't have to read about them! At least observing them would keep us from having to be near them... much! Fucking Humans! I HATE THEM!!).

I despise Humans, every single one! They make me want to puke out my guts! Especially when they keep making things more and more complicated for THEMSELVES!! It's very irritating and annoying! I hate Humans! With every fiber of my being, I absolutely DESPISE them! I can't even stand to talk to them, or even look at them! I may respect all living things, like Mother had taught me, but I just hate Humans! Mainly for their stupidity. I wish them all a most painful death!

Irritated at what Wolf suggested, I quickly drank my soda and threw it away, yet I missed the garbage can by about half a foot. Humans do it, why can't I?! I turned to my left towards the parking lot and two Humans came out from the restaurant, both female and whispering into each other's ears as they cautiously walked towards me. I didn't know why, but I was sure it was because of me sitting out

in the rain that they wanted to ask me something. However, I wasn't in the mood to deal with them. Before I reached the street into the lot, one of the Humans called out to me.

"Excuse me, sir!" she called out, "Can we ask you something?!"

I don't know what possessed me, but I stopped just at the curb as I turned my head slightly to my left and looked down at the ground. I then quietly spoke through my teeth and said to myself, "Son-of-a-bitch! My Monday pain just kicked in!"

I turned to face them just as they got within three feet of me. I don't know why I even bothered trying to talk to them, I should have just kept on walking. They're Humans, they're used to being shunned. They do it to themselves—in a way. 'Course, I had already stopped in my tracks. So, in trying to scare the two away, I made my expression seem angry and moved my head up to stare down at them with a fierce gaze when I turned around.

Once the two Humans got close, the dark brunette one quickly stopped and stepped behind her friend. However, the blond one was a little more courageous and got up to stand just about a foot away from me. She looked directly up into my eyes and said, "Whoa! That's awesome!"

"What?" I bluntly asked.

"Your eyes, man! The color of them is pretty much glowing red!"

"That's because my eyes ARE glowing!" I said, "They're shining, to be correct, and they're blood red, to be precise. Now what's the question? I'm in a hurry."

Both of the girls looked at me, confused, then at each other as if they didn't have a clue of what to say. The blond one, courageous as she was, seemed like an idiot, and the other, of course, was too afraid to do anything—except stare.

They both looked young, about 18 to 20, had skinny jeans, tight shirts, jackets with fake fur inside, and those weird shoes with graffiti on them. All of that, to me, looked like crap. It only made me want to ask how they move with it or how they got it on in the first place. I hate those clothes!

The blond didn't seem cold but she was holding a black umbrella over herself and her friend in her right hand. The brunette, however, was almost the opposite. She was shivering like crazy and seemed frozen to the bone. Ironically, the brunette looked the same as her friend but with no makeup and two small gold circular earrings on each ear. That made me laugh a bit inside!

The two Humans whispered to each other, then turned to face me again.

"Sorry about that." the blond one said as she smiled, "I'm Amber, and my friend here is Jewel."

Jewel gave a quick wave with her left hand and said, "Hi."
"I'm Zaec." I said, putting my right hand out for a handshake,
"Zaec Shero."

When I put my hand towards Amber, she said she doesn't usually shake hands, then when I turned to Jewel, she got scared and stepped back behind her friend. Whatever!

"What is it?" I asked, "I thought when you introduced yourselves, you're to shake hands with one another?"

Amber gave a quick laugh and said, "Where did you come from, the 17th century?! Hardly anybody does that anymore. And the few that do hardly ever do it either."

With that, I slowly pulled my hand away and tightened it into a fist, becoming angry as I said, "Alright then." I then turned back towards the lot to head for my car as I said, "Forget it! You two can piss off!"

Just as I started walking, I heard Amber apologizing to call me back as she followed me, while Jewel followed her. She didn't even try to speak, so I guessed she was just following Amber to try and stop her.

I couldn't believe what had happened! I was not only insulted by some mere peasant, I was insulted by a Human! I swear, that bitch was blessed by The Creator himself—or something—because she was lucky as hell that I let her live! It took every ounce of my wellbeing to not just straight up beat the living shit out of her! Not even the fact that other people were watching and could have exposed who or what I was would have stopped me!

About three feet to my car, I felt Amber grab my right arm and try to pull me back. Instead, in her failed effort to stop me herself, I stopped and stood still as she tripped by, actually pulling herself forward and plunging herself towards the front of my car. She tried to use her umbrella to stop herself, but broke it, only continuing to fall forwards onto my car.

"Oh shit!" she quickly said, just barely able to throw her hands out to brace herself against the hood. She then stood up and asked herself, "What the hell?!" Afterwards, she quickly turned around and pointed her right finger at me and yelled, "What the HELL is your problem?!!" Jewel immediately stopped right behind me just as Amber started yelling. She gasped a little and tried to whisper to her friend to stop, but Amber just continued with, "What, you think you're the fuckin' President of the United States—or something?! All I wanted to know was why you were out here in the freezing rain! But you're too much of a stubborn jackass and a stuck-up prick, apparently, to talk to!"

Slightly confused, yet unmoved by her angry and idiotic choice of words, I glanced over into the passenger side of my car to see Wolf

in her Half State smiling and slowly shaking her head as she watched the Human yell at me. I then looked back over at Amber as she continued.

“And another thing you should know about yourself! The way you dress makes you look like a fuckin' serial killer!”

“And?” I calmly asked, “What about it?”

“My God, dude!” she said calming down a bit, putting her right hand on her forehead as she shook her head slightly, “You have got to be joking!”

“What?!” I asked, becoming impatient as I stepped my right foot towards her, “What is it?!” Out of the corner of my eyes I saw Wolf quickly jump out and run in between Amber and me just as I yelled, “Tell me or I WILL bash your skull into the hood of my car!”

Wolf quickly pushed both of her hands lightly against my chest as she said, “Ray, enough!” She then quietly said, “She's not worth it. Let it go.” It took me a minute but I finally calmed down and took a step back from Amber. Wolf lowered her hands to hold my right hand as she turned to look over her left shoulder to the Human and said, “Leave now! The situation's only going to get worse if you stay!”

Too bad Wolf forgot to get her hat before she stepped out of my car. Amber was slightly surprised as she looked up at Wolf's ears. I also glanced over my right shoulder to see that Jewel seemed almost petrified with her wide open eyes staring at the ears too.

“Who are you guys?” Jewel asked.

“More like; what are you guys?” Amber corrected as she reached up for the ears with her left hand. She then stopped herself from touching them and asked, “Can I...?”

Wolf hesitated a little, yet responded by quickly shaking her head. In doing so, she put her ears as far down and back as she could. She didn't want to respond with words because she was afraid to expose her fangs as she had with her ears, even though it didn't matter at that point. As Amber slowly pulled her hand away, Wolf turned towards the Human but stepped back until she had pushed herself up against me, trying to cover up her tail.

Once Amber placed her hand down, she quickly examined Wolf and asked, “Aren't you cold?”

It was a good question for a Human, but it was a bit stupid to me. Wolf was never affected by the weather, no matter how bad it was.

She wore skintight white leather short-shorts, with her black thong barely showing above it in the back and a hole for her tail to hang out. She had a small skintight white tank-top, with thin straps that went over her shoulders and crossed at her upper back with her black bra straps showing slightly next to them. She had white three inch high heels that had eight straps that went over the top of her feet, with one strap that went around the top of her heels. As a servant

to the Shero family, being MY personal servant, Wolf had black weight training gloves as well. And even in her Half State, Wolf had her collar tightly strapped around her neck—the only piece of clothing that stayed within both of her forms.

She had a slightly skinnier than average size body and stood about five feet, eight inches tall. Her hair was neon white and styled to hang straight down the sides of her head to her mid neck.

Wolf responded to Amber's question by shaking her head again and said, "I'm used to it." She then turned her head slightly to her right and quietly said, "Sorry, My Lord."

I gently put my hands on Wolf's shoulders and moved my mouth closer to her right ear, while keeping my eyes on Amber and whispered, "It's okay, Wolf. Just get back in the car." She nodded as I removed my hands and looked around to see if anyone else was watching. Once I saw that there was no one else, I lightly pushed Wolf with my right hand to edge her forward.

Wolf quickly walked around the Human and opened the left side car door and quickly slammed it shut as she sat down, with Amber just keeping herself still when the Alykenz walked by.

I moaned, irritated that two Humans had found out about Wolf, then I motioned for Jewel to move in front of me. Just as the Humans were next to each other, I grabbed my right hand pistol from under my left arm, then jerked it down to open the revolver as I inspected it and said, "I'm sorry I have to do this."

Amber and Jewel quickly looked at each other in fear, then back at me terrified as Amber asked, "What do you mean?! You're not going to kill us, are you?!"

I laughed a little as I leaned myself back slightly, while jerking my hand up to latch my pistol. Then as I motioned to face them again, I placed my pistol back into its holster and said, "That's one of the options I can give you, but I'm sure Wolf would hate me if I did that to two simple Humans. I was actually going to say: You can either forget what you just saw and pretend that this whole thing never happened. OR, you can come with us and have to live by our etiquettes. Which is it?"

Amber sat there for a minute looking at the ground pondering, while Jewel whispered to her about what they should do. A few seconds passed and Amber looked over at her friend and started to argue a little. After about four minutes, they came to an agreement and looked back at me as they both simultaneously said, "Go with."

I stared at both of them, confused and a little surprised, as I asked, "Are you sure?"

Amber nodded her head and said, "Yeah. As long as you answer some questions about yourself when we ask."

I gave them a smirk and said, "Okay. Get in then."

I walked around my car to the right side where the driver seat was, it set up that way because I was mostly right handed with just about everything that doesn't have to do with combat. So, in case you were wondering, yes. I do drive with only one hand.

I knew it wasn't going to be so easy dealing with Humans. I knew THAT day was going to be a bad day. I seriously HATE Mondays...

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STAR WARS

THE CLONE WARS: BATTLEFIELD CRISTOPHSIS

Chapter 5

Slade Eide-Ettaro

Separatist Command Post, Planet Christophsis

Ventress' eyes were locked on the Jedi. The Mandalorian standing besides him was of little consequence. He was her prize. As the armored figure opened fire, Ventress swatted the shots away with ease, her blood pumping and burning with vengeful hatred for the man before her. As her bike neared the pair, she split her sabers in two and leapt as he swung his own double saber and cut the front of her bike off.

“DIE JEDI!” she roared as she assailed him from above.

He parried her blows but gave ground with each strike, causing Ventress to grin wickedly. He was no match for her, she just had to push him and—she parried a flurry of blaster bolts from the Mandalorian, hissing viciously as she swung her right hand saber out and slashed through the armor like a piece of flimsi.

“You will not interfere!” she shouted as she turned back to the Jedi with a feral tooth filled grin.

Kahan winced as Aira-ty went down with her wound, clutching the molten gash in her flank where the Sith's lightsaber had penetrated. He wasn't much of a healer, he'd have to make do with the bacta kit on his armor. For the moment though, he was hard pressed to fight off his opponent. He was not ashamed to admit that his skill did not lie with the sabers, even if he used two of them forged into a single staff, his talents lay elsewhere. However in this case he wished that he was as skilled a fighter as Master Kenobi or even the infamous Count Dooku. As it was, if this kept up he was going to lose. He tried to find a way into the Sith's mind but her hatred was so focused and her concentration on him so great that he could find no chink in her armor for him to penetrate.

Her style matched his own in many ways, but was by far more ferocious. He managed to find a moment to breath and split his blades, matching the Sith's two sabers with two of his own.

“You will die Jedi.” she snarled at him. “I swore to kill you.”

“Indeed.” Kahan replied as he blocked her attack. “I do seem to be at a disadvantage.”

The Sith's face twitched and she raged at him. "React damn you! I want to see you beg!"

Kahan smiled through gritted teeth as their blades clashed and sparked violently.

"I'm afraid—" he ducked low and swung at her. "—that you'll be disappointed in your—" he leapt back from her assault. "—desire."

Then it happened, she knocked one of his sabers aside and kicked his hand. He lost his grip and the hilt skittered away uselessly, leaving Kahan with just a single blade to defend himself with.

Aira-ty touched her side. The slash was not deep, but it still burned, badly. Through gritted teeth she watched the battle unfold, feeling useless as the two combatants fought. Then Kahan faltered, one of his blades lost to the ferocity of the Sith's attack. The hilt rolled towards Aira-ty, coming to rest just a meter before her. Kahan was being pushed back, further and further. She had to help. Steeling herself for the pain, she picked herself up, her side burning with agony as she staggered forwards and hefted Kahan's discarded blade and ignited it. The amber glow so alien when compared to other Jedi's weapons which were typically green or blue.

Old memories long suppressed surfaced and Aira-ty gripped the unfamiliar hilt with more surety as she stepped forwards.

"Hey, psycho." she growled. "Why don't you finish what you started?"

The Sith was distracted for a moment as she glanced towards Aira-ty, then she laughed.

"Lie back down before you hurt yourself! I will finish you soon enough." she boasted as she knocked Kahan on his back.

Aira-ty's temper flared and she rushed forwards, fueled by her own anger at being mocked. She raised her blade high and swung down, very nearly taking off the Sith's head. She staggered away from Aira-ty who was panting from the pain in her side but nevertheless ready to fight.

"I'm not dead yet...and you aren't killing him until you kill me."

"And I'm afraid." Kahan said as she stood up and brought his blade to the ready. "That I will have to die before you can finish her off."

Ventress snarled in annoyance as the two faced her. The Mandalorian was holding her saber rather well for an amateur. No matter. She'd cut them both to pieces. She renewed her attack, venting her fury on the pair now instead of the one. Neither was very good, this would be over quickly.

Aira-ty staggered back under the Sith's assault, feeling her lack

of training heavily now. A part of her regretted her past choices but honestly, this life had been good. Who knew what that other life could have meant for her. If she was going to die, it was as she was, not as she could have been! Her frustration gave her strength and she pressed back against the Sith, forcing her back briefly. Aira-ty found herself bracketing the Sith with the General on the opposite side of her. It gave them some edge as their opponent now had to split her attention, but only some. Stang but she was good!

Kahan watched Aira-ty's movements curiously. She obviously knew how to use a saber which was more than most people could say. Swordplay was a dead art, vibroswords had not been used in major combat for centuries if not millennia and there were few beings beyond the Jedi who bothered to use energy blades let alone train with them. Was Aira-ty a Jedi? He didn't think so, still, she was certainly something. Something which bore watching.

At the moment however, he had more pressing matters to deal with. The Sith. Her attention was divided now as they danced and parried around one another, her armor not as complete. If he could just find the place where it was weakest. There. He'd found it. He applied pressure until the crack became a fissure and his mind poured into hers. He had her, and he would not release his hold.

“NO!” wailed Ventress as she clutched at her head, falling back from her opponents. “Get out get out GET OUT!”

“No.” the Jedi said simply. “I will not.”

“No! NO! STOP IT! STOP!” Ventress pleaded as the Jedi's assault carried him deeper and deeper into her mind.

“You are in great pain...always such pain.” his voice echoed through her head. “Why? What is it that hurts you so?”

“STOP STOP STOP STOP!” Ventress shrieked as she fell to her knees, the pain of his presence inside of her too much to bear. “I. WILL. KILL. YOU!”

“Not now, I told you before that while you may be superior with the blade, once I am in your mind, you have no defense against me.”

And with that, he burst into Ventress' deepest, darkest memories, the very essence of her being and took a hold of them, forcing her to relive her past moment by moment as it all happened again.

“Master!” she cried. “Master no! NO!”

With a last desperate cry, Ventress collapsed onto the ground, senseless.

Aira-ty watched as the Sith crumpled and then turned to look at the General.

“What did you just do?”

“I found what I was looking for.” he replied taciturnly.

“And what was that?”

“A frightened little girl.” he replied, his blue gaze meeting her vizor.

Aira-ty looked away first, stepping up to the Sith and raising her saber. He was there in an instant, holding her wrist firmly.

“No.” he said simply.

“Why not? We can finish her now.”

“Because I do not slaughter the helpless.” he said firmly. “You may do so if you like, but I will not sit by and allow it.”

“She will come for you again.” Aira-ty snapped. “She will kill more Jedi.”

Kahan nodded. “That is likely, yes, but that is the future. This is now.” his eyes narrowed. “Do not compromise my respect for you.”

Aira-ty stepped back, extinguishing the saber and glaring at him from behind her vizor. “It's your funeral.”

“It will be, yes.” Kahan replied, holding out his hand.

She handed him his saber and retrieved her blaster from the ground where it had fallen before turning to look at him.

“What are you looking at?”

He shrugged indifferently. “Simply wondering.”

Aira-ty's insides froze. Did he know? Had he realized what she had been? What she had forsaken? She hoped not. She walled herself off entirely, refusing to have faith in his good intentions. He would not glean anything from her without her permission.

Kahan stood there a while longer, watching his companion curiously before turning aside. She did not want to divulge her secrets, he would not force her. He looked down at the unconscious Sith, the woman had a name. He had found it within her mind. Asajj Ventress. He couldn't rightfully justify sparing her life, but he felt she was somehow...meant to live. As if there was more she had yet to accomplish that needed to be accomplished. He would let fate decide. Her life would be spared...again.

An explosion behind him caught his attention, he raised his comlink.

“Skywalker, I believe that was a fuel depot?”

“Affirmative Master. We're about to destroy an armory as well, we're not taking too much fire, looks like most of them are assaulting the city center.”

“Very well, finish what you're doing. We're done here.”

Aira-ty let her breath out. He wasn't going to pry. Good. She looked back at the Sith with an annoyed frown. She could kill the

murderous lunatic right now. Right this very instant...but...spit, why did his words bother her so much? What did she care for a Jedi's esteem? She let out an annoyed growl and turned on her heel, stalking away and leaving the General to catch up to her.

Anakin frowned as he put the comlink away. What had changed? It probably had something to do with that surge of power and raw hate he'd sensed. It was gone now, had Master Kahan and the Mando killed the Sith? If so then it was indeed time to go. And quickly, the rest of the battle still had to be won!

"Get on that STAP." he ordered Hanabi. "Head back to base."

"What about you Master?" Hanabi asked as she moved towards the repulsorcraft.

"I'll be right behind you." he said with a smile as he hefted a grenade.

Crystal City, Planet Christophsis

"Lana, are you alright?"

"I'm fine Master." Lana said as she batted away another blaster bolt. "But we're being overrun!"

"Fall back to the next line of defense Lana. No heroics."

"You got it Master. Jesp! We're falling back!"

"Roger that Commander, everyone, pull back!"

Lana looked out over the barricade and felt her heart sink. There were too many of them. They didn't have enough troopers, enough tanks, enough anything to stop what the Separatists were throwing at them. It seemed hopeless.

Jesp looked up at the Commander, she was standing alone atop the barricade and looking out at the oncoming enemy.

"Commander! We've got to move now!"

She looked back to him, her face set in stone and nodded, jumping down to join him in the retreat.

"Alright, let's move, next position, all of you go!"

Jesp nodded, wondering where out in that maelstrom Commander Nokta and the others were. It seemed that the plan had failed, the enemy was still pressing their attack and was breaking through on all sides. So much for victory.

Obi-Wan followed his troops back to the next strong point, several walkers striding alongside and providing fire support for the retreat. There was no way to say it nicely, they were losing, badly. Despite their best efforts, the Separatists just had too many droids and tanks at their disposal. The way things were going, the Republic

forces would be completely wiped out or captured if they did not get further relief.

“General, all forces have called in, we've regrouped at the next line of defense.” Rex reported.

Obi-Wan nodded. “Good, keep fighting, we have to hold out as long as possible.”

Rex nodded in turn, his voice strong and sure despite the impossibility of the situation. “Roger that General, we'll hold.”

Obi-Wan's comlink beeped and he pulled it up. “Kenobi.”

“General, this is Senator Organa, I believe we need to talk.”

“Now is not the time Senator.” Obi-Wan replied.

“I believe now is the perfect time General.” the Senator said grimly. “I will not take no for an answer.”

Obi-Wan looked at his troops and cursed the Senator's timing.

“Rex, you're in command, report to Lana and maintain your position until I return.”

“Yes sir.”

With his orders given, Obi-Wan left the battlements and headed towards the government building where the Senator waited for him.

“What do you mean he's gone?” Lana shouted into the comlink.

“He's gone to the government building.” Captain Rex replied. “The Senator wanted to speak with him, you're in command now.”

Lana's eyes widened as the gravity of what had just been said settled on her shoulders. She was in command? That was insane!

“Commander, your orders?” Jesp asked.

Lana blinked. “Uh, just hold position for now. We can't let them get through.”

He nodded. “Right, you heard the Commander, stand your ground, make every shot count!”

Lana bit her lip, this was insane...but she'd told Master Kenobi that she could do this and she would. She cut a trio of droids in half as the clones around her poured their combined fire into the advancing columns. They would hold. They had to.

Crystal City, Planet Christophsis

Senator Bail Organa looked up as General Kenobi entered the room. He didn't have to be Force sensitive to see the annoyance evident on the other man's features.

“Senator.” Kenobi said respectfully.

“General, I think we have a problem.”

Kenobi raised an eyebrow but said nothing.

“We're losing this fight, no, don't interrupt me.” Organa said as Kenobi opened his mouth. “I'm not a warrior, but I am not stupid. Be honest with me.”

“Yes Senator.” Kenobi replied. “We are hard pressed.”

“Can you honestly say that you can hold out until reinforcements arrive?”

Kenobi stood there for a long moment before shaking his head. “No, we had our gambit, it did not pay off...we'll be overrun in the next few hours at the rate we're going.”

“That is what I feared.” Senator Organa said. “Then allow me to make a suggestion. Let me speak with General Loathsome.”

Kenobi's response was immediate and predictable.

“Absolutely not! You're part of the reason the Separatists are attacking this planet!”

“I am well aware of that, however I am not critical to the Republic. I am merely an influential philanthropist and humanitarian. I am in no way vital to the war effort. Allow me to meet with him and discuss terms for our surrender...perhaps I can buy you the time you need.”

General Kenobi drew in a deep breath before he nodded.

“Very well Senator, I will have my men open an unsecured com frequency for you.”

“Thank you General, trust me.”

Crystal City, Planet Christophsis

General Loathsome considered himself a cultured being, and went to great lengths to show it. So when he'd received the message from the Republic forces that they wished to discuss terms and that Senator Organa himself would be the one conducting the negotiations, he of course had gone to great lengths to ensure that the meeting was as civilized as the current situation allowed.

He'd ordered his forces back to a respectful distance and now sat at a prepared table with tea in front of him and a cursory guard of two destroyer droids and an AAT. He wanted to display his strength while also showing that he was willing to expose himself for the sake of a settlement.

His eyes lit up as Senator Organa and General Kenobi crossed over the barricade and came to meet him. The baser part of his mind delighted and reveled in the fame and accolades that would be given to him for defeating the famed Jedi General. However he did his best to keep his gloating to a minimum.

As the pair approached him, he stood up and greeted them magnanimously.

“Senator, General, it is an honor to finally meet my worthy

opponents face to face.”

“The honor is ours General Loathsome.” Senator Organa replied respectfully. “I only trust that your worthy opponents may beg your mercy in their defeat.”

General Loathsome frowned but merely nodded as the Senator took the opposite seat. General Kenobi remained standing, his expression guarded. Loathsome couldn't say he blamed the Jedi, it must rankle to be defeated...not that Loathsome would know.

Aboard the Republic Assault Ship Jelial, Crystal City, Planet Christophsis

Lana watched anxiously as Cody was detanked and laid out on the cot. His eyes were still closed and she wasn't sure if he was breathing regularly or not...but at least he was alive. As the medics cleared the way, Lana approached the fallen clone commander. As she reached the bedside, he took in a long, deep breath and opened his eyes. She froze, looking at him nervously as his gaze swept the overhead before he turned his head and locked his gaze with her.

“Commander.” he said simply.

“Hi Cody. How're you feeling?”

He reached down and touched his stomach where the shrapnel had hit him.

“Better. Alive.”

“I'm glad.” Lana said with a smile. “You were pretty beat up.”

“The saboteur?”

“Dead. Commander Nokta shot him.”

Cody blinked and scowled. “Damn, I wanted to do it.”

Lana smiled. “You can't go around executing your own men. You might scare the rest of them!”

He looked at her for a moment before snorting and swinging his legs off of the cot and standing shakily.

“Here, let me help you.” she offered, letting him put his weight on her.

“You're awfully strong for someone so young.” he said.

Lana smirked. “You try training your entire life to be a Jedi and see what it does for you.”

Cody paused and eyed her curiously. “Your entire life?”

“Yeah...I guess you wouldn't know about that. The Jedi take us from our homes when we're very young...most of us don't remember our families at all.” she shrugged. “At least not many of us do. Then we train everyday to become Padawans and then Knights.”

Removing himself from Lana's support, Cody began donning his armor, his expression thoughtful.

“Perhaps we are not as dissimilar as I thought.” he murmured.

Lana chuckled, punching him in the shoulder.
“Does this mean you're going to respect me a bit more?”
“Only a little.” Cody replied wryly.

“What is our status?” Cody inquired.

The Commander shrugged. “Not sure. We're not fighting anymore...at least, not at the moment.”

“Did we win?” Cody asked, from her tone he assumed not but he couldn't think of another reason for the fighting to stop...at least he didn't want to think of another one.

“No, we were actually losing...pretty badly...but then Master Kenobi and that Senator went over the barricade to discuss terms.”

“They did WHAT!?” Cody exploded, turning on her and looking at her in disbelief. “We surrendered?”

“Well...we're surrendering...I guess.” she shrugged. “I think they have a plan...trying to buy for time.”

“Is the relief force that close?” Cody asked hopefully. Surely the General wouldn't be willing to risk a surrender without a plan.

“I have no idea.” she replied, crossing her arms. “I'm not powerful enough to sense that sort of thing.”

Cody swore, hurrying to put the rest of his armor—brand new to replace the one that had been blasted apart earlier—he had to get out there and see all this for himself. He slapped his comlink.

“Rex, report status.”

“Rex here, is that you Cody?”

“It is Captain, report.”

“Reforming after the attack, the General is meeting with the Seps, for the moment the droids are holding back but we're not taking any chances. I've got snipers aiming at the Sep general.”

“Any idea what they're talking about?”

“Honestly Commander? I have no idea, they just seem to be sipping tea.”

“Tea?” Cody asked in bewilderment.

“Tea.” Rex confirmed.

Cody shook his head. What was this? He got knocked out and suddenly the whole war stopped for tea time?

TITLE

Author
of

Cover Letter goes here: something about the work, the writer, or whatever else the writer wants to talk about.

POETRY

START WORKING

TheMeTheyDontSee
of <http://TheMeTheyDontSee.deviantart.com>

Completely drained.
Can't focus.
Eyes blurring.
Want to sleep.
Can't sleep.
Can barely eat.
When will these pills,
Start working?

THIS ONE IS FOR YOU

Amanda Applegate
of <http://thehityouneversawcoming.blogspot.com/>

Sometimes I just don't know,
My mind feels so out of control,
It feels like I've lost a piece of my soul.
Don't know what to do,
Which door I should go through,
What path should I take?
I can't figure out which choices to make.
Are they wrong?
Are they right?
I don't know anymore,
But I know I won't be getting any sleep tonight.
The pain rages on,
In my heart and in my soul,
Constantly fighting,
Crushing my dreams,
Taking all of my hope.
I want it so bad,
To be normal,
Not always feeling sad.
My mind is fuckery,
Confusion and raging thoughts,
Trying to hold back,
Not let that devil inside attack.
I'll try hard, that I can promise,
If for no one else, for Gavin Thomas,
That boy deserves the world on a silver platter,
Too bad the one I had I let shatter.
I will get through this,
I will fight to the end,
I won't those thoughts raging in my mind win.
Back and back, the farther they go, I push them out,
For they don't know,
Know my strength and what I can do.
Just remember my boys,
This is all for you.