

Imperial Villa, Caelestis City
Ragnath Moon, Seraph
Caperion System
38 ABY

A cool, late night enveloped the city of Caelestis in darkness as the moon and the stars remained hidden by clouds. The smell of rain filled the air, and it didn't take too long before the first streaks of lightning danced across the sky with an encore of thunder. Heavy rain began to plummet towards the earth in a frenzied shower, sending those out late fleeing for shelter.

Within the Imperial villa, the Empress herself had to forsake her spot in the office balcony for the dry office itself. Disappointed from no longer being able to enjoy the fresh air, Shadow Palpatine Nighthunter left the glass doors slightly open just so she could at least listen to the rain while she finished her work. So much had been going on since CSP began to rebuild itself from its defeat in the last Great Jedi War, and even with her new Proconsul and Rollmaster around to help, she had a lot of work and responsibilities to attend to. She knew some of the clan and its military questioned her leadership, and she couldn't help but wonder if perhaps she was fit for the job. She had chosen to step up as Empress for the sake of protecting her clan. For the sake of protecting her sons. And yet, despite the victories against Meraxis and the Palpatine Zealots, she had nearly led her clan to destruction in the war with the Collective. The defeat had stung like alcohol on a fresh cut, and it had destroyed her confidence and pride.

And yet, she still pushed herself to keep going. She reasoned that they hadn't fared so well due to the lack of Summit members. Now, finally having a full Summit, things were set in motion. Plans were being made, the military had been rebuilt from the foolishness Elincia had created, and the Praetorian Guard had been formed and fully established. Training exercises were being held, Mune Cinteroph having led one on the Nethal Archipelago. Mune's report on the results had proved interesting and promising. Scholae Palatinae was still kicking, and in time, would return to its former glory. The return of old members like Sykes Jade and Kell Dante raised morale.

Still, Shadow questioned if she truly was a good leader for the clan. She didn't expect to be perfect, but the pressure from all that was expected of her by her clan weighed heavy on her shoulders. Especially, with the failures that had occurred on her behalf. She only hoped that she could redeem herself, and prove to everyone as well as herself that she did have what it took to lead the clan to victory and glory.

However, such hopes had to be put to the night as she worked on into the night. She was looking over reports and requisition forms much to her disdain, and wanted nothing more than to be out somewhere on the field. Rasilvenaira had been keeping a close eye on her, and especially did so when they were out fighting the Collective. Shadow hadn't been allowed to take to the field, and the veteran Sith Warlord had made sure she didn't sneak off to do so. That's what Shadow hated more than anything. Being safe on the bridge of an ISD while her

clanmates and troops were out there putting their lives in danger. Even as an assassin, she'd rather be facing the enemy head on with her comrades. Having others fight for her filled her with silent anger.

And how did she deal with such anger? Normally, she would go to the small gym and workout or spar with a few guards and training droids. Sometimes, short walks in the gardens helped along with being with her sons. Other than that, drinking had become a way to escape her many stresses and rage.

And this night would give testimony to that as her thoughts over past events and the work began to nag her. Knowing it had been awhile since she took to the bottle, she opened the small fridge with the Force and Force pulled a bottle of champagne to her hand. With a glass already on her desk, she popped off the cork, and poured the alcohol. Eager to have the cold and crisp bubbly, she down the glass quickly before pouring herself another.

"Alright. Let's see how much I can get done before I finish the whole bottle again..."

Only an hour passed, and it was two in the morning when the Empress finally couldn't keep her eyes open much longer. The alcohol was taking its toll, leaving her mind in a hazy mess. She groaned in protest as she laid her head on the desk. She would've preferred to go to her quarters, but she already knew her legs weren't going to carry her there.

"Ugh. Frak. I'm...drunker than...than last time." She chuckled. "Oh if Tarsus saw me now. He'd be angry maybe...or maybe not. I don't know."

The sudden memory of him brought tears to her tired eyes. She still missed her late husband dearly. Shadow also knew that if he was still alive, he'd probably be scolding her for being so reckless and not taking care of herself. Then, he would just pick her up in his arms, and help her get comfortable before laying down with her in bed. The Mandalorian would follow up with sweet kisses of affection while keeping her close against him protectively as she drifted off to sleep.

And yet...would...I have become Empress...had he lived? Frak...just...I miss him so much. Brandon...why did you have to leave? Why couldn't I have...been there on time to...

The Sith closed her eyes as more tears fell and she tried to hold back from sobbing. However, with her emotions compromised by alcohol, she ended up giving in. So many thoughts and emotions flooded her mind and heart, and she felt as if the weight of the entire galaxy had just fallen on her. Unlike the strong Sith she was supposed to be, she was weak and broken. She was exhausted both mentally and emotionally. The pain from all her mistakes and losses came crumbling down on her, suffocating her immensely.

"Shadow? Shadow, what's wrong?"

The voice caught the Warlord's attention as she looked up towards the figure entering the room. Her mind still in a haze, she smiled as she saw who she thought to be her late husband coming to her aid. She reached out weakly towards him, just ready to be in his arms again.

"Brandon? Brandon is...that...really you? Oh how...how I've...missed you..."

Her voice trailed off as her hand dropped. She felt someone lift her up into their arms. She looked at the face of her savior, still sure she was looking at her husband through her blurred vision. She was ready to speak again, but her consciousness finally slipped. The Sith feeling comforted in her savior's arms, she quickly passed out and fell asleep.

The storm still continued on into the morning, keeping the sun at bay as rain and wind battered against the windows of Shadow's quarters. The Empress herself was sound asleep, blissfully lost in the world of dreams. It was only the fragrant smell of Jasmine Flower tea and freshly made breakfast that stirred her in her sleep. Instinctively, she rolled to her side, and tried to snuggle against her husband for added warmth. It was when she realized no one was in bed beside her that she opened her eyes and slowly began to become more alert. After a minute of her vision and mind clearing up, she realized she was in bed in her room instead of at the desk of her office.

But wait...how did I?

"Ah, sleeping beauty is finally awake."

The Empress looked towards the source of the voice, and found herself bewildered by the sight of the half-Sephi approaching her. "Fëanor? What...are you doing here?"

The Sorcerer smiled as he sat the tray of food and tea down on the nightstand next to her bed. "Taking care of you. You were in quite a state last night. You had passed out from all the alcohol you had. I brought you here so you could rest comfortably in your own bed."

"I..." The Empress rubbed her head, feeling slightly embarrassed. "I see..."

The half-Sephi placed his hand gently on her shoulder. "Don't worry. I won't say anything. Nor will the guards."

"Th-thank you, Fëanor. I...appreciate it." She looked at him a bit shyly, before suddenly realizing that his hand was touching bare flesh. She quickly pulled back from him. Checking herself, she found that she was in her tank top and shorts. Anger swelled up within her as she then glared at him. "Did you undress me!?"

The Seer was taken back by her outburst. "No! I didn't! I swear!"

"Liar! How else did I get changed?"

"I...had a droid help," he answered before he suddenly looked at her a bit sternly. "You honestly think I would disrespect you like that? How could you think of such a thing? I just try to take care of you when you refuse to take care of yourself, and you just come at me with accusations instead of thanking me."

He looked away. "I seriously never thought of you to be so callous."

"You-" The Sith clenched her fist and looked down. "Fine. I'm...sorry. I should've asked first without accusing."

He returned his gaze to her and nodded. "At the same time, I shouldn't be surprised. I'd probably panic a bit if I woke up in your shoes."

He then chuckled. "Then again, undressing me isn't much of a problem as a man."

"Ugh!" Shadow threw the pillow at him. "Shameless."

Fëanor had caught the pillow, snickering. "Ah, there's the Shadow I know."

"Oh, you just shut up." The assassin crossed her arms and looked at him unamused. "Go make yourself useful somewhere before I cut your hair or something."

"Oh, I'm so terrified." He sat down on the side of the bed next to her, taking the cup of tea from the tray to offer to her. "Here, this should help you to calm down. Don't need you going around biting people's heads off."

"Ha ha ha." She hesitantly took the tea and took a sip. As always, his tea was perfect, and she could sense a hint of orange blossom honey added to it. However, being the stubborn woman that she is, she studied the cup like a critic after she took her first sip. "Thank you. This will suffice."

"Uh huh. I saw that light in your eyes. You loved it."

"Maybe..." She didn't wish to give him satisfaction, and looked at him with a slightly uncaring look. "You may go now."

Fëanor rolled his eyes and poked her nose. "You're the shameless one. I do something nice for you, and all you do is continue to be a stubborn nerf. Maybe I should tell the summit about-"

"No!" She gave him a pouty look. "Fine. You win. Thank you so much for this delicious tea and for saving me from my drunken stupor," she said half sarcastically.

The Sorcerer grinned, and quickly kissed her cheek before quickly taking off. "You're welcome!"

"You! Ugh! Shameless!"

Shadow scowled, imagining all the ways she could get revenge on the man. However, the small cry of hunger from her stomach pulled her attention to the breakfast still warm on the tray. She put the tea back on it, and took the plate on her lap. Eggs and bacon awaited her along with a matcha choco bun. She bit into the bun, and found herself spellbound by the explosion of sweetness.

Studying the bun, she sighed and took another bite. "Why does he have to be such a good cook?"

The Sorcerer was out in the gardens for a walk, his mind in deep thought. Though he had spoken true about having a droid for assistance, he hadn't told her everything else that had happened. How he had stayed with her the whole night holding her protectively. How she had refused to let him go, thinking he was someone else.

After the droid had done its work, Fëanor had picked her up from the chair she was in, and had placed her in bed. When he was sure she was comfortable, he turned to leave. Much to his surprise, he felt her hand wrap around her wrist as she whimpered for him not to leave. He looked back at her, and felt her tug at him subconsciously, asking for 'Brandon' not to leave her again. The mention of her late husband touched his heart with bittersweetness. He still had ever growing feelings for the Empress since their first kiss, and knowing Shadow still hung onto her late husband both stung him as well as give him pity for her.

"Please...don't...go. Stay with me."

Her pitiful plea for her husband caused him to sigh. What he was about to do would probably be frowned upon, but he couldn't just leave her alone saddened. Knowing the risk, he went to the other side of the bed, and laid down on top of the covers next to her. He wrapped his arm around her as she snuggled closely to him. Her closeness eased the pain within his heart slightly, knowing that she was thinking it was Brandon Tarsus and not him.

"I love you..." she said as she held onto him tightly.

Fëanor sighed and kissed her forehead. "I...I love you too...Shadow."

The Dark Jedi sat down in the small gazebo and sighed. He felt a bit guilty for what he had done, and also felt even more pained from not being hers. He was at least glad that she didn't

remember anything, and that she had slept soundly in his presence. He just wished she would let him in, and let him help her be free of her sorrows. He hated seeing her abusing herself emotionally. It shattered his heart, and he just wanted to hold her tightly saying he would always be there for her. That he would take care of her and love her.

“Oh Shadow...that kiss...how can it mean nothing to you now? I felt it, and I know you did too. Can't you just...accept us?”
