

*...Kyn...*

*...Kynder, sis...hey...*

*Click-click, snap...*

“Kalta Phay, hey! Earth to sprite, wake up—”

Pale nicitating membranes passed across open mulberry eyes before she blinked, gaze shifting from staring through her sister to meeting her matching gaze. The sounds of their bedroom came crashing in, replacing the hollow aching sounds of inside a conch seashell. Dappled dark green shoulders fell from being frozen and rigid, faint pale blue specks catching the dim light from the lamp on their joint desk. Light that cut through the shadows of the night, multi-hued globuals drifting lazily within the circular tube. Kynder stared at that for a moment that seemed like forever and nothing at all, still dazed and trying to gather her bearings, her grey-blue and white spotted disheveled feathers rising lightly.

*Lamp, desk, loud-mouth sister. I'm in my room, our room, home. Not...it was a dream, just a dream...always, just...*

The sounds of clicking beak and snapping fingers brought the Omwati hybrid back to her twin. Oshin sighed heavily and flopped so hard back onto the foot of Kynder's bed that she nearly fell off. Her ruddy brown plumage sinking slowly from a fear risen full crest. She pinched her nose before turning to look back at the other teen, speaking hushly.

“*Puhta*, Kyn, you fraking scared me!”

“Heh,” Kynder shifted where she sat on her bed apparently, adjusting so her full-leg was more comfortably flexed beneath her. A hand ruffled darker feathers at the back of her

head, gently pulling forth the longer plumes and couple thin tendrils to stroke awkwardly like a ponytail. “I bet it was spooky, like, just sitting there, not saying anything like some horror holo. Boo!”

Clearly Oshin was not amused with her joking, her lips pursing together and brow furrowing as she leaned in. “Kyn, I...It’s getting worse. I think you should tell Atta and Dad, seriously, please.”

Swallowing, Kynder looked away and starred at a poster of two light grey Twi’leks in racing suits posing on a pod-racer up on their wall by their closet. The Daegella Twins. They were five or six when they first saw the pair race and Kynder would convince Oshin afterwards to play pod-racer with her, dragging their older brother into it who’d pulled them in a sled or wagon. If she recalled correctly that was when Atta started bringing Oshin to the shop and doing projects with her, and she had joined Marrien on the little league Meshgeroya team. She remembered great aunt Inid Low visiting then too, sometime after their Omwati father had found her sleep *climbing* the rock wall in the gym. The same rock wall that was promptly removed over the next couple days by their Nautolan father, the gym kept locked at night for awhile afterwards.

Those years they *both* suffered from night terrors. Both their fathers would sit with them as they fell asleep, telling them stories far longer than normal. But Atta, Kynder could recall his face at times, feathers raised, gaze glancing somewhere nearby, his head cocked as if listening to something. He would smile when caught in the act and redirected their focus to an activity or task. Their nightmares and her sleep walking had stopped for a long time after their great aunt’s visit.

Until recently.

“Kynder...”

“No. They don’t need to know. It’s nothing, honestly! Plus you’ve been having dreams again too, so...You promised we wouldn’t.”

“That was before you started crawling on the floor across the house!” Oshin’s voice rose with a trill and she had to catch herself, both of them pausing to listen for any movement farther into the house. Her twin quietly gestured to the blue and orange scaled Kaedean in the doorway, the first time Kynder noticed their eldest sibling’s presence. “Childe had to stop you from going on a hike in the middle of the night, Kyn—”

“—*Orja Sola.*”

Oshin’s beak clacked shut as her lips drew thin in a very angry line. Kynder felt like an asshole initiating the sibling code. It was something they got from both Atta’s Omwati culture, seen between him and *Serek Gaile*, and Dad’s mandalorian or just behavior they had witnessed between the Nautolan and Uncle Jax. If Han’duwil name was spoken, we respected it. That doesn’t mean they had to be happy about it however.

Shaking her head, the red feathered twin stood abruptly and muttered over her shoulder. “I’m going to sneak into the kitchen and grab some water for us. Be back later. Childe?” She approached the door and waved a hand behind her, as if asking her taller brother to speak some sense into their sibling before slipping past him and down the side.

The reptillian sighed while he unfolded his arms and ceased leaning against the frame. He crossed the room and gently took one of the chairs at their desk and set it down closer to her bed facing backwards. Sitting down, he crossed his arms over the back of it and just kind of sat there quietly for a moment. Eventually his orange eyes met her dark red-purple gaze and he asked with that steady, grounded tone of his.

“How are you doing?”

*Puhta.*

Childe was only like three years older than them but subscribed to the older brother role too well. She had a knee-jerk reaction to just brush it off and tell him she was fine, but he could read the twins almost as well as Dad could and Atta if he was using the Force, cheater...

But it was bad.

Like failed science and math this quarter, Oshin covered for her than, and Coach had talked to her about getting her head in the game.

Yet how could she tell Childe what was going on? Closest she got was talking with their sister a couple weeks ago when she dug at it, shortly after she had a couple dreams herself — lucky hers always ended with some ‘hot pale guy’ interrupting, her words...

*“Do you...remember when we were kids and like I had that imaginary pet-friend thing?”*

*“Like, the whalebear, er, fishdog creature? Yeah, I guess. I thought it was weird but like kind of cute. You used to draw it sometimes.”*

*“Yeah, if could call those scribbles drawings, heh...We used to have nightmares back then too.”*

*“Kyn...”*

*“I don’t know, feels familiar these dreams. Just find myself like in this deep deep blue with the muffled sounds of ocean waves and — there would be this voice, this faint melody, both haunting and inviting, calling from the shadows below and if I tried swimming closer towards this like I don’t know motherly voice a large pale shadow would stop me, passing so swiftly by that all I see is a flash of fins and teeth, a whoosh of bubbles until I wake up—”*

**“Hoo, breath, sis...”**

**“Sorry...”**

“...I don’t know what it means, I just feel like something’s missing, in *me*.” Kynder paused as she filled in her brother, the conversation giving heavy *deja vu* from the one she recalled with Oshin. Her hand rubbed absentmindedly at the stub of her left leg where her knee should be. A deep inhale, catching her breath. “And that all this is going to continue until I find out what that is. I just...I don’t know, Childe.”

The Kaedean frowned lightly with concern and nodded, indicating he had been listening. He rose with a sigh, came around the chair and gave her a one-armed hug, squeezing her gently into his chest. “Suns, Kynder, I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine—sorry, I mean, it’s not, just what can you do when it’s all bumps and knocks in your head, yeah?” She squeezed him back before sitting up again, shugging and shooting him a feigned smile. “Don’t worry about me, I’m built different, yeah? The champion of stepping on duraplastic blocks,” the avian hybrid raised and wiggled her half-leg, “Seriously, if I can handle that, I can handle anything.”

Childe’s concerned and sympathetic face remained, but he at least decided to give her a small laugh at that and elbow her lightly. “Alright, yes, Queen of the Leggos.” His brief smile fell and the calm serious drifted back in. “But consider telling Atta and Dad, or Gaile, hell, call up Inid Low. Just talk to someone, okay? We’re just worried, care is all.”

He flicked a grey-blue feather that was hanging loose in front of her eyes. The simple motion freed it, letting it fall lazily into her lap. Another frown at now noticing the first signs of stress molt in his sister. “Please...I’m going back to bed, but if you need me, the

door's open."

Kynder watched him leave and with him the dim light of the room seemed to follow even though that silly lamp still sat on the desk. Her heart quickened in her chest as he crossed the threshold.

"W-wait! Childe...could you hit the light for me?" Her crest pressed down lightly before she quirked a wince of smile, "heh, just gonna do some light reading for a bit, help me get back to sleep."

A pale, blue-scaled smile reciprocated briefly with an exhale. The eldest Erinos kid flicking the switch up before moving on his way with a light, "Good night."

Kynder flopped back into her bed with a deep sense of relief as the yellow light washed over the shared bedroom. Staring at the ceiling for several long heartbeats, for waaay too long. Her mind crossed between wanting to scream into her pillow or ruminating on everything she shared tonight.

*'I just feel like something's missing, in **me**...And that all this is going to continue until I find out what that is.'*

Something was calling her name, singing her songs, and either chasing her away from the deep or protecting her from it.

What?

And who was *Alla'su*?

Perhaps...

Perhaps it *was* time to find the answers to all of this.

Maybe it lies out there in the ocean of Selen, waiting for her.

Maybe she could...

Kynder rolled over to the sound of soft approaching feet, looking up to meet Oshin's gaze. The two shared an apologetic glance, the passing of water glasses as her sister joined her in bed, head pressed against her shoulder as she read.

-x-

***Two weeks later...***

Foxen stirred to a light rap on the bedroom door. He glanced to the crimson feathers fluttering against his chest with every *hee-hoo*. His home, no, one of the lights that composes his home and nowadays he couldn't be bothered to say which was the brightest and would silence anyone who implied anything less than all of them. The knock sounded again and he groaned internally, more because he was going to have to disturb Flyndt in order to get up and less because he should answer the door. Their children were all teenagers. If they were waking them up, it must be something important — even if it wasn't, the aging Nautolan would drop everything to listen to them.

Gently, Foxen attempted to slide his *ber* off, and action that rewarded the man with a drowsy sunset gaze blinking up at him. *Brrrt?* came the quiet asking trill.

'*One of the kids are up, knocked on door. I will see what is needed, stay here if you want,*' the Nautolan signed, leaning in to plant a kiss upon the birthmarked head and getting up to do just what he stated. The door creaked open just enough that he could see the shock

of red-brown feathers. Upon opening the door fully, however, he stiffened and his brow furrowed.

*'Oshin, what is wrong?'*

The girl chattered involuntarily, anxiously, her mulberry gaze flicking down the hall as she wrung her hands. Her feathered crest rose and fell sharply in turn. A rustling of blankets sounded behind him and in an instance his love was pressed beside him, reaching out to cup those worrying hands.

*"Orja Sola, please...you may tell us—"*

*"I—it's— It's Kynder!"* The Omwati hybrid bursted out, tears streaming down already moisten cheeks as short raspy breaths raked her in absolute fear and panic. The two *bers* eyes locked in deep and sudden concern. Foxen pulled Oshin in to a tight hug as Flyndt's hand let go in surprise and shock. The teen continuing to repeat herself and cry into the dark Nautolan's stomach. *"She's gone...nightmares...told me not to tell you...I can't find her..."*

Farther, deeper into the home, the light in the gym flicked on. Slitted orange eyes scanned the room and over the various equipment and mats until they paused on an ajar locker. Childe crossed the room and nudges the door open fully, a knot forming in the back of his throat — an eating suspicion as he *knew* what was stored there. And what was not present now.

A rebreather, goggles, and fins.

Everything one would need to swim in the ocean...

*To Journey to the Depths of Shadows...*