

The portal was like a tear. It wasn't quite visible to the eye if one wasn't paying attention. It was like a shroud had been cast over the spot, leaving the Force and reality with it swaying around it while also trying to reshape and thread back together. A battle sewn within the fabrics of what *is*.

Melissa had taken the research mission, knowing it may worry her adoptive family. It was supposed to be safe, though standing at the fraying ends of the galaxy known left her suddenly aware of how unsafe it was. She wasn't even armoured, but the Mortis' presence was one that could be evaded. Others were entering in different places more violently. Hopefully the Children would concern themselves with bigger threats.

The Arcanist took a step forward, grasping the threads and pulling them aside. She stepped through, letting go of what she knew even as the ground beneath her was no longer there.

The fall took Melissa's breath away. It was short however, as if from a window ledge rather than anything more substantial. With a glance behind herself, the Echani could see a far more potent version of the portal. The threads writhed here, a bright display of blinding lights fighting against a shadow that led back to where she came from. There was no subtlety on this side.

There was no hiding. The Force was too strong, pulling at her from within. Even concealing herself, trying to hide away was fruitless. It took several minutes to adjust, to pull herself out of speckled visions from the future that it left her lost in. Faces, tormented. Some joyful. Regretful. None of them she knew, but they were taken. They were hurt. One was... buying milk after hours of indecision. Melissa wondered how long he had already been making that decision, before finally managing to drag herself from her farsight and into the present.

She was standing in a field but the grass was golden not green. The grass was waving in the breeze, brilliant *metallic* stands awash with themselves. Flecks of the same gold were rising in the air. Some were already caught in her hair as they made their slow journey up. It took crouching down to see what was truly occurring. The grass, or... The blades of what should be grass, were made of grains of sand. They rose from the ground and fell upon each other, building up into towers, crashing like waves of the ocean, only to grasp onto other strands and move upward. It was a constant battle to be on top. To rise above the rest and begin the fall to the sky. All at Melissa's ankles. She crouched there for many minutes, observing the cycle. Some were cast back to the ground entirely, yet those that managed to rise to the top of the stalks didn't remain there in pride of their achievement. Instead they rose into the air. The wind had no effect on them now, unbound from nature's laws, and even those that got tangled in her hair would drag strands of it up rather than stay near the ground.

Melissa stood, following the sand to the sky.

Her gaze fell upon purple. A shade so dark that it dizzied her from being so pigmented in colour, despite the shadows of the cosmos. It felt as if she was drifting toward it as well, her stomach dropping, the weight of her own form pressing on the underside of her bare feet. The sand was rising and rising. The grains became the stars. Sparks of gold. It made the purple feel less unreal.

Trails of silver paled the colour more. The rose above, casting lines across the dots. Constellations moments from birth.

Gold took freedom from the silver, a moment later Melissa was pushing her own hair out of her face. It was hard to say how long she'd been standing there but it was enough that it took a good few shakes to release the sand that had been netted.

The Echani took another look around, before simply deciding to walk straight ahead across the field. Trees, interspersed with strange structures laid in the distance.

It wasn't until she drew closer to the structures, passing between the oddly normal trees, that Melissa realised they weren't attached to the ground. The trees brushed against them, though they were not cut back. Their branches and trunks warped to avoid them, the journey upwards in the sky interrupted. It created the visage that the buildings were sitting in chairs made while still living.

But no. Upon drawing closer, the floating sands of the field far behind her back, it was clear that they were floating. The wind made the buildings sway but only side to side. Vertically... it seemed as if they were locked in by taut chains. It was peculiar.

Years of living in a forest made it an easy decision for Melissa to begin climbing up the trees.

The trunks were broad with cracks up and across the lengths of the bark, the branches dense. It was perfect climbing really, even if Melissa had no clue what kind of tree it was. The colour was a bit too green, as if moss was growing through the bark itself yet there was no softness to it. There was no sign of lichen either. Something to note, but not to question for now.

It took several minutes, with many breaks, to reach the top. The Echani was sweating slightly when she breached through the canopy. She couldn't stray far from the main trunk, the branches too thin to hold her weight bar at the base of them where they connected to the rest of the tree.

But, with the view she could see that several metres below herself was a large enough branch that she could cross to a window in the building.

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It had been an hour.

It was dark inside the building. The lights were on but the ceilings were so high they barely highlighted the floor. It felt like they were leaning, as if the wind outside was brushing against the very walls within despite *surely* not being able. Melissa had made it deep into the building. There were Children of Mortis here, cultists. They whispered in various rooms, but containing her Force signature and the occasional use of sitting in a corner and turning indivisible had made the flickering clues her Farsight gave her a *lot* more useful.

Melissa could close her eyes and focus, and know that a door would open and she'd need to hide, in one of those instances. Though it had opened behind her and the Echani had almost missed the warning, she had enough time to hide herself before the cultists actually left the room.

Many spoke of breaking chains. There was so much *power* here it was dizzying.

Still, there was another door that Melissa needed to go through. She had notes that spoke of it, and the strange mirror they kept in there. None of them seemed to know what it was or what it did, but maybe that meant it was an asset? Or maybe a worse weapon to use against the Brotherhood.

The door at the end of the hallway she now stood in was it. It intrigued her. Only a few more steps to reach it, anticipation building. Her gaze drifted from the present, and the pain and stale grey shades of that vision worried her, but Melissa still walked forward, reached out and pulled the door open.

There wasn't a light inside but a window provided more light into this room than most of the rest of the building had. It was mostly blocked by a cupboard or... something. It was a plain board of wood, the back of something larger. She closed the door behind her before walking around it to the window. It looked out on the golden field, though she could only see the sand falling into the sky.

For a moment, she let her forehead rest against the glass, feeling the warmth of her skin ebb away as the cold absorbed it.

Then she turned around and saw herself asleep on the floor. In the field outside.

Melissa tilted her head, approaching what she had thought was a cabinet but it seemed to be a mirror. Or.. window? She'd call it a portal, but as Melissa reached out, her hand met a cool material. Just like the glass of the window.

Her gaze looked down upon the other her, fast asleep. A soft smile lightened her features.

She felt tired again. A frown crossed her features. It was sudden, not the quiet protests of her muscles but a bone aching tiredness of... what?

Melissa turned around, unsure what she was looking for but catching a glimpse of herself in the reflection of the window. There were wrinkles at the corner of her eyes. She raised a hand, brushing against the skin and feeling the lack of resistance. It was still in her cheeks but even as she pressed against there she could feel it ebbing away.

Or could she?

Her hands were shaking, though not with whatever this was. Fear was pressing at the back of her mind for much of her short journey in this place. Now it broke free. What was happening?

Silvery eyes cast downward at her shaking hands, of which the veins were beginning to press against the skin. Her joints *hurt*. The world became fuzzier at the edges before it filled in. And, upon raising her gaze once more, wrinkles had sagged her face. All of her seemed to sag.

With a panicked whine, Melissa used the edge of the mirror to guide herself to the floor. Even now, the other version of herself was resting calmly. Even as she felt herself fading. Was she going to die?

Melissa whimpered as the pain grew worse. Her hands looked awful. She couldn't see the window well enough to glimpse her reflection again.

So she looked to the younger form of herself and rested her hand against the mirror. Alone. After so many years alone, hse was going to die on her own as well. She closed her eyes, the silver having lost its shine and become milky.

Breathe. That's what Ruka would say.

Breathe in, one two three. Breathe out, one two three.

*Breath* in. One. Two. Three. Breathe out. One two three. It caught on her throat.

Keep breathing. In. One.. One two-

Breathe out. One...

Breathe in. Breath in-

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Falling is a strange thing. The feeling of dropping. Like a grain sand falling through the tumultuous grasp of its brethren, into the unknown. Yet, some sand is in a hourglass. The fall is long, for such a small thing, but eventually...

A shuddering breath shook Melissa's body, she sat up coughing, *choking*. Choking on nothing. Or was it air? It hurt.

It took more time than the Echani could process to recover, to finally find enough breath in her lungs to calm. Where-

She was surrounded by gold once more.

Looking up, many grains of the golden sand were floating up, a cloud of them that must have gathered beneath her like a dam before she had released them back on their journey.

Melissa got to her feet, unsteady. Had.. she ever left? Had it all been a vision?

A quick glance at a chrono she'd been given told her it had been hours since she originally left.

The portal was still open, though the tears were becoming thicker. The fraying was more severe.

Was she still.. Melissa?

Or was this the mirror now? What... A shiver ran through her. A vision. It'd have to just be a vision. Which meant, she still had the information whether it was true *yet* or not.

The seeress calmed herself, before walking back to the portal and clambering up the verge.

Upon standing once more, she was back in the room on Arx. A lone researcher was sitting at their desk, a Kaminoan that looked surprised but relieved at her appearance.

“Oh, Miss Luxor. You were gone for a week, are you alright?”

Ruka was going to be worried sick.