

Hush the Storms Away

A dull ache woke the Mandalorian, the same one that had bothered him for years, a gnarled pain that started in his side and radiated across the damaged nerves in his burn-scarred flesh. He could feel the familiar rumble of the Somber Respite's Ion Engines and life support systems throughout his body, the deep and consistent baseline that told him the ship was alive and healthy. The intractable tinnitus was ten times louder this morning as he rolled to his side and snatched his helmet from the bedside stand. Eyes watering, he pressed the vox switch and called for Lillian or Asani, his voice drowned out by the high-pitched whine earned in years of combat. What came through the comms was anything but a collected request. When his voice was too quiet, too muffled to be heard, to even himself, he raised his tone to a mild shout as he tried to figure out why the pressure in his cabin was so high to make his ears ring as bad as they were.

“Lillian, Asani, kark's going on. Where are we docked that the ship's got this much pressure built? I can't hear a damned thing in here.” He bellowed into the microphone as he tried to get his bearings and pulled on a loose pair of shorts.

Lillian hadn't been awake yet, stuck in a restless sleep. It was only when Wulfram's voice shouting across the commlink in her helmet echoed across the room that she finally startled awake. A few blinks cleared the sleep from her eyes, and she was alert. Letting out a loud groan of frustration, the redhead picked up the helmet and grumbled into it.

“What in the kark has you shouting at way-to-damn-early o'clock, Wolsha?”

She swung her legs around to sit on the side of her bed and then hesitated, emerald eyes squinting in the dim light of her room. Something felt.... off, wrong, missing. The Human took a deep breath and looked around her room, assessing her surroundings for the issue her mind screamed at her about.

There was nothing abnormal about her room. She was fine physically, and the door was still closed in the exact same way as when she had gone to bed. One shoe gently rested against the door on the far edge where it wouldn't be visible, but she'd be able to tell if someone entered.

Everything was fine, but it wasn't.

Another groan escaped her lips when Wulfram didn't answer her, so she grabbed some clothes, quickly got dressed, and made her way toward his room. Maybe he just fell asleep again.

No response came through Wulfram's comms, at least not for him. Others onboard whose auditory senses hadn't been affected would still be able to hear the shouting match between the pair, but the Armis Patriarch couldn't hear their chatter. As he dressed and staggered, once more, to his feet, his equilibrium offset, he made his way to his doorway. When there was no response over the comms, he checked his helmet's tactical sensor for known friend or foe communications before he dropped it.

It was only family on the ship. They were alone, supposedly, and everyone was at stations or in bed. But there were no responses. A weary hand reached for his RSKF-44 as he ventured out into the halls and called for Lillian and Asani.

"Riduur? Ad'ika? Winchester? Sound off!" He shouted into the hallway as he turned down the hall and banged on the piping with the butt of his blaster.

He felt the thud of his impact. But the sharp metallic clang didn't sound off following it. A second rap on the metal followed, and he listened for what should have been a high-pitched pinging but nothing other than the reverberations reported down the shaft, which he felt more than heard.

Panic took over, and he raced towards the end of the hall towards Lillian's bunk. Few things could rob someone of their hearing in their sleep without waking them: either loud enough noises that overwhelmed the senses before they could respond or biological agents.

She heard Wulfram before she saw him, shouting out for her down the hall.

Tang tang tannnggg.

That sound, ingrained in her memory, the butt of a gun as it rapped against metal. She had heard it enough— strikes against her armor or her father taunting her. She also understood the undertones of that noise. Wulfram had grabbed his gun, which meant he was in defense mode. Bare feet quickly carried her down the hall to meet her fellow Mandalorian halfway between their rooms.

There was no sound, and he saw a figure dart into his periphery and turned his RSKF towards them. His finger stayed at the trigger guard for a moment while he deciphered who or what it was for just a moment before he realized it was Lillian. She registered the shock on his face.

She knew that look and could feel his panic. She recognized the quick snap and the rise of the gun. Unsure, alarmed, scared.

Her scarred hands quickly checked him over, panic registering on her face now as well. There were no new scars or injuries or bruises or bumps. That nagging feeling hit her harder— what was wrong? What had gotten him so spooked?

“Wulfram, what’s wrong? Talk to me. Talk to me *riduur*,” her voice was stern but obviously worried. A turn in Wulfram’s expression made her heart falter. “*Riduur*? Wolsha?”

He saw her lips moving and knew Lillian was trying to speak to him. But he couldn’t hear a word of it. She had spoken so fast, and his own internal panic had set him to a state where he couldn’t keep up with her lips, no matter how focused he was.

“*Riduur*... What are you saying? I can’t hear anything over the pressure in the ship.” He shouted over her.

Seeing that she was here and that her focus was, at the moment, focused on him calmed him down.

When she reached out into The Force for any hint as to what was going on, she received nothing in return. And it wasn’t just nothing— There was an absence, a complete lack of any and all feedback like a rope cut loose and hanging. Panic slammed into her and turned her sun-kissed skin a few shades paler.

Her connection to the Force was *gone*. No, it didn't matter. She would deal with Wulf first and then her own problems. She swallowed her panic like bad whiskey and turned her attention back to her husband.

Wulfram watched Lillian for a few moments as he tried to gauge the entirety of the situation. The tinnitus drowned him out, the overwhelming pressure and pain, the nothingness, but then he saw his Riduur drained of color, and his hands reached out.

“Lillian?” He questioned, his voice a hoarse whisper, the concerned cry he held for when any of them were hurt.

Lillian shook her head, not wanting Wulfram to worry about her issues, at the moment, considering he couldn't kriffing *hear anything*. She should have paid more attention to Dadita when one of the other Mandalorians she had run with before she came to Arcona had tried to teach it to her. The redhead cussed loudly and looked around, then gestured for Wulfram to follow her to her room.

Her steps were purposeful and quick back to the cabin she hoped to soon abandon in favor of Wulfram's. Once inside, she reached into her side table and pulled her datapad out. Her expression was one of intense concentration as she tried to ignore the aching emptiness inside her head and her veins.

It would come back. Right?

Once she finished typing, she handed the pad back to Wulfram so he could read it.

[Your hearing is gone? We're not anywhere special, and the pressure feels fine to me.]
[Do you think something bio is loose on the ship? Any symptoms other than hearing |
| loss? Virus maybe? Would be just like you to catch some backwater xenovirus.]

Wulfram took the datapad from Lillian, and his shoulders slumped as he turned his RSKF in his hand and engaged the safety, handing the blaster to his riduur before he began to type himself. A heavy sigh escaped him as he scribbled on the pad, erased, scribbled again, and then looked into her eyes.

| Ringing, tinnitus, what I can hear sounds like swimming. Like bass, I feel it |
| more than I can hear it. Balance is off, shifted. What about you? I don't feel |
| comfortable with the look on your face. Are you having symptoms? |

He handed the datapad back to Lillian before he laid his hand on her thigh and looked into her eyes again. It was a plead for her to be honest with him. He knew all too well when she was holding back from him, as well as she knew when he held back from her.

If one of them was sick. Both of them were. And likely, so was everyone else aboard the Respite.

Kark.

Lillian placed the RSKF in her hands down on the bed and took the datapad back from Wulf.

Emerald eyes quickly read over the response from Wulfram, one finger tapping at the back of the datapad in a mixture of annoyance and frustration. He was right, of course. If one of them was sick, chances are everyone on the ship was— and those who hadn't shown symptoms would likely begin experiencing them with time.

They were beyond the point of quarantine.

Lillian's eyes flicked up from the datapad to meet Wulfram's slate ones, and she felt her resolve crack under his concerned and pleading expression. The redhead's jaw set as she weighed her choices, index finger still tapping away at the back of the datapad while she thought. After a few seconds of staring into Wulfram's eyes, she looked back down at the datapad and typed her own response before handing it to him.

[If it is, it's not the same symptoms. I can't feel the force. I reach out, and there's]
[nothing. It's just— gone. No visions, no telepathy, nothing.]

Wulfram's weary eyes scanned her report and sighed as he wiped it away. Of course, the difference between the two of them would be The Force. He absolutely abhorred that intrinsic entity that linked all of them, but Lillian? Lillian was bound to it; it guided her day-to-day existence.

The Human woman looked away, swallowing hard. She had spent her whole life at the mercy of the Force and its visions and precognitions. It was how she found Wulfram. It was how she survived the fight with her father, and now? She had never felt so naked before. So helpless. Lillian used to dream about what it would have been like without snippets of the future leaking into every moment of her life. She had never thought she would miss it.

| Trade you. I'd gladly live a life without the Jedi gimmicks, without worrying |
| they're going to hunt me or the girls down because of who we are. Riduur, |
| are you well else wise? Not sick to your stomach, no tinnitus, no pressure? |

He questioned, handing the tablet back. Until he was sure of his voice and the situation around them, he didn't want to raise alarms or make anyone else worried worse than they already were. Containing this situation as much as possible was in their best interest.

As he handed the tablet back to Lillian, his palm rested on her knee, and he shook his head before he slumped into her and sighed, a hoarse whisper escaping him.

"Of all the things that shock us, it would be a damned virus that your foresight couldn't even warn us about." He chuckled under his breath.

Instinctively Lillian rested her head against Wulfram's as she sighed. She grumbled a bit at his comment about her foresight and rolled her eyes. Maybe she had caught the virus first? Maybe The Force was just being cruel to her. One hand reached down and squeezed her riduur's on her knee before she went back to type on the datapad.

[We should get to a medic. Make sure that these symptoms go away. Would be]
[trouble if they didn't. Check on the girls. I can call 'Gitta since you can't hear.]

She slid the datapad over, so Wulfram could read it, removing her hand from his so that she could rub her face. Her mind went through a mental checklist of their next possible steps, contingency plans, and worst-case scenarios.

Wulfram nodded and held up the datapad as he pointed to it and then to himself. It was a gesture to show that he would need it to communicate since he couldn't modulate his voice properly.

| I'll go and check on our ad'ika and Chris' crew. You check on Gitta and see |
| if there's any known outbreak matching ours in Marshal or Arconan care |
| hopefully someone's got a bead on this thing, and we're not patients zero. |

The elder of the pair nodded as he waited for a response from his partner before he went to check on their children and the rest of the crew.

Wulfram (Wulfram Armis): 1,141 Words

Lillian (Zosi'val'ria): 1,069 Words