

*Revenge...is a foreign concept. Thought of once or twice and little more. I wondered about many things, but vengeance was never a large one, closed chapter as it was. But...there were quiet moments when I'd often wonder about this path I was on. A path...is something you make for yourself, I suppose. So, when did I start down this winding, wandering road of mine? That was what I pondered more often than not, should I bother to stop and ponder anything at all.*

*But should you pray for a story, for one I've not told another soul, then I'd share it, freely. You wonder at the intimacies of my life...the stains and the catharses, all the pain I've ever been put through. You're curious about my love, revenge, regret...the threads of my being, the mistakes I am too late to fix, the pieces of me at peace in their sleep...for just this hour, I will wake them for you...*

*There was a time in my life when I'd been very much alone. An outcast perhaps, but not with some piteous story of not belonging or having no friends or of being fearsome and disgusting—the opposite, in fact, as I loved and was loved. Yet I was lonely, and it was that I just was. Perhaps because I didn't recognize the aching that pulled me forward, didn't know what it was, what to call it, that it was there at all.*

*It was...how to describe the sensation? Not knowing the reason...for not knowing what the problem was...with a situation I felt was off but didn't know why. It made my head hurt to think about, and I felt ungrateful when I did, so I didn't, but the nagging feeling was always there.*

*I was lonely, I suppose.*

*Why though? Well...maybe because...*

*Because...*

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It was the depth of a gorgeously mild summer, so swelled with good rain and growing and sleepy pollinators and hazy sun that most were drunk off of it. The air constantly smelled of turned earth and fertilizer and berries and songs. The crops were flourishing. Life was beautiful and sweet. She was tenderly fourteen, of an express mind, and unnecessarily sad.

“Yiru! Come along. Let us get home.” Her father called in his warm baritone.

“Coming, Father!” Atyiru replied, dusting off her skirt and running after him, short legs not carrying her nearly as far as his full ones. He took her hand when she grew close and they waved to their brothers and cousins and turned separate ways up the road.

Despite the heat of the setting sun baked onto her shoulders like freshly risen bread, and the sweaty comfort of her small hand clutched between her father's fingers, a heaviness sat in her chest. She puzzled at it a bit, and then entertained herself with the thought that she could collect gravity in her ribs and sell it with the vegetables to whoever wanted to keep their feet on the ground; then maybe she could fly.

“Are you well, little star?” Father asked as they reached their porch, the smell of herbs and spices and Mother's perfume wafting from within the house.

“Of course, Father. Ashla and Bogan bless me.” Atyiru said, hugging his middle. He put a hand on her hair, and she could sense his quiet happiness.

It was something she didn't have. That, she knew instinctively. But she filled up the space with her family and good food all the same.

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Several weeks later, and their drowsy summer had lied down, ready to be put to sleep. Despite the approaching autumn, the season still held on, the warm, slightly diffused, pale beams streaming from above as the sun dipped toward the horizon. A cooler breeze danced through the clearing, filling the area with a symphony of rustling as tree branches shook and leaves trembled. One or two crackling bits of foliage were carried on the wind, a testament to the coming change of season despite outward appearances. The playful gust added a fresh, crisp flavor to the many scents already permeating the meadow, a mix of sweetly wilting flowers, sweat, hot durasteel, soil, and wood-smoke.

It was the kind of weather she loved, which left her wondering why she didn't feel it.

Atyiru wandered around the market, chatting with people as she went. Her sister-cousin walked along at her side, swinging their joined hands in big arcs and laughing. Their dresses brushed and billowed gently around their legs.

“Yi, I want something sweet. Do you think brother Heyml will have any *sparklemint* today?” Aruga asked excitedly.

“He might, but berries would be good too, y’know. They’re yummy and better for you.”

“Yeah, yeah, Miss Healthy-Lady! C’mon! Some sugar will cheer you up!”

“Hey, you didn’t let me finish! We could have *chocolate*-covered berries. Sister Eav had some.”

“Really? Yes! It’s been forever! Let’s go already!”

Atyiru squeezed her hand. “I’m not that hungry. You can get some though.”

“Fine, just wait for me!”

“Duh!”

Aruga ran off into the crowd, giggling and finding friends as she went. Atyiru stood for a moment in the middle of the street, pulling on her two short braids. Without her cousin nearby, the melancholy was less easy to ignore. The girl sighed softly to herself and retreated back a bit, leaning against a nearby building.

That was when she noticed him.

In the alleyway between the two shops, a weak light flickered, tinged with pain and something smoldering. It was not an open, shining light, not like the family. Not a Miraluka. Biting her lip, Atyiru ducked into the alley, stepping carefully closer.

“Pardon? Is someone here? Are you well?” She called out cautiously. There was a groan in reply. The alley stank, but under the refuse, she could smell blood.

The young girl rushed forward, dropping down next to the person. “You’re hurt!”

She reached out, and whoever it was flinched back and growled, “Get...away...” in a rough, pained voice. Deeper, male.

“Please,” Atyiru implored. “Let me help you. I, I’ve been studying a bit and I can probably clean up your wounds at least. Then we can get you to the medcenter!”

“No hospitals.” The man hissed, grunting again. “*No hospitals.*”

She swallowed her anxiousness and pressed on. “Okay, okay, no hospitals. But at least let me help. Please.”

There was no reply.

“Hey. Hey! Sir? Can you hear me? Can you understand me?” Nothing. Atyiru reached out again, touching him this time, feeling for pulse, checking for breathing. Still alive, just unconscious, it seemed. “...well...like it or not, you can’t just go dying here...”

The Miraluka moved closer and laid the slumped man on his back with trembling hands that she willed to stop shaking. She felt along his body until she found a hole in his thigh, wet with blood. There was a lot of blood.

Had her texts covered this?

“Ashla and Bogan help me...” She whispered.

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Early fall had truly taken hold and she had saved a life and perhaps made a friend amidst the autumn leaves. Every day when she was not working with her family, she went to the market to see him, and did not tell her parents because they did not ask. She knew they trusted her enough not to be bothered and believed that she was right enough not to be violating anything.

Atyiru learned that the man was named Karju. He was a Zabrak and a mercenary, and had come to Alpheridies on contract with some of the transporters running produce exports as their guard. The wound in his leg had been from his employers, trying to kill him because they hadn’t wanted to pay him. She had never before had reason not to believe someone and did not start then.

She told him her name, but he did not call her by it; instead, he referred to her as ‘Silver’, and informed her it is for her hair color, another thing she had not once thought of. He regaled her with stories of his many exploits and the adventure of life somewhere other than home, but only if she brought him food or cigarillos and only ever came alone. He never left the alley she’d found him in that she could tell, but that seemed to be well enough, because he would just listen to what she had to say about the world outside it.

She had no concerns. She was one of her people, and there were no strangers among the family. As far as she’d cared, he had been her dearest friend, and if sometimes he made strange

comments or asked things of her or pushed her to keep quiet, she did not question things. When she was with him, she did not feel so lost. She almost felt...something other than it, even. Hopeful?

And she didn't want that to fade away.

So when, on one of her visits, Karju mentioned he might soon depart, she grew pensive and silent. She listened to his tales without comment or interest, just focused on his presence, and imagined the solitude different from this one.

But he seemed to want something from her that time, because he noticed her brooding, and put his large hand low on her back, heat seeping through her shirt to her skin.

“What's up, girly? Ya ain't bein' a good audience.”

She frowned but shrugged slightly, distracted by his out-of-place touch and its obviousness. “Nothing is wrong. You're better now. I'm happy. I should be.”

“C'mon now, Silver. After all this time we been buds? Y'can tell me.” He nudged her arm. “Ya never been very quiet before. What's up?”

“I don't know.” Atyiru muttered, tilting her head up, imagining the lip of the dull roof skewed high above her, the clouds looming heavy with rain. “I don't know what it is, why nothing seems like enough even though I've got so much. I just want to get out. I want...” She stumbled, stuttered, bit down hard. The breeze picked up, blowing the stink of garbage and oil out of the alleyway for a moment.

Her head lolled back, and in the deeper darkness, far from all the stars she knew so well, longing for the ones that were far, far out of reach, she whispered, “I want you to take me away.”

Karju was quiet. She sensed him staring at her very intently. He reached out and put a hand on her shoulder. She turned to him, holding herself still, wondering, vaguely, why she felt uneasy, why she couldn't just believe.

“C'mon, Silver.” He murmured coaxingly, his grip sliding a little higher, thumb brushing softly over her throat. “You're too old to be all shy.” The Zabrak whispered heavily against her skin as he leaned closer. She exhaled, something sick coiled tight in her stomach until she couldn't breathe, and didn't say anything.

She didn't say anything when his hand moved back down to her collarbone. She didn't say anything when he pushed her lovingly-sewn shirt off her shoulders. She didn't say anything when he threw it on the ground to muffle the ground beneath them and laid her back, her spine pressing into the unyielding rock. She didn't say anything when he stretched his body out overtop of hers, gently nudging her arms away from her still-flat chest, caressing her side. She didn't say anything when she started to cry silently and he kept on because he couldn't know how a Miraluka cried, couldn't know what sadness was without the tears to show it.

Because she'd felt so lost lately and she just wanted to feel something, somehow, and maybe this was it.

But she couldn't help but notice the way his light was so deceptively warm, so riddled through with oily shadows that ate up the hollows of his eyes, elongated his horns, highlighted his cheekbones. He seemed bright but there was cruelty there and though she had so long not thought of it she could not ignore it then. She bit her tongue, feeling very, very brittle, aware of her thin bones like she hadn't been before.

She didn't want that. She didn't want to feel so weak. She wanted to feel something else, anything else.

"..ai...ust..." She'd whispered, lips sticking shut a little. Karju had paused, lifting his head from the crook of her neck. She cleared her throat, biting her tongue harder, tried again. "I can...you..." She clenched her jaw. "Please, just tell me I can trust you. Please."

He seemed reluctant to do anything, staring down at her again. But after a very long few seconds, he simply leaned over and went back to his ministrations with no answer, and she was left to find her own meaning in the silence, in the nothing.

And there in that dark, she had no more protests. She didn't say anything else. She just lifted her shaking arms and wrapped them around his shoulders, clinging to a bit of warmth, that bit of heat between them, clinging as tightly as she could.

When she woke up, she was cold, stiff, sore in strange places, and alone. She lay curled on her shirt, the heavy fabric soaked, freezing, and melded to the contours of stone. Her thin, frilled skirt was thrown over her offering a lame buffer against the weather.

Atyiru sat up, her body protesting, but it was pointless to wait, as if she'd get any stronger against the pain in her muscles, as if it wouldn't hurt if she didn't move. She took a moment to catalogue her surroundings.

A storm grumbled up above, poised to pounce. She could hear people out in the market, so it had to be near the midafternoon lunchtime, if they weren't in the fields. She'd been gone for over a day; Mother and Father were probably beginning to worry that she'd gotten lost exploring.

There was no sign of Karju.

It began to downpour, but she didn't get up. She didn't want to go home yet. She felt...empty. Empty and filthy. Not the good dirty of soil under her nails or dust on her clothes or mud on her and Father's boots, but like there were stains under her skin.

And she didn't want anyone to see them.

Atyiru huddled against the wall in her soaked clothes, her hair plastered to her skull. She turned her face up to the rain, as if it could wash her clean, as if the water droplets streaming down over her brows were like other race's tears.

As if she might be crying that way.

And when she drifted in and out of fitful sleep, squatted there, she wasn't feeling more alone than she had in a long, long time. It was just the wet and cold.

Nothing more than the wet and the cold.

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Her parents came looking by evening. She got up, walked out of the alley, and smiled at them with the smile she'd been practicing for the last few hours. She'd smiled so much, in fact, that she only allowed a tired happiness to project outwards.

It had never occurred to her that she'd lie to her family before, not just to her mother and father, but to *the family*. She had not even comprehended what lying was, because for her it had not existed.

But Karju had taught her what truth was, brutal truth. It was her and her families that were the honest liars, seeing only good. But she knew then. And like it had not been hard for him to deceive her with it, it was not difficult to persuade her peers.

She told them she was happy and well and there was nothing else to wonder at, even when she could not get clean, even when it hurt, even when she screamed silently into her sheets at night.

Because she was taught another thing: pain was awareness. She had to know to feel it. She tucked it away into herself, into her nerves, and carried it with her, less a reminder, more a heartbeat. But she knew it was a hurtful beating, and wanted to shelter the others from it, and so she convinced them of her wellness and protected them as long as she could. She let Karju's memory lie. Whatever he wished to do were his choices; their lives had but intersected and then she was to account for hers.

Karju did not lie quiet long.

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It was wintertime. The harvest had been bountifully reaped and her parents had spoken to her of joining the medical university after her fifteenth birthday in the spring. She contented herself to the knowledge and spent long, chilly evenings studying when all the storage had been done and their animals fed. She went walking with her cousins but rarely played with them in the snow. They told her little anymore and she found the distance befitting enough.

Aruga alone had still come to lighten her spirits. She made all possible attempts to remind Atyiru of her child status and at the same time encouraged her to levity with daring things like talk of older boys and how some sisters now more resembled their mothers. They were the best of friends, most precious sisters.

Around the time of midwinter, Aruga went missing from the market when shopping. Her family, the Dasotes, called upon their kin for help, and so the Araaves and the Induses too searched longer than the rest of the party, in the steadfast manner only relatives could. They waxed hours and hours in the cold, looking for that one bright light.

Their cousin, Shearn, found her, and everyone was called to the scene shortly after. Aruga had been attacked, raped, and left buried in the snow. Her body was battered and she was broken. Atyiru was called on to treat her wounds until more help arrived.

“Yi...” Aruga had whispered to her as she’d set fractured bones and carefully minded frostbitten, dead flesh and swiped a comforting hand over swollen cheeks.

And before she had bled out of her internal injuries, Aruga had told Atyiru of the man who had hurt her. It had not been one of the family, which had been a detestable idea at best. But Aruga had not needed to inform her, because Atyiru had recognized, somehow, with the strange, powerful instinct separate from her mind that the Luka Sene bespoke as the Force, that Karju had been there, had hurt her cousin.

Argua had died in her arms that night, and Atyiru had discovered another lesson: hatred, and vindication.

The Miraluka had left her family and sister- and brother-families in mourning, chasing her senses, her rage, her justice. She had found Karju at the small, barely-used commercial spaceport some distance from her hometown. It had not been difficult, to track his shadow.

He had been as flawless and honest in his maliciousness as ever, pretending nothing of his crimes. He acted as though glad to see her, as though he’d missed her, or cared.

Atyiru had so much left to say to him. So many things that she left unsaid, for they were not tender, and neither was she been any longer. Instead, she let them go, and had merely said, “Goodbye, my friend.”

And then she had taken the small scythe she’d carried with her from the fields and slashed open the arteries in his legs, not far from the very wound she had treated.

There was no making death a secret to her people, and she made no secret of her actions. But there was also no formal authority, merely the militiamen, of which her uncle, Aruga’s father, was captain.

He made no secret of grim acceptance. They had stood at the station together and recognized one another as tarnished souls. It had been a very quiet night, so far from the mournful dirges in their homes.

Atyiru had asked, with perhaps the last of her innocence, “What comes next, after goodbye?”

And her uncle had replied, “You realize there is no true farewell, and move on with your life.”

And after that, they had spoken no more, and there had been nothing more, not of death, or vengeance, or justice, or ardor, or lonesomeness. There was just the peace and cold of the grave night.

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Spring arrived and they began planting again. Atyiru rose with the dawn beside her parents and studied at dusk after hours of tilling and seeding. Every night, she prayed to Ashla and Bogan and remembered her love for Aruga and for Karju, though she thought of them little. They were always with her the way whispers and echoes were. The lights that still lit the beloved Void were the present.

By the time summer turned again, she had put them to rest. All that was left was to wander, until she found her goodbye as well.

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*And there you have it. My bloody and exciting epic of vengeance, to be sure. I suspect it is little what you imagined, but people so rarely are. It is strange, how we know we are unlike, but believe differently.*

*My tale does not have answers, if you had questions. My experiences have not even satiated my own musings. What you may take from it though, is a warning against caution. Strange, I know. My folly was, conceivably, nativity and trust. Argua died because of me, even if indirectly. But I would not bid against that. To do so would wither Argua's memory, and destroy me, and perhaps you, as well.*

*Be not cautious. Be bold! So many things will go wrong in your life and you will make so many more wrong choices than you already have...but let them come. I wish everything for you. I hope you know love, and it hurts unlike anything else ever could. I hope you know freedom and it is the bitterest thing you've ever tasted to hold on your tongue. I hope you know happiness and yet long for familiar sorrows and the agony that has always been your friend.*

*Pain teaches us. And if we do not learn, then we have not truly lived. And if you have not lived, then your revenge is more pointless than you can possibly imagine.*

*Smile...*



*...but be not a fool.*

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*Atyiru Caesus Entar*  
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