

The First Time Always Sets The Tone

SAV Kordath Bleu

20 ABY

Hosk Station

“Where is that boy?” murmured the middle aged woman as she surveyed the gathering of her family’s clan. Her husband was nearby with their eldest, Kordo, stacking crates filled with what little the clan owned. While no barriers had been erected in the cargo bay, the clan was relatively well known on Hosk, and there was still a definitive area where people seemed to avoid crossing. A border with no markings but a border nonetheless. A large transport was already taking on some of the clan’s belongings as cargo, the ship’s crew sitting nearby, watching as the owners stowed things themselves. Part of the deal for transport for the clan of Ryn had been doing all their own labor. They’d also agreed to do some shipboard cleaning, scrubbing out rust and stains that even the maintenance droids had given up on.

Along one side of the Ryn’s makeshift encampment, which the clan had used for the last two weeks as they did various odd jobs on Hosk Station, stood a line of crates. They were nearly two meters tall each, stacked three high. On the other side could be heard the scuffling of running feet and laughter as two Ryn chased one another. Well, one was chasing, the other running. Well, she was running, but not in a way that suggested she was trying to get away, darting back and forth just out of reach of the boy pursuing her. It was evident that she knew what was going on, and even more so that the boy bordering on manhood was completely lost but felt compelled to catch her.

She laughed as she taunted him, “Come on, Kordy! You’re so slow!”

“Gwen, I swear...Imma get ya...and...and...” the just barely a teenage boy couldn’t decide how to finish that statement as he darted in at her. She let out a squeal and another laugh as they tumbled to the deck head over heels, landing with her lying below him.

“Oh my, you caught me, Kordy. Now what?” she asked, grinning up at him with big, lavender eyes. From the corner of Kordath’s vision he could see her tail languidly move a few times along the floor.

Kordath Bleu was at a loss, staring down as his childhood friend. She was a year or two younger than he, friends with both of his little sisters. The three of them loved to terrorize ‘big brother Kordy.’ At some point in the last few months Gwen had cut back on that, as well as referring to him as big brother.

“Uhh, I, uhh...” he stuttered out, looking at Gwen.

“Ah! Kordath Bleu! There you are!”

"Oh thank the gods," muttered the Ryn as he scrambled to his feet, reaching down to help Gwen up as an afterthought. He spun to face his mother, feeling his tail twitch several times and his ears grow warm. He felt flustered and embarrassed yet he had no idea why.

"Gweniever. Hmm. I suppose this isn't a big surprise, but you should be helping your mother get ready to leave. That's a good girl," said the woman as Gwen turned to dash off. The girl paused for a brief moment before leaning in and pecking Kordath on the cheek, further inflaming his blush. "Now you, young man, are meant to be helping your father."

"Yes ma'am!" he shouted, turning to run as well before a firm grip on his tail halted him mid-step.

"So. What were you and Gwen up to?"

"Just playing about, mum," muttered the boy, staring at the ground and shuffling his feet.

"Really? That's not what it...oh well. I think your father and I need to sit you down and have a talk about...things," stated his mother. Kordath was almost certain he heard her trying not to laugh. "And have a little talk with Gwen's mom after we're away," he heard her mutter quietly as she shooed him off.

Kordath shuffled up to where his brother Kordo and their father were working and began quietly putting odds and ends into a box. A few minutes of loading boxes finally drew the attention of his father.

"Kordath? There you are, about time boy. Where are your sisters?"

"Wait, what? Kairna and Karo were here when me and Gwen went off to, uhh, play..." the boy trailed off as he saw a look of concern pass between his elder sibling and their father.

"They...they may have wandered off, dad," spoke Kordo, quietly. Kordath looked between the two older Ryn in confusion.

"Do you want to me go and find them?"

"Well you were meant to be watching them in the first place, boy!"

"Sorry," mumbled Kordath.

His father took a deep breath and continued in a calmer tone, "Go do a run about the cargo bay and see if you can't find them. Don't get in anybody's business, though. We've had no real problems on this stay and we don't want to leave a bad impression with the station folk."

"Yes, dad," said Kordath, quietly. He'd only been allowed out of the Ryn clan camp in recent years to help with work and learned how the outside galaxy viewed his people. The clan traveled, often, usually before real trouble could start. Traveling folk always had problems though, because it was convenient for

the locals to blame trouble on them. Items turned up missing, people wandered off or went missing, it must be the fault of the people just passing through. So they never stayed anywhere long. They'd been on Hosk station for two weeks now and had been relatively well received. The station manager, a Human named Krinsk, had a good relationship with their clan and usually had work for them in exchange for them staying in the cargo bay.

Even with the station manager and some of his crew being rather accepting of his people, the young Ryn treaded lightly as he moved about the cargo bay. Other ships were berthed and taking on or dropping off cargo, and all it would take to cause an issue would be to stray too near a crate to be called a thief. After making it all the way to the other end of the large bay, he came up empty, though he'd gotten a few stares from a beat up looking freighter with a rough looking crew lounging about outside as it fueled up. Starting to fret, the young Ryn turned and started to head back towards his family. As he walked past an open passage that lead deeper into the space station he felt...he felt a tug of some sort on his mind. He paused next to the portal and stared down the poorly lit corridor.

He'd felt this sort of sensation before. It'd lead him on more than one occasion out of trouble, and into it a few times as well. It'd lead him to lost items of value a few times, things that when he'd tried to return them he got chased off and again called a thief. After a while he'd learned to simply keep such things and trade them when his parents weren't about and add the credits or foods to the clan's reserves so as not to arouse suspicion. He'd felt it when his mother would teach him to read the Sabacc cards, when'd she show him the divination that the ancient Ryn had practiced. More than once his divinations had come a little too true for comfort, and his mother had decided that letting her son do it for credits when people came to the camp on some worlds wasn't a great idea anymore.

For good or ill, the feelings always lead to *something*. A sensation came over Kordath as he stepped through the doorway, knowing he was disobeying his father by leaving the bay. But the girls were his responsibility to look after. Gwen hadn't made him leave his sisters, she'd wandered by and given him one of those smiles over her shoulder that she'd been doing as of late, and he had followed her. When he asked why she was grinning at him like that she'd told him, 'If ya can catch me, I'll tell ya!' and ran off.

Karo and Karina were missing and it was *his* fault they'd wandered off unattended. It was his responsibility to find them again. As he walked down the corridor the only sounds were his own breathing and his footsteps on the metal grating. In the distance was the thump of machinery but the boy filtered it out as he walked. His mind was flitting from one scenario to another concerning his little sisters, as well as dredging up the odd memory of them tormenting him. Gwen seemed to be hovering in the back of his mind as well, her big lavender eyes filling him with uncomfortable feelings. Intruding on his thoughts were the sounds of men's voices ahead, which caused the Ryn to crouch and slow his steps.

Kordath realized he'd been taking turns and had wandered further into the station then he'd realized. Simply following the sense of rightness had brought him this far, to a blast door that was set to open and a dim room beyond. The Ryn inched up to the doorway, careful of the light and shadows, to see a trio of Humans within. Beyond them sat a small...cage...

Kordath felt something rising in him. Every time his family, his clan, had gotten run out of a camp because the locals thought they'd done something wrong. Every time someone had smacked him and called him a thief or thrown things at him and Gwen when they were playing, simply because they'd gotten too close to a fence.

All the anger, all the hate and fear from all of the little things over the years had been piling up inside of young Kordath. Now, he could see huddling in the small cage beyond the Humans two small figures, and the feelings were beating against the walls of his self control. A pair of tails, tipped with bits of fluff, lay curled on the base of the cage as the two small children inside clung to one another in fear. Kordath felt the muscles around his left eye twitch. Everything about today was unfamiliar territory to the young Ryn. Between the heated moments of confusion earlier with Gwen and now, the unthinking rage and anger that seemed to be pouring into his mind, filling it with red, Kordath was lost.

It was this that lead to the young Ryn to stand up and walk into the room with his hands balled up into fists at his sides. The Humans quit talking to one another as the diminutive alien approached them, reaching for weapons before recognizing the lack of a threat. Laughter burned the Ryn's ears as the Humans approached him, beefy hands smacking him in the shoulder.

"Get lost, kid, you're too old for our buyer."

Kordath mumbled something through gritted teeth.

"What was that, kid? Speak up! Act like a karking man for kriff's sake."

"Let my sisters go," he said, quietly.

"Oooh, these your sisters? Squirmly lil' things they are, bit me mate here," spoke the apparent leader, gesturing to the smallest Human. Kordath lifted his head slowly and looked at the man, unblinking.

"Let. My. Sisters. Go," he growled out.

"Kordy!?" came a little voice from the cage. He looked over to see Karo with her face against the bars. Next to her, Karina was still crying, but Karo was staring with big, crystal blue eyes at her older brother. Kordath couldn't even force a smile or look of reassurance to his dear sister. He simply turned to look back at the leader of the slavers.

"Let them go."

"Not happenin' lil' Ryn. How bouts you run back off to mommy and daddy before we gots ta hurt ya, eh?" the big man leaned forward and placed a meaty hand on the top of Kordath's head. He ruffled the Ryn's white hair before turning to one of his men, "Get the lil' brats fitted with shock collars. 'bout time for us to get off this station."

Kordath watched a man pick up two metal circlets fitted with spikes facing inward. Something inside of the Ryn broke.

The red, the rage and anger that had been beating on the back of his brain since spotting the cage holding his sisters broke through and washed over his mind. It overtook his vision and his body. Somewhere inside he floated, disconnected from what his body was doing, lying in a void filled with flashes of memory and emotions. He saw his mother, her face, her smile. He could feel her as if she was next to him, holding him when he was with fever at age seven. His father teaching him how to properly hoe a field on some agricultural world they'd set down on for a few weeks during the sowing season, his first time outside of the clan's camp to help bring in credits. Karo and Karina chasing him around the camp while their parents were out working and Kordo couldn't be bothered to corral them. Gwen flashed through a few times as well, a smile and a set of eyes, her tail, why would her tail come to mind, wondered the young Ryn.

Eventually the void receded and the crimson that had filled his eyes and mind washed away. Kordath found himself sagging against a wall in the corridor outside of the room he'd seen his sisters in. A pair of bodies, burnt and stinking lay upon the metal grating that made up the floor of the hall, a dripping sound suggesting they were still cooking and leaking fluids. Retching, the Ryn threw up and fell to his knees. Shuddering breaths left him as a fatigue flooded in. Kordath wiped at his mouth with the back of his sleeve and tried to stand. He stumbled into the wall once more before steadyng himself and lurching back towards the blast door. The smell of cooked flesh permeated the air, causing him to gag as he almost tripped through the doorway.

A larger pile of burnt meat and hair sat in the middle of the dimly lit room. Scraps of clothing marked him as the leader of the men Kordath had confronted. The Ryn stared at it in horror and confusion before looking over to the cage. Karo and Karina were huddled as far back as they could from the scene. Kordath crouched next to it and fumbled with the latch, hearing his little sisters whimper within. Finally he got it opened, after much frustration and anger at his hands not doing what he wanted them to do while fighting off the urge to pass out. Pushing the cage door aside, he leaned in to soothe his sisters, who recoiled from his touch.

"Karo? It's okay, it's Kord, the bad men are...they're gone," he whispered, gently.

"No no no no."

"Karina? Come on girls, we gotta go. Dad's waiting on us," he said, a little louder.

"Stay away," whispered one of the girls. Kordath stared. He was tired and confused. Getting the girls back to the clan was the only thing that mattered.

"What the hell happened in here!?" came a loud voice behind the Ryn. Kordath stood and turned slowly to take in the face of the station manager, Krinsk, watching him.

“They...they took my sisters. Gonna sell ‘em. Slavers. Bad...uhh, bad men.”

“By the...okay. Okay. Wait, I know you, you’re...oh no. Get the girls out of here! Get back to the cargo bay before the ship leaves you here! These are Humans, boy, they’re dead and you’re the only ones around, people will...just get out of here! I’ll have to tell your father not to come back here, I’m sorry, I liked him but if people think you killed some Humans they’ll hunt you to the Rim. Get them out!”

“They...they won’t come with me,” mumbled Kord.

“Bloody...GIRLS!” shouted the manager, causing Karo and Karina to jump in their cell. “You gotta get back to your folks, NOW! Get to running!” the man shouted before slamming a hand on to the top of the cage.

Kord fell back as his sisters scrambled out and stopped, staring at him with wide eyes before running away from him. He felt like crying but he didn’t know why. Nothing made sense. He turned to look at Krinsk.

“Did I do this?” he whispered, staring at the burnt corpse in the middle of the room.

“I dunno, kid, but I do know ya can’t be stayin’ on board me station or they’ll string ya up good. Get back to yer people.”

“I can’t go back, not if I did this.”

“What? Lad, don’t be thinkin’ that way. Ya got yer family back, get out of here.”

Kordath sat next to the body, pulling his knees up to his chest and resting his head on them. Finally the tears came.

“The girls...they’re...they’re terrified of me, I can’t go back! I did this! I don’t know how, I don’t remember how! If I go back...if I go back...I can’t go back. They won’t be safe with me around, not anymore...”

The station manager watched as the boy, no more than thirteen years of age who’d just wasted three slavers with no apparent weapons, had a breakdown. With a sigh Krinsk rubbed at his face.

“Alright, lad, I know another ship leaving from one of the other bays. If we hurry, we’ll catch it. Take this as a kindness, I’ll pay your fare to get ya off board. I don’t like slavers snatching people on me own port, it’s bad for business so this means we’re square. I can’t have ya around though, people figure out what ya done and somehow it’ll be my problem instead of just yours. I’ll let yer dad know...well, I’ll tell him somethin’.”

Kord scrubbed at his eyes and blinked back the tears before looking up at the manager. “Thank you.”

"Thank me by gettin' off me station, lad. It's the bay adjacent from the one yer clan is in, so we'll have to wander by there quiet like. Don't yell out for 'em if yer serious about this, right?"

"Yessir."

"Good lad, come along."

With aching muscles the boy followed the Human back through winding corridors until they found themselves in the cargo bay once more. Staying to Krinsk's right to avoid being seen by his family, they traversed the length of the bay. As they neared the end where the Ryn clan's camp was, Kordath couldn't help but glance past his escort. The clan was good at cleaning up after itself — only the row of cargo containers along one side were still present. Kordath and some of the other children had checked them when they first set up camp. They were empty, which mean the clan was all packed up. He could see his parents, down on their knees, hugging Karina and Karo, stroking their hair and holding them.

Kordo wasn't far off, standing on the top of the loading ramp of the transport and watching everyone and everything that came near. Lingering around the ramp as well was...Gwen. Big, lavender eyes and a look of worry on her pretty face. Kordath nearly missed a step as that thought came crashing through. Gwen was pretty. Suddenly a lot of the morning made more sense to him, and he wanted to kick himself. But he shook it off. There was no place for him here now. Ryn weren't meant to be killers, it was bad for the clan. Wanders, workers, musicians, sure. But breaking the peace could have consequences on the entire clan though, even if it was in protection of it.

Better I leave. Maybe someday I'll be able to find them again, he thought, knowing that the odds of tracking down a Ryn clan on the move were incredibly out of his favor. *When I can control it. If it can be controlled. Oh gods.*

He saw Gwen turn her head towards Krinsk and himself, Kordath ducked his face back and tucked his tail in towards his legs. This was better. This was clean.

It just felt like hell.