

Zakath was reclining out on his deck in the small apartment that he maintained within Estle City, a lit cigar clamped within his mouth as he gazed up at the stars beginning to emerge as twilight began. As the spicy sweetness of the smoke drifted past his nose, Zakath sighed softly as his eyelids began to close, his usually tense nerves beginning to relax.

The silence was suddenly interrupted by a quiet rapping coming from the front door. He lifted his head up and sighed, deciding to wait, hoping that it was just a messenger and that he would go away after a minute. After another minute of rapping, the sound faded and he felt himself relax again, his eyes closing as he returned back to his reclin-

“You know Zakky, it’s rude when you don’t answer the door.”

A chiding yet amused voice broke through his relaxed state, and he jerked, eyes flying open to see a slim Miraluka female gazing in his direction from behind her brightly cheerful pink blindfold, an amused smile touching her lips as she shifted two large boxes within her hands.

“Atty?” Zakath blinked as he rose from the chair, settling his cigar into the ashtray before moving to take one of Atty’s packages from her hands. “What are you doing here?”

“I just thought I’ll come by and have some dinner with you and celebrate a bit.” Atty replied, a happy lilt to her voice as she set her package down on the table. “I brought some food and a gift you can- oh, what’s that smell? It’s lovely. Is that incense or do you smoke?”

“I- that’s a cigar I’m smoking, yez.” He blinked as he watched the Consul nod slightly at his answer before returning her attention to the package, her hands deftly untying it. “...wait, celebrate? Celebrate what?”

“Your birthday, Zakky dear.” Atty cocked her head slightly as she returned her gaze in Zakath’s direction. “Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten.”

Zakath stared at Atty for a long moment, speechless.

“Stop staring at me and go get some plates and some utensils, please. I’m afraid I don’t have any with me.” Atty said as she opened the box and began lifting various containers of food out of the box.

Zakath blinked and then obeyed, entering the apartment to gather the requested items. A couple minutes later, he reentered the deck to find his table now covered by various delicious types of food, ranging from roasted vegetables to bloody-rare nerf steaks, with light charring on its surface. The ashway with the smoldering cigar had been carefully removed and put on the thick railing that lined the deck.

Atty was now seated on the chair opposite his own, her nose lifted up slightly to enjoy all the smells intermingling together from the food arrayed in front of her. Zakath carefully laid the plates and utensils down and retook his seat, grabbing his cigar as he went.

“What do you mean, celebrating my birthday?” He asked again before taking a puff of his cigar, allowing the smoke to trail out of his mouth and up into the air.

“Exactly like it sounds, Zakky.” Atty smiled up at him before cocking her head. “When was the last time you celebrated, anyway? I don’t remember ever hearing of birthday celebrations on your behalf when Arcy and I were discussing and reviewing you a while back.”

“Uh...” He had to actually think for a moment on that question. “Not before I left my family on Barab 1. So... thirty yearz?”

“You-” Atty gaped at him for a minute before recovering her voice. “You haven’t celebrated your birthday in *thirty years*?”

“Why should I?” Zakath shrugged slightly as he returned his cigar to the ashtray before picking up his fork and knife. “Celebrating alone iz no fun, after all, and beyond my creditz, bounty hunterz were not welcome company.”

“I suppose that makes sense, but surely you’ve had *some* friends back then?”

“Nothing beyond what my creditz gave me.” Zakath replied before tucking a chunk of meat into his mouth.

“Oh dear. That’s... well,” Zakath’s eyes had narrowed slightly at the Consul’s starting words, which she had clearly picked up on before continuing on, her voice more cheerful. “No matter. We’ll just have to restart the tradition then, hmm? Where is Nath? I heard she was back in the city?”

“She will be back in a couple dayz.” He replied as he speared a piece of vegetable with his fork. “She had buzinezz offworld.”

“Oh? What kind?” Atty’s voice was curious.

“I did not azk.”

“Of course not,” The Consul sighed softly before taking a delicate bite out of her own more well-cooked steak. “If I know her, you would’ve been headbutted if you’ve persisted.”

“Ha!” Zakath barked out a harsh laugh. “It wouldn’t be the firzt time.”

And so the conversation flowed back and forth as the Dark Jedi and the Consul enjoyed their dinner, with Zakath doing the lion's share of the eating while Atty chattered, pausing every now and then to ask him a question to prompt answers and talk out of him. Eventually the table's contents were picked clean, and the Barabel rose and began to clear the dishes while Atty leaned against the railing of his deck, a glass of light colored wine in her hand, enjoying the softly whistling wind as it blew past her, lightly ruffling her silvery hair.

"Cigar?" Zakath asked as he returned to the deck, a half-full box of cigars in hand.

"No, thank you." Atty smiled before taking a small sip of her wine. "But do enjoy yourself. I like the smell of that particular kind you smoke. It's very incense-y."

"I... am glad you approve." Zakath chuckled softly as he took a cigar and lit it up with his lighter, customized for his larger hands.

"Just try not to smoke too much, hmm?" Atty replied as she took a slight sniff of the air, smelling the rich spicy scent of his cigar. "It's hard on the lungs, after all."

"It'z not an everyday thing with me," He assured her as he took a deep draw from the cigar, a plume of smoke rising from his mouth.

"That's good to hear, Zakky," Atty smiled before cocking her head slightly. "Oh! Before I forget, here."

Zakath watched with interest as Atty set the glass down and returned to her chair, bending down to retrieve the second package she had brought into his home, a much smaller one, before rising and handing it to him.

"What iz thiz?" He asked as he handled the simple package, examining the cheerfully bright wrapping paper.

"Your birthday present, Zakky!" Atty chuckled softly as she resumed her leaning position against the railing, her amusement obvious. "Go ahead, open it."

"I... you get *prezentz* for being born?" He asked incredulously as he popped out a talon and began to carefully cut away the paper, before opening the box. "Your cuztomz are very strange sometimez."

Before Zakath could continue on, he had opened the box, and the content within caused him to fall silent. Within the box lay a beautifully crafted nail file, the file itself obviously strengthened to industrial grade, while the handle was made of a dark ebony material, tipped by a small emerald pommel, which threw off flashes of green light as it glinted under the deck's light.

"I..." Zakath was speechless as he carefully lifted the nail file out of the box, setting the box down to examine the file more closely. Missed upon first glance was a silvery inscription written into the handle:

*To Zakath; Wishing you many happy years ahead. Yours, -Atty*

"Do you like it?" Atty asked, a slight note of apprehension in her voice.

Zakath remained silent as he stared at the nail file in his hand, the first genuine gift he had received in...he couldn't even remember. His emerald eyes flicked toward Atty, back to the file, and then finally back at Atty.

"I..." Zakath paused and swallowed slightly. "I.."

Before he could stop himself, the Barabel had lifted the Miraluka off her feet and into a near-crushing bear hug. A slight squeal of laughter escaped from her throat as Atty returned the hug, patting the Barabel on the back.

"I'll take that as a yes, Zakky." Atty giggled as the Barabel finally released her, settling her carefully back on the ground. "I'm glad you like it."

"I do." Zakath felt his lips curve up into a rare genuine smile. "Thank you, Atty. Thiz... means much to me."

Atty's smile broadened as she patted the Barabel on the arm before picking up her wine glass.

"You're welcome, Zakky dear."

"If anyone azkz, the hug never happened."

"Of course, Zakky."