

My papa used to tell me stories about what it was like raising me. Sitting with him now, it me of a story papa told me from when I was younger. He said that his years in Shadow Gate are what allowed him to stay alive long enough to be able to be there for me when I got old enough.

Black Parade

*When I was,
A young girl,
My father,
Took me into the city,
To see a marching band.*

Kira Araave Tyris kicked her feet back and forth on either side of her father's head. Her tiny legs kept an easy grip on his neck as she sat on his shoulders, enjoying the faint wind that kissed her skin and displaced strands of her long, wavy mess of hair. Her tiny hands drummed gently against the top of her father's head, matching the staccato beat of the passing drumline. Her "good" eye took in the sights before her while her "special", glassy eye looked deeper into the world around her. Her rounded nose wiggled slightly as she sniffed the air and then grinned.

"Papa, there are all kinds of friends here!" Kira said with all the wonder of a seven-year-old girl discovering new things.

"That so?" he asked softly, his lilted voice steady and assuring.

"Spirits love parades, you see."

"Do they?"

"Mhm. Lots of positive energy. And this parade has lots of different types of people. Big ones, small ones, furry ones, spiked ones," she explained as she pointed at each of the varying species gathered. "All creatures have people watching over them. And many of them are cross-breeds, like me!"

Her father frowned and glanced upwards in her direction. "You're not a cross-breed, Kira, you're our--"

"*Lunayi*, yes," she nodded to herself. "I am *bright*, and as lovely as the *moon*," she grinned.

She was the daughter of a Miraluka and a Hapan afterall. Technically, her mother said she was a 'Hapaluka'. Kira thought the term silly, for she did not think of herself as anything other than herself. Why would she, when a lettuce could be content knowing it was lettuce. People spent so much time worrying about how things were classified that they never stopped to simply

appreciate existence for what it was: a gift. However, she made it a point to listen to her mother. As her father always said: "Nothing is true... but listen to your mother."

Born with the blessing and curses of both; beauty and kindness, willpower and a unique blindness. Yet she saw so many things.

*He said, 'girl when, you grow up'
'will you be?'
'the savior of the broken?'
'the beaten and the damned.'*

"Papa, bad people is coming," Kira said, lowering her voice to a whisper in his ear.

Marick Tyris Arconae felt every muscle in his finely honed body tense as he went still as stone. "What do you mean, 'bad', honey?" he asked quietly, as he doubled down on the part of his mind he had dedicated to maintaining his Concealment through the Force. It was no where near as powerful as Wyns' clouding abilities, but with a crowd this large it should do enough to minimize his presense.

"I don't think they want to enjoy the parade. I can see, anger..."

*He said will you,
Defeat them,
Your demons,
And all the non-believers,
The plans they have made*

Marick reached above his head and lowered the girl down into his arms, propping her against his shoulder. Her hands slid around his neck as she nestled into the chest. Marick adjusted the hood on her little long sleeved shirt and pulled it over her head. She looked like nothing more than a small bundle of rags in his arms now. "Remember the quiet game that we play with Momma?" Marick spoke softly.

Kira nodded her head once.

"Good," he said as he ran a hand over the front of his face, seamlessly changing his features. His black hair turned into a dirty blonde hue, his nose became more angular and his beard faded away. His eyes became a dull brown. Just like that, the *Shadow* melted back into the crowd, right as a pair of Inquisitors pushed their way through. One of them held up a datapad that had a picture of Marick Arconae, former Shadow Lord of Arcona and Combat Master of the Brotherhood.

They had been on the run for years since he left his position. For the first time in his life, Marick had valued something more than his devotion to his Clan or the "Brotherhood" he served. He had never thought about being a father before--the concept so alien to him--but on the day she had come into his life, everything had simply changed.

*Because one day I'll leave you
A phantom to lead you in the summer
To join the black parade*

Marick moved swiftly through the crowd, seeking a back alleyway he could use to make an escape. The Master Assassin had planned for such things. He knew that a public event would be dangerous, but Kira had practically *begged* him to see the parade.

Kira made a whimpering noise that caused Marick to pull up short. He checked on her and saw her sniffing.

"What's wrong, honey?"

Kira rubbed at her good eye, and then pointed off to the side.

"They are going to hurt him," she said weakly.

Marick's head turned to follow her tiny finger. The two Inquisitors had found a Cathar who was not doing a very good job of blending in. Elongated ears, tail out, and golden fur proudly on display, he shoved one of the Inquisitors away. The second knocked the Cathar backwards with a heavy backhand while the first recovered. The first Inquisitor swept the Cathar's legs out from under him and both of them started to kick him in the ribs.

Marick looked down at the child in his arms, then towards the alley exit he had almost made it to. He looked at the Cathar being beaten down into submission. He knew what would happen better than anyone else. It was a good distraction, though. He could get away unnoticed now.

The former Grand Inquisitor made a decision. It was still an odd sensation to not be wrapped in the cool zen of *Deadheart*, but he knew that he had to act.

Marick held Kira tight in one arm and extended the hidden stiletto blade on his other wrist's gauntlet with a soft *ssclick*.

The crowd had split, but attention was still on the parade. People were cheering and shouting, and doing their best to ignore the beating. This made it easy for Marick to slip right behind the first Inquisitor, augment his speed with the Force for a brief moment, and drive the tip of his hidden blade into the man's jugular.

Marick twisted away from the killing strike, limited in his true mobility with the child in his arm. Blood trailed the blade before the artery began to spurt out crimson like a broken valve. Before the first dead Inquisitor hit the ground, the Adept blurred towards the second one. His knuckles *cracked* into the second Inquistiors chin, snapping his head upwards and exposing his neck. In the same flowing motion, Marick's blade made a quick slashing motion, the needle-like tip of the stilleto wrist-blade cutting a line of crimson across the Inquisitors jugular.

Marick melted back into the crowd before the first screams sounded the alarm. He pushed his way towards the alley with haste. The Hapan did not stay to help the fallen Cathar. He had risked enough as it was tapping into the Force for heightened alacrity. Any *Seeker* nearby probably sensed his flare through the Force.

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To her credit, Kira did not scream. She clung to her father as tightly as possible, but otherwise remained quiet. Death was odd, but not something that confused her. It was natural that things lived and died. She knew that the two bad men her father had killed would not find peace for their actions. But who was she to judge these things?

Her father took them into an alley and ducked behind a dumpster of all things. She wrinkled her nose at the smell. She was going to point out that it smelled horrible, but remebered she was playing the quiet game. She really liked that game, and was good at winning it. Especially against her mother. Kira wasn't sure why Momma wasn't good at the quiet game. She made a note to ask uncle Fuzzy. The Ryn knew lots of things, being a writer and all that.

Her father's body became translucet as he wrapped himself in the Force. The shadows themselves seemed to stretch over them, and while his Force Cloak only covered his own body, Kira knew that she looked like just another clump of rags laying behind a dumpster. She could pretend to be rags if it meant helping Papa out. Better than the other garbage that had resigned itself to thinking it was garbage.

Marick remained still as he protected her body even though he could not be seen. The Inquisitors--three of them, she counted--stormed past the alleyway with murderous intent. They did not even look at the dumpster.

She did not know how long she waited for her father to move. She continued to make sure she would win the quiet game, though.

"Are you okay, *Lunaiya*?"

"You talked first! I win!"

Marick sighed slightly, his body shimmering back into view. He wore his usual face, and Kira reached up to stroke his beard. She liked how it bristled against her tiny hand. He ruffled her hair and stood up, making his way back the way they came, taking a different alley he had marked as an escape route.

Tilting her head slightly, she thought for a moment before nudging her father. "You could have killed them, couldn't you, Papa."

Marick was quiet for a moment but then gave his daughter a slight shrug. "I could...but sometimes fighting to kill is not the best answer."

Kira flashed a tiny smile. "You sound like mama!"

"Yeah..." Marick said, unable to not return her smile. She had that affect on him, and knew it. "Just don't tell her, okay?"

"Mhm, promise."

*We'll carry on,
We'll carry on...*