

“Hey, Koekie...?”

“What’s good, Koek?” the Twi’lek asked over her shoulder, brushing her lekku back.

“Why do you chase the scary man?”

The Twi’lek’s piercing green eyes shot the young Zeltron an icy scowl that made the rose-skinned girl cringe and take a step back. When the Savant saw the reaction she sighed and softened her gaze.

“Come here, ya’lil *frangface*,” K’tana said, gesturing Yolandi over. The girl hesitated, but stepped forward into the Twi’lek’s reach. The violet woman pulled the green-and-blue-haired girl into her arms and gave a squeeze. She ran her hands through her hair and stepped back.

“*Numa*, I’m never going to hurt you. I can get angry and I lose my temper sometimes, but I love you like a little sister. I’m always going to look out for you. Please don’t fear me. You are very important to me.”

The girl stared into K’tana’s eyes, hoping to see some glimmer of emotion behind the placid emerald pools. But she saw nothing, not even her face reflected back. It was as though the Twi’lek’s eyes were so empty that they drew her in and refused to let go simply to contain something.

“Do you know the worst thing about love, Yolandi?” K’tana asked, stepping away from the youth. The Zeltron shook her head and the Twi’lek placed an arm around her shoulder and led her to the large blow-up chair on the floor. They sat down and the Shadow stared into an abyss as she sighed.

“The problem with love is that it’s a weakness. In Arcona, love can get you dead,” she paused for a moment, casting a sad look to the girl before continuing, “or it can make you wish you were.”

“You didn’t answer me, Koekie...”

“I chase something I cannot have, knowing I cannot have it because it’s safer than actually loving someone who will love me back. If he cannot love me, he cannot hurt me. If I can’t love him, then I will never have to fear him leaving.”

“But where would he go?” Yolandi’s eyes scrunched in consternation and confusion. She never actually expected the older woman, a being with incredible power in comparison to those she knew, to allow herself to seem so weak.

“He could kill me. He could abandon me... he could die.” K’tana shrugged. “Goddess knows he has nearly done all of those things. More than once.”

“What about me?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well...” Yolandi suddenly found her boots very interesting as she spoke. “You said I’m important to you. Isn’t that the same as love? Cuz, I could die. You might think I abandoned you if you never found my body. I could become one of those people who gets you killed...”

“Yes...but I didn’t get much of a choice with you, little one.” K’tana suddenly smiled, the love behind the grin nearly blinded the young Zeltron and she scootched closer to the older woman, burying her face in the Twi’lek’s violet arm.

“So, why can you love me and not him?”

“Yolandi, I’ve already loved like that once. You’re something new and different. I would die to protect you and keep you safe. If that meant sacrificing the entire population of Ol’val, I would do it.”

“..but you’d die for me, right?” The young girl barely understood the concept of love, yet made K’tana think hard before she answered.

“No. I would kill a solar system to save you. I would blow up a sun to protect you. I would die with you. But if I died *for* you...” the Shadow hesitated, “to me that means I didn’t try hard enough to look after you. I would lose a limb or *lek* for you, but if yer gonna stand in front of a speeder, I ain’t throwin’ myself in front of it simply to push you out of the way. I value my own life too, ya’know.”

“But would you go kill the guy?”

“What guy?”

“The one who ran me over?”

K’tana burst into laughter, her bubbly voice bouncing off the walls and filling the room.

“He would wish to die a bajillion deaths before I granted his wish.” K’tana smiled

wickedly, snapping her teeth to get the point across. Yolandi smiled her most menacing grin, but looking far too innocent to pull it off.

“So, who was the love you once had?” K’tana inhaled deeply at this question, having never spoken of it aloud, she was unsure if she even could.

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Four years. Has it really only been that long? I feel like I’ve been within the grasp of the Brotherhood for so much longer. Ryloth, the Slug Mistress... they’re so much closer than I realized. Then again, this last year has been more like hell than any fable I’ve been told. I always hoped I could go back to my old life. Everything was so much simpler... that is, until it wasn’t.

My Mistress was the proprietor of a pleasure ship. I’ve forgotten it’s name, but it was there that I met the first male to break me. I’ve been broken by so many since then. So many forgotten names. So many painful memories. The only constant in life is pain. I’ve known this for so long that I cling to any pleasure that comes within my reach. He was the same. Nameless, though, as he had become.

I was our Mistress’ favorite. Her only , her only perfect submissive, and I wanted nothing more than her favor... and her love. My parents did not love me, or they would not have sent me to her at so young an age. They would have been there, cared for me... wanted me. The Slug, however, did. She treated me like her own revolting child. Gifts and luxuries were available to me and none of her other pets. Other Twi’lek girls were sent to do tasks that she never once demanded of me. She kept the males and females separate, Twi’leks all. They were to be seen, but not intrusive. Beautiful, but not garish. Polite, but silent.

I was allowed to speak. I was allowed to flirt and talk and play. And when I was on my nineteenth year, I fell in love. A new addition to the Mistress’ pets was picked up outside of Corellia. He was a gorgeous Twi’lek. Deep emerald skin and eyes the color of burning coals. I loved him from the first moment he spoke.

“Greetings, Mistress. I’m called Nelo.”

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“Nelo’s not a Twi’lek name... is it?” Yolandi asked the Shadow as she smiled sadly, staring into nothing.

“He was raised among Humans. He wasn’t born a slave, as I had been. He had loving parents, a good life and just ended up in the wrong place at the wrong time. We spent more than a year together. He stole as much time away with me as he could and our Mistress encouraged it. She seemed to find joy in seeing me happy. And I was. It’s been so long since I’ve felt so at peace.”

“What happened to him?” The innocence of the girl only twisted the dagger in K’tana’s heart. Her eyes grew cold and focused. She turned her piercing eyes to Yolandi and spoke in a voice that rang of the calm before a storm.

“He betrayed me. And I killed him for it.”

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I discovered my abilities before I reached my tenth year. Fearing the Mistress shunning me, I kept them hidden. No one could know that I was blessed by the Goddess. I thought I was an abomination. At that time, I felt like my blessing was a curse. I had not felt the enslavement of my people the same way as the rest had. I believed that Kika’lekki cursed me for thinking that the Mistress was sent to protect us. So, I swore that I would take it to my grave.

When I reached my thirteenth year, I could make animals do things that was not in their nature. Even more, I could lift and throw things across the room with a single thought and a flick of my wrist. I know now that my Mistress had been aware of my power, which was why I was treated differently. I was going to be a perfect enforcer. A perfect body guard. And she was a Hutt never to be trifled with.

A year later, I was training with mercenaries and learning how to incorporate my dancing skills with that of a combatant. I was taught to move like water, attack without hesitation and defend my life. More importantly, I was being taught to defend the only mother I ever had.

Then Nelo arrived. When I kissed him, my heart raced in a way I have never felt again. I would grow weak and my body would shake. I showed him things he had never seen and he taught me things that I use to this day. He told me that my body was a weapon. My abilities were a tool and I was Goddess among insignificant mortals. Whatever I wanted, I simply had to take it.

Then he, an insignificant mortal, demanded I take my freedom and my Mistress' life.

When I balked, he threatened to expose my secrets. I refused to believe him, denying myself the ability to see the faltering, flawed and manipulative hearts of men. But still I followed him. When he prostrated himself before our Mistress, I knew what he was going to do.

But I was faster.

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"I don't understand," Yolandi whispered, "you loved each other. He was just trying to free you."

"I've been told that a gilded cage is still a cage. But I would do almost anything to have my gilded cage back. Do you know how many people have died by my hand, Koek?"

The Zeltron remained silent, watching K'tana rubbing the invisible blood from her fingers.

"Countless. I used to keep track. Now..." she quietly sighed, "now there is so much blood beneath my nails that it's become a part of me. I was the Little Slave Queen. Now I am one of Death's many mistresses. Nelo should have been the death of me."

"What do you mean?"

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I exposed myself in a way I never had before. People surrounded my Mistress, their eyes all turning towards me as I ran towards Nelo in a blind fury. In two swift motions, I pulled a blade from the nearest guard and drove Nelo to the ground with a gesture of my hand. I shrieked about a coup and betrayal, hesitating no longer than necessary to blubber incoherently before removing one of his lekku. The piercing screams filled my soul with something I never felt before. My first taste of the soothing sensation of nothingness. I was numb and empty while filled with rage and passion. I swore I would resist to use this power again as my next movement drove the blade into the back of his skull.

My Mistress saw me break. She watched my eyes grow distant and I crumpled to the ground. My death sentence was announced with the sounds of disappointment and regret. Everything moved in a blur. I'm not sure if seconds or days passed. All I remember was the peal of a thunderous crowd and knowing I was to accept my execution with humility and dignity.

Then Jaek changed everything and ruined any chance I had for a graceful death. I was removed from my from the only home I knew and forced into real slavery. I was to become I was his apprentice, but I was also his possession. He hurt me in ways I had not...could not have known. My body and mind were torn apart for his amusement and pleasure.

Every day since then, I just wish I had died.

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“And so do I!”

K'tana snapped back from her rivalries to see Yolandi's horrified face, glaring in disgust.

“B-but...I-”

“You're a *karking* monster! You should have died! You **chose** slavery over freedom. Over and over. You did this to yourself and now you blame others?! That's sick!”

Yolandi leaped from the bed and stormed from the room, leaving K'tana to stare in shock. The Shadow had always known this, but somewhere in her she wished that the

youth would have told her 'everything will be okay.' Instead, the image of the Zelton's rage and disgust remained imprinted in her mind.

K'tana began to shake, burying her face in her hands, she wept. For every life she took. For every life that could have thrived and given beauty to the world. For every person who she callously slaughtered without hesitation... and for everything she had become.