

The light flickered from candles along the shelf, arrayed around framed holos and mementos. In the corner of the small apartment, mostly bare now as much of it had been packed and shipped back to Selen with the residents impending new duties, lay a pile of blankets and pillows. Nestled inside was the red-skinned, short-tailed child that had shown up on the Ryn's doorstep, a misadventure with a Zeltron captor nearly a year past. The little girl slept peacefully while her father and the woman she was beginning to associate as her mother sat under the makeshift mantle, several small glasses placed before them and a pair of bottles.

"You really don't think we'll go through two bottles of wine, do you?"

"Ain't all for us, luv." The Ryn smiled sadly at the woman who'd accepted his proposal; he still wasn't sure how she put up with him and poured the blood red liquid into the small glasses. When the bottle was empty, he gently placed them on the shelf before the pictures and items, a sad look on his face. "Somethin' I picked up with Blinky when we was startin' out here. Mind ya, I added tha drink, but I think it fits."

While he was busy arranging the altar, she was filling their glasses, and handed him one as he turned. She saw the wetness at the edge of his eyes. "Are there usually so many?"

He shrugged, "Sometimes are worse than others, eh? Least we managed to avoid a bleedin' war this past year. Still, these hurt more. More personal, I guess." His fingers moved across the shelf top for a moment before stopping on a wooden token, picking it up and idly rolling it across his knuckles.

"Tass? I never got to meet him, sounds almost like he was a second father to you."

"Nah," replied the Ryn, grinning despite the sadness in his eyes. "More like an uncle; could nae trust him ta be a dad. Taught me a lot about livin' and survivin', though, wish he'd not turned out bad in tha end."

Zujenia recalled the night he'd come home after hunting a charlatan on Ol'val for three days. How he'd put together the pieces of the con the man had been running, and how it'd been just like the ones he and his old mentor, Tass, would run. Years spent thinking the man was dead, and in the brief reunion, his old teacher had pulled a knife on a child to try and get away from the consequences of his actions. Kord had been forced to put the man down

She turned her head as she sipped at her wine, and then laughed. He gave her a quizzical look as she put the glass down and lifted her hands, making rings with her fingers and holding them before her.

"What are ya doin', luv?"

"Wondering what you looked like with a mask, robbing people in the night."

This brought a grin to his face as he leaned forward, pressing his face into her faux mask. Her fingers moved as he closed in, holding his face as his eyes gleamed and he went in for a kiss. She felt him hum as he did so, his arms pulling her close for long moments before he backed off with a smirk. When he held a hand up before them holding the ribbon she used to hide her tail, she nearly hit him.

"I never work a mask, luv." He was still grinning when she snatched the ribbon away, and he sat back on his heels. She watched him turn from smug satisfaction to distraction as she pulled her hair back and tied it with the strip of purple cloth, his nose letting out a low whistle that turned her cheeks red. He placed the token back on the shelf and picked up the holo next to it, shaking his head. "Ya dumb big bastard, ya deserved better."

"We'll find out who did it, Kord," she said with a sigh, leaning over against his shoulder as they looked at the picture together. The Barabel in the frame looked imposing even in still form.

"Never put up with me crap on tha Nighthawk, ya know that? Even if he had nae reason ta like or respect me, which I did nae give 'im much to begin with, he always gave it ta me straight. Shoulda spent more time talkin' to him; there's a reason she called him 'dad' I suppose, wisdom and all that. Even if he was scary as all 'ell."

"Poor Rrogon," whispered his fiance, causing him to wrap his tail around her waist and squeeze in reassurance.

"He's bleedin' tough; he is, he'll make it." The Ryn's eyes moved across the holo to the other one in the frame, his throat choking up. "Course, be easier if she was...if she hadn't..."

Now it was her turn to wrap arms around his neck and pull him in, burying his face in her neck. She could feel him shaking as hugged her back. He'd explained to her that the new years ritual had been about facing those they'd lost and letting them go, one last drink and remembrance. This wound was still fresh, he'd lost his master only a few weeks prior, and he'd been the one holding the knife.

A proper Sith death, some had called it, except she knew Kordath would never see it that way. A mercy killing, perhaps, but that wasn't his way either. He'd done it because Nath had asked him to, and he'd owed her so very much.

"Woulda been dead a dozen times over if not for her," he whispered into Zuj's ear. "Without what she taught me, hell I'd have died on Eldar a few days after stepping off tha boat if she had nae been lookin' out for me."

"I'll have to thank her someday," he heard her say, her breath on his ear. This just made him cling to her harder before pulling back, resting his forehead against hers and showing her the

tears that stained his face. It took a lot for the Ryn to let go his happy go lucky facade, but he could drop it here, with her. "I'm sorry I didn't get to spend more time with her, Kord, I know she was important to you."

"Well," his face broke into a grin, "we could always name one after--"

She gave him a quick kiss, a way to shut him up. "Don't jinx anything."

"Right, right," he suddenly lit up with an actual smile, "Oh! Got ya somethin', I do, a bit of happy atop all tha sad, ya might say."

Suddenly she was suspicious. The last time he'd sprung something on her it had been an engagement ring, topping that would be difficult. She watched as he pulled a wrapped item from the shelf, rectangular in shape. He was grinning still as he handed it to her.

"Caught ya sleepin', I did, thought I'd take advantage of tha situation."

"What did you do?" Her tone was suddenly serious, but it did little to lessen his smile. She sighed and unwrapped the parcel, finding another framed picture inside.

"I, uh, made two of them actually, one ta take with me ta Selen," now he sounded sad again. His new posting was going to be a strain on both of them, all of them, she thought as she glanced at the sleeping form of Shay. She looked back to the holo inside and felt her tan cheeks start to blush.

"Ya looked, ya both looked, happy, seemed a wasted opportunity not ta take a snap of it, eh?"

Her fingers traced the image, her, passed out in Kord's overstuffed arm chair with Shay, also asleep, head resting on her chest with a trickle of drool.

"Ass," she whispered, setting the photo aside and embracing him anew. "We'll be okay. And hopefully next time we do this, there'll be less holo's on the shelf."

"Aye," he replied, his hand trailing down her back with a light touch. "Aye."