

"H-how...?" Tali stuttered, staring as Koliss Welcott carried plate after plate of delicious food out of the kitchen and laid them down on the cracked plastek table. The table almost broke under the weight of the abundant feast, one of its legs having been patched up hastily by some improvised ventilation adhesive and repurposed coat hangers. Considering the state of Ol'val in the wake of the Hutt invasion that had almost overrun the Arconan Shadowport, how the medic had managed to get his hands on such a display of delicacies was beyond her.

The Human merely shared her a soft smirk and a knowing wink, tapping his nose in a gesture of secrecy before returning one last time with a bottle of amber liquid and two fluted glasses, the drink mirroring in color the Twi'lek's eyes. Tali accepted the offered glass, though she could not stop staring at the display of food even as Koliss poured the sparkling wine into it.

"A magician never reveals his secrets, lavender," Koliss chuckled softly at the purple Twi'lek whom he'd grown rather fond of over the months they'd spent together, both fighting and otherwise.

"Vell you really are a miracle vorker," Tali agreed, finally tearing her gaze away from the succulent mynoc that she was more than ready to sample. Turning her eyes to the man responsible for it all, she offered him a grateful smile, letting him know just how much she appreciated such a moment of luxury in the wake of the horrid invasion and all that had transpired. "I don't know how you manage it, but... thank you."

Koliss felt a faint blush creep on his cheeks and he averted his eyes, trying to mutter something in response, but finding it difficult to look straight into the Twi'lek's amber eyes. Heart pounding in his chest, he felt the palms of his hands sweating and the familiar knot tighten in his gut. But he couldn't get the words out.

Tilting her head to the side ever so slightly, the motion accented by the shifting lekku, Tali blinked and reached out to rest a gentle hand on his shoulder. "Are you alright?" she asked innocently, a hint of concern in her voice. As she did, she gently extended her senses to probe his aura, feeling his emotions to verify if he was in any pain or distress.

What she found froze her in place.

The sheer magnitude of the turmoil he was struggling with threatened to overwhelm the empath and it was only through a supreme force of will that she managed to retain her control. A swirling vortex of desire, hope, affection, fear, anxiety and trepidation all welled inside the Human's spirit and though he was not attuned to the living Force, in that moment the strength of his emotion rivaled that of any Sith or Jedi.

Confused, but quickly realizing what she was witnessing, Tali caught glimpses of herself in his mind. The odd caress of her lek on his cheek, the faint chuckle of her laughter, the warm scent of her skin and the unmistakable pattern of her accent. All these minute details and more flashed before her in a heartbeat, sensing herself through the medic's own perception as the thoughts and emotions raced towards an impending revelation.

Though she knew she shouldn't pry, Tali found herself drawn towards the deeper depths of that swirling whirlpool of sensation. Daring past the banks of anxiety and the jagged shoals of his collective fears, she extended her consciousness ever deeper, diving into that sea of raw emotion until she saw a glimmering pearl at its core.

The pounding of a racing heart, whether hers or his she could no longer tell, echoed in her mind as she reached that gleaming thought. Impossibly frail, yet carved from the finest of marble, she found a statue of herself at

the bottom of his ocean. A representation she barely recognized as herself, its image so far idealized and perfected, Tali could not help but blush as she approached the concept of herself within his subconscious.

*"Is this how you see me...?"* The innocent question was left echoing inside the void where suddenly nothing else existed than her and though she heard no reply, she could feel it stronger than ever.

Closing her eyes as she took in the burning, affectionate, tender love that he felt towards this creation of his own mind, Tali could not prevent the burning red from creeping upon her cheeks and down her lekku, its force too strong to resist. She had never imagined others could feel as strongly as she did. Nor that she could ever be the locus of such affection.

The moment of realization had lasted only the span of a few heartbeats when it was over, Tali's consciousness dragged back into her own form as the stupefied Human was left staring at her in blind confusion. Recovering faster than him, she squeezed the hand still resting on his shoulder.

"Are you alright?"

"I..." He muttered, mind still reeling from the experience. "You," he began, but faltered, the words failing him as he struggled to comprehend what had just happened. "You saw it?"

She waited for a moment before nodding her head softly, sensing the panic welling up in him. "I didt," she admitted.

He visibly recoiled and only her soft grip on his shoulder kept him in place, a gentle yet unyielding tether. "I didt..." she began, pulling herself closer to him as a warm smile spread on her features. Wrapping her lekku around his neck as she stepped so closer to him their chests almost touched, she closed her eyes and tugged upon his mind once more, this time letting him bathe in the sensations of her own psyche.

"Andt I feel the same..." Tali admitted to the stunned human as she pressed her lips up against his.