

Selen
Dajorra System
Just outside of Estle City

It had grown slowly, a tent here, a lean-to there, small shelters built up from scavenged materials or prefabs that had been discarded and then fixed up by their new owners. A small tent village, just a mile outside of the lowest circle of the capital city, sitting on the plains in the shadow of the mountain. Security and troops from the Citadel had been placed a half mile out, in between the city and the tents, ordered there by the interim leader of Galeres.

The troops had been confused, at first, as to their purpose. The native population was fascinated with the visitors popping up on the outskirts of their city. It was likely that their isolation from the Galaxy at large was cause for some of it, and the denizens of the tent community were equally intrigued. It wasn't often they found a local population that viewed them with something beyond suspicion and mistrust.

Word had gotten out, through various intermediaries such as traders, merchants, smugglers and pirates, that Selen would be a safe place to gather. So far it seemed to be true, though as they filtered from the spaceport to the tent village, set aside by the same man who'd ordered troops to keep watch, none were certain of their benefactor. All they knew was that the security forces didn't harass them, which was odd in of itself and had stopped the one or two would-be violence inciters who'd tried to start trouble. Spacers, or folk who'd come to Selen for various reasons that had held to old racial preconceptions.

Whatever else oddness was surrounding their arrival, the locals of the city were open to trading with them, both goods and stories.

It wasn't every day a Ryn Gathering happened on your doorstep, after all.

-X-

Kordath Bleu stood at the window of his office, still uncomfortable with the station he'd found himself in. The view was impressive, at least, and was something he tried to drink in a few times a day. He figured it'd help with some of his fear of flight, at least, being so high above everything. The sun had set minutes before, long shadows stretching across the city and surrounding plains as it sank beyond the horizon. Outside of the city, torches and fires blazed to life within the Ryn encampment, and even from here he could make out shapes moving around the flames. It set an ache in his heart; they were out there dancing and singing songs that he could only half recall.

He'd taken a gamble, sending out a message of a safe place for Ryn to organize a Gathering. While he had been confident that Atyiru wouldn't be too hard on him for going behind her blindfold to set it in motion, the recently appointed Maenaki was another story. She was

unnerving, and who knew what she'd do to consolidate her power. Bleu was known to be a staunch supporter of the Miralukan Consul, whether or not he shared her politics, she was still a friend. So far nothing had come down from the newly minted Shadow Scion, but that didn't mean it would hold.

The Ryn's hands were balled into fists, pressed down against the window sill as he stared past his reflection, down at the distant camp. They would be dancing and singing much of the night; the Gathering had swelled the past few days. Dozens of Families were down there, mothers would be organizing marriages to help keep the bloodlines diverse, and fathers would be trading details about where it was safest to find work.

They'd first started to arrive a week prior, the first ones setting up in the open area that had been marked off for them. Two days ago, Kordath had nearly collapsed when leaving a meeting when he sensed...them. He'd not made it to the camp, yet, and he wasn't sure he should go. The door behind him opened, and he could sense the calm presence before he even bothered looking.

"What's up, Blinky? Got somethin' ya need me ta do?"

"Those are your people, Bleu, down outside of the city. You should go, while you have the chance," she spoke in a singsong voice.

"I know," he sighed, head hanging before he turned to face her. "I should, I really oughta. But they're here, Atts, the...they...bleedin' 'ell it's been fourteen blasted years. What if....what if they do nae wish ta see me? What then?"

He sat at his desk, holding his head in his hands. In the corner of the room, he heard a burble of happiness from the infant laying in a crib. He glanced up to see Atty leaning over it, a smile on her face and her hand down inside of the crib.

"Then you'll know, but I doubt it. And they should meet little Shay, shouldn't they? And she them."

Her tone suggested less a question and more of an unspoken order.

"Besides, Zujenia will be at the Citadel tomorrow for a summit meeting; you should give them one surprise at a time."

Kord winced, the Miraluka's words stinging as he realized he'd not even thought about that. Of course, Zuji would want to go down to see the Gathering; she'd grown up getting to see such things. And if she'd found out his family was present and he'd made no effort to reconnect? Or even worse, introduce her to them? He could write off the much-anticipated wedding. He could write off a lot of things; she'd just as likely take off with Shay'Ira and go back to her mother.

"You're right," he muttered, standing up and rubbing at his face. "Of course you're right. I dunno if I should take Shay down right off, though."

"Go, we'll keep a watch over her," she spoke gently, taking him by the arm and directing him towards the door.

"We?"

"I have some business with your Zeltron colleague," spoke the woman, sweetly.

"Oh do ya now?" asked the Ryn, lechery dripping from his voice.

"Out!"

-X-

The guards had, regrettably, waved him on when he neared the Ryn encampment. Kord doubted that went unnoticed by anyone paying attention from inside the camp itself. Even if the security was there to keep them safe, it wasn't a thing any of them had experienced before. There'd be a watch, and they'd be curious as to why a lone Ryn, wearing clothes that weren't tattered or worn and faded, was being acknowledged as a superior to the armed troops watching over them.

The sun had finished its descent as he came down from the city, but it didn't matter. Fires and torches, glow bulbs and rods lit the temporary village, making it easy to find his way. Not that he knew where he was going, wandering aimlessly. He could feel a connection, he could sense them. Or at least he suspected, his abilities hadn't been this advanced when he'd fled from home, he'd never viewed his parents through the Force. Not knowingly at least.

Instead, he felt a familiarity, further inside the camp and was circling it. Hesitant to get closer, he knew he was a coward, he knew he should find his way to wherever they were camped and throw himself on his knees and beg for them to forgive him for running off as he had. To ask his sisters to not think of him as a monster for what he'd done to save them. To make sure his brother was alive and well.

Except there was that voice in the back of his mind, whispering, little worries that had haunted him for years. What if he was wrong? What if he was just sensing some other Force sensitive Ryn, his hopes dashed? What if it was just one of them, the rest having...no. He pushed those thoughts back in their hole. If nothing else, he had to hold on to hope.

Kordath paused as he neared the center of the camp, smiling as the music of his people got louder around the main fire. Days ago it had been small, but those who came had built up

around it, pushing further and further out into the plains. People were dancing around the fire, in pairs or alone. He watched, a strange sense of peace settling over him as he picked out the little signs of why the Gathering was important.

The young men with garlands of local flowers weaved together on their heads. Girls were dancing along with them, clinging to their arms and laughing, matching crown of flowers in their hair. The older men, not elderly but past their teens, joining in the dance with sashes around their waist that marked out they were no longer available. The Gathering kept the bloodlines separated out, a way for mothers to arrange marriages between the eligible, coming of age children.

He suddenly felt conspicuous, not because his clothes were in better shape, but because he lacked a sash. Surely no one would notice; he was shorter than the average Ryn anyways, and celebrations were moving along around him. He could beg off any attentions with apologies if he had to--

Hands grabbed him by the arm, slender fingers wrapping around him and tugging him towards the fire. He yelped in surprise, looking over to see a pair of laughing, gray eyes set in a pretty face. She was laughing as she pulled him into the circle of dancers, spinning and moving with a grace that came with the balance granted by a tail. He tried to keep up, out of politeness he told himself, going through half-remembered steps and watching the rest of the dancers. After a minute of frustration, they fell into rhythm with the rest, and Kord spun the girl about in tight circles.

Sometime later he extricated himself from the nearby fire, sweat sticking his shirt to his back and his feet sore. Still, he felt flushed with life and laughed when the girl bounced up alongside him once more, her hands going to his bicep anew. A creeping sense of unease came upon him as he realized she didn't intend to let go, walking him further away from the fire.

"Uhh, lass, I do no wish ta get yer hopes up..." he began, trailing off when she rested her head on his shoulder, turning her head to look at him with big gray eyes.

"Nobody gave you flowers yet," she said, "did you just get here today?"

"The soldiers saluted him when he came down from the city," came a new voice, and Kord jumped when another set of hands grabbed him by the left arm. Another set of gray eyes, eerily familiar to the ones to his right, drilled into him. "I don't think he's available, Kari, and if he is, he's a merchant or something."

"I do nae be a merchant, lass, uhh, could ya maybe let me go?" he muttered, shrugging his shoulders and working his elbows to try and get him out of their grip. "And, uh, yer right, I'm not--"

"Karo! Karina! Let that poor man go this instant! You know you've both got another Gathering before you're marrying, leave him be," came a strict, somewhat weary voice from behind the trio.

Kordath locked up, his brain coming to as much of a halt as his feet.

Karo. Karina. And that voice, he knew that voice. He heard it in the dark hours when he couldn't sleep, not as often as he did a decade past, but still, it had never left him. He began to shake in the grip of the two girls.

"Aw, but Mom! He's kinda cute!"

"Bit short, though, but he looks like he's got some credits to his name."

"Leave him be," spoke their mother, cutting the pair off and walking up. Kord could feel her getting nearer, his body refusing to turn and face the woman. "Both of you, leave him be and go fetch your father."

With some disgruntled mumblings, the pair let him go and wandered off into the torchlit darkness.

"You gonna stand there like you've got a blaster at your back all night, or turn around and speak to me, young man?"

He took a deep breath and turned, bowing as he did so, "Thank ya, ma'am, I was no lookin' ta cause any trouble with yer lasses, they just kinda surprised me. Lovely gals, the pair of 'em, I'm sure you'll have no troubles pairin' 'em off in another year or so."

"Stand up," she said quietly, and Bleu could see her feet squared in front of him. Loud she wasn't, but firm was the tone, and he found himself shaking again as he slowly straightened up.

Silver eyes stared into his gray, and he couldn't help but drink in her features. There was gray streaking through the once white hair, more lines on her face, especially around the eyes and mouth. But it was still her. It was still his mother. Thirteen years, she looked almost no different, when he was certain he'd changed so much as to be unrecognizable to the woman who'd raised him.

"Again, sorry, ma'am--"

"Come with me," she stated, turning on her heel and walking towards a nearby tent, her manner suggesting she'd brook no argument. For a moment his instincts said to run, to flee, but she cast a look over her shoulder as she stepped through the entry and it quieted. He'd come too far to run and ran too long already.

Inside it was warm, a small fire in the center under an opening, a traveling kitchen arrayed around it. Chipped glasses for tea, the same ones he remembered from so long ago, cracked and mended over and over again were resting in the glass next to the flames. A kettle sat on a small grate over the fire, heating as the woman settled onto a blanket and stared at him. Finally, she gestured to a spot near her, not across from the campfire as he'd expected, and he sat, tail flicking in apprehension.

"I feel I do owe ya an apology, about tha lasses, ma'am, and, uhh..." he trailed off, catching the dry look he was getting.

"You owe me a great many apologies, young man, but I don't think you were trying to abscond with either of your sisters."

For the second time in as many minutes all brain processes came to a halt, and he stared at her.

"I may be older," she gestured at the lines on her face, a tired smile tugging them into place, "but don't you think I know my own when I see him?"

"Mom," he choked out, unable to speak further as his shoulders slumped and he bent forward, twisting himself until he was pressing his forehead to the blanket. "I'm so sorry, I should have told you why, I should have said something, I should have..."

"Shush, boy," she spoke sharply, causing him to lift his bleary eyes in surprise. One of her hands, fingers still long and as graceful as he recalled, reached out and caressed the side of his face, a thumb running over tears streaming down his cheek. "We both know you couldn't. The girls didn't speak for almost a month about what had happened, and when they finally did a lot of why you left made sense to me. Your father never believed a lot of it, but I knew."

Her voice turned a little, wistful he'd almost have said. "I knew when they said you saved them from slavers, and the way, something they never put to words, I knew. I knew from the first day I showed you how to read the cards. Now sit up and come here."

Kord pushed himself up to his knees, which was as far as he got before she pulled him in, her arms having lost no strength since last she'd held him. He sobbed into her shoulder, holding her just as tight.

"I'd been so scared," he croaked, "so bleeding scared of seeing you again, mum. Almost as scared as I was of never seeing ya again. I don't know, I wasn't sure you'd come here, it was a shot in the...dark..."

He paused, and raised his head, looking at her oddly, "Wait, what do ya mean since ya taught me ta read tha cards?"

"Where did you pick up such strange speech mannerisims, boy?"

"Long story, happy ta tell ya after ya explain that wee bit, eh? Did ya know? What I was? What I was gonna...what I was gonna do?"

She hugged him again, pressing her forehead against his. "My boy, my Kordath. I knew what you could do, not what you would. Because I felt the spark in you, same as your grandmother felt it inside of me."

Kord stared at his mother, realizing why he'd been able to feel her so clearly when she got on world. "Oh."

"Oh," he repeated, ears burning. "So that's how ya always knew if I was lyin' or had been doin' somethin' I shouldn't of been."

"No, my boy, you were just a terrible liar as a child. I'm guessing you had to get over that while on your own," she smiled and touched his face again. "Curious beard, but it suits you."

Her eyes flickered past his shoulder, and Bleu realized how anyone walking into the tent would perceive what was going on. He felt a grip on the back of his vest, pulling him up and spinning him around to face a male Ryn of middle age. Gray eyes met gray, and the man's beard, trimmed yet with some bushy growth to it, streaked gray and white, filled Kord's gaze. Broad shoulders moved as the man let go his grip, and before the younger Ryn could speak, a fist that had been hardened through years of manual labor slammed into his chin, sending him sprawling back. Luck saved him from falling into the fire or on his mother.

"Krynn! Stop it, dear, there was nothing inappropriate going on, you should know better!"

"I trust you, Faun, but I don't know him, now do I?"

"Ya might," grumbled Kord, righting himself on the floor and wiping the blood from his mouth, in a daze. "Though I deserved that."

"Girls, wait outside, go back to the fire and enjoy yourselves, your father and I have business with this young man."

"Yes Mooooom," came the unenthused voices of the teenage pair.

"Business? You sent the girls to find me and I come back to find this boy cuddled up with you, honey, and you look as if you've been crying. What business do I have besides hauling him in front of the elders and having him tossed out?" growled the man named Krynn.

Kordath pushed himself up to his knees, not daring to stand when this man...when his father, was this angry and confused. The movement still caught a glare, though as the older man got a better look, the anger faded more towards confusion. "I know you."

He could only nod, the lump in his throat not allowing more.

"I should hope so," spoke the man's wife, busying herself as the kettle began to whistle. Kord saw her preparing three cups, much to the confusion of her husband. "You two have a lot to talk about, Krynn Bleu."

"Fine." The man turned to Kord, "Fine, you weren't trying anything with my wife, delectable as she might still be--"

"Krynn!"

"Not going to lie to the boy, dear," a smile flashed, and Kord felt some of the tension leave the tent. He also couldn't help but wonder if this is from where his own cavalier attitude originated.

"So you weren't trying nothing, but you still say you deserved the hit? Sit up straight, boy! Let me get a good look at you."

The older man knelt down to eyeball the younger Ryn, his gray eyes probing Kord's for a long moment. Finally, a hand was raised, and Kord did his best not to shy away from it as Krynn lifted it, covering the younger man's beard and mouth. "Oh," came a surprised, quiet exclamation. "Oh."

"Hi, Dad," croaked the Ryn, finally, lips trembling and eyes threatening to cry once more.

The older man rested both hands on his shoulders, taking in the rest of him. "Bit small, aren't you?"

"Had a terrible time keepin' meself fed when I first left, yeah. Got over it, though."

"Always knew you'd make it, one way or another, lad. And look at you, all dressed up in clean clothes that can't be more than a year old," spoke the man, brushing at the dust and dirt that had gotten on his son's shirt when he'd laid him out.

"Me clothes, really, dad?" laughed the nervous young man, shaking. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry it took so long for me to...ta find ya."

"You ran off to keep the Family safe," spoke the older Ryn gently, drawing his son in for a hug. "It tore our hearts out, but it was the right thing to do. Even if I wanted to strip your hide and nail your tail to a post so you could never do it again at the time. But we knew *why* you had to do it."

Kordath shook, as he felt a warmth at his back, his mother wrapping her arms around both of them.

"I'm so sorry; you do nae know, tha things I done. Thievin', stealin', griftin' folks and connin' 'em. I'm nae proud of it, but it doesn't change what I done," he spoke into his father's shoulder, the words just pouring out.

"Survival is a hell of a thing, son. And it's not always pretty."

Kord shook, wracked with guilt, tears, and relief as he sobbed in his parent's embrace.

-X-

The three sat, drinking tea and chatting. Kord learned that his brother, Kordo, had been married off a few years back and was probably on the other side of the Galaxy right now, with a pair of children of his own at this point. They were expecting to run into him at another Gathering halfway around the Rim in a few months time, which Kord promised he'd try to make it out to see them.

He danced around the subjects of what he was doing for work, finally settling on 'important work up in the big bloody castle' to get them to stop asking. Or so he thought.

"Karo said the soldiers watching the camp showed you respect when you walked down from the city. They've been kind enough, or indifferent, to us, but never anything like that," spoke his mother, sipping her tea and staring at him.

Next, to her, his father grunted and smirked, "We were curious who put out the word about this world. None of the Families had heard of 'Selen' before, and none of us could figure why word had gone out about a Gathering here. Just how much sway do you have around here, Kordath?"

"Uhh...well, I'm not in charge, but I'm pretty good with tha person who is? It's, uh, it's hard ta explain. Place is a wee bit complicated, but ya caught us at a peaceful time. There's a reason there's bloody soldiers around, heh. Still, city folk have nae given ya trouble, from what I understand."

Before they could plumb for more information, Karina and Karo poked their heads into the tent, "Mom! Dad!"

"We got visitors in the camp!"

"Two ladies, one dressed really pretty!"

"And the other has a baby!"

"Oh kark," muttered Kord, a chill crawling up his spine.

"The one with the baby is red!"

"Red? Slow down, girls!"

"Sorry, Mom! The pretty one has really long hair, and a blindfold, but she's dancing with everyone around the fire!"

"A blind dancer?" mused Krynn, sounding intrigued. This drew a glare from Faun, much to Kord's confusion. "Sorry, uh, red, uh, person?"

"Woman," muttered Kord, correcting him.

"Yeah! What he said, with blue hair. She's kinda cute," spoke Karo, her cheeks turning red under her parents scrutiny.

"Oh great. Wait, did ya say a baby!?" asked Kord, springing to his feet, turning to his sisters.

"Umm, yeah, why? What is this guy still doing here, Mom?"

Kord collapsed back to the blanket and hung his head, rubbing both eyes with his palms and sighed. "The blindfolded one is me boss lady."

"The...person running things, as you said?"

"Aye. And I have nae idea why...no. I know why she's down here, because she loves bloody dancin' and meetin' new people and givin' me minor heart attacks is why. Bloody 'ell."

There was a cry of surprise outside the tent and both Karo and Karina disappeared from view, before a blindfolded face wreathed in white hair stuck its way through in their place.

"Kordy! You found them!"

"Yes, Atts, I found 'em."

From outside he could hear a muffled exchange.

"Did she call him Kordy!?"

"Wait, did you try and drag our brother off to get wreathed!?"

"Oh like you didn't try too!"

"I need a bloody cup of coffee," grumbled Kord, laying back on the blanket. "Well, they know who I am, now."

"Oh my gods this baby is adorable!" came floating through the canvas, causing him to sit upright, eyes wide. "Look at her little tail! Who's the papa!?"

"No, Qybbles, don't tell 'em that first, tell 'em it ain't yours first, or this is all gonna go--"

"Um, Kord is the dad, but--"

"OH MY GOSH YOU AND MY BROTHER MADE A LITTLE RED RYN!"

"No! I'm not--"

"MOM! DAD!"

"I can explain," started Kord, staring at his parents, who were still staring at the Miraluka who'd shoved her head into their tent. "Yes, I've got a wee one, was gonna bring that up, so, uh, yeah, that's a thing. Her mum was a Zeltron, and that's one out there holdin' onta her, but that ain't her mum. Uhh....also I'm engaged," he said, lamely.

"To the Zeltron?"

"No. She'll be around tomorrow, I'm sure she'll be morti--love ta meet ya."

Kord swallowed and gave them both a weak smile, hearing his Consul giggling behind him and a shouting Qyreia outside.

"Uh, wanna meet Shay'Ira?"

"Shay what?"

"Her mum named her," grumbled the Ryn, rubbing at his face anew.

"You should have a talk with her about that, young man."

"Eh, she's dead anyway."

"You shouldn't speak of lost loved ones like that!"

"Makin' a lot o' assumptions, mum, like I said, I can explain. Now, grand daughter, outside, meet her before her aunts do somethin' unfortunate?"

Kordath stayed sitting on the carpet as his parents walked out, left only with his thoughts for a moment. At least when he tried this again the next day, he'd have Zujenia along to be as nervous and terrified of the situation as he would be. That was a bonus.

At least he'd gotten over himself and come down to see them. One less worry in the Galaxy.

"Get out here, Bumblefluff, you gotta introduce me to your parents; otherwise I'm just the weird blind girl!"

"Oh, aye, that'll make ya less weird," he muttered, getting to his feet, feeling better already.