

“So, what did you get from the team?” Koliss Welcott asked, trying his best to hide his boyish curiosity as he stoked the fireplace. The warmth of the flames radiated far as the combustion began with renewed fervor, casting a bright glow upon the purple Twi’lek lounging on the soft rug not three paces from him.

“Lekwarmers,” Tali Sroka sighed, relishing the warmth of the fire.

“From all of them?”

“No, you silly,” the Twi’lek chuckled with a cheeky smirk. “Not even a single pair. Not even after I askedt for them...”

The Human shook his head with a humored smile, fetching a pair of mugs of mulled wine and setting them down beside her while he took a seat on the rug as well. “Well, don’t keep me in suspense forever. If you didn’t get lekwarmers, then what *did* they give you?”

Groaning, Tali reached out with her hand and called the satchel to her, the bag dragging across the floor until the strap touched her palm. “Hmm, let’s see...” She rummaged around within.

“There veren’t any tags, but I think I can figure vho gave me vhat.”

She pulled out a tangled mess of bleached sticks tied together with dark brown string, the jumbled mess forming some sort of pattern that defied all artistic sensibility.

“Grot’s?” Koliss asked, raising an eyebrow.

Tali nodded.

“I could tell from the...”

“Bones andt sinew, yes. I vouldt have been gladt to notice that a bit earlier.”

“Well what is it?”

The Twi’lek shrugged. “Knowing him, probably some sort of tribal trinket, granting me goodt hunting fortune, or fertility. Or it might be a macabre dream-catcher, for all I know.”

Koliss took the bundle into his hands and squinted. “Fascinating.”

“Vhat is?”

“There’s still some scraps of meat on these bones...”

The Twi’lek looked like she was about to be sick.

“Into the fire you go!” she declared, snatching the object from his grip with a wave of her hand and propelling the bones and sinew into the roaring fire. A few instants later, the flames themselves turned a vivid blue, proceeding to shift through the colors of the visible spectrum as the bones burned up one after the other. The pair could only behold in mesmerized wonderment.

“That was, unexpected.”

“Do you think he meant for that to happen?”

“He’s a Trandoshan, I don’t know what he’s thinking half the time... Better just say thank you and hope he won’t pry.”

The Medic nodded and agreed that was probably the safest course of action.

“Well, what else? Kelviin gave me a can of glue. Said it was for putting people back together again...”

Tali couldn’t help but giggle at the revelation. “That sounds just like him,” she admitted. The team’s Wookiee mechanic had always striven to understand Human culture, but his attempts at fitting in, beyond obvious physical hurdles, had met with *mixed* results.

“I suppose someone had tipped him off that I was looking for some decorations for my cabin, since he gave me this,” the Twi’lek sighed, gesturing at a slender collection of junk, vaguely pillar shaped and serving no other function than being the final resting place of random debris.

“W-what is it?” Koliss asked incredulously.

“I, have not the faintest clue,” Tali admitted. “Best guess? Art. I mean, at least it certainly sparks a conver...” She suddenly fell silent.

“What is it, lavender?”

“I just realized something...” Tali muttered, reaching out to hit a singular button at the makeshift statue’s base. Faint arcs of electricity sparked between two nodes at the statue’s tip, a lingering scent of ozone soon flowing from them.

“Is that a...?”

“Yes,” Tali sighed, chuckling to herself. “A literal conversation starter.”

Once the bout of hearty laughter had died down, Koliss wiping a manly tear from the corner of his eye, Tali scooped up one of the mugs and sipping the warm beverage within. Murmuring contently at the richness of the spices and faint alcohol, she shuffled closer to the Medic and pressed her cheek against his arm.

“So, what didt you get me?” she winked, dragging her lek expectantly along his forearm.

“Me? Oh, uh, shouldn’t we see what else you got first?”

“You didn’t forget, didt you?!” she gasped, seemingly mortified.

“No-no! Of course not, lavender. I just, uh, want to gauge the competition.”

“Riiight...” the Twi’lek raised a singular eyebrow. “Vell, if you’ve got to know, Zuji sent me some lovely homemade treats, of which, erm... a few are still left. Kordt sent me a suspiciously large bar of soap, which I gave to Kelviin, after he sweepedt it for hidden cameras andt found like... seven. Julie gave me half a bottle of whisky...”

“Oh! So that would explain why I received half a bottle’s worth of whisky in a plastic cup,” Koliss exclaimed with a sarcastic eye roll, earning himself a jab in the side.

“Hey, she’s trying. Last year I’m sure I’d have gotten usedt needles or something. As a doctor, you shouldt be happy for her,” Tali chided.

“Oh, I am, I am. No harm in a spot of humor, though.”

The Twi’lek’s eyes didn’t seem to agree, but she continued nonetheless. “Andt from Lucine... Vell, that one vas probably as much for you as it vas for me...” the purple Twi’lek smirked with a sultry gaze, her amber eyes flashing with a forbidden flame beyond the rim of her mug.

“Ahem, well, uh... huuh, I’m happy that you, uh, found your gifts to your liking,” he struggled, choking on his wine and trying to hide the spreading blush on his cheeks.

“You think that’s *stiff* enough competition for you?” the cheeky Twi’lek leered at him, watching the man squirm.

“Huuuh...” Koliss groaned, gently shifting further away from the salacious Mystic and trying to reach his gift from behind the couch.

“You’re acting so strange all of a sudden,” Tali continued, inching closer as the man attempted to dodge her presence. “Don’t you vant to... unwrap your present?” she caressed her lek playfully before leaning in to whisper in his ear. “I’ve got a special little box vith your name on it.”

“Stop!” Koliss exclaimed, drawing ragged breaths. “Please, I can’t take any more of your teasing!” he panted. “Here, just... just take it.” He shoved her a soft packet wrapped in brown paper like a lamb thrown to a ferocious predator.

Tali merely chuckled and shot out her tongue in a playful smirk. "You're way too easy, doctor," she giggled as she tore into the packet, not even seeing what she was doing until most of the wrappings had disappeared. Looking down, she stopped, blinking once, twice and continuing to stare. Before her, on a bed of crumpled brown paper, lay two lengths of unevenly knit fabric, looking like tapered tubes and made of soft, luxurious wool that was most out of place considering their rather lackluster workmanship.

She gingerly picked up the lekwarmer and held it up, Koliss' gulp audible as she ran her fingers against the weave. It was crude, yes, but it had been handmade with love and dedication.

"D-do you like them?" he managed.

Her cheeks burned with a soft red glow as her lekku entwined over her chest. Leaning forward, she pressed her lips against his and whispered. "I love them."