

“Gods, Atts,” grey-furred hands ran roughly down his face, passing over exhausted, bloodshot eyes and landing heavily in his lap. The Ryn’s lithe form was slouched forward, spent from nights and days waiting, hoping, and dreading. He shook his head, grey eyes drifting up past tubes and pumps and glass to a wrinkled blue blindfold. “She’s been like dis for weeks, luv. Is she...”

He didn't dare to finish the question, bloody wishing that there wasn't a reason to even ask. But, his gaze dropped back to the bacta tank, Zujenia...she was in bad shape. Synthamesh covered the gaping hole burnt through her left midsection, the medics unable to fully patch her skin as multiple attempts to replace the scorched and ruined soft bits inside had failed. They tried giving her Human parts, and they worked for a time — until the Half-Ryn rejected them. The docs mentioned it being related to her hybridness. Kord had jumped, desperately offering to donate what he could live without. They refused him, background health check or something, and the same issue as before. Now they've fashioned synthetic organs, her body's fighting them, but they keep saying it's looking hopeful. He thought they may have forged their med papers, licences, or whatever.

“Zujubean,” Kord whipped his head back to Atyiru’s face. Her voice was calm and sure, though her brow furrowed above the fabric band with concern. “She is still fighting, Kordath. Holding strong to the desire of life and all thing living entails. I sense...turmoil, however, something she is attempting to surpass, solve while her body heals. Yet, this Bean is a stubborn one. Zujenia is at the helm of her sails right now.”

The Miraluka’s dark fingers darted out, carefully adjusting the tank’s settings, each new level chiming aloud for her to hear. Her other hand rested upon the glass, feeling out with the Force the former student’s vitals. Her words did little to edge the heavy knot of worry in the Ryn's gut, but he found himself sinking deeper into his seat as if just hearing even half of a reassurance from his close friend was enough right now. Exhaling a long sigh, Kord continued his watchful vigil over his fiancée.

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It was dark. Cold, quiet, and dark. Silence. It was foreign and ethereal and otherworldly. She floated, the only thing visible to her eyes, wild white hair curling and coiling around her tan sides, enveloping the bare skin in an ashen curtain. There was pain, but it was a memory of pain, detached and unrelatable. Where before a scorched and a gaping hole was embedded, a lavender blossom bloom. The lotus wasn't the most beautiful of flowers, its petals browning and curled — each inner flare of doubt and grief mirrored with more blight. Panic sprang forward inside her, a fear of what each damaged spot reflected upon her, what ill omen it would bring. The half-Ryn struggled, thrashing against nothingness as she frantically tried to wipe the petals clean.

***Drip.***

Zujenia froze. Somewhere, out in the black distance, a drop of liquid had fallen. From where it sounded a light manifested, small with coalescing swirls. It expanded outward in pulsating, serene ripples that washed over the expanse. The light paused, one circling band reforming into an ovalesque shape just below her hovered form. Curiosity overcame her worries, and she stretched a leg down to touch it. A small yelp of surprise escaped her as she suddenly descended from where she floated, toes connecting lightly with the bright surface.

Settled, the half-Ryn glanced around, uncertain and awed at the same time. Where once there had been complete darkness, now a rippling pool was illuminated. Each dark crest of the water was outlined in lines of gold, captured from the stagnant rings of light just under its surface. It lapped at her heels, her ankles, cool and refreshing, almost familiar. The feeling, this presence, welcomed her into its fold, inviting Zujenia to step forward and to follow. And she did.

As soon as her feet left the glowing platform of serenity and security, a new bodeful pit deepened in her flowered gut. An ill, new, invisible being swirling about her with a deep and morbid mirth. With one foul swoop of energy, the rippling pool whipped into chaos. The dark water snapped and lashed at the light, contorting and herding it into a jagged, convulsing line of white energy. A mournful moan, a painful whine seemed to omit from the light.

And Zujenia finally realized the familiarity. This was the Force right down to its very essence. Light, Dark, how they interacted. There was no grey, no easy curb to stroll upon, and it was abruptly apparent that her grasp on the Force was neglectful, foolish. The Jedi stumbled backwards, taken aback as the epiphany mixed with terror and...*guilt? Why?...*

Blue eyes appeared behind her visions, scared and lost. The half-Ryn tried to shut them out, her eyes closing with tears escaping from their prison. Her chest tightened, more lives she had lost — failing to protect them. The Cathar mother, and now...she clutched onto dead and empty hope that Kelviin has managed to keep the Hapans safe.

*Kelviin...*

The Wookiee death was her fault, she wasn't there to save him. He was her responsibility, bringing the lad into a dangerous life. Immense grief wrapped around her hands, pulling her to her knees, the pool crashing against her skin. The anguished cries of the Light was joined by the voices of the lost, and she swore the grumbling tone of her apprentice was among them. Zujenia watched helpless, defeated as the Dark masses continued their feast upon its glowing rival entity.

*I couldn't help you...but I can now.*

Energy surged to her being, rising her up to full height before she moved forward. One step, and her heart *ka-thunked* to the bottom of her chest. Two steps, and her footing steadied fast. Three

steps, and she was sprinting, stopping only to slip into the center of the bright vein of energy. Zujenia was not in control of her actions, a protective drive overtaking what space fear had etched out within her. Instinct choreographed her movement, drawing her momentum into sweeping circles and pivots. Her right foot placing purposefully in the darkened side of the boundary before her left brushed supportive outwards from the light, nurturing its own peaceful conquest. The half-Ryn continued, her soaked sandy tail arching for balance on the slippery ethereal surface beneath her feet. A leaf swaying with the wind.

### ***Zujenia, luv...***

Startled, her focus dropping as her fiancé's voice rang through this otherworldly place, and she lost her footing in the shin high water. *Kord*, a fresh tear ran down her cheek, *I'm sorry*. The Ryn must have fallen her in death, with everyone else she couldn't protect. Zujenia lifted her head with a sniff, ready to utter out loud to her lover when her golden gaze caught sight of two towering walls of dark water closing in on the Light energy. Her breath dropped, and she was exploded onto her feet — calling upon the Force with greater will than ever before, pleading for its aid to protect these spirits.

*I*. A bright, netted energy gathered before her outstretched hands. *Will*. It grew and stretched around herself and the band of light. *Protect you!* An typhlosion of light boomed across the expanse, chipping away the dark as it squealed and shrieked to its touch.

Collapsing to her knees, Zujenia looked up, exhausted. The ethereal light once again rippling bands of light, a circle of it resting beneath her. Satisfied she had succeeded in balancing the peace, the half-Ryn curled into herself. The lotus blossom from her side, bright and vibrant in color, blemish free.

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A burst of light exploded within the bland white walls of the med bay. Kord blocked his eyes, only to blink and realize that before him knotted a barrier of Force energy. Its length expanded between him, the bacta tank he leaned against, and to the Miraluka across from him. The two exchanged looks, one a eyeless tilt of a head, before Atyiru smiled.

“As I said, she is still fighting for the good of life.”