

"You want me to what."

She said it so flatly, so deadpan, that it couldn't truly be considered a question. The Ryn across from her, seated at a desk and chair that almost swallowed him, much like the Serpentine Throne did, merely gestured uncomfortably.

"C'mon. You'd be good at it. Uh. Probably."

*"Probably?"*

"I am accountin' for losses, o' course. Some. Try not ta kill them kiddos fer me, eh?"

"I haven't even agreed yet," Satsi spat through gritted teeth.

Tired gray eyes squinted back at her. "Buuuuu?"

She crossed her arms and glared for a moment, but when he looked so miserable and gave her his version of pleading eyes, it was hard to outright resist.

"Convince me."

"It's not like ya nae 'ave done this before, Red. Ya an' Uji used to whip up tha Talons back on the Hawk. An' ya got yer lil band o' wee ones."

The bastard snickered, because for some frakking reason it was amusing to him that she'd ended up with practically two and a half apprentices and multiple toddlers.

Yeah. Her teaching people. Goddamn hilarious.

Red flashes rose in the back of her mind and she pushed them back, swallowing bile. Kord didn't know about that bit of her history; only Uji really did. He wasn't trying to set her off, she knew. Logically. But she still had to fight the urge to curl up and cry or run screaming.

"And?"

The Consul sighed. "And I just...I need me some help here, luv. Please?" The endearment was still halting, uneasy, but they'd at least patched up some of all the broken between them after their trip to Endor. "It's just a lot ta be mindin' right now when I got more important things ta be fixin', an' I don't trust Q or that schutta Kaleesh to get a handle on Grot."

"And his team."

"And 'is team."

Satsi narrowed her eyes.

"You want me to retire to some glorified karking babysitter position."

"I'm kinda hopin' less kark gets blown up this way."

"You should be HAPPY I put a rocket in that frakker's face."

"Dinnae say I was unhappy, luv, just, uh...tha' I could use less headaches about now."

The scarred Human growled.

"If you don't get Spots back while I'm busy training these idiots, I'm going to rip out your throat with my *teeth*."

"Not helping, Sats," grumbled the Ryn, adjusting his pants. She rolled her eyes so hard she thought she saw her brain. "Look, I'm askin' here, and I think ya owe me tha' much."

"That *I* owe *you*?!"

He winced. "Poor choice o' wordin'. Wha I mean to say is, we both gots ta be better to each other, yeah? And better ourselves."

"You know what I promised Sammy."

*I swear, I'll do bettah.* Every day and every damn night when she tucked her in.

"Yeah, an' I'm tryna do the same by Zuj and Shay. S'why I sent her away." His tail and shoulders drooped sadly, and Satsi sighed. She knew, she did. It killed her a little every time she had to leave her daughter behind, knowing that maybe she was just *leaving her* for good.

"Dammit, Kordy," groaned the woman, tugging at her black locks, and he perked just slightly.

"Is tha an aye?"

"Yes, yes, fine. But anything goes how I don't like it, I walk, no questions."

"Would nae expect otherwise." His voice dropped to a mutter, "Hell knows ya wouldn't listen anyway."

"You damn well bet," Satsi snarled, but she managed a smirk as she got up, reached over, and yanked the Ryn into a hug. He squeezed back, sagging into her chest briefly, before they parted.

"Go whip them younglins inta badarses, luv."

"In a bit. Go take a nap. I'll push some of this paperwork around."

"Yer tha best."

"Don't forget it."

-X-

By later afternoon, Satsi was back home at their manor and doing up her daughter's hair after her post-lunch bathtime. The jelly casualties had been high, today.

As she was dragging a comb through the child's wet locks, midnight-black as her and Uji's, Samantha finished her tale of fighting off masked lizard warriors and winning glory for her stuffed bunnies. Satsi praised the strange victory and nuzzled the top of Samantha's head, gently broaching a new topic.

"So honey...Mommah's gonna be working another job now, extra sometimes."

"Issa dangah?"

"Not so dangerous, no, bunny." Satsi stuck a ribbon in her mouth while she bundled half of the toddler's hair up in a tiny bun. "Mostly I'm gonna be training people, teaching them to fight. Ya know, like Ruka."

"Rooah!" Sammy cried happily. She loved her Mirialan 'big brother'. Seemingly more than she loved either of her parents. Satsi was only jealous of her apprentice sometimes.

"Yup. Lots of beating people up."

Sammy, seeming to sense her mother's thrill and amusement like always, laughed and clapped her hands, a little violently, as Satsi finished the second bun on the other side of her small head.

"There ya go, butterfly. All done."

"Thanku, mamah."

"You're welcome, babygirl." She tweaked the toddler's nose. "So it's okay, yeah, that mommy goes and helps her team? They're called Spectre Cell."

"Wahssat."

"What's what?"

"Spessers."

"Specter? It means ghost. Cell is just...like another word for team."

"Mamah gon be ghost?"

"Heh, yeah, babygirl. Mommah's gonna be a ghost."

"Cool."

"Yeah, cool."

Satsi tried to keep her daughter informed of what she was doing, where she was going, how likely it was that she was going to be coming back — she'd promised Samantha nothing but truth when she was born, and it was a promise she intended to keep no matter what. She didn't really give the tot the gruesome details or overly specify exactly how dangerous some of her "jobs" were, but she made sure Sammy knew when she was leaving for "work" and that she wanted to come back to her.

That if she did leave, it wasn't because she *wanted* to. That if she did leave, it wasn't because for one goddamn second she had ever stopped loving Sammy.

And so she worked. That's what she told Sammy, what she and Uji told Sammy. Going out to visit her gang in person, as Blood — she was working. Off on some assignment for the clan, either for espionage or assassination or intel or what have you — working. A night singing and managing Sugar's — working. Undercover work in any of the many organizations previously or currently trying to kill them — working. Meeting with Odanites or other allies — working. Directing crews to clean up bodies or corralling the riots in the streets of Capac ring while Uji did his damndest to actually help the people — working.

At the very least, while Sammy was always upset about not spending time with her parents, explaining their absence seemed to mollify the nearly three-year-old. At least marginally. She was unusually smart for her age, despite her speech impediment, and more often than not, Satsi felt her heart ache at the too understanding gleam in her daughter's beautiful, squinty brown eyes.

"No worreh, mamah," Sammy said around the fingers she had jammed in her mouth. She moved from examining her hairdo in the mirror with adorable satisfaction — she kept bouncing in place to make the buns jiggle and jump, like tiny ears — to turn and throw herself at her mother, clambering into her lap and nuzzling their faces together.

Satsi smiled — damn did she always smile so much when Sammy was around — and wrapped her arms around the girl, smushing their noses and foreheads together and making raspberries against her cheeks, ears, neck. Samantha squealed in delight and defiance, waving her arms with enough force that the gangster had no doubt there was sparky power in those tiny, bruising punches.

After a few moments of snuggling, the woman disentangled herself from her daughter.

"Alright, my baby-bunny-butterfly. Why don't you go play for a bit, okay? Mamah has to go talk to Ruka and Eilen, then she's gonna pick up daddy, and we'll all have dinner, okay?"

"Uhkay."

"What do you want to eat, sweet thing?"

Sammy seemed to ponder for a moment, her nose scrunching up adorably. "Pancakes?"

Satsi laughed. "Breakfast for dinner? Okay." She couldn't stand to say no to the request, not when she was going to be spending even less time at home for the foreseeable future. It was all she could do not to curl up on the floor and let the guilt crush her, phantoms with voices like her mother's echoing in her mind, but saying things Satsi herself had said about the woman. How she was a liar and cruel and hurtful and never loved them once. How she abandoned Uji and Satsi.

*What if she hates me?* Satsi often asked her brother, but he always kissed her hair softly and assured her that their daughter would adore her, would know no fiercer protector.

"Kiss?" Sammy asked, bringing Satsi out of her thoughts. Satsi smiled before offering her cheek, to which the toddler pressed a big, messy, wet kiss, complete with a *"mmmwaah!"* sound effect before turning her own cheek to Satsi. The woman did the same, before settling Sammy on the floor and watching her walk, lunge, and — frakking hell — *jump*, towards her toys. It was a little ritual they'd begun, one Sammy insisted they do whenever they're away from each other, even if it's just across the room. It made Satsi's heart do its best impression of sweet frakking syrup melting in the Tatooine sun.

Once she was sure Sammy was settled down with her mangled stuffed animals and building block weapons and that the windows in the room were locked — what a day that had been, finding their two year old out on the second story roof after climbing out at the *ground floor* —

Satsi left to climb up to the second floor where most of the bedrooms were. She'd wanted to kids close to she and Uji, so she'd given both Ruka and Eilen their own rooms on the same floor, at least a room between all of them as a buffer.

*Maybe move Tufty soon...* she thought idly. She'd seen the way the Selonian hybrid liked to squirrel away near the kitchen and speeder garage. And Eilen was a grown-ass woman. She didn't need Satsi hovering.

The gangster approached the door she needed — the outside was decorated with racing stickers and stripes and a sign with her name on it — and rapped her knuckles against the wood.

There was no response, but she could hear lots of thumping, which usually meant...

Satsi opened the door with a raised eyebrow and a smirk as she watched the immensely tall, gangly girl dance and jump around her room, strumming at an invisible instrument and lip-singing to a song the Human couldn't hear. The hybrid's headphones were firmly settled over her large, fluffy ears, obviously blaring loudly enough to hide Satsi's entrance.

It was probably mean, but Satsi cackled when, a minute or so later, the Knight finally noticed her lounging against the door frame and promptly kissed the carpet; full on flailed, spun, and faceplanted just short of her leaping from her bed to her desk.

"...hey, Satsi..." eventually squeaked from the wreckage.

"Hey, kid," the older woman replied, still smirking. "Having fun? Good day off?"

"Eh, yup, yeah. What's up?"

"Just wanted ta let you know I'd be scarce this week. Settling in with the Galeres battleteam."

"Oh, yeah, okay. No worries! I'm actually going to this HUGE speeder circuit off-world for a couple days, it's gonna be so awesome."

"Where at?"

"Somewhere," teased the tall hybrid, and Satsi shook her head before backing out the door.

"Be safe, kid. You call me if you need anything. Anybody touches you without your permission, I will pull out their teeth with pliers made from their leg bones."

Eilen shuddered. "Um. Thanks."

"Always, babes. And take some of the female condoms I gave you."

"Merp."

That squawk never failed to make her cackle.

"Don't be late for dinner!"

"BYE, SATSI."

-X-

"Ooooo," came a small voice.

Satsi cracked an eye open, peering at the end of the bed. Already she could feel Uji moving next to her, waking up just as she did, their bond keeping them in sync while they each searched for any danger. However, the only threat was to their toes being squashed as a lumpy shape climbed up onto the comforter and waved its appendages, making strange noises.

"Oh my," her twin said, rubbing sleep from his tired eyes. "*Shimai*, what have we here? I think we might be under attack."

"We're bein' haunted. Oh, Shadows, *kyodai*. Protect us with yer powers," she joined in dramatically, diving for his chest. She perhaps used a bit too much force, since she bowled them both over. It didn't seem to matter, though. Their daughter giggled and jumped on them both.

"Gotchya, gotschyahs!" Sammy cried, peeking at them through the two holes she'd evidently cut in the pillowcase she was wearing over her pajamas and the plastic shoulder pauldron she liked to sleep in. "I ghost too, mamah, daddeh!"

Satsi cooed and pressed kisses to their toddler's sheet-hidden face.

"You want to be like your mother, butterfly?" Uji asked as they all rolled over, settling the girl between them. She gripped strands of his long hair and chewed on them, staring at him adoringly.

"Ye," Sammy answered. "An' daddeh."

Her father pulled free her costume and nuzzled their noses. "I am proud of whatever you wish to be, my butterfly. We both are."

"Damn right we are," Satsi agreed, snuggling with her family, even as she worried. Uji, of course, sensed her unease, and found her hand under the sheets, twining their fingers.

"My girls," he murmured, then chuckled. "My ghost girls, hmm?"

"Ye!" Samantha cheered, and her mother couldn't resist that. Perhaps the new team wouldn't be so bad after all, with the toddler as their mascot.

"Alright, loves," she replied. "Goodnight, kyodai. Goodnight, Sammybunny."

"Goodnight, shimai, Samantha."

"Guh'ite mummah, daddeh."

And they slept.

...at least, until the snoring tyke ended up, somehow, upside down and kicking them both in the teeth. But such was their life.