“It’s not fair! I WANT to go!” boomed a female voice.

A loud stamping of a foot echoed.

“But you can’t. It’s not safe.” The male voice replied.

A disapproving groan was all that could be said at a time like this.

“Please,”

“No,”

“Pleeeasseee,”

“No. Don’t beg. Just don’t,”

“Pretty pretty please,”

“Fine! But I set the rules!”

“But…”

“No buts. No ifs. Leave no traces. You wear this and when it vibrates you return back to your safe base. If you need…” the male voice sighed as he relented to the female’s demands.

She had already left the room excitedly.

“Mumma’s going on a mission!” Kooki squealed quietly.

Justinios buried his head in his hands.

He just hoped he had done the right thing.

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Kooki squeezed into her maternity leggings and put on her furry boots, which luckily concealed her ‘tag.’ She felt like a criminal. All these silly timings and rules and regulations. Kookimarissia Mimosa-Inahj didn’t get where she was by following such nonsense. Rules were there to be flouted. However, she had a family now and another child on the way, so for their sakes she obliged and followed her Quaestor’s instructions.

The expectant mother was soon fully equipped for her upcoming mission. She wanted to set out while her twins were asleep to cause minimum disruption and avoid annoying questions. She had already sent out correspondence to this Kagu Shi on a neutral datapad, and was awaiting response.

***1 NEW MESSAGE***

***FROM: Drakula***

***TO: ChocChip***

*ChocChip,*

*Don’t embark until you’ve receive confirmation.*

*Stay safe.*

*Drakula*

***\*MESSAGE DELETED\****

Kooki sighed as she deleted the fussy message. Grabbing a small rucksack, the keen Alderaanian kissed her short spouse on the head and headed for the door.

“Stay safe!” Andrelious hushed, trying to sound protective.

Kooki just sighed again, smiled politely and nodded without saying anything.

Andrelious hugged her whilst she stood outside their new homestead and suddenly felt her ankle make a weird shudder.

“Nervous are we?” he teased.

Kooki pushed him off her.

“NO! It’s this frakking ‘tag’ thing!” she yelled, shaking her foot inanely.

Once she stepped back indoors the vibrating stopped. She slumped into a nearby armchair and kicked off her boot, revealing her latest ‘addition’ to Andrelious.

As try as he could, the Warlord couldn’t stifle his laughter.

“What the frak is THAT?” he giggled.

Kooki put her boot back on and stamped on her spouse’s foot.

“OUCH!” he squealed.

“THAT…THAT is what Drake attached to my ankle in exchange for letting me go on this mission.” Kooki complained.

Despite having sore toes, Andrelious still found it funny.

“So are you not allowed out at night?” he continued to tease.

The icy glare he received was enough to make him shudder and silence any further comments. He decided it was for the best that he headed to bed instead of discovering the conditions attached to said device. He would rather not know and keep his body relatively intact, since Kooki was in a feisty and unpredictable mood.

Since she hadn’t heard anything more on her new datapad, Kooki laid on the sofa. Soon her eyelids grew heavy and she drifted off.

After what felt like forever, a beeping sound came from beside the sleeping Sith.

***1 NEW MESSAGE***

***FROM: Kagu Shi***

***TO: Marie Kook***

*Miss Kook*

*Before we can process your application to become my personal assistant, we must meet and converse to assess your suitability.*

*There’s an alleyway next to a tavern on the north-west side of town. See you there at 02.00 hours.*

*Shi*

Kooki glanced at the timepiece on the mantelpiece above the fireplace. She had just short of two hours to prepare herself and make her way through this new lunar settlement. She started to put the pieces of her plan together in her head.

Justinios wanted Taldryan to recruit him and still Kooki was puzzled as to what use a drugs kingpin would be. Maybe his scientific knowledge? These and many more thoughts would keep Kooki warm in the cool, chilly air as she stepped out into the night.

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The little magnetic needle inside the device in Kooki’s hand flickered over the aurebesh letters indicating she was heading in the right general direction. As she looked up, she noticed the quality of living had drastically deteriorated from whence she came. A chilly breeze cut across her cheeks and as she panned around, a metallic thud echoed from the opposite direction. Kooki spun round fast, and noticed the breeze had knocked off an empty can of Ebla beer onto the concrete ground below, and tiny stale droplets of carbonated foam trickled out.

Looking down at the device, the needle was now frantically quivering, whilst it tried to regain its bearings. Soon enough it settled and Kooki headed a few more yards in the north-westerly direction. In the distance, a rather grey, rundown building appeared. There were rusty shutters on the windows, and a dim glow emitted from the cracks around the perimeters of them. It certainly lacked a warming glow of most cantinas Kooki had visited in her time. She looked adjacent to the aesthetically unappealing building and spotted the dark alleyway and headed towards it, whilst pocketing her useful device. The lighting was just as poor as inside the building beside it. The stony walls were black and wet from where the damaged guttering above was constantly dripping downwards. When it looked like it was empty and a total waste of time being here, Kooki caught sight of a dark silhouette. All that she could make out was an arm moving to the face, a deep inhale was heard, and a tiny glow appeared and disappeared. Then as the arm returned to its original position, a deep exhale emitted and a cloud of strong smelling smoke surrounded the figure. Kooki coughed and still the figure said nothing.

After taking another drag from his cigarillo, the strange figure threw it to the floor, still alight. Seconds later, the discarded cigarillio was extinguished beneath a huge, black foot.

“Miss Kook?” a voice boomed.

After what felt like forever, Kooki managed to say something.

“Shi?” she queried.

“Very astute. Well done.” Came a sarcastic reply, the figure still remaining as a shadow.

Kooki sighed. She had to fight the urge not to get agitated and use her trusted weapons against him. He was clearly testing her.

“Are we going to get started or just hang around dodgy places getting a reputation? People will talk.” The disguised female teased.

“Let em talk. That’s what they do. Keeps them off our backs. Feisty thing aren’t we?” Shi mused.

“Very astute. Well done.” Kooki retaliated.

Another awkward silence loomed.

Had she annoyed him before her infiltration had even begun?

Shi let out a hearty laugh, which quickly turned into a coughing fit. Years of smoking heavily and pumping goodness knows what into his body had taken its toll, which was evident as the grating noise echoed in the almost darkness.

“I like you, Miss.” he uttered gravelly, his voice still not quite its normal self.

Another loud cough emitted his weakening body, and he coughed up a sizable amount of saliva mixed with phlegm, tinged with his scarlet blood, which narrowly missed Kooki’s boots.

“Follow me,” he continued in a loud whisper.

Without saying another word, Kooki obediently followed silently.

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It wasn’t long before the pair were a few yards away from their destination. By now the navy night sky was lightening and becoming a lighter hue and streaks of electric blue were replacing the stars. Light pollution was not problem since most of the streetlights no longer worked, and occasionally broken glass would appear on the ground beneath them and crunch eerily under Kooki’s footwear. A few shells of buildings adorned the sides of the walkways, yet they were shabbily boarded up. Flickers of light came from inside some of them. A damp smell loomed in the air, combined with a spicier, slightly sweet and sickly smell. A hooded Shi continued on leading the way, almost oblivious to the surroundings that he knew his empire had caused.

A deathly pale, barely clothed male approached the pair and was shaking, yet not because of cold nor fear.

“S..Shi…m…m…more. I n…n…need m...m…more.” he stammered, clinging to Shi’s arm.

Shi heartlessly dodged his arm away, causing the unknown male to flop helplessly to the floor. He crouched down beside the man, still fully cloaked.

“Not until I see MY money!” the drugs kingpin hissed at him, before returning to his feet.

“Please miss,” he tried to reach out for Kooki.

Kooki looked down at him and into his eyes. He was pained. He had no life and no one in it. The veins in his arms were collapsed and covered in pin pricks. His days were numbered. Kooki dodged and he slumped to the ground. He barely managed to clasp his hands together.

“Please,” he begged.

“Leave her alone!” Shi boomed, without bothering to turn around.

“Ple…” the stranger began, once again but now on his knees.

An echoing thud was heard and instantly cut off the man’s weak pleas.

Just as Shi turned round to discover the source of the noise, a lifeless body slumped to the ground once again, but this time for the final time.

“What the…?” began Shi.

Kooki smiled.

“Steel-toe caps.” She calmly explained.

Shi just stood there open-mouthed and rather speechless.

“The skull cracks like an egg…if you know where to kick it…of course,” Kooki mused, still cool as ever.

“Well done! Welcome aboard!” Shi commented.

Kooki smiled again.

“You’ll fit right in here.” He stated whilst unlocking the door.

“Ladies first.” The undercover female teased.

“I’m going to have to keep an extra close eye on you, aren’t I?” Shi mocked, and headed inside.

“You are indeed!” Kooki whispered under her breath, and followed inside the factory.

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A few hours later…

Kooki awoke groggily in a small camp bed. She stroked her bump, which was hastily responded by a little reassuring kick. She soon pulled her baggy jumper over her growing tummy, which was housing her unborn child.

A knock on the door resounded.

“You awake, Miss Kook?” came a familiar voice.

Kooki managed to make a coherent noise indicating she was waking up and munching on breakfast and juice she had been provided with. Time was not on her side and she knew she had to sort things out… TODAY! So she put the finishing touches to her plan and disguise and headed out to meet Shi.

“So…Miss Kook. You are officially my personal assistant. Forgive my hasty appointment, but your immediate predecessor met a rather grisly end. Turned out he failed a test and wasn’t up for the job.” Shi, still remaining concealed under his engulfing black hooded cloak explained.

“I am up for anything,” Kooki obediently disclosed.

“I know. You showed that earlier.” Shi continued.

Various droids and species dressed in white cloaks hurried around the factory’s interior carrying out various tests on liquids and powders and shipping them out through communication tubes.

It was a very serious and dangerous operation within a relatively small space. The more they ventured round, Kooki’s anxieties grew. Her primary fear was the ‘grisly end’ the previous personal assistant had met. Was she going to meet a similar fate? Her determination not to was still high, but there was a shadow of doubt.

“Ah…here we are,” Shi gestured for Kooki to enter his poky little ‘office’.

She cautiously entered the claustrophobic room. It was very minimalistic. There was a small wooden desk with just a datapad on, a decanter a third full of a ruby tinged brown liqueur and a small tumbler next to it. Behind the desk was a rotatable black chair. Opposite the desk, just a couple of feet opposite, was a tall, narrow cupboard, sealed by a combination padlock. Shi poured himself a large measure of drink, sat in his chair and reclined slightly whilst sipping at his drink. He leaned forwards and opened a top drawer to his left, got out a cigarillo, and went into the inside of his cloak and produced a lighter. After a few presses, a little amber flame flickered and illuminated the end of his nicotine tube. Shi inhaled deeply and took a long drag of his cigarillo and breathed out, creating a grey smoky cloud. Kooki let out a cough, since the room wasn’t well ventilated.

“Right…” he inhaled. “Your test…”

Shi stubbed out his cigarillo and finished his drink.

This time he reached into a top drawer to his right. Shi produced a syringe of brown liquid.

Kooki swallowed hard.

Before either could say anything, a datapad beeped.

*Phew! Saved by a message!* Thought Kooki to herself.

“Urgh! Not again! That damn reptile is so impatient!” Shi growled.

Kooki caught a tiny glimpse of a familiar headshot of an Aleena.

“When will he get into his head I don’t care if he wants me to join him. If he sends someone to recruit me, I’ll frakkin’ kill em…and then go find him and kill ‘im an’ all!” he yelled and hurled the datapad at the wall, causing the screen to crack beyond repair.

Kooki swallowed hard again.

“Second time lucky,” Shi continued.

“We have been saving this for someone special,” he mused, picking up the syringe.

Shi picked it up and was about to inject Kooki’s arm, when a knock came upon the office door.

*Phew! Saved by another message!* Kooki thought.

Shi went to the door.

“What?!” he boomed, hiding the syringe behind his back.

“Master Shi. We need your help. A communication tube is blocked.” A lab technician stated.

With a heavy sigh, Shi agreed to go and check.

“I’ll be back. Don’t try any funny business while I’m gone,” he teased.

“Course not!” Kooki uttered, trying to hide her nerves.

“Just to be sure…” Shi stated slyly.

Kooki swallowed hard…AGAIN!

She looked down.

Her head began to spin.

The syringe was sticking out her arm.

Shi was gone!

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Meanwhile Shi managed to ‘fix’ the communication tube by firmly hitting it and dislodge the blockage. Soon the machine started whirring again and bags of green and brown shavings were being dispatched to various contacts. The boss began heading back to his office.

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Once the footsteps had disappeared, Kooki removed the empty syringe from her arm, threw it to the floor and began snooping in Shi’s top drawers. Nothing. The middle ones. Nothing. Then deep in the corner of the bottom right-hand drawer was a little black book. After checking it was still quiet, the Alderaanaian flicked through the book and she was delighted to locate a four-digit number. With the number she found, she twisted the combination lock on the cupboard, whilst sweat trickled down her brow.

Suddenly, the padlock clicked open!

The doors swung open, almost knocking Kooki over. A grey tinged body dressed in a white lab coat, with a quarter-full syringe full of a brown liquid in, fell to the floor. As footsteps began approaching and getting louder, Kooki went pale and spotted a name tag…

*Prindu Fei- Personal Assistant*

She pushed the dead body under the desk, closed and sealed the cupboard, sat back on the chair.

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Shi entered his office, completely oblivious to what had happened in his absence.

“Ah! You survived then? Even if a little pale.” he mused.

Kooki nodded.

Shi spotted the syringe on the floor and bent down to pick it up. Kooki wasted no time and shook the arm she had been injected into violently, whilst rising to her feet. With a loud and resounding snap, the prosthetic limb slid out of her sleeve and she grasped it tightly in her two hands and smacked Shi swiftly round the back of the head. Now a pile on the floor, Shi looked up at Kooki still trying to refuse to look scared. He went to move, but given there was little space he shuffled towards the space under his desk. However, he was horrified to discover he was sharing a hiding place with his former personal assistant. Whilst he was face-to-face with the corpse whose death he was solely responsible for, Kooki speedily removed an opaque bottle and small box from her rucksack. She began squirting the colourless liquid out onto the floor, and the last few fluid ounces she flickered onto Shi’s black cloak.

“Business ***hotting***up is it?” Kooki hissed.

An alarmed and spooked Shi managed to shuffle forwards on the wet floor towards Kooki fearlessly. He couldn’t smell anything, since many years of snorting various substances up his nose had caused significant irreversible damage to the inside of his nose and permanently destroyed his sense of smell. Nonetheless, he had spotted the dampness of his cloak and floor, and the bottle in the female’s hand.

“What the frak have you done, you crazy woman?” Shi panicked, whilst rising to his feet.

“Oh my! How clumsy of me.” Kooki said carelessly.

“Clumsy?! Clumsy?! I’ll give you clumsy!” Shi yelled.

“I just spilt my drink,” Kooki explained calmly, waving her hand slightly.

“You just spilt your drink,” Shi replied, robotically.

Shi chuckled, but his laughter soon turned to anger and he went to lunge to swing for the Sith before him.

Kooki saw it coming, dropped her ‘drink’ and grasped hard on the fake arm once again and swung it round, colliding with the side of Shi’s head.

“Business on fire is it, ‘Master’?” she teased.

Slightly concussed, Shi cocked his spinning head.

“Huh?” was the only sound he could manage to utter, whilst trying to slowly rise to his feet.

Kooki dropped the aesthetic limb, opened the little box in her hand, and removed a little stick. Turning the box on its side, she struck the little stick with just enough force for it to catch light. She opened the office door just as Shi had got to a wobbly standing position.

Kooki ran.

The illuminated stick began to fall.

The match rotated three hundred and sixty degrees as it fell.

Shi looked on, panic-stricken and began shuffling towards the office door.

Flames engulfed the office space, yet Kooki was already continuing to sprint away.

Shi had barely managed to escape his office, but was trying to move towards the factory door. Still shaky on his feet, this evacuation was proving a big struggle. The anger and adrenaline inside of him was fuelling him to move at all.

“Find…the…woman!” he yelled, in a pained voice at those workers he passed.

However, the workers had spotted the flames and one technician had sounded the fire alarm. The building was ablaze with flames and panic. Soon the doors were in sight.

“Hey!” yelled out the drugs expert, catching sight of the escaping expectant mother.

Shi reached out his hand to Kooki, the flames licking at his cloak.

Kooki spun round, coughing into her lower arm, just as the flames caught up with Shi and the base of his cloak began to burn.

“Please…miss…s…save m…me,” he stammered.

The female just stared blankly at him, as his mysterious cloak began to almost dissolve beneath the fire. He mustered just enough strength to use one hand to feebly remove his hood. Beneath the dark attire revealed a face that had been concealed for many years. Years of hard drug use of experimental compounds and concoctions was clearly evident. His skin was covered in severe acne, sores and had no elasticity. His eyes looked withdrawn.

Kooki needed to cough again and was responsible for herself and the life inside of her to get back home to their family. So she escaped through the factory doors. Seconds later the fire took hold over Shi’s body and he breathed his final breath and his empire continued burning to the ground.

Once outside Kooki continued coughing and a legal official from a team of them investigating a mysterious dead body, came over to her.

“You alright luv?” he asked, putting his arm around her.

Kooki nodded, but patted her tummy, indicating her pregnancy in fear.

“Did you work for ‘im?” he asked.

Kooki shook her head.

“Right guys. Finish up ere with the dead druggie. Get an ID on him. I’ll get mum and baby checked over.” He ordered.

\*\*\*

A couple of hours later…

Kooki awoke groggily with a mask of oxygen on her face and a cheery looking medic grinning inanely at her.

“So Miss…?” the medic soothed.

“Mimosa-Inahj!” Kooki replied sounding muffled under her mask.

She was safe now, so she was finally able to reveal her true identity.

She removed her mask, as the medic explained.

“Just a tiny bit of smoke inhalation, however we did an ultrasound and your baby is perfectly healthy. No harm done whatsoever. He’s a tough little cookie.” She continued.

Happy tears trickled down Kooki’s cheeks.

“I’m h…h…having a b…b…boy?” Kooki whispered.

The kind hearted medic nodded.

“Here’s a printout of the ultrasound miss Mimoosa-Inad. You are free to go home whenever you’re ready.” the medic cooed.

Kooki chuckled.

The news came into view on a holo on the wall. The burning factory appeared on the screen and the reporter explained how the drugs empire of Kagu Shi had been burnt into nothing along with the almighty and mysterious drugs baron himself.

“Let’s switch this awful thing off!” the medic ordered.

The screen went black.

“Thank you,” Kooki smiled.

“No problem you two. Take care of yourselves.” The medic left the room and cast a smile at the pregnant female.

\*\*\*

An hour later…

Nightfall had come. Streetlights had flickered on. A speeder pulled up outside a home. Just as Kooki got out to pay the driver her ‘tag’ started beeping at her. The speeder hastily sped off into town.

“Alright already!” yelled the annoyed female.

As she took a couple of steps into her new lunar home, the beeping ceased.

“Right!” she stated.

“Be gone!” she moaned under her breath as she yanked the ‘tag’ off her ankle.

“YEOWWW!!!” she screeched, as the tape pulled off some of her leg hair, leaving an obvious bald patch on her lower leg.

“Mummyyyyyyy!!!” came two happy voices in unison as they came down the stairs, with their groggy father in tow.

“So you’re back then?” Andrelious said sleepily.

Kooki was too emotional to be home and reunited with her family to even respond sarcastically to her spouse. The three of them hugged Kooki’s bump happily.

“Say hello to Mostynn,” Kooki hushed.

The three looked up at her.

“It’s a boy?” Andrelious asked.

Kooki nodded, whilst her twins ran around happily.

Andrelious’ hands were almost shaking as he stared at the ultrasound image.

“C’mon girls! Let’s get you to bed. Justinios is coming round in the morning for breakfast for an update.” The bossy mother stated as she ushered them up to bed.

Andrelious quickly wiped his eyes so no one could notice his unusual show of emotion.

Kooki looked back round at her spouse on the stairs.

“Alright?” she asked calmly, placing a hand on his shoulder.

Andrelious nodded quietly.

“Yeah. Just something in my eye that’s all,” he replied, his voice merely a whisper.

” Good!” Kooki mused, removing her hand, and turning to follow Poppy and Etty to their bedroom.

“Oh!” she popped her head round the corner.

“Check we’ve got eggs and milk for breakfast!” she ordered.

Andrelious smiled and said nothing.

She was home.

Everything was back to normal.

The End

(for now…)