

A low whistle left Satsi's mouth.

"Oooh, shit..."

The Human and her Mirialan former apprentice stared out the viewport of the former's modest ship, staring at scattered bits of durasteel floating in a void.

"Kriff," Ruka echoed, slipping out of his harness to lean forward. His inked face creased, troubled. "Do you think anyone survived?"

"That's one of our listener ships," Satsi said, adding, "the Inquisitorious ones. I've flown a couple. What happened here, hmm?" the gangster muttered, tapping away at some controls on the console above the yoke.

"Who cares? There are escape pods out there, look! Those are pods, right?"

Satsi only glanced up for a second before returning to her data reads, messing with a commlink withdrawn from a stash compartment. "Huh? Yeah. So?"

"So we have your little gunship, we should go *help*."

The woman snorted. When his silence lasted, she looked up again.

"Kark, you're serious? Seriously, Green? Haven't I taught you anything?"

"Yes, seriously. There are people still alive out there. I kind just kinda sense them when I concentrate."

"Frak no. That's the enemy over there, and this wreck could be a trap besides. If not by the Council, then by the Collective, or Shadows know who else. Any one of the clans could set this up. We're getting the hell out of here."

"We can't just abandon whoever's out there without checking."

"Yes, we can, and we're going to. I don't care if you found religion or whatever after that broadcast. It's not safe. Now. Sit. Down." The woman started flipping switches, snapping at her astromech to resume their hyperspace route. They'd only stopped on their way to the Kias system because it had detected an anomaly in their flight path that needed to be redirected around.

"Frang that," Ruka barked, getting up and stalking out of the cockpit. He climbed up into one of the upper maintenance shafts and pried open the panel he was looking for. When his violet

eyes landed on the right component, he focused on it and delicately unscrewed its casing with the Force before yanking it forward, the device flying into his waiting palm.

The ship shuddered around him.

"Frak!" Satsi screeched somewhere below, and then her footsteps came stomping down the halls. Ruka replaced the panel and slid down the ladder to meet her at the ledge over the cargo bay.

"What the hell is happening to my ship?!" snarled his master as she shoved him into the wall with an arm bar over his chest. He glared down into her eyes. "What did you do?!"

"You know how to fly this thing, and I know how to fix it. Or take it *apart*." He waved the capacitor he held in her face. "So here's the deal. I put this back, and you get me over to those lifeboats so I can help those people, and neither of us starves in deep space or gets blown up by scavengers. Yeah?"

Satsi glared furiously at him, but he lifted his chin and glared right back. The tense moment lasted, nearly boiling over. Her hand twitched into a fist, and he inhaled sharply.

Then, she blew out her cheeks, sighing noisily, and slumped, releasing him. Her hand scrubbed at her hair.

"When did you get so snappy, huh, Green?"

"Guess I just had a good teacher, coach."

"Oh, frak you." She pivoted on her heel. "You get thirty minutes and then we are leaving. You got me?"

Ruka straightened.

"I'll take it."

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The first ship was doomed, having been damaged. The second he found two unconscious crewmen, and carried them across to lay them in the cargo bay. The third they can't reach through the debris, so he has to leave it, which sat like lead in his stomach.

In the fourth and last, he steps into the pod only to get shot at.

"Whoa, whoa!" the Sith cries, only the Force saving him as he spins his blue saber to take the blow. "I'm here to help!"

"You aren't getting anything from us," spat a voice, and he squinted past the lightsaber's shine to see a woman's figure in the dark. She turned her blaster on herself.

"NO!" Ruka shouted louder, voice tearing, and yanked the pistol from her hand in a telekinetic grip. "We're both Brotherhood, come on!"

"I shouldn't...we didn't send any distress beacons...We don't get rescues. You— you can't be here."

He deactivated his blade, making a show of it and lifting his suit visor. "Hey, me and my master just came through, okay? We didn't get any signal. I don't even know what ship you were from or what happened."

"The *Psi Termina*..." the woman whispered, finally sagging. It seemed like she'd exhausted her strength holding herself up. Ruka approached carefully, lifting his glowrod.

"Kriff, that's a lot of blood. *Ay mi*. Okay, uh, hold on, here."

Pulling off his helmet, since the air left inside the pod was perfectly breathable, the Mirialan tugged off his gloves too and shimmied out of his outer spacesuit. Once free, he yanked off the jacket he wore underneath, moving to rip the left sleeve off with a little help from the Force. The woman's sharp intake of breath stopped him, however.

He glanced up from his task to see her pink eyes fixed on his shoulder. Following her gaze to the enormous flower tattooed on his bicep, he grimaced. They locked stares.

She didn't frown exactly, but her pained face had gone from tired to wary. She said, "You're Lotus."

"And you're Inquisitorious," Ruka replied. "And yeah, maybe that means we're supposed to be enemies. But maybe it doesn't."

"What's it mean, then?"

"I dunno, lady. Maybe it just means you have your mission and I have mine. And mine is to help you, because someone really important to me taught me that you never turn your back on people who need you. Maybe you're my mission. So," he lifted the jacket towards her again, "are you gonna let me get you out of here?"

The Zeltron nodded, and he went about tearing up his jacket to tie around her leg. It wasn't much, and he wished even more desperately for his husband to be there, to actually *help*. But hopefully she'd be okay until he got her and anyone else on board the *Blood*.

"My pilot, he's up front," she sighed against his shoulder when he hoisted her up in his arms.

"I'll come back for him," the Mirialan promised. "Gotta get you first."

"Okay," she said. "Okay."

"I'm Ruka, by the way."

"We don't share names."

"That's fine, ay. Can give you some cool nickname that way, like Hotshot. Since you nearly took my head off."

Her violet lips were disturbingly gray as she almost smiled against his petal-pierced shoulder. He tried not to think about all the blood soaking through his jacket-wrap.

This a step.

It had to be.