

The party was in full swing, all dazzling lights and tastefully rhythmic music. With the drinks and food freely flowing, even the most dour of the Brotherhood seemed to be having a decent time. Alcohol really did solve everything.

Or, well, it did *something*.

Kordath and Zujenia were enjoying a bit of a break from the obligatory socializing as befitted their positions and roles as hosts. They talked quietly to each other over a cup of hot, spiked caf and water and some pastries.

That was, until Satsi Tameike dropped down between the two of them, all but falling into Kord's lap.

"Kordy, am I pretty?" the woman asked drunkenly. The Ryn had frozen, eyes skittering between Satsi and Zujenia, wide as if begging, *'this isn't my fault, this isn't my fault!'*

"Satsi," Zuji warned, her tail already lashing as she gripped the stem of her drink, and the Human twisted her torso all the way around while her hips remained planted in the Consul's lap. Her face scrunched up even as she said, "Oh, heeeeeey, Spotsie. I knuh, I knuh, m'not s'posed tah touch 'im no more, I'm not gooona. I just—" She fumbled with her drink and put her elbows on the bartop, fully leaning over into Zuji's space despite her legs being turned the *other direction* and wasn't that a morbid but fascinating show of the spine, oh Gods. "Am I pretty, Zujah?"

She had obviously looked more put together earlier in the evening. Now, a bra strap was falling down her shoulder underneath her dress, and she was missing an earring. Her face and hands were smudged with the dark eye makeup she wore, probably from crying and rubbing at it. Her lipstick was chewed off, and she'd spilled something down her front that smelled like pure alcohol. Her expression was miserable.

"Of course," the Ryn-hybrid replied haltingly.

"Very pretty," Kord assured too, wincing when Zuji shot him a look. "Uh, lass, can ya move maybe whiles we have this conversation?"

Satsi slumped further.

"M'botherin' yah," she mumbled, her lip wobbling. The Human stood and swayed. "Sorry, sorry..."

"No! It's-- okay." Zujenia reached out and grabbed the other woman's wrist, gently guiding her into another stool. Her tail curled, outward concern and awkward discomfort for seeing the normally strong she-akk of a woman in such a state. "Satsi, how much have you had to drink?"

Satsi shrugged. "'nough to be whoooooasy, nah 'nough tah be 'appy. Er forget." She waved at the bartender, who made the wiser choice of answering Kordath and Zuji's matching glare.

"How 'bout some water? Ya sound parched," suggested the Consul.

"'kay."

"Who knew you could be anything but difficult?" muttered Zuji, and Satsi snorted and hiccuped a laugh that sounded more like coughing.

"Jashin. An' Uji. Kinda. Mebe not. He frakked me up an' he left meh so I guess m'always diffi...di...cult...bad. Tah much. M'tah much. An' nah pretteh."

"Satsi..." both Ryns hushed, but she went on.

"Uji *left*," she said miserably. "Wha' if he don't love me anymore? Like. Like he's just *stuck* wit me and doesn' want me anymuh. Why else he'd leave me and...and... Is it cause I had a babeh? I worked REAL hahrd tah get mAh body back buh...maybe he jus' thinks m'fat. Or ugly. OR OLD. We jus' turned *thirty-seven*, uuugh. I didn't nevah think I'd live this long, yaknow? An' now m'not prettah or sexy and my brothah left an' nahbudy wants me."

"That nae is true, luv." Kord insisted, perhaps too eagerly. He added, "And Uji came back."

"He came back fer *you*," the woman suddenly snarled, tears spilling from her eyes. Her companions looked alarmed, and Kordath winced guiltily. "Not *me*. Not *our daughter*. You. Cause YAH asked 'im tah. We're not enough."

She sniffed, and started crying quietly, raggedly, whimpering.

"*I'm* not enough."

Her head dropped into her hands.

"Oh, Sats..." Kordath sighed, looping an arm around her again. Zujenia frowned too and reached out, kind and cautious, to squeeze the Human's hand.

"Satsi, Uji is a hard man to...understand, but having worked with him for some time now, I think he barely really does care for you. It's just that sometimes, other things have to come first. You know that too." The half-Ryn spoke slowly at first, obviously unsure, but then with more and more certainty. "And sometimes the people we love leave us because they think that's the best way to help, because they love us." Her amber eyes grew misty, and her thumb ran over the vine tattoo she had shared with Atyiru.

"Well he's uh idiot an' so's was Atty," Satsi snapped, wiping snot on her arm. "Yah don' leave. Yah fight togethah."

"You can be fighting together and not be side by side. Can't you?"

Satsi's lips pursed. She hunched slightly and looked away from Zuji.

"I guess so."

"I mean, you're always fighting for your family, aren't you? And that doesn't change when you're away or apart."

"Damn right I am."

"There, see? He might have gone away, but he never lilefr you."

"...mebbe. Thanks, Jena."

"Jena?"

But Satsi didn't answer. Instead, she leaned over and placed a big, sloppy, mucus-streaked kiss on Zuji's cheek in appreciation. Then, she did the same to the top of Kord's head and stumbled away, disappearing back into the rest of the party crowd.

Kordath's tail curled and twined with Zujenia's.

"That was well done, luv. Heh."

"Yeah, well..." the hybrid shrugged and fiddled with her water. "I don't know if it really helped."

"I bet it did, ey? Stars, yer such a great mom and wonderful woman."

"Enough flattery."

"Ain't nothin' but true, me lass." He offered her a napkin for her cheek, then a hand. "Dance with me?"

Zuji only paused a moment before she gave a small smile and took it.

More vomiting sounds issued from the bathroom. Ruka sighed and nudged open the door as he carried in a glass of water.

His master was right where he'd left her after he helped her back from Krayt Keep, sprawled on the tiles and bent over the refresher. He used the Force to mute his sense of smell entirely, not wanting to have to deal with the stench of alcohol she was soaked in.

"Deep breaths, ay," advised the Mirialan. Experienced or no, Satsi was in bad shape, and Ruka knew all too well how to take care of someone drunk off their ass.

He knelt down and held her hair back, though it was already sticky and wet from the ordeal. His other hand rubbed up and down her back, over the freaky protrusion of her spine.

When this round was finally over, she sat back and drank her water, and he sat next to her with a sigh. After a beat, she looked at him blearily.

"Am uh pretteh, Ruuu?"

"If I wasn't married," Ruka began graciously as he wiped drool off her face, grimacing. "Or gay, and ten or twenty years older, I'd totally sleep with you, coach. Okay? Now let's get you to bed."

"Uhkay."

Not for the last time, Ruka had to grit his teeth in frustration at the woman's other half being back home working. And insensitive enough to put her in such a state in the first place. Not that she shouldn't have been more responsible and handled her shit like a kriffing adult. Ugh.

Why was he always the mature one?

The Mirialan got his master into her bed, tucked in nicely and with water and painkillers in reach for the morning. She mumbled something.

"...that would be enough..." it sounded like.

Ruka's face softened. He patted her head, then turned out the lights and went quietly back into the hotel hallway.

Corazon brightened to see him, golden eyes tender with worry and bright from the makeup that lined them. He hugged Ruka immediately, and Ruka returned the embrace.

"So glad I'm not alone," muttered the Sith to his partner, and the Jedi smiled up at him and cupped his jaw.

"You never are, angel."

They kissed, and then pulled back, Ruka offering Cora his arm.

"Is she okay?"

"Close enough, for now. Sorry about that."

"No apologies, mister! We help our friends and anyone else first and foremost, always!"

"That's why I love you."

"I love you too. Do you still want to go dance?"

"As long as it's with you, I can put up with all this stuff awhile longer."

Cora beamed.