

The smoke was everywhere.

She couldn't hear a thing but tinny ringing. She couldn't see. Not far. She tried to breathe and got more smog.

Satsi bumped into a piece of rubble and fell to one knee, pain beating at her senses, creeping in and trying to smother her. She braced herself up on her arm, panting for breath, pain squeezing her lungs. The ceiling was coming down. Furniture burned. Had Eilen come home? She could be hurt. And Uji—

Shadows. She needed to find Uji.

She pulled herself up again, holding onto the wall she leaned on, and managed a step before her leg went out once more.

She landed hard on her shoulder, choking on nothing, on pain, and rolled awkwardly onto her stomach. *Fine*. She couldn't walk. She couldn't even feel her left leg any longer. *Fine*. She pulled up her good leg and stretched out her good arm, and she dragged herself forward.

"Kyodai—" she wheezed, then louder, voice cracking high and strained on the smoke, "*kyodai!*"

She could still feel him in the back of her head. She could. She could. It had to be that. Not— not her head wounds or the concussion. Not just panic or desperation and wishful thinking. It had to be him. It *was* him. It was, it was, it was.

Shadows, if it wasn't—

"*Uji, please!*" Satsi screamed, coughing, not caring if some Collective soldiers heard her. If they were even nearby yet. The bombs came so fast. They'd known for ages now about some cells still on the planet, had routed so many out, but suspected worse and then and now and and and—

The woman left a fingernail and more skin behind as she dragged herself across rubble, out onto superheated sand and burnt grass. She scrabbled onto her knees and crawled, one handed, further from the heat, until it didn't smother her lungs anymore, until she could wheeze in a gasp, until her flesh wasn't searing and blackening. She collapsed again and hacked and coughed and Shadows, it hurt. It hurt so bad.

But Uji.

Satsi sobbed and coughed and pushed herself upright, forcing herself to move. To turn and look and call out.

"Kyodai! KYODAI! KYODAI CAN YOU HEAR ME?! WHERE ARE YOU?! UJI!"

She turned and looked and—

Her eyes filled with more tears than just those caused by the smoke.

Their home was burning.

Their home.

They had holos all over, stacks and stacks of them. The quilt Atty had made for their wedding. Sammy's toys and baby crib and baby shoes and her lock of hair from the first cut. The stuffed Ryn she'd made when she was pregnant. The stuffed rancor Turel gave her. The rocking chair from Vorsa. Her favorite blankets and her pet rats and the stash of ribbons Uji tied his hair with that she stole to keep in her bedside drawer and play with and smell. Their bedroom, her kitchen, the stairs where Sammy jumped down to "fly" into her parents' arms. The porch where they drank their caf in the morning. Their home.

She'd had a *home*.

Satsi's lip trembled and she whimpered and covered her mouth with one hand. She curled over.

"Noooo...no, no, no..."

"SHIMAI!"

The bellowed word, ripped from a throat in desperation, brought her out of the crushing despair, paused her hiccuping sobs. She looked up again and then there was a body crashing into her, her twin running full tilt and sliding across the ground, arms thrown over her. They both went down and he clutched at her and she at him and she felt him shaking.

"You're alive," he rasped against her scalp. They pulled apart and his eyes roved over her as hers did over him. He looked mostly uninjured, clothes not even torn, just sooty. He looked bright and alive and furious and she didn't know what.

"You're—" she didn't have to say it. She slammed her mouth to his, not even a kiss, just teeth and bone and breath. A reaffirmation. He clutched her tighter.

"Samantha—" he started to say and she shushed him.

"—with Shay and Zuji, still, Shadows," she reminded him in his panic. "Shadows. Gods. Ashla and Bogan and whoever, thank goodness."

"Thank the Shadows," he whispered just as fervently. They'd sent her off on a playdate and been about to collect their daughter. He'd been upstairs, she down. He must have gotten out with his powers. Satsi decided right then that she'd do anything for damned Rhy lance to thank him for helping her brother get back in shape.

"Eilen?"

"Not home. She's...away," Uji muttered, never having been the best with his external senses but still able to feel those they spent a lot of time around if he focused and they weren't offworld.

Satsi's breath and strength left her all at once in relief. Ruka had moved out months ago to be with Cora back on Kiast, and if Sammy and Eilen weren't home then...

Home. Well, not anymore, her brain supplied bleakly. Uji picked up on the thought in their melded mindscape and kissed her temple, resting their foreheads together as their everything burned.

"We have to go. Ground forces could be coming, and we don't know where else has been attacked. If they're just targeting coastal homes and villages or Arconan in particular...the populace could be in danger again."

Both of them knew war didn't spare civilians. Neither of them ever had. Anywhere could be a battlefield and anyone a victim.

"I can't walk," Satsi admitted. Her head swam. The adrenaline fading suddenly made it hard to breathe again. Her heart thudded in her chest.

She remembered, suddenly, on their vacation to Corellia, when the hotel had been attacked. How Uji had dragged her from that fire. Atty saying something about smoke inhalation in the cell where they'd been captives.

"Kyodai—" she tried, but her voice failed, and blackness descended on her vision.