

Nightmares and Dreamscapes

by: Calindra Hejara

Darkness had taken Usiku Wa'joto after he had been thrown against the window sill. He'd more or less felt the impact and the shards flying through the air around him, flicking his skin, his hair, his lips... He heard what sounded like thousands of tiny shards of splintered glass tinkering loudly around him like a small hail storm of glass. His body lingered there, almost exaggeratingly so... *'The mind is a funny thing...'* he thought before the laws of physics reaffirmed themselves, pulling his body back towards the floor.

That too had been in slow motion, and he was thankful that there was no pain.

'Yet,' his mind amended.

There was only stark surprise and the darkness that would soon swallow him, but only after he'd met the floor with a slow, almost comical thud.

Usiku didn't think he was out long – his anger flared and then his thirst for revenge dulled everything else – awareness tugged at him, and he tried to piece together what his brain was now too addled to remember. Something had happened, and that he needed to face it – now. Sluggishly, he tried to open his eyes as fast as he could...

'Eye,' he realized, *'the other's swollen.'*

He had been tied up and hamstrung to a duraplast board; his face and jaw pained him. Judging from the whistling sound and pain that radiated from his nose, he figured it had been broken. His good eye started distinguishing more details now. By the looks of things, he was in a simple hut, but that detail confused him even more. It wasn't where he was supposed to be, and so he wrapped himself tightly with his fear, willing it into anger before the dying embers of his rage – the only thing that could possibly get him out of this situation alive – evaporated and the pain and trauma his body had been through overpowered him.

Suddenly, a knife loomed menacingly over his good eye, and he glared at the creature in front of him to go ahead and use it.

The large male – at least he thought it was a male – simply backhanded him again, this time harder. "Oh, I'm afraid it won't be so quick..." it said as it went to grab a brush from a nearby

table, "Not quick at all..."

'Bastard must have knocked a tooth...!' he thought as his tongue tried to gauge which tooth was damaged, but all he found was a hole where a molar should have been... his eyes narrowed. "You want to kill me," he suddenly realized.

"Well, yes — eventually," the creature admitted matter-of-factly, "your body will die, but you will serve us, even in death."

Calindra knocked on the heavy oak door, but there was no answer, although the shadow beneath the door flickered with movement. Calindra paused as she decided what to do next--when she heard a dull groan of a man in pain, that's when she decided to take action. "Hello?" She called as she opened the door.

Calindra had expected to see someone on the ground... What she had not expected was to find herself intruding on a creature with a conical head -- eyes protruding on each side -- as it held a dull black knife over a tattered prisoner's hatred-filled glare.

"What is going on?" she managed a few heartbeats later, happy for the comforting weight of her lightsaber in her hand. Surprised and angry, the dark-skinned prisoner glared back towards her, stared at the lightsaber in her hand, seemingly puzzled and confused.

The creature ignored her intrusion, and came back towards the man and started drawing graceful swirls on the man's body. The prisoner hissed in pain--his own blood mixing with the ink.

"I think," Calindra said carefully--holding her lightsaber before her, "you should step away from that man. Now." The last word was accentuated by the sound of her lightsaber blazing to life, but the creature ignored her warning and continued with the brush as the man on the table screamed in agony. With a quiet rustle, she cut the creature's head off and fumbled with the bindings around the captive's wrist.

"Can you run?" She barely managed before the room glowed with an unhealthy orange light.

The man looked around the room, his senses trying to make head or tails of what had just happened, whether he was dreaming or he was dead. "Hapana," he said shaking his head and grunting in pain, "mimi ni mauvimu mengi ya kuwa amefuka..." he added as an afterthought as he comforted his bruised wrists, "na jino langu limekwenda." The last was added as he poked his mouth with a finger. He licked his dried lips as he considered his next move. *'She didn't kill*

me... that's interesting,' he thought as he looked at Calindra a second time, and then at the room's strange orange glow...

"Uhh... that can't be good!" she groaned as the orange glow swallowed the creature's inert body a few meters away.

The body was swallowed in a nimbus of orange staticky lights, bubbling, expanding, and eventually spiraling its body upwards. "Je, unafanya yoyote ya hii!?" he shouted over the maelstrom as it coalesced before them.

"Are you kidding?! Run!" Calindra shouted as she took another look at the weird orange light apprehensively. She slowly backed away from whatever it was, trying to protect their escape from whatever was happening. The orange light eventually collapsed in a deafening roar, sending both them skidding into the back wall.

The body was gone.

It was Calindra's turn to scream as Elincia Rei attempted to force whatever had possessed the girl back at the Temple of the Forgotten to relinquish its hold on the Sith Warrior. A concerned look crossed the Scholae scientist's face as she watched the volt meter's tiny gauge needles flare up to the more dangerous levels a human body could tolerate.

"NAISHIIIIiii HAPAHHHHHh....!!!"

The words escaped Calindra as her body shook and her head arched back. The tendons in her neck bulged, her teeth were clenched and her face contorted by pain as electricity coursed through her body. So much so, that the sweat on her body started to evaporate in small wisps of mist from her exposed arms, legs and forehead. Her beautiful blond locks were wet and in a tangled mess. Wetting them had been Elincia's way of preserving her patient's beautiful blond locks. Normally she would have completely shaven them off, but this was a prized member of the clan and the Emperor himself was interested in the outcome, so she did her best in making sure that Calindra more or less came out of the experiment unscathed.

She was suddenly at an oasis deep within the desert; a welcome contrast and a familiar sight if she was honest. “Naishi hapa,” repeated the man who had been tied to the table a few moments ago. He emphasized the words by opening his arms to indicate the place where they were.

By the look of things, the oasis had seen a long dry spell: it was almost out of water and the small amount of vegetation was slowly turning brown. The oasis itself was encircled by windswept stone and rock formations, there was a small campsite nearby under one of the rock formations. It would be a good shelter against the desert’s sun and unrelenting heat, but it’s what dominated the sky that took the most of her attention. Large storm clouds, dark and sinister, crossed by lightning and swollen with rain.

“Naishi hapa,” the man repeated and then again encompassed everything that was around them with a motion of his arms. He then pointed to his head and then to hers: “Tunaishi hapa.” He motioned to both of them again “Sisi wote,” and suddenly clasped her left hand into his. He emphasised the words by holding her hand tight and shaking it together as is reaffirming the meaning, “tunaishi hapa sasa,” he motioned the oasis by extending his arms again... and pointing to her head.

Calindra had lived long enough with the nomadic tribes near Hejaran Keep to know the superstitious and religious significance of an Oasis as a symbol of life and shelter from the elements. The desert was always merciless, but life always managed to flourish despite that. What concerned her was the fact that she wasn’t supposed to be here, she was sure of it. The place felt like a dream, and the fact that the man pointed to her head a few times, she thought it was a dream they both shared.

“If we are to survive, we must work together...” she stated, looking at the menacing storm on the horizon. Beyond the oasis and the safety of the rocks was death. It was simple as that.

He shook his head and frowned, “Si kifo. Hekalu la wamesahau, Rakata. Wajenzi.”

The word Rakata got her attention. That was it! “Rakata!” she shouted, suddenly remembering.

She crouched on the ground and traced the likeness of the Temple of the Forgotten in the sand. “Hekalu la wamesahau,” he nodded in agreement, then traced a humanoid figure with a conical head and protruding eyes in the sand next to her temple: “Wajenzi. Rakata.” He drew more humanoid figures, this time they were standard humanoids, and put bars over the human looking figures. “Watumwa!” he said and brandished his arms in front of him as if he had been shackled. He then encircled two of the prisoners and erased the temple and the Rakata.

“We’re no longer prisoners of the Rakata..?”

He twirled about and kissed the sky, and he laughed.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” she said with a whimsical smile.

He suddenly motioned for her to sit down in front of him, which she did. “Kutafakari na mimi,” he said as he closed his eyes and started breathing.

“Ok... I’ll meditate with you.” What did she have to lose anyway?

As she closed her eyes, he took her hands into his and they were suddenly back in the hut with the Rakata looming over him, but it was like she was watching the story unfold this time. He was standing next to her, holding her hand while the events that she interrupted earlier carried on without her. She saw the ritual that had bound the man’s soul to the Temple of the Forgotten. She saw the temple being built, and how the Rakata priest had ground the man’s teeth into a powder, added it into a mixture of sand and clay. She noted how the priests had shaped the clay into a square slab with symbols and a man at its center. The man wore sandals and garments akin to the ones the tribes used on her homeworld. She then noticed the drawn figure was holding a scythe. She suddenly understood that it represented the person she was with somehow. That he was a fighter that had likely resisted the Rataka.

The man was bound to the table for what seemed like days as the tablet was made, and then more priests came and his lifeforce was sucked into the stone carving. His body arched and fought the process, but the black knife was plunged into his heart.

They were suddenly back at the oasis, but he was alone. He had protected his mind as they tortured him and the oasis was of his own making. She suddenly understood that throughout the pain of being bound to the frescos, the oasis was the only thing that kept his mind together. Now they were here together.

“Why am I here?” she suddenly wondered. He squeezed her hand in response and she closed her eyes again.

They were both suddenly standing next to her body as it was strapped to the chair that Elincia Rei had strapped Calindra in. “C’mon... please work...” She saw the paleness of Elincia’s face, and heard her own blood curdling screams as electricity coursed through her body: “WHHHHHYY AM I HEEEEEREE...?!?”

‘Because he’s protecting me from that pain and keeping me whole, just like he did to survive the

Temple.’ It hadn’t dawned on her that he’d been dead for millennia already.

She was suddenly back into her body, very much in pain. “No... no more...” she pleaded. “Please...” her throat was parched, her voice hoarse and her very skin was on fire.

“Thank goodness! Finally! Calindra..! You’re back..!!”

Calindra’s eyes focussed a few seconds on Elincia’s face before a painless darkness took her.

Outside the room, Empress Nighthunter pressed on the intercom button: “Is she still possessed?”

“I don’t think so,” Elincia said, “but there’s no way to know with any certainty if I was able to eradicate the Force spirit from her synapses.”

“Can she be trusted?” came the Empress’ response over the static.

“Time will tell, but she is one of our best. She’s gone through a lot, but she’s always been rather resilient in the past. Perhaps keeping her under observation would be prudent.”

“See to it that she gets the best of care... she has a lot of allies, and she has served with distinction in the past. I would hate for anything to happen to her that would cause people to think we’d turn on one of our own.”

The Togruta scientist looked at Shadow Nighthunter from the other side of the window and nodded, but they both knew that if it came to that, they’d both see it done.