

She hadn't been here since the attack.

There wasn't much of anything left.

It had all burned down right to the flagstones, the foundations blackened and cratered from impact blasts. Two or three of the thickest timbers from some part or another remained in short pieces, lying black and pitted and molding on the stones haphazardly. Shiny, rainbow-like spots of warped, melted glass stuck to the ground where the unstoppable tropical vegetation sprung up around them, unable to bypass, were the only hints at where some windows had been. Not one wall or bit of roof was left, and they hadn't had a basement, not on an island.

She didn't even have a skeleton to walk through and remember.

Satsi sat on the ground, butt in the dirt. Stared for a long time, feeling like she had water in her lungs, or stones. Painted ones like Atty had liked so damn much, ugly and chipping color and poisoning while they weighed her down. So she couldn't breathe.

She just missed it *so damn much*.

"I miss you too, y'know that?" she said out loud, but quietly, to no one but her own bones and the ocean and somebody who couldn't hear her. "You gave me a lot, and I never got to thank you for that. Too proud or mad. And now I'll probably never have the chance."

Satsi ran a thumb over one of the scars on her hand. One of a lot.

"Summer's over. War's over. For now. Should be glad about that, right? Well, you can keep a secret. Gotta say, m'not happy. I feel. Heavy. And. And lost. *Kyodai* knows. Knows it's cause. Cause I just can't not fight. I don't know how. So days like these when I'm supposed to...what. Go home? I'm. Not good. And I don't even. It feels like I don't have a home. I mean. He's home, of course he is, so's Sammy, but. But still."

The wind and waves didn't say anything.

"Frak."

"You do, you know," said a voice behind her, and the woman shouted and nearly jackknifed out of her skin. The knife in her hand definitely flew out of her grip, only stopped by a quick-acting barrier.

"By the Force," Zujenia gasped, watching the little dagger fall to the sand annunch or so from her chitin-tipped nose. "It's only me."

"Shitfrakdamn, Spotsie— I didn't mean— you surprised—"

"Oh, I know. Remember the lightsaber therapy?" the hybrid scathed lightly, arching a brow, and Satsi snorted. "Sorry. For startling you."

"It's okay. Sorry for throwing a knife at you."

"It's okay."

A beat.

"Can I sit?"

"Free planet. Kinda."

The half-Ryn padded over and folded her legs under her, sandy tail blending into the earth.

They both listened to the ocean for awhile, Satsi obviously more comfortably so than Zuji. Still, as the quiet went on, the Human's fidgeting increased, and finally she demanded, "What are you doing here?"

"Uji said you'd be here."

"And?"

"I... Thought you might...want company. Or need it. And I couldn't help but overhear earlier..."

"Ugh," groaned the mercenary.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"Why are you being nice?"

Amber eyes narrowed at her.

"I'm *trying*," was all she said, and Satsi swallowed, looked away.

"... Right. Stupid frakking question."

Again, silence. But like the stillness without a fight or the peace between wars, Satsi was terrible with silence, so she started talking, because—

*Try.*

"You know, I never had something like. Like this," she gestured at the ruins. "Like, *things*, that meant that much, you know? That I'd miss. That I can't. C-can't get back. It was always more people, yeah? Uji, then when he was gone, I fixated on...o-on...*Jashin*," she grit the name out like she was spitting glass, "and then Uji again. Sammy. You guys. I never had. A home. And we. We built this home. Not built built, frak, you get what I mean, it made something."

"I do," replied the hybrid, simply.

"I hate this place, you know. I frakking hate it. It took my brother, it took Atty, it's taken me, our kid, our friends, our apprentices, it nearly took Kordy. Over and frakking over we've given everything and it still wants more, I HATE IT. But. But I miss it. I want it *back*. I want my *home* back. And that ugly as sin quilt Atty made, that's gone. Can't ever get that replaced. Sammy's drawings, gone. That painting Lil Blue made us, gone. The kitchen table, I loved that frakking table, okay, I— goddamn, how can you miss so much *stuff*? I don't get why it matters, but I— I can't even remember what it smelled like anymore, you know? And shouldn't I? We lived here three years, I should remember—"

Her voice cracked again and she stopped to scrub at her eyes.

"I understand that. I hate it too. But it's where home could be, right? Even when we have far more reasons to leave than stay, here we are," Zujenia murmured.

"I j-just. I don't get why this kark matters. We're alive. The kids weren't there. So I got more scars and lost a house, so what. *So what?*"

"It matters to you, that's enough," the Jedi said. "I didn't miss many of the people when I left my father's, but I missed things that reminded me of him or my sister. I missed my own bed. I missed them. Grief...*matters*, Satsi. You know that. Better than some. And you can grieve for things and people. This might surprise you, but that's pretty normal."

"Frak off."

The hybrid only huffed, and the Human scowled while she tried to get her hiccuping under control.

"You could rebuild."

"Thought about it. Talked to Uji about it. We got...some money still. But. It's probably insanely stupid, to rebuild here, right? They know the location. We'd be in danger. Not practical."

"That doesn't mean you don't want to," commented the half-Ryn. "Do you... Do you remember what Atty said, sometimes, about doing what we liked even if it made no sense?"

"Something about 'listen to your heart' or banthafodder like that."

"Be true to your heart and it alone, Zujubean, for no one else will."

"You sure got that memorized."

"I've heard it a lot recently."

Satsi looked at her sharply, and Zujenia gave a small nod. The Human shuddered, looked back at the shoreline. The very thought of Force spirits of any kind made her want to run into the water and never come back.

"I told Marick," she said, after a minute.

"I know," Zuji replied, again causing the scarred woman to whip her head around.

"You did? How? Frak... He's been here, huh?"

"Mmm. He's...I think he can help. And I'm trusting him." Amber eyes too kind for the hardness in them bored into her. "Like I'm trusting you. "

Satsi swallowed.

"I..."

But she didn't have anything to say. That she could say.

"Besides," Zuji added, and she touched the scar on her abdomen, with her tattooed hand, and then gestured at the house. "I think that's what she would have wanted. For us to heal, right?"

Satsi looked at the crater. Pictured her home. Pictured it with a few more rooms and even more laughter.

Zujenia didn't say anything about her crying.

"Yeah. Yeah she would have."

The half-Ryn offered her a hand, and Satsi took it, standing.

"We want that too, you know."

"We?" questioned the Human, and then finally turned around to look behind them. Back up the beach, far enough away to give them privacy even with super-hearing, waiting with a couple

speeders, was...her team. Eilen, Karran, Skar, Alara, Scarlett, Kord, of course Uji, always Uji, probably having started this, the ass, even Turel and Ruka and Cora. She stared. "What."

"It's sort of been a plan, since the attack, but other things took priority. They wanted to help too."

"Help with *what?*"

Zujenia actually rolled her eyes.

"Help *you*, Satsi. You and Uji and Samantha. That is what families do, remember? Atty taught us both that."

"...Shadows," was all the Human could say, and she was too busy boggling to resist when the hybrid took her hand and tugged her up to the group.

Bouncing on her clawed toes and towering over all of them was another former occupant of the house. She dashed forward to awkwardly hug Satsi.

"Uji told us you'd be here," explained Eilen, not knowing Zuji had already mentioned as much.

"He also said neither of you knows anything about architecture," commented Karran with a wide smile. "Which is why I'm here to survey the area. Can't start planning what I'll build otherwise, right?"

More tears welled in her eyes. She covered her mouth with a hand to bite back a whimper.

They all looked at her, very kind. Kinder than she'd ever deserve.

Uji, sending waves of reassurance and steadiness through their bond, put an arm around her discreetly before she could collapse in front of all these people. She sent back gratitude. And a whole lot of other screaming emotions. He just gave her a soft, one-sided smile.

"If we go, we go," he murmured to her. "But if we stay...we stay, yes, *shimai?*"

Satsi sniffed, looking between him, Zuji, and the assembled faces. Back at the wreckage. At the ocean beyond. Pictured Sammy playing in it. Pictured other, faceless children. Pictured her friends and even, because she could for a second, Atty and Marick tucked under a tree. Not unlike their wedding, that they'd had on that same beach. So much had happened in that house, before it fell down in fire on top of them.

Maybe more could.

Maybe she could have a home again, and it could mean walls *and* people. Whether or not she was worth it.

"Yeah. Okay. Yeah," she managed, snotty.

Her *family* cheered.