

Port Ol'val
Dajorra System
37 ABY

Specks of dust hung suspended in the air like snowflakes in a holopict, time seemingly standing still within the sea of moving boxes. The small apartment had never held much in terms of earthly possessions, and yet she somehow had managed to fill up a depressing number of crates in preparation for her departure. A depressing number, and a few more left vacant.

Tali felt a lump in her throat as she forced her gaze upon the far corner of her living room, the place where she'd built a cradle with a belly full of hope. It had stood unmoving since then, surrounded by gifts unopened and toys unused. All the small niceties she'd gathered for Ayoka.

"Ayoka..." She still dared not speak that name, afraid it too would fleet away from her.

The tears came, like they always did, but she did not fight them. She'd accepted they might never dry up, but she still had to move on. She still had to move *out*.

A few steadying breaths to calm herself later, the Twi'lek knelt down with a box in hand and began placing the items within. One by one, reverently like a grave robber pilfering a trap laden tomb, she took each small trinket and placed it gingerly within the larger box. Toys, dolls, blankets and nappies, they all found their place within.

Her eyes were cascading throughout and the burning sense of longing would not relent. By the time she reached the pair of hand-knitted lekwarmers, she could take no more and coiled over. Wet, heavy sobs filled the empty apartment, the despair seeping into greasy walls and the sticky floor. She'd finally left her mark upon it, one of baser living; much like every other prior occupant.

Knock, knock, knock!

The sound startled her. How long had she been weeping? Her hand still clutched the soft garment in her hand, so tiny in her palm.

Knock, knock, knock!

The sound repeated with urgency. Tali hesitated, but managed to let go of her work. The lekwarmer disappeared into the box which she shut in passing. Wiping diamonds on the back of her hands, she reached the door and opened it.

"Merry Lifeday, lass," Kordath smiled a toothily.

Tali was a bit too overwhelmed to respond, before finally managing to return the greeting in kind.

"Everythin' alright?" Kordath inquired, the obvious rather difficult to hide from her cheeks.

"I'm... *fine*," Tali lied through her teeth. "It'll pass."

Kordath did not seem to be buying it, but he shrugged all the same. "Me and tha' others got ya this. Figured ya might need one." The stunted Ryn stepped to the side and allowed an even squatter droid to step forward.

Shuffling its feet, the machine was little more than the pair of locomotors attached to a humming box with an adjustable grille at the front from which cool-ish air was blowing at a somewhat steady stream. It warbled and gave an awkward bow of sorts.

"V-vhat is it?" Tali inquired skittishly, not quite sure what to feel about it, or the fact her friends had thought she needed one—whatever it was.

"It's an HVAC droid," Kordath smirked proudly. "Since ya kept on bitchin' 'bout that leaking AC unit over yer bed, we figured..."

That was when he peered past the Twi'lek and saw the smattering of boxes behind her. It didn't take more than that for him to put two and two together.

"You, uh, goin' somewhere, lass?" he asked timidly.

"Yes—"

"'Cus ya know whatever's bothering ya, we can talk it out," Kordath interjected, "Ya don't have ta—"

"I'm not *leaving* leaving," Tali sighed, raising her hand to cut him off. "I'm just, *moving out*."

Kordath gave her a curious look, tilting his head a bit to the side.

"Why? An' where?"

"I just..." Tali shrugged. It was difficult to explain without choking. "...needed a change of place." Kordath gave her a long look and nodded. "Aye, perhaps for tha best," he agreed solemnly. "Can't have tha Quaestor livin' like this. Would nae look good."

Tali looked up, her eyes shimmering, and nodded, appreciating the out. "Yes, *that*."

“Come on then, I’ll help ya move ‘em outside.”

Before she had time to protest, Kordath had already marched past her and begun dragging out some of the filled boxes. The Twi’lek stood stunned for a moment, before another warble from the HVAC droid caught her attention. It had changed to a soothing breeze which the Twi’lek found oddly comforting.

It did not take them long to carry out all the boxes; all but one. Tali stared at the haphazardly shut container still standing in the living room corner, while Kordath finished making sure the cupboards were empty.

“That’s all of ‘em, lass!” he declared as he returned from the kitchen and then moved towards the final box. “I’ll just grab that an’—”

“No!” Tali found her response sharper than she’d liked, so sharp it had even startled the veteran Ryn.

“I mean, *no*, that one isn’t for moving,” Tali managed, this time with a softer tone.

He raised an inquisitive eyebrow.

“It’s, uh...” Her gaze wandered, and met the HVAC droid that had dutifully kept her cool throughout the labor. “A gift!”

“A gift?”

“Yes, a Lifeday gift!”

“To who?” Kordath asked, mildly puzzled.

“To, the... orphanages. On Selen. The ones Atty founded before...” Another painful silence.

Kordath appeared pensive, and before Tali could say a thing, he’d raised the lid ajar to peer inside.

“Don’t...!” Tali managed, though far too late. She clutched her hands against her chest, afraid what he’d think of it, and her.

Kordath closed the lid and smiled. “I bet this’ll make many a wee-’un happy,” he concluded. “I’ll see tha it finds tha right recipients,” he promised as he carried it outside. “Merry Lifeday.”

“Merry Lifeday,” Tali replied, watching the Ryn carry away all she’d had left of little Ayoka.

No. Not all she had left. The memories, the name, the spirit of her daughter would always, *a/ways* be with her. Those were things no-one could ever take from her.

Turning around to give her old home one final look, she breathed out a long sigh.

“Merry Lifeday, *Ayoka*.”

She shut the lights.