

Fly Away Home



"Jack-a-dale, jack-a-dale, I have a feather."

She sings a nursery song.

"Jack-a-dale, jack-a-dale, a feather of yours, and I call you to me."

Her step bobs as she paces the room, heavy hips making a slow sway. She's waiting, waiting to meet her. Her palms cup her round stomach, rubbing gently, feeling the heartbeat beneath.

"Jack-a-dale, jack-a-dale, it's time to come away from your play."

She's waiting.

"Jack-a-dale, jack-a-dale, now listen to me, for I've your feather and I know something you don't."

She paces another circle, singing as she has been sung to so sweet.

"Jack-a-dale, jack-a-dale, the forest is a fire, and your children shall burn."

A tap at the window.

Atyiru turns, and smiles brightly. Ivoshar has been growling and rumbling all this time, his coat stood on end, fangs permanently bare. He tried to break down the door once, tackling and splintering and clawing, but the holes he has made do not allow him free to fetch someone for her. He snarls louder now, tries to shove her by his shoulder back towards the bed, the door to the bathroom, back and away.

She pats at him, all sinew and tenseness and bone, and says, "There you are, jack-a-dale me."

The bird has landed at the balcony's edge, and the curtains swirl around it and into the room; she had left the doors open wide in invitation. It chirrups at her now, singing back, warbling and wanting, and she coos, stepping forward.

Her cythraul *snarls*.

"Ivoshar, stay," she Commands, and he howls, he howls and he howls and she sees in his mind as he prepares to lunge for the bird. He is prepared to die dragging it to the earth, to fall with it. His muscles bunch, and he surges to leap, growling, but yelps and twists when she steps into his path. He crashes into her, and she goes down to the ground, and holds him, his great head between her palms.

"Ivoshar, sleep," she **tells** him, and he fades with a whine. She struggles to push her bonded gently off of her, but he is too heavy and her belly too round now with her on her back, but she has help. Another head pokes in, and then two more, along with six arms and eight legs. It is another brother-sister, not the bird, but one that had been scaling the building to reach various flowers, both for fetching new family and feasting, and now for fetching her. It clammers over the plush carpet, dripping as it goes, and carefully rolls Ivoshar's limp form over with three hands, using the other four to lift her.

"Thank you," she murmurs, and takes its rattling heads in her hands and kisses each one between hollow-hole eyes. They are alike. "Oh! Oh, you are hurt. Let me..."

The Force answers her easily, water and wind and time, to tend all things. It soothes the burns and bruises, knits up a slash. Her newest friend clatters with cricketsong and she sings three notes back.

"The others are hurt too..." Atyiru frowns, sorrowed. There are so many who need her; she can feel every single one of them, all of their shadow and light, all of their hurts. But she cannot reach them all, and some needs are greater. It is the healer's burden. "We will do what we can, yes? Take me to them, and then to the babes."

Both brother-sisters shudder and whisper at that word. She shudders too, and the fire in her belly is warm, smelting steel of her spine. Their family. The smallest and most vulnerable and precious. They must be fed and held and kept safe.

They cradle her in their arms, and she presses her cheek skin to skin as they descend, climbing down while their flying companion circles above, watchful. She is taken to the beaches, and to the pools, and to the entrance halls. There are many hurt. Bombs have burned and torn them. Knives have cut them. Still they struggle on. She walks among them bare of foot and heals them all, dress swirling around her legs in the hot, humid night's tepid breeze. It smells of blood and island mycosia blooms and the salt foam ocean. There are more, but they are in the buildings with the people, in the jungles, in the seas; too many, too spread out. And she can do no more.

"*Jack-a-dale, jack-a-dale,*" she sings again, and down comes the bird, transferring her to its many talons and wings. Her stomach swoops when they take flight, and were she not so intent, surely she would have vomited over them both; certainly her daughter is not happy with it. Her pulses are distressed and quiet at once— she is dreaming, and does not want to yet wake.

Atyiru hopes they are good dreams.

They fly, the night air cooling as they climb higher, but only in increments— with a passenger, their ascent is laid low, and the sweet tree sap fills her nose as they skim the forest. She can sense her families, both of them, spread throughout the resort and at their destination, and wishes only that she could hold them all close: Zujenia, Lucine, Tyga, Qyreia, Kiera, Sera, Diy, Alaisy, Zig, Yezid, Jax, Kobgin, Tali, Violet, others still...Marick, little Fela.

She knows her love will be there, and he will kill them, their new family, because that is how he knows best to fix a thing. Present a problem, and resolve a solution. She does not begrudge him that, but she cannot allow it.

They fly over them in the jungle. They fly over the ridge upon which her brother-sisters played when they were small, eons ago. They land on the sandstone steps of their home. The bird raises its head and cries, and so do the others as she steps free. She feels it, they all do—some of them have died, and that is a grief too terrible to name, a space where once someone was that they will never be again, a hole in their hearts.

Jack-a-dale, jack-a-dale, fly away home, your children are burning, and your mother is—

Her ears twitch and she croons, apologetic.

"Yes, mother has gone. I am sorry, litluns. But I am here. I have got you. I will keep you safe and we will all find mother again."

Atyiru cradles her belly again and mounts the steps. Her brothers and sisters guide her, past mother's empty bed, past nests already well-guarded, past the walls with their family's story that they watched painted in days more full of nectar and sun, before the long dark that trapped them away. She goes, and then she is finally home at last, deep in the heart of hearts. The babes are here, fresh-torn from the wombs in which they had waited so, so very long, since the darkness descended. They squeak and hiss and cry, and she gathers them up one by one and settles them with her, in her arms, on her legs, over her shoulders. They are very hungry. They try to feed, but she has very little food to give them.

"I am sorry, litluns. They are not real flesh, they cannot feed you," she explains brokenly, her sadness sudden and sharp. If only it was milk from the breast they would need, like her daughter — their unborn sister — would. She has not the flesh to give them, though she would give it gladly. She has so little left. But...she can heal. Perhaps in this they can feed. She cups a gentle hand over the one in her arms and holds it up so it may latch its teeth into the meat of her, between her shoulder and neck. It is one of the few places left she can offer. The bites are sharp, and she bleeds, and bleeds, and heals, and bleeds, and gives them each a turn to feed a little this way, just to ease their terrible hunger, just until their brothers and sisters bring more food.

And she sings a nursery song.

"Jack-a-dale, jack-a-dale, come home to me, for I have a feather, and I am finally free..."

Eventually, they come. She feels it, feels their pain and their loss, feels her own, as more and more die and hurt on both sides, and she wishes more than anything that they could all be happy and whole.

"Jack-a-dale, jack-a-dale, take to the sky, for only feathers and ashes can fly, and now as ashes, so too can I."

They come bearing blades, and sabers, and guns. She cradles the littlest one to her chest, atop her rounded belly with its sister. She shushes, feels it dig claws into her in fright. She stands and she shushes as she sets the little ones aside, so that she can move freely, shushes as they all cry behind her. She stands between the children and the others and she shushes and she draws her weapon and raises her chin. They are burning, they all in their forest, and none of them are free, for their mother had left them and all they knew was their family and their home and they would all die for it tonight if need be.

"Atyiru," and that is her love's lilting voice, and she smiles, and it is a sorrowful thing.

"No," she shushes, and her saber sings.

Jack-a-dale, jack-a-dale, oh, remember me...