

Sithmas Aftershocks

By: Aiden Lee Deshra

"I promise you this. I will protect this family at any cost. You have protected me my entire life, Atyiru, and now I shall repay my debt to you. I will lay down my life for you and this family. This is my most solemn vow."

Those words...

Those words he had said to the one closest to his heart.

He could feel the weight against his chest as he remembered those powerfully charged words.

Eleceos had made a solemn vow to Atyiru. To his cousin. To his Yiru.

He had tried his best. His hardest. He had fought the scores of droids and broke his way through the underground hideout of Rodrigue. He had fought alongside Atyiru and the rest of the rescue team, and they had succeeded. Marick was saved, even though he seemed lost inside his own head. The Hapan was unresponsive but alive. Atyiru would free the man from his mind.

But he felt hollow. Empty.

Everything had been fine. It was all going so well. Until Skar. Until the traitorous Rogon Skar Agrona. The Kaleesh had thrown it all asunder.

Maybe he shouldn't have tried to help the Sith. Eleceos had always wanted to be like his Yiru, so he had done what he knew she would do. He had melded his mind with the Kaleesh, and what he'd found was darkness. Evil.

He felt tainted by the things he'd seen. He couldn't fully process it all. Perhaps he wasn't strong enough for this Clan. All the training with Satsi, with Aiden. Perhaps it was all for naught.

Skar held such intense hatred. He was a volcano bursting at the seams, steam and ash sprouting from the cracks in his psyche. Ele had only the briefest glimpse, but he felt he would never be the same. He thought he knew pain. That he knew loneliness. But nothing compared to the emptiness he felt within the Kaleesh. And all that wrath, all the rage. It was centered on Marick, and by extension, on Atyiru.

The Miraluka was deeply conflicted. He knew what Marick had done now. A saber carving through the Barabel's neck. The killing of his fellow Arconan. Zakath.

There were still so many questions that he had. How were Marick and Atyiru to blame for Nath, or for Skar's dead family? So much hatred from those events again focused on Marick. Was it simple jealousy? Did Marick have something to do with those deaths as well? He didn't know. But he also couldn't trust the Hapan now, could he?

And Atyiru, she knew? How could she love a man like that? How could she trust him to create a family with her? He was lost, wasn't he? He betrayed the Clan, didn't he? Wasn't that against everything that she had taught him? Was she just a hypocrite?

Ele ran his hands through his hair, messing it up as he did. He scratched at his head in confusion. He didn't know who to turn to about this, but he couldn't go to his cousin. Could he even believe whatever she told him? So much confusion. So much conflict. And he felt the darkness within him. It was pulling, scraping its way into his heart. It wanted him to give in. To fall. To concede.

"I promise you this. I will protect this family at any cost. You have protected me my entire life, Atyiru, and now I shall repay my debt to you. I will lay down my life for you and this family. This is my most solemn vow."

Again...that vow. Those words were ever present. He had a niece to protect now. He should be able to move past the rest, shouldn't he?

So lost in thought he was that Ele didn't notice his cousin walking over to him. She sat at his side and placed an arm around him.

"You fought so bravely today, *Efyrvesianier*. I am very proud of you." Her voice shook him to his core. It held an intensity to it that he couldn't forget. The words he longed to hear from her. But something didn't feel right about it. He was simply too conflicted.

"Thank you, Yiru. I fear though that my training thus far has been for naught. I wasn't strong enough to protect you today."

"You did so well. You have been getting so strong, little one. I couldn't have asked for anything more."

Her words fell on deaf ears. He just couldn't believe what she had to say. Something inside of him was breaking. Twisting. One question ate away at him above all the others, and he couldn't help but let it loose from his lips.

"If I did so well, why was it up to you to be the hero?"

"I don't know what you mean, Ele," Atty responded with genuine confusion.

"I couldn't keep you from sacrificing yourself again. I don't want to lose you again, Yiru, but you always put yourself in these situations."

There was silence for a few moments of time. No word was exchanged between the two Miraluka, they simply felt each other through the Force, and Atyiru could feel the tumultuous emotions within him.

"*Efyrvesianier*, I would do anything for the safety of those I care about. My life matters not in comparison to theirs. They are my reason for being, and I will protect them with all that Ashla and Bogan have given me."

"You only had to because of my weakness. My inability to help you this time. To help you anytime." Ele was shaking at this point. He tried in vain to control himself, to maintain balance. But Aiden's teachings were failing him.

"You are so strong, my little one. You have such strength inside of you. We never would have made it through this without you there. You saved me in so many ways tonight. You were my hero tonight, Eleceos," Atty proclaimed with a smile, trying desperately to soothe the young Miraluka.

"Then why did you do it?!"

Again silence surrounded the two. Tension rose, reverberating off of the young Force User's body. He stood from his bench and took a few steps away from Atyiru.

"Eleceos, I..."

"You always do this, Atty! You fight and give and care not for what you leave in the background. You stand by these "ideals" of yours but today you did things I'd never thought possible from

you. The way you twisted Skar's mind? Rodrigue's mind that you lobotomized? How is that what the light would do? Aren't you Lotus? Doesn't that mean something?"

"Ele, you have to understand that I had no other choice..."

"Isn't there always a choice? Isn't that what you taught me? There is always another option. I mean, you could have ended Skar's suffering. Instead you increased it. You protected Marick from the Kaleesh, and why? I know you love him, but why? All the horrible, horrible things that man has done— why?"

Atty rose and tried to console and calm Eleceos, but the young Miraluka wasn't having it. All the conflict within him was rushing to the surface like an uncontrollable flash flood, a tsunami of grief, despair, and confusion overtaking his head. And he was drowning in it. In the darkness.

"There is more to the story than you know. What Marick did...he did it because he had to. There is more to him than you know."

"And Rodrigue? He is dangerous, Yiru, too dangerous. Why is he still alive? You taught me about justice, and he needs to be stopped so he can cause no more harm, doesn't he?"

"And I have stopped him. He will hurt no one else with his power again."

"But now he lives with constant suffering. Who does that help? How is that good?"

"Not everything is black and white, my little one. There is more than just dark and light. Surely Aiden has taught you of what he calls The Balance."

Atyiru felt fear. She didn't know what was wrong with Ele, but the young man was falling out of her reach. He was vanishing right before her and she couldn't stop it. They had never had a fight like this, and she didn't know what to say to make it all alright.

"What about Kirra?"

"What about her? Eleceos, there is nothing more important to me than my daughter. I would move the heavens to keep her safe. To give her everything that she needs. To make sure that she is happy!"

"Then why wouldn't you let me go?!"

If he could glare, his eyes would have been fixed solely on Atyiru. Anger flowed from the young Jedi. Anger directed only at his beloved cousin.

“What?”

“I tried to fulfill my oath, to make sure that you and Marick would be with Kirra. To keep your family whole. But you couldn’t let me go! You had to step forward and be the martyr, didn't you, Yiru? You just couldn’t help yourself, because it's who you are Atyiru.”

“Ele, I...”

“That’s what you're good at, isn't it, Atty? You always do this! You don't care what happens after the fact, or how everyone else feels. You leave! You always just leave!”

Atyiru was speechless. The woman shook at the words her cousin shouted at her. The direct attack on her very nature. Was this still her Efyrvesianier?

“Kirra would never be as happy as she could be with her mother in her life. That little girl needs you, Atty, and you almost abandoned her, and for what? Marick? For a man who slaughtered a member of his own Clan?”

“Ele, you don’t...”

“No, cousin. It’s my turn to speak, and your turn to listen. I needed you and you left me. You died, and left us all, and now that you’re back, the first opportunity that came around, you tried to leave us again? Something is broken inside of you, and I don’t know how to fix it.”

No words were said for a while between them. The unshakable silence that followed was painful and disastrous. None of it could be taken back.

“I will try, cousin. I will try to move past this, but you need to stop. You need to stay. You cannot leave us all again, you just can’t. I will continue to grow stronger and maybe one day, I’ll be able to truly allow you to rest, but until then you must stay! You cannot disappear again.”

Atty said nothing in return. The truth was she didn’t know what to say. Eleceos turned away and started walking. He stopped for a moment and sighed.

“I love you, my Yiru, but I can’t look past this. I don’t know what to think or believe anymore. I don't know who to be. I wanted to be you, but now...I just don’t know anymore. I will continue to protect this family though. I will try to figure out what it is that made Marick so special. But I don’t understand the love you have for him.”

He continued walking away, leaving behind the one who was his reason for being. His muse and inspiration. Atyiru was lost to him now, but he needed to find something new. He needed to find a true purpose for his life. Something away from his cousin.

He wanted to understand everything he felt today. He wanted to find his life, to be truly happy. But that happiness had always eluded him, though he was still young. He passed by others around him, feeling their fear from the day's events, their worry for those they loved, and it was all so new to the young Miraluka.

He needed to up his training, and work longer and harder with his masters. That was what he could control in this moment of time. For the rest though, he was silent. He didn’t know what this feeling was he longed for. He thought only to himself.

“Maybe it’s only because I don’t know what it is to be in love yet.”