Smile

A submission for the fiction competition: **In The Feels**

Written and submitted by Mystic Appius "Zappius" Wight of Clan Taldryan

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Chyron
Taldryan Citadel Library
38 ABY

Have you ever wondered what it's like to want to die? To wake up in a morning and have no energy to move, to wonder if those around you would be better off if you didn't exist? If you weren't around anymore and just disappeared, how would they react?

Appius didn't have to wonder, he'd been there. Numerous times he'd wondered what it would be like if he just took his lightsaber, placed it over his heart and flipped the ignition switch. Would it hurt? Probably. But it was better than living his life on his own with his family dead all because of him. He could remember it all so vividly, and every time he closed his eyes the ash, fire and smoke overcame him. The buildings and rubble from his Mandalorian Clan burned in front of him, the scorching flesh of those he called family seared before his own eyes.

The ordeal changed him. He turned to the Dark Side and lost all sense of purpose and who he was. One day he thought he had everything worked out, a job as Quaestor of Ektrosis, a Mandalorian Force user... it was odd how quickly your life could be flipped and put on its head. He stopped wearing his armor for a while and got into fights for the sake of getting into fights hoping someone would kill him. A Mandalorian without a Clan was pointless, but he still had honour, and that honour demanded he died in combat giving his all if that was what it took. Even after he returned to Taldryan it didn't fill the hole those events left in his soul.

"Appius, what makes you happy?"

The question caught him completely off guard. There he was, helping Dasha with yet another lesson in reading and writing, basics that were sadly neglected when she was younger, the basics he intended to correct come Hell or high water. She fumbled over her C's and D's and he didn't know if the question was just to distract him from the lesson, or if it was genuine, but either way, it worked and caused this particular train of thought to emerge from him.

"What makes me happy?"

He asked the question back and got a simple nod as an answer. The clattering of Taldryanites outside the Citadel library broke the immediate silence, though the Master in this situation had to wonder...

"*What brought that on?*"

Dasha shrugged and fiddled with her hair. She was always the timid type. Shy, reserved, but underneath that exterior was a heart of gold and out of everyone Appius knew, she was the one that saw his transformation the most. From before he left the Brotherhood, to returning to here and now. The young girl had seen him through thick and thin. She'd been there for him, she was there and the very least he could do was give her a straight answer.

"*Dasha, not too long ago if you asked me that question I would have told you nothing. I'd lost... everything. I just felt empty, lost, broken and it felt useless trying to do anything.*"

"*And now?*"

Appius couldn't speak initially. That was the thing about those sorts of feelings he'd experienced. You don't just wake up and instantly want to die, *oh, hi there! Yes, I'd like a healthy dose of being suicidal, please!* That's not it at all. Every day just becomes a challenge to motivate yourself to do anything. It struck him in doses. Some days it wasn't so bad and then on others, it was just the worst thing in the galaxy, harder than any kind of training Farrin ever put him under. But then he met...

"*Is it Ankira?*"

Dasha pretty much nailed a point right on the head. It sounds incredibly cheesy, maybe corny too, but that's just how it happened. It's weird how one person can make such a huge difference the moment they walk into your life. She'd taken a broken man, splintered and shattered in so many different ways and pieced him back together bit by bit until he was whole again. The cracks were still there, but those were wounds and scars that only time would heal. Dasha still awaited an answer, and from the back of his mind, Appius knew exactly what to say.

"*Yeah, Ankira makes me happy.*"

And he answered with complete honesty.

"*I'm glad.*"

"*Why do you ask?*"

This time it was his turn to ask the question. His curiosity piqued and for whatever reason, he just needed to have an answer. His young Sephi apprentice wasn't normally the type to open up about such things, after all. Being left to fend for herself on an unknown world after living in an abusive orphanage in her younger years did just that to her.

"You smile more. Just like you used to, that's all."

The Human opened his mouth to speak but no words came out. It was like his heart was struck by tiny little needles. He had no idea how much he'd changed since leaving and coming back, or what effect it might have had on her. With a gentle flick of his wrist, he closed the giant textbook Dasha was trying to read from, an act which startled the young girl, though it gave him her undivided attention.

"There's more than just that. Ankira... I love her, I do. But there's more than just her. There's Aylin, Tracinya, and of course... you."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. Kaysh evaar'la aliit. It means my new Clan, or family if you prefer. That's what you all mean to me now. I have no idea what I'd do without you all, especially you. You were there for me through everything. Dealt with me through everything. Gave me your companionship and were just there when I needed someone to be there because frakk knows what I would have done without you. So thank you, Dasha. Thank you for being you."

He hoped that answered her question, and from the young Scavenger's big, beady eyes, he could see a trickle of water from within them. Immediately afterwards she launched up from her seat and wrapped her master in as tight a hug as possible as the dam broke, gently flowing water into his shoulder. He rubbed her back with his hands, they were gigantic compared to her light frame but he smiled. The thing that made him happy? It was that they gave him a purpose. They needed him just as much as he needed them, and he wouldn't have it any other way.

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