

Papa does not have many rules.

They both pretend he doesn't know she breaks them.

The breakings are for rules that are not very good at being rules. More like lettuces, those. Generally bad at being at all — she still eats her cabbage, of course, and tells them they are doing their very good and best, but they taste like water and have the texture of wilted leaves and, well, there.

But these rules she breaks are things like times to be a'bed and whether or not socks are for matching or wearing at all, or if her hair is really meant to be worn back and not forward, or if elbows in fact do not belong on the table.

According to Mother, *elbows do not belong on the table*.

Papa touches his elbow to the bottom of it when he sits. They smile secrets at each other.

But then there are rules that *are not* for breaking, not like how she can leave her bed whenever she likes to go talk to the animals, or the crops, or the stars, or the wind. Not like how she can dig her toes into the earth and then her fingers and feel how she is alive and so is everything else.

These are rules like, *do not stand directly behind the bantha, in case they kick*. Things like, *be careful with fire*. Dangerous things, things that make his brows crease like the leathers in worry under her fingertips, that put a tenor in his tone when she has been off in the forests or the fields for longer than he likes without him checking on her.

Papa worries quite a bit, really, she thinks. He says it's because she's a wanderer. She tells him once she already knew that. Mother says he worries too. Mother says they are very independent, and calls her Atyiru instead of Yiru just to watch Papa squirm. They kiss each other and their love despite these differences is the warmest glow she knows in all the world.

One of the rules, also, is to be careful with The Machines. This is because, unlike the bantha about to kick, or the flame too close, she cannot sense these things. None of them can. Their people are truly blind to things of metal and wire and oil, and many of the Family refuse to use Machines even to farm. Harvest time is aching backs and broken toes and torn nails and deep sweat and soil, is all hands from oldest to smallest helping where they can, is a solid month of unrelenting work to reap what was sown before it spoils or the winter turns the ground too hard to work. Then there is the packing and the preparing and the animals and— many things. But only in the most dire straits does it seem anyone is willing to let a droid or a crop mower help.

She finds it quite silly, personally. Like everyone has lettuces for brains. Good at being lettuce, sure, but not even a lettuce wants to be lettuce.

And, moreover, she finds it *rude*. Her Family is love endless, she feels it, she feels them all, all connected, to stars and stones and— and they won't have a care for the machines? Won't talk to the droids? No. She *refuses*.

So this is a rule she breaks. She is breaking it today.

"H'llo there, Mib!" Yiru cries, skipping up to the stall and throwing her arms around the protocol droid. Her arms do not go all the way around, because she is seven, and even though she has small lithe muscles and is *very good, thank you* at lifting whole apple bushels and carrying carrots and holding Pansy, their most grumpiest hog, very still for her ear washings, they are not long arms, which is very unfair. Mother promises she'll grow, because Papa is tall and that is genetics. Yiru likes genetics. She's trying very hard to be patient.

Mother said trying to argue that taking growth hormones to speed things up was also against the rules. But she did compliment her rhetoric, and was proud that she researched, even if researching was just reading Mother's biochemistry notes.

Patience was hard.

"I say. Desist with your assault, spawn!" says Mib in their modulated voice. They pry her off with swift robotic ease. She gasps in delight at the motion, and giggles when they drop her right back into the dirt.

"MIB-88!" cries Jonda, Mib's owner — another thing Yiru *dislikes strongly, 'owning.'* As if Mib is to be owned. None of the Family treat anything but machines this way. All is for everyone, and everyone is all. "Don't you dare hurt Yiru!"

"Mib's not hurting me," Yiru shoots back, bouncing to her feet. "We're playing."

"I do not *play*, spawn, I am a *translator* and *calculator*—"

"Mib's just grumpy today. 'lo you too, Jonda." Yiru sings, running over to hug the shopkeeper. He hugs her back.

"Where is your Papa, Yiru?"

"Wif the cart and Miss Elleope."

"You buying today?"

"Sellin'."

"Well why don't you go trade with your father, sweetheart? Delphin needs your help, you know."

Yiru's ears flick back. No one else's ears do that, or have points, not since her Mother's-Mother's-Mother's-Father became one with the Force, so hers are better. She frowns.

"But I wanna talk to Mib."

"Leave the droid alone, Yiru. Go on now."

She slumps, scowls, kicks at a rock, but goes. And because rules are only rules if they're sensible, she stops and hugs Mib again.

"I'll bring you oil next time, Mib!"

"Release me!" demands the droid, though this time they don't lift her away. Mib is allegedly *too mean and insolent* to be a good protocol droid, and it's why they were offered so cheaply to the market, even a Miraluka would buy one to help with the very, very rare visit from an off-worlder who didn't speak their tongue.

"Bye, Mib! Hey, hey, I love you!"

"Infernal spawn," Mib beeps, and goes back to stacking very large crates.

Yiru goes to Papa. They finish their business and begin the trek home, which was a day's walk. Conniferous was a good cart-puller, but she liked to chew the sweetgrasses a lot, and tended to wander. Still, with her cart empty except for Papa on the bench, and even then not that when they walked, they make good pace.

"Did you go see that droid again, Yiru?" Papa asks when they were down the road a'ways.

"Of course!" she chirps, swinging her arms, skipping beside the bantha. She smells flowers, decides to get some to braid into Conni's mane.

"You *know* you're not supposed to talk to that droid."

"Papa, that's stupid."

"Yiru, mind your manners."

"Mind yours!" She stops, puts hands on her hips. Mother does this. It is very effective.

"Everyone is mean to Mib! I won't be! That's a terrible rule, Papa! Being mean should not ever—never, be a rule!"

Instead of upset, she feels pride well from Papa. She smiles. He smiles back in their way.

"...I am very proud of you, little star. I only worry for you."

They keep going. She braids Conni's mane, and takes a break walking, and then hops up again. They pass the Heppa's and the Laynanae's, stop to break bread and water with each and hold each other and hear news. Press kisses to foreheads and have a song then go on. There is awhile between farmsteads, and then they are approaching the Iveren's, and—

*And then pain.*

Yiru's knees hit the dirt. She clutches at her chest, her stomach, her arms. She's crying. Screaming. Papa too. Conniferous bellows in alarm.

"Yi— Yiru—" Papa is gasping, holding her. How is he moving? It hurts. "You're okay, it's alright, you're not hurt, breathe, my girl. Atyiru. Yiru, breathe."

She gasps.

"Papa—" she cries, because, because—

*Something is wrong. Someone is hurt. Someone is hurt and it's wrong.*

"Stay here!" Papa's voice is horribly scary. She's never heard him like this, except when Shearn broke his hand at the creak when she was four, which was a baby. "Stay here, Yiru, I have to— to go help."

Papa knows too, something's wrong. They can both feel the distress, the pain, the panic. Something has happened to the Iverens.

Someone is dying.

Papa goes.

She sits in the dirt and hurts, knows her arm is shredded, her face is ripped open and her scalp ripped free, her stomach spilt. It's wrong, it's wrong.

Someone is hurt.

*No.*

Papa said, and he made it a rule.

Someone is hurt.

*Someone is hurt.*

And she refuses.

Yiru puts her feet under her and runs. She runs and runs.

There's shouting up at the farm. In the field, they're in the field. Yenle and Ritoa and Efyssn, all there, the children there and back in the house, a mile off. And there's Papa and there's—

The Iveren's is one of the places she is not supposed to play on her own. This is a rule, because he Iverens have a harvester. It is a great big massive metal thing that swallows whole swathes of crops in seconds. They have very much land and even with ten children, not enough hands — not enough all grown, at least. Their radishes and cress grow too fast. They need it, everyone says, with unease and discomfort and shame in their voices.

The harvester is making a horrible noise, and so is Efyssn.

The adults talk, babble, scream. He fell in. Got caught. He's not—

That's Papa, saying, "...going to make it."

*No.*

*She refuses.*

*She runs.*

"YIRU!" Papa yells, because she's not supposed to be here, because she and her impatiently short legs carry her right up to the harvester where Efyssn lays flayed, ripped socket from joint from sinew. She can smell the blood now. It's so thick she tastes it. It's warm and the ground under her toes squishes wet like mud right after rain with it when she drops down beside him and puts her hands on the places she can reach.

And she thinks, *no, I refuse.*

There is light.

It's like the sun, above and inside. She feels it. She feels the stars and the soil and the wind and her name and his. She feels how they are all one, and how one is all in them. And she knows she can change this. She knows she has to try.

Because she loves. She loves Efyssn and she loves Mib and her Papa and this harvester who no one else will love and someone is hurting and *it is not right.*

She'll make it right.

Under her hands, Efyssn gasps. The pain stops, finally, it stops. Around her, the others gasp. The machine finishes grinding up bones of the arm it took. It's like the rabbits, she thinks, eating the baby birds that fall out of their nests. *Needs the calcium*, Mother explains. That was just the way of things. The foxes tried to eat the chickens. The crops drain from the soil and they had to help give it back, plowing and fertilizing and rotating plants and dead land.

"It's alright," she says, or tries to. She's been screaming and her throat hurts. She whimpers. Wants tea. Or warm milk. Papa is grasping her shoulder. "Everythin'll be...a'right..."

She isn't aware of collapsing, just of the blood and the soil against her cheek.

When she wakes up again, it has been eight days. Mother left all her work and refused to move from the bedside. Papa has barely slept or tended the animals. The lettuces won't be doing well. Yiru resolves to go talk to them immediately, and it not allowed to do so, and is *not* given the option of breaking that rule.

"How are they?" she asks. She means the Iverens. Papa knows.

"Alive," he answers, and strokes her hair. "You...you did a miracle, little star. You saved his life. I— a miracle. Like the gods," he whispers.

Mother sniffs. "She used the Force, the Luka Sene have said so, it's not myth, love. It's our Atyiru."

"It does not have to be mythical to be miraculous, love," Papa says back, and this is an argument, but a soft one. They both kiss her cheeks.

"Papa?" she asks later. "What about the harvester?"

She senses his anger, so misplaced, his weariness. "The Iverens are selling the parts. Got the droids up from the spaceport to come dismantle it right out."

She is angry, too. But anger is tiring. She falls back asleep.

The next time they go to town, there are murmurs, and everyone praises her. Mib is gone. She hugs Efyssyn tightly and all the Iverens from oldest to cradle-kept on their way back, and she mourns, because this is not right. She saved him, didn't she? She made it better. So why was anyone *still* hurt?

"I'm not going to follow that rule, Papa," she tells him, and her father sighs and kisses her hair.

"I know, Yiru," he replies. "And I am proud of you. I just worry."

"Dont worry," Yiru huffs. "It will be alright."

She holds onto the Light she has found, and the Dark, and knows they're all one, man or machines, rules or no, and refuses to let there be anything else.

-=X=-

*Beeee-ooop*, came a bright, soft tone in the night.

Atyiru turned from where she was swaying over Kirra's crib. Marick was attending another meeting with the *Voidbreakers*, helping Zig prepare for a presentation of sorts. Wyn would be by later tomorrow...or today?

Not that litluns cared very much for night or day. Quite right, too, given it was all so subjective based on location on the planet and location of the planet and if there was even a planet, and all.

"Oh, hello there, Bidy. Did we wake you too? Terribly sorry, dear." She knelt slightly, waiting, braced for something from nothing, for an impact, a weight, a twist in her stomach— *\*thump\**, and the droid booped a happy tone on her shoulder. She lifted the arm she was equally blind to and patted his head. "I was just thinking about you. You, my very special Bidy, and the general you, you see— you, Bidy, heehee — of droids. And about my father."

*\*Beee-ooob, boo-beep.\**

"Nothing's wrong, Bidy, but thank you for asking. I think about him quite a bit, you see. Not all the time and every day, but still rather with frequency. Moreso now. With her." Her face turned down towards the babe in her arms, and her lip trembled. Her ears folded. She smiled, and the trembling got so much worse. "He will never hold her, do you know? He. Well, we didn't marry grandly, but Miraluka often don't, we're simple folk about that, but— still, I would have liked if he could have been to my wedding. I do love weddings. He did too! Good cake. But oh, for babies...babies are the grandest of joys...Ashla and Bogan, how he would've loved you, our little *\*lunayi\**."

Atyiru hiccuped, broke off. Swallowed thickly. Bidy thumped his head into hers with a little uncomfortable *\*conk\**, and she laughed, snotty.

"Why thank you, dear heart, I appreciate the hug. Goodness. I miss him, is all, Bidy. I wish— I w-wish he could have met Kirra. Or any of his grandchildren. And you, of course! He had a bit of a rule about droids, but I think he'd like you. I'd have convinced him. I am a very good convincer, you see, not at all like a lettuce. More like a good loaf. Bread is *\*very\** convinceful."

*Beee.*

"His birthday was just recently...he and Kirra were not too far apart, really. I forgot about it, with everything. That's alright, though. We still remember, and we love him." Sensing Kirra had finally gone deeply into R.E.M. sleep, perhaps off to walk in Zujenia's dreams, or whosoever's, Atyiru bent and put the babe back in her bed. Tucked the blanket up just so. Adjusted the mobile so that it was off-center and Marick would have something to fix when he came home. "But I think I might have a cup of tea, if you'd like to join me?"

*Beep-boo!*

"Right you are, Bidy. Come on. *Mika yirue* made just the loveliest blend this morning — yesterday morning? Hum — and I think it will do our circuits just fine."

*Boo-bee ooo.*

"Well, you know, it is a funny thing, actually. I once had a friend named Mib, and I'd bring them oil and put it in a teacup, and they never drank any but they never threw it away either and I just know we'd have had the nicest parties..."

The Miraluka took them both downstairs to the kitchen, careful not to let the kettle's whistle shriek and wake Kirra again. She smiled into her cup, chattering all the while with Bidy.

They didn't need to be able to understand each other. She didn't need to be able to sense him, or even her own self. Those things didn't matter. She could still heal with these hands. That— that was important. That way, she could refuse the pain, the prejudice.

That much was a rule that was right.