

Luka Zarkot - Waking Terrors

38 ABY

Port Ol'val

Luka felt a weight on their chest as they slept. Heavy. Crushing. They lay still, breath caught in their lungs. The place they found themselves in was unfamiliar in the dark, and they sensed a disturbance that foretold of a hostile presence. The weight on them shifted, and as Luka's eyes adjusted to the dim light of the room they could see a figure sitting at the edge of the bed. A ragged breath, coarse and slow, could be heard from the shape. As it slowly turned its head, there was some primal sense within Luka to run. To run before it turned its head. Before it saw them.

They sat upright on elbows as they pushed away from the creature. The weight lifted from them, but a sudden movement to their right drew their eye. There was a crackle of thunder and a flash. Had it been raining? Light danced upon a raised club and the metal sockets of a Raider's mask before it let out a hunting wail.

It swung its club at Luka as they twisted away to avoid the crushing blow. Luka fell from the bed into...mud? It clung to them as they tried to get away.

*Luka!* The hoarse shriek came from the foot of the bed. A woman's voice. They turned their head towards the sound of her scream.

"No..." The pitiful sound that came from him was barely a word. They shut their eyes tight, and tighter when they heard a wet crunch as metal hit flesh, hit bone.

"Luka?" They could feel a hand on their shoulder and they shoved back instinctively. The sheets were still wrapped around their legs, and they thrashed to remove them. "Easy... I've got you." Careful hands - one built from cool metal - helped unwrap Luka from the sheets even as the Human retreated backward into the wall.

Their vision was blurred with tears when they opened their eyes, but Luka recognized the voice. "Kobign...?" But who else would it be? Luka seemed to never sleep in their own bed after meeting him. With the light coming in through the window, it would seem that they had an almost restful night for once, too. "I'm sorry..."

"I was already awake," Kobign replied with a gentle smile.

"No, I mean..."

"You okay?"

Luka's throat caught. They couldn't even make up some dismissing remark to deflect Kobign's concern. The dream was still so vivid in their mind.

They could still see the figure at the end of the bed.

*They could still see the figure at the end of the bed.*

Luka's eyes widened as they stared behind Kobign. The other man's voice faded into a dull whine as the Knight watched the shadow stand and slowly turn toward them. The profile was misshapen, a strangled gurgle emanating from its form. Luka shut their eyes, rubbed at them, and when they opened again the figure was gone.

"I-I'll be okay," Luka sputtered as they refused to look Kobign in the eye. "It's morning, anyway. I... I should go." Without waiting for a response, they picked themselves off of the floor and began

collecting their clothing from wherever it was tossed the night before. They checked under the bed for their shirt, which Kobign retrieved from near the balcony. Luka hesitated before taking it from him and gave a muttered thanks.

"If you need to talk about it..." Kobign started.

"I don't." Luka was surprised by their own abrupt tone, but let the statement hang between them as they dressed. Kobign seemed to accept it as the finality to that conversation as he made the bed.

Luka was the first to break the silence between them. "Any scheduling vacancies in the near future?" they asked. They put on a coy smile and hoped it may lighten the tension somewhat.

"I'll be sure to call you," he replied, "Unless you plan on disappearing again." The usual dry joke, as the Knight had a habit of doing just that when the mood struck them.

"Never for long." Luka approached the other man and placed slender arms about his neck, leaning in to give a kiss far more chaste than the person giving it.

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*Never for long...*

Luka flipped a few switches, pulling the Scyk out of hyperdrive and into autopilot for their approach. A low groan could be heard in the cabin behind them as Bico stirred from their sleep. "I don't know why you're complaining," the Human replied, snapping a few more toggles in place. "You slept just fine."

They put the starfighter into orbit, then unbuckled themselves from the cockpit. Crouching low, they made their way to the back. The Nexu was still safely buckled in with their custom harness, and a tug on the straps ensured it was secure. She let out a two-toned yowl in complaint. Luka rolled their eyes in response. "We'll be planetside soon, I promise. Then you can stretch your legs."

They opened a few overhead compartments until they found what they were looking for, stashed haphazardly among travel rations. Caffeine tabs. Lately, they had been taking them regularly to keep those things away. Luka tossed a few tabs back. The taste was awful, but they chewed them. The bitter taste would help them stay awake.

It had been days since they had last slept. Each time they had, they were jolted awake by visions of sand, Raiders, and blood. Perhaps they were mad to come this far because of a dream, but it had to be some spirit haunting him. They had every reason to. Perhaps it was finally time to put it to rest.

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The homestead was covered with years of sand. As Luka dug through what remained, they found most of the machinery scrapped. The Jawas had been around to pick up the pieces, though Luka doubted that anyone else had come to check on the family. The home was just close enough to reach Mos Eisley by speeder, but otherwise it was alone.

They had thought they were safe out here. Tucked away. Their own part of the world. Between the moisture farm and the nearby flamegem mine, they thought they may save enough to afford a ship away from there. The mine proved difficult to make profitable on one's own and they could barely afford the repairs on their equipment, but they were happy.

Bico ran ahead to the canyon to scout, and Luka trailed hesitantly after them. They knew what would be there, but fear gripped them all the same.

They lay where Luka had left them, all those years ago. Time and the dry desert sun had immortalized Tereza as a dried husk, leathery skin taut over bleached bone. The head... Luka's stomach lurched, threatening to spill whatever meager meal they last had before they had to look away.

The world grew fuzzy and spun skelter before Luka sat down with a loud thud. The walls of the crevasse seemed to tower further to the sky, and the shadows around them encroached further. Further. Hands in the dark. A hunting bellow. A scream. This was where it began.

Luka spread their fingers into the soft sands around them, closing their eyes. The connection was immediate, blinding white light flashing behind their eyelids before it all played out around them.

They had come here to hide when they saw the Bantha on the horizon. Mari had seen them first. Tereza had scooped the child up in her arms as they fled. They had thought that perhaps the Raiders would have been content with the homestead, but the shelter of the canyon was too good to leave alone. A flash of pain, familiar, as Luka was struck down. Tereza's scream. She had pleaded that they run, even with Mari nowhere to be seen. Where was she? Blood on the stone, a scarlet sunset. The pain was searing, yet they dug their hands deeper into the sand. Perhaps if they let it all unfold, they would see the escape. Mari wasn't here. Perhaps...

Smaller fragments were scattered around where they sat, and but Luka was convinced they belonged to some scavenger animal. That is what they believed until they found a small human skull among the scattered bones. They held this small thing in their hands.

"I left you..." Their strained voice echoed in the sunset canyon. "I ran... I could have been with you. But I left you."

They felt something against their back and turned around. Nothing there.

"If you wanted me here, I'm here. I'm here. I can make it right. I can..." They reached out while kneeling, collecting the small bones. Their hands trembled, making it difficult to hold them.

*"You shouldn't be here, darling."*

Luka froze and turned again. This time they saw a shadow approach with careful steps. Barely a form, but the familiar voice elicited a choked sob. "I came back for you."

*"We were never here."*

A smaller shape pulled itself from the first and drifted close to where Luka still knelt on the ground. It seemed to fall, scatter, recollect, then drift back to its origin.

"But..." Luka looked down at the bones in their hands, then at the mummified remains nearby.

*"We left with you long ago."* The figure drew closer and Luka could see the concave face, the leather skin, brittle bones...fade. Tereza stood before him, with her long hair pulled into a braid, her golden eyes, her sweet smile. She knelt down and they instinctively reached out for her, but their hands passed through.

"I left you..."

Tereza shook her head. *"I told you to run. I wanted you to live."* She held her hand out to them, toward their chest. *"You took us with you. Now you can let us go. Go home."*

"I'm home."

*"Go home."*

A low bellow drew Luka's attention. Expecting to see another nightmare, they were glad to see otherwise. Bico had returned with some small animal in her mouth, pleased as could be. When Luka looked back to Tereza, she had gone.

Luka buried the remains beside the homestead and marked the area with stone collected from the mine many years ago. Nobody would know this place was still here, save for them. It was something, at least. A place for them. A place to rest.

They climbed into the cockpit of their Syck, set it to orbit, then slept for a full rotation.