

The fuzzy image of a man manifested from the polished aluminum colored projection device. His face was instantly recognizable. The corners of her mouth turn up slightly, suggesting a smile might follow. She admired, for a moment, the fidelity of the image. The crisp resolution of the hologram maintained his feature cleanly.

“Hello, my friend.” He began, nodding the introduction. “I hope this message finds you well and in good spirits. I extend my sincerest apologies for not being able to deliver this message to you in person. The calls and burdens of my affairs prevent me from being in the Caperion System at this time.”

She shook her head. That was a lie. The monitoring of all of his transmission to Clan personnel in recent months had been rigorous. Years of interaction with him had filled her with the wherewithal to spoke the lies he wanted spotted. The Sith’s dishonesty in his transmission meant he was planning something. Whatever that plan was, this message was certainly an invitation to participate.

“While my time away has been productive, I have found myself in terrible need of some socialization I shall be returning to Seraph for a short window of time in ninety-six standard hours. It would be wonderful if you were available for a short visit, while I am in system. It has been such a very long time since we have caught up. I’ve arranged with the Tokare City Council to sponsor the visitation of a Diathim Ballet Troupe. They have a performance on the night of my arrival. I hear it is quite a sight to behold.” The Sith man said, casually gesturing with his hand as he extended the invitation.

Rayne thought a moment. It had been a long time since they had spoken. Since his return, their friendship had occupied a strange space between diving right back into their old monkeyshines and feeling like they were meeting for the first time. She doubted that his only motivation in extending the summons to watch an alien performance, but she couldn’t not put her finger on identifying his actual motivation.

Nevertheless, a seed of excitement began to grow within her. Thran had a way about him of bringing out exhilaration. Everything about the man was chaotic and unpredictable, but she delighted in the comfortable uncomfortableness he could bring to a room. He was certainly planning something and he was asking for her directly. Whatever machination he had set in motion, it would be a lot of fun to help it develop. Without much thought, she had settled on the conclusion that she would accept his invitation.

“I can arrange for transportation and accommodations that suit your liking. Should you meet this invitation with warm reception and you should find yourself interested in joining me, send word to my business attorney. His information will be provided at the end of this message. I *will* be expecting you.” He said as the message cut off.

The Battlelord realized in that moment that he was not requesting her presence. He was ordering it. Even after all the years away, Thran still behaved as if he was the Emperor. Some things never change.

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"Are you paying attention, Jasmine?" He asked with consternation in his tone.

"I understand," she replied as her eyes focused down a fluttering pair of wings among the flowers, lost in thought of the beauty of the lepidopteran.

"No. You are not paying attention" he said, holding his temper tightly as if it a leashed lylek.

"That is interesting." She said, with another canned response.

"Jasmine. Hey. Hey! HEY!" he said, snapping his fingers to get her attention.

"Hrm?" she said, looking back to him slightly dazed.

"Where has your mind gone, girl? Do you think it is acceptable to waste my time in these lessons if you're off world in your daydreams?" his tone was fierce as he questioned the girl.

"I'm sorry, father. It won't happen again." She said, averting her gaze from his.

The Sith sighed. They had been deep in lessons for several hours by this point. Memories of his own apprenticeship tiptoed through his memory. He had been no different, at times, even when studying under a Grandmaster could not bely his own distracted mind. The man abandoned the pacing performance of his lecture stage and sat down beside the girl.

His motivation for pushing her so hard in the last three months had been mostly self-interested. She was cut from the same cloth as he was, her mannerisms and defiance were like miniaturized and slightly feminized iterations of his own behavior. He said the same things about her that others had said about him in his youth. He said things like "She squanders her natural talent", "If she applied herself, she'd be a formidable opponent" and "She lacks discipline". If he could remedy those deficiencies, he would be adding a powerful weapon to his arsenal. The thought haunted him for a moment. The coldness of his interactions with her had not displayed the efficacy he had hoped.

As the wizened perspective of age took a firmer grasp upon him with each passing day, the ghosts of his absence in her youth were becoming more apparent. There were times when she idolized him and an equal number of moments where she detested him. The focusing the strength of either one of those emotions would open up a wellspring of power for the girl, but her passion was scattered to either side. He could live with her hating him, he'd come to terms with his culpability in her troubled heart years ago. She would be right to hold him as the target of her hatred. Yet, her grip on that loathing would ebb and flow as the tides.

Perhaps, he thought, trying to illicit that hatred for him as a locus for her to connect with the Dark Side was not the most effective method for completing his weaponization of the girl. The warm of affection, and perhaps more importantly the fear of losing that, may serve as a better foundation for his plans. It would require a change of angles, but her honing could be accomplished easily enough. He sighed again.

"What is on your mind, Jas?" he asked, softly.

"Oh, nothing." She replied nervously.

"You do know that I can make you tell me, right?" he said

"I...I don't know." She said, trying her best to lock away her feelings in a vault in her mind.

"Suit yourself. Perhaps you are just tired. Yes, surely you must just be tired. It has been a long day for the both of us." He said, his voice was soothing like honey.

He watched her sharp green eyes as they drifted back into the garden in search of the fluttering wings of the blue-gold butterfly. "Come, let's walk." He added.

He stood, towering over her, offering his hand to her. She looked up at him for a moment, cocking her head slightly to the side. The girl was unsure if this was another test or if he was showing a genuine moment of tenderness. Either way, refusing his hand was the wrong answer. He closed his fingers around her hand and for a fleeting moment, she felt as she had when she was much younger. Among a garden of exotic flowers with a calm stillness in the air, she could almost taste the cakes and tea that would follow their upcoming slow stroll. She swallowed hard, keeping the feelings of her seemingly eternal loneliness to herself.

She expected him to berate her about leaving her emotions unguarded. She expected him to be searching through her mind at that very moment, picking away at whatever had kept her mind off their lessons on the various applications of telekinetic abilities. Yet, she did not feel his presence in her mind. She took his hand and rose to her feet.

The pair strode into the garden. It had been curated and maintained by one of the various members of his staff and was full of all manner of rare and unique horticultural specimens. Gravel paths wound through the garden, all meeting under the shade of a pale yellow namana tree at the heart of the garden. They walked up one such path. She dragged her feet in the gravel. They approached the tree together, hand in hand. There was a sorrowful longing in his eyes as he breathed in the sweet smell of the white blossoms littered about the drooping branches. She pulled her hand free of his.

"Oh." He said mournfully, turning to look at her

"I'm not a little girl anymore." She said "I don't need to hold your hand to prevent me from wandering off."

Her tone was insolent. He thought about punishing her, but the thought floated away on the gentle southerly breeze. The Sith nodded to himself and clasped his hands together, interlocking his fingers and joining his thumbs at their tips.

"Yes, of course." He said, turning his saddened eyes to the tree once again.

The following silence stung them both. He could not sit in it any longer.

"I suppose I owe you some kind of explanation." He began.

"Don't. I don't want to hear another lie." She said, stopping him.

"One day, you will understand." He replied quietly.

She turned away from him and looked out over the garden. Waves of anger flooded her, but she once again failed to maintain purchase over the emotion. She was conflicted. Thran did not require an invasive scan of her thoughts to sense how conflicted she was. He maintained his poise as he stepped up next to her.

“Don’t.” she replied, stopping her. “I’m tired of trying to figure out your lies. What is real, what is not. You’re cruel, then you’re kind. It’s like being at the end of an emotional whip. You run your little schemes. But I will not let you play your games with the past. Just let it be.”

“You have no idea what you’re talking about.” He replied.

“Oh, wanna bet?” she said, resting her hand on her hip. “You poke and you prod me, looking for weakness. You think I am not good enough. You think I don’t belong here. You wish I had never been born.”

The fetters of restraint in his temperament were instantly broken. His eyes narrowed on her.

“You have missed it again. You disappoint me.” He said, nearly growling.

“There it is. Perfect. Just perfect. I’m a disappointment.” She said, fighting back the tears in her eyes.

He shook his head. The anger in the pint-sized girl was bubbling up, but again she could not settle on the purity of that emotion. She clawed for it, begging to hold on to the anger.

“You know that’s not how I meant it.” He sighed, “Look, out there. What do you see?”

The pair stood in silence as the fluttering wings of the butterfly moved from blossom to blossom, collecting nectar at each stop. She thought about how simple the insect’s life was. The girl held back tears in her eyes.

“It’s just a bug.” She said.

“Come now...You’re better than that. Look beyond that.” Thran said, with slight disappointment.

“I don’t know.” Jasmine replied, tapping her foot.

“You’re looking at the expression of the Force. It is right here, among all this life. That butterfly started its life as a caterpillar, feeding on the plants in this very garden. It crawls, from branch to branch, filling itself on leaves, developing and growing. It gains its vital life energy by consuming life, from the plants who in turn got it from the soil. And the soil gained its nutrients from the lives that came before. All that grows here is connected, intertwined, and in a constant battle.” He said leaning forward slightly.

“It is beautiful, that butterfly. It has specialized in such a way that only it can get to the sweet nectar in all of these flowers. But watch it...So concerned is it with getting the nectar that does not see the lizard sitting on the next leaf over.”

He finished speaking and the brilliant blue and yellow wings of the butterfly snapped shut between the jaws of a small reptile. The miniscule green garden anole was faster than the butterfly. The insect was caught before it had a chance to react. Its sticky tongue grabbed the insect in and impossibly firm grip. It choked down the scaly wings in several chomps, before licking its lips and carrying on.

“Nature seems so cruel.” He said coldly. “The lizard is stronger, faster, better than the butterfly. That bug never had a chance. Neither did the other lizards. That little guy has beaten all the other lizards in the garden. There are no other insects here. Oh, yes, he thinks he has won. He has a belly full. But,

look at him now, so full is his belly with his prize that he has slowed down. I bet he is proud of himself too. What a shame...He does not see the snake creeping up behind him." The Sith pointed out the small brown serpent with an extended finger.

The snake struck out from a nearby branch, capturing the fattened anole in his mouth. It quickly coiled around the smaller reptile, crushing its bones under the tightening grip. Its jaws pried open, as it took in its meal.

"Another lesson. The snake was more cunning than the lizard. Did you see it there before? Waiting. It waited for the lizard to eat first before it attacked. It knew the anole would be slow. It was clever and patient." He said turning his eyes upward.

"But, I am afraid not even that will be enough to save the snake." He mused.

Above them, a Bard's Shrike circled in the air. The black and white bird keyed in on the snake, locking its eyes directly on the target. In a flash, the bird dove from the sky. A single talon strike caught the snake, but could not grab hold. Quickly taking back to the air, the shrike rolled over redirecting its momentum effortlessly. It quickly gained some altitude and dove again at the snake. It found purchase on the second strike. Lifting the long slender body of the serpent into the air, where it was utterly helpless.

"I bet you think it ends here. The bird was best. It wins. Perhaps, for now." He said, shrugging.

"But what about when the bird returns home to its nest? If this were Bakura, he'd be wise to nest at the top of the tallest tree so that the cratsch doesn't climb and steal him while he sleeps. Tenacious little creatures, the cratsch. They are so persistent, eventually they would find that nest. Surely, the bird does not win that day." The Sith said.

"Where are you taking this riddle?" the girl replied.

"To the end. From little insect all the way up to huge beasts, like Spud, nature acts upon them and there is cruelty in their actions. Look at where you and I stand. There are no birds or snakes or lizards we have to worry about. Even Spud...the puppy, he is not dangerous to us... But yet there are still hazards we must guard against. What do we do to combat it? To be a Sith is to be aware of the nature of life. We practice, we prepare, we study. We endure the cruelty of it and use that to fuel us. We listen to the Dark Side, it will arm us better than anything we can muster ourselves. We do this all so that we may be free. So that we may be safe." He paused, shaking his head for a moment.

The girl looked at him for a moment, slightly confused. She parsed through his words, dissecting the allegory he had painted before her. She still wasn't certain she understood what he was trying to say to her.

"I don't take joy in teaching you the lessons you need. Truth be told, I barely have the heart for it. But, if pushing you beyond where you will take yourself will keep you safe...Then I will do what I must and I will face the consequences as they come. I will say it again. You will understand someday. But perhaps today is not that day." He said, turning back to the namana tree

Jasmine wanted to reply, she wanted to fight him on his rationalization of how he treated her at times. She didn't believe his words. The audacity it took to stand next to her and tell her that he mocked and

chided her to protect her went beyond her understanding. She knew better than to challenge him in this moment.

“When the exhaustion of today’s lessons has gone away, think again on this one.” He said. “Now, go inside. Freshen up. I will be in after sunset. One last thing, Rayne is coming to join us. She’ll be here in three days.”

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“He demanded I come here and he isn’t here? When did he leave?” the Firrerreo woman asked, eyes paling with a cold blue frustration.

“Three days ago.” Emily replied, turning her eyes back to the reports scattered across her desk.

“Where did he say he was going?” Rayne pressed

Emily shut her eyes, expelling a deep breath through her nose. The line of questioning, while likely innocuous conjured an old nagging feeling of ineptness in monitoring her husband. She had for years attempted to keep a constant knowledge of his comings and goings, but even her razor mind was lost keeping up with his various schemes and motivations. Emily had learned her lesson and had abandoned all hope of containing him. She likened him to a wild creature, it was best for both of them to not keep him imprisoned under an overbearing watch.

“Does it matter? Wherever he said he was going is certainly not where he is. He said he was going somewhere, he went somewhere.” Emily replied, calmly opening her eyes and placing one of the datapads in front of her upon a stack of completed reviews.

“Doesn’t it bother you that he lies to you?” Rayne said, using the leverage of her words as if twisting a knife in a wound.

Emily took another deep breath and placed her palms flat on the dark durasteel desk. Her eyes met the chilling ice in Rayne’s eyes. Though she was seething with anger, the businesswoman employed restraint in formulating her response. The words did sting, but to let that show would give the Witch ammunition to use against her in a future battle. With Thran gone, the peace between the two was tenuous at best. Were it not for the certain displeasure her husband would show knowing that she’d accosted his dear friend, Emily would give serious consideration to climbing over the desk and ramming her holdout blaster into the Firrerreo’s mouth. Discretion, however, truly is the better part of valor. The sorceress would see it coming and Emily could still get the upper hand.

“Rayne, I appreciate your concerns for my feelings in regard to my husband’s actions.” She cleared her throat slightly. “However, you, of all people, should know what it is like to be lied to by Thran.” Their eyes locked for a moment, sharing a deeper message than words could ever convey. “You know how he is. You know the doubt it plants in your mind. You also know how particular he is about his secrets. He doesn’t like me meddling in his affairs, unless he specifically instructs me to attend to a particular matter. I respect his wishes. While I appreciate you coming to me with your concerns over his well-being, I can assure you that whatever my beloved husband is up to is his business and his business

alone." The blonde woman winced and slightly bit her lower lip. "As much as it pains me to say it, I do not own him. I do not control him. He is free to come and go as he pleases. Even though I, too, am sworn to carry the weight of burden of worry over him. And what a burden that is."

"Indeed." Rayne chirped.

"Do you not agree it would be easier to share that weight? Instead of tearing each other down, we can share in our worry. Or better yet, we can share our faith that he will be home soon, triumphant in whatever it was that required his attention. Don't you think he would like it if we tried to get along?" Emily asked.

"He's more likely to find that suspicious." Rayne replied.

Emily let out a slight chuckle. "Yes, that is probably true. If it will ease your mind, I can reach out to some of his contacts and see if they have any details regarding his whereabouts." She said, opening a window to broker a truce between them.

"That would be appreciated." The Sith woman said sternly.

"I'll see what we can dig up." Emily said, depressing the call button on her intercom device with her manicured finger. "Saris. Toss out a net and see if we can find any hits on where Mr. Kast has run off to. Start with Angelo, Sooni, Dev Bardoona, Siinek, and Lieutenant Tosten. Try to hook Quish too. He may have chartered a flight."

"Yes, Ma'am." Came back a tinny but strong feminine voice.

"Oh, and Saris...Have Maarel confirm our reservations for dinner at Alani and confirm out seating for the ballet..." Emily looked up to Rayne, lowering her voice slightly. "It would be delightful if you joined Jasmine and I for dinner, she would love to see you. Think of it as a girl's night out. Interested?"

Thoughts danced through Rayne's head. Emily had turned her demands into a pleasant invitation to be a part of their world. In a moment, Rayne realized that should she accept the offer, there would inevitably be a time where she was seated at a stolen desk being pressed for information about where Thran was. She realized that she would also not have answers. She paused. Thran had recently suggested that his daughter could use another strong woman in her life. He wanted that influence to be someone he could trust. He would have articulated that to Emily at some point. Jasmine may yet have information regarding where Thran had wandered off to. Emily would have known that was possible too, but being unable to squeeze the teen for anything useful, was offering to make peace with Rayne to access whatever secrets the girl had. The tactic was positively diabolical. It was clear to her now. Thran had deliberately called her here only to disappear just as she had arrived. He did not want to be found, putting them all together would keep them pointing fingers at each other while he was away. Rayne nodded slightly to herself, in acceptance of the invite, affirmation that she was now curious and must get to the bottom of whatever Thran was up to.

Emily smiled. "And have her add one to our party for the evening."

"It will be done, Ma'am." The strict sounding voice returned.

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“For the last time, I don’t know where in the kriffin’ Hell he went. Can’t I just enjoy this...fancy tomato goop or whatever...without a damn inquisition?” Jasmine said loudly.

“Please Jasmine, the volume.” Emily said, politely as she could muster.

Rayne smiled silently to herself. Thran’s daughter had every ounce of fire that he did. She had an utter dislike for authority, especially the authority claim was made without the power to enforce it. Rayne scanned the girl. Her hair had been dyed black, recently. It still held the inky shine of a brand-new coloring. Smudges of discolored skin at her hairline told Rayne she’d done it recently, certainly without permission from her father, and likely in the refresher just before they went out for the evening. It reminded her of something Thran always said; Consequences are a later problem. She wore a slim black dress that fit her well, but sleeves she wore over her forearms felt out of place. Rayne noted that she was quite beautiful. The girl was impulsive, but for all the traits she shared with her father; his defiance, his eyes, his slight Bakuran accent, she lacked his ability to deceive. The girl was practicing, but there was not even an attempt at deception here.

“I’m sorry, I know I said I would drop it. I’m sure if he’d told you, you would share with us. Isn’t that right, Rayne?” Emily said, looking to the Sith for backup.

“I’m sure she would.” Rayne affirmed.

Jasmine took a scoop of the so-called-food on the plate, the slightly gelatinous substance smelled of the sweetness of crème and exotic spices. The girl tipped over her spoon, letting it fall to the plate below. The globule bounced and shook, as it disturbed the deliberately random swoop of green puree at the base of the plate. After poking at it several times, the girl mustered the courage to taste it. She watched as Rayne, drew the spoon from her mouth.

Jasmine focused her mind on the sensations rolling around in Rayne mind, hoping to divine if the experience would be an enjoyable one. Before she could assess what the Firrerreo was thinking, flavor rolled over her tongue. First, the warmth of honey, backed by the smokey hints of the toasted spice, finished with the sweetness of crème.

“Jas, try it with the puree.” Rayne said, her piercing blue eyes issuing a warning to stay out of others minds.

“Mmmm.” Emily purred, trying another spoonful.

Jasmine took Rayne’s advice, in regards to both not prying in to the Sith’s mind and adding a bit of the green puree to her spoon. She pulled the metal through her lips. The puree added another layer to the dish, finishing it with a gentle acidity that cleared the mouth of the richness and sweetness of the crème. She kept quiet and enjoyed the next three courses, while the two women talked, rotating through tasting, wine, commenting and repeating. The normality of the whole event struck her deep in her core. Her life had not afforded her the opportunity to enjoy the little things, the pleasantries of life. As a child, she didn’t have these luxuries. Even when he wasn’t present, her father was still teaching her lessons. This one, perhaps, might be one she would remember.



“Emily, thank you for inviting me. It has been a long time since I’ve had such a lovely meal.” Rayne said, lifting her glass of sparkling apricot wine.

“I am glad you came. I must admit, I’ve been in dreadful need of some good company since we came to Seraph. This planet has so much potential, but the work that must be done to actualize that, leaves my social life wanting. It has been a pleasure having you. You’re always welcome in our home.” Emily replied, tipping her glass to ring it against Rayne’s

Dinner concluded with a fruit consommé, chilled, with floated greens that reminded Rayne of an expensive tea. Emily explained the happenings of the business, the tenuous political climate of the planet, and discussed Thran’s expressed interest in starting a designer clothing line. The food was good enough to make up for Emily’s incessant need to fill moments of silence with some kind of conversation. Both Rayne and Jasmine indulged her, commenting and questioning where it seemed appropriate.

Rayne stood up from the table as they finished. Her gown was silver. It matched her hair. In the right light, the sequins spat back points of light. She shined like a pearl. The Firrerreo woman possessed a remarkable, savage beauty. She was graceful and tall, standing several inches over both Jasmine and Emily. Jasmine noticed the men in the restaurant trying to avoid being caught looking by their wives and girlfriends. The girl smiled to herself; in that moment she saw the same poise she’d seen in her father. Their relationship made sense, in a way. They were kindred spirits; savage, beautiful, misjudged.

“Well, shall we go to the ballet?” Rayne asked, a hint of flushness showing in her cheeks.

“That sounds like a great idea. We’ll get a bottle of champagne for the road!” Emily said, gleefully.

The woman ordered a bottle from the maître-d and paid for the meal. Jasmine looked at Emily, who wore a deep navy and charcoal colored dress. Jasmine realized just how beautiful she was too. She was strong, tenacious, cunning. Even for a non-force user, she could keep up with her father. She understood her just a little bit better. She caught her reflection in the polished metal cladding on the building. She was there, among two goddesses, and didn’t feel out of place. The girl held the thought to herself for a moment moment as they made their way to the street, climbing into hired luxury landspeeder.

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The speeder came to a stop at the foot of the towering building. Rayne looked up towards the pinnacle of the building. The trail of lights vanished into the night sky, obscured several thousand feet up by a growing blanket of would-be rainclouds.

The flushness of her cheeks was a clear indication that the evening was full of revelry and drinking. She was a bit surprised by how much fun she had had. Emily Coral had been a gracious hostess and the hostess’ penchant for life’s fineries mirrored her own. Their dinner had been an exquisite multi-course experience and the following ballet performance was indeed quite the spectacle. The dances were pale, ghostly like beings with mothlike wings that allowed them to extend the dance vertically.

The three women made their way in through the lobby of the highrise, accompanied by six security officers. The interior of the building was as ornate as the exterior. It was clad in fine black marble, with fine golden planters holding rare plants strewn between deep crimson lounge chairs. The height of the ceiling must have been more than fifty feet. Long cables hung from above, in varying lengths, dangling simple but elegant lighting fixtures.

Rayne was not surprised that the building which Thran called home would be so opulent. It lacked the gaudiness she had anticipated, but after a night out with Emily, she assumed that the refined style of this building was a result of her suggestion.

They stepped into the turbolift together. The doors shut as soon as the last of their party was aboard. One of the security agents placed a card against a lock reader. No button was depressed, but all of the floor indicators turned red. As the lift was cast into motion, the chief security officer touched his finger to his ear, cocking his head slightly as he listened to the message coming through the communication device. He pulled his collar close to his mouth, issuing a coded response to the provided information.

“Ma’am” he began turning to Emily “A vessel touched down on the landing pad seven minutes ago and departed four minutes later. It was the *Sultana Reed*. Mister Kast will be waiting for us. Sinnek has informed me that he seems to be in a bit of a...strange mood.”

She smiled slightly. “Oh...Well, that certainly is a pleasant surprise.”

“He planned this whole thing, ya know. He probably ran off to Big Daddy’s with uncle Angelo...while we had to go to the stupid ballet.” Jasmine scoffed.

“Oh, stop it.” Emily said. “

Rayne closed her eyes for a minute, sorting through the champagne fog in her brain to see if she could divine the temperature of the other Sith’s mood. She never felt the need to walk on eggshells with him, even when he was angry, but being prepared for what volume he would be speaking was a measured precaution. She didn’t feel rage at all, whatever had pulled the Sith away from joining them

Thirty seconds later the doors of the lift opened with a brief magnetic hiss. The doors revealed the Kast home. The design was refined, polished, and spoke of wealth and class. Rayne expected nothing less from Thran. The women and the security detail entered the penthouse. Their attached guards scattered to their various posts, leaving the women standing alone.

“Come, let’s get some more wine.” Emily said, grabbing Rayne’s hand. “You too, Jas. Let’s get you some ice cream! Ooh! And we’ll show Rayne the house.”

She practically dragged the others through the penthouse to the kitchen. They laughed and chatted as they weaved through the halls and rooms, along Emily’s shortened tour of the home. They could all hear him in the kitchen before they entered. Jasmine took a deep breath. She was sure her father would start a fight about her dying her hair. She was readying herself. They entered the room.

His eyes lightened up. Emily ran to him and threw her arms around him. He embraced her and gave her a light kiss. He turned to the other two.

“How was the ballet?” he said.

“Wonderful.” Rayne said. “Good to see you.”

“Yes, I’m sure.” He said.

Jasmine remained silent, hoping to avoid his attention. The things he would get upset about seemed so petty to her. She thought him petty enough to comment on her changing her hair. His eyes leveled on her.

“Wow. Nice hair.” He said, stepping away from his wife. “I have something for all of you.”

“Oh?” all three said in harmony.

He moved towards Rayne and Jasmine. He reached into the sash around his waist. He passed a small datachip to the Firrerreo. Then he turned to Jasmine. From his belt he drew two lightsabers. They were caked with mud and a speckling of blood. He patted Jasmine on her head.

“These are meant to remind why you must pay attention during your lessons. Rayne has come to give you an alternate perspective. When the student is not learning, perhaps it is the teacher that is at fault.” He said.

Rayne smiled and nodded graciously.

“And what about my gift?” Emily said.

Thran turned back to her.

“I think it’s better that I give that to you later...Come now, tell me all about the ballet.” He said.

Jasmine looked down at the lightsabers in her hands. Her eyes darted back and forth across them. They had seen use. Their emitters were scored with carbon and the hilts were worn in certain places. The realization that these weapons had been tools of Jedi somewhere struck her. Her mind flooded with questions. She looked up at Rayne, who looked glanced quickly at the lightsabers, and had clearly come to the same conclusion.

Both of them had so many questions for him. The time would come where they could ask, but that time was not now.