



THE TWINS

General Zentru'la

The Burning Building

Lilina covered her mouth to protect herself from the smoke. She could feel the heat of the raging fires on her face. Cries of panic and anguish echoed across the city, punctuated by the percussive blasts of mortar fire. Port Kasiya smelled of smoke and death. Lilina adjusted her robes in the uncomfortable heat. The sky was ominously dark.

The smoke did not obscure her vision, Miraluka eyes, hidden behind a blindfold, required no physical light. But the Mortis attack was a corruption within The Force. The auras she usually sensed so clearly were distorted and angry.

A shell hit a nearby house, exploding into a fiery ball of crimson plasma. Rubble crashed to the ground and dust plumed into the air. Lilina ran over to the fallen building. Bits of duracrete wall remained, but the roof had fallen in. A fire had started in the corner. There were five people trapped inside, she could sense their life presence through The Force.

One hand gripping her lightsaber, she extended her other towards the building. More artillery shells soared overhead, but she narrowed her focus on the rubble. One by one, she picked up bits of broken duracrete, levitating them to one side. After she strained to move a piece of the fallen wall the size of a small speeder, an elderly human emerged from the wreckage, his legs barely able to hold himself up.

Lilina dashed towards him as he fell, catching his fall.

“Thank you... kind lady,” he wheezed, then coughed violently.

“Do not thank me,” said Lilina serenely. “Thank The Force. I am a conduit for its will.” She waved a hand over his body and returned him to his feet. He had regained the strength to stand.

“Well then... er... thank The Force?”

Lilina had already gone back to moving wreckage. “Get to the city centre. It’s safest there.” She felt the life energy of one of the survivors extinguish. There was not long to save the others.

“Can I help?” asked the old man. “There’s another family in there.”

“No,” Lilina continued working. “Arroyo isn’t safe, get to the city centre.” She could feel it, she had almost reached another survivor. “Please, just go.” The old man finally recognised his dismissal, allowing Lilina to focus. She had stopped delicately placing the rubble to one side and began tossing it away. There was no time to lose. She was nearly there. She could hear crying.

A small girl jumped up from out of the wreckage and ran across the rubble, screaming, and wrapping Lilina in a hug. “My mamma! She...” and the girl broke down, crying into Lilina’s robes. Her clothes were tattered and torn. She must have been barely ten years old. Lilina placed a hand on her head, trying to comfort her. She could feel small horns beginning their growth - the girl was a Zabrak. There was no life in the area of the building she had emerged.

Lilina felt a disturbance in The Force, a seething vortex of Dark Side energy. It was approaching fast. She let go of the girl. “Get behind me.”

She saw the glowing crimson eyes first. The raptor charged toward them. Its giant teeth and savage hooked claws dripped with blood. The girl screamed behind her. Lilina lifted the beast off the ground with The Force and threw it backwards. Its back was lined with a ridge of red crystals. It snarled as it scraped across the duracrete road, let out a high-pitched call to the sky, and then charged at Lilina again.

She couldn’t just keep throwing it back. Zentru’la always told her staying in one place on the battlefield was a bad idea. She had to kill this thing, but there was no way of keeping it at a distance and dealing damage. With no blaster weapons, she just had to let it get close. Just close enough...

The raptor hit an invisible wall head-first. Lilina’s Force Barrier held as firm as duracrete against the raptor’s charge. As it fell to the ground in front of her, Lilina activated her white lightsaber, and stabbed it into the raptor’s head, killing it instantly.

She turned around, and the girl was still behind her, sobbing silently. There was no more life left in the building. Such a terrible loss of life created a wound within The Force. But she couldn’t stop to dwell on that. The city needed her

help, especially this young Zabrak orphan. Lilina crouched down in front of her, putting a hand on her shoulder. “My name is Lilina. I’m going to keep you safe.”

She sniffed. “I’m Koshi. Thank you for saving me Miss Lilina.”

“There might be more raptors coming. We need to get you to a safe place.”

“Nuh-uh!” Koshi shook her head. “I want to find my sister Roshi! She looks just like me!”

If there was any life in the building, Lilina would have been able to sense it. “Your sister..”

“She was staying at her friend’s house!” There was a pause, and Koshi’s lower lip tremored. “She’s... she’s all I have left. I have to find her.”

“We’ll find her, Koshi. Just stay with me, and stay safe.”

The Restoration Troopers

They had barely moved from the raptor corpse when Lilina’s commlink beeped in her ear. There was only one person that could be. “Lilina,” said the General’s booming voice. “Port Kasiya is falling. You need to get out of there. I’m sending Rohla to your position.”

She already knew that. The outskirts of the city had already become completely overrun by Mortis forces. There seemed little sign of any Taldryan rally. But she couldn’t leave now. It wasn’t the Jedi way. “People are suffering here, General. Mortis are targetting civilians. I will not leave them here to die, they need my help.”

“We need yo-”

“And they need me here, General.”

“Negative, Lilina. It’s too dangerous.”

She looked to Koshi, who seemed to know that Lilina was being called away. “When you hired me, you knew that I would uphold the Jedi code. We are the guardians of peace in the galaxy. We protect the weak. My place is here, protecting the people of Port Kasiya”

“What is your strategy?”

The General changing the subject to talk strategy was a sign he had accepted her decision to stay. “I’m directing everyone to the city centre. It’s the safest place for them.”

“Acknowledged. I’ll have Rohla stand-by in the *Harbinger* for evac when you’re ready.”

“Thank you, General.” Lilina cut the call. “Take me to your sister, Koshi.”

“Okay!” The girl said, in higher spirits now she knew Lilina was staying with her. Artillery fire continued to rain down on Port Kasiya. Blaster fire rang in the distance. There was fighting on every corner. Houses began to turn into larger apartment blocks as Koshi led Lilina towards her sister, in the direction of the heavily fortified city centre.

Destruction was everywhere. The bodies of Taldryan soldiers, crystalline Mor-tis mutants, and civilians - men, women and children - littered the streets. Half the buildings had fallen or were on fire. The artillery fire began to reach a crescendo as the heat rose to sweltering levels on the streets of Kasiya. The city had never seen such violence. It was a crime against The Force.

“Stop, Koshi.” Lilina stopped next to a man in white armour, laying face down. Blood streamed from his neck and onto the city floor. A blaster rifle lay a short distance from him. “He’s still alive.” Lilina crouched over him and rolled him onto his back. His eyes were closed, and his breathing was shallow.

As she ran a hand over his neck, the blood flow stopped. Lilina reached into her robes, pulled out a needle, and injected it into his neck. The man woke up with a gasp and immediately began hyperventilating. “Calm down,” said Lilina softly. “Deep breaths.”

He began to slow his breathing and looked up at Lilina. “Am I dead? I must be dead.”

“You’ve lost a lot of blood, but you’ll be fine,” said Lilina.

“It was one of those raptors. We tried to run. It got all of my men.”

“How are you feeling now?”

“Strangely okay,” said the soldier. “Are you a medic?”

“Of a sort.” Lilina pulled him back to his feet and put the blaster rifle back into his hand. “Go to the city centre. You’re needed there.”

Koshi screamed in the distance. Lilina whirled around. Four soldiers approached in black armour, carrying rifles. Red crystals protruded from their heads and they walked in a shamble. Lilina had faced their kind before. Restoration Troopers.

They opened fire. Lilina projected a barrier over Koshi, blocking the blaster bolts. They dissipated harmlessly against her shield as Koshi covered her face from the bright lights and then ran towards Lilina. She activated her double-bladed lightsaber and jumped between Koshi and the Restoration Troopers. Crimson plasma ricocheted off the pure white blades, as Lilina’s twin blades worked together to cover her.

She advanced towards the troopers, whirling her saber staff like a shield in front of her, repelling blaster fire back at the assailants. The shots didn’t kill - their armour was too thick for that - but having their own fire returned at them caused their accuracy to waver.

Lilina took one hand off her weapon and swiped it to the side. One of the troopers flew into its allies and sent them crashing to the floor. Before they could get back to their feet, Lilina swiped her hand back the other way, and their weapons were launched to the side, out of arms reach. She was in Kasiya to protect, not to kill. Killing was not the Jedi way.

“You want to leave this city and stop fighting.”

“We want to leave this city and stop fighting.”

The Restoration Troopers retreated and Lilina turned to Koshi.

She wasn’t there.

o.1 The Sister

“KOSHI!”

Lilina dashed around the corner to the neighbouring street. There were scattered bodies, weapons, and broken bits of building, not no sign of a child.

“KOSHI!”

She went back to the last place she saw her, calling again.

“WHERE ARE YOU KOSHI?”

It was no use. She knelt where she had last seen the girl, reading the ripples of The Force to try to pick up a trail. The actions of the Children of Mortis had thrown a shadow over Port Kasiya. Following its echo was like trying to isolate an individual voice in a sports crowd. She couldn't sense Koshi through the disturbances in The Force, but she felt a compelling force pulling her towards the City Centre.

She followed the pull of the Force into the city centre, where a jungle of modern high-rise glass buildings stretched into the sky, yet one loomed over them all: the Taldryan Tower, with the Consul's panoramic office on the 72nd and top floor.

Somewhere nearby there was a sound on the edge of hearing, the voice of a young girl almost lost in the droning noise of battle. Lilina approached the noise. Words began to form. “Help! Somebody help!”

She sprinted towards the girl's voice. A family speeder was overturned, smoke billowing from the engine. Koshi lay beside it, her leg stuck underneath its weight. She locked eyes with Lilina. “Please help me! I'm stuck and the monsters are coming.”

“Hold still.” Lilina extended an arm and lifted the speeder, carrying it safely away from her. She dropped it to the ground and ran towards Koshi, kneeling beside her.

“I can walk,” she said through clenched teeth.

Lilina ran a hand over her leg. “Everything seems fine. Take these. It will null the pain.” She gave the child a pill of bacta, and after she took the pill, Lilina wrapped her in a light hug. “I'm glad you're okay Koshi.”

She giggled a playful, childish giggle then stepped back. “I'm Roshi!”

“You.. you're what?”

"I'm Koshi's twin! Where is she?"

"We were together, but we got separated. She's strong like you. She'll be okay."

"We have to find her." Lilina opened her mouth to speak. "She would do the same for me!"

"She would. Let's check the City Centre first!" Lilina had no idea where Koshi might have disappeared to. She could have been captured or killed. But the Tower Plaza would be the most fortified place in the city. If she could lead Roshi there, then at least she would be protected and then Lilina could look for the other twin.

Lilina was not the only one who had had the idea of going to The Tower Plaza. The large courtyard around Port Kasiya's tallest building was crammed with people of all races and sizes. "Stay with me." Lilina gripped Roshi's hand tightly and led her through the crowd towards the entrance.

The Tower

Two guards in bulky, heavy armour holding large riot shields stood before the large transparisteel doors to the tower. Lilina approached them, with Roshi beside her. "Please, open up the doors."

The guards slammed their riot shields into the ground. Lilina did not move. "This is a government building. It's reserved for government and military officials. No civilians."

"You haven't seen what things are like out there," said Lilina serenely. "Mortis are overrunning the city. It's not safe out here."

"We've been given strict orders. No civilians in the Taldryan Tower. Please, step away from the tower."

Roshi tugged at her robes and looked up at her. "What are we going to do?"

She had no idea how long they could stay out there. The Taldryan resistance in Arroyo had fallen. The longer they waited out there, in the open, the higher the risk of them becoming penned in the courtyard. Another round of artillery thundered against neighbouring buildings as if to punctuate her thoughts. There

was no time to be arguing with guards.

She waved a hand in front of them. "You can let them into the tower."

"We can let them into the tower."

Lilina felt another tug at her robes. "But I don't want to leave Koshi out there!"

"Once we're all inside, I'll go out and find Koshi."

The guards stood aside and the doors opened to a cavernous atrium with pristine glass furniture that looked as if it had barely been used - a symbol of wealth kept immaculately tidy while the rest of Port Kasiya burned. Lilina and Koshi entered first, and the civilians behind nervously followed into the Taldryan Headquarters. Those working in the atrium looked outraged at the rabble entering the building.

A small shape moved in a blur of motion beneath a table nearby.

"KOSHI!"

"ROSHI!"

The twins wrapped in a tight embrace. The crowd in the atrium stopped and watched. It was a moment of pure elation, pure child-like innocence, enough to make all the problems in the world go away. Even the staff looked moved. Lilina could barely remember the warmth of her own family. She had been taken from them at an early age to train as a Jedi. But seeing the twins hugged stirred emotions that had lived longer than her memories. As a Jedi, a protector of the weak, it was an important reminder of the importance of family.

Then an explosion ruined everything. The building shook but stayed firm. Koshi fell to the floor and was picked up by her sister. It was a stark reminder of something even more important - they were still in a war zone and complacency was death.

"Rohla, come in for evac from the top floor of Taldryan Tower. Bring the Spear with you. We have a lot of civilians."

"Copy Lilina, ETA 8 minutes. 12 for the Spear. See you there."

The Consul's Office

"The top level is the Consul's office." A middle-aged woman with a long hooked nose walked up to Lilina, pointing a finger at her. "Whoever you are, you can't just barge in!"

"And who's going to stop us?" said a large, burly man getting in between them.

"Enough, there's no need for more violence," said Lilina calmly, but the woman had already retreated behind a desk as the elevator arrived on the ground floor with a loud ping.

Lilina, Koshi and Roshi were among the first batch of thirty to ride the elevator to the top floor of Taldryan Tower. Security was light around the Consul's office. Clearly, Appius was hoping the guard would do their job.

From the summit of Taldryan Tower Lilina was a panoramic view of the city. The city that burned. The destruction spread in every direction.

"I have a bad feeling about this. Everyone get behind me." The elevator beeped loudly again, but rather than the thirty civilians Lilina was expecting, there were two cloaked figures. They exited the elevator and activated red lightsabers.

"Thank you, foolish Jedi, for leading us to the Consul's office. What secrets does your leader hold? We'll find out when you're all dead."

Lilina activated both blades of her lightsaber, advancing toward the Sith. She just had to keep them as far away from the civilians as possible. "You will never harm these people."

She spun her lightsaber blades in a whirlwind of white plasma in front of her, preventing the Sith from striking.

There was a disturbance in The Force. She whirled around, where a gunship hovered outside the panoramic window. Lilina threw up a barrier to protect herself and ran to the civilians, but she was not quick enough.

The gunship's turbolaser swept across the office to a shower of broken glass and screams that were cut short.

Koshi and Roshi lay wrapped in each other's arms. Time crawled to a standstill. Barely half the civilians survived the barrage. She shouldn't. It wasn't the Jedi

way. But yet... as she looked at Koshi and Roshi... the innocent lives cut short... it seemed the only way.

She roared and gave in to her primal emotions. Lightning streamed from her fingertips. The gunship exploded into fire and shrapnel. The Dark Side coursed through her. She didn't know how to control it. She didn't need to control it. She only needed to bear justice on those that killed the twins she had worked so hard to protect.

She slashed with her lightsaber at anything that moved. She sprayed lightning. The Dark Side had taken over.

She dropped to her knees. Everyone was dead. Her breath was drawn out in rags.

The rage had subsided, and the darkness had lifted. She was faced with the terrifying, stark reality. She had killed people. Some of them were innocent.

Tears streamed from her eyes. She threw her lightsaber to the side. "I'm sorry," she sobbed over the lifeless bodies of the twins. "I couldn't protect you."

Another ship appeared outside the consul's office, a sleek, black shuttle. It was the *Harbinger*. "It's Rohla, what the hell happened in there?" The *Harbinger* hovered outside the broken window for a moment, the boarding ramp open. "Lilina, get on board, we can't stay here forever."

Lilina couldn't move. She stayed huddled over the bodies. She couldn't even look at her own hands. There was blood on them. Innocent blood.

"Lilina!" Rohla ran down the boarding ramp and jumped the gap into Appius' office. The ship stayed right where it was. Rohla lifted Lilina to her feet and grabbed her by the shoulders. "What happened Lily?"

"I wasn- I wasn't strong enough."

"Ya did all ya could. I know you did" She could smell the stench of alcohol on Rohla's breath. But at that time, all she needed was a shoulder to lean on.

"You - you don't understand. I - I killed them. I killed all of them. I used the Dark Side." Rohla simply held Lilina close, her hands on the back of Lilina's head. "All I wanted was to protect them."

“You’re only one woman Lily.”

“I should be more than that.”

“Let’s just get back aboard, have a drink or five and you’ll start feelin’ better.”

“I don’t drink Rohla... I am a Jedi.”

“Yeah and I’m a pilot. But it helps, Lily. Trust me... I know these things.” She took Lilina by the hand and led her back aboard the *Harbinger*. “Let’s just get out of here.”