

The Darkness Within

4 1 A B Y – S e l e n : T e k p a n t l i

Sivall fiddled with her hands, fingers intertwining with each other then letting go. There was a pit in her stomach, and not one caused by the movement of the ship. No, there was something else, something deep in her telling her that coming here was a bad idea. Sanguine eyes flicked up from her hands to watch Ruka pace the length of the area they were sitting. Did he feel it too? The sense of *wrongness* that hung in the air.

The Chiss woman inched closer to the Human Force sensitive beside her, finding comfort that Alex was here with her as well. He had seemed worried, but proud, to hear that she had been placed on the mission to Tekpantli as well. He didn't voice his concerns, but she felt it all the same. She was stronger now. Stronger than when he found her, but not strong enough. Yet.

And he was right to be worried because things went bad very quickly.

It felt like her stomach dropped into the floor as the ship pitched suddenly to one side causing several people in the LAATI to skid and stumble. Then the screaming started. The man in the cockpit began to panic and yell about something coming out of the water towards the ship. Sivall felt bile rise in her throat, a voice in the back of her head screaming, the bells of danger chiming loudly in her skull. Something was wrong. Very wrong. The reactions of Ruka and the pretty Zeltron woman (which she now knew was her consul) only solidified that.

Amongst the chaos, the sound of a lightsaber igniting reached her ears and pulled her attention.

Stepping out of the shadows near Ruka came a cloaked figure, holding a limp loth cat from the tail. The Chiss woman sucked in a sharp breath, her entire body tensing. The blood in her veins turned to ice and she forced her eyes away from the lifeless animal to look in the eyes of the figure.

They were her eyes.

The medic frantically reached out her hand, her breath quickening, panic quickly setting in for her as well. Her fingers only grasped air. Alex wasn't there anymore. Quickly her head turned to the spot where Alexandyr once sat, only to find him gone. He was gone. Everyone was gone. Her stomach turned.

"A-Alex!!" She screamed, the bile rising further. He was gone. *He was gone.*

Help. Help. Help.

"For Bogan's sake, please shut the kark up."

Sivall's breath hitched in her chest, and she felt her gaze drag back to the cloaked figure surrounded in shadow. Blood-stained fingers with long, black nails pulled the hood off and Sivall was left staring at a twisted reflection of herself. Three thick scars dragged across the face of not-her, starting at the hairline above her right eye continuing across her eye and nose, then across her cheek. It didn't take

someone specialized in medicine to realize the markings were from claws. The scars' ragged and puffy edges were a testament to that. She didn't need her other self to tell her where they came from, just like she didn't need to look at the face of the deceased loth cat to know who it was. Her heart already knew.

"You're not real," Siv whispered.

"Ohohoho, well no duh, *ebeucot*,"

"You're not real, you're not real, you're not real..." The Chiss kept repeating the words over and over, forcing herself to stand on her shaky legs. She wanted, no needed, to run... but her legs didn't answer when her body commanded them to move. Instead, her other self stepped closer to her, dropping Fia to the floor. The scene around her shifted, the passenger cabin of the LAATI changing to become the courtyard of the estate she once called home.

Wake up, she kept telling herself, wake up. Alex needs you. The clan needs you!

As if sensing her thoughts, Not-Sivall smirked a wild and crazed smirk. Murderous intent glistened in not-her's eyes, the sanguine hues interrupted here and there by golden cracks. Not-Sivall's hand grabbed Siv's chin, nasty, blood crusted nails breaking her skin causing blood to run down her neck. The panic in her rose more, choking her, closing off her airways. For something that wasn't real, *it felt so real.*

"S... S-si..... Siv-" A voice broke through the haze of her panic. A voice that didn't belong to her twisted double. The chiss woman closed her eyes tight, forcing herself to focus on it. Her head hurt, every synapse in her brain screaming at the effort.

"Sivall... Siv-Sivall... Sivall! STOP KARKING HITTING ME, I'M TRYING TO SAVE YOU."

With a gasp the young woman's eyes snapped open. She was graced with the bright light of reality, and the smell of salt and burning fuel hit her nose like a sensory wall. Her eyes strained and took a few heartbeats to adjust to the burning sun before Ruka's face came into view. The Mirialan was holding her by the wrists, both floating in the ocean, and there was annoyance clear on his face but also worry. The medic blinked hard a few times, as if blinking sleep from her eyes, before looking back to her Proconsul.

"What...?" she started, but Ruka just shook his head.

"I have no clue. Can you get yourself to the shore, ay? I need to go back for the others."

Sivall just nodded numbly and watched as Ruka swam off in the direction of someone else. Turning towards the shores of Tekpantli Siv paddled her way to dry land. What had just happened? She felt exhausted, like she had just physically and mentally run a marathon. Now standing on the shore, she looked out over the ocean at the wreckage of all the Arconian ships in different stages of sinking and burning. Her jaw set and she forced herself to take a deep breath.

There were going to be a lot of injuries to treat and they hadn't even started fighting.

"Ktah...." She breathed out, sticking a thumbnail between her teeth.