

Untold Stories-April 2023
"The Unexpected Return"
By Shadow Palpatine Nighthunter

Caldiren Homestead
Nagai Homeworld
40 ABY

Flickering light danced through an open window on the waving grass outside a humble abode bathed in shadow and moonlight. A strong breeze rippled through the long strands, sending disturbed fireflies into a flutter of blinking, blue bioluminescence. Two of the insects swooped and revolved around each other before racing to the windowsill of another open window where only dim lamplight lit up another room. There, they watched inquisitively as a tall Nagai male entered what was a bedroom with two half-Sephi younglings on his heels.

"Daaaad! Can't we stay up a bit longer?," the eldest twin asked pleadingly. Tomorrow is the weekend. We don't have training in the morning."

"I know that, but we're all going down into the city tomorrow morning, Deus," his father replied as he pulled back the covers of a bottom bunk bed. "Your mother and I thought we could spend half a day there before we come back and get ready for our camping trip in two days. Besides, we can stop buy that tea and pastry shop you and Art enjoy."

"We can't say no to that, Deus," the younger twin remarked as he climbed the ladder to his bed. "Could we go to that park with the cherry trees too?"

"Of course. We can make time for that," his father assured him as he stepped up on the lower bed to help tuck the boy in. "Right now, you both get your rest. We need to be on our way down the mountain by six."

"That early, and Sorin's going to be crying the whole way down," protested in annoyance. "Can't we just go with you and mom stay behind with him?"

"We're all going together, Deus," the boy's father said firmly. "You're going to have to learn to tolerate Sorin when he's having a fit. You were a baby yourself once, you know."

“Well, fiiiiine.” The brown-haired boy quickly climbed into bed, the Nagai tucking him in and handing him his nerf plushie to sleep with. Deus accepted it grudgingly, still not happy about the trip tomorrow with his little brother. “Doesn’t mean I’m going to like it.”

“I don’t expect you to, kiddo,” the Nagai assured with a pat to his son’s shoulder just as an anooba slunk into the room. “Just get your rest. Loki will make sure to keep the monsters away.”

“DaaAAaad!”

The Nagai chuckled before he kissed both of his sons on the forehead. “Goodnight, you two. Pleasant dreams.”

Confident that the twins were under the watchful eye of the furry guardian, the ancient warrior closed the bedroom door behind him as he left, and made his way back to the small livingroom bathed in shadows and light from the crackling fireplace. A smile graced his face as his gaze landed on his wife dozing off on the couch with their youngest son cradled in her arms. The soft, motherly image before him almost made the husband forget that he was married to a woman who was once the Empress of a powerful Empire. It was only the sight of a scar on her arm that reminded him of the horrendous torture the half-Sephi woman had endured from her kidnappers. It was that scar that reminded him of his vow to never let his wife go through such a thing again.

“I tucked the boys in bed,” he finally spoke as he sat down next to his beloved, pulling her into his arms carefully so as not to disturb the infant. “You should head to bed too, Ro.”

A soft sigh brought the lullaby to an end, the woman tucking her head beneath her husband’s chin as she relaxed into him. “I could sleep like this instead.”

Her mate chuckled softly. “I think you’d sleep better in my arms in bed than on this couch. Besides, we should put Sorin to bed while he’s out.”

“I suppose you’re right, Sanguis...” A small smile crept upon her lips. “I’m just so comfy like this.”

“I know. Come on. Let’s just head to the bedroom. Here, I’ll take Sorin so you can go get ready for bed.”

“Alright. Thank you, hun,” she replied with a kiss on his chin before she relinquished their son into his arms. “You’re the best.”

Sanguis smiled as he watched his wife get up and go into their bedroom. Despite all the heartaches and trials he and his wife endured, the ancient Sith always found himself feeling truly lucky to have Rowan Night as his beloved for life. Though they clashed every now and then when his dear assassin decided to be stubborn at times, the Nagai always found himself amused by the woman's witty comebacks or exasperated groans of defeat. No matter who won an argument, he always awarded her with a few affectionate kisses. Next thing they knew, they were back to teasing one another or just cuddling on the couch locked in love's embrace showering each other with kisses when the kids were occupied.

She drives me crazy for someone generally quiet and reserved, but gosh am I so lucky.

Shaking his head in amusement, Sanguis turned his attention to the little one resting peacefully in his arms. Like him, the infant was born with the typical Nagai skin tone, and he shared the pointed ears of both his parents. The only thing that really made his son stand out was the unusual red color of his irises. The only conclusion they had for this trait was that somehow Sanguis' affliction had passed onto their innocent boy. An affliction Sanguis had hoped would die with him one day.

Little Sorin cooed softly in his sleep, pulling back Sanguis from the first few days of worry and frustration that followed Sorin's birth. They still didn't know the extent of what had passed on to their child, and there was a chance the eye color was the only result from the passed on mutation. Whatever the case, both he and his wife had agreed that they would still raise their son to the best of their ability as well as give him the same love given to the twins.

The Nagai huffed as he caressed his son's forehead with his thumb. He still had his worries. Would the mutation be stronger since his son was naturally born with it, or would it be overpowered by Shadow's genetics? If stronger, would teaching him how to control the bloodlust from an early age allow the boy to have better control when he was older, or would he struggle more to control it no matter what guidance and patience his parents gave him? Would they one day have to put their own son down because he was more monster than man?

"Sanguis, don't..."

The warrior's furrowed brow relaxed at the sound of his wife's voice. He looked up at the woman standing in the doorway to their bedroom now dressed in her sleepwear with a brush in her hand. The look of concern on her face drove his worries to the recesses of his mind, the Nagai offering a half-hearted smile in response. "I know. I'm sorry. I don't worry so much about Artorias. I shouldn't doubt Sorin."

The half-Sephi smiled as well, hiding her own fears for their son for both their sakes and his. “Go ahead and put him in his crib. You look like you could use some rest. Especially after your hunting trip with the twins.”

“Yeah. Didn’t like it that we had to travel further away this time,” Sanguis remarked as he stood up slowly with son in arm before following his wife into the bedroom. “I think we need to reign in Eqkaesyrr for a bit. He’s scaring off the wildlife further away from the mountains down river.”

“I’m not surprised. I can go looking for him tomorrow when we get back from the city. I was worried his presence here would cause a problem. He’s an invasive apex predator. I wouldn’t be surprised if some ecologists from the city begin to notice.”

“Ah, speaking of the city, I promised the twins we’d make a stop for some treats,” the Nagain quickly remarked as he placed their dormant son in his crib and tucked him in. “I could take Sorin and the twins while you meet up with Horus’ contact and pick up the supplies. That way we kill some birds with one stone, you get a break from the kids for a bit, and then we could meet up at the park and relax.”

“Sanguis, I already had a break from the twins when you took them on the trip,” Shadow reminded as she sat down at the vanity and began brushing her hair. “I can handle all three of them for a bit.”

“I know you can. I just thought...”

“I know, hun.” His wife looked back at his reflection in the mirror, her gaze meeting his own. “I appreciate it. Really. Truth be told, I’d like to spend more time with the twins. They’ve been going out a lot with you on hikes, training runs, hunts, and so on. Don’t forget one of the reasons why I faked my death as Empress.”

“I haven’t forgotten,” the ancient one assured her as he came up from behind and began to massage her shoulders. “I have been keeping the twins busy with training especially. Maybe after the camping trip with the boys, we should all go on vacation somewhere secluded and just enjoy each other’s company.”

“As long as it doesn’t end up like last time,” the pale woman said with a sigh. “I’m not sure anywhere is secluded enough from my enemies.”

“Last time happened because we were just at the wrong place at the wrong time,” Sanguis reminded. “We’ll be more careful this time.”

“We better be.” Shadow closed her eyes, allowing her husband to chase away the tension in her shoulders with his cold fingers. “As always, your hands are magic, my love.”

“Only for you,” he responded with an affectionate kiss on the top of her head. “You really do need a break, though. Motherhood is beginning to weigh down on you.”

“I can’t argue with that, but it is worth it. Besides, I raised the twins on my own for a bit.”

“You had your estranged sister helping you out with the twins while Tarsus was gone, didn’t you?”

“Yes, but even she was gone often doing things for the Clan,” Shadow quickly pointed out. “Alara did her best, but even she had things to attend to. Plus, her absence from duty would’ve drawn more attention to the twins and me.”

His wife twisted around in her seat to face him. “Being Empress took more out of me than raising the kids ever did, my love. And I enjoy it. Especially now when I’m not having to worry so much about serving an Empire. I can actually enjoy time with my kids that I never had before.”

“Well, if that’s how you feel, then I dare not argue with it. I just want you to know I’m more than happy to take them off your hands when you need a little time to yourself,” the Nagai remarked while caressing her porcelain cheek with his thumb. “I want to do my part too as your husband, and as their father.”

“And you do, my love,” the half-Sephi assured him, the woman rising from the cushioned seat before giving him an affectionate kiss on his nose. “Trust me. I’d let you know if you weren’t. I still have the rolling pin handy.”

“Oh dear. A rolling pin. I’m so scared. What’s an ancient, bloodsucking Sith like me ever going to do?” Sanguis asked mockingly before he swept his beloved off her feet. “I should punish you for such a silly threat.”

Shadow squirmed in his grasp, already knowing what doom was upon her as she tried to escape. However, her efforts were too late, and she found herself quickly held down on their bed facing a merciless onslaught of tickling. “Nooo! Sanguis! You fiend! Mercy!”

“Mercy?” The taller Sith firmly, but lovingly held Shadow’s chin up, forcing their eyes to meet. “Did the former Empress...just ask for mercy?”

“Oh, it’s not like it’s the first time that I have,” she answered with slight amusement as she tried to catch her breath. “You and your constant torture of tickles.”

“Torture? Not at all,” he countered as he kissed his beloved wife passionately. “Just another way to show you my love.”

Shadow returned his kiss, wrapping her arms around the back of his neck. “Mhm. Whatever you say, you devil.”

“You love this devil,” Sanguis reminded her as he laid down next to her, pulling the Sith woman into his arms until she was on top of him. “And I love this beautiful angel.”

“Oh, there you go again.” Shadow chuckled slightly before she rested her head on his chest, listening to the rhythmic beating of his heart. “I love you.”

“And I love you, Ro. Always.”

Early morning found the family of five arriving in the city below the mountainside. Just as they planned, Shadow had taken the children with her to the tea and pastry shop while Sanguis made his way to the store to pick up supplies that he had ordered. The old Nagai shopkeeper of the family-owned trading post was tending to a huddled bunch of porgs in the exotics corner of his store when the ancient Sith arrived. It always amused Sanguis that the trading post he had visited with his father so many times during his childhood was still standing. The building itself had been remodeled and improved upon several times over the ages to withstand the erosion of time and age. Yet, it still had some of the old-wooden paneling and ornate windows from Sanguis’ ancient past.

Just proves that old things can still thrive in the modern age. I would know.

Chuckling to himself with amusement, he went to the counter, grabbing a small stick and striking the table gong. The old Nagai perked up, his eyes brightening with recognition when he saw who it was. “Oh, Mr. Caldiren! As always, you’re here early. I have your order ready for you in the back room. Uh, er, feel free to browse around a bit. Maybe your sons would like a porg? I just got an order of them yesterday along with some vulptices my son delivered.”

“I don’t know how I feel about the porgs, but maybe the vulptices. Loki tends to spend time with the twins while our other two beasts run wild. My wife could use a new companion to keep her and the baby company.”

“Then please, feel free to take a gander while I get your things. Is your speeder outside?”

“Yes, but don’t worry about that. I’ll load it up,” Sanguis stated as he went to look at the four vulptices held in a large cage with padding. “Also, any messages? Rowan and I were hoping to hear from our friend.”

“Ah, lemme check. I’ll be right back.”

While the elder went to retrieve the goods, Sanguis studied the vulpine creatures carefully. Loki had always been his wife’s companion until recently when she began having the anooba follow them whenever they wandered off into the woods to play. The half-Sephi could use a new companion, although she wouldn’t be cuddling with a vulptix anytime soon. Not with the crystalline bristles covering its body.

“All the same, it wouldn’t hurt to have something with keen senses around when Loki’s not around,” Sanguis commented to himself as he carefully extended a finger into the cage for one of the vulptices to sniff. The animal extended its neck to investigate, taking a few whiffs of the Nagai before nipping at his finger.

Sanguis only chuckled. “Feisty one, huh? I think my wife would like-”

“Mr. Caldiren!”

The old man’s cry interrupted the Sith, drawing his attention to shopkeeper urgently waving a datapad in the air. “What is it, Nairo?”

“Urgent message, for you! Says it must be read right away! Aya, how could I have been so foolish not to check for messages as soon as I got here. It came in last night.”

Alarm immediately filled Sanguis’ heart as he immediately went and took the datapad from the shopkeeper. On the screen before him was the word ‘urgent’ flashing in red letters. He tapped the screen, revealing the message meant for him and his wife. His eyes skimmed over it, and before the shopkeeper could ask what was wrong, Sanguis dropped the datapad on the floor and sprinted out the door.

Bewildered by Sanguis’ actions, the shopkeeper picked up the datapad and read what had sent the ancient one hauling out the door:

**Bogies incoming.
They have found you.
Get out while you can.**

Find me at old rendezvous point.

I will wait for you.

Stay Safe.

The Bigman

They had just left the tea and pastry shop when Shadow first felt a prickling sensation in the back of her mind. Her golden gaze quickly scanned the surrounding area as she reached into the Force, feeling for auras and emotions of ill intent. It didn't take long for her to pinpoint several presences in the area. One was in a tower on the opposite side of the street. A few others were waiting in one alleyway down the street a ways to their left. The rest were scattered in the crowd trying to blend in, but definitely watching her.

"Artorias. Deus. Back inside," she ordered as she reopened the door to the shop. "Don't ask questions. Just do as you're told."

The twins did as their mother told them, sensing the urgency in her voice. Shadow backed into the shop, scanning the street and glancing up at the tower where she was sure a sniper hid. She gestured for the boys to go further into the shop, quickly placing Sorin in Artorias' arms.

"Boys, things are about to get really bad here. I need you both to take care of each other and to take care of Sorin."

"Is it the mercenaries again, mom?" Artorias asked, worry and concern evident in his wide eyes.

"I think so. Which means I'm going to have to deal with them on my own. I can't protect you if you stay with me. There's a back door to the shop. As soon as I walk out of that door, you make a run for it and don't look back. Get as far away from here as possible. If you can, find your father. Otherwise, leave the city, alright?"

"But mom--"

"No buts, Deus. Just do as I ask. I'll come find you. I promise."

Before her sons could try to stop her, Shadow abruptly went to the door. Both of her hands hovered over the now exposed lightsaber hilts clipped to her belt beneath her long-jacket. The equite closed her eyes, calming her mind as she drew upon the Force. The world seemed to quiet down around her to where she could only hear her own heart beat loudly in her chest. The power of the dark side whispered to her in response, slowly taking control. Her fingers twitched in anticipation, eager to grasp her blades and bring both terror and death upon her enemies. The old

desire for action was loosened from its prison created by a time of peace. The Empress of old, the bringer of death and horror, was back.

Aided by the Force, the Sith quickly spun away from a blaster bolt meant for her head. The patrons of the shop and other Nagai outside began screaming with fear as they sought cover or distance away from the danger. More blaster bolts lit up the air, the familiar and rapid *pew pew* of rifles joined by the shouting of orders from several voices. The sound of two lightsabers coming to life joined the chaotic cacophony, pressing the assailants with urgency to take down their target. Their efforts were in vain, for the wolf was tearing through her prey with ease. Shadow's white and red blades seared through flesh and bone, severing limbs and heads from their owners while slicing or stabbing through chests and guts of those foolish to take on the huntress. The yelps and screams of the fallen brought a wicked grin to the woman's face as did their intoxicating fear.

While the chaos ensued, however, the twins did exactly as their mother had instructed them. As soon as the first bolt had been fired, Deus led Artorias quickly through the back door ahead of the other patrons that sought escape. Fearing that they might get trampled, the older twin headed for a smaller alley off to the side behind the shop, knowing that the stampeding crowd would stick to the larger backalley that led to a more open street. Thankfully, his much quicker brother was able to keep up despite carrying their younger brother that was now crying for his mother.

"If he keeps this up, they may find us!" Artorias remarked as they found a spot to huddle down in. "Come on, Sorin. Not now. Please, stop."

"He's scared, Arty. What do you expect?" Deus quickly took the infant in his arms and began to rock him back and forth. "Besides, I don't think they are coming after us. They'll be too busy trying to get mom."

"Are you sure?"

"Yep...well, maybe."

"Maybe?"

"Look, I don't know, okay? Just, mom probably has all the attention on her, and hopefully dad will get to her before we can even find him. I'm sure he somehow knows. We need to just get away from here and hide somewhere safe until it's over."

"But...what if something happens to them and...we end up all alone?"

“Stoppit, Art! Don’t say that!” Deus glared at his twin, doing his best to look tough despite sharing the same fear. “They’ll be okay! They’re Sith, okay? They’re tough! They’ll be alright, got it?”

Artorias clamped his mouth shut, not willing to question his brother again. Through the Force, he could sense Deus barely keeping his own fear contained despite his domineering and unwavering tone. After all, they had both lost their real father before, which had created a new fear of losing their mother and step-dad. He knew Deus was displaying strength for both their sakes, and that he himself needed to stay strong for both their sakes and Sorin’s as well.

“Alright, Deus. I believe you. Let’s just keep going then. Let me take the lead. Sorin does better with you, anyways.”

Deus nodded, the boy silently relieved to see his twin taking charge while he himself was trying to keep it together. “Okay. Lead on, Art. I’ll be right behind you.”

Fear and hate filled Sanguis’ heart the minute he heard and saw people running past him and screaming in fear. The warning had come too late, and now his wife and kids were in danger while he was several streets away. With each passing minute came the chance of losing his family that he had sworn to protect.

Thankfully, he had taken the airspeeder, and was closing the distance rapidly between him and Shadow rapidly. It wasn’t long before he could hear the blaster fire and see the flashes of bolts through the air. One flash of light drew his attention to a tower where a sniper was popping shots into an alleyway most likely trying to keep his wife pinned while the surviving adventures moved in.

