

The Dark Side of the Moon

Her left hand stayed pinned down against the skin, the right pulling the suture tight and closing the flesh of the wound. The nurse at her side snipped the line, and began tying it up as Nyx stepped back and set the suture onto the metal tray.

“Clean, bandage, move to post-op. On to the next.” She said, changing out her bloodied gloves with a clean pair, working her way down the line of trauma victims collected all throughout the city’s warzone. She had long been out of the trenches, but the bloodshed wasn’t waiting for her. Nurses, physicians, and medical androids all worked in unity up and down the halls of the trauma wing. She kept herself busy, never allowing a moment to idle in an attempt to stave off lingering thoughts in her head. The day dragged on, the controlled chaos inside the wing dwindling little by little until it could finally be called calm.

She stood behind the shoulder of a technician watching over a cluster of monitors, vitals from a number of patients all represented here, perpetually under watch. She’d been such a constant presence in the wing that most of the staff there didn’t treat her like their boss hovering over their shoulder. They just looked at her like any other attending physician. The tech at the desk had olive toned skin and slick black hair.

“Anything unusual, Christoph?”

He glanced back at her, before shaking his head and returning his gaze to the monitors. “No ma’am. Stable everywhere.”

She let out a breath, relaxing her shoulders for the first time in ages. “Good...” She glanced up, a completely separate TV above the monitor cluster. It was muted, with closed captions turned on and tuned to the news. The display was meant for cross-department messages and communication, but only a few days into the war a few technicians had the idea to keep an eye on local news, as it would give them an early warning as to what they would expect to come rolling through their doors. The 24/7 doomcycle often had faster response time than militaries, much less their own response network. She stared at it for a few moments, the anchor

shoved into the left third of the screen while wide shots of the carnage in the city played beside him.

The ticker at the bottom scrolled by with something that caught her attention, before the entire news title block changed.

“ARMISTICE SIGNED: HOSTILITIES CEASED”

Her jaw hung open for a minute. Christoph must have noticed her in the reflection, before he looked up as well.

“...Holy shit,” his head hung back in his chair. “Just like that? It’s over?”

“War... Rarely ends with a dramatic flash. Just a meeting of higher ups that never saw the turmoil, a signing of papers and a shaking of hands... Then it’s done.”

“Christ- I dunno how long you’ve been at this ma’am but I think most of us are about to cave in from exhaustion.”

“I know. We’re not through it yet but... At least the worst of it’s done for.”

“I was wondering why it got so quiet...” He remarked.

She chuckled quietly. “Happily, not from disaster.” She gently tapped her fist on the wall beside them before walking away. Her stride carried her down the hall in a straight line, her mind awash with thoughts about it being over. For how long, maybe a few years, but enough. Hopefully. She felt cold for a second, like the cold of that grim night at the start of all this. The fresh scars on her body tinged, as if they were there to complete the psychoscopic image in her head better than the images alone. She shook the thought from her mind almost physically, blinking her eyes shut and shaking her head.

It was done. The rocket fire, bombs, gunshots, explosions... Done. There might be celebration, by whichever side ‘won’, and vengeance by the scorned. All around though, there would be grief. Her commlink flashed up in the corner of her eye as she placed a call to her brother at the edge of the city.

“Nyx? What’s up? Y’hear the news?” Nix answered in only a few seconds.

“I have. Prep a jet, I want my daughter back in my arms.”

“It’ll be spun up before you get here. See you then- And hey, bring her by sometime ‘kay? I wanna squish those fluffy little cheeks of hers,” He chuckled.

She smiled, he could almost certainly hear it in her voice. “I will. See you soon.”

“Later.”

Call ended.

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She pushed open the door with her left hand, her right clutching her daughter’s hand down below.

“Welcome home little star...” She murmured with fatigue. The little white goat trotted past her, a cheery smile on her face as she looked around her home for the first time in a long while. The tiny little *tack-tack-tack* of her hooves against the wood-insert flooring was a sharper sound than the genuine pine floors of Nix’s hideaway cabin, but it was still home. Aurelia had a backpack draped over her shoulders and her plushy lashed to the shoulder, safely strapped in for whatever ride she was about to take him on. Nyx carried a few more bags, the remains of Aurelia’s things she had taken with her.

She’d been up for days again, unable to give in to the demands of sleep while her hospital continued to fill up. Now though, she could finally give in. She could pass out in the foyer right now and not feel an ounce of regret over it... Except for waking up feeling mangled from sleeping on the floor. She kept her chin up, and swore to at least make it to the couch.

Aurelia beat her to it, practically diving into the soft cushions of the furniture face first, arms and legs splayed outward. She said something, but her voice barely escaped the muffling conditions of the cushion.

Nyx laughed softly, walking down the stairs into the landing of the living room. She slid the bags from her shoulders and left them at the side of the couch, just staring at Aurelia face down on the couch, playing possum. She noticed that the hem of her shirt, the cuffs of her sleeves, and ankles of her pants were all a bit high. She chuckled, thinking that Jessica actually managed to shrink all the clothes she had with her. The moments slipped by, until she had a thought. It might not have been her clothes shrinking, she was just growing.

“Aurelia?”

The little goat quickly turned her head off of the cushion.

“C’mere, I want to try something.” She beckoned her to the doorframe leading towards their bedrooms. Aurelia clambered off the couch, curious as to what her mother had in store. Nyx fished around in her daughter’s backpack, finding precisely what she was hoping for. She took out a plastic ruler from it and withdrew a pen from her own white coat. “Stand with your back against the doorframe.”

“Why?”

“I wanna see how tall you are.”

“Okay!” She giddily agreed, hurrying over and standing perfectly straight.

Nyx laughed, setting the ruler across the top of her head and marking the doorframe’s trim with the pen. She pulled it away, and wrote the date beside it, followed by Aurelia’s name.

“How tall are you? You do it!” The little goat chirped, her tail flicking back and forth rapidly behind her.

Nyx chuckled. “I’m not growing any more silly, but you most certainly are.”

She stared up at her mother, who towered over her much like anyone else, “I wanna see though!”

She playfully rolled her eyes, giving in quickly. “Okay, okay, I will.” She said, standing herself against the door frame and pressing the ruler over the top of her own head, making sure she kept it level. She carefully kept it in place, spinning around beneath and marking the line, signing her name as well. “Happy?”

“Mhmm!” Aurelia nodded quickly.

She looked at her with that ever present small smile she always wore in her daughter’s presence. She gently tousled Aurelia’s hair before walking back over to the couch, sliding her jacket off her shoulders and tossing it over the back before laying down across it, back against the pillows stashed in the corner of the armrest and couchback. Her eyes felt heavy, but not yet. Not quite yet, she thought. “Have you been keeping up with your reading Auri?”

“Yes ma’am!” She said, taking out a book from her backpack. It was *The Little Prince*, a fitting book for a girl like her, a French novella about a little six year old prince and his journey across the stars. The book was in its original language, her reading ability still best in her native tongue. She quickly clambered up on top of her mother, laying across her as Nyx did the couch. They both nestled in, Nyx against the couch, and Aurelia on top of her in her arms as she read aloud to her.

It was an advanced book for a girl her age, full of prose and flowery language. It still had illustrations, but the story itself was told mostly through text. She had already made it a large portion of the way through the book, and her oration skills were exemplary as well. Time slipped past, the little goat enraptured with the story. Her voice, unbeknownst to her, was Nyx’s most perfect lullaby. The soft sounds of her little star’s speech draping over her better than any blanket ever could.

“[‘...My star will just be one of the stars, for you. And so you will love to watch... all the stars in the heavens. They will all-’]” She read on, having made it through a few of the chapters, before she felt her mother’s hand slip a bit. She looked back, just enough to see that Nyx had fallen asleep, her eyes closed and her chest rising and falling gently. Aurelia smiled, slipping the bookmark into the hardcover book and setting it on the ground beside them, before reaching up to the top of the couch and clawing at the blanket draped over the back, dragging it over both of them. She made her last little nestling motion, closing her eyes and whispering. “[Goodnight Mama... Sleep tight don’t let the bug beds bite...]”