

STAR WARS

Baby It's Cold Outside
A most precious gift

By Vyr (Morgan B.Sorenn, 6463)

Kiast Imperial palace

Turel's eyes seemed to pass through the sixtieth report that day before he rubbed his temples with his index finger and thumb. He felt an overwhelming pressure on his shoulders, pinning him to the comfortable and fancy chair he was sitting in. His room, gracefully granted by Her Majesty the Empress of Vatal, was far too lavish and aristocratic for his tastes. Crystal glasses and bottles lined the bar next to the farthest wall, a fireplace slowly burning a piece of firewood. The overhead lights seemed dimmer than they usually were. He put the datapad on the small caff table next to his chair, exhaled a deep breath, and rubbed the sleepiness out of his eyes.

His thoughts wandered beyond the cozy interior, into the cold, dark of space. He and his people...they were fighting a war out there, a war he knew in his heart they might not win. Even with all their allies and friends at their side, hope seemed just out of reach. But he had to be the anchor for everyone. He had to be the adamant rebel, standing in enemy fire while everyone else fell around him. The first one to rise and the last to fall, and yet he did not have his own anchor by his side. She was somewhere in that cold and dark of space, fighting the very same war because she wanted to; because she needed to. For all their sakes.

The High Councillor reached for the newest addition to his stack of medals, trinkets and other formal junk he really didn't need. His Councillor's ring, plated with electrum and silver, gleamed in his fingers, a prominent symbol of Odan-Urr stamped across its face. Another waste of resources, if you asked him, but he understood the morale behind it and allowed for such trivialities. They had to keep a semblance of cohesion, of order, and of control. Minor acts went a long way to boosting morale. Seeing him with a Councillor's ring, shaking hands and saluting, made all the difference to the lowest privates in their newly recruited army of rebels.

He set the ring on his middle finger, right next to the one that bonded him to his life partner, somewhere parsecs away. He spun it around his finger, reminiscing about the night they were paired first; her tender touch on his skin and the kisses they shared. He smiled a sad smile as it all came back to the present in a cruel circle. The High Councillor stood up, grabbed

his glass of whiskey and walked over to the balcony door. It opened with a hiss and let in the chilly winter air. He inhaled deeply, sensing the night's frost against his cheek.

The Jedi looked across the massive courtyard, into the Empress' chambers, staring at nothing in particular, but thinking of everything. Suddenly the Empress, Katlani, walked into view, dressed in a bathrobe from head to toe. Turel didn't even notice her until she tossed it aside, revealing her nude body for him to see. His cheeks flushed as red as a Zeltron pop-pepper as he averted his gaze and stepped back inside his room with all haste, hoping she hadn't noticed. His heart skipped with surprise and embarrassment before he pushed it all out of his mind and tried to remember one of the many meditative lessons Vorsal had taught him. He exhaled and sat back into his chair. Before long he was meditating — as best he could — and pushing the image of Katlani's pale, curvy, perfect, naked — *Stop it!*

Irritation gnawed at him and he stood up again. He paced across the room and finally stopped next to the balcony door. *Just a peek*, he thought, and strained his neck so he could see outside without opening the glass portal. She was still there, still dressing. She had her nightgown on and looked decent and presentable, so Turel exhaled and relaxed. The door opened and made him sigh and grumble. If he wasn't that obvious, she might not have noticed him, but now he was sure she had.

"Might as well read the reports again," he mumbled to himself and slumped into the chair again. As he reached for the datapad he felt something...familiar, but elusive. It wasn't malicious in nature, no, it was kind, calm, and tender. Like a candle light in darkness. He paused to feel it more but the familiar *beep* of the door chime interrupted. "Come in," he said nonchalantly, knowing who it was outside the door.

Socorro, his loyal protector and fan girl, jumped in with all the chirpiness of a hyperactive manka cat. Raava, whom he had left with Socorro for a while, jumped onto the giantess' shoulder and mimicked her pose as best she could. "My Lord High Councillor, do you know what today is?"

"Um...your...birthday?" he asked quizzically.

Both she and Raava seemed to give him disapproving looks. “No. My birthday is in the summer. I thought you knew this?!” For a mere moment she felt insulted and hurt, but it passed as soon as she remembered what she wanted to tell him. “It’s Life Day!”

Turel’s eyebrows jumped as a smile crossed his lips. “Yeah, I guess it is.”

“So...Raava and I have a bit of a present for you.” She stood next to the door in a *“let me present you with”* pose. She didn’t have to. Turel felt his heart jump in his chest. He knew he felt that same sensation somewhere just as soon as he saw his wife in the doorway. It was the very same sensation that he felt when she was deliberately hiding, but she could never hide from him, not with their connection. She was wrapped in her traditional Korahaii garments, red, blue and green cloth covering her from head to toe. She smiled at him and it melted his soul.

“My apologies, dear. Socorro insisted on these games.” The commando-woman winked at her and put Raava on the floor next to her feet.

“Well...” she started, squeezing behind Vorsal and heading through the door. “Youhavealottotalkaboutbyeeeee!” she bit her lip, rushed through the door and closed it behind her, leaving the couple alone.

“Wh-Why are you home?” Turel asked, bewildered but glad that she was.

“Well, it *is* Life Day. I thought you would like for us to spend it together,” she said as she leaned in to give him a kiss. “And I have a gift for you.” She smiled and bid him closer. Finally, Turel noticed what he had missed before: he saw movement under Vorsal’s robes, and heard gurgling sounds. She unwrapped her cloak and showed him what it was she was carrying: a young, beautiful Togruta baby slept in the Neti’s arms, perfectly content and at peace.

If Turel could have melted completely, he would have. “What...is this?” he asked, never moving his gaze from that perfect red nose. The baby’s skin was scarlet with triangular, white markings across the cheeks. She had a twirling pattern on her forehead, and light blue and white montras. Around her neck a necklace hung loosely.

“I am sorry. I had to bring her with me. Her mother...” The Neti stopped as the words hung in her throat. “Her mother asked me to look after her.”

“She’s perfect. Look at her cheeks! I could squeeze them.” The baby finally opened her eyes, woken up by the shuffling. She looked at Vorsa first and gurgled something as bubbles formed on her lips. Her eyes turned as she stared at Turel... and she smiled.

Vorsa smiled at him as only she knew how. “Her name is Nayru.”

“Nayru. What a pretty name.” Turel clasped his fingers over his mouth.

“Would you like to hold her?” Vorsa asked, and without his say-so, gave him the child to hold. It felt natural, normal and altogether new all at once. The High Councillor couldn’t hold it all in: here in his arms was the very thing they were all fighting for. In his arms was the future, and he cried as she smiled at him.

Vorsa caressed the baby’s head as Turel held her tightly. “She has no one to look after her. I cannot leave her alone,” the Neti finished in a sorrowful tone. Her lips curled and she almost looked like she could cry herself.

“No, no,” Turel corrected her as the baby gripped his index finger. “She has us. We’ll keep her safe.”

“Oh, Turel.” All doubt that Turel would object vacated her mind. Feeling his strong emotions in that moment... the war, her injuries, the perils she had faced, it all felt worthwhile.

“Welcome home, Nayru,” Turel finished as he took his wife’s hand and carried their new daughter into the bedroom.