

Damn it! She was running low on credits. Again. No matter how hard she worked and now matter how well she bartered, she never seemed to have enough of the damn things to buy the necessities and niceties of life that she so cherished. Of course, some had questioned her need to buy more glitter lip gloss and lek-bands, but she needed to look good at her work. They were an investment! And they meant bigger tips from the customers at the bar.

Besides, she liked to look good for Josruvu. He always commented on how great she looked when she bought something new to wear and what good wife wouldn't want to look great for her husband? Especially after such an arduous pregnancy. Though it had been three years already, she still felt she had some of those extra pounds on her, despite spending countless hours at the gym.

If only she didn't have to spend so damn many hours tending to Tali. She guessed it came with the whole being a parent -thing, but no-one had really told her it would be quite *this* much work. Not to mention the expenses! Even with Josruvu working overtime, they hardly had the money to go out thrice a week for dinner like they used to. Paying the babysitter alone was becoming a major expense.

When was it that she could leave the little girl alone in their home? Surely she could handle herself for two or three hours, right? Maybe not. The neighbors might know and she'd hate to look like a bad parent.

Walking down the relatively busy street to pick up Tali from the charity daycare center, Feen exchanged niceties with the overbearingly positive Togruta that ran it. Smiling and nodding as she regaled the mind-numbingly dull exploits of her daughter, the Twi'lek could not comprehend how other mothers managed to be enthusiastic about such things. Did they really lose their minds when they gave birth? Did they lose all ambition for a life of their own?

Sure, she liked the kid and all, but it wasn't like it had changed too much and for a strong and independent woman like herself, she couldn't imagine playing second fiddle to even the little purple-skinned lek-bundle. "Come on now, Tali. Time to go home!" She called, hoping to distract the Togruta who chuckled at some triviality she found amusing. No doubt a toddler falling over or mumbling some innocently cute word.

The little girl came running, her lekku bobbing excitedly as she hurried with awkward steps to hug her mother's leg. Looking up with her yellow eyes, just like her father's, the innocent little thing did make her smile. "Who's a cute little girl? Yes you are! You're the cutest girl in the world, Tali! Just like your mother." She smiled, ruffling her lekku affectionately before thanking the Togruta who was giving a slightly reserved smile and then leaving.

The journey back home was long and the day's exhaustive work taking its toll on her, Feen decided to take a shortcut through a less well-respected part of town to save some time. The shadier streets and more unkempt citizens did not phase her much, streetwise as she was, but the infant following briskly in her long strides tried her best to press in closer to her mother for safety. "Come on, Tali. Ve're almost home. The quicker you walk, the faster ve'll be home." She stated to her daughter who stumbled every now and then, trying her best to keep up.

Unknown to them, a pair of eyes watched the two as they made their way through the rundown district, evaluating and weighing character at a glance. A narrow teal mouth widened to a grin as gleaming celestial orbs flickered with intrigue.

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Feen brushed her lek back behind her shoulder from where it had slipped. Leaning against the bar counter she felt the beat of the music course through her while she waited for her gal-pals to arrive. Josruvu had valiantly offered to stay at home with Tali, though in all honesty she suspected he was sound asleep already while the little lek-head was roaming around on her own.

Leaning forward to snatch the straw of her drink into her mouth and sucking in some of the sickly sweet cocktail, she figured it just went to prove that they didn't need to waste money on a babysitter. She hadn't died thus far, right? So what's the worst that could happen...?

Even as she dismissed the philosophical thoughts as too taxing on her weary mind, a Rodian male walked up to her with as wide a smile as his narrow mouth could manage, offering her a gentle bow, behind him a leathery human flashed a mostly toothless grin. Had it not been for the elegant way the Rodian was dressed, she might have found the encounter rather uncomfortable.

"Good evening, milady." The Rodian began. "I must say you look ravishing in that dress. Easily the prettiest face around."

Feen gave a dismissive chuckle, though a faint blush unmistakably flowed to her cheeks. "Oh you flatter me, but I'm already taken, boys." She said while flashing her wedding band, the oversized jewel on it worth more than three of Josruvu's monthly salaries.

"Ah, a luckier man than I will ever be!" The Rodian countered, offering a soft chuckle. "However, as unlikely as it may seem, I was not approaching you with such a proposition. But rather one of business."

The Twi'lek raised an eyebrow, intrigued by the man's words as she took another sip from her drink. "A business proposal? My, this hardly seems the place and again, I'm not that kind of girl..."

The Rodian chuckled politely, raising a hand in soft protest. "Again, not what I was after, although I cannot lie that if offered, it would be quite tempting. However, I am also happily married." He stated, flashing a bare wedding band on one of his digits, a far cry from the luxurious ring on Feen's finger.

"I happened to notice you and our daughter passing by." He continued. "And me and my associate over there..." He gestured at the leathery human who offered a grunt of acknowledgement. "Could not help but take note of your predicament."

"Predicament? Vhat predicament? Everything is quite fine." Feen replied, a bit agitated by any insinuation directed her way.

"None as such, but rather that a woman of your elegance and beauty be stuck spending her finest years tending to the needs of others. We find such a thing so wasteful, so wasteful indeed. Would you not agree that youth is the prime of one's life? And that it should be celebrated and enjoyed to its fullest before the ravages of age take their toll on us?" The Rodian waxed lyrical, his celestial eyes glittering with the promise of untold delights and experiences.

"Vell... I cannot argue with that, no. But youth is only part of the equation, is it not? You also need credits and time." Feen replied with a hint of sourness.

"Ah yes, indeed. Credits and free time. Both which a young mother as yourself must be quite short on. Such a tragedy that when we are young, we lack the funds to enjoy life and by the time we're rich

enough to indulge, our bodies have already begun to rot.” He sighed, shaking his head. The leathery man behind him grunted, rolling his eyes at the show his partner was putting on but saying nothing.

“To that end, my dear, I come to you with a proposal.” The Rodian stated, his voice snapping back to a more focused and clear tone. “I am willing to offer you a chance to do exactly what you have dreamed of and provide you not only with the funds, but the time to enjoy that most precious gift given to us. Life.”

It would have been a grave understatement to say she was interested. The man was speaking to all her ambitions and filling her head with all sorts of wonderful vistas that she would wish to explore, if only it weren't for her crippling lack of creds and the little lek-head she had to tend to.

“If you are willing, we will take your daughter off your hands and raise her among our own. In exchange, you will gain a princely... nay, princessly sum of ten thousand credits.” The man offered with a court bow. “We assure you, no harm will come to her and once she is of age, we will provide her with steady employment among our other workers.”

The offer, though laced with honey until it was dripping, still had an aftertaste of vinegar and Feen shifted her weight back ever so slightly upon hearing it. “You're... vinting to buy, my daughter?” She furrowed her brow. “Vhy?”

The Rodian's smile did not flinch, not even for a second, as he replied unabated. “I represent a very rich man, a philanthropist of sorts, who unfortunately prefers to remain anonymous. He has tasked me to spread his philosophy to those who seem most receptive of it, like a missionary if you will, and offer them his blessing. I could see that you were quite agreeing to our ideals and I wished to extend to you this offer.”

“He is a very kind and altruistic soul and seeks to make life better for those who see things as he does. You can rest assured that no harm will come to your daughter and she will be raised well and to a steady job.”

The story felt a bit too good to be true, but then again, Feen had never been one to look a gift bantha in the mouth. “Thank you.” She stated with a nod. “I am honored that you would choose me for such an honor. However, I can't make such a decision right now, however tempting, so I hope you won't mind if I ponder about it?”

“Ah, not at all!” The male beamed. “Please, if you decide to take up on our offer, here is our card.” He said as he slipped a pristine business card over the counter, along with a credit chip. “Though I may be married, it doesn't stop me from buying a ravishing woman a drink, now does it?” He flashed a smirk before sliding off the bar chair and giving a respectful bow. “Enjoy your evening, ma'am. And if you decide to make the most of what has been granted to you, you know how to find us.” He stated and pointed at the card in her hand.

The odd pair leaving, Feen was left with a peculiar business card and a cred chip in her possession. Prioritizing, she turned to the bartender and handed him the chip while ordering a replacement to her drained cocktail before inspecting the card. Plain and lacking most distinguishable features, like most fashionable business cards did, it had only a simple frequency stencil-stamped onto it along with a swirling pattern roughly in the shape of the number six turned to its side.

The bartender returned with a new glass, informing her that the chip had been charged and asking if she wanted to keep the tab open. Apparently the chip held enough credits to cover one of her notoriously liquid-heavy party nights. Sighting her friends finally arriving, Feen let the bartender keep the chip while ordering a pitcher of wine for the entourage to enjoy while slipping the card into her handbag. It promised to be an excellent night out on the town!

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It had been a hard choice, though maybe not quite as hard as it should have. The deal the men struck was good. Very good indeed. So many credits and they'd take Tali off her shoulders? One less mouth to feed and so many lovely credits. She was sure Josruvu would also understand. He worked so hard and reminisced of the old days, when they used to date and did not have to take care of an inconvenient bundle...

"Alright, I've made my decision. Give me the credits." She stated to the Rodian with her hand outstretched and expectant.

"Not so fast. We'd like to... inspect the girl." The man replied, trying his best to sound diplomatic and suppress a grinning leer.

"Fine, but don't scare her. She's a bit timid. You don't want to hear her when she screams..." She sighed and headed to get her daughter inside, soon returning with a small purple-skinned, yellow-eyed Twi'lek holding onto two of her fingers with her tiny hand. The small lek-head looked up at the two rough-looking men and squeezed her fingers harder, pressing her body against her leg as if anticipating something awry.

Gently shaking her hand free, she knelt down and turned to address her daughter.

"You're going to go away for a while with these nice men, ok Tali? Just do what they say and it will all be fine." She smiled at her daughter who nodded apprehensively in return. Turning to the men, she accepted a hefty pouch of credsticks which she slipped into her pocket and gave her daughter a kiss on the lek. "Take care of her, she's a good girl."

The men shared a look before the other nodded and reassured her of as much. "Of course, we'll take good care of her. You made a good deal, ma'am." He replied even as his companion turned around to head towards the spaceport and their ship, tugging the infant Twi'lek with a soft, yet firm, yank to come along.

As the slavers hauled her daughter away, the woman felt a sliver of guilt in her conscience. Had she really just sold her own daughter? The weight of the credit chips in her hands made her forget the moral conundrum as quickly as it had arisen, pushing it aside as she headed back to the town to buy herself something nice. She was still young, she could make another if she needed...