

(The story is self-contained, but extra nuance can be gained if the reader is familiar with the events of this previous fiction: <https://www.darkjedibrotherhood.com/competitions/12440>
As well as Twi'leki nomenclature:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PHiv1aIQ03NYvoJP9I_ybrNzl1BThnNRKVEmfzVPth0/edit?usp=sharing)

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The bustling hubbub of Naruba's bazaar district filled the air with a blanket of sound, a dozen dialects of a dozen more tongues spoken all around as merchants and clients alike tried to haggle for the best deals over untold goods. The rich scents of spices, fragrant perfumes and exotic delicacies mingled in an overbearing cacophony of sensation, the heat of the Dajorran sun bathing the whole in a festering heat that the raised tarps tried to impede.

Shuffling along the narrow walkways between the haphazard shacks, thriving in the economic shadow of colossal banking institutions that made Naruba so famous, Tali picked her way past peddlers and pickpockets that tried to relieve her of her wealth by any means. Her belt pouch laden with credits, the Twi'lek pushed past the titillating temptations of succulent Rylothian sweetmeats, elegant Coruscanti evening wear and alluring Zeltrosi lingerie that made her blush all the way up the lekku. She had to stay focused. This purchase could not wait.

Her senses thrown wide, though scrambled and distorted by the assault of sensation all around, Tali searched for a small vendor she knew lurked somewhere within the expanse of the great bazaar. The Takondanan trader, diminutive and intelligent, was the only source she knew of that could deliver her the goods she needed. With war on the horizon and the Voidbreaker set to part her moorings any day now, Tali knew she did not have time to dally.

She did not even know the trader's name, but the mysterious woman somehow was able to get her hands on Akul yarn, made from the fur of the famous predator. Tali did not even dare to speculate how that all was facilitated, but it hardly mattered. She only knew one thing that did; Akul yarn was perfect for her new line of lekwarmers.

With the Voidbreaker being prepared for long-distance patrolling, she figured there would be many an idle hour spent sitting in the void or in transit, so she might as well stock up on knitting supplies and spend her time constructively. Even if stocking her new collection aboard the ship could be seen as risky, considering what had happened to her previous stockpile on Ol'val in the wake of Whallatta's invasion.

Peering over a pair of Rodians arguing over the price of Meilooruns, she thought she spotted the elusive trader when a sharp cry for help caught her attention. Head snapping in the direction of the call, lekku dangling in the wake of her sudden motion, Tali spied a Twi'lek girl struggling to get a purse of credits back from a Neimoidian trader.

"Give them back!" the girl cried out, stomping down in anger as the merchant tried to pull away, but found himself backed against his own wares. "You cheated!"

"No! You maade this bargain fair and square! If you have a prooblem, you should not have agreed to my priice," the man retorted, struggling to keep the purse from overly eager Twi'lek's grabby hands. "No refunds!"

"Aaaanh! Von't someone help me? He trickedt me!" the child cried out, but no-one seemed to pay much attention to neither as such trade disputes were fairly common and annoying to deal with.

"Gaaaah!" the Neimoidian yelped as the young Twi'lek lashed out with her lek, trying to distract the man and snatch her purse, but the man's reflexes were faster and he swatted the lek before it could reach his face with a slap of his hand.

"Iiargh!" The Twi'lek girl fell into the sand, convulsing and holding onto her injured lek.

If she hadn't considered intervening before, the choice was made for her that instant and Tali sat off past the Rodians and in a few swift strides reached the Neimoidian who kept staring in shock at the young woman at his feet.

"You!" Tali snapped at him, "Vhat didt you do?!"

"I-I did nothing!" the man stammered, "She tried to slap me with her... her... head-tails."

Her expression turned into a snarl as she glared at the man in anger. "They're calledt, Lekku andt they're very sensitive! You couldt have causedt her brain damage, you karking voidbrain!"

Kneeling down to inspect the girl, she gently eased her hands around the purple skinned girl's back and raised her to rest against her lap. "Sshhh, it's ok. No-one vill hurt you anymore," she consoled the sobbing girl who looked disoriented and dizzy.

As she slowly recovered, the girl turned her gaze towards her and her eyes fluttered open, the sight of them striking Tali stiff with surprise. The amber sheen of the girl's irises was like looking into a mirror. For a long moment, she stared in muted silence before the girl finally recovered enough to speak up.

"Uh, lady? T-thank you, but I'm fine. Honestly. It vasn't that badt a hit," she muttered, trying to gently squirm out of her grasp and back onto her feet.

Snapped back to the moment, Tali nodded and let her go, helping her up and then dusting herself off. "Right, um, allow me to introduce myself. I'm Tali Sroka, here to help."

"I am Numa, pleasedt to meet you," the girl replied with a court bow. "Please, if you can, help me get my money back. That double-crossing Neimoidian soldt me a broken defrakulator!" Numa spat, pointing an accusing finger, and lek, at the shopkeep.

“Lies!” the man protested, emphasizing his words with a wide-handed gesture. “All my wares are of the highest quality!”

“But it’s not working!” Numa insisted, pulling out a rectangular device from her satchel and holding it up, connection wires and leaking tubing dangling beneath it. The device looked dull and lifeless, the pitted corrosion on its front panel suggesting years of neglect or very rough service.

“That is a multi-phase quantum resonator!” the Neimoidian exclaimed, waving his hands dismissively.

“But does it defrakulate?” Tali chimed in, trying to make some sense of the deal they had struck.

“Kark no!” the trader grunted with a chortle.

“Then it’s a broken defrakulator andt you owe Numa here her money back.”

“Whaat? That is not how I make deals!”

Furrowing her brow, Tali sighed and shook her head. “Fine... Come on over andt ve can talk about this. Maybe ve can reach an agreement...” she gestured towards a stall that sold carbonated tea out of hollowed out gourds. The trader hesitated for a moment before obliging, following the older Twi’lek to the counter.

Numa did not hear what they spoke as she watched by the Trader’s stall, only seeing Tali chatting with the man in short before waving her hand at him, likely to signal forgetting about the transaction entirely. The man’s resistance seemed to evaporate and when they came back, he handed over the purse and accepted the refund without a further word.

“Vow! That vas amazing!” Numa chirped as they walked away from the suddenly somehow vacant Neimoidian. “If only I couldt repay you somehow, but I don’t have much...”

“That’s quite alright,” Tali smiled as they walked, “happy to help! Though I have to admit, I’m curious as to vhat a girl you needs a frakulator for?”

Numa gave a nervous chuckle. “Vell, it isn’t for me, as such. Our family is on vacation on Selen andt the drive to our shuttle broke down. It’s an oldt model, so it uses frakulation. My mom sent me out here to buy some replacement parts while dadt is busy fixing the fuel lines.”

Tali furrowed her brow. “Your mother sent you here, alone, to buy a defrakulator? Didn’t she know this place can be dangerous?”

“Oh, she knows, I guess. But she has faith in me andt ve still hadt a day left at the hotel, so she stayedt at the pool to enjoy the vacation. I mean, she vorks so hardt to get us credits, so

she's earned it. Or so she said to me anyway..." "That was why I was haggling with the Neimoidian. He was the only one with a defrakulator that fit my budget, so I guess I'll have to go down to the scrap market and look around..."

Taken aback, Tali looked on with concern as the girl seemed oblivious as to the danger she had been put by her careless mother. "*Almost like Feen...*" she thought bitterly as she recalled her own self-centered banthaturd of a mother.

"Listen, it sounds like your family couldn't use a bit of extra help, so why not allow me to pay for that defrakulator, hmm? Then you can go back to your mother a bit quicker and you don't have to put a dent in your food budget," Tali offered.

Numa's amber eyes lit up like lightsabers, a wide smile spreading on her cheeks as her lekku perked up with excitement and joy. "You would do that? To me?! I cannot thank you enough, kind lady!" she exclaimed joyously. "Here, this way, I know where to find a defrakulator..." she beamed and led Tali towards another stall that sold more high-end spaceship parts.

A quick haggling and transaction later, Numa was the proud owner of a functional defrakulator and Tali got a crash course in the expenses of starship repair. Though her own ambitions would be severely hamstrung by the sudden deduction in credits, she still smiled at Numa as the young girl waved her goodbye and headed back towards the hotel, vanishing into the bazaar's crowded streets.

Sighing to herself, Tali pushed aside the gaping wound the part had cut into her finances and returned to her task at hand. She was looking for Akul yarn and she would find it, even if it was the last thing she did. Setting off with renewed determination and feeling good for helping another Twi'lek, she found her thoughts drifting to Feen and the childhood she never had.

"Vonder what would have come of me if I'd actually had a childhood..." she mused idly while her eyes kept scanning the stalls for the elusive merchant.

Half an hour had passed by the time she'd located the vendor, haggled a price and spent almost all of her savings on three balls of Akul yarn. Not enough to realize the ambitious plans she'd made, but enough for a prototype or four. Even if she'd have to settle for a single warmer instead of pairs.

Her mission now complete, Tali ventured back without a care in the world, letting the sights and sounds of the bazaar come to her and riding in their wonder. With a few more hours left before she had to get back to her shuttle, she dallied at the stalls and sampled some wares, even if she had no credits left to buy them with.

When she came to the stall selling Zeltrosi lingeire, she had to peek over her shoulder to make sure no-one she knew was watching, before daring to reach out and touch the soft satin lace of a perfect new bra. She shivered at the sensation, the tingle running up and down her lekku as a soft sigh slipped her lips. If only she had a few more credits...

“Why hello! Back for that second set?” a soft female voice greeted her as a Zeltron woman pushed her way past hanging garments. “Oh! My apologies, I mistook you for another Twi’lek,” she quickly apologized as she saw Tali’s surprised expression. “You two look so alike, I thought you were her!” the woman chuckled. “Please, take your time and if I may be so bold, you might also find this one quite... persuasive.” She held up a sleek black night gown, made of the softest silk Tali had seen and even putting to shame even Lucine’s notoriously scandalous nightwear.

“It looked simply divine on my previous customer...” the Zeltron woman smiled as she offered the garment to her.

Tali merely stared at the gown as a soft whimper died in her throat. Why had she been so darn generous?

“T-thank you kindly, but I was just browsing,” Tali managed, distancing herself from the alluring clothes by sheer force of will and heading away blindly just to not be tempted again. What had the merchant even been on about? Someone like her? It couldn’t have. The dress had cost a fortune, almost as much as the defrakulator. Numa was a sweet girl, she wouldn’t waste her family’s fortunes on a racey dress, right?

Tali shook the disturbingly accusatory thoughts from her mind and pressed on, so lost in her thoughts she did not hear the Neimoidian’s voice until he repeated himself for the third time.

“Heey! Lady! Would you like to buy a defrakulator?”

Turning around on her heels, Tali thought to smack the man for his petty grievances, but was genuinely surprised to see the man holding up a defrakulator to her with a sheen of credits in his eyes. “Oonly for you, oonly today. Fifteen hundred credits.”

Tali blinked, twice. “V-vhat? Vhere didt you get that?”

“Oh? Nowhere. It waas, hidden underneath some other stuff. I forgot. But it’s here now and on sale!” the merchant blabbered.

It did not take much to see he was lying, or at the very least leaving out some key details and the burning sun above had made her just irritable enough to act. “Tell me, vhere didt you get that?” she demanded, hand moving in a circular motion before her as she compelled the man to act for the second time today.

“The oother Twi’lek, the one you left with, sold it to me,” the Neimoidian stated with a blank stare, not even realizing what he’d just blurted.

Tali stared in shock. It couldn’t be true. Her family needed that part! Or did they? Troubling thoughts began to cloud her mind as she turned on her heels and headed for the hotel

district, the merchant's desperate cry for a one-time-only deal falling on deaf ears as she sprinted away with haste.

Arriving at the fenced off area of the largest hotel complex nearby, Tali gasped for air and panted hard, the burning sun above doing little to ease her distress as sweat ran in beads down her drooping lekku. Steadying herself against the fence, she peered through the bars at the pools where rows upon rows of sunbathers enjoyed the heat that she was cursing in her mind while others dived into the azure ponds for a refreshing swim.

Picking up a familiar color of lekku, she closed her eyes and let the Force flow into her exhausted muscles, the jump propelling her over the fence and inside the hotel compound. Landing softly, she regained her composure and headed towards Numa, intent on getting to the bottom of this farce. She still could not believe the girl would have lied to her. What incentive would she have had to...?

The thought, and her step, froze abruptly as she rounded a trio of sunbeds and caught sight of Numa lying next to another purple-hued Twi'lek whom she would have recognized anywhere, the young girl proudly showing off a scandalously deep-cut black nightgown to... her mother?

No, *Her* mother.

"Feen?"

Tali stood in place, confused and dumbstruck by what was taking place before her very eyes. It couldn't be, could it?

As she watched, a yellow-skinned Twi'lek man arrived by their side bearing drinks for all of them, a wide smile on his weary face as he affectionately ruffled Numa's lekku and gave her a peck on the forehead before turning to kiss his wife.

"Josruvu?"

Tears welled up in her eyes as she stared at the family of three settle down to tan, fighting the dawning realization until she could deny it no longer. She had not been the last of her name. She never had been.

When she'd learned of what her mother had done to her, that she'd sold her first born daughter into slavery just to support her lifestyle, it had broken her. The callous admission of guilt her mother had given had held no remorse, beyond perhaps not asking a higher price when she learned her daughter was gifted in ways beyond the obvious.

That moment had broken her, shattered what good she had hoped her family to be and turned to ashes any hopes for a recovered childhood. And when she'd spited her parents by renouncing the family name of Zorah and taking on a new one, she had thought she'd hit

them where it hurt. Denied them of something only she could have given them. But that was not the case.

Her mother had had a second child, another daughter, and the line of Zorah would live on in her. Another scheming, manipulative bitch out only for herself and caring nothing what it cost others. Numa was, she realized, exactly like her mother. Her mother, that... that...

“*S-schutta...*” Tali hissed bitterly, tears streaking down her cheeks in bitter anger as she could take no more and ran away.