

Hell And Consequences

A fiction written by Appius "The Mandaboo" Wight.

Caelus System
Port Kasiya
40ABY

If war was bad enough, then the aftermath could be just as grim. The 'clean up' operation, as it was so aptly called, began as soon as Clan Taldryan took up residence in the Former Governor's Tower. It overlooked the city as a beacon of strength and safety, but now? Now it led to uncertainty as the corpses were removed from the streets, infrastructure was rebuilt, and the wounded were taken care of.

"Frakk off, Taldryanite!"

"Go back to the hell you all came from!"

Even then, some still resisted. Darrio stood, arms folded, leaning against the wall in such a way that it was obvious that he was heavily armed. Of course, he was. He was Mandalorian and weapons were as much a part of who he was as the language of Mandalore itself. Yet, it seemed like *some* people didn't get the memo.

For the third time in the last couple of hours, someone attempted to attack the makeshift, outside facility designed to help the sick and injured. It was little more than a series of tents made up by the Taldryan Army Medical Corps as a way to show *goodwill* to the people of Port Kasiya, especially when said people need help after all the damage was done. The first thug was scared off pretty easily when Darrio brandished one of his Westar blasters. The Mandalorian could have sworn he saw the poor unfortunate woman wet herself as she ran post-haste in the opposite direction. The second was more to Darrio's liking, picking up a few jagged stones and throwing them at anyone in particular that looked like they were a member of Taldryan. Unfortunately, blaster beats rock in that particular game, and it was nothing that a couple of warning shots couldn't do to deter the aggressor, and after dancing on command to avoid the blaster fire, they quickly scampered away.

The third, however, had to be the Mandalorian's favourite. Forget blasters, rocks, or throwing insults. This particular Kasiyan native decided a good ol' fashioned vibroknife was the ticket to some good ol' fashioned, sweet vengeance.

It lasted all of five seconds before Darrio shot him in the knees. The thug collapsed to the ground and the Corsair seized the advantage to prove a point. The screaming intensified as the Mandalorian bent back the attacker's arm in a way that most limbs with bones shouldn't until a distinct *crack* was heard. The squeal that came afterwards was inhuman. A good thing too, since the man wasn't Human, but Shistavanen.

After putting the dog in its place, Darrio rose to his feet and turned to the crowd of onlookers that had gathered to watch the violence unfold.

The Mandalorian stepped forward and dared anyone to test his ire. "Anyone else feel like being a tough guy?"

No one did, and the crowds began to disperse, mumbling words to each other under their breath that Darrio couldn't quite hear or make out. Not that it mattered, he was doing his job, and that was all he cared about.

"Darrio," a light, yet firm voice called out to the Mandalorian. "While I do appreciate you looking out for us, do you *have* to be so... aggressive?"

She was a young Zygerrian woman with eyes that sparkled like diamonds in the night. She held herself with the posture of one in the military, upright and with a certain dignity that Darrio could not understand for the life of him. As far as the Mandalorian knew, this was all some sort of Imperial thing from a time decades prior that some people never learned to grow out of.

"I'm doing my job protecting all of your sorry hides, Violet," Darrio said in a tone that reeked of *'I don't care what you think'*. "Why do you need me here to do this, anyways? Aren't you all trained Taldryan Army soldiers? You shouldn't need my help to point a blaster and pull the trigger."

Not for the first time since Darrio was assigned under her watch, Violet let out a heavy, unfiltered sigh. "Because not every soldier relishes the opportunity to take a punt shot at civilians, Darrio. Especially the ones in the Medical Corps. We are doctors, surgeons, and first-aid specialists that want to help those who need us most. We are *not* front-line soldiers with itchy trigger fingers that thrive on the battlefield. Yes, we are trained to use a blaster, but none of us want to use our weapons unless we absolutely need to."

Darrio scoffed at the notion. "So you're a bunch of goodie-two-shoes? Got it."

"That is why you were assigned to us, to *me*. Having someone around with a bit more... combat experience... helps ensure our safety without us needing to resort to violence ourselves," the Taldryan Captain said.

"Yeah, yeah. I'm a glorified bodyguard. I get it, *Captain*. You don't need to keep checking up on me, " Darrio mumbled just loud enough for Violet's sensitive feline-like ears to pick up on. The two remained silent for a few moments when the pained whimpering of the Shistavanen gained the Captain's attention.

Violet rushed to the poor, unfortunate, Shistavanen's side and quickly scanned over his injuries. A broken arm and burnt knees wrecked by blaster fire were pretty severe for a *Human*, never mind a sentient canine.

Violet turned to face two Medical Corps officers overlooking the situation. "Jaxon! Sven! Bring a stretcher!"

The two officers brought the stretcher and carefully lifted the Shistavanen upon it, taking the injured being into one of the tents for further treatment.

Violet began to make her way back towards the tents, but stopped and faced the Mandalorian. "Come with me, Darrio."

Hesitantly, and with Port Kasiya citizens watching him nervously, Darrio relented and followed Violet into the makeshift medical facility set up on a random street of Port Kasiya. Inside was a hodgepodge of medical equipment, kept as clean as possible given the environment the medics amongst them were working in. The tent sheets themselves were white, like they aimed to mimic the spotless, chemically atmosphere of a hospital as much as they could. Only these sheets were stained with dirt from the street, along with the occasional spattering of blood from procedures Darrio could only dream of understanding.

"I still don't understand why you bother," the Mandalorian said. "I know the governess approved of this initiative, but the people don't seem to be taking too kindly to you Tal folks being here."

"I was born and raised on Kasiya," Violet said, her tone slightly harsher than she intended. "Orders or not, hated or not, I can't just stand and let the people I grew up around suffer. I've lived here all my life. I went to school a couple of districts away from here, and if I can do something to make Port Kasiya just that little bit better, then I will. I know everyone else will do the same."

They walked through what seemed like a maze of surgical equipment and bodies, both medic and patient alike until they entered a purposefully isolated part of the makeshift medical facility.

A little girl, a Twi'Lek with Amber coloured skin, no older than three or four years old, was sitting upon the durasteel table, clutching her teddy of a loth wolf like it was the only thing keeping her safe. Her big, bright Amber eyes looked up at Violet, but the unmistakable look of fear remained on her face. One of her lekku was heavily bandaged, with several other smaller wraps scattered across her limbs. The presence of bruises blemished her skin, and Darrio couldn't help but stare at her through his visor. It was a good thing he was wearing his helmet. His staring probably wouldn't have helped the young girl in the slightest.

"Hey there, sweetie. Are you OK?" Violet asked.

Despite Violet's question, the young girl did not respond. Instead, she whimpered quietly and held her teddy even closer to her, as if that were even possible. The Loyalist gently stroked the young girl's cheek with one gloved hand, and the Twi'Lek shuddered at the touch.

The Zygerrian attempted to comfort the young girl in a way any mother would. "It's OK, sweetheart. I brought a nice man to help you find your family."

That got Darrio's attention.

"Excuse me?" the Mandalorian said. "I am about as far away from a *nice man* as you can get."

Violet looked at the Mandalorian with a sly smile on her face. "Well, you are going to help her find her family. So, I guess that raises your stock a little bit."

"I am, am I?" Darrio said. "Last I checked, I was supposed to be protecting your sorry asses because you couldn't do it yourselves."

The Zygerrian's eyes hardened. "Yes, you are, but I will remind you that you have to do whatever I say."

Darrio's shoulders slouched. "Great. So I go from glorified bodyguard to a babysitter,"

"Do you have to complain about everything?" Violet whispered.

"Do you find it annoying?" Darrio asked.

"Yes, very," the Captain said.

"Then yes, I do. I find it hilarious," the Human stated bluntly.

Violet pinched the bridge of her nose and inhaled a deep breath. She was a consummate professional, but there were limits to her patience. "Look, I'm giving you the chance to do something good and stretch your legs at the same time. You even said so yourself, you aren't needed here. We all know how to use blasters, so why not put your skills to better use? If it helps, I'll put in a good word to the Consul about you for doing this. I promise."

"Kiss ass," Darrio said. "Fine, I'll do it. You got anything I can use as a lead?"

The Taldryan Field Medic smiled and began to rummage through a small toolbox next to the table. She threw a locket made of gold at the Mandalorian, who caught it in his grasp. Darrio opened it to reveal a slightly torn picture of a happy Twi'lek couple. One of them, who Darrio assumed to be the father, possessed the same amber complexion as his daughter. The second, who the Mandalorian assumed to be the mother, was pale blue, but there was no doubt where the young girl's bright eyes came from. They were her mother's, plain and simple. The most notable detail, however, was the large bump on the mother's stomach and the look of excitement on each of their faces.

The Weapon Specialist felt a heavy weight hit him in his chest when he saw how happy they looked, that look of belonging...

"They lived in Westwind," Violet said. "There's an address on the back of the locket."

Sure enough, in big, bold letters was written *'If found, please return to 524 Governor Street, Westwind, Port Kasiya.'*

Violet took one last look at the little girl's injuries. "I don't know if they are still there. Westwind was one of the areas hit particularly hard by the fighting when it broke out, but at least it's something."

"Well..." Darrio started to say whilst the Zygerrian braced herself for some sort of snarky response. "I suppose this is a start. I'll see what I can do."

The Field Medic was taken aback by Darrio suddenly going a little softer. Violet gave him a small smile.

"Thank you, Darrio," the Captain said.

The Mandalorian pocketed the locket, making sure it was safe before he departed. "Don't get used to it. Come on, kid. Let's go."

Darrio left the tent whilst the apprehensive and nervous Twi'Lek girl jumped down from the table. Still clutching the Loth Wolf teddy in her arms.

She looked to Violet, unsure of what to do as the Zygerrian smiled back at her. "I know he's a bit... rough around the edges, but he has a good heart deep down. I know he does. He'll get you home and keep you safe. I promise."

It seemed to do the trick. The Twi'Lek toddler hobbled out of the tent after the Mandalorian.

"I hope I'm right..." Violet said to herself.

The Zygerrian shook the negative thoughts from her mind and returned to her work. There were still so many patients left to see that she wondered if it would ever end.

—

Westwind Port Kasiya 40ABY

Westwind was about as sorry a state as Darrio had imagined. The area was infamous in Port Kasiya for being the place where the *Lekheads* worked, gathered, and lived. For those who were into a specific kind of entertainment, they could spend their evenings at some of the local bars *admiring* the beauty of some of Westwind's more exotic dancers.

Darrio was often one such client. After a long day working as a bouncer at the *Playground*, or as was the case now, being the big, mean Mandalorian scaring the local populace, he liked to unwind and watch as their bodies twisted and contorted in a way that could excite almost any man.

Alas, it seemed his favourite venues were closed until further notice. Rubble was still being swept to the side of the roads and businesses had remained closed since the invasion. What

made matters worse was it had taken a god damn enormous amount of time to even get to Westwind in the first place. Darrio wasn't willing to pick up the small Twi'lek that struggled to keep pace behind him, so they had the slow trudge for the last hour through the city.

At least she'd been quiet, which Darrio certainly appreciated. Most kids he'd had the unfortunate experience of dealing with did nothing but cry, scream, scratch, poop themselves, or a mixture of all four. This was a pleasant change of pace.

"It's OK, sweetheart. I brought a nice man to help you find your family."

What Violet had said was plaguing his mind during their journey. The Mandalorian was almost one-hundred percent sure that he was *not* a nice man, and that he was last on the list of people most would choose to interact with given the choice, with other varying options being Hutts or rancors. Yet, as he looked back to the struggling young, he thought maybe, just maybe, he should try.

"What's your name, kid?"

The Mandalorian stopped walking for the moment to let the girl catch up. She stopped a couple of feet away, but when she saw Darrio's t-shape visor face her, she looked down and remained silent.

"You hear me? I asked what your name was."

The little girl shuddered and trembled when she heard his voice again. Seeing what he'd do e, Darrio eased up, taking a step back so as not to look so overbearing. Then, he had a flash of inspiration. He reached into his pocket and retrieved the golden locket. He clicked it open to reveal his one and only clue to finding the girl's family, then showed it to her.

"Are these your parents?"

The Twi'lek toddler looked at the photo for half a second before giving a timid nod.

"Looks like this was before you were born. What are your parents' names?"

The Twi'lek averted her eyes and said nothing.

Darrio sighed and scrunched the bridge of his nose. He wasn't getting anywhere quickly.

"Look, kid. I'm trying. The least you can do is say *something*."

She did not.

"Whatever... just keep up and don't fall behind."

The Mandalorian spun on the spot and walked into an adjacent street. The little girl struggled to keep pace, but every now and then, Darrio would glance behind him to make sure she was still following him.

He stopped when they reached their destination. The little girl stopped immediately behind him, slightly leaning to the side to see what the Mandalorian was looking at.

"Well... Frakk..."

Darrio clenched the locket in his hand and looked at the back. *524 Governor Street*. This was definitely it.

It was a shell of its former self.

What once stood as a moderately sized house made of duracrete had been toppled, wrecked and scattered into a debris field no living person could have survived if they were inside it. Part of the durasteel had melted and was scorched, no doubt from a fire that had broken out when the house was destroyed.

There were other houses on the street much like this one, but Darrio hoped this one wasn't going to be one of them.

"Sorry, kid. Looks like it's back to the drawing board."

It was a long shot. Most of the area had been decimated during the conflict. For all Darrio knew, the little girl's parents could have been crushed, or burnt, or both under all that wreckage. If they were still in the house, they certainly weren't going to be amongst the living anymore.

"HELP ME!!!"

The Mandalorian heard the sound coming from nearby. Instinctively, he wanted to check it out. It was the hunter instinctively within him, and his Mandalorian blood craving the challenge. Yet, there was one thing he had to do first. He walked over to the little girl, and for the first time, picked her up in his arms. He was clumsily, clearly not used to handling children, but that didn't matter right now.

"Stay here."

Darrio placed her down behind a pile of debris that would keep her out of sight and out of mind. He stepped around the dirt mound and into the open street.

The sight that greeted the Mandalorian was one typical for scum looking to take advantage of the weak and vulnerable. Darrio liked these sorts of people, they kept his bounty hunting line of work particularly busy. There were several beings gathered around a middle-aged Twi'lek man, who had been handcuffed and was being dragged around the street like a sack of dirt.

"Add another one to the list, boys!" one scum said. Darrio designated her as their leader judging by how little work she was doing herself, and by how bossy she was being. Oddly

enough, she was Zygerrian too, just like Violet, but that little detail led to one conclusion for the Mandalorian.

"He ain't as young as some of the others. Won't be worth as much," one of the grunts said, a burly Zabrak who was no doubt the big, stupid muscle of the group.

"Erm... boss?" a third had noticed the Mandalorian step out into the open.

The Zygerrian let out a heavy groan as she spotted him. "Ugh, great. A Mandalorian here to spoil our fun. Wait here, I'll sort this out."

She stepped forward ahead of the rest of the thing, stopping directly in-between Darrio and her posse. "How much?"

"Excuse me?" Darrio asked.

The Zygerrian rolled her eyes. "How much? You know, to walk away and pretend you didn't see anything."

Darrio remained silent.

"Can't we just shoot the frakker, boss!?" The Zabrak said, stepping forward to join the Zygerrian at his side whilst the rest of the gang held their Twi'lek prisoner down. The Zygerrian smiled at her comrade and patted him on his shoulder.

"Now, now, Guz. There's no reason we can't come to a more amicable agreement. Isn't that right, Mando?" She asked, never letting the smile drop from her face.

"Boss! Look!"

The Zygerrian's attention was drawn to the small Twi'lek toddler that was peering around a pile of rubble, trying to get a look at what was happening. The Mandalorian turned around to see her too and curled his hands into fists.

"*Haar'chak*, kid! I told you to stay hidden!"

The toddler squeaked upon hearing the harsh snap in Darrio's voice and retreated behind the rubble.

"She's just a kid! She'll be worth a fortune, Mura!" the Zabrak said, holding a sadistic glint in his eyes.

"You know what?" the Zygerrian said, following the same line of thinking as Guz. "You're right. Kill the Mando and grab the kid."

The Zabrak grinned from ear to ear. "With plea-"

He never finished that sentence.

In moments, Darrio grabbed one of his WESTAR blasters from its holster and pulled the trigger. The blaster bolt soared and nailed Guz in his forehead, right between his eyes. The Zabrak collapsed into a heap on the ground, his eyes had rolled into the back of his skull as a small fume of smoke rose from the mark where the shot had hit its mark.

Not giving them any time to react, Darrio unleashed a volley of blaster bolts in the direction of the group holding down the young Twi'lek man. They'd barely had time to draw their blasters before they were dead.

All that was left was an incredibly perturbed Zygerrian, the highly relieved adult Twi'lek, and Darrio who stood in front of the rubble hiding the child under his protection. The Mandalorian stepped forward, blaster in hand, aimed at the Zygerrian.

"That was a terrible call," the Mandalorian said. "Here's how this is going to work. You are going to tell me the answer to every question I have. If I don't, you'll be joining them in hell. Understand?"

The Zygerrian spat at him. "Frakk you! What's to stop you from killing me after? I ain't telling you nothing, *sleemo!*"

Darrio shot at the Zygerrian's foot, and the woman howled in agony as she fell to the floor. The Mandalorian towered above her, threatening her with his blaster.

"Next time you say something I don't like, it'll be your tongue. How big is this slaver operation?"

The Zygerrian said nothing, clenching her jaw shut.

"How many Twi'leks have you captured?"

She still said nothing.

The Mandalorian retrieved the golden locket from his pocket and showed the slaver and hung the picture of the Twi'lek couple in front of her face.

"Did you capture these two?"

Once again, the Zygerrian was annoyingly quiet. Darrio knelt and pressed his blaster against her chin.

"You are quickly becoming my least favourite person. Speak, or I pull the trigger."

She didn't say anything, but shut her eyes and braced himself for the inevitable.

"I-I might be able to help?"

Darrio resisted the urge to pull the trigger when he heard the meek, slender voice of the Twi'lek young man the group of slavers had been hunting.

"How can you help?" the Mandalorian asked.

"I-I broke free from their capture and..."

"YOU SHUT THE HELL UP, SLAVE!"

Darrio pressed his blaster into the Zygerrian's throat, silencing her.

"Quiet, or else, " he said, then gestured for the Twi'lek to continue.

"I-I know where they are holding more of my kind. It's underground, but I can take you there."

Darrio threw the golden locket to the Twi'lek who barely managed to grasp it in his fingers.

"Do you know if *they* are down there?"

The Twi'lek opened the locket and glanced at the photo, but shook his head.

"N-no. I'm not sure."

The Mandalorian shrugged his shoulders. It was a long shot, but at least he had a lead to go on now.

Plus, slavers were the worst kind of scum. He'd take a great deal of pleasure in destroying their entire operation piece by piece until there was nothing left of it but ash and smoke.

"Do we need her?" Darrio asked, prodding the Zygerrian with his blaster.

"N-No. I don't think so..." the Twi'lek said.

The moment he said that, Darrio pulled the trigger on his blaster, happily putting the Zygerrian out of her misery. The Twi'lek jumped back in shock, but quickly tried to regain his composure.

Darrio put the blaster back in its holster and raised a finger to the Twi'lek.

"One second. Hey, kid!"

On command, the little girl re-emerged from behind the rubble, still clutching her Loth Wolf teddy in her arms.

The Mandalorian beckoned her over. "Come here."

The young girl approached cautiously, remembering full well how angry the Mandalorian was with her. She stopped a couple of feet away, and Darrio knelt to her.

"Are you OK?"

The girl timidly nodded her head, not making eye contact with the Mandalorian.

"Good," Darrio said. "My job is to get you back to your parents. I'll defend you with my life until that happens, but you need to listen to me, OK?"

The little Twi'lek then did something Darrio never expected. She ran and embraced him in a hug, planting her cheek into the breastplate of his armor. The Mandalorian remained where he was, frozen in place. He had no idea what to do in this situation, so he did the first thing that came to mind and patted the girl gently on the head.

"Erm... OK. Thanks?"

The girl let go of him and gave him a soft smile. The first one he'd seen from her since she was entrusted into his care. Darrio turned to the adult Twi'lek.

"Lead the way."

The Twi'lek did as commanded, with Darrio and the toddler following closely behind. The Mandalorian picked up both the toddler to carry her, and his communicator to speak with a very familiar face.

"Darrio," Violet said, her gentle voice coming through loud and clear. "How are things going? Have you found her family?"

"Not exactly," Darrio said. "Listen, things are a little more complicated than we thought..."

—

Slaver's Den
Port Kasiya
40ABY

It wasn't every day you descended underground into Port Kasiya. The tunnel network was simple in design, and Darrio had to wonder how this had gone as unnoticed as it had for as long as it did. Basic lighting illuminated the way into the depths of Westwind, the slaver operation coming into full sight within the cavity of the cavern.

Four cages hung to the walls, with durasteel bars so thick it would take a lightsaber to cleave through them. Within the cages were Twi'leks of varying shades and colours, frightened, scared, and without their freedom. They were no doubt waiting to be shipped off-world for whoever spent a good amount of credits to become their new masters, or to be sold to the Hutts as exotic dancers and servants.

That last thought made Darrio cringe.

Regardless, they were far from alone. The Mandalorian had effectively walked into a den of wampas. Slavers equipped with blaster rifles, stun batons, shock collars, and fibre cord whips turned their attention on Darrio. The little Twi'lek clung to Darrio like she was trying to hide in his armor herself.

"So, I take it you're the punk who took out Mura and Guz?" another Zygerrian asked. "Typical. Her ego was always too big to see the big picture."

"Word travels fast," Darrio said. "And you are?"

The Zygerrian, burly and intimidating as he was, spat on the ground near the Mandalorian's feet as he approached. "Zil Circan, slavemaster of the former Zygerrian Empire. These Twi'leks belong to us now. If you value your life, you'll hand over that little asset in your arms."

The toddler buried herself as far into Darrio as she could like she was hoping to turn invisible.

The Mandalorian placed his spare hand to his chin like he was lost in thought. "I've thought about it, and the answer is no. Here's how this is going to go down..."

Darrio reached into his pocket and pulled out a thermal detonator. He held onto the activation switch as the circular explosive began to flash red and beep.

"You are going to stop this operation you have going on. You are going to let the Twi'leks go. If you don't, you are all going to be in for some hell and consequences no deity will be able to save you from."

The Zygerrian broke into a nervous sweat. "Now, now. There's no need to be rash..."

The slavers had their weapons primed and ready to gun the Mandalorian down where he stood. No matter how valuable a slave child was in the Outer Rim, in their eyes, it wasn't worth blowing their entire operation to kingdom come with them alongside it.

"Tell them to lower their weapons, and I'll let it go," Darrio said.

Zil gestured for his grunts to lower their weapons, and whilst hesitant, they did as commanded. "Now, for the detonator."

"Sure," Darrio said. "A deals a deal."

He then threw the explosive behind him, back into the tunnel from whence they arrived. In seconds, a thunderous boom echoed throughout the cavern. A cave-in blocked the entrance.

The Zygerrian slaver looked enraged as he pointed at Darrio. "You fool! What did you do that for!? That was our only way in or out!"

Despite how true that statement might have been, Darrio seemed unphased by the situation.

"Three... two... one," he said. Suddenly, a loud erosion was heard above them as the ceiling to the cavity opened up. Voices could be heard up from above as flashlights beamed into the cave.

"There they are!"

Members of the Kasiya Protection Programme used ropes to traverse into the cave. Blaster fire erupted between them and the slavers, but the latter very quickly found themselves woefully outmatched.

Realising how dire the situation was, Zil attempted to make a break for it. He made his way quickly to one of the ropes that led to Westwind, but tripped when his feet were tangled together by a thin wire. He fell face-first in the dirt, but had the awareness to roll onto his back in time to see the Mandalorian approaching.

"Where do you think you're going?"

Darrio took a casual leisurely pace towards Zil as the slavers quickly dropped one by one. The wire attached to his vambrace snapped as the Zygerrian attempted to scramble to his feet. Once he did, he was face to face with the barrel of Darrio's blaster.

"Wait! We can-"

Darrio pulled the trigger.

Zil's body dropped to a clump on the ground, and in minutes, the fighting was over with minimal casualties to the KPP. The cages holding the Twi'leks were opened as mass cheering and relief ensued. Partners, friends, and families separated were reunited amidst the horror that had taken place.

The Twi'lek girl snuggled herself into Darrio's arms, and the Mandalorian looked down. She'd played her part as the bargaining chip perfectly. She was the one thing that stopped the slavers from shooting Darrio the second he walked into their hideout.

"It's OK, it's all over now. You did well, kid. You were very brave. I'm proud of you."

—

Westwind
Port Kasiya
40 ABY

Darrio had to admit that the Taldryan military could be damn efficient when they put their mind to it, and the Medical Corp was no exception to that rule. Violet had already pulled out all the stops in setting up supplies, food, water, first aid, shelter, and any other care that those captured would need.

Tents had been set up for those who needed extra care, namely the elderly, children, and the more seriously wounded. Considering the Twi'leks were destined for slavery until Darrio reared his ugly head, they were more plentiful than initially thought.

However, that didn't matter to Darrio. He stood waiting as more and more Twi'leks gathered into Westwind, relieved for their freedom, and relieved to be alive. Kept the toddler close to him with one hand and held the golden locket in the other.

That's when he spotted them. A young couple, the male holding the same amber complexion as the Twi'lek toddler, and the woman being pale blue. When Darrio looked into the locket, he could see the small distinctions that identified them as the girl's parents. It was them. It had to be.

Darrio wasn't the only one to notice them. The toddler saw her parents and gasped. Her eyes lit up, and her parents turned to see her too beside her Mandalorian protector. The mother dropped to her knees and opened her arms, tears rolling down her face.

"Sulla!" the mother called to her child.

The little girl was about to run but stopped herself, looking up to Darrio with the most begging look a child could muster in her eyes. The Mandalorian handed the young girl the locket and bent down to her.

"Go on, kid. They're waiting for you," he said.

The little girl now identified as Sulla began to run toward her parents who were still waiting for her with open arms. However, she suddenly stopped halfway, looked at her parents, and then back to Darrio. She ran back to him and tackled him as hard as she could, wrapping her arms around him as best as she could in the best hug she could manage. The difference this time was that Darrio returned the hug. He put his arms around her gently and accepted the hug, his heart aching slightly.

After a few moments, Darrio lifted his helmet off of his head to show her his face for the first time. The two looked each other eye to eye for the first time, and Sulla smiled at him.

"Thank you," she whispered, letting go of the hug. She ran back towards her family who embraced their lost child, finally reunited.

Darrio returned to his feet and observed the family. How long had it been since he was that happy to be around those he cared for? Around his kin? Around *Appius*? The little girl had awoken dormant emotions in Darrio that had remained locked away since the destruction of the Clan he was the leader of. Unfortunately, for him, he was so lost in his thoughts that he hadn't heard nor noticed Violet approach him.

The Zygerrian placed a hand on his shoulder. "Hey, you OK?"

The concern was evident in her voice, but Darrio just shrugged it off. "I'm fine."

He started to walk away when Violet called out to him. "Maybe I should tell the Consul how attached you got to this case?"

Darrio stopped and spun to face her. "You wouldn't..."

Vietnam started laughing, which made Darrio slump his shoulders.

"I'm kidding!" the Zygerrian said. "Seriously, the Governess has been informed of what went down here, which means your brother probably knows. Hopefully, he plans to do something about it."

Darrio huffed. "He better."

"Regardless," Violet said. "Thank you for everything you've done. You are dismissed until further notice."

"Yeah, yeah," Darrio waved off the order like it was nothing. "Call me when you have a real emergency."

Violet watched as Darrio disappeared into Port Kasiya. She smiled and shook her head, unconvinced by his tough-guy persona. She turned towards the medical tents and fit her latex gloves on her hands. Darrio might have been finished, but she certainly wasn't. There would be hell and consequences before a medic's job was done.

-END-