

Thirty-two weeks...

"We should tell them, you know," he said.

He was right but I shook my head anyway. "It's too soon."

"You've been saying that for weeks and at the beginning I agreed with you but...."

"I've had three miscarriages," I told him as if that explained everything.

Thrawn watched me for a long heavy moment and then nodded, "I know, Tekari, but the last two were so early in the pregnancy there was almost no time to consider talking about them and everyone knew what was going on. This has to be one of the best kept secrets since the second death star." He sighed as he got out of the bed and slipped on his robe. This was a touchy subject at the best of times. I got out of bed with him and stretched. I was beginning to feel like a bantha, fat and slow.

I stood up, "Every time, we get our hopes up then I lose the baby. I know this is the longest I've carried yet. I don't want to say anything and then have to cope with everyone else's grief including ours. I just can't take all the pity and the sympathy, not again."

"I think we are beyond that stage now. Thomas doesn't see any reason for you to be this concerned. At your last check up he was pleased, was he not?" Thrawn said as we headed downstairs for breakfast, "Besides, you're showing, you have been for a while. Even your loose dresses and robes can't hide it anymore and you walk like a pregnant woman. People are asking indelicate questions and I am getting tired of being evasive especially with Kirja'navaar'inkjerii who, at the very least, suspects but is too damned polite to say anything outright."

"When did the Doc say he was coming back?" I asked evading his question. Thrawn had arranged for Doctor Thracer to come and see me as soon as we had suspected that I was really pregnant and I had cried with relief when Thrawn had flown me out to meet the doc on his ship. As much as I liked the two Dantassi doctors in the enclave Thomas just knew me too well. I adored him and trusted him with my life.

"Four days from yesterday but this time I don't care what you say I shall be asking the council to grant special dispensation for him to stay here until the baby is born and to have full use of the enclave's medical facilities. I'm not risking you going anywhere anymore and that includes flying up to meet his ship in orbit just so that he can check you out. Thomas is your doctor and he's saved your life more than once. If Dantassi rules mean I need to go over people's heads or pull rank somehow or adopt Thomas into the family so that you can have your doctor at your side and our child can be born here then that's what will happen," he said firmly. "So people will know once I talk to the council anyway. I think you should tell everyone who needs to hear it from you first before then."

I made a face and sat at the breakfast counter waiting for him to make me tea. I would have argued with him but he was right. From the moment I had discovered I was pregnant again I had experienced a fear which had rivalled any other fear I had ever known. My first pregnancy had happened while I was still living on Nirauan and it had ended very badly. I had not dealt very well with the loss of the baby and neither had Thrawn. We had been living on Hjal for three years when I discovered that I was once again with child. We had both been cautiously optimistic but I had miscarried a week later. I was saddened by the loss of the tiny life but not devastated the way I had been with the first child. There had hardly been enough time to become used to the idea of having a baby before there was no baby to have. The third pregnancy, nearly thirteen months later had been the same. The Dantassi medical staff had been wonderful but just as Doctor Thracer had said repeatedly; they told me that the chances of my carrying a child to term were small at best so I had given up hope. Time had moved forward and I had gotten used to the idea that I would never have children. Once I let the idea go I was happy enough and looked forward to almost every day just as it was.

My life with Thrawn on Hjal was all I could have hoped for and more. I was busy, I was loved and I had a wonderful extended family. We travelled and I knew a peace for the first time in my life that had never really existed after I had started working for the Empire. The galaxy could have gone to hell and back and I would never have known or much less cared. I was more than content to stay on Hjal and live the life I had started there with the people I cared deeply for.

Thrawn, on the other hand, was anything but content to sit and enjoy a leisurely life. When he wasn't frequently travelling off world in his Dantassi guise to meet with people and discuss strategies for a myriad of things I didn't want to involve myself in he was teaching the younger Dantassi tactics and strategy skills or hunting with Navaari. He wasn't a man who enjoyed being settled and retirement was a word he didn't understand. Without his work he would have gone crazy. I was grateful that he had something to keep him occupied even if he did have to do a lot of it from behind a mask.

The galaxy had taken Thrawn's death in stride and breathed a sigh of relief that one of the greatest war lords ever to grace the stars was now gone. Politics, as was the way, had moved forward but I heard little that made me care one way or the other. We knew that the Empire, or what was left of it, had not quite given up the fight and news of Admiral Natasi Daala's return reached us. It had surprised me but not Thrawn. He had suspected there would be Imperial leaders coming out of the woodwork so to speak vying for power and trying to regain the might of a lost Empire. Thrawn was unimpressed by Daala's strategies and even less impressed by the results of her attempts to regain a foothold in the galaxy under the Imperial banner. As far as he was concerned she had been sent to the Maw to work and it was there she should have remained.

"I think she just likes to blow stuff up," I had remarked after hearing the tales of her attempts from the reports that Thrawn received.

"She has the right idea in trying to unify the warlords but they won't follow a woman," Thrawn had remarked dryly, "Especially not one who is as clueless about how to wage war as this one is."

I had just laughed, "I guess she should have stayed Tarkin's bed-mate then shouldn't she?"

"So the rumours were true? She slept her way up?"

I had just bitten my tongue by way of an answer and Thrawn had just shaken his head in disgust.

I was, oddly enough, far more interested in news about Luke Skywalker. I had heard through letters from Shiv that the word was Skywalker had set up some sort of a Jedi training camp on Praxeum and was looking to find other force users in the galaxy to train for his new Jedi Order. Thrawn had asked, offhandedly if I had wanted to leave him to be a Jedi. My answer had been to throw the Ka'lu's soggy ball at him. I no more wanted to learn how to be a Jedi than I had wanted to be one of Palpatine's concubines but I liked hearing the news of what Vader's son was doing for reasons I could never have explained.

The New Republic had become well established as the new governing body of the galaxy and time shifted forward some more. Before I knew it five years had passed since Thrawn had magically come back to life in Navaari's living room and nearly shocked me to death. Never in a million years could I have imagined my life as it had turned out and while some days I found myself melancholy missing the dead or thinking about things that might have been but, for the most part, I loved life and was happy. My life had a wonderful routine to it until the day I found out that I was, once again, pregnant. It was the stim'caf that had given it away.

Just like all the other times being pregnant and stim'caf didn't mix well for me and it had become a sort of early warning for us. The moment stim'caf made me vomit we knew something was up. Thrawn had suspected but had kept his mouth shut until I brought it up first. It was only after my suspicions had been confirmed by the small home medical scanner that I actually believed it and mingled with my joy was a sickly fear. I had already gone through this three times and I wasn't certain I could deal with it a fourth time. It might have been funny if pregnancy hadn't been such a tragic, difficult thing for me.

"I can't go through this again." I had told Thrawn after emptying the contents of my stomach. "Even though it's supposed to be a secret everyone here always knows. It's a small enclave and people talk. I don't want them knowing about this one."

"I'll get in touch with Thomas this time. He'll come out as fast as he can for you. You can see only him about it until we know for sure that way the enclave won't know until the time is right. We will take it day by day A'myshk'a," Thrawn had said as I had sat in the quiet of our home crying, my tears a horrible mixture of joy, fear, and hormones.

I was terrified at the prospect of going through another failed pregnancy and he knew this. I wasn't sure what was worse my grief or the Enclave's. I hadn't answered him but he had been right so I followed his advice expecting at any moment to feel cramps and lose this child but moments became hours which turned into days and days

turned into weeks and weeks, much to my surprise turned into months. It had been, given my previous track record, a fairly easy pregnancy and the throwing up at the drop of a hat had stopped early on.

Now I was beginning the 33rd week, well past the point Doctor Thracer had set as a marker for the baby's survival. I was indeed showing although not as much as I should have been. This baby was small and I worried but then again I was worried about everything that had to do with this pregnancy in spite of the fact that Thomas, who managed to make regular trips out to Hjal to see me, assured me that this time I was doing fine.

Thrawn pushed a cup of tea over to me and set about making a light breakfast of fruit. I sipped the tea slowly and then nearly dropped the cup with a gasp. He arched an eyebrow at me.

"Tell me that you are alright," he said.

I smiled then winced and swore. "Ow!"

He was at my side faster than I could have even imagined. "Merlyn?"

I set my cup down on the counter and took his hand in mine placing it on my belly. "He's kicking the crap out of me." And right on cue, under Thrawn's hand came the bulge of a heel pushing hard against me from the inside.

"He?"

I nodded. "Oh hell yes," I said crossly.

"Did Thomas tell you the baby's gender? I thought you wanted to be surprised."

"I don't need Thomas to tell me that our child is a boy because our child tells me this every chance he gets." I said gasping as the baby kicked again. "I don't think he likes this tea very much because he does this every time you make it for me."

"Is he...like you?" Thrawn asked clearly puzzled by this sudden revelation. I had not planned on telling him but trying not to use gender specific words had just gotten annoying and I was tired of keeping it a secret anyway.

"Like me?"

"A force user?"

I smiled and shook my head. "I have no idea. If he is I don't sense it but I do feel him. I pick up on his life force the way I feel you or anyone else I'm really close to. He's just active and forceful and very definitely male."

Thrawn kissed my cheek. "And you worry about him? Sounds to me like he's just fine, exactly as Thomas told you. I guess we should start thinking about getting a room ready for him then shouldn't we?"

"Yes which means we have to tell Navaari today because he will want to be a part of all that. He and Kerrjan have secretly been making toys and have had a cradle made ever since the second pregnancy but after the miscarriage they hid everything away. They think I don't know but I do."

Thrawn laughed. "You know this is a side I never thought I would see of either of them. Strong Dantassi warriors turned to mush by the thought of a baby. You do have a way of disarming the fiercest of people. Speaking of, you should send word to your Uncle."

I nodded and smiled. "He'll want to come."

"And he's always welcome."

I sipped some more tea and sighed knowing, that once we told people, there would be no going back. A baby, it seemed, belonged to the entire enclave and not just its parents so once we shared the news our lives would become even more crazy than usual but somehow the thought was comforting.

"Okay, you're right. Invite Navaari and A'njast'a for supper tonight and we'll drop the bomb then. Once A'njast'a knows the whole enclave will know. She loves to talk about stuff like this." I sighed then added, "If... when this baby comes everything is going to change, you know that right?"

Thrawn looked at me and smiled. "Everything changes anyway Tekari but sometimes change can be a good thing. Now stop fretting and eat."

I gave him a smile, plucked a piece of sliced fruit from the bowl he had pushed in front of me and nibbled at it absently. "We should start thinking about names soon," I said.

"Yes, although it isn't Chiss or Dantassi tradition to do so before the birth, I guess we should probably give names some thought."

I just looked up into his eyes and smiled with the sudden realisation that if everything continued to go well in less than eight weeks we would be parents. It was a daunting prospect.

"We will have lots of support," he said gently as if he had read my mind.

I grinned. "I know. I was just trying to imagine you cradling a baby or being called papa."

Thrawn arched an eyebrow. "Stranger things have happened, my dear."

"Indeed," I said smiling.

He just shook his head at me and asked, "More tea?"