

**Tipoca City**  
**Kamino**  
**3 ABY**

Dark waves crashed against the smooth sides of elevated laboratory platforms, a primordial ocean venting its futile rage upon the bulwark of Kaminoan civilization, whipping into white foam. Within the brightly lit room that pleasantly reeked of antiseptics, a similarly white-clad woman worked diligently on a batch of experimental zygotes. The client had specified a certain set of parameters for the finished product to meet and Tiam Vor prided herself on exceeding expectations.

Long, spindly limbs moved with practiced precision as she measured out the testing solutions with unerringly steady hands, guiding the filament thin tips of the multi-pipette into the waiting maws of neatly arrayed test tubes without so much as gracing an errant lip. Tiam Vor's hands never shook.

Working methodically, she finished the batch for gestation, before meticulously replacing her equipment in their proper places. Everyone on Kamino had a place and everything had a place in her lab. Even her wife.

Tiam's pale-grey gaze shifted from the arrays of geneticists' tools over to a pict of her, safely screened from the solvents and bio-contaminants by a triplex layer of transparisteel. Nal Ha's regal features were genetic perfection, from the absolute symmetry of her face to the slope of her neck. Yet the most striking were her eyes, a pair of celestial greys that mirrored the rain squalls of their homeworld. No geneticist could have achieved finer, even if given all the resources in the galaxy. Tiam was sure of it. After all, if she could not, who else could?

How such a perfect being had chosen her as a partner was beyond Tiam's reckoning, but she'd long since put those queries to rest. It only mattered that she had, all else was trivial.

Nal did, Tiam admitted, have a few less than desirable qualities, but those same qualities were why she'd risen to be a major player in Tipoca City's political sphere. She was ruthless to a fault, exceedingly intelligent, and above all goal-oriented. When she set her mind onto something, she was not far from a Loth-Wolf with a bone. Except for all the ways in which she was.

One could, for example, tempt a Loth-Wolf to relinquish its bone with a steak.

*"Miss Vor, there is a visitor to see you."* The gentle voice of a junior assistant sounded over the intercom.

Tiam furrowed her brow. "I do not have any appointments." It was a statement of fact.

*"No ma'am, but she is quite persistent."*

There could only be one person that would match that description, especially when faced with her unflinchingly pedantic assistant.

“Let her in,” Tiam replied, instinctively smoothing the front of her lab coat to make herself look more presentable. “She is always welcome to my laboratory.”

There was a beep and a hiss of cycling air as the hermetically sealed door opened, admitting the most stunning woman Tiam had ever known. As she laid eyes upon her partner, the faintest of smiles threatened to tug at her lips, but she suppressed such superfluous emotions at once.

For her part, Nal Ha’s reaction was as measured and poised as befitted a woman of her station. Without more than a glance of acknowledgement, she went straight to business.

“We need to talk,” Nal stated in a breathless monotone.

“Oh?” Tiam was taken aback by the formality of her partner. Of course, *affection* was not something Nal was known for, but even for her this seemed almost ominous. “Then let us talk,” she gestured towards a pair of seats.

Nal strode forward in reply, disdainfully inspecting the more elaborate seat before taking it and leaving Tiam to the glorified stool. Of course, a woman of her station should have expected nothing else.

“We are to have a child,” Nal announced, her tone not unlike when making an observation of fact in parliament. “And you are to create it.”

Tiam was, for the first time in years, stunned speechless. Not that Nal did not leave her flustered and short on words from time to time, but this had been *unexpected*.

“I did not know you even wanted a child?” she finally managed, if only to buy herself some time. Every discussion with Nal was like a verbal joust.

“I had not planned on it,” Nal admitted, her gaze sweeping over the instruments and chemicals neatly arrayed along the lab counters. Appraising them like a headmaster. “But there is to be a shift in parliament, and being a mother will be beneficial. Hence, a child is required.”

“I see,” Tiam managed, what little hope she’d managed to kindle of this being some flavor of affectionate whimsy now thoroughly dashed. “And you wanted me to create it?”

Nal’s eyes returned back to her partner and a rare smile spread minutely on her lips. “Precisely. I could think of none better. It shall be ours, after all.” The smile faded. “I will supply the template, and you the gestation.”

Tiam almost fell off her stool, reeling from the suddenness of the revelation. “You wish for the child to be... manually gestated?”

“Yes,” Nal replied affirmatively. “Children are not extraordinary in and of themselves, but true-born Kaminoans are rare. Having a child birthed, not grown, will set me apart from others.”

She had that look in her eyes, her beautiful perfect eyes, that told Tiam to expect danger. Nal had made up her mind, and to challenge her was to invite a dangerous wrath.

“I am sure you considered it,” Tiam began, picking her words through a verbal minefield, “But would this not affect my work in a rather considerable way?”

Nal looked at her and did not blink. For a considerable while. When she spoke, it was with the tone of a *very* patient parent.

“We are a partnership, are we not?” She expected no reply and Tiam was wise enough not to offer one. “And as partners, we must consider that which is best for us both. I have made these considerations and the conclusion is that you will gestate our child. It is what is best for both of us.”

“*All* of us,” Tiam tried to interject some levity. It failed to register as Nal continued with her unblinking stare. “But what if you were to—?”

“Impossible,” Nal objected outright, though her voice never rose from its practiced monotone. “It would impede the performance of my duties and most likely cause irrevocable damage which could not be offset even by a child.”

“But what about *my* duties?” Tiam pressed, her frustration getting the better of her.

Nal gave her a look that spoke volumes. Tiam lowered her head in supplication. What she’d said made sense and she could see it as well. As brilliant as she was, her work as a geneticist was hardly as important as Nal’s meteoric rise to Prime Minister. It would cause damage to her career, no doubt, but between the two of them, she was the one who could better weather the blow and recover. It made sense—and hurt all the same.

“Then we are in agreement,” Nal said as she rose up from her seat, barely a minute after taking it. Her schedules would not permit much more. “Have your secretary talk to mine and arrange a donation. I wish to see our child by next elections.”

Tiam sighed and nodded, escorting her partner towards the door. “I will see to it, Nal. You can count on me.”

Nal turned around and gave her a deep look, one that made the geneticist forget the world. “I know you will,” she whispered. “You always exceed my expectations, *darling*.” Her long, elegant neck craned forward until their foreheads touched, however briefly, and then returned. Tiam simply stood and stared as Nal Ha left, utterly bereft of her senses. There was a reason she was the woman of her life, Tiam thought with a longing sigh.

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The donation, as Nal had put it, had gone without a hiccup and splicing the DNA from her own gamete was proceeding with the same calm efficiency for which Tiam was known for. However, though she'd been prepared to accept some *complications* from manual gestation, she had not anticipated them so soon.

Word had slipped of their plans and a line-up of promising projects that would surely have seen her career flourish were being passed onto others. Though far from as politically savvy as her partner, Tiam was no fool when it came to such dealings. Her upcoming pregnancy was being seen as a weakness and any plans, no matter how long or short-term, involving her were now seeing her not as an asset but as a liability.

While her hands worked, her mind was elsewhere, ruminating on the lot that life had chosen to give her. No, not life, but *Nal*. She'd called this a partnership, but the longer she recalled, all Nal had ever done for the two of them was benefit, while *she* carried all the burdens. Granted, her career in politics was by all accounts the more important, but why did that argument hold sway every single time?

She was not looking forward to the pregnancy. Not at all. And the academic repercussions were already seeming to become daunting. A question she'd tried her best to ignore kept resurfacing like a stubborn strand of RNA, and the longer she stewed the more pressing it grew; *Why me?*

She was doing everything for their relationship. She was giving up her career for her partner, and no matter the moments of heart fluttering fluster that Nal induced in her, she was not getting a fair return out of this. And now she was expected to sacrifice her body in a distasteful practice her own forebears had worked so hard to rid their species of? It just wasn't *fair*.

The crystalline sound of a snapping instrument tip brought her attention back to the present. The pipette trembled in her hands. In her *shaking* hands. Tiam Vor's hands never shook.

She placed the instrument upon the lab desk and buried her face in her gloved hands. She was *ruining* her life for her partner, and for what? A faint smile? A careless whisper? A soft caress on her bare shoulder?

Yes.

With a deep sigh, Tiam raised her head, replaced the broken tip, and returned to her work. Her face mask absorbing the saline solution upon her pale cheek.

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“Initial tests look promising,” the unflinchingly pedantic assistant stated while moving the scan head down Tiam Vor’s lower belly. “The zygote has taken hold and gestation is proceeding as expected. All blood work is nominal, though stress hormones are slightly elevated.”

“So we are proceeding normally?” Tiam inquired, feeling oddly exposed despite her seniority over her aide who, to her surprise, had yet to turn in her resignation.

“As normally as this can be called,” she replied. “Gestating a child in this manner is highly irregular—”

“I am aware.”

“—but also fascinating.”

“What?” Tiam turned her head from the readout panel to look at her assistant.

“Begging your pardon, ma’am, but there has not been a recorded event like this in Tipoca City in years. Yes, live births happen at times, but not one with two mothers. She will be quite remarkable.”

Tiam turned away and mused on the words. Remarkable, she decided she liked that word. Indeed, could they expect anything less from the child of two such remarkable women as herself and Nal Ha?

“Yes, I believe that is an apt descriptor,” she concluded, allowing herself to be overwhelmed by the hormonal imbalance that was starting to rear its head within her, and smiled.

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The holoshow reached an intermission, the two partners lounging in a rare moment of respite within their shared quarters.

“So?” Nal Ha inquired, her lips departing the brim of an elegant glass of sparkling wine. “How is our project coming along?”

“Everything is proceeding as expected,” Tiam replied, nursing her own glass of water. “Although I must admit I’ve grown more sympathetic to our ancestors who had to bear with this several times during their lifetimes.”

“Do not concern yourself with our forebears,” Nal consoled her. “It will pass and you will give birth to a naturally born Kaminoan.” She took another sip from her glass before adding, “As naturally as two women can, of course.”

“Of course,” Tiam sipped her own bland water and nodded thoughtfully. “Though,” she paused to reconsider the words she’d tried to put together for the past week. Every discussion with Nal Ha was like a joust, and just for once she’d like to come out of one with more than broken lances. “It has caused me a somewhat significant amount of *discomfort*.”

Nal raised her eyebrow minutely, but let her proceed without contesting that point.

“So I was wondering whether you could—?”

“I’m sure my assistant can find someone to help you with whatever you require.”

“But I’d pref—”

“*Anything* you require, darling.” Nal grasped her hand and gave it an affectionately dominant squeeze. “This child is too important for me.”

Tiam felt her lance shatter. There was no use reaching for yet another.

“Of course,” she conceded. “I will discuss the matter with her.” She sipped her water.

“Very good,” Nal leaned back and returned to enjoying the holoshow. Tiam turned her head, though her gaze was unfocused.

*To us.* Those were the words she’d hoped for, but instead Nal had only considered the child *hers*. Despite not even carrying the now embryonic life-form within her own womb and having hardly taken part in its origination.

She made to sip her water, only to feel the cool brim dance on her lips. Her hands were trembling, again. And her first thought to hope Nal hadn’t noticed.

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“Ma’am,” the unflinchingly pedantic assistant sounded unsure as she went through a standard update report on the embryo’s development. “There may be something you should look at.”

Tiam Vor looked up from her nanoscope and moved over to observe the report herself. Visible signs of her pregnancy were starting to set in, and despite her best efforts to the contrary, they were starting to cause certain physical discomforts in her.

“Yes?” she grunted, taking a seat where she’d but two months ago had stood.

“Here,” the assistant stated, pointing at a row of text detailing a particular set of genes and their current status. “You may find this *peculiar*. Especially considering your partner. I know she can be very *demanding* in such things.”

Tiam cast her aide a glance, before focusing down on the lines of pale blue text that to most were nothing but gibberish. The genes were instantly recognizable to her, for they dictated a facet considered very important in Kaminoan society.

“This cannot be correct,” she stated outright. “Neither of us have blue eyes.”

“I do not know what to tell you, ma’am, but the readings are correct. I already triple-checked them. And judging by markers found in adjacent base-pairs they—”

Tiam zoned out from her pedantic babbling. How could this have happened? She’d been so careful, except. *Except*. The crystalline sound of a snapping pipette tip echoed in her mind.

The magnitude of this revelation was significant. She knew already how Nal would take it—poorly. She expected perfection, and Tiam had always prided herself on exceeding it. To now get a blue-eyed child would be a blemish on her perfect shield. She would not let her hear the end of it. So why did the thought intrigue her so?

“—but you should have ample replacement stock. I know Madam Ha donated several ovums. They should still be perfectly viable. If we terminate the gestation immediately, you should be able to replant a zygote within four weeks. The loss in time is lamentable, but—”

“No,” Tiam raised her hand to silence her aide. “I will not terminate.”

“But ma’am, the embryo is *defective*.”

“No!” Anger flashed suddenly in her eyes and Tiam found her hand curled with a fistful of her assistant’s lab coat in it. She immediately let go, but the woman’s pallid expression spoke volumes.

“Apologies,” she tried, but knew it was an empty gesture. “But I will not terminate *our child*. And you will not speak of this to anyone. *Especially* to her.”

“Ma’am?”

“I intend to make this my own experiment,” Tiam decreed.

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“Have you decided on a name?” the doctor asked.

“Well,” a heavily pregnant Tiam Vor turned to her partner, reaching to grab her hand. It felt like a right thing to do, but then again, so many other things had felt right as of late to her hormone-addled body. “I had been thinking perhaps Leh—”

“Yumni,” Nal stated, her hands safely in her lap and out of reach. “Her name will be Yumni Ha.”

“A good name,” the doctor agreed. “Well then, we are ready to induce labor. Unless you prefer we extract the fetus?”

Tiam’s lips were pressed into a line, her hand withdrawn and balled into a fist. They had discussed the name. And Nal had said they’d choose what was best for the child. She should have known what that meant. After all these years, she should have known.

“Miss Vor?” the doctor inquired.

“Perhaps extraction would be bet—” Nal began.

“No,” Tiam almost snapped. “Induce it, I prefer to birth her like our forebears did.”

The doctor glanced at Nal who offered no protest, merely staring with a hint of shock at her partner, clearly expecting an apology. It was not forthcoming.

“Very well then,” the doctor stated after a moment’s uncomfortable silence. “If you will follow me, miss Vor.” He rose up from his seat and led him to the ward.

The last glance Tiam shared with her partner was one of defiance. She’d given so much for this, and Nal had reaped all the benefits. But she’d be damned before she let her have it all her way.

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Thirteen hours later, Tiam Vor’s throat hurt from screaming and her body was in ruin. Exhaustion was overwhelming her, but even through the haze of pain-killers and hormonal highs she kept hearing a new remarkable sound. The sound of her daughter’s cries.

“Congratulations,” the doctor stated behind his mask as he offered a wrapped-up bundle to her, still reeking of amniotic fluids. “She is a healthy girl.”

Of course she was, Tiam thought to herself, what else had they expected from her? Too weary to move, she accepted the bundle by her side and wallowed in the moment. It did not last.

“Is that her?” she heard Nal’s voice as if from some great distance. “Is she alright? There’s so much blood...”

There was something new in her voice. Something she’d not heard before; concern. She blinked lazily, dazed by the cocktail of chemicals in her brain. But Nal Ha was never *concerned*.

She saw the unmistakably perfect form of her partner push past the doctors and nurses to kneel by her side and, without prompting or asking, wrap both her and their newborn child in a sweeping, tender hug.

“I was so worried,” Nal whispered into her ear. “But you did it. Just as you promised you would.” Her voice was deep with emotion. It was the second new sound of the day. “You gave us a beautiful baby girl,” she cooed, brushing an affectionate hand over the bundle before planting a kiss upon her forehead.

“Nal, I...” she began.

“Shush,” Nal smiled softly, pressing a gentle finger on her lips. “You deserve to rest, *birth-mother*. You exceeded expectations, as always. I knew I could not have chosen better.”

Tiam felt a terrible knot tighten in her gut, watching in horrid slow motion as Nal’s hand moved over to the bundle. It stirred, beginning to rouse.

“Do you wish to see us?” Nal cooed, her attention now entirely upon the babe. “Here,” she gently picked up the bundle so it was facing them both. “Welcome to the world, little Yumni. Your mothers are very pleased to meet you.”

The bloodied babe shifted, letting out a distressed coo and brushing dried amniotic fluid from its face before opening a pair of deeply radiant, sapphire blue eyes. What she saw when she gazed upon the world for the first time, was the heartbroken visage of her birth-mother and the shocked, appalled stare of the woman that shared her name.