

Starlight Contemplations

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© 19-Dec-09

Rating: K+

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Author's Notes: Written for the BlueTights December Challenge, 2009 Prompt: Starlight.

"I'm always amazed at how many stars I can see from here," she told her husband of ten years.

"I thought we needed a short holiday before things get hectic again," he said, gazing up at the dark dome of sky above them. They were well away from the artificially lit warrens of the city and there was no one else within miles of them. City-dwellers rarely came out onto the plains and they never *ever* came out at night. That required curiosity, foresight and a little fortitude. There were few left that had that anymore and those few who did - he didn't want to think about them. Tomorrow would come soon enough.

The baby in his wife's arms gurgled cheerfully. She handed the baby over to him so she could set out their picnic supper on an insulated mat.

"Look," he said to his son, knowing the baby was hardly of an age to attend to his words. "There's the Northern Cross, and there are the Seven Spinning Sisters." He pointed out the constellations. "And over there is the Great River..."

The baby cooed at him cheerfully and he smiled. Jor had never expected to feel so much joy at the presence of this small bundle of life - he was a scientist, expected to be logical and rational.

But the decision to even have a child had not been rational, not really. But it had been expected. He and his wife were both from leading families and they had impeccable genealogies and excellent genetics. *Not* having a child would have been suspect and with the current political climate, he didn't dare raise suspicions that he and his wife were anything other than upstanding law-abiding citizens. He did not dare allow anyone to know that he had qualms about bring a child into a doomed world.

"Can we see their sun from here?" Lara asked.

"Not without a telescope," he answered. "It's a yellow dwarf. But if you could see it, it would be just below the second Sister. A little bit of the wool she's spinning."

"Can they see our sun?"

"Possibly," he said. "They will certainly see its death throes."

"Do you really think it will..." she began.

"You've gone over my figures," he said. "You know what is happening, what *will* happen."

"There is no way to convince the council?"

He shook his head. "They are so full of their own brilliance and infallibility that they

would rather accuse their own chief of planetary security and his two most trusted advisors of treason rather than face the truth."

"The trial is tomorrow?"

He nodded. "There is no question as to the verdict. They will be condemned to a living death. And if it were not for this little one, I would have us join them there. At least we would be alive."

"Ursa's tests were conclusive?" Lara asked. "Children cannot survive there?"

Jor gave her a surprised look. He hadn't realized his wife knew the extent of Ursa's experiments - exposing the children of Council enemies to the radiations of the pocket universe the Council used as a prison.

"Her tests were conclusive," Jor said. "The growing neural networks of the young do not handle the radiation at all well. How did you hear of it?"

"I'm Chief Archivist, remember?" Lara said. "The Council forgets that they are not the only ones with access to information they don't want the public to have. I know they authorized Ursa's experiments in the hopes they could exile entire families of dissidents. I know they have ordered their authorization to be purged from the Archives so they could disavow her."

"And did you?"

"Purge the information? No, I classified it with the other government secrets. Assuming there *is* a world here a generation from now then the people have the right to know to what lengths this Council would go to protect themselves against those who disagree with them."

The ground began to shake and the baby whimpered. Lara pulled him close to comfort him.

"How soon?" she asked as soon as the trembler had passed.

"I don't know exactly. Soon," Jor said. "A few days at the outside. At least the ship is complete. I wish I had been allowed the materials to create a larger ship. Then I could send..."

"I will not leave you," Lara said. "Do not ask me to. Besides, we both know that the Council will never permit us to leave."

"I know. At least Kal will be safe."

"On a primitive, violent world?"

"On a young, vibrant, evolving world whose people are much like we were thousands of years ago," Jor told her. "The long range probes indicate they are taking the first steps at moving past their violent tendencies. There is hope there. They can be a great people, if they choose to be."

"He will be alone."

Jor ruffled his son's dark hair. "He will never be alone. We will always be with him, in spirit if not in body."

"He will be different."

"Yes. He is the best that Krypton has to offer. He will be stronger, faster, more intelligent. The enhancements that allow us to live on this planet will allow him to defy their gravity and will make him impervious to virtually anything they have."

"They will fear him."

"Not all of them." Jor sighed. "I have programmed the ship to choose a landing site near those who will have the intelligence and fortitude to overcome their fear of the unknown. The ship will also have access to the orbital monitors and will choose a time and place where the danger is minimal."

"How long will he be in space?"

"I do not know," Jor admitted. "I dared not build hyper-light engines into the ship for fear of the Council discovering our plans. That will make the journey much longer. But the ship will choose the safest path and will be monitoring him, educating him, as he travels among the stars."

Lara looked up at the starlit sky once again, seeking out the Second Sister. "Will our destruction mean anything to them?" she asked.

"I can only pray that it does, someday."

In a small house in a small village a young woman held her baby in her arms as her husband packed their few belongings onto the back of an ass. She wondered at the warnings and predictions the three strangers had made based on their reading of the night sky - a new star had appeared, indicating the destruction of the old empire and the raising of a new one.

More than that, they had predicted that her son would be ruler of that new empire. She would have laughed at them - her husband had - had they not seemed so sincere. Now the strangers were gone and she and her husband were preparing to flee across the border. If the strangers believed that her son was born to bring down an empire, then others might believe it too.

Signs written in starlight had led the strangers to her little family but she found herself wondering as she followed her husband away from the village they called home, if the strangers had been altogether correct in saying the new star indicated the death of *this* empire. Maybe, just maybe, there was another empire that was already dead. She said a silent prayer for the mothers and babies of *that* empire, wherever it was.

In the darkness of deep space, an orphaned child slept on, his ship lit by starlight.