Edges of the World

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Summary

Leia Organa finds herself stuck in a strange alternate/parallel universe where the Empire never came to exist. Meanwhile, trying to navigate a galaxy ruled by the Sith weren’t exactly the Jedi Trials Leia Skywalker had expected.

Or: Leia from a universe where Anakin never fell and canon Leia switch places. Now the two of them - and everyone else around them - have to deal with the consequences of their dimensional swap.

Notes
A reminder that this is something I am writing for free, and you are reading for free. If you want to pay me, let me know, and I'll write something perfectly tailored to your tastes. Otherwise? I am writing for myself first and other people second.

Essentially, no one is forcing you to read this, and doing so should be fun for you. Much like how I am simply writing for the fun of it, you are reading for fun. If reading this at any point stops being fun for any reason, please take care of yourself and stop reading. Just x on out and do what you need to do to stay as happy and healthy as possible.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

Thank you to my beta TheBlindBandit, to Matt for encouraging me, and Sofiya for letting me pester them with my silly ideas for this fic (and for all the excellent suggestions they have sent me).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There are many different universes out there.

There are universes where you could meet your counterpart and find their life is fully identical to your own, the divergence between your universes having happened in the life of a person you have never met and who had no impact on you. Then there are the universes where your closest counterpart is your diametric opposite or even those where you may find you never existed at all. For every possibility a life could take, there is a world where those choices played out, where different narratives took hold, and all the would-haves, could-haves and should-haves are been-thers and done-thats.

There is a universe where Leia Solo neé Organa became the Chief of State for the New Republic. Her youngest child, a boy named Anakin, died when the fighter he was piloting exploded. Her daughter Jaina carries a heavy destiny and the even heavier memory of striking down her twin brother Jacen after he joined the Sith.

There is also a universe where Leia Organa’s election to the position of First Senator in the New Republic failed. She was shoved out of politics outright in the scandal surrounding the revelation of her biological parentage, and to deal with the mounting tensions and the coming danger of the First Order she formed an organization known as the Resistance.

She too had a son who fell, but where Jacen Solo became a Sith in the true sense, Ben Solo was not a Sith - instead, he joined the Knights of Ren. In the strange way of ripples and echoes that thread through the universes, Ben, like Jacen, tortured a young Force-sensitive who could have used his guidance, and where Jacen murdered his aunt, Ben murdered his father.

There are universes where a thousand different things took place. Worlds where Jyn Erso made it off that beach on Scarif and was there in Hana City on the day Mon Mothma signed the Galactic Concordance; worlds where Sinjir Rath Velus never drank alcohol; where Greer Sonnel lived a long life in perfect health and took the racing world by storm; where Ciena Ree defected and Thane Kyrell remained an Imperial; where Doctor Chelli Aphra was a law-abiding academic who respected the field of archaeology too much to steal and make a profit off of artifacts; where Ezra Bridger never became an orphan.

Which is why it stands to reason that there are even worlds out there, countless worlds, where Anakin Skywalker did not fall.

Worlds where Padmé Amidala’s life was not drained by Palpatine to fuel Vader’s recovery, where she got to live to a merry old age in a democracy she believed in and had always been ready to fight for.
Worlds where Palpatine’s evil was stopped before he could establish the full horror of his Imperial regime.

Worlds which, from the perspective of those who lived through the Empire’s terror, would appear to be nothing less than realizations of their most treasured and unhoped-for dreams.

The thing about this wealth of possible worlds is, of course, that they are supposed to remain separate. You are never supposed to meet that other you, the you who made different choices, or had different circumstances thrust upon them. Nobody is ever supposed to learn the answer to the age-old question of ‘What if this had happened instead?’

Yet in the Force all things are possible.

Leia Organa was turning twenty years old. It had been a full two decades since her Name Day, but rather than any joy one might expect that fact to inspire, she felt nothing but an engulfing sense of pain and loneliness.

Twenty should have felt like an incredibly young age to be.

Leia did not feel young.

Less than a year earlier she had stood on Yavin IV with her father as he told her where to find General Kenobi on Tatooine. Less than one year earlier her ship, in need of minor repairs, had docked with the Profundity, which was to be their escort to the backwater Outer Rim world Kenobi had chosen as his hiding place. Less than one year ago they had been diverted to Scarif, to the battle and then to that frantic rush to escape.

She had held the Death Star plans, acquired at such a steep cost, in her hand with a steadfast grip. With all the naivety of a child unused to combat - she hadn’t been seeing it for the first time, no, but it had still been relatively novel and different from her duties as a spy in the Senate - she had truly believed the worst of the Empire’s destruction would be behind them. Against all odds, they had prevailed and retrieved the plans from Scarif, and she was going to get General Kenobi, the real Obi-Wan Kenobi, to return to Yavin IV with her, and surely then nothing could stand between them and restoring Democracy at long last!

Then came the explosion, that horrible feeling unlike any she’d ever felt before, almost as if she could somehow sense each and every Alderaanian cry out all at once before being silenced. The explosion that she still saw anew whenever she closed her eyes. And through it all, the memory of the hand holding her still. The heavy gloved hand belonging to the Emperor’s dog clamped tight on her shoulder, making sure she could never turn away, never find any peace or solace from the unthinkable destruction the Death Star had wrought.

A part of Leia had died with Alderaan. The part of her that had somehow made it intact through the hours of torture, overseen by Darth Vader and the two guards who never spoke as she writhed on the floor before them. The part she had retained even as she’d prepared for her execution, content in the knowledge that, whatever happened to her, R2 would ensure the plans reached General Kenobi. The destruction of her home had destroyed her faith, her surety that when they won the day everything could ever be normal again. Or what she had fantasized ‘normal’ could be in a Democracy - she’d never exactly had the privilege of living in one.

Had it really only been last year that she had celebrated turning nineteen?

She had been granted a short leave from her duties in the Senate for the occasion and had met with
her parents at their home. When she did not have royal rituals to fulfill on her Name Day’s anniversary, her family would gather together on the balcony off of her father’s study, gazing together at Alderaan’s incredible snow-capped mountains. There her mother would tell her the familiar tale of how her father had brought Leia home to her, the best surprise he had ever given her, how she had held her for the first time right there in that very spot.

They celebrated Leia’s birthday on that day, the anniversary of the day her mother had carried her into her throne room and declared Leia her daughter, rather than the far less meaningful day she’d been born. Each year she delighted anew that she had been given a gift so wonderful as to be the daughter of Breha and Bail Organa.

But now there were no more mountains.

No more Aldera City.

No more balcony to gather on.

No Royal Palace of Alderaan.

No more parents to hug close to, to hear thoroughly familiar yet always thoroughly delightful stories from, to talk to and confide in and seek advice from and and and-

Her whole world was, quite literally, gone.

She refused to allow her thoughts to dwell on it any further.

Leia Organa was twenty years old, and she was at war. She needed her wits about her. The Rebellion needed her to have her wits about her. She had to be as cool as a dead star and as calm as the vacuum. There really was no time for her to indulge in any sort of self-pity. She would shove her pain aside until she had time for it: after the war was won, or never at all.

Instead of watching the mountains from her favorite spot on the balcony and listening to the soft murmur of her mother’s voice, Leia was on some backwater in the Outer Rim, once more setting up a temporary base of operations until a better-hidden and more permanent place could be found. They needed bases like these to ensure as few Rebels as possible got ailments such as Bloodburn, or worse.

She already missed the Harbinger, the Imperial-class Star Destroyer she had hijacked and been based on for a while. Sure, the thing had been falling apart and Han had insisted on challenging her position of being in charge of the ship, but at least it had been mobile and hadn’t required them to constantly be packing up and moving from planet to planet.

“Leia! Leia, there’s a call coming in for you!” Luke shouted, interrupting her reverie - how long had she been daydreaming, anyway? The Rebellion could hardly afford her to lose herself like that. He was running up to her from the cave where they’d stashed their communication equipment, a grin on his face. “It’s from the Alderaan Flotilla? You didn’t mention it was your birthday!”

Oh. Of course they’d want to speak with her today, and she should have been the one to call them, really, how had she let herself get so derelict in her duties to what was left of her people?

Luke was still talking, staying by her side as she walked back towards the communication array. “Last week was my birthday, too, two days after Empire Day. I had no idea ours were so close together! I just turned twenty, how about you?”

She and Luke were so close in age? She’d always assumed he was at least a year or two younger
than her. “Coincidentally, I’m also twenty.”

He seemed inordinately pleased by that revelation. “Oh! Some of the others wanted to throw me a party, you know, since last week we were so involved with getting this place set up that celebrating was kind of impossible. I can’t guarantee that it’ll be a truly wizard party, but it should be better than nothing. You wanna join us?”

She smiled back, almost in spite of herself. It was no intimate family gathering, but it would get her out of her head for a bit. Besides, she liked Luke, in a way she’d rarely liked her peers growing up. There was something about him that drew her to him, and his company never failed to put her in a good mood. She’d always had trouble making friends, but with Luke everything felt so strangely easy. As if she had somehow always known him, and they were falling back into comfortable patterns rather than establishing new ones.

“Yes, I do think I’d like that, Luke. After this call, of course.”

His answering smile was dazzling. “I’ll let Sana and the guys know you’re joining us. And that it’s your birthday, too!” And with that, he dashed off.

When Leia reached the well-hidden part of their temporary shelter that housed the communication equipment, the holo was already switched on. Evaan waited there, her features washed over with the pale blue of the holorecorder.

“Your Royal Highness, on behalf of the Alderaanian people I would like to wish you a happy Name Day.” She even gave Leia a formal bow with the exact right amount of flourish needed for a proper birthday greeting to a royal. Honestly, Evaan was so much better at the nonsense Elder House protocol than Leia herself could have ever hoped to be - especially considering those were the lessons she’d always found a way to escape.

Well, it was her Name Day and the Elder Houses’ formal customs could shove it.

“Hey, Evaan. How’s the life of an elected leader treating you? Missing combat yet?”

For a long moment Evaan was silent, with the only acknowledgment of Leia’s statement a slight flicker of the corner of her mouth. For an Alliance fighter pilot, the woman was absurdly strict about her Royalist views. Leia thought she had broken her of those habits during their time in space together, but obviously, she was going to have to find new ways to get Evaan to treat her like a person and not some larger-than-life symbol.

Finally, Evaan’s posture relaxed. “Sorry, Leia, Astane was in the room. Thankfully she no longer is.”

“Oh? What could have possibly drawn Preserver of Alderaan Jora Astane away from the opportunity to engage in a formal Alderaanian custom?” Leia couldn’t keep the scorn out of her voice. She almost felt bad about it - Astane had pledged herself to the House of Organa and was one of Leia’s people, but the woman was a bigot. Evaan gave Leia a conspiratorial look as she talked about Astane, and Leia was once more reminded that while she had been able to walk away from dealing with the xenophobic woman, Evaan was now stuck living on a ship in addition to working closely with her.

“We’re having some ship issues. Nothing too major - the fleet is doing fine, really, but living on these sorts of starships full-time does put a strain on them.” Evaan tried to act as if it was normal for so many to live on ships such as those for so long. She did not quite manage to sell the idea.
“Here’s hoping one day we can find somewhere more permanent to set the fleet down.”

Evaan nodded, just as eager as Leia for the surviving Alderaanians to find a new home.

“Oh! That reminds me: some of the members of one of the artist colonies were talking, and - get this - they are thinking of building something we can live in out of the remains of the Death Star.”

“Why would they want anything to do with that horrible thing?” Leia tried and failed to keep the disgust out of her voice.

“They are proposing that if we built a station out of it, and lived and thrived there, it’d be the ultimate kriff you to the Empire. Actually, the idea is starting to grow on me.”

If it had been anyone other than a fellow Alderaanian telling her about such a plan, and one who had fought in both the Battle of Scarif and the Battle of Yavin at that, Leia would have snapped at them. As it was, she merely shook her head at what seemed to be a terrible idea.

“Well, I leave it in your capable hands.” Leia fondly regarded the former Y-wing jockey “You are my elected leader, after all.”

“Your elected leader?”

“Yes, Evaan, technically I am one of the citizens under your command now. I may have left the fleet before the election, but I very much am a citizen of Alderaan, thanks.”

“Princess, please don’t even joke about being under my command. You outrank me in every conceivable way.” The hologram of the tall woman shifted a bit, suddenly looking eager for information. “Have they reformed Gold Squadron? What are the new members like? They better not have let rookies take over the Rebellion’s best Y-Wing squad!”

Delighted by the opportunity to talk about the Rebellion with a close and trusted friend, Leia let herself enjoy their conversation, talking with her about everything from their shared hopes for the Alderaanian people’s future to ways the Rebellion could improve some of its flight tactics. Then, when she could put it off no longer, Evaan asked her to give a brief formal address for her Name Day. After all, hearing from the only remaining member of House Organa would mean a great deal to her fellow survivors.

A surprising amount of hours had passed by the time Leia shut off the holocaster - hours mostly spent in pleasant conversation with someone she could call a friend, a rare remnant of home - not entirely pragmatic and practical of her, perhaps, but, well. It was her birthday.

She let herself ponder self-indulgence some more as she made her way down the poorly lit corridors and to the party, where she immediately came face to face with a hastily scrawled banner proclaiming “And Princess Leia”, pinned under a far better prepared one that read “Happy Birthday Luke”

Han handed her a drink, and as a birthday gift seemed to be determined to be strangely pleasant to her for a change. No sarcastic or cutting remarks, no insults against her or the Rebellion, no reminders that all he really wanted to do was leave. Leave and never come back.

She knew that somewhere in that man was a brilliant military leader.

She saw how he was with Luke, the way he took the time and care to really show the kid (and again she found herself marveling at the fact they were the same age) how to take care of a ship. Of course, his own ship was a pile of trash that seemed to be held together by pure luck, but she supposed the
very fact he could get that heap of junk to fly proved that he knew his way around machines.

He smirked at her over his drink, and leaned down, invading her personal space far more than she would have liked.

“Having a good time, Your Worshipfulness?”

Strangely, she actually was.

Today was Leia’s twentieth birthday.

It was her first birthday without her family.

Her first birthday without her home.

She was not alone.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter: Two timelines collide, and neither will ever be the same.

Happy May the Fourth!
Leia Skywalker was never alone.

Which perhaps was why Ahsoka’s explanation that Leia would be facing her Trials entirely alone made her stomach twist in a way fully unfamiliar to her.

Not that she’d admit that to anyone.

Not even Luke.

“If you need to wait a bit longer before facing your Trials, there is no shame in that. You don’t need to rush into them.”

“What? No! I said I wanted to take my Trails not long after my birthday, and I meant it. I’m twenty now, which makes me a whole year older than my father was when he became a Jedi Knight. Much older than you were when you had your Trials. I’m ready”

“Skygal, it doesn’t work that way. There isn’t a schedule you are supposed to follow. You’re ready when you are ready.”

She hummed her acknowledgment of the statement but refused to cede the point.

Ahsoka sighed, and asked, “Would it help to remind you that Obi-Wan didn’t become a Knight until he was twenty five? That how quickly one achieves knighthood has nothing to do with how great a Jedi they will be?”

Leia snorted.

Rolling her eyes, used to her student’s endlessly stubborn nature, Ahsoka said, “No one is going to judge you for needing more time to prepare. In fact, it will probably be seen as a positive mark in your favor, since everyone knows how impulsive you are.”

“If the Council really wanted to curb my impulsiveness, then they should never have let me become your Padawan.”

“True. But they did, and that’s their headache to deal with.”

The two of them began to laugh then, the idea that Ahsoka would possibly temper Leia’s brashness a long-standing joke between the two of them.

A joke that had originated long before Leia had passed her Initiate Trials and became a Padawan, long before she had even held a lightsaber for the first time.
Leia could not remember when she and her Aunt 'Soka had started conspiring together, joking about how together they would be an unstoppable team.

It had been nice, spending the past few years training with Ashoka. Their missions together were the furthest Leia had ever been able to get away from her family before. Not that Ahsoka wasn’t part of her family!

Actually now that Leia thought about it, since she and Ahsoka were just as much family as they were Master and Padawan, she really had never been apart from her family before in her entire life.

Had never had to really puzzle things out fully on her own.

Normally, if she needed help she could easily reach out to her brother, who was as much a part of her as her sense of smell or connection to the Force. She had shared the womb with him, they had grown up with a Force-bond that connected them at all times, and of course, they’d been together for every single major milestone and event of both of their lives.

Growing up with a twin could be intimate enough. Growing up with a twin you literally have a psychic connection with made being on your own seem like an impossibly strange concept.

Not that either of her parents was prone to giving her much by way of privacy either. They both had their means of checking in on their children.

From her mother’s near endless number of contacts and aides who somehow were everywhere and eagerly reported everything back to the politician they served, to her father’s larger than life presence in the Force, there was nowhere one could really go where they were unable check-in on their children.

And that was just her immediate family!

Leia had spent her whole life making constant and easy use of bonds that keep her securely attached to the people around her, and not even a single one of those bonds would be there with her during her Trials.

Sure she’d be able to access them again once they were over, but during the Trial itself? For the first time in her life, Leia would be entirely on her own.

Leia had always vaguely wanted to know what it would feel like to experience solitude for a change, but she didn’t want her first experience with it to be during something as important and challenging as her Trials.

She shoved her uncertainty aside.

Leia had formally requested her Trials a week ago when she had been on Coruscant to celebrate her birthday with Luke and some of the other members of their old creche group.

During the party, Ezra had mentioned that Master Dume thought he was getting close to being ready for his, and Leia had decided right then and there that she needed to be the first in the creche group to pass them.

She’d marched up to the Council the following day to announce her intent to take them at the first available opportunity, and to her surprise they’d told her she could have her Trials as soon as she and her Master completed their next assignment.

Leia had expected it to be more of an argument then that, and was almost let by down the ease of the
whole process.

That was what brought her and Ahsoka to Horox III, actually.

There was an ancient Jedi temple here, or at least that was what the Temple records claimed. No one had been able to find the place for generations now, its presence was somehow blocked off in the Force. Recently a Padawan doing research in the archives had found a reference to this specific mountain range on Horox III, so they had been dispatched to survey the location and report back any evidence of an ancient Jedi presence that they may find.

As far as Leia was concerned, the problem really was that a Skywalker had never visited this desolate rock before to find the lost temple, and now that one had been it'd take no time at all to track the place down.

Then she could return home, and get those damn Trails over with. She’d finally be a Jedi Knight, like her father before her.

She reached out with the Force, seeking anything at all that might be a clue as to where to start looking.

There, just out of reach at the edge of her senses, it almost felt like… a campsite?

“Do you sense that? I think there are other beings here.”

The white markings on Ahsoka’s forehead drew together as she concentrated. “I don’t sense anything Skyygal. Where are you picking up those presences?”

Leia pointed to an opening in the cliff wall near their campsite. “Through there.”

Ahsoka contemplated where Leia was pointing. “On the other side of the cliff?”

“Through the opening, yeah.”

Ahsoka beamed, understanding dawning across her face. “Leia, I can't see an opening in the cliff face. I think the Force might be showing you something that isn’t for me." Ahsoka's smile dimmed into a more worried expression. "Do you sense any danger from it?”

Leia contemplated the opening, probing it as much as she was able. It pulled at her, beckoning her forward, to it. She couldn't sense anything but that building need to enter it, so she shook her head no.

“Well then little one, perhaps you should go and explore it.”

“Alone?”

“Leia, we came here for what could be your final assignment as a Padawan, for one last mission before your Trials, and the Force shows you a pathway I can not see or sense? I don’t know where it goes or what you will find inside, but I trust that you are ready. That you were meant to explore where that opening leads.”

And then to clearly end the conversation, Ahsoka began to meditate. Or at least she made to look like she was meditating, Leia was pretty sure the Togruta woman just had her eyes closed and was focused on listening to what Leia would do next.

Great.
Just great.

Leia shifted her weight from foot to foot, suddenly finding every excuse in the world to avoid going down that path.

She knew she was putting off what she had to do, what she wanted to do no less, but there were so many unknowns.

Finally, she nodded sharply, muttered, “I have a bad feeling about this,” to herself, and drew her saber. She let her blade’s aqua blue light illuminate her path as she began to go down the crevice in the cliff face.

Leia had not expected to enjoy the party as much as she had.

She had drunk a fair bit more than she planned, had danced with both Luke and Sana, and had spent a great deal of time with Chewbacca, who was helping her brush up her Shyriiwook.

Oh sure, her senatorial profile had claimed she was fluent in the Wookie's native tongue, but that was only because she had sliced into the database herself to make that claim. She had naively thought she wouldn’t need to use the language in her work, and that smudging the truth would not have any consequence. After all, how could her meager proficiency with the language ever impact her day to day life?

How strange to know she had thought in such a way just a few months ago.

Her lessons with Chewie had ended at least an hour ago. She'd lost track of time, letting herself enjoy the moment in a way she rarely did, and now Han was helping her back to her makeshift quarters.

Not that she was drunk enough to really need his help, but it was a nice gesture all the same. She blamed the way she was leaning against him on the Lum.

He was saying something, she could feel the rumble of his voice as he talked, but she kept spacing out and missing good chunks of it. Well, whatever it was probably didn’t matter that much, since he just kept speaking regardless of any response on her part.

Then she saw something she was certain had not been there when they had scouted the area and set up camp. An opening in the cliff face, fully unguarded.

“Do you see that?”

The comforting rumble of his voice stopped for a moment, and returned again when he asked: “See what?”

She stumbled out of Han’s grasp and began to walk towards it, to investigate closer.

“Hey, come on, whatever it is you think you see can wait until morning.”

“It’s a breach in our security.”

He followed after her, annoyed. “It’s a breach that can wait, Your Worship, you need to get to bed.”

She was dizzier than she had expected she’d be, and she could sharply feel the cold night air where she had been pressed against him just moments before.

Letting him wrap his arm around her again as he guided her through the base, lying down and then
sleeping... well all of those things did sound awfully tempting.

Too bad she could not let this go uninvestigated.

“No Captain Solo, I don’t think it can wait.”

He threw his hands into the air and turned away from the cliff, making a show out of moving in the direction her bunk was set up in. “You’re drunk Princess. There isn’t anything there but a fragging cliff face.”

Just to prove him wrong she rushed into the crevice.

She stumbled, finding quickly that she had to lean on the edge of the wall to keep going in the dark and narrow passage.

Perhaps Han had been right, and she was too drunk to follow this path right now?

But she couldn't have turned away from this, deep down she knew that. She couldn't explain why, but she knew she absolutely had to see where it led. There was something about this tunnel that just seemed to be… calling to her.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Leia Skywalker attends a party, and Leia Organa puzzles over how she found the supposedly dead original Fulcrum sitting in front of a campfire.

Please know I'm going to try my best to stick to a chapter a week update schedule.

Also, please let me know if you'd be interested in helping beta this monster of a fic!
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

I felt kind of bad about how short the early chapters of the story are, and well... I honestly just dislike having so much of this thing just sitting on my laptop unread by anyone but myself. So enjoy chapter three!

Please please please if there are any edits you think should be made, let me know. I would very much appreciate help making sure it is the best story it can possibly be.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Someone was yelling.

A Lot.

Mainly things like “this is so not my fault” and “never should have let her out of my sight”

It was clear there was someone else here, and whoever they were they were not having a good day.

Fortunately, the Force seemed to indicate that while mad, this being posed no threat to her of any sort.

Weird. The inherent nature of the Force felt very strange. Darker, colder, and somehow emptier. The place where she could normally sense the presence of the entire Order was empty. She couldn’t feel any of her bonds either. Maybe this really was her Trial and that was why she felt so alone in the Force? She was probably going to have to investigate that. But first, time to make contact with the locals.

The source of the yelling was a pale Human, dressed like a spacer. She was assuming the spacer was male, but of course one could never tell those sort of things simply by appearance alone. He was not facing her, so she called over a “Hello there!”

“Finally! There you are you -” he stopped talking as he caught sight of her, and his mouth kind of just hung there as if he had been intending to say something and then forgot it. He’d be all kinds of handsome if he just closed that mouth of his.

She’d seen tons people react similarly before, especially on Outer Rim worlds like this one, places where Jedi were far less common.

There really was no mistaking what she was. Her no-nonsense short hairstyle emphasized her Padawan braid. Her robes were of a cut and style that only Jedi really wore, and well… the lightsaber was a dead give away.

She nodded at him with understanding. “Yes, I am a Jedi a-”

Now she was the one who wasn’t finishing her sentences, although in her case it was because the man had decided to cut her off mid-word.

“I’m not being paid enough to deal with this nonsense!” He turned and stormed away. Which really
was not good, because he was the only person Leia knew here. Well not that she knew him, but at the very least the Force had made it clear he was safe, and that was better than nothing. So she clipped her 'saber to her belt, and quickly followed after his longer strides. It seemed he was still ranting, something had clearly really ticked him off.

They were drawing closer to the sounds of a party. Music, voices, laughter. Of all the weird things she was preparing for when she set out through that tunnel, a hot guy taking her to a party was not one of them.

Just as they approached the edge of the party he spun around, jamming a finger in her face. “Look, sister, I have no idea what sort of nonsense you are trying to pull here, but I want no part in it. I was trying to be nice, helping you back to your quarters and all that, and first, you go and disappear on me, and now you pull… whatever this is. If you wanted me to leave you alone, you could have just said so.”

She had to be missing something here. To make things worse, the man had managed to lose her in her confusion over his outburst.

She looked around the party and caught sight of a banner hung over a table with various cheap alcohols on it. “Happy Birthday Luke” it read, with a far less put together second banner pinned to it adding “And Princess Leia.” What?

She looked around again, hoping to see something, anything, that could help her get her bearings. A lot of the party goers were giving her strange looks along the lines of the one the spacer had earlier. She sent out a silent plea to the Force to help her figure out what was going on. It seemed however that the Force really had a sense of humor that day because on her third glance around the room she saw something she really did not expect at all.

There, in one corner of the party dressed in a garish orange flight suit, somehow having arrived without her sensing his presence at all, was Luke.

She knew that tunnel had been a security breach.

It opened onto a wide clearing. As if to prove that it was indeed large enough for someone to land a ship and sneak up on them, there was a starship already waiting there.

By it was a small campsite, with bedrolls set up for two occupants. Only one was there at the moment.

An oddly familiar Togruta sat by the fire, seemingly meditating.

Leia was sure she had seen that person before, but where?

She drew closer, letting one of her hands fall closer to the defender sporting blaster pistol holstered by her side. She wished she had her modified E-11 blaster rifle, the one she had named Trooper Bane, with her but unfortunately she had left it in her bunk. She was still confident that the smaller blaster combined with her hand to hand combat training would suffice. Even if she was still dizzy.

Worst came to worse, she also had a holdout blaster tucked into one of her boots.
“Find anything interesting?”

The Togruta didn’t even open their eyes, just sat there with legs folded as if meditating.

“Leia?”

Whoever this was knew who she was somehow. Had their eyes been open Leia would have understood how. Her face was after all well known throughout the galaxy. Thanks to a childhood spent in the public eye as both a member of the Elder Houses and a Senator, and because she was now the face and voice of a great deal of the Alliance propaganda campaigns.

“What was inside the opening?”

Where had she seen those markings before? They were so familiar. She should know this. Those markings, they were a symbol a symbol of…

“Fulcrum!”

“Inside the crevice, you found…..a fulcrum?”

Yes! Yes, those markings were used by Fulcrum agents like Captain Andor or Captain Kallus when they sent their transmissions. In honor of the very first Fulcrum, a Togruta woman who the Rebellion had assumed was dead years ago. This had to be her! Her facial markings, they were identical to the Fulcrum call sign!

She must really be drunk if it took her this long to place those markings.

“Yes, yes it seems I have found a Fulcrum.” she laughed then, at the absurdity of going through a tunnel to find one of the founders of the Rebellion calmly sitting in front of a campfire. “Have you been hiding from the Empire? Is that why you are here? The last anyone saw you had been on Malachor, where we were told you encountered Darth Vader. We didn’t know you survived.”

Fulcrum looked puzzled and finally opened her eyes, her confusion only increasing as she took in Leia’s appearance.

“Leia, what are you talking about? The Empire? Darth Vader?” She laughed then, it sounded bitter and rueful. “I am pretty sure I’d remember going to a place as cursed and forbidden as Malachor, and I’d definitely remember fighting with a Sith there.” She cocked her head to the side and smirked. “Actually fighting a Sith on Malachor sounds pretty incredible. I hope in this story of yours I kick the ass of this Darth… Vader was it?”

“How can you pretend you don’t know who Vader is? Like you don’t know about the evils of the Empire?”

Fulcrum laughed again and stood from her spot by the fire. “Ok Skygal, enough with the wild stories. Time to take off that… wig?” Her tone changed from amused to worried. “Leia, where did you find that? I mean I may not be the galaxy’s best expert on Human hair, but I am pretty sure it can’t grow that fast. Did you bring it here with you? Is it your mom’s?”

Leia shook her head, clearly, she was very very drunk and that was why nothing was making any sense.

Karabast, shaking her head was really not a good plan. Now everything was starting to spin. She should not have had that last glass of Lum.
At some point when she was trying to reorient herself, Fulcrum had approached her. She now was standing far too close for someone Leia had just met, and even put a hand on Leia’s shoulder without asking permission first. Leia flinched away from her hand on her shoulder, and Fulcrum frowned. She crouched down, so she would be eye level with the far shorter Human. “Hey, what’s wrong?”

Leia started to respond, but before she even could Fulcrum interrupted. “Is… is that alcohol I smell on you? Are you drunk?”

Great. Just great. She was isolated from her camp, talking to a complete stranger (thankfully one she was sure was an old friend of her father’s and even a founding member of the Rebellion), and not only was she tired and dizzy, but her head was starting to pound as well.

Han was never, ever, going to let her live this one down. He had told her to wait until morning to explore that tunnel and she just had to go barreling on into it just to spite him, didn’t she?

Fulcrum let out a loud sigh and gave her the sort of exasperated look her tutors used to after she’d slipped their lessons. Or made it clear she hadn’t been paying attention. Or they had caught her calling them one of the thousands of less than kind nicknames she’d spend her lessons making up. Leia knew that sort of expression really well.

“Ok, clearly talking to you isn’t going to go anywhere as long as you are drunk, Force knows where you found alcohol on this rock or what possessed you to drink it, and honestly given how strange your presence in the Force is right now I’m thinking it’d be best if we spoke to the Council. So why don’t we go back to the ship, and figure things out from there?”

The Council? Yes! Speaking with the rest of Alliance High Command really would be the best course of action. She knew that Fulcrum had been on the Council in its earlier years, long before Leia was, was she still able to contact them? If so why had she fallen out of communication four years ago?

Leia wasn’t comfortable getting on that ship, but she also didn’t want to lead Fulcrum to the base camp without more information about where she had been since her excursion to Malachor.

There had been a time when even knowing there was an agent called Fulcrum had been evidence that a being was loyal to the Rebellion. Doubting Fulcrum’s dedication to the cause would have seemed outlandish then, but Leia believed there was no such thing as too much caution. Not when it came to preserving the existence of the Rebel Forces.

Fulcrum seemed to be taking her silence as permission to head back to her ship.

Wait a moment. Clipped to her belt, were those lightsabers?

“Are you a Jedi?”

Fulcrum stopped walking and spun around. Her brow furrowed, and she glanced down to Leia’s blaster. Then her gaze snapped up again, and all the concern and humor vanished in an instant, replaced with a steely resolve. Two green lightsabers flared to life in her hands.

“You are not my Padawan.”
Next time: Leia Skywalker has a very frustrating conversation, and remembers why she dislikes psychometry.
She tried reaching out to her brother through their bond but found there was something blocking her. Then she tried just feeling for his familiar presence and was really concerned. Leia knew how her brother felt in the Force better than anything. It was likely the very first thing she had ever learned in her life. Yet right now, at this impossible party taking place on what should be an abandoned world, Luke felt… wrong.

Leia was reminded of some artwork she had seen the last time she had been on Mandalore. The artist had portrayed the world around them with cubes and other shapes to represent what they saw, and in the end, had created something fully distinct from the original subject and yet representative of it all the same.

Luke's presence right now was like that painting. He was still very clearly recognizable as Luke, but each and every single detail was wrong.

What was going on here?

Leia made her way over to him, noting with distracted interest that the crowd seemed to part for her. The people here were intimidated by her presence. Maybe that was why Luke was dressed in that horrid outfit. She could see a lot of the others present wore it as well, it was some sort of uniform, he must have been attempting to blend in.

"Luke!"

He looked up from the conversation he was having with another flight suit wearing being, then did a double take.

"Leia? What did you do to your hair?"

What was with people today and her hair? Her hair was fine, and Luke knew better than to bug her about it. She hated, absolutely hated in a way she knew a Jedi should not, the way her mother was always criticizing her choices regarding her hair. It was fine, she liked it the way it was, and she had no intention of changing it in any way, save for cutting her braid off once she finished her Trials. Speaking of Padawan braids…

"I should be the one asking you that. Where did your braid go?" His hair was also far shaggier than it was a week ago. He must have had some sort of hair growth tonic. She couldn't imagine why.

"Braid? What braid? Huh? I'm uh… I'm sorry, I really am lost."

The man her brother had been talking to, and knowing Luke he probably had been flirting with him, gave her a strained smile. "I like the new look, Princess. It's really… Different?" He and Luke exchanged glances, and Luke shrugged.

"What is going on here?"

"Uhhh, a birthday party?"

"Yes you moo-f-milker, I can see that," she said.
"Hey! Why are you insulting me? If you want to insult someone go find Han."

"Who?"

"Oh no. What'd he do this time? It's probably bad if you're pretending you don't know him." He looked at her hair and robes again. "Is Han responsible for your new look? No, wait, that makes no sense."

She'd have to agree with him there. Nothing was making any sense.

She was also finding it disconcerting to be having an entirely verbal conversation with her brother in such a loud place. She had trouble focusing at times in environments like this and really was not used to being unable to communicate with him via their bond.

"Can I speak with you alone? Somewhere quieter?" She asked while casting an apologetic look at her brother's date. As soon as she asked, the man departed, slapping Luke on the back and winking at him as he left them.

"Where were you thinking of going?"

Lacking any better idea Leia gestured back the way she came. Luke gaped at her for a moment, was there something in that direction that she should be aware of?

"You aren't just doing this because you're mad at Han, right?"

How had her twin gotten so concerned with her relationship with some guy she didn't even know?

"Come'on Lu, I promise this has nothing to do with" she paused as she recalled the name "Han."

His grin was hopeful. It was also very strange. There was one thing in the universe she had thought she could always count on to make sense, and that was her brother. He was always there and he was always himself. It seemed that wasn't the case anymore. For the first time in her life, she couldn't figure out what he was thinking, at all.

She grabbed at Luke's hand, and they walked together back towards the tunnel Leia had come through. As they walked Leia took in her surroundings once more, feeling far more calm with her brother there.

Whatever this place was it was clearly very hastily put together, but not in a way where it could have sprung up overnight.

She still didn't understand how this camp had been built in the short time since she and Ahsoka had arrived on this planet, why the Force felt so wrong, or why she couldn't connect with her brother with it, but at least he was there with her.

She wasn't alone.

She wanted to share her joy at finding him here but kept encountering that strange block in their bond when she tried. She squeezed his hand instead, and he gave her a wide grin in response.

Finally, they reached somewhere where the sounds of the party were low enough for them to have a conversation in peace. She let her brother's hand go and leaned against the smooth face of the cliff.

"Where'd all these people come from?"

"Huh?"
"The people at that party?"

"Well, I told you, since we weren't able to do anything for my birthday last week the others started talking about throwing a party for me." That made no sense, the two of them had celebrated together on their birthday. "Actually I think it was supposed to be a lot smaller than it ended up being. After I told people that it was your birthday and you'd actually be coming to the party more people got involved." He glanced back towards the party. "They'd really like to know you better Leia. I know you're their superior and all, but well, you're mine too and that hasn't stopped us from being friends."

This was without question the most confusing conversation she had ever had with her brother. "What?" She decided the best thing to do would be to change the subject. "There's an ancient Jedi temple around here."

"What? How'd you find out about that? Where?"

"I don't know where. Do you want to look for it with us?"

"Us? Who else are you looking for it with?"

"Aunt 'Soka is here. I left her by our ship. She couldn't sense any of the people over here though, which is weird."

"Who?"

Ok, that really was not funny. What sort of game was he playing at?

"Aunt 'Soka? My Jedi Master? Dad's old Padawan? Ring any bells?"

He looked as confused as she felt. "You... you have a Jedi Master?"

"No Lulu, I took the Trials and didn't tell you. My braid's only still here because I didn't feel like cutting it off after." she rolled her eyes at the absurdity of it all.

"Will you stop talking krayt spit and make some sense? I don't understand a word you're saying!" He yelled and then sighed and collected his thoughts before continuing, "Leia, when you said 'your Jedi Master', did you mean you have found one for me to train with?"

"What? I'm not making sense? You're the one who isn't making any sense!" Every time she thought this conversation couldn't get any more confusing he just had to go ahead and make it worse.

"Why are you yelling at me? Leia, please I'm trying to understand, really I am. Why don't you start over from the beginning, and maybe this time one of us will understand what it is the other is trying to say." Luke ground the words out, far more frustrated than he normally let himself get.

How committed was he to this act anyway? She certainly was over it. An idea came to her then, to actively remove the two of them from this dead end of a conversation. She grabbed his hand again and led him further along the cliff wall. The tunnel she came through had to be there, somewhere up ahead.

They went for a bit like that, Leia rushing ahead and dragging Luke behind her. Yet they encountered no break in the cliff's wall. The path Leia had used to enter this place was gone.

"Ugh! Where did it go!"

"Where did what go?"
"There was a path here through the cliff. I can't find it."

"There was?"

She tried sensing it, but not only could she find no indication of it, when she cast her senses towards the campsite where Ahsoka was waiting for her she felt nothing.

Luke was staring at her. "Were you just using the Force?"

She was prepared to start another fight with him until she actually looked at his face. He looked so confused, lost and also strangely hopeful. She studied him again with the Force, and saw that there was a loneliness to him she had not expected, as well as a growing sense of almost… betrayal?

Earlier she had been assuming that they were talking about the same things, but what if she was wrong? Had she been the one starting their argument?

A thousand variants of different people in her life saying to her "Don't rush into things so much Leia," "Your impulsiveness makes you sloppy," and "That's not the Jedi way." flashed through her memory, and she inhaled deeply and counted to five before exhaling and forcing her posture to relax.

Mindfulness. Right. "Luke, what is bothering you about me using the Force?" She promised herself she'd hear out whatever he said, no matter how confusing it was.

"So you were using it! Why… why didn't you tell me that you could? You know that I want to be a Jedi, that I am searching for whatever information I can to possibly learn… anything really, yet you kept from me that you can use it? All those times I've shared my frustrations with you, and," his tone switched from angry to sad, "you just never mentioned that you actually have a clue about what to do with the Force? Who is this Jedi Master? Why have I never met or heard about them before? I understand if you have to keep secrets from me for the sake of the Rebellion but… I really thought you supported me becoming a Jedi."

None of that made sense and part of her wanted to vent her frustrations at him over that. But she had promised herself to let Luke explain, so instead, she tried to figure out where to start unpacking that long stream of nonsense.

"You were unaware that I can use the Force?" That was one of the biggest sources of their miscommunication it seemed, and also the one that made the least amount of sense to her.

"Of course I was unaware of that! You never mentioned it, or let me see you use it before! Why didn't you trust me with that Leia? I thought you knew how much this means to me!" Wow, she hadn’t really heard him get that mad since they had started their training at the temple.

"What do you mean, I've never mentioned it or used it in front of you before?" The patient understanding thing was so much harder when you were dealing with your sibling and he was insisting on saying absolute bantha shit.

He sputtered, trying to recall any examples of a time Leia had used or mentioned the Force.

It shouldn't have been hard.

Then his anger faded, and he seemed lost in thought.

"Were you using it to guide you during combat? Like when you pulled off that suicidal stunt on Vrogras Vas?" It was a sincere question, clearly, Leia just had no idea what he was talking about.
"I've never even heard of that place. What you are saying just doesn't make any sense, you've known we're both Force-sensitive for... well forever. Since we were old enough to understand what that means."

"Huh? Leia, I only met you a few months ago! You'd think the whole thing would be hard to forget, what with Han and I rescuing you from the Death Star and all. Well... we provided you with a ship and opened your cell door. You kinda ran that rescue, we were just the fools there to try and help." His smile suggested this was some sort of private joke, but whatever he was trying to reference went right over her head.

Screw patient understanding, he really was committed to just saying nonsense to her. "That is probably the most outlandish lie you've tried telling in your entire life. Of course we knew each other as younglings, we've always known each other! I'm trying really hard here to understand what you're saying because you're my brother and I love you, but you're making it really hard for me right now."

"I'm your what? Leia, come on, stop joking around and be serious. I've never seen you act like this before."

"You're my brother. Specifically my twin brother."

He laughed. "Leia, I'm like a week older than you."

"Five kriiffing minutes, and they really don't count." She hated it when he teased her about being older and taller than her. He wasn't that much taller than her, and what difference did such a short amount of time make anyway?

He drew away from her, regarding her suspiciously. Then he closed his eyes and breathed in hard. She felt his presence touch up against her in the Force and gladly latched onto it. The bond wasn't as strong as she was used to, but it was there now, it existed. When he opened his eyes again there were tears in them.

"You... you're telling the truth. Somehow, you really are my sister. It seems so impossible, but also, right. This explains so much. The way I've always felt about you makes so much sense now. But... why? Why were we kept apart? What reason was there to separate us? Leia..."

Her brother hugged her then, squeezing her tight against his chest. She felt his emotions swirl about in the Force as if he had just had some sort of major revelation.

She didn't understand it, but she didn't need to. What she needed was to make sure her brother was ok.

She did not know how long they stood there, just holding each other, before she heard footsteps coming towards them as well as voices. One she recognized as the man she'd run into as soon as she'd exited the tunnel, the other was speaking Shyriiwook.

"...if we put off paying him back any longer, Jabba's going to change the terms of the bounty. Right now it's 50,000 credits, but once it says he wants me dead or alive, well there ain't no going back from that is there?"

"Han, is this really about the bounty?"

"Hey! What sort of ulterior motive could I possibly have?"

"You and the Princess had another fight. You know, maybe if you stopped insulting her and everything she believes in..."
"Oh, shut up Chewie."

"Her cause is a just one. You know what happened to Kashyyyk. To my family."

"Yeah, I know Pal. I know."

Had something happened to Kashyyyk?

Luke stepped away from her, and he turned to face in the direction the voices were coming from. "Should I actually say goodbye, or are you only thinking about leaving again Han?"

"Why're you out here alone in that corner? Shouldn't you be at the party, celebrating the great wonder of somehow surviving yet another year? And look, Kid, it's been fun but I've got a bounty to pay off, c'mon you know how the Hutts are."

Their bond may have been far weaker than Leia was used to, but she knew that something he said made Luke feel bad. As far as Leia was concerned, she was the only being in the galaxy that was allowed to do that.

"We were having a pleasant conversation until you arrived," Leia said as she stepped out of the shadows.

The man, this Han she kept hearing about, sputtered for a bit, glancing between the twins with outrage. "Oh, so the two of you were-"

His Wookie friend placed a hand on his shoulder "Leave it Han. You wanted to leave anyway. Let it go."

"You should listen to your friend and leave," she said, gesturing towards the Wookie as she spoke.

"You understood me, Princess?" "Since when do you speak Shyriiwook?" "Leia, how do you understand Chewie?"

The three questions rang out all at once, overlapping each other as the three men expressed their surprise. It was Luke's question that she chose to focus on.

It was another strange question he should not have been asking, in a long line of him saying and asking things that really made no sense, but she answered it just the same. "One of our teachers, when we were younglings, was a Wookie. Master Gungi," she spoke slowly and clearly as she would to a youngling. What was wrong with Luke?

The Wookie, Chewie, huffed his interest before responding, "I knew a cub named Gungi who had been sent to the Jedi to train. But he was killed with the rest of the Jedi. How do you know someone so long dead?"

"Dead? I just saw Master Gungi a week ago!"

Han sneered at her, "Oh, does this go along with whatever possessed you to chop all your hair off, and that laser sword you were waving about earlier?"

"She has a lightsaber? Leia, is it one of the ones we found with Grakkus the Hutt? Because you didn't say anything about keeping any of those."

Huh?

"No, I built it myself when I was a youngling. Just like you made yours." To emphasize her point
she reached out and took the 'saber clipped to her brother's belt. Only it wasn't her brother's 'saber, it was their dad's. "Why do you have this?"

"It's my father's lightsaber," he said, and then gave her a confused glance, "uh, our father's lightsaber?"

Han looked at Luke with surprise but did not say anything.

"Yes Luke, I know that. Why are you carrying this one, and not your own? Does dad know you took it?"

"Leia, he's dead." His matter of fact tone grated at her.

"What! When? How? Why didn't you say anything?" No wonder Luke was acting so strange. Something had happened to their dad? She felt sick. Her father was dead?

What was it that Chewie had said? "Killed with all the other Jedi." She reached out again in the Force and felt nothing but a staggering emptiness.

"Are you ok? Leia? This… this isn't new information," Luke sounded flabbergasted, "He died a very long time ago, I thought you knew."

Han snorted and pointed one of his thumbs in Luke's direction. "It's practically the first thing the Kid says whenever he meets anyone, isn't it?"

Leia was barely paying any attention. She was still focused on the Force, on how dark and sad it somehow was.

She reached out with all of her strength towards where she could normally sense her father, and was met with an overwhelming cold. It rolled over her and choked her with its intensity. Yet in the center of that anger, of that hurt and sickening resentment, she felt something familiar. Something she knew.

For a moment, just a moment, the bond she and her father shared flared to life in full, and through it she felt endless pain. A voice, mechanic and unfamiliar echoed in her head, Luke? Luke is that you? …Do you know who I am Luke? She closed off the bond as quickly as she could, and felt him pounding against her defenses as she did. What she felt terrified her, and as much as she had wanted the reassurance her father was alive, what she had found brought her no comfort.

Her father was a Sith, and based on what she sensed, he had been one for a very long time.

She was shaking, could feel sweat already cooling against her body. She was so cold, why was she sweating?

The three men she'd been talking to were all watching her, not sure what to do. Some time must have passed, the men were in different places than they had been before. They looked panicked.

She tried to center herself. Except that action involved her reaching for the Force, and doing so only reminded her again of how wrong it felt.

How wrong everything felt.

She swallowed, and it burned in her throat like bile.

Now she noticed the things she had missed.

The scar on the back of Luke's hand, the one he'd gotten when they were six, was gone. His face
looked more weathered, he'd been exposed to the sun too long without protection in the past. He was thinner, his smile more hesitant. She hadn't wanted to see those differences before, had overlooked them to focus on the comfort of attachment she had needed instead.

Another thought came to her, a way she could really understand just how deep this wrongness went. She still held her father's lightsaber in her hand.

If she wanted, she could get it to tell her what she needed to know.

She never liked it, but she was able to use psychometry. In this case, the need to know overwhelmed her usual hesitance. She focused on the blade in her hand and…

It came to her in flashes.

*There were children, many of whom she recognized as Jedi she'd grown up around, dead. Cut down by this very blade.*

*There was her mother, pregnant, lying on the ground. Alive, but only just.*

*Her father's voice, full of such hate, "From my point of view, the Jedi are evil!"*

*There was her father, his limbs cut away from his body, falling into lava.*

*A pained cry, Uncle Obi's, "You were my brother, Anakin! I loved you!"*

No.

No.

This… This could not be happening.

How was this happening?

She dropped the Sith Lord's lightsaber, her father's lightsaber, not wanting to see anything more.

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Leia Organa has a hangover, and Leia Skywalker is pretty sure she is actually in some sort of Sith Hell
“Thank you for carrying her Chewie.” Luke’s voice drew her out of the nightmare visions and back to the nightmare reality.

She’d stopped shaking. Someone had laid her out on a cot, in what was clearly a sickbay.

She tried releasing the worst of her emotions into the Force, but there were so many of them and she could only let go of so much.

She tried to smile at her companions, but the muscles of her face protested the simple action.

A med droid whirred near her, about to run some tests.

“No, that… that’s ok,” she told it, “I think I understand what is happening now. I’m sorry it took me so long to figure it out.”

“I’m glad things are making sense to someone, but why don’t you share this revelation of yours with the droid so we can all get some peace of mind?” The spacer, Han, practically growled.

“No, there isn’t anything the droid would find, physically I’m fine. It... Kriff, the reality of it is pretty impossible. You’d probably just laugh.” If only it was a joke.

“Well, why don’t you tell us, Leia? I mean you’ve already said some pretty impossible things today, and well I can’t speak for Han but I didn’t laugh at them,” Luke said in his usual understanding tone. Usual for her Luke. She didn’t know if it was usual for this Luke.

“Ok,” she said catching her breath, “Are either of you familiar with the concept of alternative universes?”

Han didn’t miss a beat, he cocked his head to the side and nodded. “Like the one Loo Re Anno was from?”

“The racer? Really?” For a moment she let herself feel a surprising sense of joy, happy to learn something new about the most famous racer in the Galaxy. Did this man somehow know her? She and her dad had watched the last Dragon Void Run together, and Anno had been so close to winning, just to somehow vanish at the last moment as she neared the race’s end. She closed her eyes and savored the memory of her father’s overjoyed smile as they huddled close in the crowd and cheered for their favorite ships.

As she opened them again, she gave Luke another long lingering look. How had she mistaken him for her Luke? “I think the Force sent me from another universe. One with a different past. I’m sorry for only figuring that out now.”

“Look I may not be the brightest star in the sky Princess, but as far as explanations go that one is pure krayt spit.”

“It is. But it is the only explanation I’ve got. I’m still Leia Skywalker, just a version of her from another timeline.”
“Organa,” Luke said, and when she gave him a curious glance he continued, "Your name is Leia
Organa. Princess Leia Organa of Alderaan, to be exact.” He shrugged as she gave him a surprised
look. “It’s important.”

That explained why everyone kept calling her Princess. She’d been wondering about that.

Huh.

She wondered if the Organa family had never adopted Princess Winter in this universe if apparently
she had been their daughter.

What a strange thought, being the daughter of someone other than her parents.

Her mother had to be dead.

She thought of her lying on the ground, of what it probably meant about who was responsible for her
loss.

Her heart clenched.

“Right. So you just stumbled on into our reality from a place where you and Luke are what?
Siblings? Ran about the desert together learning nonsense from crazy old wizards? You really expect
us to believe this crap?” Han seemed determined to rationalize the impossible away.

“Han, it does explain how she suddenly understands Shyriiwook,” Chewie said, and Leia was
grateful someone believed her, “earlier tonight I was teaching The Princess how to understand simple
phrases, and now she seems to understand me as well as you do.”

“That doesn’t prove anything, maybe she’s just a fast learner.”

“No one can learn that fast.”

“Ok, say she is telling the truth. Where is our Leia then, huh? Are you suggesting that she just
vanished? That she’s lost in some alternative universe and who knows if she’ll ever come back?” As
he spoke his voice increased in volume. His eyes flashed with a potent mixture of panic and anger,
and he rounded on Leia. “Where is she then? How do we get her back? You have to know how to
get her back!”

“I thought you were talking about leaving again?” Luke asked, looking at him with a fond
bemusement. "Why do you care?"

“Shut it, Kid. Either she’s pulling our legs or we need to figure out how to get The Princess back.”
He didn’t yell this time. It sounded like his voice was going a bit hoarse.

She needed him to stop yelling at her.

She needed to try to mediate.

That horrible dark presence (what happened that could have possibly turned her father into that
monster?) was still pounding on her shields.

Why had he thought she was Luke?

Why did Luke think his father was dead?

A million questions ran through her mind, each one summoning a thousand more to join in its wake.
She needed to breathe.

Just breathe.

Find somewhere quiet to sit and try to release some of this all into the Force.

“I don’t know if we can get her back right now. I think this is my Trial, I can’t go home until I’ve done what I was sent here by the Force to do.”

Luke gave her a curious look. "I think you are right, about the Force wanting you here. I just... have this overwhelming feeling that you are where you are supposed to be. It's."

“Oh is that what your mystical hocus-pocus wants?” Han asked, outraged. "That why you are so calm about this whole ridiculous story of hers?"

The cold presence pressed up against her again. By reaching for him earlier she had opened up a path between them, and unfortunately, she had always been far better at establishing bonds than ending them.

Oh no.

She realized then what the Force probably intended for her to do.

She was going to have to confront him, meet this twisted and corrupted version of her dad and… what? Fight him? Bring him back to the light?

Both seemed impossible.

She wondered if Luke knew anything about what had happened. How their father had fallen. If Luke didn’t know, then he might know of others who did.

Leia finally settled on asking, “Who is the Sith I sense?”

Unfortunately, it seemed Luke did not know what a Sith was. He did, however, understand who she meant when she called him a Dark Sider.

“That’s probably Darth Vader. Ben said he’s the one who killed my, sorry I am still adjusting to this, our father. He killed Ben too.” Luke was angry and restless and so very sad as he spoke, the emotions suffusing the space around them, unguarded and open.

Leia would need to remember to ask him to tell her more later. Like who this "Ben" was.

As it was she knew this story would be emotionally taxing for her to hear, and she was already dealing with enough on that front. She wasn't going to overwhelm herself emotionally if she could help it.

She’d already done that enough for one day.

So instead of asking any of the questions she needed the answers to, Leia asked if they could leave her to rest.

She had to agree to have some tests run on her by the droid of course, but once she agreed to those the three worried men agreed to give her some peace.

With a sigh, she leaned back and tried her best to find some inner calm and sort through all the strange events that had made up her day.
Leia woke up slowly. Her head hurt. A lot. She remembered something to do with… Fulcrum? And Lightsabers? Everything was very blurry and… ugh, the lights were far too bright in here.

Wait, where was here?

She tried to sit up, and her body responded with a rolling wave of nausea.

Great.

To make things worse, she could hear the unmistakable hum of hyperspace.

The sound was really making her head hurt.

Well it was making it hurt more than it did already.

Wonderful, she was in a fully unknown situation, and she was hungover.

What was the point of being 20 years old if you couldn’t have a few drinks too many and still be fine?

She groaned and accepted that any plan to escape would have to wait.

“Do you need water?”

Ow. That voice was way too loud.

“Sorry about knocking you out earlier. I kind of panicked.” The woman from the campsite was sitting on a chair next to her cot, regarding her in what seemed to be a sincerely apologetic manner. “I’m going to guess that getting knocked out on top of a hangover must lead to a really awful headache. So I brought you some water as a peace offering.”

She lifted a glass of water up, presenting it to Leia with a grin.

“You… you knocked me out?” Even inebriated Leia should have been able to remember a fight that ended like that. The woman’s larger size and rippling musculature (she must have kept her shoulders bare as some sort of intimidation tactic) was no excuse, she’d taken on plenty of opponents in the past who were larger than her, as well as those with far more brute strength. Anyone who doubted that could talk to Pash Davane about what happened when you underestimated Leia in unarmed combat, even when she was severely incapacitated.

Not-Fulcrum had the decency to look apologetic, at the very least. “Yeah, I used the Force. I was… not exactly thinking clearly when I figured out you weren’t Leia.”

“What?” Leia moaned, “I am missing several large somethings here.”

She had used the Force? Maybe she really was a Jedi. Also, what did she mean, Leia wasn’t Leia?

“Oh believe me, so am I. After I ran a full scan of the planet and detected no biometric readings save for a handful of tiny settlements pretty far from where we were, I contacted the Council. They want to see you in person, so that is where we are headed.”

How had her scan missed their camp? They were well hidden, sure, but not well enough to escape a life scan.

Leia was also very uncomfortable being on this woman’s ship. She’d have to take it over as soon as
they dropped out of hyperspace. She didn’t really want to wait, but her hangover combined with the risks of hijacking a ship while it was on an unknown hyperspace route forced her hand.

Wait, earlier when the woman had mentioned a Council Leia had assumed she meant the Rebel Council. She did not want to make the same mistake twice. “When you say you contacted the Council, who are you referring to?”

“The Jedi Council.”

Leia laughed. It hurt her head to laugh, but that statement needed to be laughed at, pain or no pain. “That’s a good joke. Where are we actually headed?”

Not-Fulcrum, Leia really needed to learn her name, smiled at the sound of Leia’s laughter. “That’s not the reaction people normally have when they’re told they’re being hauled in front of the Council.”

“The Jedi Order is long dead and gone. Destroyed before I was even born. Maybe you should update the lies you tell your captives.” This really had to be the worst abduction she had ever experienced.

Not-Fulcrum grew quiet then, and gave Leia a puzzled look. "You really believe that."

“Yes, because it is the truth.” How obtuse could this woman be?

“Can… can you tell me what happened?”

“What?”

“To the Order. Can you tell me what you believe happened to the Jedi Order.” She actually looked like she didn’t know. Which was extra odd, since Leia guessed Not-Fulcrum had been just a bit younger than Leia’s current age when the Purges had actually happened.

“You want a history lesson?”

“Humor me.”

So Leia recited the official version of the story of the end of the Jedi Order and formation of the Empire in her most bored and dismissive tone. If the woman wanted a basic history lesson, government-sanctioned propaganda was all she was going to get.

As she recited the Empire’s version of events, Not-Fulcrum’s face went through a strange range of emotions, and once more Leia thought it was as if the woman was only hearing the story for the first time. Funny, her ship looked far too nice and new for her to have been fully removed from society for two whole decades.

Leia finished her detached recital of state approved facts, and Not-Fulcrum looked stunned.

“Wow, ok, that definitely did not happen. Please tell me you don’t… agree with any of that Jedi-are-evil stuff.”

What sort of game was this woman playing? Of course she didn’t agree with the Empire's propaganda!

“Ok, so I clearly just insulted you. Sorry about that. What is it you believe happened?”

If this woman was, as Leia suspected, some sort of Jedi, then she was someone Leia wanted to bring
into the Alliance as quickly as she could. If she wasn’t however, she really did not want to waste time deconstructing Imperial propaganda.

The fact that she kept insisting on acting as if Leia wasn’t the most famous Rebel in the galaxy was very confusing. Leia’s face was not exactly hard to recognize. So was her insistence that there was still a Jedi Order out there. Leia really could not figure out what game this woman was playing. Before anything else, she wanted to try to gain some power back in this situation.

“I really do not feel comfortable opening up to a woman whose name I do not even know.”

Not-Fulcrum stood from her seat and gave Leia a short bow. “My name is Ahsoka Tano.” Leia had suffered through enough etiquette lessons to know that the way Ahsoka had bowed fit with the Jedi theory. Interesting. “Now that you know my name, do you want to share yours?”

“You clearly already know it. You’ve addressed me by name several times.”

Ahsoka gave her a nod. “Alright then. Leia, I’m beginning to put together a theory about what may be happening here.” One of the ship’s systems beeped, and Ahsoka grinned. “Why don’t you get some more rest before we see the Council.”

She didn’t know if that meant they were getting ready to drop out of hyperspace, and therefore was the prime chance to make her move, or if she should actually take advantage of the opportunity to rest. Well, better safe than sorry.

“Could I go with you? I’m not exactly comfortable being flown somewhere I do not know.”

“Fair enough. But try anything funny and I’ll set the Astromech on you.”

As if on cue, the door opened and a very familiar blue and white droid rolled in.

“Artoo? What are you doing here?” He must have followed her when she left the base. C-3PO was probably annoying everyone back at camp to death with his worries and fears for his missing partner.

“I am so glad that you know Artooey,” Ahsoka said.

The astromech let out a series of pleased beeps in response.

Huh. Well if R2-D2 liked Ahsoka, Leia was going to trust his judgment. She’d known that droid for years, and she had trusted her life to his capable servers on several occasions.

She’d still take the ship over and return to base, of course, but R2’s favorable opinion of Ahsoka meant that after returning Leia would not treat her like a kidnapper, but instead, she would definitely try to recruit her.

Leia followed Ahsoka and R2 through the small ship to its cockpit. The setup was designed for two pilots sharing the controls, with a port behind them for an Astromech to plug into. Overall it seemed cozy, well used and loved. She could tell that someone had babied the ship extensively.

Ahsoka gestured for her to take the seat on the right, and Leia sat herself down. The seat had already been perfectly adjusted for her.

“So, what’s your theory?” Might as well hear what Ahsoka thought was going on while waiting to make her move.

Ahsoka fiddled with the ship’s controls a bit, putting off responding to Leia’s inquiry, her bright blue
and white striped lekku and montrals bobbing as her head moved this way and that. “You’re probably going to laugh. It sounds like a bad holonovel, but I think you may be from an alternate timeline.”

She was right, it did sound like a bad holonovel.

It sounded so much like a bad story Leia found she couldn’t even be properly upset with the prospect. “An alternative timeline?”

“I know how it sounds, really, I do, but that story you told is just so out there, and different from the events I know and remember, and you really did think you were telling the truth.”

“Alright, if this is an alternative timeline, tell me what happened at the end of the Clone Wars. Or are you going to claim they never happened either?”

Ahsoka laughed, a far more bitter sound than any of the other times Leia had heard her laugh already. “Oh, we had the Clone Wars. I fought in them when I was young. There just weren’t any… purges. Not long before the fighting ended, and we were able to open up real lines of communication with the disenfranchised senators in the Confederacy of Independent Systems, we figured out who Darth Sidious was and we took him out.”

“Darth Sidious?”

“Palpatine. He’s a Sith Lord, or at least he was in this timeline. Probably is in yours as well.”

Palpatine was a Sith? Mother of Moons, Leia had always known the shriveled old prune was evil, but she had never considered that possibility before.

It did explain Vader. Having a Sith in your employ when you were one yourself made more sense than a Sith Lord just hiring himself out to the nearest evil overlord.

Wait, if he was a Sith then she really needed to encourage Luke’s Jedi training more. She had always been sure he was destined for greatness, but if he was their only hope of taking down Palpatine, she’d have to work even harder to make sure he got whatever resources he needed. Kriff, why didn’t they have more Jedi left in the Alliance?

They sat in a long silence, Ahsoka absorbed with the task of piloting a two-person ship on her own, and Leia trying to come up with new plans to take down Palpatine. Plans that took the possibility of him being this “Darth Sidious” into account. Leia was so absorbed in that task she didn’t even question why she was certain Ahsoka wasn’t lying to her.

“Oh! I should give you a heads up. There is a real good chance that my Padawan’s family might be waiting for us when we land. They’re really not happy with the news that I think their daughter has vanished and been replaced by a lookalike.”

Leia nodded. That made sense. Of course they would - wait, they were alive? Her parents were alive? Wherever they were headed, Bail and Breha Organa would be there, and waiting to see her? Even if they were from an alternate timeline where Palpatine had died during the Clone Wars (can you imagine?) the thought of seeing them again was too wonderful to describe.

“I - Do you think I could see them? I mean, could I talk to them before meeting with this Council of yours? I… My parents…” She could feel the tears fighting to come out, but she refused to let them fall. “My family was killed a few months ago. It would mean a great deal to me to be able to see them again.” If this woman was not lying to her, she was going to bring Leia to see her parents.
There was a long pause where Ahsoka said nothing. At various points in the silence she turned to Leia and opened her mouth to start to speak, each time closing it again and frowning. Finally, she turned to R2, and asked him to send a personal message explaining the situation in full, and requesting for some time between Leia and her parents before the Council meeting.

Now, with the possibility of seeing her parents again, Leia no longer wanted to redirect the ship as soon as possible. Maybe she’d let this strange woman direct where she was going for a bit longer. If things started to get bad, she could always fight her way out. Yes, this was likely a trap, and yes the best course of action would be to take over the ship and return to Horox III as soon as possible. Yet if there was even a slight chance of seeing her family again, Leia would take it. She settled back in her seat and decided that for now she’d simply watch and wait.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: These aren't the parents Leia was hoping for.

HAPPY 40th ANNIVERSARY STAR WARS

(I am still not sure about the Winter thing, but it is hard for me to think about Leia’s parents having another daughter, so I just... gave them one they had in Legends?)
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

A second chapter in one day, just because today is Star Wars’ 40th anniversary.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

They dropped out of hyperspace, and as she took in the sight before her Leia had to admit Ahsoka’s story was the only explanation that made any sense.

They were approaching Coruscant, yet in the space around the planet, Leia saw not a single Imperial ship or symbol. In fact, the satellites that were scattered around the capitol all bore symbols of the Old Republic.

It truly did not feel real.

Their ship was cleared to land and moved towards a pad in Core Square. As they got closer, it became apparent that they would be landing at what Leia knew as the Imperial Palace. It seemed brighter somehow, the whole planet did, and the banners around it all bore the crest of the old Jedi Order.

She really was in another timeline.

Which meant her parents would really be there to greet her.

As she let herself truly believe it, it occurred to her that her parents would be upset, concerned that their daughter had been replaced with a different version of herself.

Leia could scarcely understand it, and she was living it, she imagined it’d be even more of a shock for them. If it wasn’t for the fact that she was on Coruscant, the very heart of the Empire, and it looked so different from what she had come to know when she had worked and lived there, she’d still be doubting the validity of her situation as well.

As much as she knew they would not be welcoming to her at first, she was incredibly eager to see them again. To be able to talk to her parents one last time, share all she had experienced since their deaths, since the genocide of their people, it was more wonderful than anything she had ever imagined.

She rushed down the hatch as soon as it opened, glancing about eagerly for either parent and found neither.

Instead, two strangers stood on the platform.

Her stomach dropped, and she pieced together who these people were.

They had to be the people whose genetics she shared, the people who had conceived and given birth to her.

Then a strange realization.
She knew who that woman was.

She’d first seen a holo with her in it when she had been studying history as a youngling of about nine or ten. The woman had been younger in the picture, standing between Leia’s father and Mon Mothma. Something about that holo had captured Leia’s attention, and she had spent the rest of that day researching as much information as she could about Senator Amidala of Naboo.

The official accounts all claimed she had been killed by the Jedi in the immediate aftermath of the Empire’s founding, killed two days after the very first Empire Day.

She’d gone to her father to ask him about her, about this incredibly beautiful and sad woman who had died alongside the Republic. He told her that Senator Amidala had been murdered by Palpatine, assassinated since it would not do for a popular Senator from his homeworld to be opposed to his regime.

Leia’s father had used Senator Amidala’s story as a cautionary tale, to impress upon his daughter the need to always be mindful of where the line stood on the Senate floor. She could go up to it, and critique the policies the Emperor put forth, but she could never give full voice to her convictions so long as she was operating within that world.

Leia had dreamed about Senator Amidala for a long time after that.

She had kept researching her too, eager to know as much about her as she could. Leia had even studied old speeches the senator had given, both for their content as well as the lessons they contained on poise and vocal tone.

Of those she had seen and studied, her favorite was one that had been given within the Royal Palace of Alderaan, under a mural symbolizing the rule of House Organa.

The Senator had spoken of the true cost of war, and the steps the Old Republic would have needed to take to ensure those displaced and affected by the Clone Wars would not be threatened by poverty, hunger, homelessness, and even slavery.

Leia’s father had sat at Senator Amidala’s side, and midway through the speech an assassin shot her in the shoulder. The holo cut off between the shot and when the speech resumed later that day. Amidala had finished remotely through a droid, and Leia had been in awe of the woman who had not let a blaster bolt stop her from speaking.

She had watched the holo of that conference and told herself the emotions it provoked were because she herself was one of the individuals whose lives had been forever impacted by the Clone Wars.

After all, Leia was an orphan of those wars. A war refugee in her own right, one who had been fortunate enough to be adopted into a life of privilege.

Leia had as a girl gone into that same conference room, stood exactly where the Senator had given that speech and practiced her own future speeches. As if she had hoped to channel some of the other woman’s strength.

She was Leia’s birth mother?

Why had her mother or her father never told her they had known her birth mother?

The simplest explanation was that Leia had never asked.

The man, her birth father she assumed, stepped forward, moving quickly towards Ahsoka. He did
not look happy. “Alternate timelines? Do you really expect us to buy that, Snips?” One of his hands was in a thin black glove, and he clenched it as he talked.

Senator Amidala stayed where she was, intensely scrutinizing Leia with an expression… an expression Leia could almost recognize as one of her own.

Without meaning to Leia fell into playing a sort of game she had never had any success with before. The one where she would, as a child, stand in front of her bedroom mirror, study her features, and desperately try to find something that in some way vaguely resembled the parents she knew she would never look anything like.

She had a ton of success now, looking for linkages between her appearance and that of her birth mother.

They had the same chin, and similar cheeks, were almost the same height, and Leia did not know how to handle any of this.

“Ahsoka’s message said you wanted to talk to us, before your meeting with the Council?” Her birth mother's voice didn’t offer any hint of what she was thinking. Leia nodded. She didn’t know what else to do. “She also mentioned that in your world, we’re dead. I am very sorry for your loss.”

Leia wanted to laugh but choked the impulse back. Technically that wasn’t wrong. These two were long dead where Leia came from, mere footnotes in Leia’s life story. The parents she had lost, the parents that she was mourning, were not these strangers.

She decided to greet this woman as she would any other Senator she was meeting for the first time. As she slipped into the role of politician, she shoved the remainder of her emotions deep inside.

Hopefully, her father was on Coruscant and she’d be able to meet with him later, for now, she had to get through the time that had been set aside for these two.

“It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance.” She bowed an informal and brief nod between colleagues. “I’m afraid there has been a bit of confusion, what with the differences between my world and this one. You see, I was adopted as a newborn, and when I requested this meeting I had not considered the possibility that the parents I had in this timeline were not the same as my own.”

Her birth father acknowledged her for the first time, the anger melting off his face replaced by astonishment and pain. “Adopted? But… that makes no sense. We would never have given you up,” then, far quieter, “Does this mean you don’t know who we are?”

“I was always told I was orphaned in the Clone War. That my biological father died fighting at the end of the war, and my birth mother in childbirth. I do know who Senator Amidala was, but I did not know until just now that we were related. In your case, yes, I do not know who you are.” There was no point in sugar coating it or drawing things out. Best to just put the information she had out there and let them react.

He laughed, there was no humor in it. “We have something in common then. I never knew who my father was either.”

Before she could respond - to tell him that she did know her father, Bail Organa - Padmé Amidala spoke. “Your meeting with the Jedi Council is in a few hours, and I don’t plan on spending that whole time out here on this landing pad. I think I can speak for my husband as well when I say we’d like to hear more about this ‘Alternate Timeline’ of yours, and what you think happened to our daughter.” She gestured towards a speeder parked near the landing platform.
Odd, Leia had always thought that had she the opportunity to do so, she would have enjoyed meeting her birth parents. Yet now that she was actually meeting them, all she felt was a curious tightness to her throat. It made it difficult to swallow, forced her to strain her breathing.

Leia nodded at her birth mother’s gesture and followed after Padmé Amidala and her husband as they piled into the car.

A gruff voice she did not recognize was talking to her. She pulled herself out of her sleep to listen.

“- Your Highness? Are you alright?”

A pale bearded Human in what had to be a military uniform was standing over the bed she was in.

Whoever this was seemed very worried.

“Princess? You missed our daily debrief, and when I tried to find out why I discovered you were here. Are you alright?”

Princess? Debrief?

The Sith tried to enter her shields again.

Right.

Her Trials.

She sat up, registering that she was still in the medbay. “I’m sorry, I was not feeling well.”

“Yes, of course.” The Military Officer gave her a fond smile, “Please use this time to rest up, Princess. The Rebellion needs you at your best.” With a quick salute, the light-skinned Human departed from the medbay.

The Rebellion?

She recalled the orange flight suits she’d seen people in last night. There had been green ones as well mixed into the crowd, people in blue shirts and black vests, and people in garb similar to what this Human wore.

Uniforms.

This was a military camp? For some group that called itself the Rebellion?

She looked around with confusion.

All in all, it was pretty boring, full of bacta, droids, computers and medical equipment. The same as any other medbay she’d ever been in.

Luke had returned at some point in the night. He was asleep in a chair by her bedside.

Her stomach growled.

She wondered if she should wake Luke, or try to find where this place kept its food on her own.
Looking at how peacefully Luke was sleeping, even if he was in a sitting position, she decided to try her chances wandering around the base. She tucked the blanket she had slept under over him and set off.

Luckily for her, the base wasn’t large enough for a person to actually get lost. All she had to do was follow along with the general flow of where people were headed, and there was a mess hall with all the standard markings mess halls all over the galaxy shared.

There were the bored workers and droids, bringing trays out from the kitchen.

There were the aged and slightly falling apart tables, pressed together in rows with small uncomfortable seats crammed together close.

There was the line to approach the food trays.

Leia fell into the back of one of the lines, grateful that the protocol for these sort of places was the same everywhere one went in the galaxy.

Oh sure there were variants in when and how you got your dishes or trays if you served yourself or a worker scooped it up for you, what you did when you finished the meal, and even the food itself, but essentially everywhere Leia had ever been; mess halls were mess halls.

This universal nature of mess halls meant she also knew she had a problem. Leia didn’t know what sort of dynamics she’d have to navigate wherever she sat down. She wasn’t just a stranger entering the social order here for the first time, she was in their eyes someone who already had an established place.

She already suspected that this place engaged in military hierarchies, and she wouldn’t even be able to read where anyone stood in that regard. She could sit at a table full of her superiors casually and rudely, or full of soldiers who would be beyond uncomfortable having a superior drop in on them like that.

She really needed to learn the rank markers around here, and fast.

Also, figure out what her counterpart’s rank was, there was no point learning this information if she didn’t know how she fit into the structure herself.

Luckily for her, there was an empty table in the corner. Hopefully, no one would notice her there and she would get through this meal in peace and then…

Well, she’d figure out what she was doing next when she got to it.

Not too long after Leia had started to eat, a Human sunk into the seat across from hers. Much like the man from the previous night, this person declined to wear one of the uniforms everyone else in the mess was clad in. Instead, they were wrapped in a bright green hooded shawl, and under that was tight black body armor. The color of the shawl popped wonderfully against the Human’s dark skin, and Leia could not help but admire this person’s fashion sense. Whoever this was didn’t speak to Leia as she ate, just joined her with an air of silent camaraderie.

They maintained the silence until Han decided to join their table as well. He took one of the chairs directly next to Leia and gazed at her with amusement.

“Keep hunching over like that, and I actually will believe your alternative universe story,” he said after he had watched her for long enough.
Around a mouth full of food (a habit she had fostered in part because it bothered her mother so much) Leia broached a light-hearted topic that had been on her mind since the previous night, “Didn’t you say Loo Re Anno came from another universe? Also, you know Loo Re Anno? How?”

“We raced The Dragon Void against each other. You set the whole thing up, remember Princess?” He shook his head. “Besides, Anno wasn’t claiming she had switched places with some sort of body double, it made actual sense. Woman from an Alien species no one’s ever seen or heard of, claims to be from some other universe. Far more cut and dry.” He shrugged. “Plus I saw her universe with my own two eyes.”

Their table’s other occupant gave them both a curious look. “Alternative universes and body doubles? Really? Did you run out of other things to fight about?”

Han responded with some sort of hand gesture Leia didn’t recognize. The other spacer clearly did and started to laugh.

Leia didn’t want to let things move away from racing quite yet. “You were in The Dragon Void Run? You must be good. Like, really good. That’s one of, possibly the, hardest professional races there is!”

He seemed stunned by her reaction. “Well, yeah I’m good. The best. Was real close to winning too.”

She grinned at him, happily impressed by him, and he gave her a surprised but genuine smile in return.

Their table’s other occupant did not share in the mood. “Oh come on, you know you are far from being the best. You can’t wish that junker of yours into a better ship than she is.”

“Shut up, Sana,” Han growled.

“Make me, husband,” Sana said in response.

Husband? He was married? Leia felt disappointed. Of course a handsome man who also happened to be capable of surviving something like The Dragon Void would be spoken for.

“We are not married!” He turned to Leia, looking slightly panicked. “She is not my wife! You know that!” He turned back to Sana then, panic replaced with anger. “Stop claiming that we are!” This was clearly an old argument and one that really upset Han.

It also seemed to be something of a joke on Sana’s part, as she was laughing at him again.

With a frown, Han turned back to Leia, worried. “You still feeling sick? I’m assuming if they let you out of the sick bay you’re fine, but you were really out of it last night Your Worship.”

“Why do you keep doing that? Calling me things like that? Obviously, you remember what I told you yesterday, so you know those titles don’t apply to me.”

He shifted uncomfortably. “You were drunk and sick last night, and it was funny for a bit, but you can drop the act now.”

“Unfortunately it isn’t an act. If the problem is that you want to use formal titles, the proper way to address a member of the Order is as Master Jedi, but I really am ok with simply being called by my name, Leia,” she said, very matter of factly.

He gaped at her. “I’m sorry, what?”
“Master Jedi. Padawan Skywalker. I’ll answer to either of those, but would rather you just call me by my name, Leia,” she said it slowly this time, enunciating each word clearly as if he had not understood her earlier statement at all.

“You’re really dedicated to this, aren’t you?” He obviously was stubbornly set on denying that this situation was real.

If only it was possible to stubborn what was happening away.

Sana snorted. “You’ve caught the Jedi delusion from Blondie? Is it infectious? Should we be worried that we’re going to suddenly find religion ‘cause we hang around you?”

“Thought you already believed in all that junk”

“Oh I do, but the Force doesn’t speak to me, or anything like that,” she paused to chew a bit more, and then continued. “I believe the Jedi Order was a real thing, and they waged wars against something that called itself The Sith. I used to date an archaeologist,” a look of regret and longing crossed Sana’s face, and she blinked it away, “she is wildly unethical, but she’s still an archaeologist, and you’d have to be trying real hard to deny the evidence. That doesn’t mean I am ready to take vows or believe a farmboy from the Outer Rim can single-handedly restore the Order or anything like that.”

It occurred to Leia that something truly awful must have happened to the Order for their existence to be casually debated over breakfast. It was probably tied to what had turned her father into a Sith.

For a moment she let herself pretend that he fell after the Order was killed, twisted by grief. It seemed almost understandable that way. Too bad she knew that wasn’t the case. She had seen the younglings dead by his ‘saber’s blade.

This universe sucked.

“Speaking of the Kid, what’s this about the two of you being related?” Han emphasized his speech by jabbing a fork full of food in the air in front of him.

Sana seemed surprised by the question, “How could they be related? He’s an Outer Rim Yokel, she’s a Core World Princess. You can’t get more different than that.”

Han waved his fork at her, “Exactly!” and gave a sharp nod.

“Look, I don’t know how things came to be the way they are in this universe, but well yes, Luke and I are siblings. Or um, I am siblings with my universe’s Luke and Luke is siblings with this universe's Leia? The specifics are confusing and weird and it is probably best to just think of the two of us as siblings to avoid getting too confused.”

“Sorry we’re already confused, so avoiding confusion is a bit impossible right now.” Sana laughed and shook her head. “Is she claiming she is from some other universe? That really does not seem like a sustainable act,” she said with a wry grin. “Please take it from us, two rather excellent con artists, that really isn’t going to work out.”

Leia rolled her eyes at the two criminals (what a strange military base, letting scoundrels like these two run about). “It isn’t an act, a con, or a joke,” she sighed as she finished her breakfast. “Look, I don’t even know why I am talking to you about this. You don’t want to believe me? Fine, don’t.”

What did their opinions matter anyway? So far she’d only encountered one person here who she actually cared about.
Speaking of her brother, she wondered if he was still asleep or if he’d woken up yet.

She reached out to him to check, and unfortunately, it seemed he was so unused to such things that the faintest touch of her mind against his woke him up. She really had been hoping to let him sleep. He looked so exhausted, so ill cared for compared to the Luke she knew, and it sent all of her protective instincts into high alert.

He was confused and alarmed at the sight of her empty bed. Their bond was still too faint to really properly communicate with him in full words, so instead, she sent him the impression of the meal she’d just had along with a wave of reassurance. It took him a bit to figure out how to respond, a series of false starts that finally led to a hesitant communication that he was going to join her in the mess.

She realized that she would have to help teach him how to use their bond. She didn’t know if she knew how to. Leia and her twin had learned how to communicate with each other with their bond before they had even started to speak out loud. It was such a natural skill for her, and teaching it, especially teaching Luke of all people, was a strange prospect.

Then again, given how he had adapted already, she wondered if she really only had to be patient with him and let him figure it out on his own. She knew he had the ability, that given the opportunity this was something he would have figured out as a baby. He probably didn’t need that much by way of instruction.

This Luke didn’t know things hers had as a baby.

How neglected had his education been?

She really did hope her counterpart was in her dimension. There she would have access to the best teachers the Jedi Order could provide, people who could help her learn what she needed.

Luke only had her.

She hoped she could be enough.

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Luke starts his training, and Leia has a long and uncomfortable conversation with Padmé and Anakin.
Luke couldn’t seem to take his eyes off of her as he ate.

He tried, at several points during his breakfast, to communicate with her via their bond some more. Brief flashes of awe at her knowledge of the Force, as well as worry over her counterpart.

Every time she felt his worry she sent back how sure she was that the other her would be well taken care of. Leia’s timeline was, for the most part, a happy one. Her counterpart would be safe, get to meet their parents, and would have access to the greatest minds the Jedi Order had ever had in their ranks.

The worst she’d probably face is a headache from trying to parse out Master Yoda’s cryptic lessons.

Both Sana and Han had departed not too long after Luke had arrived, clearly frustrated with the way the two of them kept staring at each other without speaking. Leia was used to reactions like that; she’d been told constantly throughout her life that she and her brother were “creepy” together, and that was coming from people who had grown up around them. It must have been an even stranger sight for these two spacers.

As Luke and Leia exchanged thoughts and feelings back and forth, it reinforced and strengthened their fledgling bond. By the time Luke had finished eating they were able to communicate with each other in whole words.

Thank you, Luke sent her as he bused his tray. He sat back down and grinned at her, “I’ve been trying to learn the ways of the Force on my own for so long, I was beginning to think I would never make any progress. Thank you. Would you mind showing me more?”

She beamed back – there was nothing she would like to do more than that. “Is there somewhere we can go to practice? Just the two of us.”

He sent back the image of a decent sized room, empty save for a few training remotes. She got the impression of Luke running through some basic learning exercises, and his frustration whenever the low setting blaster gave him a zap.

There was also the impression of a voice, her voice, scolding him when he expressed his desire to give up, infusing him with her boundless faith in him and his potential.


She sent back her emotions towards her own twin, a sort of mental hug, and promised that eventually they both would be reunited with their proper sibling.
She gestured for him to show her the way to this training room of his, and the two of them set off through the base, side by side.

The more she got to know this boy, the more she came to understand the ways he was different from her brother, and also came to like him in his own right.

He had this wide eyed earnestness about him, an innocence she could tell was not thanks to a lack of experience, but instead due to a deep inner strength. He refused to let the things he had seen and done fundamentally alter his faith and trust in people, no matter how many times he was hurt.

He was also somehow harder than her brother was.

Where her Luke was all soft rounded edges all the way down, this boy was sharp and hard, yet it was a sharpness he had taken great care to temper down until all one encountered was the padding making it safe and soft at the surface.

She could also tell that unlike her brother, he had killed before.

He carried the lives of far more than she would have expected with him, thousands it seemed, and he was aware of that weight in everything he did.

She could sense he was working through that weight in his own way, processing and letting it go slower than she had been taught to do, but doing so all the same. She wasn’t sure that showing him the methods the Order had taught her to both honor and let go of those burdens would be any better than his own method. Whatever he was doing was working. He was still firmly in the Light.

Why had this Luke murdered thousands of people? How had he been able to walk away from it untainted by the Dark Side?

She needed to talk to Luke, really talk to him, and learn all she could about this timeline.

They reached the room he’d shown her. Even though it, like the rest of the base, had only recently been set up, there were already scorch marks scattered across the floor.

“This is it. All I really do is train against the remotes. That’s pretty much all I can do.” He went to a cupboard in the corner, and from it took a thick handwritten book, to her surprise.

Leia had never seen a physical print text like that outside of the Archives before. She recognized the handwriting on the cover as Uncle Obi’s, it read “The Journals of Ben Kenobi.”

“Ben left me this, in his hut on Tatooine. Just this book, a handful of lessons, and my father’s lightsaber. From this I have been trying to cobble together what I can, but it is hard.”

He put the book down, and this time took a lightsaber out from the cupboard. “I collect Jedi artifacts when I can, this one I got on Rodia. I hate taking other people’s lightsabers, it feels so wrong, so I left all the ones Grakkus the Hutt had behind. This one, however…” He looked at it, so impossibly sad. “The Jedi this belonged to, Huulik, he made it home to his family before he died. His niece, she made sure he got a proper burial, that he was remembered as something more than a traitor to the Republic. She gave this to me, told me he would have wanted me to have it.” He placed it back in the cupboard, near the book.

He pointed at the remotes. “I got those on Devaron. At an old Jedi temple I found. I’m getting better at fighting with a lightsaber thanks to them. That’s it. All that I have to learn from. People keep dangling the promise of more in front of me, and even though I know each time it’s a trap, I can’t turn them away without being fully sure.”
His soft and sad expression turned to steel. “Don’t be another person who uses this to hurt me. Don’t pretend you can teach me if you can’t. I know how I come across, that all anyone sees is a farmboy who can do nothing more than make a noodle flop about with the Force, but know that I am not as naive as everyone seems to think. I know you aren’t my Leia. That you are someone different, someone I do not know. If all you can teach me is how to communicate in the Force, and nothing more, please be upfront about it. Don’t string me along.”

She wanted to find each and every person who had made false promises to this boy, and shove her ‘saber up their ass. She did not let him know that.

He had done so much with so little, had emerged from what increasingly seemed to be an impossible circumstance still pure and good and kind, and she did not want to blemish that. To let her own lifelong need to protect her brother overshadow his own need to be seen as a capable and strong adult. Someone able to take care of himself.

So instead of pledging to keep him safe, or even beginning the conversation she had wanted to have about the history of the timeline she was in, she folded herself into a meditative position on the ground, and gestured for him to join her.

He didn’t need a conversation about the differences between their universes right then, didn’t need to recall the traumas he had undergone or hear how much better her world was than his. She needed those things, but if she was going to teach him she would have to learn how to put his needs ahead of her own.

He copied her position exactly, an intense desire to learn as much as he can overtaking him.

“I won’t make you empty promises. I don’t know everything there is to teach, I am just a Padawan myself. I will do my best, and will teach you what I can.” How strange. Just yesterday admitting she did not know everything she needed to to be a Knight had been impossible. Yet now she knew that to move forward, to help without causing harm, she had to own her own failings as much as she owned her strengths.

Maybe she was going to pass her Trials after all.

She felt his relief in the Force, and a genuine smile had overtaken his face once more. “Thank you, for being honest. For agreeing to try and teach me.”

“No. I am not going to try. I am going to do it. There is no try.”

“Huh? What is that supposed to mean?”

She grinned back at him, and laughed. This was going to be fun.

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Their destination was a luxurious penthouse at the very top of a tall building in the Federal District.

Leia noted, with some shock, that this building had not existed on the Coruscant she knew. In fact several parts of the skyline looked all wrong to her eyes, while others were achingly familiar.

This particular building was somehow taller than The Pinnacle, which Leia could see not too far away from it in Core Square.
Taller than The Pinnacle, and Leia’s birth family lived on its very top floor.

They must really enjoy showing off their wealth.

Senator Amidala’s stoic expression gave way, once they were in her home. “Is there anything you’d like to eat? Or drink? If there is anything you’d like that we don’t already have I can always have it delivered.”

Amidala’s mask had slammed back into place before Leia had even begun to answer.

“Just some water, thank you.” Her headache was gone, but in its place her mouth had become terribly dry.

Her birth father went to get it for her, but as he passed her he stopped and turned around, and there was something in his gaze that inexplicably reminded her of Luke. While his eyes were shaped so much like her own, the blue of his was the same shade as Luke’s. It made her feel bad for being so cold towards him. He stared at her for a bit, looking conflicted and sad, and then headed into what Leia assumed was the kitchen.

She felt terribly awkward here, in this apartment. Maybe she should excuse herself to the ‘fresher to get away and gather her thoughts.

Amidala sat on the large couch in the center of the room, and gestured to a chair across from it as she sat. Ahsoka was already in a matching chair next to it, lounging across the chair sideways, very much at home in this apartment. Leia folded herself into the indicated seat.

The three sat in an awkward stiff silence.

C-3PO emerged from the room Leia’s birth father had gone into. He was carrying a tray with several glasses on it.

“Threepio? What are you doing here?” He’d belonged to Leia’s birth parents? What were the odds of that? He’d probably know the answer to that question if she asked him.

“Hello Mistress Leia! May I say, I do like what you’ve done with your hair. It looks so much nicer than its usual mess and-”

“Thank you for the glasses, Threepio. We’ll let you know if we need anything else.” Amidala cut him off with fond exasperation. She gave Leia a small apologetic smile. “He isn’t wrong though. You do seem to have a better style sense than my daughter.”

Leia’s birth father – why hadn’t he told her his name, and what was keeping her from asking? – followed after the droid, holding a large pitcher full of water. He gave her a fascinated look. “You know Threepio?”

“Yes. He belonged to my family for as long as I can remember. Both him and Artoo,” she said as she glanced at the blue and white astromech that had followed them from the ship.

“Huh, so whoever took you must have gotten the droids as well.” As he spoke he set the pitcher down on the caf table, and sat at his wife’s side.

“I wasn’t taken, I was adopted.”

“Right. Sorry, I just really don’t like the idea of someone else raising my kids. So who was it? Who adopted you and your brother?”
“I don’t have a brother.”

He scowled at her, and his voice got deeper as his tone shifted from polite to frustrated. “Of course you have a brother.”

Leia did not know how to respond to that.

She was saved from doing so by the ping of an incoming call coming from a holosystem in another room.

Neither the politician or her husband seemed eager to take their attention off her and answer it.

“Please, don’t ignore that on my behalf.” Anything would be better than sitting here with these people focused on her.

Senator Amidala nodded, and squeezed her husband’s arm as she stood to make her way to an office that came off of the larger living room. She didn’t bother to shut the office’s doors, so Leia could easily overhear what was going on in the other room.

“Bail! Is everything alright?”

“Yes Padmé, this is actually just a social call. I have almost finished up all of my work for once, and thought why not see if you wanted to have dinner with a friend later this week? I promise there will be no work discussion during our meal.”

The rich baritone of his voice washed over her. She could feel parts of herself, parts she had locked up inside ever since that horrid day on the Death Star, start to ooze out from where she had been keeping them. Leia thought she could listen to that voice endlessly, forever, without any complaint.

“As wonderful as the thought is, I’m going to need to call you back later. We’re in the middle of something here actually...”

Eager to get close to him, even if he was just a holo recording, Leia rushed over to where Amidala stood. Her eyes eagerly took him in, happily making up for the head start her ears had had in reacquainting themselves with him.

Leia had watched, rewatched and rewatched again countless holos of both of her parents in the days since Alderaan’s destruction. Simply knowing this feed was live, not a recording of a past event but instead capturing him in this very moment, made everything about his blue-tinted image that much more precious.

“Dinner sounds wonderful! Why don’t you come here and join us, sometime soon? Maybe even tonight?” She knew she sounded overeager, and her face was flush. She did not care.

Her father was alive.

He was alive and she was speaking to him and maybe, if she played this right, she could have dinner with him tonight.

“Oh! I had not realized you were home, Leia. Are you sure you’d want me to intrude on your family time?”

Intrude on her family time? What a joke. He was her family, far more than these people could ever hope to be.
She gave her father the smile she only used when she wanted something from either her mother or him, the one that had gotten her out of trouble more times than she could count.

“I wouldn’t be asking if I didn’t want you to accept. Please, I’d love to see you.”

He looked startled, but smiled back all the same. Now that her eyes had reached his face, she’d been captivated watching the rise and fall of his chest when she first stepped into the room, she could tell it wasn’t the right sort of smile.

Yes, there was affection there, but it didn’t fill him with love and joy and paternal pride.

His eyes did not sparkle, the corners of them did not fully soften.

She was his best friend’s daughter, not his own.

Her father was truly dead.

Even in this impossible world where Bail Organa was alive, her father was dead.

“Well, who am I to turn down such an invitation?” His image made eye contact with Amidala, “I will leave you to it tonight, but perhaps tomorrow we should finalize our plans, my friend?”

“Of course Bail, we’re looking forward to it.”

As the holo shut off Amidala regarded Leia curiously. She was going to ask her something, the unspoken words already hovering in the room, but before she could begin to speak them her husband had stormed over with obvious distaste.

“Why’d you invite Organa over? We are kind of having a family crisis!”

Leia’s posture stiffened. A good argument would truly do wonders for banishing the pain that was infusing her now. “Yes, which is exactly why he should be here.”

“Is that supposed to make sense?”

The two attempted to stare the other down. Two sets of jaws clenched tight, both with the muscles in them jumping with the intensity of the clench.

“Oh you two, time to break it up,” Amidala pulled off that parenting trick of both laughing and scolding at the same time, “It’s nice to know that even if you weren’t raised by us you still have Ani’s temper Leia – it makes me feel better about my daughter’s behavior.”

Leia did not like being told that she had inherited traits from these strangers. It threw into sharp relief that even in her own world she was intimately tied to them, yet here her tie to her parents did not exist.

Amidala’s attention turned from Leia to her husband. “As for you Ani, why not let her explain her actions before jumping down her throat? You need to remember that she isn’t our Leia. She’s from a place where her life was very different from what we know. We are strangers to her.” Her voice broke on her last sentence. She paused, steeling herself before continuing. “As much as it hurts to contemplate, she probably is more comfortable in Bail’s presence than either of ours.”

Her shoulders sagged, and she looked at Leia again. “That’s who adopted you, isn’t it? The Organas? Your face lit up the moment Bail started to speak, the same way my daughter’s does when she is with us. I had been wondering why it was you seemed so… restrained, compared to the girl I
know, but that is what was missing isn’t it? We really are just strangers to you, but Bail… Bail isn’t.”

Ahsoka poked her head up over the back of the chair she was still sprawled in. “C’mon Skyguy, you’re fine with me being here, what’s wrong with her inviting Senator Organa to join us too? Especially if he is her dad.”

He sputtered something unintelligible, unhappy to hear someone other than himself be acknowledged as any version of Leia’s father. He scowled deeply, and flexed the hand in the black glove.

Rolling her eyes as she did, Amidala lightly shoved her husband back towards the couch they had vacated.

Leia followed them back to the seating area, still reflecting on her father’s holocall. She took note of how different the room seemed now, as she sat. The formal atmosphere was gone. The call and short argument had brought emotions to the surface, and shattered any delusion of formality.

Leia was still sure the conversation ahead of her was going to be an interrogation of sorts, but at least it would be a casual one.

Amidala poured herself a glass of water. “How did you get here? Maybe if we understood that better we could retrieve our daughter and send you home?”

“I was at a party. On my way back to my room to sleep, I noticed a hole in the cliff wall where there shouldn’t have been one.” Why hadn’t she waited until morning to explore that tunnel? “I, well I had a bit too much to drink earlier at the party, and decided to investigate it on my own. Ahsoka was waiting for me when I emerged from the passage. I thought… in my timeline there was a founder of the Rebellion I am a part of, who went by the code name Fulcrum. I mistook Ahsoka for her when I saw her, and I believe she has told you what happened from there.”

“Maybe I am this Fulcrum,” Ahsoka said, “Obviously not me, but the other me in your timeline.” She grinned, “You said she went out fighting a Sith on Malachor? That’s quite the impressive way to go.”

Leia didn’t agree. The loss of the original Fulcrum was a major blow to the Rebellion. She had been the lynchpin holding several cells together, one of the most important leaders they had, and in the short gap between her death and Chancellor Mothma officially starting the Alliance there had been a wave of confusion that cost them the lives of far too many good people.

After a brief awkward silence, Amidala questioned her again. “Breha and Bail had told you who I was, but not that I was your mother?”

Leia nodded. “The official story is that you were killed by the traitorous Jedi, but my father told me that was not the case. It was Palpatine. Given what I know now about my parentage, I think it is safe to assume he was present when you died.”

Amidala’s husband was clearly very uncomfortable with this topic, so Leia was surprised when he had a follow up question for her. “Traitorous Jedi?”

“Yes. Palpatine claimed that the Jedi tried to assassinate him, and in response he both had the entire Order executed and reformed the Republic into a Galactic Empire under his rule.”

Obviously he had not been expecting that. “He managed to kill the entire Order?”

“There were a handful of survivors, on the run and in hiding. Those who were left, that we know of, joined us in the Rebellion. I’ve only ever met two survivors from the old Order, and both of them are
unfortunately dead now too.”

“What were their names? The survivors you encountered that is.”

“The first was a Knight named Kanan Jarrus. He had taken an apprentice, a boy my age named Ezra Bridger.”


Leia’s birth father confirmed that he did not know who Jarrus was either, and Leia wondered if he was connected to the Jedi in some way. He raised an eyebrow towards Leia. “And the other?”

“General Kenobi. He was hiding on the planet Tatooine.”

Leia’s birth father stood, his body jumping out of his seat spring loaded. “What? Why would Obi-Wan be on Tatooine? The only reason to go there is to torture yourself.” Amidala gave her husband a wry look at his exclamation and he sat down, still muttering. “Obi-Wan sunburns easily. Endless sand and sunburns, some life.”

Amidala gave him a fond smile. “Did you get it out of your system Ani, or should we expect to hear more about the sand?”

He blushed, looking very uncomfortable. “I don’t like thinking of him burning to death, ok? Plus, he’s Obi-Wan, he’d never be happy getting all crusty and dirty in the desert.”

She shook her head at him, and turned back to Leia. “How did Obi-Wan die?”

“He vanished, while fighting Darth Vader. I was there when it happened.” Perhaps now that she could speak to actual Jedi she could finally understand what had happened.

“Vanished? What do you mean vanished?” Ahsoka seemed as confused by General Kenobi’s disappearance as Leia was.

Great, would she ever find someone who understood what she had seen? “I don’t know how else to describe it. One moment General Kenobi was there, wielding a laser sword against Darth Vader, and the next there was just a pile of robes on the ground.”

“Oh, of course he’d leave a discarded robe just lying on the ground. That’s so like him.” Leia’s birth father muttered from his seat on the couch.

Leia didn’t know what to make of the jokes being thrown into the middle of it all. It wasn’t that she had a problem with banter, she understood its place and importance for relieving stress. There was nothing like gallows humor to help soldiers cope with the weight of their own looming mortality. What she did have a problem with is civilians who had never even known the oppression her universe toiled under, making light of the deaths of those who had sacrificed to help bring down the Empire.

She understood that the deceased individuals she mentioned might be alive in this timeline, but that did not make the very real tragedy of their deaths any less serious.

“You’ve mentioned a Darth Vader several times now. Who is he?” Amidala asked.

“A Sith who serves Palpatine, a monstrous pet on a leash.” She tried and failed to suppress the memory of him torturing her on the Death Star.
Amidala noticed her slight shudder. She frowned at Leia, concerned.

Her husband didn’t notice, and made another comment directed towards Ahsoka. “He must be Sidious’ apprentice. I wonder where he found someone stupid enough to con into taking that position.”

Amidala seemed to have put together that Vader was not a topic Leia wanted to dwell on, and she very quickly changed the subject. “Tell me about this Rebellion of yours. Who is in charge of it?”

“Mon Mothma is our leader. She, along with my father and… you, are credited as some of the movement’s most early ideological founders.” Amidala looked like she wanted to hear more about her involvement with the movement’s ideology, so Leia continued. “In the waning days of the Republic, the three of you authored an objection to Palpatine’s powers, known as the Delegation of 2000. In time the Delegation of 2000 grew into our Alliance.”

“And Mon is your leader? Really? She’s brilliant, yes, a good friend and someone I personally trust to always do the right thing politically, but she’s never been a leader within our party. I suppose she must have adapted with the circumstances.”

Leia couldn’t imagine Mon as anything but a leader.

The woman had taught her so much about being aware of how history would remember your actions, being accessible to those you had command over, making hard but necessary calls, and especially how to hold your ideology close even when the situation demanded compromise. Chancellor Mothma had taught Leia both how to play the political game, and how to know when it was time to abandon it fully.

There was no living person Leia admired more than the Chancellor.

“What were you doing on Horox III, before you found me? Aside from partying that is,” Ahsoka asked.

Leia blushed. What an impression of her these people must have! She didn’t normally go to parties. Or to be more accurate she didn’t go to many parties by her own initiative, or parties she actually enjoyed. Attending elaborate soirées for the Coruscant elite had been a major part of her life when she was still a part of the Imperial Senate. “We were setting up a base. We had only been there for a week when this occurred.”

“Snips, you said you thought Leia was receiving her Trials?” That was two times now Leia had heard her birth father call Ahsoka that. She wondered where the nickname came from.

“Yes. I didn’t see any path through the cliff when she told me about one. Plus the Force seemed to really want her to go down it. After I knocked this Leia out I even went over and felt the entire length of the cliff, and it all felt solid. I had Artooey scan it too, and I took the ship around to the other side to make sure before we left. Nothing on that side either.”

Her birth father nodded, and then gave Leia a particularly odd look. She felt that same tingling sensation she’d experienced when she had spoken with Ahsoka by the cliff, but this time it felt far stronger. As the tingling stopped, she felt something brush up against her mind. It almost felt like someone knocking at a door asking permission to be let in.

She focused hard on keeping whatever it was out. She’d had enough of her mind being invaded when she had been on the Death Star, thanks.

Her birth father looked hurt. She didn’t know him well enough to guess at why. She decided to focus
on the glass of water in her hand rather than the way he was gazing at her.

“The Force does seem to want you here, at least for now. I don’t think we’re going to be able to retrieve our Leia yet either. This is very clearly a case of the Force working in mysterious ways.” Was he a Jedi, like Luke’s father had been?

She still didn’t know this man’s name, aside from that diminutive the Senator had addressed him with, and the nickname Ahsoka had used earlier.

“What does Ani stand for? I don’t even know what to call you.”

There was something lurking in his expression that seemed unstable, but it was fleeting, gone as quickly as she saw it leaving him looking impossibly sad. “I’m sorry, I should have introduced myself. I’m Anakin Skywalker.”

Leia choked on the water she was drinking.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Leia O. learns about the connection between her and Luke, and Leia S. is annoyed no one has ever told Luke anything about their mom before.

Luke’s memory of Leia encouraging his Jedi training is a direct quote from Star Wars (2015) #3. Also yes, I know Luke passed out in the middle of Leia saying that to him in the comic, but I'd like to think he heard her anyway.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Posting this week’s chapter super early, since I’m going to be traveling to a friend’s wedding later in the week and don’t know how great my access to the internet is going to be. Since this chapter is pretty short, if I do have internet access in my hotel room I may post another chapter later this week, but I doubt it.

Thanks so much to this chapter’s beta, saveloy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

She coughed, and finally managed to clear her throat. “Anakin Skywalker?” She repeated.

He was not surprised by her reaction. “I see my reputation precedes me even in your universe.”

She shook her head. “No. Well yes, but that isn’t why I am surprised.” She placed the water glass down on the caf table as she considered the implications of his identity. “I know someone who claims to be the son of Anakin Skywalker,” she began. “I only met him for the first time a few months ago. On the day my…” she trailed off, not wanting to get into the story of Alderaan’s destruction. “On the day my parents died. He’s a farmboy from Tatooine. Well he was a farmboy. Now he’s the best pilot in the Rebellion, and one of my closest friends.” Just the thought of Luke made her smile. “He wants to be a Jedi. I know he’s going to do it, he’s going to be the most extraordinary Jedi ever. General Kenobi saw it too – he had been teaching him, right before he died.”

Both of her birth parents’ faces went through a riot of different expressions as she talked. Anakin made a strange noise when Tatooine was mentioned again, and when she mentioned Luke’s piloting skills he began to laugh.

“Wow. This world of yours just keeps getting worse, doesn’t it.” He shook his head and looked at Ahsoka, “Hey Snips, want to put credits on someone separating them because of me?” He slumped down, gazing at his feet. “It’s my fault, right? Had to keep The Chosen One’s kids away from Sidious, so he wouldn’t kill them for what they inherited. And you know I was dead before that plan was made, because I would never, ever, have let anyone, even Obi-Wan, take one of my babies to that rock.” He paused, looking lost, his lanky frame folded into something so much smaller. “He spent nineteen years there? Without me? Without our family? You didn’t even know about each other?”

Padmé (if Leia was going to think of her husband by his first name she’d do the same for her as well) put a hand on his back and began to move it in comforting circles. “Ani, Ani it’s ok. It didn’t really happen.” She gave Leia an apologetic glance. “It did happen for you, yes; but Ani, please, you are not responsible for things that happened in a different universe!”

“Chosen One? Chosen for what?” That was an odd turn of phrase if she’d ever heard one; it had to be some sort of title.

“It means, among other things, that he’s the one who killed Darth Sidious, Palpatine, in this timeline,” Ahsoka supplied helpfully.
He had killed Palpatine? Her estimation of Anakin rose. Even if it was just an alternative version of the fascist dictator, she was very grateful to hear of his demise at the hands of… Luke’s father.

“Luke is my brother?” It should have felt surprising and world changing. It didn’t. It just felt right.

Padmé nodded, “Your twin, actually.” Padmé smiled, the hard proud lines of the fierce politician giving way to a different woman entirely, and Leia was struck by the difference between how Padmé looked at her, and how her father had earlier on the holo.

She shoved those feelings down as far as she could.

Anakin and Ahsoka shared a worried glance.

“I am glad to hear that you and Luke found each other in your world,” Padmé said, “I’m saddened to hear you were separated from each other, but I am glad you found each other. I’m also impressed both of my children have dedicated themselves to fighting to restore justice and democracy to the galaxy. I’d love to hear even more about this revolution you are both part of.”

Leia was grateful for the distraction talking about the Alliance afforded her. “I don’t know what to tell you, really. We started small, and tried non-violent means of resistance.” Padmé nodded approvingly, Leia was almost sorry she would have to let her down by telling her how ineffective those methods were.

“We’ve almost fully abandoned those now,” Leia said, trying to compact decades of political evolution into just a few sentences. “For years I worked in the Senate trying to advocate for reform, and honestly all that effort was pointless. You can’t reform fascism, you can’t compromise with it, you simply have to stomp it out and destroy it. Only then can there be any form of freedom and justice.”

Now that she had started to talk about The Alliance to Restore the Republic, Leia found it hard to stop. She spoke at length about the need to oppose Imperial policy on all fronts, the difference between her role in the Senate and now that she was engaging in armed resistance, and the Alliance’s hope to one day bring back the Republic they had lost.

Padmé looked at Leia as if she had never seen anything so wonderful before in her life. “I know I had nothing to do with you developing into this intelligent and passionate woman, so my pride probably means very little to you, but please know that I am also certain that the me who died in your world, and both Breha and Bail, would be so proud.”

Having a long dead senator and close friend of her father’s, the woman she’d had dreams about for years, compliment her political acumen on top of all the other surreal occurrences that made up this day, was just too much for Leia. Refusing to deal with the mix of emotions the other woman’s words caused, she stood and asked for directions to the ‘fresher.

When they were children, and had first started to learn how to meditate, Leia had decided she did not like anything about the process.

Sitting still, emptying her mind, both of these had seemed so pointless and impossible.

While she’d always had trouble sitting still for meditation, the process had come to Luke so easily, and her frustration with herself had only been amplified watching him enter a state of peace with ease.

Fortunately her father had noticed her discomfort as a child, and had taught her a few tricks that had helped him learn how to meditate.

One of those was the use of various items he could engage in some form of physical activity with so his body could be absorbed in a task while his mind drifted off.

Leia had over the years built up a fairly impressive collection of toys and other items she could play with as she meditated.

She didn’t have her collection with her at the moment, but thankfully she was familiar enough by this point with how meditation was supposed to feel, what she was supposed to do, she could enter that state even without them.

Luke, on the other hand, had no idea what he was supposed to do.

He projected his nervous energy all around him, kept shifting this way and that, and every time she thought he had finally found that inner center of peace, he’d start sending her questions in the Force.

No wonder her brother had been so annoyed with her when she used to bug him during meditation practice as younglings; his peace and ease must have been harder won than she had believed, and her own discomfort would have sent him into a similar tailspin.

She wondered how many other presumptions would be challenged.

For just about every lesson the two of them had had since they were little, she would excel at the physical aspects of their training, and Luke the spiritual. She had assumed that when teaching this Luke, he’d be similarly inclined towards the spiritual aspects of the training, but she no longer thought that was going to be the case.

Regardless, it was clear this Luke was not going to learn this first lesson as easily as hers had.

She unfolded herself from her position on the floor, and stood, telling Luke they were going to take a break.

He remained seated on the floor, although he unfolded his legs, and rested his head on his knees.

He was quiet for a long moment, and Leia almost began to wonder if he’d finally figured meditation out. Then he spoke.


Did he know what their father had become?

“I don’t really know how to describe him. To me, he’s just my dad. He loves us fiercely. Would do anything for us, or for mom. Any of his friends really. He has a great sense of humor, and always tries to make us laugh.”

As if summoned by her speaking about her father, and knowing how the Force tended to work he probably was, the Sith Lord pounded against her shields once again.

“Ben said he was murdered by Darth Vader. That he betrayed him. He must have known he was
loyal to his friends, and used that against him.”

Luke did not know who he was. She was going to have to tell him, eventually, but she wanted to avoid that for as long as she could.

She wanted Luke to know that he came from a good man, a loving father. Not for him to think he came from a twisted place of darkness and evil.

So she sent him something, through their bond. A memory, a simple memory of a family dinner.

*Their parents, her brother, herself, and both Uncle Obi and Aunt Ahsoka sat together, not in the formal dining area where her mother often hosted dinners, but casually reclining on the furniture in the living room. To further emphasize how informal and intimate the gathering was, they ate their food directly out of take out containers. Leia kept trying to steal the food out of Luke’s container, and he kept dodging her to avoid the theft. Then suddenly the container flew from his hands, right into their dad’s. He took an over-exaggerated bite of the food within, putting on a show of savoring the taste, and everyone present dissolved into laughter. The memory faded as their mom fought to maintain a straight face while she scolded him for taking Luke’s dinner.*

It wasn’t a particularly treasured memory. It wasn’t anything special. It was just dinner.

That was why it was such a gift.

It was a normalcy this Luke had been denied, a normalcy he had deserved to know.

With a start, Leia noticed that Luke was crying.

“That woman, was that our mother?”

She had underestimated how large of a gift it was.

“Yes.” Leia did not know what to say. Her mother was such a huge person in all but physical size, such a bedrock of not only the twin’s lives, but also the political structure of the Republic around her. More importantly, she hoped Luke knew something, anything, about her because the alternative was just too heartbreaking. “What do you know about her?”

“Not much. She visited Tatooine once, I think? My aunt and uncle said they weren’t even sure that was my mother, but if it was she didn’t interact with them too much. She had a fancy ship and wore expensive clothes that no one had any business wearing in the desert. They only knew her first name, Padmé.”

How wrong must things have gone, for Padmé Amidala Naberrie’s own son to not even know who she was!

“I think that visit happened in my timeline as well. Our grandmother died while she was there, right?”

Luke’s face scrunched up, as if the fact their timelines had shared events only occurred to him right then. “Yes. Murdered by the Sand People. Grandpa Cliegg lost his leg thanks to them just a little while before that.”

“Dad took us there, once. To the Lars’ homestead, so we could pay our respects at her grave. Owen and Beru seemed…” she didn’t know what to say about them, really. They had been gruff and suspicious of everything, and her father had spent that entire trip radiating displeasure in the Force. Leia had not liked them, or Tatooine, very much at all.
“You only visited once?” Luke looked positively offended. “I kept her grave maintained, it was one of my most important chores. Our grandmother, she was a freed slave, you know? Father was as well.”

“Yes, I know.” He didn’t like to talk about it, so she didn’t know too much about that chapter of her father’s life, but she knew where he had come from.

He frowned, shifting restlessly. “But what about our mother? Please, I need to know about her. Who was she? Where was she from? What was she like?”

Leia did not know where to start. So she began with the simple facts; Naboo, politics, endless bravery and nerve, then expanded out from there to bedtime stories, skinned knees kissed better, a love of art, her collection of truly dreadful romance holos, endless compassion, fierce dedication to justice... all of it.

She wanted to share it all with Luke.

With this Outer Rim farmboy who had always dreamed about what it would be like to have parents, yet had never even imagined parents anything like Padmé and Anakin.

The boy who should have had known them both, but some awful mistake in history had taken that from him.

An awful mistake that Leia was sure was the very father who should have been there loving him. Loving her.

She was so glad her counterpart was going to be able to get to know her parents. She couldn’t imagine how it must have felt, to not have them there with her throughout her life. To not have Luke.

The Sith pressed against her again, and this time as she reinforced her shields she decided to show him just what it was he had turned his back on. She sent him the same memory she she had given Luke, since it was still fresh on her mind.

From the pain that blossomed on Luke’s face, he also felt the Sith’s terrible scream as it tore and echoed through the Force.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Leia O. explores her biofamily’s apartment, and Leia S. deals with an upset Vader yelling at her through the Force.

After reading Backstories: Star Wars – Princess Leia: Royal Rebel you'll never take my reading of Leia as having ADHD away from me, because wow did that (fully canon!) book ever make it abundantly clear that she has ADHD. Which honestly means a whole lot to me, as a person who has ADHD themself.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Posting before I head off to the mountains to watch my friend stand under the chuppah. Enjoy!

Thank you to saveloy, my amazing beta who despite not being an American, still noticed and fixed it when I used non-American spelling.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was not long after she left the living room that she decided to take a look around the apartment, rather than go directly to the refresher. She had left more to get some time to clear her head than to actually use the facilities, and she wanted to know more about her biofamily’s home.

The first room she went into was full of wigs. Shelves lined the walls, and on them were wigs done up in a variety of excessive hairstyles. Most were woven through elaborate headdresses. In one corner of the room was a large mirrored vanity, so whoever owned these things could sit and admire them, Leia supposed. One of her hands touched the braids coiled around her head, and for a moment she pondered how much easier it would be to just wear wigs to formal occasions and events instead of having to take care of her own hair. She quickly dismissed the thought. That was not the Alderaanian way of doing things. Honestly, this was almost like cheating.

The next room was full of lavish formal dresses, neatly pressed and hung, with a few full-length mirrors against one of the walls. Many of these dresses were designed in ways where the wearer would be incapable of putting them on alone. Leia supposed Padmé must have staff that helped her with tasks like getting dressed. Before everything had gone so wrong in Leia’s life, before Scarif and all that had followed, she too had made use of assistance to complete her daily tasks.

There were several more rooms that served clear utilitarian functions, and it took her a while before she found the actual living space of the home.

The first room she found that seemed more lived in was a neat and well maintained bedroom, done in shades of white and grey and light blue. There were posters and pictures on the walls, as well as several holos sitting on a dresser. Leia stepped into the room, to get a closer look at the pictures within if nothing else.

The surreal atmosphere of her day only increased when she examined one of the holos on the dresser, and saw an image of this universe’s version of her taken about a year or two prior. She had never seen herself with short hair before. She was not alone in the holo, next to her was Luke. Both of them were dressed in plain robes, and had a strange small braid dangling over their shoulder. The two of them had their arms wrapped around each other, and were giving the recorder a cheeky grin. Behind them stood Padmé and Anakin, smiling fondly down at the two teens. Leia shut the holo off, and decided she really didn’t need to see the rest of them.

The room next to that one was an absolute mess. Dirty clothes, mechanical parts, and debris Leia did not recognize were scattered all over. She did not go inside.

She was about to press the mechanism to shut that room’s door when she heard someone clear their
throat.

Turning, she saw Anakin, looking uncomfortable as he towered over her in the hall. How was he so tall when both she and Luke were so short?

“I wanted to make sure you found the ‘fresher ok.’

“I don’t really need to use it.”

“Yeah, I figured when I saw you staring at your… I mean Leia’s room,” he said, clearly trying to connect with her in some way. “I want to apologize for earlier, when you first got here and I was upset? I got caught up in being worried about my daughter, and forgot to make sure you are ok.”

She scoffed. “How I am feeling is not important, what we need to focus on right now is figuring out how to get me home.”

He winced. “Ok, I get how important that is, Force knows I want my daughter back, but your emotional well being is also very important.” He took a step towards her, clearly intending to be paternal.

Leia didn’t need him to act like a father to her. She didn’t need another father. The one she had lost had been more than enough.

Anakin was looking at her like she was something precious, in direct contrast to how her father had looked at her on the holo earlier.

No.

She couldn’t let herself dwell on that.

“You really should stop doing that,” Anakin chided, as if he was scolding a child. His child.

“Stop it! Don’t you understand that I have no connection to you? I don’t know you, and you do not know me. I don’t need you to worry over me or take care of me or anything like that! I just need you to help me get home!”

A ship must have been flying close to the apartment – a common occurrence on Coruscant, Leia recalled from her time living there – because some of the art hanging on the wall started to shake slightly.

There was a long silence after that. Anakin spent it staring at a picture that continued to sway, disturbed by the earlier vibration. Finally his eyes snapped back to Leia, standing there with her hands balled into fists and her jaw clenched tight.

“You can’t hold onto and bottle your emotions like that. Please, you need training. That must be why the Force sent you here, to us. For training.”

“Training,” she said, not sure where he was going with this, “what sort of training?”

He laughed, “Jedi training, obviously.”

“I’m not Force-sensitive.”

“Of course you are!”

“No. I am no Jedi. It’s a power I could never hope to understand.”
“Really? What do you think caused the pictures to move?”

“A ship was flying close to the building, obviously.”

He gave her a puzzled look. “You really think they let ships get that close to this apartment?”

“I used to be a Senator,” she said, “I know the regulations governing how close traffic can come to senatorial apartments, as well as how drivers tend to skirt those rules in the interest of getting places even faster by leaving their flight lanes. Unless the rules in the Republic Senate are drastically different from the Imperial Senate on this extremely minor matter, and based on what my father has told me about what things were like before the rise of the Empire I do not believe that is the case, I don’t see why this apartment would have a tighter security protocol than that.”

“Yeah, ok. If this was a Senator’s apartment that may have been a driver veering out of their lane, but it isn’t.” He shook his head. “This is the Chancellor of the Republic’s apartment, and drivers are not allowed near here, and that,” he gestured to the paintings, “that was you. You bottling your feelings up and only releasing them when they boil over. You can’t do that, Leia.”

“She’s the Chancellor? Why did you let a traveler from another dimension into your home?” These people were far too trusting. Leia would never have allowed an interdimensional visitor to have an audience with Mon Mothma, let alone be allowed into her residence, without being heavily vetted first. Of course Mon probably would have fought her on that, and won said argument since she outranked her, but that was beside the point.

“Both Ahsoka and myself are more than enough security, and,” he cut himself off suddenly, “Hey! Don’t change the topic. This is about you needing to learn how to deal with your emotions.”

How dare he? How kriffing dare this man just assume he could make judgments about her like that?

The pictures were rattling again.

She clenched her jaw tighter and glared at this tall lanky stranger blocking her path out of the hallway. This man who claimed to be her biological father. Luke’s father. A Jedi Knight.

Luke was strong in the Force.

This man was a Jedi.

Oh.

But it was so impossible.

He reached out then, putting one of his hands on her shoulder.

“Hey. Look at me.” He waited until she made eye contact with him before continuing. “You need to breathe, ok? I know it can be hard, Force knows it took me a long time to figure out how necessary it was, or how to do it right, but you need to let go.”

Right. As if acknowledging her emotions and moving past them could possibly be easy like that. He didn’t understand.

She shoved past him and stormed back to the living room, hoping to put this nonsense behind her. What she did with her emotions was her business.
She *really* kriffed up.

He was still screaming.

She was pretty sure he was directing the scream at them, how else could it be so loud.

What had she been thinking?

Had she been thinking?

Was there any way to make him stop?

She had been feeling so mature, so sure she was finally on the path towards becoming the Jedi she was always meant to be, so of course she had gone ahead and done something stupid and impulsive like this.


“I may have provoked him.”

“What? Why? What did you do?”

“I uh, showed him the same memory I showed you.”

He stared at her for a long moment, “You showed Vader a family goofing off and eating dinner?”

“Yes.”

“…and this was his response.”

“Yes.”

“Wow. He must really hate Father and Ben.”

That was not the conclusion she was expecting him to come to.

The screaming ended. The Force felt so comfortably peaceful in its absence.

“Why did you show him that memory?”

She shifted uncomfortably.

Oh to be anywhere but there right then.

“I wanted to taunt him? Talking with you about our family, hearing that you didn’t even know anything about our mother, it really bothered me.” She really hoped he’d buy that excuse.

He did. He nodded and offered her a weak smile.
“Well at least he’s being quiet now. I’ve never felt anything like that before, it was so intense.”

What worried her was that the scream had been directed towards them via their familial bond. He’d also been aware of Luke’s existence earlier, clearly, because he’d kept calling her by his name. Yet somehow it was only then that it occurred to her that he may not have known of Leia’s existence. Before he’d been trying to gain access to her as his sole focus because he was only aware that he had one child. Now he knew he had two, and he was projecting to both of them.

She needed to teach Luke how to shield himself, and fast.

She changed gears in their lesson for the day, easily giving an excuse that after what they had just experienced Luke would need to know about shields to prevent feeling that again. He readily agreed, and the two got to work working on his ability to keep unwanted presences out of his mind.

Unfortunately the Sith returned not too long into Luke’s lesson, pounding against her mental shields with all of his strength.

The only good thing about his timing was that Luke had finally entered into a meditative state just before the Sith attacked, and Vader seemed to be sparing Luke his direct attention this time.

Luke would hopefully remain unaware of the battle Leia faced.

Leia had always known her father was powerful, that she and Luke were far more powerful than any of the other Jedi in the temple and their dad even stronger than they were, but knowing that and experiencing an attack like this were truly different things.

He managed to crash through her shields just twenty minutes after his attack began, and once more she heard that oh so wrong mechanical voice echo through her mind.

*What manner of trickery are you attempting, Jedi? How dare you mock me. Far more powerful Jedi than you have died by my blade. I will relish the opportunity to dispatch you.*

Starting with death threats, really not good.

*What happened to you?* She had to ask. She had to know. *Why did you become this? Anakin Skywalker was a good man. Why do this?*

Using his name only seemed to increase his rage. The Force pulsed around it.

*Anakin Skywalker was a fool. The Galaxy is better off without him.*

No.

She really had to disagree with that.

She knew for a fact what the difference between a universe where her father was... well her father, and this one was, and as far as she was concerned there was not even a single individual thing that was “better” about this world rather than her own.

Even if it wasn’t better simply for his existence, her life was better because of him. He was her father, and she loved him so much.

*You can’t mean that. No. We aren’t better off without him. No. How could she get through to him? She could feel his familiar self underneath it all, she just had to find a way to draw it out. Please, Father, I...*
His voice howled then, and she was once more reminded that he had not known of their connection before. Why had she called this monster father? She really had stepped in it this time.

*Father?! Commodex Tahn said there was but one child. How deep does this treachery run?*

The howling in the Force abated for a moment, and his sudden calm startled her.

*Wait. I have been inside your mind before. It was different and yet… yes… you are the Princess Leia Organa. I... I…*

A memory, not hers, overtook her senses.

*Everything was red. Red like a twisted corrupted kyber. The distortion went far beyond the usual hazy quality of memory - it was almost like whoever had experienced this was viewing the world through a red tinted screen. The perspective was of someone looking down from above. Looking down at... A tiny cell, yes, this was a prison cell. There was a low and constant whirring noise from a spherical droid hanging in the air, holding an empty syringe. A small figure, long hair in buns and wearing an Alderaanian dress, was writhing on the floor in agony. For a moment the figure looked up, directly at the being whose memory Leia was experiencing, and she startled, recognizing her own face.*

Leia blinked, the red screen was gone, she was back in her own body.

*No. The strange mechanical voice boomed. *This can not be. I would have known if The Princess was mine. No.*

Leia was drawn into another of Darth Vader’s red hazed memories.

*She saw herself again, still with that ridiculous hairstyle, still in that same Alderaanian dress. She appeared stronger, better put together. Perhaps this was before the previous memory? She stood in what Leia recognized as the hallway of a Corvette ship, and maintained eye contact with the Sith. On all sides of her were soldiers in some sort of modified clone armor, however given their height differences Leia knew the soldiers could not be clones. The soldiers held this universe’s Leia captive, had their guns pointed in her direction, and yet as she stood there, hands pressed together in binders, she was defiant; head held high and pure righteous fury radiating from her expression.*

*“Only you could be so bold,” she spat, managing to infuse each word with pure scorn.*

*No! Vader’s voice howled through the vision. *She is.... No, you are just like…*

There was a brief flash then, her mother’s face. She was so much younger than Leia had ever known her.

Like Leia in the memory, she too looked ahead with boundless defiance, righteous fury in her eyes.

*No. The voice howled again as the memory of Padmé Amidala Naberrie's face faded. No.*

The Sith Lord’s pain and confusion built in the Force, creating a whirlwind of emotion that promised to rage for a while yet. Leia threw up her shields the best she could, hoping to protect herself from the storm to come.

She managed to block him out, he was so distracted by his own inner turmoil she could fully shove him out of her mind, sealing the path behind him tight. It wouldn’t hold up if he tried to break in again, she’d have to stay alert, but for now he was gone.
Her head was still reeling from having a Sith, a full blown Sith, in it for so long. She felt over exerted and slightly out of breath.

She wasn’t doing much better emotionally

She inhaled, and took in the calming presence of Luke in front of her. He sensed her distress, and came out of the meditation he had been in. He had clearly done a far better job at building up his shields than she had expected, if he had managed to block out the encounter she had just had.

“Are you ok?” He asked, furrowing his brow.

Was she ok? Was any of this ok? “I miss my home,” she said. Uncle Obi always said half truths were better than lies if one absolutely had to deceive other Force sensitives. They would be able to sense an outright lie, but not a lie by omission. She had never expected to have to hide something from Luke before. “I miss my parents. I miss my Jedi Master, and having the Jedi Order there to help guide me. I just... miss it all.”

He gave her a sad smile. “It must be nice, having those things.”

Her heart broke for him all over again.

“Should we continue with the lesson?” She asked, hoping to give him something, in the face of all that he had lacked.

The smile he gave her in response was stunning.

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Leia Organa attends a meeting of The Jedi High Council.

A special thank you to Sofiya, who insisted there had to be a wig room to house all of Padmé’s many fabulous wigs.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

A massive thank you to my beta, saveloy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Leia kept reminding herself that the building they were driving towards wasn’t the Imperial Palace, that Palpatine would not be waiting there, that this was not just an elaborate trap to capture her.

It wasn’t easy, even if the large building, and all the rest of the Federal District around them, seemed so much more welcoming and bright than it ever had before.

No, she wasn’t going to be brought before the most evil man she could imagine (the fact he was a Sith in addition being a power-hungry demagogue really felt over the top); instead she was going there to meet with the Jedi Council.

Just a collection of the wisest and strongest members of an ancient order of warrior monks with powers and abilities far beyond Leia’s understanding.

Way less intimidating.

The speeder parked closer to the temple than the ship had earlier, right near the front entrance.

She, Anakin, and Ahsoka got out of the car and began to walk towards the building. Padmé had stayed behind at the apartment, citing the need for there to be a division between the civilian government and a religious institution like the Jedi.

It was a fascinating deviation from what Leia understood about the Old Galactic Republic, and she had wanted to stay and learn more about these policies and how they came to be in place. Unfortunately it seemed she had a set appointment time with the Jedi Council and could not be late.

Ahsoka put one of her hands on Leia’s shoulder, giving it a light squeeze as she did. It was a testament to how much entering this building unnerved Leia that she did not react to the invasion of her personal space.

“You ok? There isn’t anything to be scared of, not really,” Ahsoka said, lightly as they began to walk up the steps. “They like to argue with each other more than anything else.”

Right.

The last time Leia had been here was for an Ascension Week party, just a year and two weeks ago.

She kept expecting to see Imperial lackeys, bureaucrats, stormtroopers, sycophants, ISB agents, Imperial officers, and Imperial guards around each corner they turned. How could she not? This was Palpatine’s Palace.

Instead she saw scores of people of all different species, mostly dressed in simple brown robes. They all had lightsabers clipped to their belts, and quite a few had those same strange braids she had noticed both her counterpart and this universe’s Luke had.
Some of the people they saw as they walked down the halls even called out to members of their
group, and waved. Others gave them curious glances, or seemed to intentionally avoid coming near
them.

They were getting closer and closer to the Emperor’s office.

Leia had never been in there before, very intentionally.

The thought of having a direct audience with the Emperor had always turned her stomach. If there
was ever a subcommittee she was in that had to meet with the Emperor, she’d found a way to beg
out of it. She had worked very hard to ensure there was never any reason for their paths to ever cross
more directly than when he visited the Senate floor.

She knew the Emperor would not be in there.

That he was long dead in this world.

That it wasn’t even an office.

They were at his office’s doors now.

As they swung open, revealing the sunny room within, the setup was all wrong for a meeting room.

There was a circle of chairs, facing inward around a circle inlaid on the floor.

People – Leia assumed the members of the Council – sat in the chairs, reclining casually.

Anakin went to one of the empty seats and sat down, while Ahsoka went to stand in the circle’s
center. She gestured to Leia for her to join her there at her side.

Standing at the room’s center with everyone on all sides watching was a very vulnerable position to
be in.

As Leia moved to stand next to Ahsoka, holos flickered to life at the remaining empty chairs, and
those seats filled with several Council members who could not be physically present.

She made a mental note that General Kenobi was one of the Jedi gathered there via hologram,
although he looked oddly younger than when she had seen him briefly on the Death Star. Life on
Tatooine had clearly been bad for the older man’s health, if his counterpart was anything to go by.

To Leia’s surprise a holo flickered on in the center of the room by her and Ahsoka as well, and the
life-size image of that universe’s Luke suddenly stood there.

He gave her a curious look, and she supposed she must have been doing the same.

Compared to the Luke she knew, his face was a bit rounder, his hair shorter and darker, his skin
smoother. He seemed more relaxed, more comfortable in his own skin. He was dressed in the plain
robes she’d seen many others in earlier as she walked through the Jedi temple, had one of those
ridiculous side braids, and clipped to his belt was a different lightsaber from the one her Luke always
wore.

After the two stared at each other for a bit, he looked at Anakin, an expression of such total
bewilderment on his face Leia could not help but laugh.

“Find humor in this, do you hmmm? Not serious, perhaps, you think the situation is,” said a gravelly
voice at the front of the room.
The speaker was a tiny and hunched over green member of a species Leia had never seen before. From how the others in the room all fell silent and at attention when he spoke, Leia deduced that he must be the leader of the Order.

He was right, opening a meeting such as this with nervous laughter really was not proper decorum. It was the sort of nitpicking rule she hated, but Leia knew better, had in fact known better when she was just a child.

She stood up a bit straighter, calling on the posture and poise she had always employed on the Senate floor. “My sincerest apologies. Personally I blame the surreal and frankly unbelievable circumstance of this past day for my current mental state. You are correct about this being incredibly severe. I am needed back home, and worry about what will happen in my absence. The longer my return takes, the more danger I fear my reality may be in. Laughing in light of something like that is truly inappropriate.”

The tiny figure nodded. “Your situation we understand, although doubts about your story, we still have.”

“I do not know how to prove to you that I come from another timeline,” she said, not liking that this meeting already had her on the defensive. “If I was not living it myself, I wouldn’t believe it either.”

“We can sense that your presence in the Force is not the same as Padawan Skywalker’s,” said another Council member, a Nautolan. He gestured towards the holo of Luke. “We asked the other Padawan Skywalker to join us because he would know the differences in your presence the best, and is most likely to know if you are lying or not.”

She nodded her understanding, and from the corner of her eye saw Anakin’s frown deepen. He did not seem to like the direction this was taking either.

He shifted around a bit, then he joined the conversation. “There is more, Masters. I think the Force sent her here for training,” Anakin continued to move about in his seat as he spoke, “She comes from a place where the Sith rule the Galaxy and there are no Jedi left to stand against them. Considering those circumstances, and what we know her strength in the Force to be, it is imperative she be trained.”

“That raises the question of if we have the right or responsibility to interfere in another universe’s affairs,” General Kenobi responded, “or if we should focus the entirety of our energy on getting our own Leia home.”

“What? Are you suggesting that I don’t want my daughter back?”

“You know that isn’t what I am saying. Honestly, Anakin.”

“It’s implied. You implied that I-”

“Master Kenobi raises a good point. It is true that our Order has stood against the Sith for ten thousand years, yet for all that time we have only ever fought them in our own dimension,” a Kel Dor said. “Taking steps to engage the Sith of another universe, even if those steps are only the training of a being from that dimension so they can take our fight home with them, that escalates the battle. Whether or not we decide to train the girl hinges on many factors, including the larger metaphysical question of what interdimensional battle would mean.”

“If we take steps towards bringing down the Sith in her dimension, where do we stop? Surely hers is not the only timeline out there under Sith rule. Would we need to find ways to help those elsewhere
as well, lest we be neglecting our responsibilities?” The speaker was behind her. She felt disoriented, unsure who any of these people were, unable to even keep track of where the speakers were seated.

All of them seemed to have some sort of thought or feeling on the matter, the debate long and winding, and strangely academic and theoretical. Leia herself was quickly forgotten, ostensibly the subject of the debate, yet barely remembered.

If they wanted to talk about her they could do that when she was not present. Why make her stand here and listen to them have this conversation? Nothing about this meeting model made sense.

Occasionally she’d hear a voice she actually recognized – Ahsoka, or Anakin, or General Kenobi – join the others in the winding endless debate, taking on a variety of different roles as the discussion progressed. Not Luke.

He wasn’t forgetting her presence.

He was paying attention to her, and only her.

He kept looking at Leia, confused and slightly lost.

Had he not been a holo, Leia would have given him a hug. It wasn’t rational, but there was something about that particular look of bewilderment on Luke’s face that called to a deep place inside of her.

She felt that strange tingle again, but it was softer, more familiar somehow. She didn’t fight it, and when she felt something hesitantly touch her mind, she let it in.

Even though Luke was not present, even though he was somewhere far away, where she did not know, his presence filled her like he truly was standing there next to her.

Luke seemed to mentally check her over, like a post-battle triage checking soldiers’ injuries and trying to determine just how urgent their needs were.

Whatever he found there surprised him.

She could feel the impression of his emotions and could glean the start of pieces of meaning behind them, but Leia did not know how to respond, how to mimic what he was doing. She wished she understood more of the specifics behind his emotions – what was surprising him, what had him so concerned?

They stood there, gazing at each other’s faces, unspeaking and almost unblinking.

She was the one who broke their eye contact.

This was Leia’s first time seeing Luke since learning they were related, and slight differences between his appearance and her Luke’s aside, she found her gaze drawn to his nose. She studied its shape for a bit, the roundness of his cheeks, the way his brow was formed. If she squinted and unfocused her gaze all at once, she supposed she could see some similarity between his facial structure and her own.

Twins.

Separated-at-birth twins taken to opposite corners of the Galaxy and raised in ignorance of one another.
Why did so many aspects of her life sound like a particularly bad holodrama?

She didn’t even *like* holodramas, yet she seemed cursed to *live* through one.

The debating Jedi had reached a lull in their arguing, and one of them, a Human with looped braided hair and facial piercings, seemed set on actually acknowledging one of the silent figures standing in the center of the room.

“Luke, you have been quiet during this conversation. What do you think we should do?”

He seemed startled by the attention, and looked around a bit at those gathered before meeting the gaze of the Human who had spoken to him. “I think we should train her, Master Billaba,” he said, finally. Funny, Leia had never noticed before that Luke had an Outer Rim accent, not until this boy spoke and his voice contained no traces of one.

“And why is that, Luke?” Master Billaba pressed further.

“I understand the concern my Master has about where our responsibilities do and do not lie in regards to other universes, and of course I very much want us to work as hard as we can to bring my sister home. However I do believe that she,” he gestured at Leia, “did not come to us by accident. She says that she is from a Galaxy that is ruled by the Sith, one under such rule without any Jedi left to protect it. She is clearly untrained, yet contains the same potential and strength in the Force as my sister.” He paused then, looking uncomfortable. “I also sense that she is in a great deal of emotional turmoil. Would it not go against our vows if we did not help her deal with that pain?”

Emboldened by his son’s observation, Anakin spoke once more. “I too have sensed the girl’s pain. She is lacking the training needed to work through it, and with time it may pose a danger to her. Masters, I know she is far older than any student we have taken on before, and that her time with us will likely be short. Yet I believe that to ignore her need to be trained would be doing her, us, and the Galaxy at large a huge disservice.”

“Ignored perhaps the most important voice in this debate, we have. With us share your thoughts, Leia.” The leader of the Council brought the focus back to her.

It was about time someone remembered she was in the room. She had been starting to think that they would be deciding her fate fully without any input on her part.

“As I told Master Skywalker earlier, I do not have Force abilities, and therefore attempts to train me would be pointless. I also do not appreciate having my emotions spoken of by a large group of strangers, as revered and wise as they may be, as if they were a burden or something that I need to *learn to control.*” There was only so much a person could handle in the name of proper decorum.

“You are fully ignorant of your strength in the Force?” The question came from another Human, bald, unadorned and seated next to the small leader.

“No, I am not ignorant of it, I simply have no strength in the Force to speak of.”

Ahsoka looked faintly uncomfortable. “I ran blood tests on her, when I first brought her onto my ship. According to those scans, there is no difference between her bloodwork and that of my Padawan. That includes her midi-chlorian count.”

Impossible. Like any other Senator in the Empire, she’d had to submit bloodwork to official databases. Unless her parents had figured out a way to falsify her tests? It suddenly occurred to her that her parents could have known that Leia was Force-sensitive, if any of this was really true, and that they could have hidden that fact.
She knew that Inquisitors had always been a danger for Force-sensitive children, but like the knowledge of who her biological parents were, she did not understand why her Force-sensitivity had been hidden from her. There were so many things her parents had apparently known, and Leia would never be able to ask them why they had not shared their knowledge with her.

Leia found herself grateful for the Council leader’s unique speech pattern, as it allowed her to identify him as the speaker even when she was not looking at him. “From a universe ruled by the Sith, you come. Of defeating them you may be the only hope.”

Her? No. Luke was their best shot at… of course, how had she not realized? Whatever they taught her would be immensely valuable in taking down Palpatine. Even if the efforts would be wasted on her, the methods and practices they’d try to teach could in turn be passed on to Luke, who would actually be able to utilize them in defeating both Vader and Palpatine. That is, if Palpatine was indeed a Sith in her world. She really hoped he wasn’t.

Ahsoka took a small half-step forward to draw attention to herself before she spoke. “I am willing to work with her to teach her as much as I can, if the Council grants permission.”

“I don’t think you should work alone, Little ‘Soka. This circumstance is highly unusual, and her instruction will be incredibly unorthodox. I actually think we may need to work with an outside entity for this,” the Kel Dor said.

“What are you suggesting Master Plo?”

“Perhaps we should speak with Asajj Ventress.” There was a murmur of dissent, and Master Plo paused to let it pass before continuing. “We know she was a teenager when her training began, and over the course of her life she has done much to work through and contain vast amounts of anger and pain. Yes, she has chosen to live apart from our Order, but what was the point of training her in our traditions or granting her a full pardon if we fail to call upon her when circumstance demands? While Ahsoka will undoubtedly have to work hard to ensure she does not pass along any teachings that directly go against our code, I believe there is much of value she could pass along to the young displaced Skywalker.”

“What? Ventress? No, Masters no, my daughter does not need to be exposed to whatever lessons she might have to pass on.”

“That’s the problem Skywalker. She isn’t your daughter. Your daughter is currently, most likely, in this woman’s home dimension just as she is in ours,” the bald Human said.

“I still think the main focus of our efforts should be bringing Leia home. There are so many uncertainties at play here, and we can only imagine what sort of dangers exist for a lone Jedi in a world ruled by The Sith,” General Kenobi said.

“It was the will of the Force that brought us this Leia and sent ours there. I am sure that with time the Force will see fit to restore things to how they should be as well. What is important is what we do in the meantime with this current state of affairs, Master Kenobi.” Leia really had trouble keeping up with all of these speakers. They could have introduced themselves to her at the meeting’s start or arranged the chairs so that you could see all of them at once. The voices she did not know speaking behind her, and about her, situation was just rude.

General Kenobi nodded his head at someone behind Leia. “Perhaps. Tell me, Leia, are there any Jedi left in your world? We know you come from somewhere that Darth Sidious rules as some sort of Emperor, and that we were wiped out there, but were there any survivors?”
“I have only ever personally encountered four individuals laying claim to a connection to the Jedi Order, two of whom began their training after the Order’s destruction. All save for one of them, one of those who began to train after the Order’s end, are dead.”

“And the names of these individuals?” She gave up on even pinpointing where this voice came from.


“Interesting. I know not only one of the names you have given. A false name to protect the Jedi’s identity, perhaps this is.” The ancient green Jedi Master truly seemed surprised that he did not recognize one of the names, and Leia had to wonder if he truly knew every member of the Jedi Order by name.

“I also suspect that Ahsoka Tano may have been a founder of the Rebellion against Palpatine I belong to, but I can not be certain. If so, then she too is most likely dead, last seen in battle with the Sith Lord known as Darth Vader.”

“Do you happen to have any information about who this Darth Vader may be?” The bald Human next to the leader asked.

“I only know what was told to Luke Skywalker by General Kenobi just prior to his death.”

The Master who had asked her gestured for her to continue.

“He said that Vader betrayed and murdered Anakin Skywalker. That he was responsible for the deaths of a great many members of the Jedi Order. Apparently Vader had been a student of General Kenobi’s, before he fell to the Dark Side.”

There was quiet after that.

Finally, Anakin broke the silence. “He was a student of Obi-Wan’s? When?” He was obviously upset.

“I’d imagine before Palpatine seized power and had the Order killed.”

“Which was when?” This voice came from somewhere behind her.

“The 20th Empire Day celebration, in honor of the day when Emperor Palpatine dissolved the Republic and established the Empire, was just held a week ago.”

“Obi-Wan never had any students other than Anakin, not until he took on training Luke.”

“Perhaps in that timeline he did have another Padawan, and that is the place of divergence between our worlds.” Whoever said that sounded particularly pleased with their theory.

Leia could tell from the expressions on the faces of Anakin, General Kenobi and Ahsoka that this was a topic she’d want to explore with them more in the future if she could. All three looked highly uncomfortable, and the identity of the person behind Vader’s mask was something Leia needed to know. If they even suspected who he could have been, it was possible that they could discover some sort of weakness they otherwise would not have been able to exploit. Something she could use to finally destroy him.

She decided it would be best to confront them in private, away from the watchful eyes of the full Council. She hoped the fact she looked just like a person she knew was within the confidence of
those involved would aid her in her attempts to collect information.

The rest of the meeting proceeded the same as before. Lots of debating the theological implications of being able to access and alter events in other universes. At some point, Leia was not exactly sure when, it was fully decided that she would receive Jedi training, taught to her by Ahsoka Tano with assistance from an Asajj Ventress. Leia still was unsure about this plan, but she apparently didn’t have much of a say in it. Anakin Skywalker had for his part objected to the last part of the plan, but he was outvoted.

It was also decided that the majority of the Order’s energy would be focused on trying to find ways to get her home, and bring her counterpart back to this universe. She was grateful to hear that the best minds in the Jedi Order would be devoting themselves to solving this problem.

As the meeting began to wrap up, the holo of Luke gave her another long look, and she felt his emotions once more. She realized with a startling clarity that he wanted to speak with her again, without others present. She nodded at him, unsure how else to communicate her response. She found it strange, not the connection itself, no, rather how normal it felt. Being so intimately connected to another person should have felt like an invasion of her privacy. Instead, it simply felt right.

Ahsoka and Leia were dismissed not long after, and as they left Luke’s holo flickered off. Those who had been seated stayed, clearly intent to debate with each other even more.

As the two of them left the Council’s chambers, Ahsoka gesturing for Leia to continue following her, as if there was a real risk that Leia would go off into the Temple alone, and the two walked through the Temple's large and impressive halls together.

Leia was still expecting Imperials to jump out from behind them, but she was finding it increasingly easy to relax.

They reached a courtyard, where a large golden tree was located. All around the courtyard’s expanse were groups of younglings, clustered together practicing stances with either lightsabers or training sticks.

Occasionally she saw older youth and teenagers, all with either the side braid Leia had seen all over the temple - in the case of species that did not grow hair they wore a chain of beads - practicing stances, and occasionally sparring lightly.

“Once you have a lightsaber, this is where we’ll be coming the most to practice. I don’t want to spend too much time in a stuffy practice room.”

“I am going to be given a lightsaber?” Leia asked with surprise.

Ahsoka rolled her eyes. “No, no one is going to give you one. You’re going to build a lightsaber.”

She was going to what? Luke had been struggling for a while now trying to figure out how to do exactly that, fiddling with and trying to take apart the lightsaber he had gotten on Rodia. If someone more mechanically inclined, and far more skilled with the Force, than Leia couldn’t figure the process out, what hope did she have?

Then again, if the Jedi showed her how to, even if she couldn’t replicate the process herself, it would be knowledge she could bring back to Luke. He’d be so thrilled with whatever information she could pass along to him.

She’d do her best, learn as much as she could, and then once she got home she’d make sure Luke learned what he needed to fulfill his destiny. She knew he was going to be an amazing Jedi one day.
Ahsoka took her through the Temple, showing her the various places she’d be working with her during her training. Occasionally they’d pass people who would wave or even call out to them as they walked by.

Not everyone wore the plain robes she saw many of the Humans in. The religious order seemed to have a strong respect for the cultural practices of species all across the Galaxy, allowing members to opt for clothes reflective of where they came over the ascetic robes many opted to wear. Others, such as Ahsoka herself, were clearly just dressed in what they deemed comfortable, the robes far from being a uniform.

All in all the tour was a dizzying reinforcement that she was not in her universe anymore. Before this meeting, before coming to this place, a part of her had still been in denial, coping with the impossibility of her situation by insisting it was all an elaborate plan to capture her.

This however, the things she was seeing and experiencing in the very heart of Palpatine’s Empire, was impossible to fake.

She was reeling from the sight of all of these beings, of so many different species, engaging in forbidden religious acts within the Emperor’s very palace.

It was as if she had stepped into the past the Alliance wanted to restore.

Her heart cried out with the hope that one day she could witness a place like this again, in her own future. Perhaps after the war was won, Luke would be able to establish a place of learning such as this, one where the ways of the Jedi could be studied once more.

She knew she was gawking, but there was so much much to see here that was beyond even her wildest imagining.

She even, just for a moment, thought she saw both Ezra Bridger and Kanan Jarrus walking down a hall together.

They ended their tour at the front entrance, where the speeder belonging to Leia’s biofamily was still parked. It seemed that the Council meeting had ended during their walk, because Anakin was there, leaning against the car and waiting.

He gave no indication of reflecting on the events of the meeting at all, with his casual lean and equally casual grin.

“I was wondering, would you like to go out for lunch?” He asked as she and Ahsoka drew close.

“Sorry Skyguy, I have some additional debriefing to go to about this whole situation. On my own this time, just me, Master Windu and Master Yoda.” She pulled a face, clearly not happy with this scenario.

“Which one was Master Windu?” Leia asked, curious to connect more names to the faces that she had seen at the meeting.

“The bald and frowny Human who was sitting next to Master Yoda,” Ahsoka answered.

“And Master Yoda is?” It was amazing what sort of things they just assumed she knew.

“The tiny ancient green cryptic…” Ahsoka scrunched up her nose in thought. “Uh, I actually don’t know what species he and Master Yaddle are, but please don’t ever repeat that I described Master Windu or Master Yoda like that.”
Ah.

“Have fun with them Snips,” Anakin gave Ahsoka a small smile that could only be described as mocking, before turning to Leia with a genuine grin. “Want to go to lunch with me, Leia?”

She really didn’t, but it would be impolite to turn him down.

As she got into the car, Ahsoka called out to them.

“Hey, Skyguy make sure she gets back here nice and early tomorrow! First thing first I’m taking her to Ilum.”

The kyber planet?

Glancing at the dashboard chrono, Leia wondered how it was still only early afternoon. It felt like it should be far later in the day. It really wasn’t fair for a day to be this full of impossible events and only be half over.

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Leia S. attends a different sort of Council meeting.
Unbetaed, if you catch any errors please please please let me know.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 11

Luke’s shields were progressing rapidly. Far far faster than Leia had thought was even possible. He had a real hunger to learn, absorbing each task with a fierce determination Leia had not anticipated.

She should have, she realized, he’d make it very clear to her how important learning anything he could about the Force and the Jedi Code was to him.

Luke was, far and away a much better student than Leia had ever been.

If anything, his biggest problem as a student was that he took all of this so seriously that he got disproportionately upset whenever he inevitably messed up.

She didn’t know how to help him with that.

The worst part was that when he got upset like that, it caused him to focus on himself rather than the Force itself, and created more problems as he tried to learn.

Yet even with those hiccups, he was now creating shields equal to those Leia herself could make. It should have been impossible to learn the technique so fast, there was no way to explain him mastering decades of study in just one day, yet there was no denying the strength of what he was able to create.

Hopefully Luke would now be ready to defend himself from Vader’s next attempt to contact either of them.

There was a noise from the doorway, and the twins turned to see what it was in unison.

The military officer from that morning was standing there. “Princess, I’ve been looking for you. I thought perhaps you were still in the sickbay, but apparently you have recovered. We were going to go over our fleet patterns? Should I reschedule or are you ready for our meeting?”

Luke stood and fell into what Leia recognized was an at attention stance beings in the military used. “General Madine, I’m sorry, I am responsible for Leia being distracted.”

Luke gave her an expectant look. She wondered what it is he wanted her to do exactly. She’d never actually been in a military unit before.

After the Clone Wars had ended her mother, and others in the Senate had worked long and hard to ensure a conflict of that nature would not take place again. It had taken years for the structure of the Republic to be suitably altered, and unfortunately, there were still remnants of that dark period of history. Remnants such as the continuing existence of the Grand Army of the Republic, even if the military had been significantly decreased in size since the days of the war.

One of the biggest changes that had happened was the full detachment of the Jedi Order from the
Republic’s military.

Overall Leia had always been taught that this was a major improvement on the way things had been, that the previous structure of the Order in relation to The Grand Army of the Republic had been a mistake that had caused the Order to go astray. It had even caused the entire Order to drift towards the Dark Side.

Leia agreed with that, even if a part of her felt restless confined to the role of peacekeeper when she heard all the amazing stories her father, Uncle Obi and Aunt ‘Soka had from their days fighting in the war.

It also meant that Leia was truly clueless when it came to military discipline and how one was supposed to act within that world.

So she stood and tried to best imitate Luke’s pose. The Officer gave her a strange look, clearly surprised and confused by her action. Right. So that wasn’t the right thing for her to do. Great.

She sighed. She really was not looking forward to any of this, least of all having to debrief with whoever was in charge here.

Council meetings, whenever she had to go to those, went on forever, and she never felt very comfortable just standing there with everyone staring at her. She imagined that this would go similarly.

She waited for the General to speak, but was surprised to discover he was, in fact, waiting for her. She really did not know what to say. “General, I’m sorry I missed our meeting.” She hoped that would be enough to get him to leave and buy her more time to learn about this military she had found herself within before being summoned before the people in charge.

It wasn’t.

“Would you like to reschedule it, Princess?”

She nodded, hoping to have it at a far later date.

He watched her expectantly, waiting for her to say when they should next meet.

“Uh, when would work for you?” She hoped he’d be busy until she managed to get home.

“I was going to go grab lunch just now if this time would work for you.”

Right. Great. There really would be no putting this off. She sighed. Well, she may as well get the whole reporting to the people in charge thing over with. No point delaying the inevitable.

“General, before we meet you should know that, well, I’m sorry to tell you that something has happened in regards to...in regards to all the responsibilities that... I oversee? I would like to report this in full to whoever is in charge here.”

“What do you mean something has happened? Why didn’t you say something earlier Princess? Is this an Emergency? Should I notify Alliance High Command?” His tone went up in volume as he spoke.

“Yes. Yes, I suppose this is an emergency. I need to speak to the people in charge of this base and...”

Luke interrupted her, via their bond. Stop. He sent and gave her a pained look. Ok, so clearly she
was saying all the wrong things. She didn’t get why or what the right thing to say would be, but hey, at least she was no longer actively putting her foot in her mouth. *Leia, you are in charge of this base.*

*She* was in charge of this base? She hadn’t been expecting to be quite that high up in the command structure. Which meant that the absence of her counterpart actually did qualify as an emergency. She frowned, adjusting to her new understanding of the situation. “Yes General, this is an Emergency,” she told him, and General Madine nodded swiftly, hurrying out of the room.


She did, losing track of the twists and turns the two of them took through the base’s halls before they arrived at their destination.

The room was near empty save for a handful of display screens and a large circular holotable, all of which was keyed to display all sorts of data related to troop and fleet positions all across the Galaxy. Madine pressed a few buttons on the table’s side and then turned to her, worried.

“Is this related to your call to the Alderaanian fleet yesterday? I know it was mostly a formal matter, but if they had something to report...”

She blurted out “Alderaanian fleet?” before she could really stop herself, she was so confused. The people of Alderaan were peaceful, everyone knew that. Why would they have a fleet of their own? Sure they sent ships out all over the place on humanitarian missions and often asked Jedi to accompany their ships for those excursions, but no one had ever described their aid ships as a *fleet* before.

“Sorry. Fleet, flotilla, it’s just semantics to me, but if it is important to you I’ll keep it in mind. I take it then that they are indeed having an emergency?”

Madine took her confused look and pursed lips as confirmation of his suspicion. “Whatever it is your people need us to do, Princess, you know we’ll try our best given our limited resources.”

Holographic figures of several more people dressed in a variety of military-style uniforms appeared. Most of them were in the same uniform as Madine, but there was some variety, and Leia supposed that these may be representative of various branches of military structure.

She recognized some of them from the Grand Army of the Republic, and others from the Republic’s government as well. Most of them were total strangers.

The last holo to join them was a person Leia actually knew by name. Senator Mon Mothma, a good friend of Leia’s mother.

She didn’t really know what to expect from this. All she knew was what Luke had told her when she asked for this emergency meeting. Her counterpart was part of this... Alliance High Command was it? She was in charge of this base. That was all she knew. She didn’t even know who they were at war with!

Why hadn’t she asked Luke more questions when she had been teaching him? She’d had plenty of opportunities, she’d just kept putting it off.

She really was not prepared to be given responsibility for an entire base.

All the holos gathered turned towards Leia, and she realized she was the youngest person in the room by far.
How had her counterpart gotten herself this job?

“Princess Leia, what is the emergency?”

She tried to imagine she was in the Council chambers, debriefing after a mission. As much as she hated it, at least that action was familiar. She looked at all of those gathered and then took a breath in and out. She could do this.

“I am not who you think I am,” she started, and already she could see various reactions blooming on the faces of those gathered, “something happened, I am not exactly sure of what right now. I traveled here from another dimension.”

“Another dimension?” A tired looking dark haired Human asked.

“Yes. That is the only explanation that makes sense. Too many things are fundamentally different for it to be anything else.”

“Such as?” A Mon Cal asked, his vocal tone communicating that he did not believe a word she was saying.

“Well, I’m not a Princess for one thing. I am a Jedi.”

Everyone gathered started to talk at once, a chaotic cacophony of voices expressing varying states of shock and disbelief. Leia decided to float some of the datapads she saw sitting in a corner over to the table, in full view of the holorecorder, to truly prove her point. Then to really drive it home, she took her lightsaber off her belt and placed it on the table.

“I am a Jedi. I wouldn’t joke about something like that.”

Mon lifted an eyebrow, and looked Leia over with interest, “You are a Padawan I’m assuming, based on your braid?”

Leia nodded. “Yes, Senator. I know this all sounds very strange, but I am a Jedi Padawan training under Master Ahsoka Tano, a Knight of the Jedi Order.”

Everyone gathered reacted to that statement in some way. Most just stared at her with disbelief, a Twi’lek woman seemed to either be holding back tears or covering something up (she didn't know her well enough to say which), and one of those gathered even let out a bark of laughter. The source of the laughter was a pale and clean-shaven Human, who gave her a suspicious glance.

“You claim you are being trained by Fulcrum? As a Jedi? In an alternative universe? Princess, you’ve proposed some strange and foolish maneuvers in the past, but this really tops it all! Do you really expect anyone to-”

Senator Mothma cut him off. “Thank you, General Draven. Your lack of belief in this development is noted.” She turned to Leia. “Does the Republic still exist in your world?”

“Of course it does! Are you suggesting that -”

Now Mon cut her off, exuding an easy air of authority Leia was familiar witnessing her mother command. “The Republic was destroyed 20 years ago, Master Jedi. As was the Jedi Order. We here in the Alliance to Restore the Republic, as our name implies, aim to restore the Republic that once was.”

Leia could only gape at her in shock. She’d gathered from the comments everyone she had
encountered in this world had made, as well as those horrible visions, that the Order was gone, but the entire Republic too?

She was almost glad her mother was dead in this reality, so she didn’t have to see the demise of all that she had worked for. Leia could only hope she had died before the Republic fell, the idea that she had witnessed the end of her life’s work was far too horrible to contemplate.

“The Republic is alive and well in my dimension, Ma’am. I am very sad to hear it is not here as well. What sort of government do you have then, if not the Galactic Republic?”

“The Galaxy has been suffering under a Galactic Empire. Singular authoritarian rule by fear led by Emperor Sheev Palpatine.”

Sheev Palpatine? Oh. Oh no. She knew all about him, he was all over every history lesson she had ever had, both at the temple and with the tutors her mother had insisted she and Luke suffer through in addition to their regular education.

“He’s a Sith!” She looked around the table with desperation. “He’s a Sith Lord, you know that, right?”

There was a commotion after that, louder and more raucous than when she had initially told them she was a Jedi. She had never really given thought before to how the Council members managed to never interrupt or talk over each other. Oh sure, they would occasionally cut off the being reporting to them, but fail to listen to other Masters? Never. This group had no such decorum.

Even with everyone talking over each other, it wasn’t hard for Leia to figure out that not a single one of the people gathered had actually been aware of Darth Sidious’ identity. It was a fact that came up often in history lessons, that the man had managed to escape notice for decades disguised as a kind and grandfatherly politician, a leader of Leia’s mother’s own political party. He’d even once been her mother’s mentor.

Even knowing that she hadn’t expected his true identity to be this surprising. Her dad was far from the most perceptive person in the Galaxy, Force abilities aside, and he had managed to figure Sidious’ ploy out.

Through all the chaos Mon stood silent, resigned. She looked like she had just been punched. “We were unaware of this. Are you certain that he is indeed a Sith?”

Leia nodded, slowly. “Yes, in my timeline he was found out at the end of the Clone Wars. He was the mastermind behind them, pulling all the strings behind both sides. The entire war was just a ploy for him to justify a decrease in civil liberties and increase in executive authority. My... my father killed him, and brought balance to the Force.”

Mon frowned. “You do not mean Bail Organa when you speak of your father, do you?”

Leia shook her head no. “No, my father is Anakin Skywalker.”

Mon’s expression did not give away any of her feelings on the matter, but in the Force Leia sensed a brief smugness about her, as if she had been suspecting as much for a while and only just had it confirmed. Leia wasn’t too surprised, she was a lot like her parents.

Quietly, so much so her voice almost was not picked up by the holorecorder, she asked, “Are you the daughter of Padmé Amidala?”

“Yes I am, Senator.”
Mon smiled. As she spoke, her gaze seemed lost parsecs in the distance, perhaps in recollection of a time long past. “I knew I had won that bet with Bail about who the baby’s father was, Padmé never was as good at being secretive about that relationship as she liked to believe,” she laughed then, at some old joke it seemed she had once shared with Senator Organa about Leia’s parents. “I forgive him for never admitting I won, of course. Where you came from was a secret that needed to be kept.” She looked around the room, pointedly. “I expect that this will be treated with the highest level of classification.”

There was a lot of nodding after that, as well as “yes ma’am”s and even an “of course, Chancellor.”

Her title here was Chancellor?

Mon’s sharp gaze focused on Leia. “We welcome you to the Alliance to Restore the Republic, Master Jedi. I will not mince words, we need Princess Organa here and will suffer tremendously in her absence. Our resources are stretched thin as it is, and I do not believe we will be able to allocate the funds and manpower that is going to be needed to bring her home. We will try to find these resources of course,” as she said this she turned to the holo of a Human with a bushy white beard, delegating for him to take on this task, “but as of right now I am unsure if we will be able to spare any energy towards that at all. That said, we will appreciate having a Jedi among our ranks once more. Commander Skywalker tries but -”

Mon Mothma paused, in thought.

“He’s your brother, isn’t he? That’s why Bail sent you to get General Kenobi, to be reunited with him,” she laughed, “your father is still finding ways to surprise me, even after his death. Padmé too.” She looked so terribly bittersweet in that moment, the lone survivor of her closest group of friends.

Senator Organa was dead as well? Wow. This reality really was bleak.

Leia was uncomfortable with how everyone at this meeting was suddenly looking at her.

Like she knew what she was doing.

Like she could save them.

Like she was her father.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: This fic attempts to earn its Han/Leia tag, even though Han and Leia are in different dimensions and can't actually interact with each other. Well, neither of them can interact with the correct version of the other person.
I am very tired, and need to wake up early tomorrow to march in NYC Pride with my workplace, but after some weird things happened today that gave me feels about the end of this chapter, I decided to give it a post.

It still hasn't been betaed, so please tell me if you catch any errors.

She hoped Luke was in the room she had left him in, trying to meditate.

Her head was swimming from all the facts about this timeline she had learned, as well as those she had not.

The Sith had truly won.

Darth Sidious was the Emperor.

The Jedi Order was long dead.

After sharing this absurdly distressing news with her, these rebels working to restore the Republic had not only tasked her with training Luke the best she could but had asked her for her opinion on a whole host of rather dire seeming tactics.

Everyone around that table had looked at her with absolute faith, and seemed to expect her to know what to do.

She wasn’t used to that.

Her insistence that she was not a soldier but a Jedi did nothing to lessen their faith in her as some sort of military leader. Their last memory of The Jedi was of their role in The Clone Wars, and they truly seemed to believe she would be able to lead them to victory.

At one point one of them had made a comment about having the intellect and tactical genius of Princess Leia combined with the legendary military prowess of the Jedi, and it became clear that there was nothing she could say to convince the rebels that she was out of her element. She was a peacekeeper, not a warrior.

She had fumbled her way through the conversation, absolutely terrified that she’d say something wrong and doom soldiers to their deaths. Everything they asked of her seemed like so much responsibility.

It all felt like so much more than she was capable of doing. Even training Luke felt like it would be far beyond her teachings. She wasn’t ready to take on a Sith herself, how was she supposed to train this version of her brother to be?

How was she supposed to direct troops into combat?
There was so much on the line in this reality, and she wanted none of it.

She just wanted to go home.

The longer that meeting had gone on, the surer Leia was that she had not actually been ready for any of this. If what she experienced here in this dimension was to be her Trial, she no longer thought that she would be able to pass. Worse yet, she was beginning to think that she would never get home. She’d be stuck here, without any of the people she loved for the rest of her life.

Well, the versions of them that she knew.

She was wandering through the base as she thought, completely lost.

Looking up to try and figure out if she recognized where she was at all, Leia discovered she was in a ship hangar. It was as makeshift as the rest of the base, yet far more crowded.

She took the time to admire the ships around her. While the Grand Army of the Republic had been significantly downsized since the end of the Clone Wars, and the Jedi Order no longer was affiliated with their military structure, the GAR had not ceased to exist entirely.

The military vessels created for their purposes tended towards sleek and approachable, and more importantly, Leia had never been allowed near them during any of the official tours of military sites she had to be a part of thanks to her mother’s political career. The ships in this hangar were very different from the ones she would see on those tours, and more closely resembled a museum dedicated to the Clone Wars.

Old beat up ships, ones that at first glance did not look like they’d have much life left in them, were everywhere. Some of the single manned fighters, actual Clone War era Y-wings Leia realized, even lacked proper plating on their shells, leaving their internal mechanics exposed.

These people were not kidding when they said they had no funds to run this war on if this was the state of their fleet.

It was also beyond impressive, the techniques used to keep these burners running, the efficiency they got out of them, the overlay of newer technology on older ships.

She ran her hand admirably on the hull of a YT-13000f freighter. It was truly a marvel to behold: on first glance one of the most dilapidated ships Leia had ever seen, but the more you observed it, the more clear it became that every part of it had been gone over recently with tons of love. The modifications were all expertly put together, and while there was a lot of risks involved with their overlay onto the older design, if they did function properly this old model ship would be among the most impressive Leia had ever seen in flight.

Whoever was in charge of these ships had to be a genius mechanic. Truthfully there had to be a full crew of genius mechanics at work here, brilliant beings who could do unbelievable things with engines and parts far beyond the capabilities of either Leia or her father.

This was where Leia really would have belonged in this military, she mused, learning how to maintain these old ships to keep them combat ready and effective. No pressure to train her brother to take on the Sith, just her and the comforting puzzle of mechanical parts.

She began to daydream a bit about getting herself reassigned to this hanger instead of her current task. How much easier and better her time in this world would be if she gave up on her Trial and found other ways to spend her time until she could get home.
No one would judge her, really, for failing to pass a Trial as complicated as this, and she could always try at a later date with something put together for her by the Council. Something that didn’t have such huge ramifications for everyone who lived in an entire Galaxy.

Her daydreaming was interrupted by someone speaking behind her. She turned and found Han standing there, staring at her hand still placed on the old YT light freighter's hull.

“Sorry, what did you say?”

“I asked why you’re feeling up my ship, Your Worship.”

“Oh! This is yours? The one you race in? It’s...” The man winced, clearly braced for her say something less-than-kind.

If he was the mechanic who had worked on this ship, he’d deserve far more than generalized compliments on the work that had been done.

“That hyperdrive generator isn’t original to the ship, right? The YT-1300 line comes from the factory with a Class 2.0 Isu-Sim SSP05 chromium-titanium hyperdrive generator, but this looks like a Class 0.5 at the very least. And wow, have you ever gotten this baby ready for combat! Are those Arakyd ST2 concussion missile launchers? Not that you’d ever really need to go on the offense with those shield generators you've installed! Those are military-grade, aren't they?”

He stared at her, more upset now than he had been when he had seemed to think she was going to insult the ship. His body language drew in, defeated and small.

“You really are someone different, aren’t you. There is no way she’d learn stuff like that just for a laugh. Something happened to her when I should have been keeping her from making yet another impulsively suicidal move, and we lost her.”

She did not know what to say, had not realized that anyone would blame themselves for their switch, “I’m sorry. The Force was calling me on my end, so it couldn’t really be your fault, no matter what happened right before she left. She probably felt it wanting her to go too.”

“You really expect me to buy that? That some mystical energy field convinced Leia to go rushing into some alternate universe like that? Even if the Force was a real thing, and I still have yet to see any real proof of that, I doubt it’d be capable of making her do anything. Nah, it was all her, and I should have done more to try to stop her. I should...” He swallowed and glanced away from her to stare at his ship. “I should never have insisted she leave it when she claimed to see a tunnel in the cliff wall. Maybe if I had agreed with her, instead of arguing, she would have waited ‘till morning and she’d still be here.” He shook his head and then reached a hand out to caress the freighter they stood next to.

“Thanks though, for complimenting my baby. She isn’t easy to keep going, so many of her parts were not made to work together, but when they do, she really is something else.” His voice strained a bit as if it fought him on admitting that his ship wasn’t perfect. Leia could understand. When you sank so much time and energy into something, it could be difficult to own all the failings and flaws.

Leia watched him there, next to this ship he clearly cared for so dearly. She wished she knew how to help him, ease the self-blame he carried over her arrival in this universe and her counterpart’s departure.

With each passing moment, the reality of her situation grew heavier and heavier. Not only were the people Leia loved and cared about living their worst lives (if they were even alive, so many of them
seemed to be dead), but her presence in this reality was even making things worse.

Leia had never felt so alone or unwanted before.

She attempted to reach out to this man, this stubborn gruff man who cared about her counterpart so deeply. “What’s her name? Your ship. You’ve put together so many different parts in such a fascinating way, she must really be something when in action.”

He turned and drew his hand away from the ship resting it on his belt instead, laughing, “This is the *Falcon. The Millennium Falcon*. Made the Kessel Run in less than 12 Parsecs, raced the Dragon Void, flew in the Battle of Yavin and got us through more missions than I care to remember. You won’t find a finer ship in this or any other universe.”

“I’m really interested in hearing more about what you’ve done with her, care to show me more of your modifications?”

He gave her a suspicious look. “You don’t have to do that to make me feel better, you know.”

“Yes, I know. I genuinely like ships and want to see more of what makes this baby tick.”

He grinned then and gestured towards one of the tool boxes scattered across the room. “Then grab a harris wrench and come with me, there are always more repairs to be done and it’d be nice to have someone tiny helping. You can slip into those hard to reach places far better than Chewie or me.”

“Hey! I’m not tiny!” She laughed, comfortable with the direction this was going in. Her size was always a subject of lighthearted teasing among mechanics. She was grateful for the return to a more casual atmosphere, as well as the familiar ribbing that generally followed hanging around shipyards.

She could not believe they were in a lift heading down to the lower levels. Who came down this far just to grab some lunch? This was absurd.

For his part, Anakin was chatting away a parsec a minute. It seemed his favorite topic to natter on about was racing, and honestly, Leia could not care less.

He mentioned something to do with podracing, again, and it took what felt like all of her remaining energy to keep from rolling her eyes.

All this talk of racing reminded her of Han.

She wondered if he thought she’d abandoned him when she vanished after the party. Would her leaving like that cause him to take off to finally pay off his loans?

What was her counterpart like?

Would Han like her more, this other-her who apparently shared his interests?

Why did she care about that anyway? Han was… Han was just a mercenary who she kept leaning on for missions because of his skill and potential. That was all.

Anakin finally noticed that Leia wasn’t into the conversation topic. He fell silent and just watched her as the turbolift carried them deeper and deeper into the Federal District’s depths.
“Not into racing, huh?” He tried to look casual and faintly disinterested but was terrible at it. Leia had known the man for mere hours and she already knew Anakin Skywalker had never been casually disinterested in anything before in his life.

“No. It has never been my thing.”

He looked distressed but nodded all the same. “So uh, what are you into then?”

“Pardon?”

“Your hobbies? Interests? What do you do with your downtime?”

Downtime? What downtime. Leia couldn’t remember the last time she had free time to herself. She hated questions like this, often the only thing she could think to say was that she enjoyed watching thunderstorms.

Most of the activities she participated in, from her sharpshooting to her mountain climbing, all tied back to her various duties, either to the Rebellion or to Alderaan.

Back when she was a kid, before she had become a Senatorial aide as a teen, she’d enjoyed her martial arts training the most. That was what she had always been sneaking out of her lessons to do, in any case. She had even joined a dojo on Coruscant to keep her skills up when she was working here.

Anakin didn’t seem to accept that as an answer.

“That’s training, not downtime. Come on, you have to do something to relax.”

“I find training to be relaxing. It lets me sort my thoughts out as I run through my forms.”

He looked absolutely elated, “You discovered my trick! My genius girl figured it out all on her own!”

Leia didn’t want to be his anything, and did not like this conversation, or being stuck on this damn lift with him descending who knows how far.

“This lunch place of yours must be pretty amazing if you are willing to travel this far for it.”

“Authentic Tatooine cuisine. It’s the only thing from that rock worth remembering, and with the food here on Coruscant you really don’t need the actual place at all.”

Oh. Luke had made Tatooine food in the Falcon’s galley once. Leia had finished everything he put in front of her to be polite but hadn’t actually liked it. There really was nothing about this lunch excursion that sounded the least bit appealing.

The doors opened on level 1997. Leia had never been this far down before. The furthest she had ever ventured was 3204, where a large population of Alderaanian citizens lived. That was also where the dojo she had frequented was located, specializing in traditional Alderaanian martial arts. She feared that in her universe, after the genocide against her people, the Alderaanian community on 3204 was not there anymore.

The whole of level 1997 smelled horrible, like the trash compactor on the Death Star, yet somehow with more excrement.

There was no way she was eating food from this place. It couldn’t be sanitary.
She caught herself then, who was she to judge? The people who lived and worked here were just trying to get by, the same as anyone else. How *dare* she judge their businesses simply due to the conditions they were forced to live with.

They walked up to a Cantina, clearly done in Tatooine style, and Anakin ducked over to mummer something in her ear. “Just act confident. We want them to know we aren’t to be messed with, but not that we’re Jedi.”

Just how naive did he think she was? She was a fugitive on the run from the government, a leader of a Galactic wide revolution, and a perfectly capable combatant. What, did he think she was going to stroll on in there and make a point of sticking out? Moreover, she genuinely *was* someone you didn’t want to mess with, and she honestly *wasn’t* a Jedi.

They ducked inside, and Leia scanned the room both for easy exits and to be aware of which clientele she should keep an eye on.

She paused then, stuck midway through her scan of the place. Seated at the bar, far more drunk than anyone should be at this hour, was Han.

He signaled the barkeep to bring him another drink, and Leia was halfway sure that if he actually consumed it his liver would give out on the spot.

She slipped up next to him and signaled the barkeep’s attention herself.

“I’d like to settle his bill, and then pay you double his current tab to cut this man off after this last drink.”

“Hey! Whatcha tryin’ to pull here?”

“Keeping your liver going for another day, for one.”

“Kriff off, lady.”

“So... you don’t want me settling your bill?”

He frowned. If she didn’t know his facial expressions so well she’d think he was actually annoyed. “Wha, you’re going to pay all of it?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“You remind me of someone I know.”

Realizing that her credit chip probably would not be valid in this universe, she gestured towards Anakin for him to lend her his, and with a look of pure astonished confusion, he handed it to her.

After she had finished paying up she joined Anakin at a table in the corner, although she kept glancing Han’s way every so often, just to be sure he was still there, nursing that last drink.

“So, who is he?”

“What?”

“The wastoid. Who is he in your universe?”
“He’s someone I know I can rely on, even if he goes out of his way to pretend otherwise,” she said, and since his doubtful look did not change she continued, “He’s also a valuable resource to the Rebellion.”

He still didn’t believe her, and she could feel irritation on Han’s behalf rise in her. She knew and trusted Han far better than she did this man.

Kriff, she would even trust this drunken shadow of the man she knew over Anakin.

He was someone to her. Important.

She also knew how to earn him Anakin’s respect.

Not that it mattered to her whether or not Anakin liked Han.

Especially this pale imitation of him.

Really.

She told him the story of Han and the Dragon Void Run. All of it, including him trying to kiss her and her decking him in response.

Anakin watched her speak about Han with the most curious expression on his face. She was still telling the story when their food arrived and finished telling the story long after they were done with their meal. Her birth father did not interrupt her, aside from making occasional sounds of interest or surprise, and kept smiling at her as she talked. When she was finished he just regarded her for a bit, with an almost wistful grin.

“So, how long have you been in love with him?”

“What? No. No! It really IS NOT like that…”

Anakin laughed, and she was suddenly struck by his bone structure, the thin oval shape of his face, the angle of his jaw, the creases that moved about his face and gathered at his brow as his expression changed.

“Hey, what is it?”

“I was just noticing that, well, the family resemblance. I look like you.”

“No, not me,” he said with an overly fond smile, “You look like my mom.”

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Leia O. spends time with her father. Leia S. meditates.

Happy Pride everyone!!!!!!

Note: 11/19/18: I updated this chapter to ensure all information about the Falcon and its
modifications is canon accurate as of the release of "Star Wars: Millennium Falcon: A 3D Owner's Guide" by Ryder Windham and Cole Horton.
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I am resting up post-Pride march, thoroughly exhausted, and well, since it is all betaed and ready to go, why not do two chapters in one weekend, huh?

Enjoy!

(Endless thanks to my beta saveloy)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Crawling around the guts of ships, working on engines, figuring out the intricate puzzle of how the mechanical pieces and wires needed to fit together to produce the most efficient results, this was the sort of rote physical activity that truly allowed Leia's brain to enter the perfect state for meditation.

The *Falcon*'s insides were a bit more complex than most of the ships she was familiar with. She was pretty sure most of the parts she encountered as she made her way through the ship's guts were not up to any code – it really looked as if the majority of the parts had been rescued from a salvage heap and then modified. Modified to serve more functions than they had been originally intended for, even when they had been new and actually could be counted on to work.

This ship truly was a marvel of jerry-rigging.

Even with the ship's unusual makeup, it did not take her long to find her groove and enter a meditative state. Finally for the first time since she had arrived in this strange impossible world, Leia could process all the emotions she had been experiencing since her Trial began.

What had happened in this universe?

Her thoughts went yet again to the vision she had the previous night.

To her mother lying on the ground.

Her father had hurt her mother.

No matter what else she learned about this universe, her thoughts kept returning to that horrible sight.

It felt so impossible, her dad was always so careful with his family. Even when playing around or training her or Luke he'd check in endlessly, so overly worried that he could cause even the slightest amount of distress in the people he loved. Yet she had seen it, clearly, when she had asked his lightsaber for its memories; Anakin Skywalker had horribly, terribly injured Padmé Amidala Nabberie. It was inexcusable and unforgivable.

Was he beyond redemption?

She wondered when her timeline and this one had split, if they had ever *actually* been the same.

She wanted to think that *her* father would never chose the Dark Side, that the version of him that existed in this universe had to be fundamentally different from the man she knew.
She was not naive enough to actually believe that was the case.

Something had happened to cause Anakin Skywalker to fall, and along the way the entire Republic had crumbled around him.

Luke hadn't even known who their mother was, and the two of them had been raised as strangers.

Darth Vader had clearly tortured her counterpart at some point in the past.

Things had gone as wrong as they could go.

She needed to know what happened, what had led to the split between this world and hers; it had to have been truly major for it to have such devastating results.

There had to be a record of something that huge.

As she attempted to meditate she could feel the Sith testing out her shields. Every so often he would come close to breaking through, yet each time she managed to reinforce them before he had any real success.

She sighed and tried to clear her mind once more. With her hands occupied on the wires she was twisting apart and then together once more, she breathed in deep and counted to five, finding her center.

Even with the added distraction of the Sith scrambling to find entry into her mind, she needed to access that place of inner acceptance, to allow herself to feel what she was feeling, acknowledge it and then give herself permission to let it go. She needed to be balanced to handle what was coming next. She had to be calm, and at peace, and ready.

Inhale.

Focus on her breathing and clear her mind.

Let the wiring work be the focus of all her stray thoughts.

Exhale.

Feel the Force around her.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Until there was nothing left but her breathing, the wires, and the Force.

The trip back to where the car was parked on level 5127 was far less awkward than than the trip down to 1997.

The two of them spent it swapping war stories, and comparing battle tactics. When they finally arrived back at the apartment, Anakin was trying to convince her that no combatant could possibly be more incompetent than the old BX line of battle droids, but Leia was holding firm that the Imperial Stormtroopers had won that particular race to the bottom.

Suddenly she forgot Anakin was even there, as she noticed that Padmé was not alone in the apartment. No, seating in the living room across from Padmé...
"Daddy!" She couldn't contain it, seeing him in person, it was just too much for her.

For his part Bail Organa seemed startled by her outburst, and more than a little uncomfortable with the running hug she greeted him with.

His aftershave smelled exactly as she remembered it, and she could hear his heartbeat soothingly pumping away where her head rested.

He was real, and he was alive.

"I am glad you gave me a heads up Padmé, I don't know how I would have handled this otherwise."

His voice sounded even better in person than it did on the holo.

The holo, where he had looked at her earlier without any of the love her father had for her.

Because this wasn't her father. Not really.

She pulled away from him, slowly, regretfully. He hadn't even moved to hug her back. She bowed, exactly the proper bow for a crown princess greeting a viceroy.

"Apologies. I take it you are aware of the situation and my behavior did not offend?"

It hurt, so much, to know that when he looked at her he did not see his daughter.

She was someone else's daughter, not his.

In her mind's eye she saw him as he had been on Yavin IV, during their last conversation right before Scarif. He had been bursting with so much pride as he gave her the mission to Tatooine. She had not known then that it would be her last time seeing him, talking to him, being with him. Had she known maybe she would have done something different. Anything.

"Your mother... I mean Padmé, explained it to me, yes. I admit it is rather hard to believe, but..." he gestured to her braids, and to her dress. "You do seem to be rather more... Alderaanian than expected."

"So Alderaanian I eat my ruica." She was crying. She hated to cry, but she was crying. She couldn't seem to stop herself from crying now that she had started. She wanted to rest in the safety of his arms, and really let herself go. She knew better than to ask that of him.

"I am so sorry, I hoped we'd be done talking before you got home, that's why I told Ani to take you out for lunch." Leia had fully forgotten Padmé was there until she spoke. "Your day has been stressful enough already, you don't need this emotional strain on top of everything else."

She didn't need this? Utter nonsense, she needed this more than anything.

The only thing that could possibly make this better would be if her mother was there as well.

Well, she would rather they both treat her like their daughter and not just a friend of the family, but Leia would take what she could get.

Of course her mother very rarely left Alderaan. She was after all the planet's Queen, and had endless duties she needed to fulfill. That was the main reason her mother had encouraged Leia to take a job offworld as a teen. Once Leia herself became Queen she too would have almost never been able to leave Alderaan.
"You will have plenty of time in the future to get sick of this place," her mother had joked, "go and get to know our Galaxy at large, and Alderaan's place within it. Push back against this encroaching darkness, Leia. It will make you a better ruler when you take up my crown."

Now Leia regretted that she had not spent more time at home, soaking it all in before it was lost to her forever.

She could visit Alderaan, here, in this impossible place.

It was only occurring to her now, in her father's presence, that all that she loved most was accessible to her once more.

If she wanted she could go home.

Even though she had only ever taken the Polstar or the Tantive IV home, she still knew exactly how long it would take, to travel from Coruscant to Alderaan, which were the best routes, which shuttle services offered the best accommodations. There really was nothing keeping her from going. No duties, no rebellion that needed her.

She was free, and her home was whole and alive.

Alderaan lived.

What a wonderful, impossible thought.

She smiled at her father, not even caring anymore if he didn't recognize her.

She would fret over that later.

He looked vaguely uncomfortable. "Padmé said, she said that my wife and I were your adoptive parents in your timeline, and that we had recently died? Do… do you mind telling me how?"

Why did her dad have to ruin her moment of joy by reminding her of his death? That her mother was gone? Alderaan was gone?

She closed her eyes, and once again witnessed that horrible explosion.

Felt that horrid hand clamped on her shoulder as her entire world vanished.

Anakin tried to comfort her, clearly noticing that she was in pain. He put an arm around her, and she shrugged it off.

She opened her eyes, grief and pain and anger and loss consuming her, and looked at her father.

"Palpatine is long dead in this world, but in mine he is the Emperor of the Galaxy. His evil Empire oppresses people everywhere, utilizing fear to keep people in line. My father, you, well… You helped found and run a Rebellion against him. An organization to bring the good people of the Galaxy together to restore democracy once more."

She knew she was avoiding answering his question, and that she had reached the limit of how long she could put off talking about what had happened.

"They built a weapon. A massive space station known as the Death Star, capable of destroying whole planets." She had to pause then, lest she let her emotions overwhelm her.

In her pause Anakin asked "Is that even possible? Building something that can do that?"
"It isn't impossible, but the amount of military spending and research needed for something with that sort of destructive capacity would have needed to begin long before the Clone Wars ended. For that to happen they would have had to…" Padmé trailed off, clearly connecting the dots between various bills that had come before the Senate years ago. "Oh. Oh no." She wandered back towards the couch and sat down, lost in contemplation of bills long past.

Leia considered telling the whole story, Scarif, Tatooine, the torture, all of it. She didn't. "The Empire blew up Alderaan. All that is left is an asteroid belt where our home used to be."

Bail gaped at her with horror. "The entire planet? Gone? Our entire culture, our art, our history, our people…. How could they destroy it all?"

"They didn't get all of us. There were survivors, myself included. We won't let our culture die." She recalled the speech she had made to the Alderaan Flotilla in the immediate aftermath of the Battle of Yavin, "If one life with a single drop of Alderaanian blood survives, Alderaan survives." She hoped he understood just how much her home meant to her. How much he meant to her.

He held his arms out for a hug, far more awkwardly than her father normally would but she recognized the gesture all the same. As his arms wrapped around her, she let herself pretend she was home, that nothing was wrong, and her father was truly there to wipe her tears away and take on the burdens she could not handle alone.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw Anakin, scowling at the smile that was lighting up her face. Padmé was in turn scowling at Anakin, annoyed at his reaction to Leia being reunited with her true family.

Leia closed her eyes and blocked them out. She snuggled in close to her father's chest and let her senses marvel at the familiar yet impossible experience of being hugged by her father.

Luke called out to her, from where she had left him hours earlier.

How long had he been been waiting there?

Karabast, how was she going to be able to balance managing her own needs and his all at once? She wasn't ready for this, any of this, and she was still dreading what would happen when the advice on troop maneuvers she had been asked to give in the earlier meeting led to actual deaths.

He was curious about the meeting she had with the people in charge of this Revolution, and with a start she realized she knew his rank, Senator - no Chancellor - Mothma had used it during their conversation. Commander.

Luke was a Commander.

Funny, that was the exact rank Padawans had held during the Clone Wars.

She sent Luke an image of the ship she was in, of the parts she was in the process of fiddling with, and hoped he'd understand. Based on the wave of fond annoyance she got in response, he not only knew where she was, but seemed to think it amusing.

She wondered if this seemingly perfect Princess Leia Organa everyone expected her to emulate ever crawled about this ship working on it.

What she was like?
Stars, twenty years old and everyone around her expected so much from her!

How was she another version of her?

Leia didn't feel like she was capable of any of this, how could another her be so effective at doing so much?

It occurred to her that her dad had been nineteen at the start of the Clone Wars, and when he became a Knight.

Ahsoka had been fourteen when she had started fighting in the Clone Wars, and sixteen when she became both a Knight and a General.

She'd been hearing their stories from that time for years, yet it was only now that she really understood how young they had been. How demanding those roles must have been.

Leia tried to return to her meditation. She was still confused and worried and scared and sad and conflicted and… she really needed to meditate more.

She focused on her conflicted feelings, on acknowledging the source of them and letting go of her anxieties and fears.

She would allow herself to trust that the Force had sent her where she was, that it would not have done so if she could not handle it. She would trust that the Jedi Order back home would be working hard to bring her back. That if her counterpart was capable of handling these responsibilities to this military, she could be too.

Luke interrupted her meditation. Again. He sent her the impression of... food? Oh. She hadn't eaten anything since breakfast, she had forgotten.

Her stomach gave a rumble of agreement with Luke's reminder that she should take care of herself.

With a wry laugh she slipped out from where she had wedged herself inside the Falcon hours earlier, and set off to obtain some grub.

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Both Leias end their first full day in the universes they each respectively do not belong in.

There was a direct quote from Princess Leia (2015) #5 in this chapter.
Chapter 14

Dinner had been wonderful and awkward and impossible.

Padmé had ordered in from a rather excellent Alderaanian restaurant, making sure to ask Leia what her favorite dishes were as she placed the order.

Anakin had glared at Leia’s father the whole meal through, pouting like a being a quarter of his actual age. He had done much the same in the hours prior to dinner, when Leia and her father had sat and talked together about anything and everything.

For her part, Leia felt unburdened and free. She hadn’t enjoyed a meal this much in months. She was having dinner with her father.

Sure he was distant with her in a way that kept reminding her that this wasn’t really her dad, but he was still the man who raised her. Same care and consideration for the people of the Galaxy, same sense of humor, same commitment to justice.

In the way of all things, the meal ended.

Leia’s father made his apologies and left to return to his apartment on Coruscant, the apartment Leia had called home for years when she had lived and worked on the planet, and it hurt that he didn’t ask her to stay there with him. It would have been far more comfortable going home than being left here with these strangers.

Leia was now truly alone with both of her bioparents.

She wondered if they really expected her to spend the night there. To sleep in her counterpart’s room and wear her night clothes, pretending to be a person she wasn’t, a member of their family.

She really hoped they didn’t expect her to use their daughter’s toiletries.

C-3PO was puttering about, clearing dishes away and bringing them into the kitchen.

If she was going to make her feelings about potential sleeping arrangements clear, now was the time to do it.

“Where am I spending the night?”

Both Padmé and Anakin turned to her with alarm. Padmé looked slightly embarrassed. She had not made arrangements anywhere else for her already then.

For his part, Anakin just looked confused. “You’re staying here, with us, of course! Why would you go anywhere else?”

Why indeed. Aside from the unspoken expectation of affection and familiarity she could not return, and the discomfort that imbalance bred. The way they seemed to think she could somehow transform into this daughter of theirs, some strange alternate universe version of her who wasn’t her at all.

She gave this man who apparently shared his DNA with both her and Luke an unimpressed look.
Padmé seemed far more understanding of her discomfort, even if she had also clearly assumed Leia would be spending the night here in this apartment with them. “You don’t have to stay in our daughter’s room. We have guest rooms, multiple ones in fact that you can choose between.” She offered Leia a small apologetic smile, “It would be far easier and more discrete than getting a hotel room. As the daughter of the Chancellor, it’d invite all sorts of attention if you were spotted staying at a hotel, as I am sure you can imagine.”

That was an argument that actually made sense. Leia had her fair share of run ins with the press in her life, had dealt with the society pages writing articles over such silly nothings as what dress she had decided to wear to a party, or who she had or had not spoken to at any given event.

She never blamed the publications for the articles they ran. As she understood it, in the immediate aftermath of The Empire’s rise the journalists had tried to cover the reality of the new regime, but they had all been accused of libel, barred from covering legislative events, then with time they were assaulted by Imperials and eventually imprisoned and killed.

While Leia hoped the journalists here would be freer than those she knew on her Coruscant, and therefore less likely to focus on empty fluff, she did not want to risk it.

She nodded, reluctantly. “Alright, I’ll be spending the night here then. In one of the guest rooms, not in your daughter’s room.”

Padmé gave an understanding nod and moved towards the entry foyer while gesturing for Leia to follow. Once there, a door Leia had mistaken for a hall closet was opened, revealing a staircase leading down. Then through another door, far more elaborate than the first, and into what seemed to be a fully separate apartment, more sterile and official looking than the first. Rather than opening onto a living room, this one had a massive office space with the seal of the office of the Chancellor of the Galactic Republic displayed proudly on one of the room’s walls. Even though it was clearly an office, there were plenty of signs Leia’s expert eye picked up on that it could be quickly be converted into an ideal gathering space for fundraising or lobbying events if need be.

This second level was far larger than the layout of the more intimate and personal apartment upstairs, and there was a hallway leading towards an impressive series of rooms.

Padmé gestured down the hall with a resigned glance at Leia. “The first four rooms on either end are empty. You can have any one of them.” She smiled tightly, “Please don’t go into any of the other rooms. They belong to my personal guard and handmaidens.”

She gestured to one of the doors in the hall. Inside was a small office, and the walls were very obviously soundproofed.

Leia sat in one of the chairs nearest to the door, and Padmé dropped into the larger chair behind the desk.

“I wanted to check in, see if there were any other questions you might have?” She waited for Leia to respond. She didn’t.

Leia was about to finally ask if there was a way for her to obtain clothes to sleep in, ones that did not belong to the other woman’s daughter, and a toothbrush as well when Padmé began speaking once more.

“I need to tell you that Luke and Obi-Wan are en route to join us here, so you don’t feel ambushed and overwhelmed when they arrive. Based on the call I had with him earlier, Luke’s really worried. Not just about where his sister may be and when we might get her back, but apparently he thinks you
are in pain? He wanted me to talk to you.”

Leia swallowed hard, uncomfortable with the direction this conversation had taken.

“It wasn’t until you told us before dinner, about Alderaan, that I really understood. I…” Her mask fell, and the poised and strong politician vanished.

Padmé left the chair she was in and relocated to the one next to Leia’s on the other side of the desk. She reached out, placing one of her hands on top of Leia’s. Leia did not move, save to breathe. Her hands gripped each other tightly, her shoulders were held rigid and straight, and her eyes had found a fascinating knot of wood on the desk to focus on.

The knot kind of reminded her of the explosion.

“Leia, please talk to me. I know… I know I am not Breha, but I am still your mother. It may not be the same but…”

Why did these two keep on thinking she wanted their infantilizing care? That she’d open up to them, or even had anything to gain by confiding in them?

They weren’t what she needed.

Who she needed.

“You are right. You are not my mom.” Leia kept her gaze locked on the knot of wood as she spoke. She didn’t care to see how her words affected this woman. “Do not mistake biology for connection. I have gone 20 years without caring about what my life might have been like had I not been adopted, and I don’t intend to start now.”

The hand on top of hers withdrew, and Leia felt… it wasn’t victory per say. It was thick and viscous and surged through her like bile.

She chanced a quick glance away from the knot of wood, towards Padmé, and saw she was crying. She told herself she didn’t care.

There was rustling as the other woman moved, her uncertainty and pain filling the small space in waves. It was suffocating.

A few sounds, clearly the start of words - but they never got past those beginning stages. There was an almost protective edge to the pain now, and Leia found herself watching the other woman in earnest.

Their eyes made contact, and for one dizzying moment, Leia found herself inside one of her recurring dreams. The impossibly large and sad and beautiful woman in white was on a giant metal table, exhausted and scared and crying. Her eyes stared into Leia’s own, and something passed between them.

By the time Leia came back to the present, Padmé had already left.

Leia had managed to get herself lost. She had thought she had known how she had gotten to that hanger in the first place, but as she discovered trying to find her way to the mess from there, she
really had not.

By the time she found the mess, dinner was no longer being served.

Her stomach let out an unhappy gurgle.

She felt directionless and hungry and alone.

She reached out to this universe’s version of Luke, and he seemed to roll his eyes at her, annoyed that she had missed dinner when she had the opportunity to get it. Then he sent her the impression of sleeping quarters, whose she did not know, and left things at that. She didn't know what he meant, or even how to find the place he’d shown her.

“Karabast!” she kicked at a rock with frustration.

The sound of her shouting drew some attention, at the very least, both from scattered organics and… no, could it be?

“Artoo! Artooey is that you?”

The Astromech let out beeps and warbles in response, confirming that he was indeed himself.

“I am so glad to see you Buddy.” She dropped to a kneel and swung her arms around his dome. Based on the self-satisfied whine he gave in response, he was no stranger to her hugging him.

Good ole’ Artoo. Even in strange alternate universes where everything else had transformed into some sort of Sith Hell, he was still dependable and true.

“Hey Artooey, I don’t suppose you know somewhere I could get some food, huh?”

He grew silent. Then three questions warbled in Binary: would ration bars do or would she mind driving away from the base, and where had she heard that nickname?

Oh. Luke hadn’t known who Aunt ‘Soka was, and she had not seen her in any of her visions connected to this place yet.

“I don’t mind leaving for a bit Artoo, that actually sounds nice, but ration bars seem like they would be more reasonable. And well… I heard that name from someone.” She didn’t know how much to say.

Obviously, she could trust Artoo with absolutely anything, that wasn’t even a question, but she didn’t want to upset him if Ahsoka had met some sort of terrible fate, like all the other Jedi.

She knew from her earlier meeting with Alliance High Command that Ahsoka had apparently been known to the members of this Revolution at some point by the name Fulcrum. She didn’t know what that meant, but the suspicious General had put a lot of weight on her name when he had exclaimed over it. Maybe R2-D2 would know what happened to her?

R2 began to roll down a hall before she could think of the best way to ask him about her, and Leia followed smiling slightly. R2 would make sure she’d be taken care of, he always looked out for her and her brother, loved them both as fiercely as any sentient being could.

He took her to a room, tiny and sterile. The only indications that someone actually stayed there was a large blaster left lying on the bed, three holos sitting on a dresser currently shut off, and the clothes hanging in the closet. R2 bumped against the dresser and beeped that she should look within.
Inside there were not only ration bars. There were also snack foods, snack foods Leia knew all too well, as it seemed this room’s occupant’s sweet tooth matched her own exactly.

Score!

Wait.

“Artoo, are you sure it is ok for me to take these?”

The droid spun his dome about and let out an exasperated whine. He thought she was being silly, so much so he wasn’t going to dignify her with an answer. Fine, he could be that way. She knew better than to argue with him when he got into one of his moods.

Her eyes kept drifting to the holos on the dresser, and she could feel the Force nudge her in their direction.

She snapped one on, and then dropped it with shock.

Bail and Breha Organa beamed at her, and there with one of their hands on each shoulder was a ten-year-old version of herself, pouting, refusing to stand still for the holo. Much like in the vision Vader had shown her earlier, her hair was in two side buns, and she was in a dress.

The second holo was Bail and Breha again, this time just on their own, in their finest royal dress.

The third holo was simply a picture of Alderaan. Why would anyone (or ok why would the other her, because this was clearly her room) have a holo of a planet in their room? That seemed strange.

Now that she knew the food belonged to the other her, she really didn’t feel bad taking it for herself. She probably should have, but hey it was technically hers, so why not.

She lay back on the bed and indulged in the junk and ration bars.

“Thanks, Artoo” she chirped between bites, “I really appreciate this”

He rolled his dome at her again and made it clear that showing her her own food supply was hardly something to thank him over. Then he let her know that he had to go, or else C-3PO would start fretting over where he had gone and left her there on her own.

She snickered at the thought that the two droids were exactly the same here as they were back home, the most dysfunctional couple one could imagine yet simultaneously endlessly devoted to one another.

She noticed a datapad, sitting on the table next to the bed. She picked it up, and it was double locked, both with a fingerprint scan and a blood test.

Would it work? Did they truly have the same blood? The same fingerprints?

She placed a finger on the test port and felt a quick sting as it took a sample of her blood. Then the screen unlocked, letting her access the information within.

The last thing her counterpart had been working on was a letter, informing a family that their loved one was dead. It came up onto the screen, still only half completed. It was personalized in a way that had clearly been antagonized over. She clicked on the next document and found yet another letter, about a different soldier. Then another. There had to be at least 30 open and being worked on at present, each one completely different from the last. How could she stand this? Surely there was
some sort of stock letter she could send rather than have to look up the life details of each and every one of the fallen. This felt like torture.

There were also ship schematics, and for a moment Leia thought her counterpart might share her hobby, until she noticed that all the ships were far too large, and the only parts flagged and marked and notes her counterpart had added were their weakness, places to strike, ways to take them down or over and how to most effectively destroy their ability to fight back.

There were battle tactics, troop formations, personnel files, and so much more.

Leia couldn’t find anything personal on here, no hint or clue to who her other self might be, outside of this war.

There had to be something, this could not be the totality of who she was.

She went through the datapad’s many files, finally coming across one, just one search on the holonet that did not seem to do with war. A recent search for… moisture farming based insults?

Well, that made no sense.

A few had been saved for later, one was even highlighted: “You’re the farmer who swapped all the water you condensed for an empty sack.” Ok. So the woman clearly collected odd insults. She supposed that as far as hobbies go, while an awful one truly, it was better than having none at all.

It was then she saw a folder simply marked “Alderaan.”

She was hesitant at first to open it. It was one thing to go through her counterpart’s files about the war, it was something else entirely to read what sort of things a member of the Elder Houses kept recorded about the planet they were responsible for. She could hear her mother’s voice ringing in her ears, scolding her, as she opened it. This was going too far.

There were several folders within the first one. Many of them had names that made sense, but others… others did not. She decided to start with the holonews recordings her counterpart had saved, opening that file, and almost dropping the datapad as she saw the headlines contained within.

“Terrorists Force Confrontation”

“Cowardly Insurgents Hide Among Civilians, Cause Massive Casualties”

“Treasonous Organa Family Forces Military’s Hand”

“This Is What Is Left After The Death Star Hit Alderaan”

On and on and on, headline after headline.

Leia clicked on one simply labeled “Watch: Imperial Navy’s Newest Weapon is Revealed!” Its connection to the slaughter described in the other headlines was less clear.

Projected above the screen was a short video, edited to hold the attention of a person just casually scrolling through the holonet. Not a serious news recording, not by far. More entertaining than informative, with upbeat music accompanying the fast-moving graphics. The holo was focused on images of a strange mechanical ball, the text that kept popping up alongside it identifying it as the DS-1 Orbital Battle Station, but insisted on addressing it with the more cutesy name “Death Star.” It was apparently 160 Kilometers in diameter and had 1,206,293 people staffing it. Those proportions seemed impossible.
Then the image shifted, to the planet Alderaan. The text quickly told the viewer that Alderaan had turned traitor to the Empire, and that they were harboring dangerous terrorists who had attacked the Government and forced the Empire’s actions.

Then a massive turbolaser in the Death Star lit up, a beam went straight from it to Alderaan and…

The entire planet exploded, leaving nothing behind but chunks that quickly formed an asteroid belt where the planet had once been.

The cheerful music kept playing, informing the viewer that while the Death Star had been destroyed by terrorist insurgents shortly after, it was proof that Empire was capable of incredible things, and that a conflict like the Clone Wars could never plague the Galaxy again.

Leia gaped at the words, displayed in clear Aurebesh, in shock.

This could not be real.

Every single Sith Damned time she thought she had figured out just how awful this universe could be, every time, she learned some new and utterly horrifying fact about it.

She felt sick.

She did not want to see any of the other reports, attempts to justify what had taken place.

She didn’t want to enter the folder where she now understood her counterpart kept data on the refugees and their efforts to survive now that their entire kriffing planet was gone.

Nor was she particularly interested right then in learning how the Rebellion had managed to destroy something that large. That evil.

She understood why her counterpart had let this war consume her. Why there was nothing left for her counterpart but this fight. The Empire had taken everything else she had.

She reached out to Luke, needing reassurance that there was something good in this universe. Something worth fighting for. He was confused at first by her pain until she shared with him the news report she had seen. He sent back a wave of sympathy, and the image of that horrible weapon exploding.

_It’s gone._ There was a rawness to his mental voice, an edge she did not expect. _I destroyed it._

Luke had killed over a million people. She had sensed that already. She had mistaken the number to be in the thousands, the idea that her brother had killed _over a million_ too impossible to think, but he had killed them because they were operating _that_ monstrosity.

She leaned back on the bed, and it creaked and groaned and poked at her back uncomfortably, nothing more than a folding travel cot set up in this temporary military base.

She squeezed her eyes tight and wished she was home.

She slipped into troubled dreams, filled with massive weapons bearing down on her friends and loved ones, her father’s eyes flashing a horrific yellow as he hurt her mom, and Luke abandoned in a desert killing faceless soldiers.
Their first full day has ended!

Next time: an interlude.

The absurd moisture farming insult is a quote from the *Screaming Citadel* crossover event in the comics. Specifically from *Doctor Aphra #7*. 
Jedi Padawan Barriss Offee was meditating.

Lately, she had been growing increasingly worried about the war, about what it was doing to everyone around her.

She tried to stay out of battles herself, instead devoting herself to studying the Order’s past, but she and her Master kept being ordered back into the field.

She remembered that first battle on Geonosis. Being dropped into that arena, and how unaware she was then of what sort of costs were ahead of them, what sort of compromises.

If she was perfectly honest with herself, she hated the war.

Barriss mediated on the Force, and on her feelings about the war, and began to notice something, something alarming.

Everyone had known for years now that the Dark Side had grown stronger, that it cast a pallid haze over everything and made it hard to sense the difference between truth and lies, reality and delusion.

Yet in a startling moment of clarity Barriss saw that the Jedi Order itself had been plunged into the Dark, that with each passing day of war they strayed further and further from the Light.

It was too horrible to contemplate.

What could she do?

In most universes, Barriss kept this information to herself. Her fear of what the Order was becoming grew alongside her hate of the war, and in time these emotions caused her to fall.

Not in this one.

“Master? There is something I saw in my meditations that I need help understanding.”

Luminara Unduli smiled at her Padawan as she emerged from the rooms adjoining her own. “I will help however I can Barriss. Let us meditate together, and you can show me the point of confusion in the Force.”

Telling the Council what she had found, what her Master had confirmed was truly there and was not just a figment of her imagination, was beyond intimidating.

Barriss stood in the center of the Council chamber, Master Unduli by her side, and had to actively force herself to speak. What if they did not take her concerns seriously? What if they acknowledged
what was happening but kept acting as they had been regardless, no change, no way to correct that which was so very wrong.

“Padawan Offee, we thank you for bringing this grave matter to our attention. This is a very serious find, and if it bears out through our investigation, the entire Order will be in your debt.” Master Windu looked troubled, felt troubled. She could sense his worry and was reassured that what she had discovered was not going to be dismissed.

Maybe… maybe now this horrid war could finally end?

It seemed far too good to be true.

As she left the Council chambers and made her way to the Archives - she hoped to spend the rest of the day lost in yet another historical record - she bumped into Ahsoka, who had been running down one of the temple’s halls without looking where she was going.

The two teenagers regarded each other, neither aware of how important that day had been for both of their lives, how different their fates were now than they had been just hours earlier.

“Oof! Sorry Barriss, I really should pay more attention.”

“That’s alright Ahsoka. Where were you headed?”

Ahsoka gave her a wicked grin. It was clear the other Padawan was looking forward to where she had been going. “My Master is part of a team that is going to break into The Citadel. Don’t tell anyone, but I’m going sneak onto the mission.”

Barriss stared at her friend for a moment with surprise. The Order was truly out of sorts, if Padawans were relishing the opportunity to fight, and were even finding ways to be part of these battles when they did not need to be.

Ahsoka saw her hesitance and remembered that Barriss was not really a fan of fighting herself. “You headed to the Archives? Barriss, with the amount of time you spend there, I really think you may take over Master Nu’s role one day.”

Barriss smiled. That was a nice thought. She really would like that.

Luckily for her, she lived in a timeline where she would get to do exactly that.

“Good Soldiers Follow Orders. Good Soldiers Follow Orders. Good Soldiers Follow Orders.”

“Tup! Tup, snap out of it!” Fives didn’t know what to do. He knew his brother wasn’t a traitor, that he would never hurt one of the Generals on purpose. Yet he had. He’d killed General Tiplar, shot her in the back, and now he just kept repeating that strange phrase over and over and over again.

Commander Tano knelt at Tup’s other side, looking just as confused and concerned as Fives felt. He was grateful for her presence, for the fact that she believed in Tup just as much as he did.

When Fives left to accompany Tup back to Kamino, Commander Tano came with him, never leaving the Clone's side.

“Master Ti, please, given what we now know about this war… can we afford to just trust the Kaminoans’ explanation about what these chips do? It is possible all of this really could be another
part of what is wrong with the war.”

Shaak Ti agreed with the younger Togruta, and together she, Ahsoka and Fives gave Tup, and his medical records, another look.

What they found was impossible and shocking and direly urgent.

Then Fives volunteered to have his own chip removed for further examination, and once it was out, once it was plugged into a secure computer terminal and was safely sliced and being processed...

Master Ti let in a hiss of breath as she examined what they found.

As she got ready to call the rest of the Council to let them know that the Clones, all of the Clones, were rigged to kill them, she turned to the Padawan who had fought so hard to defend them. She smiled. “Ahsoka, you did a great job today. You protected your pack, and you did it well.”

For a moment Ahsoka just looked at her in shock. Shaak knew Ahsoka had left Shili at an exceptionally young age, just three years old, younger than almost all other younglings were when taken in. She knew of course why the girl had left home so soon, the trauma she had been dealt. It was why the Council had been so insistent Skywalker train her, they had hoped that together they could ease each other through the lingering effects of their time as slaves. It was possible that with how young the girl had been when she arrived at the temple, the pack hunter instincts and desires that Shaak Ti herself struggled with constantly had been truly and fully suppressed in the younger Jedi.

Then a grin, wide and carefree and wild, spread across the girl’s face. “So did you, Master Ti. Both of our packs.”

The air smelled of the younger Togruta’s pleasure at having done right by those she fought alongside, and for once Shaak did not use the Force to further verify what her hunter’s senses were telling her. She was proud of the young girl and would be telling her fellows on the Council when she spoke with them that it was time for Ahsoka to receive her Knighthood, even if she was so young.

Vos and Ventress stood in the Council chambers, hands clasped tight together.

Vos anchored her there, even when she wanted to flee from these beings she had fought against for so long.

They had done it, they had actually successfully done it, and Dooku was dead.

Asajj did not understand why Quinlan insisted they return here, to talk to the Jedi Council in person. They had been running from the Jedi when it had happened when her former Master had struck Quinlan with Force Lightning for refusing to touch the Dark Side once again, and she… she had killed Dooku and saved him.

She had wanted to start their lives together immediately, just them and their love against all odds forever. They’d make such a fantastic bounty hunting team.

Yet Quinlan had wanted to truly make things right. She could sense it, in his comforting presence at her side, Quinlan was free of Dark Side once more. Which meant he was back to insisting on those silly Jedi ideals of his.

“Shown us the power of attachment, you have,” the ancient fool was saying. Except for once, Asajj
found that he was saying things she did not find laughable. Yes. Attachment was important. It had brought Quinlan back to her after he had been lost to the ways of the Sith. “Now call into question many things, we must. Time for us to change the rules of the order, it perhaps is. Yes, hmmm.”

There was a murmur around the room, and Asajj doubted they’d ever actually act as they needed. The Jedi loved to debate and discuss and examine all sides of every argument, but rarely ever actually acted.

“Before that, correct a personal failing of mine, I must.” Oh? The wrinkled old man was going to admit he had actually done something wrong? Asajj eagerly awaited hearing what it was Yoda had to say next. “Suffered greatly at my former Padawan's hands, you have, Ventress.” She blinked hard with surprise. Where was he going with this? “For what Dooku did I feel responsible. Your training, neither Sith nor Jedi, was never finished. With your permission, to finish what Knight Narec started I wish.”

What?

Quinlan squeezed her hand, and when she turned to look at him he was grinning.

She looked back at Yoda, ready to give her answer to his request.

“Premonitions... premonitions... Hmmmm... these visions you have...”

Anakin shifted restlessly in his seat. “They are of pain, suffering, death…”

“Yourself you speak of, or someone you know?” Master Yoda asked.

Anakin was hesitant to answer, consumed by the mistrust Palpatine has spent years building within him. “Someone…”

The ancient Jedi Master finished the thought for him. “...close to you?”

“Yes.” The young Knight confirmed.

“Careful you must be when sensing the future, Anakin. The fear of loss is a path to the Dark Side.”

The Council had reached its decision about attachment just the day before, had not even yet told the news to the rest of the Order. Yoda was still unsure just how much the Jedi should allow it to consume them.

The Knight, who seemed so impossibly young to Yoda, frowned. “I won’t let these visions come true, Master Yoda.”

Still so unable to let go, to accept that death came for all living things. “Death is a natural part of life. Rejoice for those around you who transform into the Force.”

He was going to say more, offer the boy some lessons to meditate on to help him, when there was a noise at the door.

The being standing there snorted. “Having trouble accepting the inevitability of death, Skywalker?”

Anakin’s head snapped up, his confusion vanished, replaced by suspicion and naked raw hate. “Ventress!” He stood, drawing his ‘saber, and moved to stand between her and Master Yoda. “Do not worry Master, I will take care of this Witch.”

Asajj did not draw any blades of her own or move from where she stood in any way. She simply
kept talking, her voice maintaining the mocking drawl Anakin had heard so many times on the battlefield. “Seeking out immortality, never accepting death, those are at the core of the Sith teachings. You would do well to abandon those impulses.”

Anakin frowned. “What are you trying to do, Witch, why are you here?” and then less accusatory, “didn’t your people hang your dead from trees to reanimate when need be?”

“A fitting burial ritual for a race of Dark Side Witches. As for why I am here, my...” her face puckered, as if the next word she said was truly the most distasteful one she’d ever used, “Master wished for us to meditate together.”

Anakin’s blade snapped off, his eyes widening in confusion. “What?”

They were sitting in the Opera House, side by side, watching the ballet. When he had gotten this invitation from the Chancellor and mentioned it to Padmé she had let out a delighted sigh and told him she had been meaning to see this production herself.

Apparently, Squid Lake was the height of culture and her most favorite play. Anakin didn’t really see the appeal. He wished he was seeing it with her though. He was sure his wife would be able to explain the meaning behind the dances to him, and even if she couldn’t, he would have been able to watch her face light up with delight.

As it was, he was having the most dizzying and harrowing conversation with his old friend he could have possibly imagined.

It was like a play by play of the tenets of Sith philosophy Ventress had warned him about, word for word recitations of things she had been taught by Dooku in the past.

There was only one explanation for this that fit, and it was one that made Anakin feel queasy.

Sheev Palpatine was the Sith Lord.

He was sitting there now, waiting for Anakin to take his bait, to fall into his trap and fall and fall and...

Anakin could not take it anymore, the betrayal, the loss of trust. He had loved this man, this man who had made him think he was so special, who had taken the time to talk to and mentor him ever since he was a boy.

There were better, more proper ways of doing things, but he was at his wit’s end. He worried about Ahsoka - no longer his Padawan, now a Knight - fighting Maul on Mandalore. He worried about Obi-Wan, who had been acting strange and distant as of late. He worried about his wife, pregnant and the subject of his increasingly frequent nightmares. This was just one thing too many for him to stand.

He had been asking Sheev questions on autopilot as he told his story, hoping to keep him talking until he figured out what to do. But then the story drew to a close, and all there was was the music of the Ballet, and the dancing.

On stage, the young princess was betrayed, and in a fit of confusion and self-doubt committed an act of desperation.

In the audience, Anakin reached the end of his rope.
Sheev was talking again, droning on about the Sith, he didn’t even care how obvious he was as if it was already a foregone conclusion that Anakin was going to join him. “He became so powerful... the only thing he was afraid of was losing his power, which eventually, of course, he did. Unfortunately, he taught his apprentice everything he knew, then his apprentice killed him in his sleep.” Sheev gave him a terrible smile, and Anakin knew the older man was the apprentice in this tale. “Plagueis never saw it coming. It's ironic he could save others from death, but not himself.”

He acted then, fast. So fast he didn’t even know what he was doing until it was over. He was out of his seat, his 'saber in his hand, and he swung it towards Sheev with all his might. For a moment, just a moment, before the blade made impact he saw the man’s eyes turn yellow, his face twist as his kind disguise fell and a monster took his place. But before Palpatine could even act it was over, and Darth Sidious was dead.

There was chaos after that.

A Jedi had murdered the Chancellor in public, and everyone had something to say.

Everyone save for the Jedi Council itself, which stood by Anakin through it all.

He had done it. He had destroyed the last of the Sith and, apparently, brought balance to the Force.

He hadn’t left the temple since that day, avoiding those who waited to accuse him of murder once he set foot off the Jedi’s sacred grounds, and he was worried, so worried, about Padmé.

It had been so long since he saw her last.

Today, however, was to be his first day as a full Jedi Master on the Council, his reward for destroying the Sith and fulfilling the prophecy.

He had expected it feel different, for the world to feel different.

He was the same person he had always been.

He still doubted himself, still worried about the future.

Nothing had changed.

It was only superficial.

Why had he been so focused on these achievements?

He no longer understood, anything.

He took his seat and tried to meet Obi-Wan’s eye before the meeting began. He’d been so evasive lately, and Anakin did not know why.

Then the meeting started, the topic being how to best tell the rest of the Order that there were possible changes coming in regards to attachments and what behaviors were allowed.

Pointedly, Obi-Wan didn’t meet Anakin's eyes once during the meeting.

“Anakin, may I have a word?”

Obi-Wan lingered by the Council chamber’s entrance, hoping to catch Anakin as he left.
“Finally speaking to me again?” There was more than just a touch of petulance in Anakin’s tone.

Obi-Wan frowned. “Anakin, please, you have to understand I was not allowed to talk to you about this topic. If I could have shared this with you, you know I would.”

Anakin gave him a humorless smile. “I suppose you were against the changes, Master.”

Worry lines, lines undoubtedly borne from looking after the boy he considered a brother, grew more prominent on Obi-Wan’s forehead. “No Anakin, I was not. I have seen and felt too much attachment myself to believe that simply experiencing it will doom one to the Dark Side. It is all about balance. About knowing how to properly manage these things to best ensure it does not interfere in one’s duties. That is why I am advocating for there to be certain conditions to the relaxation of these rules. That is what I wish to speak to you about now.”

“Conditions? And why do you seek me out to talk about them? I only just was put on the Council, it isn’t as if I have any power there to help you get what you want.”

A cloud of profound sadness crossed Obi-Wan’s face. “Anakin, I wish you would stop thinking the worst of me. I approach you because… well because I’ve known about you and Senator Amidala for quite some time now Anakin, you haven’t been anywhere near as secretive as you may think.” He shook his head at his former Padawan’s surprise. “I believe that the two of you would be a great couple to test out the program I am proposing.”

“What?”

Obi-Wan’s sadness gave way to eagerness and excitement as he talked about what he had been working on. “I’ve already spoken to the Senator about it, actually, and she thinks it is a marvelous idea.”

“You talked to her without consulting me first?” Anakin was suspicious and already bracing for betrayal, ready to lash out at those who loved him in response to actions that were fully an invention of his own mind.

“…which brings me to precisely the point of what I am proposing. Anakin, Palpatine - Darth Sidious - he may be gone but the poison he was spreading remains.” Obi-Wan regarded Anakin for a long moment. “I do not know if it can fully be accredited to him, but you… Anakin, to be quite frank, you have trust issues and you need to work through them.”

“Trust issues?” Ironically Anakin perceived this offer to help as an attack against him.

Without guidance to teach him how to work through the patterns of suspicion Palpatine had taught him since he was a child, Anakin would be lost to the Dark Side even without him there to encourage his worst impulses. This was a danger Obi-Wan was aware of, something he had antagonized over ever since he learned he had failed his Padawan by allowing him to have such close contact with a Sith Lord for so many years, that he had not been able to detect the poison that was spread within him and help him before it took root.

“Yes Anakin, trust issues. Ones that are truly toxic, and I fear that even with the threat of Sidious removed you could be in danger. Anakin please, for me, for Senator Amidala’s sake, or even that of the child she is carrying… Anakin please pilot the order’s new marriage counseling program.”

The birth was finally happening, and Padmé had gone into labor far too premature.

Anakin was worried that his nightmare was coming to pass.
Except this was not the birthing chamber he had seen in his dreams, this Coruscanti healer’s office where Padmé lay against pillows and blankets.

The two of them were not alone.

Ahsoka had rushed to Coruscant as soon as she felt Anakin’s panic in the Force, leaving Rex in charge of the assault on Mandalore. Now she bounced from foot to foot, constantly in motion somewhere behind Anakin. Obi-Wan lingered in a corner as if he was just an intruder in this moment.

Jobal held Padmé’s hand, the one not clasped in Anakin’s own, and Ruwee hovered by the healer’s side.

Sola had stepped out for a moment, to talk with her husband who along with her own two children waited outside.

Anakin could feel the love filling the room, so much of it that it almost smothered out his worry.

Yet his worry hung on, through the hours of labor and each cry Padmé gave as she pushed and pushed and pushed with all of her might.

Finally, after an eternity, the healer announced she saw a head peeking through, and Anakin felt dizzy with anticipation. He was so excited to meet his little girl (he knew, just knew that Padmé was having a girl, just as she knew the child would be a boy).

And then after a moment where he almost could not breathe, there was a cry, loud and echoing and oh - oh - he felt the child reach out with the Force, filling the room with his presence and he had a son.

The boy’s mind grabbed onto his, and Anakin suddenly knew, his son had fought being born for so long because he had not wanted to leave her - his sister - behind. He had a sister. Twins.

The realization hit him just as the healer announced it to the room, and Anakin could not stop the tears of joy running down his face. A son and a daughter, all his own. His family, his. A real full complete free family that would never want for anything, a mother, a brother, a sister, and … him the father.

Quickly, so quickly compared to her brother, his daughter was born. Exploring the room with all of her senses as she stared everyone down with her newborn blue eyes.

As each baby was cleaned they were placed on Padmé’s chest, resting one in each arm as she leaned back against the pillows, exhausted, and Anakin felt his world expand and contract and focus.

He had foolishly believed that it was impossible for any being to love another as much as he loved his wife. He had been wrong, so very wrong. He somehow loved each of his children far more than he had ever loved anything before, and as they wiggled and cooed and latched onto Padmé’s breasts for their very first meal he felt them, both of them, cling to him with their fledgling senses. He would never let that connection go.

Padmé was alive.

Luke and Leia were perfect.

Anakin was a father.
Chapter End Notes

Parts of the dialogue in this chapter were pulled from *Revenge of the Sith*. I'm going to assume you all know and recognize those bits and won't point them out.

Hope you enjoyed getting to see some of the history of the AU! I know this interlude was pretty Padmé light, and I want to assure you that the second interlude, when we eventually get to it, is going to focus more on her.

Next Time: Both Leias get started on their second day in another universe.
The familiar sound of her alarm chimed.

She reached to where she always left her datapad charging at night, hoping to hit the snooze function and get at least five more minutes of sleep, yet it was not there.

She opened her eyes.

The strange other her’s datapad was lying on the ground where she had left it last night, tossed aside after it had shown her things far too distressing to properly deal with.

Funny, the other her used the same alarm tone she did.

She picked the datapad up, unlocking it as she did, and the screen’s display reminded her that she apparently had a daily briefing to get to in an hour.

There had to be a ‘fresher around here somewhere.

She was still in the same clothes she had arrived in this world in, and had not done anything for her hygiene since then either. She really needed to hop in a sonic, or else she’d pity any being that came near her.

She was hyperfocusing on minor details, she knew that, but it was so much easier to do that than deal with the enormity of it all.

Luckily for her the ‘freshers, complete with sonic stalls, were well labeled in the hall, and she was able to get herself clean.

She found, among far more white dresses than she had ever imagined owning, just a few outfits she’d consider wearing. Officer’s uniforms – slightly different from the one the General had worn the day before, lacking rank plaques – and a series of plain jumpsuits with vests.

She didn’t really feel comfortable wearing one of the uniforms, not when she wasn’t truly a member of this military force, but it would probably be best for blending in. Then again, a jumpsuit and vest combo would be the most comfortable, and would make her feel the least awkward. She pulled on one of the jumpsuits, unadorned and white, accompanying it with a tan vest. As she pressed down on the fastening strip, one of her hands ran over the rectangle of metal on the chest of the vest. It was on the chest of all the vests, in fact, and those of the uniforms, but she didn’t see one on any of the dresses. It didn’t look like one of the rank plaques she’d seen. She wondered what it was for.

She felt strange, dressed in something other than her usual robes. Looking at them, balled up on the bed, Leia contemplated putting them back on, despite how badly they smelled.

There had to be somewhere she could clean them, and then she could wear them again. No use
wearing them while dirty, even if wearing the clothes of this strange alternate universe double of hers made her feel less like herself.

She tugged again at the clothes she had been loaned. She had insisted on not wearing anything that belonged to her counterpart, and finally in a moment of frustration Padmé had asked if she’d be willing to wear something of hers instead. Apparently the two of them had similar enough builds to allow that to work.

The outfit she wore was not too dissimilar from the sort of thing she would have picked out for herself, truthfully. A tan jumpsuit, and a maroon vest. Practical and stylish all at the same time.

Simply knowing the clothes were not hers, that they belonged to her birth mother, gave them a strange weight, and kept her constantly aware of them whenever she moved.

The sun had not risen yet, and a pallid mist-like cloud hung over everything at this high level of the cityscape. The speeder cut through the clouds, their presence squeezing in at all sides feeling almost as suffocating as the atmosphere within the car.

Anakin drove her to the temple. He had been silent all morning. She supposed he had heard about her refusal to open up to Padmé the night before. He radiated irritation and desperation.

She had overheard the two of them, earlier when they had not known she was awake and lingering in the stairwell, talking about their missing daughter. Her birth parents were terrified for her counterpart’s sake. She didn’t blame them. She wanted to be switched back as quickly as possible too.

She also took heart, if they were so worried about their actual child, perhaps they would remember she was not their daughter.

They flew not to the temple itself, but rather to the landing pad that held the ship she and Ahsoka had arrived in the day before. Wordlessly Anakin left her and R2 next to it, and then headed towards the temple itself. She was glad to see him, and the stifling sense of worry he was projecting, go.

“Wow. Someone got up on the wrong side of the bed today, huh?” Ahsoka was standing on the entry ramp of the ship, watching Anakin depart.

Leia grunted an affirmative response, and brushed past her. She hoped that she could convince Ahsoka to take her somewhere where things made sense.

“Right. Well, you ready to head to Ilum?” Leia didn’t respond, just kept moving towards the cockpit. “I’m sorry I couldn’t secure us the ship we use for Gatherings. You’re going to have to wait ‘till we get back to actually start building your lightsaber.”

Leia sat in her counterpart’s seat, leaning back into the chair adjusted so well for her form. She glared at the other woman, hoping to silence her with her force of will alone.

Ahsoka did not have the courtesy to stop talking, and she continued to talk to Leia through their entire trip to the frozen planet in the Unknown Regions. She spoke of Jedi lore, of the supposedly living properties of the crystals that grew on Ilum, of how they would sing to the Jedi they belonged with and them alone.
Leia sat and listened, certain that she wasn't going to hear a kyber's call.

Leia frowned at the holographic display, and cocked her head to the side, hoping she looked like she really was deep in thought.

For the past several hours Alliance High Command had been going over in more depth the plans they had asked Leia’s advice on the night before. It seemed a good night’s sleep had only increased their desire to hear her thoughts on their tactics. All of these important military types, and they wanted her to review their battle plans?

There was something about this particular display though, something familiar… where did she know this from? Wait! Oh!

“Wasn’t a similar blockade attempted by the Separatists once against my father? Err, I meant General Skywalker when I said that.”

The general who had proposed the plan turned slightly red. Or rather, the holo of him went slightly purple.

“Yes, it was. It wasn’t the same as this of course, we’ve added an additional two entry points to further round out the pincer approach and ensure his flagship will be unable to escape. In the Clone Wars it failed simply due to Skywalker’s unique ingenuity in the situation, so I am confident if we try this same maneuver against Vader’s fleet, with just a bit more pressure than in the past, the result would be in our favor.”

Leia frowned; there was no way a battle plan that had failed against her father in the past would work against him now, even with the alterations they had made to the original strategy.

Fortunately she had already come up with a perfect excuse as to why. She had even rehearsed it in the sonic earlier, when she decided that Vader’s identity needed to remain secret and had then panicked over how to maintain said secret.

“Do you really think Darth Vader hasn’t studied Clone War era tactics? If this didn’t work back then, he will know why, and will be able to get around it with the same ease it was defeated in the past. You need to try something new against him.”

Mon Mothma gave her a tight-lipped smile. “And just think, you were insisting that you would have nothing to contribute to our meeting. You’ve just saved us not only substantial resources that could have been wasted in an attack, but also many lost lives.”

Leia blushed. “Surely there are others who would have pointed this out, it isn’t as if the idea that people know Clone War Tactics is really all that surprising is it?”

One of the Mon Cala in the meeting laughed. “Oh we all think that, yes. But very few of us would be willing to just blurt that thought out so clearly, especially not to him.”

The General who had proposed the attack frowned. “If you have a problem with how I accept feedback, you can just tell me directly.”

Mon laughed. “Give you feedback on how you receive feedback? When we all know we can rely on
Leia, apparently both the Princess and this Jedi counterpart of hers, to handle it for us?”

Leia had not expected meetings of a military body to contain so much teasing and laughter. She was starting to realize that these people were not just military commanders, they were friends. Surrogate family for one another, even. Their commitment to their cause also included a fierce loyalty to each other, and she could understand how a structure such as this could be so appealing and validating for her other self. Especially given what she had learned about Alderaan the night before.

The holodisplay changed to another plan of action, and this time as she peered at it, she was surprised to feel a nudge in the Force.

“I think…. I think this plan might work!” She exclaimed with a grin, before anyone even had a chance to explain the attack. She paused, realizing she had missed some important parts of the conversation the night before, when she had been panicking over having to attend a meeting of Alliance High Command. Missed things like what it was they were hoping to accomplish here anyway. She confessed to those gathered that she actually did not know what the aim of all this was.

The General whose idea she had shut down earlier gave her a level look. “We have located a slave mining camp where the people held within have not been fitted with internal tracking or detonating devices, at least not yet.” He looked distressed, understandably so. “We are planning to bring ships to their planet’s surface, today, so we can get them out. They will be offered the opportunity to join our fight, either as soldiers or in a non-combatant role, or leave and seek free lives elsewhere if they so choose. We must act as swiftly as possible due to the high risk that they could have been fitted with trackers and explosives in the time since our last contact with them.”

He nodded towards the holodisplay, both his image and the one projected over the table warbling in sync. “We have intercepted reports that Vader’s 501st may be en route to respond to early resistance attempts on the part of the enslaved locals. We hope to be able to block them off long enough to get as many people as possible off the planet, and leave supplies behind for those who wish to stay.”

Leia blinked hard.

Oh.

That was… that was serious.

The monster that was once Anakin Skywalker was working to suppress slave revolts? How evil was he?

Plus, he called his troops the 501st? The same as his old Clone Trooper battalion? That seemed... kinda obvious really. How did none of these people realize he was Anakin Skywalker when he was doing such a bad job of covering his identity up?

But more importantly… the lives of countless enslaved people now depended upon the tactics she had recommended. Having a say in this planning process had been bad enough when it was only the lives of soldiers on the line, but people who had been enslaved?

She suddenly regretted speaking before thinking. Sure there were far more experienced and better trained military minds who were going to review this plan, in this very meeting even, before it was implemented, but her recommendation would be weighed in their decision to go forward with it.

She contemplated how many people could live or die based solely on her word. She would be here, on this base, safe and sound, while people’s lives hung in the balance. Her father and Aunt ‘Soka both had strong feelings on that matter, had made it clear that it was absolutely wrong when the
commanding officers sat in safe rooms and bases when soldiers fought and died.

There was a pounding in her ears, her heartbeat, and it was drowning out what the people present were saying. She let herself inhale, hold it, exhale, let go of her worry, and refocus. “I’m sorry, what was that?”

“We were asking, Master Jedi, if you could lead the on the ground recovery group.”

She offered a weak smile, and nodded.

She couldn’t leave people to suffer, not if she could do something to help.

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Ilum
Leia’s head spun as she left the meeting. She had not anticipated that she’d see combat so soon.

Before yesterday, she had never considered being in combat at all.

Already there were announcements blaring across the base, ordering all units to report to the main briefing room.

Leia followed after General Madine (he had insisted she call him Crix. She didn’t feel comfortable doing so), unsure what she was supposed to do.

Alliance High Command had expressed that they wanted her to pretend to be her counterpart to the Alliance at large, since they feared there may be a drop in morale if the soldiers learned the Princess had been replaced by an identical stranger.

She could of course explain who she was to the individuals she worked closely with, but it would be a headache to clarify these circumstances on a mass scale. She had objected at first; she did not want to maintain an act like that, but the Council was adamant. Apparently her counterpart was a major public figure, and announcing that she was missing would be a major blow to the Rebel forces. Command wanted to avoid that if they could.

Leia knew this meant the troops would be looking to her to be the person in charge. Not only of whatever group came with her to the planet’s surface, but in the prep before battle as well.

Leia wasn’t sure how long she’d be able to pretend to be her counterpart. She didn’t want to pretend to be her counterpart. She understood why it was needed, why what had happened should not be broadcast to everyone, but how could she pretend to be a person she had never met?

They entered what had to be the main meeting room for this slapdash base.

A handful of soldiers were already there. They had been milling about and chatting, the rise and fall of their voices comfortable and friendly, but they all fell silent and took seats as the two of them entered the room.

The room, like most parts of this base, was a temporary structure of cloth and tent poles. There was a collection of folding chairs facing a screen, which was currently displaying parts of the very battle plan she had recommended earlier in the meeting.

They were using the battle plan Leia had approved.

Her mind kept returning to that fact, through all the time spent briefing the troops and getting everything combat ready – they were using the aerial strategy she had recommended.

Anyone who died today – anyone at all – their blood would be on her hands.
She felt sick.

She remembered, suddenly, the letters home to the families of dead soldiers her counterpart had on
her datapad. How painstakingly personal each and every one of them had been.

How many of the dead did her counterpart feel responsible for? Did it ever get easier?

And Luke, Luke was going to be out there in the thick of it all! If something were to happen to him,
she would never be able to forgive herself.

She knew the Jedi Code said, even with its amendments for attachment, that valuing one life over
others was wrong. Every life had to be held as equally valuable; all life was connected to the Living
Force and needed to be given equal weight. Yet Luke had always been more valuable to her than
anyone else could ever hope to be.

Even if this boy wasn’t actually her brother, just a version of him from another universe entirely, he
still was the being she cared about the most.

She reminded herself, not for the first time in her life and not for the last, that it was not contradictory
to both value her brother above all others, and value all beings. If need be, she could make herself
understand that if it ever came down to Luke’s life against the needs of the many, her brother
couldn’t ever be her choice. She just hoped she never would have to make that choice.

That in approving this battle plan, she hadn’t made that choice already.

She and General Madine reached the front the room. There were no chairs there, they just stood by
the screen and leaned slightly against the wall. Madine watched the door as more and more people
filtered into the room and sat in the assembled chairs.

He leaned towards her and, in a voice low enough for no one else to hear, asked “Would you feel
comfortable telling everyone about the situation with the enslaved people? After you do that, I’ll
handle giving out assignments and explaining the plan. You can just stand next to me and look
imposing.”

She caught Luke’s eyes as he plopped into one of the chairs, then gave the General a nod and shaky
smile. She could do this. She’d been practicing her impassive Jedi face for a while now anyway; it
was about time it got some use.

The room was almost full now, so many people watching her, trusting her to lead them into battle, to
help them liberate these people, liberate the entire Galaxy. There weren’t enough chairs for everyone,
and people were crowding in along the sides and the back. She and Madine remained the sole people
standing in the front of the room.

She gathered her thoughts, stepped in front of the screen, and hoped her voice would not betray her
as she explained why they were preparing for battle.

The journey into the Unknown Regions went far faster than expected, the hyperspace routes clear
and efficient and well-traveled. No tolls needed to be paid, there were no unnecessary stops. Just a
straight shot through to the very edge of the Galaxy, taking them just mere hours.
It also helped that the ship they were in was full of top-of-the-line, brand-new parts. It had been a long time since Leia had been in a ship with new and properly maintained components.

The ship did not have any problems during the flight, and dropped back into real space with ease. As they did, Leia gazed through the viewscreen at where they had traveled so far to reach.

It was gorgeous. A planet made of crystal and snow and ice. Everything was translucent, and shone with a soft glow.

Ahsoka navigated the ship through the harsh winds and many mountains and canyons with ease, and landed in an ancient structure, a place where Jedi had been coming for thousands of years to commune with this place and leave with new crystals.

Distantly Leia’s mind went over reports from her world. Old reports, written at the very start of it all by Agent Fulcrum herself. This place, Ilum, was ruined where she came from. Destroyed and hollowed out by the Empire.

She wondered if Fulcrum was indeed Ahsoka. If she had come the planet hoping to commune with an ancient Jedi holy site, only to find what the Empire had done. Or perhaps she had needed a new lightsaber, and was there to get a crystal. Leia did not know.

Ahsoka reached into a compartment near the ship’s landing ramp, and took from it two blue parkas. Both were emblazoned with the Jedi Order’s symbol, and Leia knew the one she was handed belonged to her counterpart. Leia was tempted to ask Ahsoka to swap, just to avoid covering herself in her counterpart’s clothing (she already had to inhabit the other Leia’s world, that was intimate enough, thanks), but the jacket Ahsoka was tugging on was larger than the one Leia held. The other Leia’s clothes would not fit the tall and muscular Togruta, but of course they were perfectly sized for Leia herself.

Why hadn’t their different life experiences granted them different builds or body types? The other Luke hadn’t looked in that holo as if he and her Luke could share clothes with ease! It just wasn’t fair.

She sighed, aware she she was just being silly. As the ramp lowered snow blew into the ship, and she was standing there holding a nice warm parka and refusing to wear it simply because it fit her right?

She tugged it on, quickly fastening it shut to keep out the cold.

Something that was both inside of her and fully removed from herself reacted as she stepped onto the planet’s surface. It was near impossible to understand herself as a Force-sensitive being, and these strange moments full of undeniable connection were disconcerting.

Even stranger that same part of her was making it clear she needed to remember this place, where it was and what sort of power it held.

There was something about it… about those old reports from Fulcrum about what the Empire had been doing, hollowing the snow-covered kyber planet out, that she needed to follow up on.

Her mind kept sliding back to the reports she had read, over and over, unable to let go of seemingly minor details. What had the then-fledgling Empire been doing here? If they were just mining for kybers, why had they used such a different process when they had cleaned out Jedha?

Of course she knew Ilum had not been the only kyber planet they had hollowed out in their mining efforts. She recalled a parade she had been forced to attend when she was 12, celebrating the
successful destruction of one such uninhabited and small kyber filled planet. How her father's hand had been clasped tight against her shoulder throughout the Imperial affair. At the time she had thought it because he had been upset their presence had been specially requested at this parade, and he needed her to behave, now she wondered if he had worried if her Force sensitivity would have called out to any of the kybers being carted around in front of them.

Yet even knowing there were other planets the Empire had hollowed... there was something about those reports...

As she grappled with her recollection of the report, Ahsoka led her down to a cave like opening in a mountain face, and through there into a sentient-made chamber. It was beautiful, ancient. Mosaics were spread across the floor, and if Leia had to guess, probably under the ice-covered ceiling as well.

Ahsoka stopped next to a massive doorway, frozen over with ice. She gave Leia a sheepish grin.

“Normally we wait for the sun to hit this at just the right angle for the ice to melt, and then task the supplicants with finding their crystal before the door freezes over again. Those leading the gathering wait here, in this chamber, as the crystals are found. But your senses aren't trained enough that I’d feel comfortable asking you to find your crystal alone. Honestly, this really isn't a task you are ready for quite yet, but we don’t have the luxury of time to wait for you to be.”

Leia nodded, understanding. This was a task meant for a Jedi, something she most certainly was not and never would be. She was almost sure that this journey of theirs would be futile, and she would not discover a kyber crystal while she was here.

The lecture Ahsoka had given on kybers and their connection to the Force during their trip had been fascinating, but Leia was still certain it was a lesson truly removed from herself.

Ahsoka had told her that the crystal would sing to her, that she alone would be able to hear it as it resonated with her Force presence.

There was no way any crystal would be choosing her.

She was sure of it.

Even if there was something in that cave tugging at her and drawing her in.

It was a curious feeling, and as she tried to understand it, it grew stronger in its intensity.

A hum, like a lullaby her mother had sung her to sleep with when she was young, began to grow. Leia was struck by a strange urge to sing along.

She walked through the opening Ahsoka had cut for her, Ahsoka trailing behind her, determined to discover the source of the song. There had to be a speaker stashed around here somewhere, the lilting tune of Mirrorbright was far too clear and real now to simply be in her head.

The further she walked the more clear the song became. She could hear some of the lyrics of the Alderaanian lullaby now, echoing in the cave.

...its glow as soft as an ember...

The singer sounded suspiciously like Leia’s mother.

...take this time to remember...
The voice of Queen Breha Organa echoed around her, and Leia found herself moving through the
caves in pace with the song’s slow melody.

...those you have loved but are gone...

The song was growing louder, coming from somewhere up ahead. She turned to Ahsoka, to ask her
if she heard the singing. Ahsoka’s full attention was on Leia, a knowing smile on her face.

...those who kept you so safe and warm...

“The singing, it isn’t actually real,” Leia said, puzzled by how clear it was for something she heard in
her head.

Ahsoka’s smile only grew larger. “Oh it’s real. Just not in the way you’re thinking.”

...Those who have ceased to be...

The song was so loud now, the source of it so close.

There, just up ahead, there was something glowing, glowing so bright, so incredibly bright.

...Mirrorbright shines the moon, as fires die to their embers...

Leia reached out, cupping the shining crystal in her hand. She had expected it to be stuck to the cave
wall, frozen in place and needing her to pry it loose. Instead it fell into her palm easily, as if it wanted
to be there, wanted her to take it with her.

...those you loved are with you still...

She held it up in her hands, this surprisingly warm crystal, and one last line of the song swirled
around her before coming to a close

...The moon will help you remember...

Ahsoka placed one of her hands on Leia’s shoulder, startling her out of her contemplation of the
kyber in her palm. Of this concrete proof that she did indeed have the Force.

“Unless you feel a second crystal calling to you, it’s time for us to go. We take what the planet offers
us, and no more.”

Leia nodded, placed the crystal into one of her vest’s pockets, and together the two of them made
their way back towards the ship. Leia did not know where they were – she had followed the singing
to get here and had not kept track of the many winding turns that had gotten her there – but Ahsoka
seemed to know the way.

Leia would trust Ahsoka’s guidance.

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Leia O. starts her training. The Rebel forces run final preps before heading
into battle
Mirrorbright's lyrics are from *Bloodline* by Claudia Gray.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Still un-betaed and I am really really really am not sure about this chapter, but I feel bad that it has been so long since the last update.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Leia watched Ahsoka program the navicomputer and had a sudden wonderful thought.

“Ahsoka, would you mind if we went somewhere, before heading back to Coruscant?”

“Depends on where you want to go.”

“Alderaan. Please, can we go to Alderaan?”

The older woman did not seem to be surprised. She smiled, soft and kind and understanding. “I thought you might want to do that, so I got us clearance codes to land there before we left Coruscant. I also put in a request for us to meet with the Queen; which I expect she will be approving, after your dinner last night with her husband.”

“How do you know about that?”

“Skyguy called me after to complain about you liking your dad more than him. He’s such a baby.” She gave an affectionate eyeroll, and Leia could actually feel the love she had for Leia’s biofather. It flooded the cockpit, infusing the very air Leia breathed.

What was happening to her? Yes, she had always been fairly intuitive and able to figure things out faster than those around her, and especially always be certain if a plan could succeed or not, but she had never felt so… open to the people around her before.

Ahsoka gave her a contemplative look. “You’ve been more present ever since you found your kyber, and Force knows you’re projecting now. I’m glad.”

Leia was unsure of what she meant. “Present?”

“Yup. Ever since you stumbled upon me at my campsite you’ve been closed off, and hidden in the Force. I couldn’t figure it out, it was part of why I ran those blood tests once I got you on the ship, I needed to understand why your presence in the Force was almost... gone. Just enough to know you were alive, but nothing more than that. But now, I can feel you here. Really feel you, you’re broadcasting pretty strong. You’re letting your Force presence out of wherever you had been containing it.”

Leia frowned. Did that mean other Force-sensitives would be able to sense her, once she got back home? She didn’t like the sound of that at all.

Ahsoka seemed to sense her worry, and for all Leia knew, she really had in fact sensed it. This woman was probably able to read her emotions. No, not probably. Hadn’t she just told Leia that she was… projecting?
What a frightening thought.

“Hey, this is a good thing. You can’t keep everything shoved up inside you Leia, there needs to be some sort of outlet, a release.”

She turned to look at Ahsoka, wanting to understand the need to give these abilities an outlet.

“Force-sensitivity is like a pressure bomb?”

Ahsoka laughed. “I wouldn’t phrase it like that, but sure.” She turned her gaze back to the computer. “We probably should establish some sort of training bond, but I really do understand if you don’t want to. I’m not going to force a relationship onto you if you don’t want one. I get it. I’m a stranger, someone you don’t know and aren’t sure if you can trust.”

“What does that entail? Having a… training bond.”

Leia could feel Ahsoka’s happiness, joy that Leia was even considering this, fill the cockpit. It swirled around her, dizzying. “A training bond would allow me to help you. To see what is going on and guide you, when you are having trouble. For those things we don’t really have the words to describe. Sometimes it’s just easier to show the proper way in the Force itself than try to find words and terms in Basic.”

She shifted her entire seat, turning it so it was facing Leia. “Leia, I don’t want you to enter into this without fully understanding. This would literally bind us together. It also isn’t strictly necessary. Not every Master and Padawan pair enter into a Force-bond, it’s truly up to you. It’ll be like…” She frowned. Apparently, they had already stumbled upon an example of something Basic was lacking the words to describe.

It proved her point.

There were aspects of learning about the Force that had to be shown and felt, rather than explained and understood. If Leia was to figure out how to use this new skill she had never known she had, she would have to let someone in.

That was not exactly an easy thing to do.

There were very few beings she had ever truly, fully, let into her life. Currently, she just had Mon, Luke, Amilyn, Evaan and… she scrunched her face up tight. Maybe she could count Han? Sometimes. On a good day.

She had very recently met Ahsoka, barely knew her, and from the sound of things, she’d have to let her past all of her defenses.

She needed to learn how to control this.

She couldn’t just let these abilities go. Not only could they be of use to the Rebellion, there was a chance that not training could actively endanger the Alliance.

There was also the chance that if Ahsoka could sense her, then Darth Vader, or worse Palpatine himself, would also be able to when she returned home.

Her defenses had kept her safe in the past, but Ahsoka was right, something had shifted during her time in this universe, and she was no longer sure it would be possible for her to go undetected. Not without first learning what it was she had been doing, and then actively working to mask her presence once more.
She hadn’t even been aware she had been holding these things inside her. Yet the combination of
hearing her mother’s voice singing that familiar song, and the undeniable presence of the kybers
around her, had unspooled it all and she did not know how to return to how things had been before.
No, If she was honest with herself this had started last night when she saw her dad. She’d felt
exposed and undone ever since then.

She needed to learn how to shut these new senses off.

Learning how to seemed to require one of these bonds.

Ahsoka sat there, patient and silent, letting her puzzle through this all. Leia appreciated it.

From the start, this woman seemed to have understood that Leia was not the person she knew in this
world. She hadn’t put any expectations on her that she could not meet.

Yes, she could stand this. Letting her in. It wasn’t as if it would be forever. She’d be returning home,
hopefully soon, and then she would never see the other woman again. It would only be temporary.

Wait.

Let someone in just to have to say goodbye so soon after?

No.

She was no stranger to loss.

Leia had already lost so much. Countless soldiers she had led into battle. Alderaan. Her parents.

Every single person she had known as a youth was dead.

The people she cared about at present were constantly in danger of being taken.

Everyone always left her.

The *only* person she didn’t constantly worry about leaving her was Luke. He was loyal, and
apparently her twin brother. They’d been apart for long enough in their lives, she could trust he’d
stay by her side from here on out.

Could she enter into a close relationship with another being, knowing that their time together would
be so short?

That the end of their relationship would not be a murky eventually, but a far closer and more
intentional definitely?

She met Ahsoka’s eyes, sharp bright and blue, a brighter shade than her lekku - bluer than any
Human eye could be, and really thought about what it would mean to let someone from this other
universe in.

She watched the pilots rush about the hanger, prepping their ships for battle. Glancing down at her
datapad, she confirmed for the millionth time that she was going to be flying out on the *Millennium
Falcon* along with Sana, Han, and Chewbacca.
As if the standing orders would change just with another look, she once more confirmed that Luke wasn’t going with them. He would be flying a one-man fighter into battle instead.

She wondered if she was supposed to be doing something, directing these troops as they got ready, perhaps give them yet another pep talk or go over the plans for the hundredth time. She couldn’t be the only one there who’s nervous energy required endless reviews of the plans.

A shout from one pilot to another brought her back to the moment.

It felt so wrong, simply standing and watching as everyone around her rushed about with real concrete tasks to do.

Someone was watching her. She was sure of it.

She glanced about, her eyes catching on a dark-skinned human woman standing among a small contingent of soldiers in blue shirts, black vests, tan slacks, and long oblong white helmets.

She recognized those uniforms from her dimension, knew that was what the Alderaanian Guard wore.

Interesting.

She wondered if they had joined the Rebellion before or after their planet had blown up.

Regardless, she figured if she was to maintain the charade High Command had asked of her, it would be best to speak with these soldiers. Especially the woman, who seemed unable to look away from Leia's lightsaber.

She drew close to them, and the five or so Alderaanian soldiers immediately snapped to attention on her presence. That same woman who had been staring at her stood a step or two in front of the others, and Leia assumed she was their commanding officer.

Leia smiled at her.

"Hello, no need to stand on formality."

None of the Alderaanian rebels relaxed. They kept standing there, ramrod straight, watching Leia with expectant smiles.

The woman who seemed to be in charge of this unit nodded. "Of course, Your Highness. It's good to see you again."

Leia nodded in return, wondering how she could get through this without giving away that she did not know who this woman was. Why had high command asked her to stop disclosing what was actually going on? Everything would be so much easier if she could just tell the truth.

Ah, kriff it, best just cut to the chase.

"I’ve noticed you staring at my 'saber. I wanted to check in and see what it was about it that was bothering you."

"Sorry, Your Highness. I just… I hadn’t known you were trained to use the weapon of a Jedi. I haven’t seen one of those in a while."

"You saw one in the past?" This woman had to have been about ten or twelve or so when the Order fell, based on the history of this timeline Leia had been told.
The officer worked her jaw a little, she seemed embarrassed, as if she had said something she knew she should not have. Finally, she gave a slight shrug. “I’m afraid that is information I can not disclose out in the open, Your Highness.”

Leia nodded and frowned. She glanced about for somewhere they could talk and saw a small meeting room that came off the hanger. It would be more private. She glanced at her chrono to be sure and was glad to see they would have plenty of time to talk before they’d have to leave for battle.

The officer agreed to follow Leia into the room, maintaining a respectful and deferential attitude the whole time. One they were in the room she refused to sit, standing at attention instead.

"Tell me about when you have seen Jedi in the past." Leia implored, figuring that this woman probably would respond best to direct commands from her, given who she thought Leia was.

The woman nodded curtly. "I am not sure how much your father told you, Your Highness. The short version of the story is that my sister and I were brought to Alderaan as refugees after a Jedi helped our home world, Raada, deal with Imperial rule."

Oh. Oh!

There had been survivors from the Order!

There could still be others out there!

Better yet, whoever this possible survivor was, they could still be alive.

Leia might still find a familiar face, or better still, someone who was actually qualified to train Luke.

“Please, if there are any Jedi out there, I need to know who they are.”

The officer considered it, stood there as a riot of emotions played across her face for several long moments, before nodding.

"It was Agent Fulcrum, Your Highness."

Leia’s world spun. Fulcrum. The name that general had used when she’d mentioned Ahsoka the day before.

"Do you know her well? Or... do you know what happened to her?"

If the officer's skin had been lighter, Leia was sure she would have seen her blush. As it was, her dark complexion hid any reddening of her cheeks in the dim lighting.

She nodded, curtly, before her professional demeanor fell away entirely.

"Your Highness, the truth is... Fulcrum and my older sister are involved. Married."

She had so many questions.

She needed to ask everything she could about the life of Ahsoka Tano after the Jedi Order was obliterated. To find out if Ahsoka was still alive.

This woman claimed to have to have a sister who was married to her. That... that made this woman part of Leia's family too.

Kriff, she didn't even know her name.
Leia tried to chase her thoughts down to start asking the questions she needed answers for, but before she could the base filled with the klaxon sounds of alarms, and lights began to flash.

Both of them needed to be at their stations immediately, they’d be launching the mission shortly.

The two women rushed out of the room, into the chaos of the base as everyone scrambled to their proper place.

She felt so much lighter now than she had before, content with the knowledge that someone she loved had managed to have a life. A real life, with love and sister-in-laws and secret codenames and who knows what else.

It was exactly the sort of comfort Leia needed before heading into her first ever battle.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Everyone is heading to somewhere important. For one this is an impossible trip home, for the other a trip into battle. For both these are journeys they never thought they would ever have.

While I am unsure of this, it really didn’t feel right to send Leia Skywalker into combat without giving her potentially good news about someone she cares about first.

I am seriously not sure I got Miara Larte right. I had something else written for her here originally, but of course, had to alter it drastically after we saw her canon adult self in From a Certain Point of View.
"So, how would this work?" Leia was nervous, so nervous, about what establishing a Force-bond would entail.

How deep would Ahsoka be within her? What would she be able to know?

Leia did not like this, this idea that she would be vulnerable to this woman in this way so long as she was here in this dimension.

She had a sudden urge to call it off, tell Ahsoka she had changed her mind – that no, she did not want to open a bond with her after all.

Instead she bit her lip to keep herself silent. It rolled under her teeth, dry edges catching, and thin flakes of skin came loose, tearing away. Her lip stung.

Her eyes cast about the cockpit, looking everywhere but at the Jedi in the other seat.

Leia could stride into battle without a second thought, brave beyond any measure, but when faced with emotions, with intimacy, with the prospect of truly connecting with another... she was a coward.

She had to do this, she had to acquiesce. She could think of no other way forward.

She made eye contact with Ahsoka once more.

Immediately she felt that tingle that was starting to be familiar. Something brushed against her mind, and for a moment – just a moment – she was in that cell, listening to the high pitched whirr of the IT-O interrogation droid. All she had to focus on to escape the onslaught of pain was her unshakable faith that no matter what they did to her, no matter how bad things got, the Death Star plans were safe and would never be found by the Empire.

Leia was lost in the memory for what felt like hours. It was in truth mere seconds. When she returned to the present, it took all of her strength not to flinch. The tingle, and the presence, vanished.

"Leia? What was that? You know you don't have to do this if you don't want to, I don't want to push you into anything--"

Leia cut her off. "No. I need to get past this. I cannot allow that monster and what he did to me limit what I do. Not if this can help me learn how to take him out."

Ahsoka did not seem convinced, but she did not press. She nodded, and Leia felt the tingle once more. Then that presence, lingering on the edge of her consciousness.

"Just let it in, Leia."
She did not know how.

"Relax. Focus on your breathing, and just… drop your guard."

She was able to focus on her breathing in any case. The rest of the instructions, she had far less success with.

Ahsoka let out a frustrated huff of breath. "Ok, so maybe that method won't work. Leia, do you think you could try reaching out to me? Just… feel where my presence is and let it lead you towards me? I'll guide you to me, you just have to follow."

Leia focused on the presence she felt, and as she felt it withdraw she focused on it harder. She kept a targeted lock on it, not letting it escape her. Then oddly, she felt something shift, and her awareness of Ahsoka seated in front of her expanded.

Ahsoka's triumph filled her, but it was warm and comforting, not overwhelming. She felt it inside of her, not crashing against her.

She thought of how this world's Luke had checked her over during the meeting the day before, and Ahsoka's amusement rose.

"Oh of course Luke already established a Force-bond with you – I should have thought of that. Although, it was always going to be easier for him than for me, wasn't it?"

Leia didn't quite understand. "He and I are bonded? But I wasn't aware of anything like that?"

"You probably are bonded with your universe's Luke, and it's just something you are so used to you don't even notice it, and probably didn't think about. For all anyone knows this universe's Luke and Leia were born bonded, it wouldn't surprise me if you two were as well. So, establishing a bond with him would have felt less like a new thing, and more like… fixing something that felt wrong? After the meeting, did you feel more at ease than you did before it?"

Leia snorted. "Well yes, because I had been reassured that the Jedi Order would be working hard to send me home. It is very hard to feel anything but comforted when you know minds so great they are still revered 20 years after their deaths are going to try to fix your problems."

Ahsoka was amused by this response.

"Am I going to sense your feelings at all times now? Can you sense mine?" Leia hoped that was not the case.

"Do you sense Luke's emotions all the time?"

What?

"No, I most certainly do not!" She frowned. "I don't think he and I actually have one of these… bonds."

Ahsoka was not convinced. "Ok, let me ask you something else. In your own universe do you often know where he is when you want to find him, or just feel a sense of connection when he is around?"

Leia scowled at her. "Luke is my friend. I feel connected to him because of our friendship."

Ahsoka snorted. "Leia, most people are not able to sense where their friends are. Or if they are lying to them, or feel it if they are in pain, not literally in any case. That's not just being connected to a
friend – that is the Force."

Leia thought again of how familiar and right it had felt when this universe's Luke had been inside her mind. Of how it had eased a discomfort she had barely been aware of.

She remembered when she had first met Luke, in that cell on the Death Star. How the moment she had seen him, even in that Stormtrooper armor, she had known he wasn't another soldier there to harm her. How easy it had been to trust him. How easy all interactions with him had been compared to everyone else she had ever tried to befriend. She recalled how she always knew when he was in danger, always knew when he was in combat, known when he was winning.

She slumped back against the chair. "Ok. So Luke and I might have one of these bonds. Both in my dimension, and now here as well. How does that help me figure out how ours works?"

Ahsoka rolled her eyes. "It helps because you already know how to use a Force-bond. If you can go about your life without projecting everything at Luke or feeling his feelings in turn, then you should know how to adjust our bond, and your senses in general, so you won't be overwhelmed."

Oh.

That actually did make sense.

Too bad she had no idea she had even been doing something with Luke.

Wait.

"If you know how to work this sort of thing, why don't you just adjust it?"

"Because I am not the one who needs to learn. Now come on Padawan, you said you'd accept me as your Master, so start learning."

Ok.

Leia closed her eyes. Focused on how she felt around Luke. Her Luke, not the strange version of him she had encountered at the meeting. The particularities of how she could relax around him, those times she felt as if she could almost understand what he was thinking.

That was entirely the wrong approach.

No.

Her bond with Ahsoka was not supposed to be like what she had with Luke. Her connection to him was special.

Instead, she thought of that nightmare encounter on the Death Star. Not the torture itself. Instead she remembered how she had clamped down on the contents of her mind, how she managed to keep Vader away from it all.

She remembered when she first entered her biofamily's home, how Anakin had tried reaching out for her. She had managed to keep him out too.

She reached towards Ahsoka, and slowly, carefully pushed her out. She didn't want her blocked from her fully, no, but she didn't want her all the way inside, the way she currently was.

She opened her eyes, and saw Ahsoka smiling approvingly at her.
"That's it Skygal!" Ahsoka flushed, aware she had said something she should not have. "Sorry. So sorry. I know you aren't her. I wasn't thinking."

Leia could feel a pulse of genuine regret being sent her way. She chose not to answer or accept it, instead turning her attention to the familiar sight of hyperspace.

Going to war was not what Leia had imagined.

So far it had been indistinguishable from a rather crowded carpool.

She sat in the Falcon's cockpit with Sana, Han, Chewie, C-3PO and R2-D2.

They had a battalion of ground troops in the hold of the ship. Soon they would be approaching the planet and all of them, save for Han, Chewie and the droids would be dropping into various hiding spaces, and hopefully, hopefully, they would be able to pass to the planet's surface assuming the role of spice dealers.

Han kept assuring her that he could play this part just fine, and after some questioning had confessed that he had smuggled spice for the Hutts before he'd come to work for the Rebellion.

Knowing their pilot was a sketchy drug dealer wasn't exactly inspiring confidence, but she kept reminding herself that he'd flown the Dragon Void, and apparently plotted a course through the Kessel Run that was only 12 parsecs long. He was a good pilot. They could do this.

If all went according to plan, they'd be leaving the planet with a ship far more crowded than it was at present. Filling every corner and nook and cranny with people en route to freedom.

Leia tried not to think of the possibility that some of the soldiers they were taking to the planet with them would never make it off. That many of the enslaved people they were going to meet could die before they reached the freedom every being deserves.

How it would be her father preventing them from escaping, causing their deaths, engaging in the unforgivable.

In many ways Leia felt he was worse than the Hutts. At least they had the excuse of ignorance and "this is how our culture has always done things" to fall back on. But him? Oh, he had no such excuse. The monster formerly known as Anakin Skywalker truly and fully should know better.

She had spent almost the entire trip in the cockpit, trying not to dwell on it, and doing nothing but that. When she had grown tired of obsessing and staring silently out at hyperspace, she had started asking Threepio and Artoo questions. She was emboldened by her earlier discovery that Ahsoka could still be alive, hopeful that the two of them might be able to help her better understand what had gone wrong in this timeline.

Instead of answers, she learned Threepio's memories had been wiped, and Artoo stubbornly did not want to talk about anything to do with the past.

She tried reasoning with him, but whenever she asked him anything about events that took place more than 20 years prior, he'd scream at her – then ignore her outright for at least 15 minutes. She'd try again, and again, until finally Han had shouted that they better knock it off or he'd be kicking them both into an escape pod and off his ship.

She had been silent since. Gazing at hyperspace as it streaked on by.
She had to try again. Maybe if she changed topics slightly?

"Hey Artoo, do you know if Ahsoka is alive?"

The droid did not scream. He didn't answer her. He just gave a sad little whistle.

"She was alive? Recently?"

He confirmed that he had seen her a few years ago, that she had still been fighting for what was right.

Leia smiled.

Chewie rumbled his interest, and when Leia turned her attention to him he surprised her by asking, "Are you talking about the Jedi Ahsoka Tano?"

Leia grinned. "Yes! Yes I am. Do you know her?"

"We saved each other, once. Back during the Clone Wars. We had been kidnapped and separated from our respective peoples, and we helped each other get home. She is a friend." He punctuated his affection for her with a happy shortle, and Leia saw that Han was giving them both interested looks as well.

When he saw her looking at him he glanced away with a scowl, muttering something under his breath. Something that made Sana laugh.

Artoo made a very reluctant noise. He clearly didn't care for whatever it was he was going to share next. Then he told her that there was a droid, not him (there was so much resentment that it had not been him) who had been there when Ahsoka was last seen alive. That if Leia wanted to know more she should ask him.

"Thank you Artooey. What droid should I look for?"

He told her to find a General Syndulla, that the droid she was seeking would be with her. His name, Artoo finally spat out, was C1-10P, and according to Artoo he was singularly the very worst droid in the entire Rebellion, far less useful than even the oldest binary box brain.

To Leia's surprise Threepio seemed to share Artoo's sentiment. "Oh yes, he truly is a frightful menace. When I first met him I thought he might actually understand manners, but it seems he really knows anything but! I'm afraid that if Chopper is the droid you need to find, then you are far better off simply letting things be."

Han snorted. "A droid that's more annoying than you, Goldenrod? I'd have to see it to believe it!"

"Well I never. Captain Solo, that was incredibly rude!"

"Yeah, well--" Whatever undoubtedly witty retort he had was stopped by lights on the console lighting up. "Looks like it is time to drop back into real space. Better get to hiding, and tell all those soldiers back there they better hide too!"

Chapter End Notes
Next time: The long awaited mission will begin at last.
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

I have never written any sort of action scene or combat before, so I truly hope this chapter is not awful. I am kinda terrified that it is.

How do you write combat? ¯\_(ツ)_/¯ I tried my best, so fingers crossed you don't all hate it.

Thanks as always to my beta saveloy, you are a true rock star.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Leia did not like sitting in one of the ship’s smuggling compartments, unable to see or hear what was going on. She reached out with the Force to monitor everyone on the ship and outside it, as she just could not sit there with nothing to do or see or know. She was riding into battle. Her first ever battle.

That flare of nervousness came to her again, and she refocused away from everything around her to just her internal turmoil. She acknowledged her nerves, acknowledged the all too real fear that something would go wrong. The Imperials would break through their blockade and overwhelm them on the ground. That Luke, _Luke_, could die in aerial combat far away where she could do nothing to help. As she acknowledged her fears she accepted them, and let them go. Yes. These were real concerns and worries, and yes, she had never been in combat before.

But she would not let these fears destroy her trust. She _trusted_ that the Rebel forces knew what they were doing, that the other members of Alliance High Command would not send troops off to die senselessly, that this mission was important. She _trusted_ that Han would land them safely and get them out of there after, that the good they could do was worth the risk of loss. Above all, she trusted Luke. She trusted him to keep the Imperials away from the planet, to live to fight another day.

She let her trust push out her fear, releasing it back into the Force. She breathed in deep, and basked in her total faith in the Force. There was only peace.

The engine was quiet.

They had landed.

No one was to leave their hiding spots until the signal.

She heard footsteps overhead. Muffled voices.

Then nothing.

She started to go over the plan again in her head.

Get the signal.

Leave the ship.

Rendezvous with their contacts at the set location – an old abandoned building next to a stream five
klicks west of where they had planned to set down. Han would tell her if they had to land somewhere else.

Give the small vital supply drop to the people who wanted to stay, and return to the ship with those who wanted to leave.

Along the way they’d transmit signals to a handful of Rebel transports, and if they timed things right the other ships would only be on the planet’s surface long enough to dump more, less vital, supplies then load up with refugees and go.

Real nice and simple.

There were going to be slavers everywhere.

Slavers who had cleaned up the reality of what they were with names like “prison guards” and “police officers” and “soldiers”.

In order for the mission to be successful, those slavers were going to have to be eliminated.

Leia had never killed before.

She shut her eyes again and began to meditate.

Then after a span of time that was both too short and far too long a wait, she heard it.

A series of knocks in just the right pattern.

The signal.

She climbed out of the compartment, while all around the ship soldiers shoved out from similar spots, and turned to where Han and Chewie stood.

“Everything’s going good. We’re right where we wanted to be, and the intel that the Imp in charge of this damn place was a Spice addict was good.” Han turned his head, watching the soldiers climb out of their hiding places and gather around them. “You think you can make it back to the ship in under four standard hours? I can make up a believable excuse for us not leaving ‘till then.” He was so relaxed, like he did these sorts of terrifying acts every day. For all Leia knew, he did.

How did her counterpart stand living like this?

Leia nodded, and everyone stared at her, expectant.

Oh. She had to say something before they set out, didn’t she.

She looked at the assembled soldiers, at their worn weapons and gear. “I know I can trust all of you to carry this out. You are good soldiers, and have done this before. I know you understand how important it is that we bring these people home with us, that we get them free. Above all, I know that we can trust in the Force. May it be with us and guide us through it all, and with its guidance I hope we will bring liberation with us to those who have been oppressed.” She sucked in a breath, looking around at those gathered, doing her best to look them each in the eye. “May the Force be with us.”

She wasn’t sure if it was the right thing to say, not really, but the soldiers seemed to like it. They smiled and cheered and she could feel the swell of adrenaline around the ship.

And then they were off.
Everything was going well. They were making their way towards their meeting spot with very little incident.

There had been one or two times they had almost been spotted, but each time Leia had sensed the trouble before it began, and had been able to correct the soldiers’ paths to ensure they made it through without being detected.

The peace did not last.

The group came up behind someone clad in the plain white not-quite-clone-armor Leia had seen in the memory the Sith showed her. Before she even had properly processed the sight of the soldier standing there, back to them and large blaster held in both hands, Sana had grabbed the figure in white, and…

Leia had never watched someone die before.

Had never seen a corpse.

Leia could feel the being in white’s connection to the Living Force snap along with their neck. The horrible cracking noise echoing through the Force.

It didn’t matter how one dressed it up, how justified the action… one moment there had been a living sentient there; the next there was just a body lying on the ground inside some armor.

Sana did not look like she had done anything of any real significance. She was looking at Leia, grinning. “Never even saw us coming!”

It was tempting to remove the helmet and give this dead soldier some identity outside of slaver and oppressor.

Leia didn’t remove the helmet. Instead, she forced a smile and nodded back at Sana, then the group kept moving.

She didn’t have much time after that to truly process what it meant to enact armed resistance against actual blaster-toting fascists.

It was all act and react, a series of brief encounters, a series of white-clad corpses, a series of scuffles where armor-clad identical soldiers fell to the ground – dead. Short and small scuffles, nothing more.

They did not give the fascists time to react, aware that even the slightest hesitation would allow them to alert others, and then they’d be outnumbered.

Surrounded.

The small group fell into a comfortable rhythm, until Leia sensed something fully unexpected.

He was here. He was supposed to be with his fleet, and yet… oh no.

No.

He was was not only on the planet, he was heading towards the rendezvous spot.

She signaled for the troops to stop.

She cast out towards him, sensing that he thankfully wasn’t quite there yet, and he seemed to be traveling alone. She could stop him before he reached where the enslaved people were waiting.
Leia turned to Sana. “Darth Vader’s here. I’m going to stall him. Can you lead the troops to the meeting place?”

Sana frowned. She looked like she wanted to say something, possibly object to Leia fighting Darth Vader on her own, but instead her gaze flickered to Leia’s lightsaber. Then she nodded, and she and the troops were off, moving further and further from where Leia stood, making their way to the set location.

Leia watched them for a few moments, before she set off in his direction. In Vader’s direction. The monster that had once been known as Anakin Skywalker.

She had to draw him away.

She imagined, as she felt him approach – his presence ever closer and closer – what her father would look like with blazing yellow eyes.

She pictured her father at his angriest, during particularly bad fights when she or Luke had done something notably stupid or reckless. She wondered how much worse it would be with him as a Sith, what sort of wounds he would have from that battle with Uncle Obi she had seen when she had asked his lightsaber to show her its past.

She was not prepared for the reality of what she found.

Clad all in black, a mask unlike any she had seen – even in old illustrations of Sith masks – and the breathing.

How could she have anticipated the raspy echoing breathing?

“We meet again, Princess.” The voice, that mechanical voice so unlike her father’s, boomed around her.

She mentally took stock of a lifetime of training, stances drilled into her as soon as she was old enough to hold a practice ‘saber.

She had never managed to beat her father when sparring.

Not once.

No. That would not work.

At least, not on its own.

He stood, as if summoned from a nightmare, before her. The sun was at his back; he cast a dark silhouette against it. His shadow stretched across the ground towards her.

She could find nothing to visually link this black clad behemoth to her father.

He was unmoving, save for his cape swaying in the breeze. Waiting. She did not know what he was waiting for.

“So you’re a slaver now?” She tried to kept her tone casual, cocky yet calm. She wasn’t sure if she succeeded.

Her hands were shaking.

Still he did not move.
“What would your mother say,” Leia forced herself to smirk as she spoke, “if she could see you now?” Taunting him was as stupid as his actions were disgraceful. She knew that. She did it anyway.

She could feel his rage, pressing against her, shoving her back a step. It burned and swelled and seemed to have no end.

Did she really just throw the disapproval of his dead mother in the face of a fully armed Sith Lord? What was wrong with her?

His lightsaber screamed to life.

She wondered whose kyber he had stolen to make that red blade.

No. This was not a time to allow her attention to be diverted onto irrelevant details. She had to focus. Her fear was making her sloppy and distracting her when she was about to battle an actual Sith Lord.

A Sith Lord with all of her father’s power and strength.

“How told you about her?” His hate was thick, viscous. It slammed into her as his blade swung down, relentless and powerful. “Was it Obi-Wan?”

His form and style were harsher, more brutal than her father’s. He kept pounding his blade down, each blow sending her backwards and she scrambled to block against them.

“No. Those worthless peasants who stole Luke. The ones responsible for her death. They must have told him about her.”

She knew, by virtue of the very fact he was a Sith, that this universe’s version of her father wasn’t exactly a rational being. She just hadn’t been expecting things to be this bad. The Larses were responsible for her grandmother’s death? How had he ever arrived at such a conclusion?

“What lies did they fill your brother’s head with?”

She considered going along with his proposed explanation for how she knew about her grandmother. She could easily claim that Luke had told her about Shmi. It was more than enough to keep him distracted.

“What did he tell you? What have you been deceived into believing?”

If she told him the truth, he would not be able to handle it. He seemed befuddled somehow, confused. His presence was dampened, nowhere near as powerful as her father should be.

“You cannot believe the lies of your kidnappers.”

Which meant laying the truth out there could potentially give her the opening she would need in battle, and might even enable her to overpower him. Not that she really wanted to wound him, Sith Lord or not.

“Cease this foolishness, you could have more power than you ever imagined.”

His style was almost fully offensive, with very little care given to defending himself. He favored overpowering his opponents over anything else, and Leia could tell it had been a long while since his last real ‘saber fight. Leia stabbed low, to see how he’d handle a shorter and faster opponent going for his leg, and she actually made contact, cutting through the black leather, and even making a mark
on the metal beneath it before he shoved her back with the Force. Interesting. He hadn’t even dodged, or swung his lightsaber down to counter.

She had been prepared to dodge, to use her height and speed to make a getaway, and his shove against her left her slightly unbalanced. Only slightly. She managed to kept her feet planted.

“Impressive. Most impressive. You have been trained well.”

They exchanged more blows back and forth, and she landed a surprising number against him now, singeing his suit but not going any further. For a while, neither of them spoke, the hum of their lightsabers, the crackle as their blades collided, and his loud and rhythmic breathing the only sounds as they lunged at one another, exploring each other’s strengths and style.

The comm on her side crackled as they fought, the pulses of the static the code her group had gone over before they had set off. Her team had reached the rendezvous point, which meant Han would now be signaling the rest of the transport ships to start to make their approach. If she was going to distract him again, this was the time.

She returned to the question he had demanded she answer at the fight’s start. “I… I learned about my grandmother from my father.”

That had his attention. His posture relaxed slightly, his assault stopped. He did not seem worried about her attacking him in that moment, even with his guard down so carelessly.

“It could not have been Organa. He never knew about her.”

Well, might as well just put the information out there and see how he’d react. With the way he kept trying to enter her shields, he’d learn it all eventually anyway, and beating around the bush with it would just be delaying the inevitable. Already talking to him seemed to be helping, his current state far preferable to when he was on the attack. “What I showed you yesterday, it wasn’t a trick. It was a memory.”

He gazed at her for a long moment.

“That cannot be.”

She shrugged her shoulders, the move doubling as a means of relieving the pain countering his blows had left behind.

“I am from another universe. A place where things went differently. You aren’t a Sith there. We’re a family, and we’re happy.”

His posture suddenly returned to a battle stance, and she raised her lightsaber up into a guard position.

“No. That’s impossible. My fall was my true destiny. It had been foreseen. There was no way around its inevitability.”

Leia snorted. “Seriously? That is nonsense and you know it.”

“No. It was the only path I could take. I cannot deny my destiny.”

She gritted her teeth, struggling to keep herself from another stupid outburst like her first. It was a wonder she was still alive after that one.
“Your feelings betray you. There is much anger in you. You would do well to join me, my child. Let me complete your training.”

Now that had to be a joke.

“I’m good, thanks.”

They spent some time staring at each other, circling one another warily. Leia did not know how long they had been here, facing each other. The comm crackled again, and this time the rhythm let her know the troops were just two klicks away from the ship. Which meant the transports would all be landing, ready to take as many people off-world with them as possible.

She just needed to get away, and they could leave.

It was risky, and could have the opposite effect from the one she wanted, but she realized then the perfect way to distract him. To confuse him.

She opened up their bond, doing her best to withstand the constant pain this twisted version of her father lived in, and sent him a simple and happy memory from when she was a child.

She was about three or four years old. This was among her earliest memories and had that loose and hazy quality such remembrances do.

She was hoisted up on her father’s back, and he was running through their old apartment. She was laughing, insistently banging her tiny hands down on his shoulders.

“Do ship noises Daddy! Do ship noises!”

He craned his head back, and she could see his grin, “Ok. The brave racer Leia Skywalker is at the starting line, and she is off!” He drew in a loud breath, then started sprinting once more, this time while making an awful impression of a ship in flight.

She had loved it, laughing and shrieking with delight.

It had only been the two of them home that day, she remembered. Luke had been at a healer, he’d had an earache and their mom had decided not to bring Leia with them. Being separated had been so hard for them both back then, and their dad had been distracting her from both Luke’s absence and his pain.

As she let the memory fade, she saw it had the intended effect.

The Sith was distracted, fully consumed with the vision she had sent him.

For the first time since she had arrived in this clearing, she could not sense any of his emotions. She wished deeply that she could see his face, could see his expression. (No. She didn’t want that. Then she’d have to confront yellow where there should have been nothing but familiar twinkling blue.)

Part of her wanted to stay here, to wait and see how he’d react, but Leia knew an opportunity when she saw it, and this mission was on a strict timeline. She turned and ran, as fast as she could with her muscles screaming with pain, racing back to the Falcon.

Darth Vader was too lost in the vision of the life he could have had to follow.

Chapter End Notes
Next Time: Leia returns home to Alderaan.

(these after notes may be triggering for some readers. If you can't handle the current political climate, please just skip to the end for your safety. If you want to read this story without any of my notes, you can do so on Fanfiction.net. Please be aware I posted this chapter and note just after Charlottesville.)

I debated on if I should say anything here or not, but well... If even one of you needed to hear any of this, then I would never forgive myself if I said nothing. I don't know about you all, but last weekend I was terrified, crying on and off nonstop, and in a very bad place for the entire week.

I am thankfully in a better place now, and want to say to my readers that even with the fascists enacting violence upon our populace, there is still hope. In Boston this past weekend we showed the fascists that truly, a people united will never be defeated, and in response those bigots have cancelled events all over the country.

Hope is not lost, and together we can push back and make sure as many people as possible make it through these dark times safely - and more importantly alive. Even when things feel like they are at their worst - even when America is once more talking of increasing the number of young people sent to fight in an endless war that is itself almost old enough to enlist - there is still hope, and as we all know, rebellions are built on hope.

I also do not want to forget or leave behind those who were suffering before an obvious White Supremacist entered the White House here in the US. America has by far the world's highest incarceration rate, and black and brown lives are treated as if they are disposable across this country (both in regards to people who live here, and those who live elsewhere). Wealth distribution is a joke, and the social safety nets have all been shredded beyond belief. This is unacceptable, and when we build for a better future our end result needs to be far better than anything this country has managed to be in the past.

We can do better. I truly believe in humanity's potential to create something better one day.

I grew up hearing my father's stories about his own experiences growing up, attending an all Jewish High School in Amsterdam in the 1950s (graduating with the class of '59 because he got held back for refusing to study German), struggling to afford a room in a boarding house for Jewish war-orphans, and other such tales from post-war Holland (he rarely speaks about what he lived through as a really young child during the war, mostly due to a trauma-induced memory block). One thing he touches on over and over in his stories is his love of science fiction and fantasy, the way that getting lost in stories brought him hope in his youth, let him imagine what sort of better future could be possible. How those stories allowed him to thrive even in the face of the awful childhood he unfortunately had.

I am sure some of you are feeling as if you are not doing anything of note right now. Goodness knows I feel that way. I am saying this to assure you that if you are in any way creating safe ways for people to immerse themselves in a story, be that through creating fanart, or comics, or fanfics, or writing meta, or fighting to make fandom a better and more inclusive place, or leaving comments and reviews encouraging people
to keep on creating, you are in fact doing *something*. You are helping, and you are a part of making this world more livable for those who need a place to check out from the nightmare our world has become.

(That said, if you *can* join people protesting, always always always do. Do not just sit at home eating sheet cake. Take an active role in the world around you, because if we disengage then we allow *them* to shape the political landscape.)

I love all of you so much, and hope you stay safe and do whatever you need to do to thrive even in the face of this period of global fascism. If you ever need to talk and do not know where else to turn, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. I use this name *everywhere* on the internet from gmail to tumblr. If you are reading this, then please know I love you and would never feel bothered to hear from you if you need a friendly ear, or even just want to hit me up on the PSN to play Battlefront or Overwatch or something to distract you until you are in a better place.

In these times it is imperative we come together, that we make sure we have each others backs, and that we fight for each other and fight hard. The Empire will fall, and one day (hopefully soon) the dark times will end. We can not, and will not, let these bigoted pieces of shit win.

I still have hope, and hope is powerful.

It is with hope in my heart I still can say "never again."
This chapter is still un-betaed, and I still have more editing work to do to bring this entire fic into full canon-compliance... but this chapter is finished and you have all been waiting for an update for long enough.

Warning for some minor spoilers for Leia: Princess of Alderaan. Very minor, but spoilers for a book that just came out all the same.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There were no casualties.

She had led a successful ground mission.

She had flown into enemy territory, led a team that freed slaves, had fought a Sith, and she’d done it all without losing any of the troops under her command.

Why didn’t she feel victorious?

There were people, families, huddled in the ship. Thanking her, thanking Sana, thanking the troops, thanking Han, thanking Chewie.

They were exiting the atmosphere, and soon would be leaving real space behind and truly would be all clear.

From where she had left him on the planet’s surface, the Sith reached out to her in the Force.

Leia. She could hear a touch of sadness in the mechanical voice’s tone. She wondered if he remembered discussing baby names with her mother. Picking hers out. You will explain what you showed me.

She reinforced her mental shields, and he tore through them like they were not there at all.

You will not escape so easily. Explain those visions.

She moved quickly towards the cockpit and shouted at Han, almost panicked, “Punch it! Let’s get out of here!”

Han turned towards her, indigent. “Give us a moment Your… youness. We’re on it.”

She rolled her eyes, exasperated. Why did this have to be a fight? “Darth Vader is here. I’d really like to get as far away as possible.”

His face smoothed out, understanding replacing the upset. “Well, why didn’t you just say so? Signal the transports, and then jump up to lightspeed Chewie.”

Chewie grumbled his agreement and fiddled with several buttons and switches on the dashboard before pushing the controls up to full speed.
As the stars stretched out around them Leia let go of the tension that was holding her, releasing it into the Force, slumping slightly against the cockpit’s wall.

This time, when she built her shields up Vader did not crash through.

“Are you ok? Did you see Vader on the planet?” Chewbacca was watching her, concerned.

She gave him a weak smile, trying to mask her exhaustion, both mental and physical.

“Yes. We fought.”

Han turned towards her, radiating worry. “You fought with Vader? Kriff, you’re as crazy as the Princess.”

Chewie laughed, agreeing with his friend’s assessment. “I’m impressed they can fit their bravery in such a small frame.”

Han snorted. For her part, Leia sunk into one of the empty seats in the cockpit.

“I’m a Jedi. It’s my job to fight the Sith when they make their presence known.”

“Oh joy, more Jedi nonsense. My favorite.” The wavering blue glow of hyperspace danced across his face, calling attention to and deepening the lines of Han’s scowl.

“I don’t get it, why are you so resistant to believing in the Force? You’d think with all the time you spend with my counterpart, and with Luke… even just fighting against Darth Vader, it’d be pretty impossible to deny that the Force is real.”

Han turned away from her, pretending to focus on various controls, fiddling with the nav computer. She knew there wasn’t much he actually had to adjust now that they were on a plotted course. He was just avoiding looking at her.

“I just know I can trust what I can see, ok?”

She reached for a hydrospanner that was laying in a corner of the cockpit, floating it to her hand.

“Would you look at that. You can see me call upon the Force with your own two eyes. Still, don’t believe?”

He glared at her. Frustration filled the room. “That’s a nifty trick and all, but it doesn’t mean there is anything larger out there.” Seeing that she was going to continue to argue, he gestured towards the door. “Why don’t you head to the back and check in on your troops? You may not know it, but that is a huge part of being a leader.”

Stretching as she stood, Leia glanced at the surly spacer. “Look, you don’t have to trust in it or feel it with you, I just don’t get how you can… deny that it is there at all.”

He rolled his eyes. “You’re as fanatically devoted to that religion of yours as the Princess is to her revolution, you know that?”

“No actually, I don’t, since I really don’t know this Princess everyone keeps comparing me to.” She was getting so tired of being compared to her too. The perfect soldier and leader who seemed to live for nothing but this fight. “If she has devoted herself to something other than the Force, I feel sorry for her. Since she is another version of me I am certain the Force is quite strong with her, and it would do her well to learn to trust in it. Hopefully, she’s learning how to do precisely that in my
Han gaped at her. “You think she’s going to come home all… religious? Kriff that, she’s smarter than that.” His face lit up with a fond smile, and he shook his head. “Her Worship doesn’t trust anything aside from herself, and a good blaster at her side.”

Leia frowned, thinking of how hard she had to work everyday to find it in her to trust everything around her. The struggle her meditations involved. The undeniable payoff of it all. “Then I truly pity her, and you as well.”

She left the cockpit, making a point of moving as calmly and peacefully as she could. It was not that she was sulking off like an insulted child, no, she was disengaging like the bigger person. Maybe if she kept telling herself that she’d believe it too.

For a moment she sensed a familiar Force presence on the ship with her, and she turned back to see who it could be. All she saw was Han and Chewie, watching her leave. The presence had not come from either of them.

She was distracted, which was why it did not surprise her too much when she walked right into a familiar gold-plated Droid on her way out of the cockpit.

“Oh my, Princess Leia! I am terribly sorry for banging into you, I just wished to inform Captain Solo that -” Leia honestly did not care what C-3PO was entering the cockpit to do.

“Tell him whatever you want Threepio. I doubt he’ll believe you. It seems the Captain is bad at admitting things that are right in front of him.”

She glanced back towards him, frustrated that she even cared. What was it about this man that got to her so completely?

It wasn’t until she had entered the ship’s main cabin and started helping Sana distribute blankets and other supplies, that it occurred to her that he had successfully gotten her mind off of Darth Vader.

They dropped back into real space.

They had only just left hyperspace, nothing more than that, and already she was emotionally undone.

She was looking at Alderaan.

The last time she had seen it, really seen it, had been aboard the Death Star. Watching it explode. Yet now here she was, gazing at that wonderful blue and green planet once more.

White clouds swirled about in the atmosphere, and below them she knew thranta and so many other precious creatures flew through the breeze. The seas and glacier lakes would be calm and peaceful. On the land the farmers would be hard at work, producing a bounty with flavors so vibrant vendors across the galaxy would clamor for the chance to sell them, and at countless vineyards stretched across the mountains grapes were being harvested to create some of the most prized wines in the galaxy.
Oh and the arts! Artist colonies devoted to nothing but but creating new songs and dances while also perfecting those left by those who came before them. A constantly changing tapestry of new and old blending seamlessly to create something wholly unique and Alderaanian anew each day.

Leia knew each aspect of her planet’s culture and history, had had each industry and trade drilled into her from a young age. She had thought, truly believed, that having them taken from her, from the galaxy at large, had made her appreciate and understand her home’s value as much as she ever possibly could. Yet now, now as she gazed at that jewel of a planet hanging in space, knowing that its entire culture was thriving and living... every molecule of her body sang with her joy and love for everything her home was and had ever represented.

If simply seeing Alderaan evoked this sort of response, what would actually setting down upon the surface do to her?

Getting to swim in its lakes, or hike through the snow covered mountains once more?

She could not wait to find out.

They began their descent, the ship cutting through wispy white clouds. The clouds parted enough for Leia to see the patchwork of farmland stretched through the valley beneath them, and she let out a gasp of pure joy.

For one dizzying horrible moment Leia remembered that every being on this planet was dead, everyone, down to every last wolf-cat was dead. They were nothing but ghosts, memories of a place that no longer existed.

Leia banished that thought as quickly as it came.

What she saw outside the ship was real. Stunningly real. This was not yet another dream she would wake from, forced to confront the reality of the planet’s destruction anew.

It was real and alive and soon she would be standing on Alderaan’s surface.

Oh! Alderaan, wonderful beautiful impossible Alderaan, she was coming home!

Then... Through the mountains was the most familiar sight, filling her with a peculiar homesickness and pure wonder all at once. Aldera City, and rising above the city her home, the Royal Palace of Alderaan. She could already make out the tower that held her bedroom, the balcony that came off of her father’s office, the drain she used to climb down to escape her lessons.

She was home.

She had just started to make peace with the fact she’d never see this place again (who was she kidding she would never be at peace with that fact no matter how long she lived) and yet here she was!

The ship set down, and her heart lurched. She couldn’t remember it ever beating faster, it felt like it was going to vibrate right on out of her chest.

They had landed not in the spaceport that serviced Aldera City, the one her family always utilized when they came to and from their home, but rather on one of the landing pads attached to the palace. A landing pad used only by visitors from off-world.

She rushed to where the landing ramp would descend, ignoring Ahsoka’s laughter as she did, eager to get off the ship and stand on Alderaan herself.
When the ramp descended she was not greeted by anyone she knew. There was no WA-2V come to check on her charge (Leia could just hear TooVee complaining now. “Coveralls again your highness! And your braids! You cannot simply pin them up like that, you need to let them fall more elegantly!”). No familiar officers welcoming her home, asking her about where she had been and what she had done. Asking in that slightly knowing way, inviting her to reinforce whatever cover story she had been traveling under this time. Absolutely no one recognized her at all. There was just a smattering of guards clustered on an otherwise empty landing pad.

One of them looked over, he seemed bored and disinterested. “Welcome to Alderaan, Master Jedi. The Queen welcomes you to her palace. She is in a meeting now, but you are to have an audience once she finishes up her current business.”

Reality flooded her, disorienting and dysphoric and just downright nasty. There was a thin strand of ice slowly expanding in her chest, almost tickling her insides as it spread out, like ink expanding in water.

She was not this planet’s most beloved daughter returning home. She was a visitor. She did not belong here, did not live here, was not known here.

This place, which should be the most welcoming location in the entire galaxy, her home, did not recognize her.

A pilot, an officer in her parents’ service, approached them as they neared the entrance to the palace.

“The Queen is currently conducting business within her throne room,” said a familiar voice from under the guard’s long white helmet, and Leia suppressed a bitter laugh. Who better to welcome her home than a friend? “You can either meet her there or wait for her to join you in her office. Regardless I will accompany you so you do not get lost.”

Leia didn’t care that she wasn’t supposed to know who this was, or that as a supposed off-worlder she would not know every room and corridor of this palace better than the back of her own hand. “That’s alright, Evaan. I know how to get to the throne room. You should still walk with us though, I’d love your company.”

Evaan Verlaine, not a soldier, not a rebel, not a politician, not one of Leia’s closest friends, but an officer sworn to serve House Organa, startled when Leia said her name. “I uh... I was not aware that you could pick up on people’s names in the Force, Master Jedi! The powers of the Jedi are impressive indeed.”

Leia snorted. Right. Impressive powers. Not months of fighting side by side, of helping each other through the trauma of losing Alderaan. Traveling the Galaxy to find other survivors, arguing over just what exactly it meant to be Alderaanian in the wake of the destruction the Empire had wrought, stitching loose pockets of refugees together to form the Alderaan Flotilla. Being all the other had in the days immediately after Yavin, holding each other through the nightmares.

It was strange, so strange, walking through her home yet being treated as stranger. No one greeted her. No one acknowledged her. No one even glanced her way. She was truly nobody to them.

It was surreal in a way she had not anticipated, wrong to the very core.

Evaan was not the only person here she knew, far from it. Leia had always made a point of knowing each member of the palace staff by name, of memorizing a bit about each person’s family. As she saw them in these halls, she was reminded each time that all of these people and every family member of theirs she would so often ask after, were all dead and gone.
Each passing familiar face was just a reminder of all she had lost.

Of the people she had failed.

There were so many people here that she had known, so many people who had known her.

Yet now not a single being here knew her at all.

No, wait. One person knew who she was.

She reached out, testing their fledgling bond. She did not know what she was doing, not really, but she tried all the same. In response she felt a comforting pulse, reassurance that the Togruta woman was aware of how hard this was, and would stay by Leia’s side as long as she needed her.

The three of them strode closer and closer to where Leia’s mother waited. On one of Leia’s sides walked the stranger who knew her better than anyone in her home, and on the other walked a dear and treasured friend who had transformed into a total stranger.

She paused, staring now at the large and heavy ancient doors to the throne room. Leia had been so eager to see her mother as soon as possible, she hadn’t even considered what it would mean choosing to meet her here. In this place neither of them had ever really like to go, as opposed to her mother’s far more comfortable and familiar office. The throne room was hardly used save for the most formal of ceremonies. Leia wondered who her mom was meeting there.

There were two places in the palace Leia would have most liked to go to chat with her mother. The royal library and the gardens. Leia knew her desires could not be fulfilled. Those comfortable, private and ancient living spaces were for family, not off-worlders come for a visit.

Yet even as her stomach twisted in new and interesting ways, she would not trade this opportunity for anything.

She would be seeing her mother.

How would she be greeted?

She had been able to give her father the embrace she had needed as soon as she saw him, because they were in private, he could be himself within the apartment of his close friend.

She would be meeting her mother not as her friend’s child or as one person meeting another, but as a supplicant brought before the Queen.

Was it too late to change her mind and go to her mother’s office instead?

Funny, all of Leia’s etiquette lessons on the formal way to properly greet the Queen of Alderaan, outside of ceremonies such as her Day of Demand, of course, had been taught with her playing the role of the one hosting the greeting.

Everything she had ever learned cast her in a role she no longer played.

She turned to Evaan, wanting somehow to connect with her. Say something that would let the other woman know that they even had a connection. Then she stopped. How would thrusting a friendship onto Evaan be any different than what she had experienced on Coruscant? No. She would not do that to her.

She hoped that it wasn’t awful for her to still desire some sort of connection, let alone a meaningful
relationship, with her mother.

She was suddenly terrified of what would happen when they were called into her mother’s throne room. There were too many unknowns and uncertainties in a place where Leia had never had them before.

She was questioning if her mother wanted to see her if her mother would reject her outright. These were not thoughts or impulses Leia enjoyed having, were not ones she’d had in a very long time. Not since before she had even learned of the Rebellion when she had believed her parents had stopped caring about her as they grew ever more absorbed in secretly working to take down the Empire.

She hated that she had these doubts, even if the Queen Breha Organa in question was not the same as the one who had rocked her to sleep as a child. Had sat with her after she’d run away that time when she was nine and demanded to know just which Aunt had made Leia think her parents would ever marry her off to some random prince without her consent, so she could have Words with her. The mother who had climbed Appenza Peak with her when Leia fulfilled her Challenge of Body and had run through these very Palace halls with her laughing when she was young.

She bit her lip, suddenly having second thoughts about this whole trip. Maybe she should never have come here.

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Leia S. hands out blankets. Leia O. is granted an audience with the Queen.

I hope that you are all safe and dry!
“Her Majesty the Queen will see you now.”

Leia’s heart jumped, and seemed to lodge itself somewhere in her throat, leaving just a radiating tingle of excitement in her chest.

It took all of her restraint to keep herself from running into her mother’s throne room, up the dias, and into her arms.

She wanted to bury herself in her mother’s arms as she always desired when upset. To rest her head against her mother’s pulmonodes, and let their golden glow wash away the rest of the world around her. No, she needed to bury herself in her mother’s arms, and trust in her ability to hug all of Leia’s troubles away.

Instead she walked into the familiar room slowly, and with all the poise her tutors and aunts had done their best to drill into her. It was almost painful to look at her mother, see her sitting there whole and healthy as if the past few nightmarish months had never happened. To dull the pain Leia forced herself to focus not on her mother herself, but the two golden thrones on the dias instead. The empty one her father would have occupied had he been on-world, and her mother’s own.

The throne Leia had always believed would one day be hers, that she had focused her entire life around being worthy of one day occupying.

Whenever Leia did allow herself to look at the woman seated on the golden throne, she saw that her mother had schooled her face into an impassive mask. She had always envied her mother’s ability to be so put together and perfect when in public. Leia had tried and failed to learn how to mirror her mother in this, but had found much like bookkeeping and accounting, it was a part of the queenly duties she could not fully master.

Leia felt her fingers and toes start to feel slightly numb, her body entering something of a state of shock. The part of her that was still in denial about her parents’ deaths was comforted, but the increasingly large part of her that had come to accept that she would never see them again was sending out alarms.

She knew, rationally, that when she returned to her dimension she’d have to start the grieving process all over again. That in terms of her own mental health and ability to cope with being orphaned at the young age of 19, this could not be healthy.

Most of her did not care.
How many nights had she dreamed of this? Of simply seeing her mother again, of talking with her? How many mornings had she woken only to have to discover all over again that her mama and papa were gone? A terrible truth she could never accept.

Breha watched her, and Leia wished her mother wasn’t quite so good at being queen, that her mask would slip just a little and let Leia see what she was truly thinking. She bowed, sure that in the eyes of those present her bow was all wrong for the situation. After all as far as they knew she was not a Crown Princess well past her Day of Demand, one who had long since fulfilled all three of her Challenges and had been properly inducted into the role of Heir. A child come before her parent. Yet in all the ways that actually mattered she was.

Breha nodded, and Leia buzzed with excitement as she recognized that particular nod as an acceptance of her greeting, of her mother informally claiming her as her child here before her court. There was an echoing murmur from those gathered, surprise at both the greeting and its acceptance.

Understanding dawned, and Leia realized that all of this, the formal setting, use of the ceremonial throne room, it had all been for her benefit, had all been staged so her mother could claim her. Then she spoke, spoke in that voice Leia could never forget. The voice that had sung her Mirrorbright every night, easing her to sleep until she finally reached an age where she felt she could take on the monsters that lingered in the dark. The voice that had taught her so much of what it meant to be a leader, to balance life and duty, had told her stories and scolded her when she misbehaved and praised her when she triumphed. The voice that represented everything that was home. The voice of her mother.

“Who is this who disturbs the queen in her seat of power?”

Leia’s heart swelled, she wanted to laugh, to cry, to scream. What was she doing? Did she really want to… formally place this version of Leia as an heir on the throne? No… perhaps to just acknowledge that she had a claim to that title? Leia was not sure.

“It is I, Leia Organa, princess of Alderaan. I come before you to…” for a moment Leia was not sure how to proceed, they were stitching together pieces of multiple formal rituals, and her role here was so uncertain. She did not regret declaring her true name and title, those were facts too precious to deny “...to hear how you judge me, my mother and queen.”

There was a loud response to this from those gathered. Confusion and shock swelled and swirled over everyone, making Leia slightly dizzy. Yet through it all her mother smiled, a real smile full of all the warmth and welcome Leia had feared she would not receive.

When she spoke her voice cut easily through the crowd, “I wish to speak to these two Jedi in private.”

While the majority of the refugees had boarded transport ships, the ship’s hold was still packed. Soldiers and civilians were crammed together, some chatting with one another, others staring morosely at the walls.

What Leia had not been expecting was the smell. A large number of mistreated unwashed beings of various species were crammed into a small space together, and the result was not pleasant. The sour smell of urine hung in the air, mixing with the almost sweet undercurrent of stale sweat, and her eyes began to slightly water. Her heart broke all over again for all that had been taken from the assembled crowd, and she hoped these people would soon be able to access the dignity of proper hygiene, washed clothes, and adequate food.
She must have made some sort of face when she first stepped into the hold and was hit with the scent in there, because Sana shot her a disapproving look.

As Leia handed out blankets, everyone seemed to stare at her. She heard whispers, then one very brave young Human latched onto her leg.

She noted that they were far too skinny, covered in grime, their hands covered in calluses no child should have, and their clothes were threadbare and torn.

Just this morning this child had been a slave. Now they were free.

“Are you really Princess Organa?” The child’s wide innocent brown eyes gazed up at her, and Leia did not know how to answer the question. No, she really was not, but Alliance High Command had made it clear they didn’t want too many people to know of the switch. So instead she just smiled and knelt so she was at the youngling’s eye level.

“You can call me Leia. What is your name?”

The youngling simply gazed at her with wide eyed wonder, eyes flickering several times between her lightsaber and back up at her.

“Are you a Jedi?”

“Zal! Zal, let go of the Princess’ leg!” The voice was strained with exhaustion, stress, and panic.

The owner of said voice was a Human man. Under the layer of grease and dirt he was covered in sores, and malnutrition had warped his frame.

The child, Zal, immediately let go of Leia’s leg and began to move towards him.

Leia reached out, placing one of her hands on the child’s shoulder. She looked into those beautiful dark brown eyes, and without thinking answered the question. “Yes, yes I am.”

The child stared at her.

The man stared at her.

So did all the troops in the hold, and all the people they had rescued.

Sana, pointedly, was still handing out blankets. She didn’t even spare a glance in Leia’s direction, and Leia decided she really liked the woman.

“Yes!” Zal sounded shocked, like this was a level of heroism that was impossible to imagine.

Leia nodded. “Really.”

Zal shoved aside some of the rags that made up their clothes, revealing an old and dirty strip of red cloth hastily tied underneath. It meant something to Zal, to the refugees and soldiers in the room. Leia could tell that it had significance from how everyone watched, how mouths tightened with understanding.

Leia wished she too knew what it meant.

Zal smiled. “Papa said to trust in the Force! No matter what, we trust the Force!”

The man who had called after Zal earlier now grabbed at one of the child’s shoulders, shoving them
back towards him. “I am so sorry about this, I’ll be sure to-”

Leia cut him off. “No, no there is nothing to apologize for. Are you Zal’s father?”

“One of them, yes.”

Leia smiled. “You have a wonderful child. So brave, and so strong.”

The man smiled back, hesitant. “Thank you.” He bit his lip, curiosity overtaking common sense.

“What you said… it was true? You’re a Jedi?”

For a moment she felt the presence she had felt earlier in the cockpit, but it was gone as soon as she processed it was there. She had almost thought she had seen something flickering in the corner of her eye when she had felt that, but there was nothing there. She blinked back her confusion, and composed her face into calm serenity.

“Yes.”

One of the soldiers let out a whistle, a low and long note.

She could see how much this meant to those gathered, how much it had meant to the child. Yes, announcing this publicly would create complications, especially for the other her once they switched back, but Leia found that she did not really care. The Jedi were dead in this universe. Dead and long gone. It wasn’t right, the effect their absence had on the people of the galaxy.

As the others on the ship stared, Sana dropped another stack of blankets into Leia’s hands, smirking. “Yeah yeah, you’re very impressive. Doesn’t mean you don’t have a job to do.” Forget like, she kind of loved Sana.

Since none of the people she was handing blankets to seemed to want to talk with her, just gape in awe and murmur amongst themselves, Leia justified her reveal to herself as she worked.

The Jedi represented many things, including the hope of a peaceful Galaxy.

After all, had it not been the Jedi who’d emerged as the very first protectors of the galaxy after hyperspace travel was discovered? Had it not been the Jedi who’d waged war with the Sith for ten thousand years, keeping the people safe from their evil? Had it not been the Jedi who’d defeated the Sith a thousand years prior, creating the peacetime conditions that allowed the Galactic Republic to form and flourish? Had it not been the Jedi who’d devoted themselves to ensuring the Force would be with the people of the Republic?

The Jedi were symbols as much anything else, symbols that the Force smiled upon the people of the Galaxy, and had not abandoned them.

Yet for the people of this timeline, they were also a distant memory.

Leia wanted, needed, to give them their hope back. She was sure her counterpart would understand.

The room cleared out, leaving Leia and Ahsoka standing alone before Leia’s mother.

Leia was still not sure if she would be able to talk to the real Breha Organa, the loving kind and funny woman who loved to pilot ships and practice martial arts or if she’d get the dedicated and proud Queen devoted solely to the rule of her planet.
“The people neither need nor want to know who you really are, Leia.” She used to remind Leia as she would run her hand over her braids. “All those wonderful things that make you my dearest girl are important, but not needed when acting in an official role.”

Leia’s mom stood from her throne, and began to walk down the dais to where the other two women were waiting.

It took an incredible amount of Leia’s control not to throw herself at her.

Ahsoka reached out to her, via their bond, sending her a wave of strength and reassurance. No matter what happened, Ahsoka would be there for her. It was a gesture of solidarity Leia appreciated.

“My husband contacted me last night, and told me your story.” Breha was now close enough Leia could smell her perfume. A blend of flowers from the Isatabith rainforest, a scent lost to the galaxy along with everything else Leia had ever loved. Her mother stopped, standing so close. “Welcome home.” Then, in a heartbeat her mother was holding her, and Leia felt the last of her restraint vanishing.

She was home.

Home, on Alderaan, home in the Royal Palace, and home in her mother’s arms.

_Leia, I’m going to let you and your mom have some privacy now. If you need me I’ll be by the ship._ Distantly she heard the sound of the throne room’s doors opening and closing as Ahsoka left.

Leia Organa relaxed in the comfortable warmth of her mother’s embrace, and for the first time in months - months that seemed to span lifetimes - she let all of her walls drop.

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Leia S. learns what that presence she keeps sensing is, Leia O. reconnects with her mom.

The formal ceremonial Alderaanian lines in this chapter were taken from Leia: Princess of Alderaan.
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Thank you again to rosebride and sethnakht for betaing this!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

They were still distributing blankets when Leia first saw the strange white shape lingering in the corner of her eye.

What was even weirder was how the Force swelled with that strangely familiar presence when she saw it, before whatever it was vanished.

She saw it again, when Sana had shoved her back towards the cockpit with her once they ran out of blankets to hand out.

Then again when they dropped back into real space.

She honestly had no idea what was going on.

By the time they were back on Horox III Leia was half certain she could make out the blurry outline of a Human, or near-Human, figure.

She wanted to know if the stress of her situation was getting to her, or if there was really something there in the Force, just out of her sight.

Hopefully Luke would be able give her his opinion on this soon. He would be able to tell her if she was just imagining things.

Unfortunately it would apparently be a long while before the fighter squadrons returned to base.

To distract herself from waiting for Luke to return, she focused on helping the people who had returned to Horox III with them.

Of the people they had rescued, about half of the adults wanted to join the Rebel forces. The rest had been eager to move to one of the Rebellion's secure farming sites, and live a pastoral life as farmers among other refugees from across the Galaxy, with only a handful of those rescued opting to strike out on their own.

Some of the refugees had seemingly latched onto her. They had mentioned to those who were screening them that they wanted to stay at whatever place she was based out of, and fight alongside her. Moreover she could feel the weight of several gazes on her as she moved around the hanger, and recognized the swiftly ending whispered conversations she kept encountering as people talking about her. Neither the refugees nor the troops she had been with understood that she was a different person from her counterpart, and she knew stories were already spreading across the base that the famous Princess Leia Organa was a Jedi.

General Madine had been giving her rather distressed looks, yet so far Leia was doing a great job of avoiding actually talking to him.
She really was not looking forward to the conversation to come with the full Council.

There was that lingering presence again. She really wished whatever it was would just show itself and get it over with.

She took that thought back immediately, when she reached out towards the disturbance and this time she actually recognized it. Uncle Obi?

By the Force, what was going on?

Uncle Obi's presence didn't fade this time. And when she turned her head towards where she sensed him… it was like he was a hologram, yet his image was strangely stable. He wasn't flickering at all.

She also was sure there wasn't a holocaster placed in that part of the hanger.

He looked bad. His robes were disheveled, his beard unkempt, and he seemed decades older than when she had seen her Uncle a week ago. His expression was full of tragedy mixed with overwhelming hope.

They maintained eye contact for a bit, and then he gave her a small and apologetic smile and vanished.

Oh no. Nope. He was not pulling a vanishing act on her. If this universe's Obi-Wan Kenobi was anything like her Uncle could get when he felt upset, he'd probably hide out for well over a week and then slink on back apologizing about whatever it was he thought he had done.

If anyone knew what had happened in this timeline's kriffed up past, it'd be her Uncle.

As his presence faded she focused on him as hard as she could, and managed to establish a bond. The action surprised him, and his image suddenly returned, and gained more clarity to it. Leia had never encountered a holorecorder that worked like this, what was going on? Even weirder, no one else seemed to see him, and he felt like he was in the room with her.

Where are you? Why hadn't she heard from him before now, and why wasn't he here training Luke?

The Force was thick with sadness. It only seemed to build the longer he stared at her.

Uncle Obi, as she called him by the only name she'd ever used for him, the sense of sadness swelled.

Please Uncle Obi, can't you tell me anything?

He looked so wistful. "It is true then, isn't it. You come from another world. Ah, there was a time when I would have thought such things impossible, but I know better than to think that of anything these days, don't I."

A soldier walked right through his image, which was considerably rude, and no one around them reacted as he spoke.

None of this made any sense.

"You aren't a hologram, are you?" A smattering of nearby soldiers who had been ignoring their conversation turned to see who she was talking to.

"A hologram?" He laughed. "No, I am afraid I am nothing so mundane. No no, I am a ghost."

Leia blinked, and then began to laugh. Sure, after alternative universes and her father being a Sith Lord, why fragging not just toss thousands of years of understanding about how the Force works
right out the airlock?

"Yes, this does go against the Order's entire understanding of theology rather dramatically doesn't it?" He pulled at his beard as he spoke. "Hmmm, maybe it'd be best if we found somewhere more private to talk."

She nodded, confused. There was no question that this was truly Obi-Wan Kenobi, there was no way to spoof a Force presence to this extent. But death meant becoming One With the Force. Letting go completely, attaining peace, achieving total harmony with the Force. How could one both be One With the Force and retain their individuality? It went against everything Leia had ever believed to be true.

She trusted Uncle Obi, and knew that if he had discovered a technique that enabled this, it must be firmly within the Light.

She ignored the voice in the back of her head, the one that sounded suspiciously like Aunt 'Soka, that reminded her she trusted her father too, and he was apparently a Sith Lord in this timeline.

Obi-Wan's … ghost, led her into an empty briefing room, and then seemed to sit on one of the seats within. He gestured to one of the other seats, and Leia plopped into it, eager to finally get some answers.

Remember a time when you came home after a long time away. How it felt to return to a place of comfort. To see your loved ones once more.

If you have a positive connection to your parents, I wish for you to reflect on a time you were upset, and one of your parents was there to help. You may have been a child or even an adult at that time, but regardless I am sure there was something about that particular set of arms, that exact voice, the precise way you were held.

If you do not have a positive connection to your parents, I'd like for you to think about your chosen family. The people you know you can rely on whenever you are down. The ways they make you feel seen, feel heard. The feeling of relief when they confirm they have time to talk. An evening spent together relaxing and reflecting, reveling in each others presence.

Or perhaps, you are most comfortable thinking of this situation from a different perspective. The joy bursting from your heart as you hold your child in your arms, the wonder when you observe something as simple as the rise and fall of their chest.

I hope that at least one one memory has come to mind for you already, but if not try to think of the animals you have known. The comforting rumble of a content purr, a happily wagging tail.

Reflect on these moments of vulnerability and trust.

On that indefinable feeling that can only come from being with someone whose very presence represents comfort in its purest form.

Think of the warmth and calm in your chest, the certainty that you are safe and loved, the familiarity and love swirling together to create a moment of pure resonate fullness.

This is how Leia Organa felt, as she rested in her mother's arms.

It was a moment of pure intimacy, a child resting her head against her mother's breast.
It was home, it was love, and it was above all else, private.

I wish I could tell you exactly what Breha Organa muttered into Leia's ear as the young woman cried. What words Leia choked out between her sobs.

I can not tell you what it was about the way Breha's hand rested on Leia's cheek that made it a gesture no other could ever replicate.

What it was Leia did that left no doubts in Breha's mind that this was indeed her child. She may not remember raising her, she may even know her as the child of another, but there was no denying that this was a Daughter of Alderaan, and more importantly her daughter.

Most of the promises Leia made, concerning the Alderaanian survivors as well as her own future, those were to never be repeated outside of that day.

In fact everything that happened in that room would only ever be shared with one being who was not present.

Later, much later, after Leia had returned to her own timeline and Breha could reflect on all that happened from the comfort of distance, then she would tell all of it to her husband Bail. Neither of them would ever speak of it with anyone else. Not even their daughter Winter.

There are some things in this world that are too powerful to be captured.

The love between a child and parent, when that relationship is true and good and right?

I do not know how to explain it, how to spell it out. It is too large to contain, too personal to expose.

Which is why, when it comes to what occurred between Leia and Breha in that throne room, the following short glimpse is all you will ever know:

At some point Breha Organa had said, "Leia, you go and show them why Alderaanians make the best Jedi. Show them how our love of nature, music and art translates directly to being open to the Force." She smiled, and smoothed back some hair that had gotten loose from Leia's braids. "I want you to know how impressed I am with you. Do you know how long I have tried to get my advisors to allow me to contact the Alderaanians on Espirion? How long that argument has fallen on closed minds, leading nowhere? Yet you tell me that in the wake of the unimaginable tragedy of our planet's loss, you successfully reunified our people. Even with Alderaanian purists there to dissuade and undermine your efforts, you triumphed. You are amazing Leia, and even having just met you, I am so proud of you."

Leia's heart felt so full, and she did not fight against the tears leaking from her eyes. It was ok, her mother was here to wipe them away for her.

"Leia, there is something else I'd like you to do. For me."

Leia nodded. "Anything mama, whatever it is you need."

Breha looked this child who so clearly was hers and Bail's, bore so many obvious signs of them and their love in how she carried herself, how she spoke, what she stood for. She squeezed one of the girl's hands tight in her own.

"Please, do not reject Padmé and Anakin for my sake or your father's. I know you may think letting them into your heart is a rejection of us, of our status as your true parents and of our love, but sweetheart, those things are far too strong and real to be challenged by getting to know where you
came from. This time here, in this universe, think of it as a gift and opportunity to learn and experience things you otherwise would not have."

Leia frowned. "Would you say this to... " it hurt to think of someone else living her life, but she knew there had to be a girl who had been adopted in her stead, so she took in a breath and pressed on "...to your own heir?"

Her mother nodded.

"If Winter's birth parents returned from the dead and asked to spend time getting to know her, I would not hesitate telling her to treasure what she could of that experience. Leia, I am not telling you to love them, consider them your family, or even like them, just to simply give them a chance. You will never know who they were if you do not." Her voice took on a self incriminating tone, "Of course the choice is ultimately yours. If you do not want to know them, that is your right. No one, not even me, can tell you who to let into your life. You know that. But if your hesitancy involves worrying about there being any doubt about the truth that is your family, there is no mistaking the fact you are ours." Breha paused, watching the joy blossom across Leia's face. "Leia, I know Padmé well, she is one of Bail's dearest friends, and she is a woman worth knowing. I would not be saying this if I did not already know her. She is a good woman."

The girl nodded, and drew her mother into another tight hug.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Leia S. chats with the ghost of Ben Kenobi, Leia O. realizes she can't stay here with her mother forever.

I really hope the stylistic departure worked in this chapter! Trying to figure out how to capture the feel of being with a person who you love with all your being and is a singular point of comfort and home was really not easy, and I almost feel like I took an easy way out? I more than understand if it didn't work for anyone reading this!
Chapter Notes

Sorry for the late update.

I did not want to post this before I was able to finish *From a Certain Point of View* and make slight adjustments to this fic to ensure canon compliance.

Since I will be at NYCC for the rest of the week, I won't have the chance to finish editing the parts that need the most tweaking until Monday. I started the process already, but am sure there is still more that needs to be adjusted.

If after next week there is anything you see that still needs editing to be canon compliant, please let me know. I really worry that I am not going to catch everything.

Thank you to tumblr user Sethnakht for betaing this chapter.

They stared at each other for a long time. Finally Uncle Obi broke the silence. “I am almost afraid to ask about the world you come from, young one, but based on what little I’ve observed I’ll hazard that the Order is doing well there?”

Leia nodded. “Yes, the Order is stronger than ever - as is the Republic.”

He stroked at his beard, it was such a familiar habit of his she could not help but smile as she watched. “Ah, I am heartened to hear there is a universe out there where they are both flourishing.” He made eye contact with her, the blue of his eyes strangely washed out by the blue-white light that made up his being. “May I ask who your Master is young Padawan?”

“I am apprenticed to Ahsoka Tano, a Knight of the Order.” Leia noticed that Obi-Wan was shocked by this fact. He hid it well, but she knew him too well to miss it.

He gave her a tight lipped half smile, the corners of his eyes crinkled with affection. “I am sure Ahsoka makes for an exemplary Knight and teacher.”

Leia nodded, and then even though he had not asked, “just as you are the perfect Master for my brother.”

The wave of sadness she had felt earlier returned, washing over the room. Heavy and thick. He did not respond to her statement, other than to look away from her, gazing at some unknown point in the distance.

She had waited long enough to start to ask questions.

“Uncle Obi, how are you here? How can you be here now if you are One With the Force?”

He nodded, and gave her that half smile of his once more. “The means of retaining oneself in the Force was discovered by my old Master, Master Qui-Gon Jinn, and then shared with both myself and Master Yoda.”
“Master Yoda? Is he also able to manifest himself in this manner? Could I talk with him as well?”

He laughed. “No, no, Master Yoda is not dead quite yet. To see him you’ll have to travel to the Dagobah system.”

“He’s alive? Maybe… maybe he can train Luke!”

He nodded. “Yes, yes, I agree, that is a very good idea. He’ll be very happy to see you. Very happy indeed.”

She wasn’t alone! Uncle Obi was with her, even if he was more translucent than she was used to, and apparently Master Yoda was here as well.

She’d remember to ask him more about how this was even possible, how one could both join with the Force and remain who they had been in life. She had no doubts about the nature of this strange new discovery, if both Uncle Obi and Master Yoda were willing to practice it, there was no way it could belong to the Dark Side. Yet as much as she wanted to know more about how this technique of his was even possible, she knew that would lead to a rather long conversation and there were far more pressing matters to discuss.

“Uncle Obi, how did my father fall?”

His smile vanished, and the Force pulsed with agony. “I thought you might ask.” He shook his head, just slightly. “I have asked myself that question many times over the years, and have never arrived at a truly satisfactory answer. It was his choice of course, his and no one else’s, but what led him to that choice…” He was lost somewhere in the past, his eyes not seeing the room they were in, or her there with him, “all I can say with certainty is that I missed much of what Anakin was going through, and was not there for him when he needed me to be.”

From what Leia had seen in her vision, he had done everything he could to bring her father back to the Light. Besides, if someone fell it made no sense to blame the people around them. To do so would be to suggest that any being in the Galaxy ever was responsible for their loved ones turning on them, hurting them.

Still, she wanted to hear more of his perspective on what had happened. She’d ask Master Yoda for his as well when she and Luke traveled to see him.

“I saw some things, when I held his lightsaber. I was hoping you could tell me what it was I saw?”

He nodded.

“The younglings, how many did he kill?”

“All of them. It was how I learned what had happened to him, viewing the security footage after discovering the bodies left strewn through the Temple.”

Leia sucked in a breath, but pressed on through her horror. “My mother. I… I saw him hurt her.”

He hung his head, pained to recall this memory. “I had thought she would be the one being he would not destroy, even in the throes of the Dark Side. I told her what he had done, what he planned to keep on doing, and she insisted on confronting him, alone. It was my fault really, both her chasing after him the way she did and…” he trailed off, and when he continued his voice was pitched low. "I wonder if she might have lived had I not been there, or if my presence is what allowed you and Luke to survive. I do not know.”
She knew, as anyone who knew Uncle Obi knew, that he had a tendency to blame himself for all the Galaxy’s problems. She had not thought his self blame problem was quite *this* bad.

“She knew, as anyone who knew Uncle Obi knew, that he had a tendency to blame himself for all the Galaxy’s problems. She had not thought his self blame problem was quite *this* bad.

“Unless you placed his hand around her throat and ordered him to choke her, then you cannot claim any blame for what happened between them. Force, even then it wouldn’t be your fault, the responsibility for a being’s actions is theirs alone.”

He didn’t seem to listen, he was still staring in the distance, lost. “I fought him after that, yet I was not strong enough to finish it. I left him, injured and without hope, and went to get Padmé the medical attention she needed. We lost her not long after that. She died almost immediately after you were born.”

Leia did not know how to feel about her birth being the last thing her mother ever experienced. “Was she the one who decided Luke and I should be separated?”

“No, that was Master Yoda’s idea. To keep the two of you safe, from your father and Palpatine alike. The era of the Sith was dawning all around us, and we did not know what the future had in store for anyone, much less the children of Darth Vader himself.”

She frowned, hating how that sounded. “My father is Anakin Skywalker, not that masked Sith monster.”

He nodded. “Yes, they are far too different to truly be seen as one and the same. Which is why I told Luke that Vader murdered your father, since in truth he took all that was good within Anakin and destroyed it.”

“He’s a slaver, Uncle Obi. How…” her voice faltered, and she paused to gather herself, “how can he do that?”

He sat there, silent in contemplation for a long while. Finally he looked at her, pain in his eyes. “I cannot understand why Vader does the things he does. I do know however that he is not Anakin Skywalker, not any longer. He’s more machine now than man - “

Leia cut him off. “What does having prosthetics or being within a life support suit have to do with anything, Uncle Obi? He is not less of a man simply because of them, and I sure hope you are not suggesting that beings who require cybernetic aid are somehow lesser than those who do not!”

His eyes widened with surprise, then he let out a dry chuckle. “Ahsoka’s Padawan indeed. Yes young one, you are correct, that was wrong of me to say. Regardless Vader is twisted and evil, and nothing of who he once was remains.”

But that was not true. Leia had sensed it buried deep within him, small and almost fully snuffed out, but she had sensed it all the same. Anakin Skywalker was alive, hidden away trapped in his own mind. Uncle Obi’s pain and grief seemed to render it impossible for him to see, to sense. Leia knew he was still in there, somewhere, and she would reach him. Once she did, she’d make sure he engaged in true restitution for his crimes.

If she did not reach him, she’d have to put him out of his misery. Letting him continue to exist and suffer as a Sith was not acceptable, and she knew he could not continue to live so long as he was like this.

Leia, with her mom by her side, left the throne room hours after she had entered it.
Breha’s hand was firmly wrapped around Leia’s own, and Leia kept finding her gaze drawn to the sight of their hands intertwined. She had long since memorized the look and feel of her mom’s warm brown fingers threaded through her own far too pale hand. It was that familiarity that made it so special. So perfect. Something she had believed she’d never get to experience again, and yet here she was, gazing at her mother’s hand holding hers.

They were chatting lightly, and occasionally laughing with each other as they walked.

Leia felt unburdened, free.

There was no Empire, she was home on Alderaan, and her mother and her father were alive and well.

If she just blocked out all the other nonsense of this universe, her being a relative stranger to her parents, the Jedi Order of old demanding she train with them, and her incessant worry about what was going on back home in her absence… it was almost ideal.

But Leia knew she could not play pretend here on Alderaan with her mother forever.

The Rebellion needed her. The Rebellion always needed her, had always called her away from home, and at the end of the day she knew she would never have been satisfied staying on Alderaan anyway. She had always been restless, always desired something more, more than etiquette and tutors and her perfect royal life.

She wanted to preserve this memory before she left. Remember that she was still capable of feeling this sort of joy.

All she had ever been fighting for was the chance to one day return to Alderaan while the galaxy at large existed within a Democracy, and in a twisted way she had gotten her wish.

Sure she would never get to experience this in the universe she was from, live within this joy much longer than during her short time here, but she could take what she learned, both the skills to defeat Palpatine and the lessons about the Republic’s strengths and failings, and take them home with her and use them to tear down the Empire and build a better Republic in its place.

She knew this to be be true, because her mama had told her so. Had told her she believed in her, and that she could do it. Leia wasn’t going to let her mother down.

Ever since she had arrived in this timeline, Leia had been without a plan. She was not used to that, she worked hard to ensure no matter what situation she found herself in she could find a feasible way out. Yet from the moment Ahsoka’s ship had set down on Coruscant the day before, she had been adrift.

Returning home, speaking with her mother, it was grounding her. Helping her find her focus, catch her breath, and figure out exactly what it was she wanted and needed to do next. She knew what she was doing here, what she needed to get out of this experience before she returned home, and she was going to achieve exactly what she set out to do.

Ahsoka and Evaan stood together by the ship, waiting for Leia and her mom. Leia smiled at them both, and felt a wave of joy from Ahsoka as she sensed how at peace Leia was in this moment.

Leaving here was not going to be easy. For all Leia knew, they would find her a way back to her dimension before she’d have another chance to visit. This could truly be her last time ever seeing her home.
Her mom’s hand slipped out of hers. While the professional mask she wore in public was not yet back in place, she would not be as casual and intimate in front of others as she was when alone. It was a reminder that they were in that liminal space between the two worlds, the private one of family where both Leia and her mom could be their true selves, and the public world where it was necessary for them to put their personal selves aside in the interest of the people they served.

Evaan bowed as the two of them drew closer, all proper Royalist manners and supplication. Some things really never changed.

Leia could not help but snort, loudly.

Evaan’s face suddenly became angry, angry in a way Leia normally had to work harder to inspire in her friend.

Right.

She did not think of her as a member of House Organa, just a strange Jedi who the Queen for reasons unknown was treating like a member of her family.

Breha gave Leia an amused look. “Is there a reason you scoff at Captain Verlaine bowing before me?”

Leia figured she may as well bring Evaan in on what was going on. “In the dimension I come from Evaan is one of my closest friends. Plus, as I told you, in our family’s absence the Aldeeranian people elected someone to lead them in our place. That person is Evaan.”

Evaan looked more confused now than angry. “The dimension you come from, Master Jedi?”

Breha spared Leia having to explain her circumstance. “Leia here has traveled to us from another universe. That is why I greeted her as I did Evaan, in her timeline she was adopted into House Organa when she was a baby, and raised as my heir.”

Astonishment chased after the confusion on Evaan’s face, and Leia could not help but smirk at her friend’s expression. It wasn’t everyday that she managed to trip the tall blond up so completely. “Do you mean say I am the Alderaanian Senator, when you call me the elected leader of the people?”

Leia shook her head no, “sadly there is no Senate in my universe, at least not anymore. No, your role and function is to directly guide the Alderaanian people on a daily bases.”

“She is the responsibility of House Organa and House Organa alone! What could have led to there being none left from that great Elder House to lead? How could every single person in the line of succession have been eliminated?”

Right. Everything always led back to that nightmare, didn’t it.

Once again Leia’s mom took on the burden of explaining her circumstance for her. “There was a tragedy in her universe, and Alderaan suffered a tremendous loss. Leia is the only surviving member of House Organa in her world, and she has devoted herself to righting the wrong that was committed against us all. Unfortunately this means she cannot be there to lead our people directly, and requested an election be held to find the best person to lead in her stead. It seems, Evaan, that the people chose you.” Leia admired how deftly her mother danced around the destruction of their beloved planet, finding a way to talk about the tragic event as if it had been something far less devastating than their entire karking planet being blown up.

“Me, your Majesty? I don’t understand any of this, including why my name would be in the running
Leia laughed. “Oh, that part is my fault. I bullied you into it Evaan, because I felt you’d be right for the job.”

The blond woman gave Leia an incomprehensible look. “So in your world, you are my princess? Or, no, if all others from House Organa are dead, that would make you my queen, would it not? Unless you have failed to pass your Challenges.”

Wow. Evaan had such a one track mind it managed to stay on the same trajectory even across different dimensions. Incredible. “No. While I did pass all three of the Challenges, I am not your queen, and never will be. My mother was Alderaan’s last queen, just as I will be its last princess. The Organa line will die with me. If I ever have children I don’t plan on having them carry my name or family line.”

She had not admitted that before, but she knew it was true. She was to be the last Organa. She glanced at her mother, and saw her decision saddened her, but Breha Organa did not say anything to cause Leia to rethink her position.

Yes, it was only right that the House of Organa die alongside the planet they had been entrusted, the failure on Leia’s part to keep Alderaan safe marked the end of the promise they had made to care for their people. She would carry the name with her until the grave, a reminder of what once had been, but the Organa line would end forever with her.

The four of them began to walk across the landing pad towards the ship’s boarding ramp, Leia’s eyes skirting towards the candlewick vines spilling onto the platform. They had always been her favorite flower, their soft golden glow firmly associated with her mother in her mind. As she looked at the bountiful flowers, now so rare in her universe, the finality of this departure hit Leia hard. Would she ever be able to see her mother, any version of her, ever again? See her home? Her heart raced, and she scrambled to think of something to say, some magical combination of words that could possibly be the ones she would never regret.

The words she had said to her mother at the end of their final holocall still haunted her. It had been before they had even left Yavin IV, the Tantive IV was still in the process of docking with the Profundity.

“Mama, please, there is no need to worry. Papa’s on his way home, and I’m just running an errand for him in the Outer Rim. It’ll be fine. I’ll be home before the Equinox, I promise.”

She didn’t want a repeat of that. This was her chance to have a proper goodbye. To say the right words.

If only she could think of them.

Her mother took the matter out of her hands. She drew Leia into another hug, and spoke to her in a steady tone. “You asked me earlier how I judge you. I judge that you have great strength and spirit. That you will bring justice to the galaxy.”

Breha pulled back slightly, to look Leia in the eyes. “Leia, I judge that what happened was not your fault.”

Leia was overcome with gratitude, racked with sobs, and full of love and grief and the impossible desire to stay here in her mother’s embrace forever. To never leave, or even to take her back to her reality with her so they would never ever have to be apart again.
Breha gently pushed Leia slightly back, towards Ahsoka, who squeezed Leia’s shoulders just a tad too tight when she placed an arm around her.

Reality flooded back in, destroying her daydreams. Leia had to leave her mother here. She would have to find a way to accept her absence, to let her go.

Ahsoka led Leia up the ship’s ramp, away from home.

**Chapter End Notes**

Next time: Leia S. and Ben talk about the histories of their timelines, Leia O. and Ahsoka prepare to return to Coruscant.
Hey all, posting this was a super last min. decision, but New York Comic Con so far has reminded me of just how much I adore this fandom. So as overflowing with love for everything Star Wars as I am (and an overabundance of sweat - the cosplay I wore today and will be in again tomorrow is HOT) I just really felt the need to share more of my story with you all ASAP.

<3

Well that and I counted out the chapters and weeks, and figured out when exactly TLJ would be coming out in terms of updates, and I really want to have more than that up before then.

Thank you to tumblr user sethnakht for betaing this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The ghost of Obi-Wan Kenobi was asking her endless questions about the Jedi in her dimension, reacting with sheer wonder and joy whenever she told him even the most mundane facts about their day to day lives.

He hung on to her every word, his expression shifting back and forth between eager astonishment and profound sadness and loss the more she told him about the Order.

He kept asking her to clarify once more that she had indeed just been to the Temple a week ago, that she had grown up among it all, each bit of news she imparted both soothing his grief and exposing it anew.

She had been avoiding talking about the romantic gossip around the Temple, Uncle Obi had never much liked hearing any of that so she cut it out of her accounts for his sake. Then he asked directly about Master Quinlan Vos, and seemed stunned by what she told him.

“He’s truly married to Ventress?”

He looked so much more like the man she knew like this, laughing and smiling.

“What, did they not get together in this timeline?”

“Oh, they certainly did. I had to personally deal with their… relationship, when we thought him lost to the Dark Side. But then Ventress died, and he returned to the Order, and that was that.”

“Did the Order still change the rules regarding attachment?”

His laughter stopped, and he looked at her with astonishment. “Come again?”

Could Ventress dying in this reality really have had such an impact?

“In my timeline after Ventress and Vos killed Darth Tyranus, the Order decided to allow Jedi to form
Uncle Obi looked lost. “They… they killed Count Dooku?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Your father killed Dooku, it was… it was part of him becoming Sidious’ apprentice, I believe. I wasn’t… I didn’t see what happened, had to figure out much of the specifics later with Master Yoda.” He shook his head. “As for attachment, I recall the conversation, yes. Unfortunately the Council never reached the end of that debate, not before Order 66 ended it for us.”

“Order 66?”

He looked terribly sad, wearing the same expression the Uncle she knew in her timeline would whenever he spoke of Satine Kryze and her death. “The start of the dark times. The day the Sith won.” There was a long pause where he stared into the distance, hand on his beard, recalling all he had seen.

“It was the Clones, you see. They had chips in their head. One of the members of Anakin’s 501st, Fives I believe, he tried to warn us.”

Leia recalled the story about Fives, Tup, Ahsoka, and Shaak Ti discovering a plot with the Clones. It was how her Master had earned her Knighthood. She hadn’t really paid much attention to the details of that story, and she regretted that now. Why had it played out differently in this Universe?

“We didn’t listen, and then came the day when the Clones turned on us. We trusted them so completely. They were our friends, our brothers.” His voice caught on the last word. He frowned, and made eye contact with Leia once more.

He seemed so agonized.

“Cody tried to kill me, and somehow… somehow even as I felt the deaths of all my fellow Jedi in the Force, I made it back to the Temple, to the destruction and carnage within. I still wonder how I survived.”

The Clones had killed the Jedi.

She thought then of Rex, kind old Rex who lived on a farm and always had sweets to give her when she saw him. She had told him, more times that she could count, that she wasn’t a youngling anymore, that he didn’t need to give her those treats. He’d always laugh and tell her she needed to savor the growing process and take it slow for him. After all, Clones like him grew far too fast.

Had he killed Jedi in this universe?

What if he had hurt Aunt ‘Soka? They had always had such a close friendship.

Wait…

“Uncle Obi, is Aunt ‘Soka alive? From what I can gather no one seems to have seen her for several years now.”

“I… I do not know. I thought her dead for quite a long time, and was shocked to discover she had survived so long after Order 66. Yes, she wasn’t with the Order at that time, of course, but the Empire cares not for those distinctions. To them all Force-sensitives who are not consumed by the Dark Side are Jedi, regardless of if they have taken vows or ever belonged to the Order.”
“Not with the Order? What?”

‘I’m afraid I must leave discussing what she chose to do for another time young one, I sense that Luke has returned.’

“Uncle Obi, no, please don’t avoid explaining this to me! What did you mean by that? Had she taken the Barash vow or something? Why? What reason could she possibly have to do something like that? Uncle Obi!”

His image started to waver, and she knew he wanted to leave. He was avoiding answering her questions, plain and simple.

Sighing, Leia frowned and cast her senses out to Luke. Luke had just entered the Horox system, and would be back at the Base soon enough.

She could leave and go to meet him now, be waiting for him as soon as he landed, or she could get Uncle Obi to give her some actual answers. She decided she’d rather the latter.

Leia focused on her bond with her Uncle, and tugged on it, tethering him in place. His presence stopped flickering, and his pale white-blue tinted image frowned at her, annoyed.

“I see you’ve found a way to prevent me from leaving, little one.”

“The Jedi Order is Aunt ‘Soka’s life. I don’t understand. She would never walk away from the Order.”

He shook his head as he gazed at her. “Anakin’s power, Padmé’s determination, and trained with Ahsoka’s stubbornness. You dear child, are truly something out of a dream.”

“You’re still avoiding the question.”

“Am I now? What question was that again?”

This had to be a test of her patience.

He probably wanted to know how she held to the Code under pressure, or something like that.

Well if it was a test she wasn’t going to fail it.

She’d stay calm through it all, even if she was far too exhausted at this point to deal with any of this.

“What did you mean when you said that Aunt ‘Soka was no longer with the Order when Order 66 took place?”

Guilt surged through the room, and the ghost could not seem to meet her eyes with his own. “She was…falsely accused of treason following an attack against the Temple and consequently was cast out of the Order.” Leia gasped, and he frowned, continuing, “in fact the military tribunal wanted her to be executed, but she broke out of prison and set out to find the one who had actually committed the crime for which she was convicted.”

Uncle Obi was clearly incredibly uncomfortable with this tale, and Leia could not blame him. Everything about it was just plain awful, and as a member of the Council he should be ashamed.

“After the real perpetrator was found she was not only offered a place back within the Order but her full Knighthood as well, and she refused both.”
He finally made eye contact with her. “I am sure you can see why I did not wish to recall any of this. It is far from something I am proud of. Ahsoka Tano was an exemplary Jedi, and should never have been made to deal with any of that.”

“When… when did this take place?”

“Not long before the purges… before Anakin fell.”

“Was that the last time they saw each other?”

“Oh, oh no. She rejoined the GAR not long after, not as a Jedi of course, but she was considered too valuable a fighter to be let go. No, Anakin last saw her on the very day Palpatine staged his kidnapping, on Mandalore. She was in charge of the campaign against Maul there, and he had been checking in on her when we got the comm about needing to stage a rescue.”

“She led the battle against him there in my universe as well. Only as a Jedi Knight, not… not as someone who had left the Order behind. That’s where she was when she first found out about my brother and I, and then traveled to be at our birth.”

“I am afraid she was not present for that event in this universe, little one. No, it was just myself, Master Yoda, Bail Organa... and your mother of course. On Polis Massa. Oh, but you were both so small. I wish… I wish it could have been a more joyous event, but I can say with certainty that you were loved. Both in that moment on that day, and after.”

He gave her a broken smile, full of far more sorrow than joy. “Now I am afraid I should depart this time for real. Luke is about to land his fighter, and you should be there to greet him. This is not a goodbye, for we shall talk more later. Know that I am here if you need me, young Padawan, I always will be.”

Coruscant loomed large in front of them.

Leia hadn’t said anything since she had left her home behind, and Ahsoka had respected that.

The fantasy was going to have to end. They’d land on Coruscant and Leia would have to deal with those insistent strangers treating her like a person she wasn’t, expecting her to treat them like family. They were not her family.

She had accepted that she needed to learn from Ahsoka. That she could learn things here that would be vital for securing victory for the Rebellion.

She did not know if she could be nice to the people who had given birth to her.

She wouldn’t normally feel bad about it, but her mother had asked her to be nice to them.

Which meant she now felt awful that there were few beings she would like to interact with less than either of her bioparents.

Ahsoka could sense that she was uncomfortable, and kept giving her concerned looks and comforting nudges in the Force.

Leia knew she meant well, but if Ahsoka didn’t knock it off she was going to scream.

“Hey, Leia, you don’t have to stay with them. Or even see them if you don’t want to.”
Leia glared at the older woman. “What?”

“Oh come on, it’s obvious what has you so upset.” Ahsoka gave her a small smile. “If you don’t want to see them, I’ll support you.”

“Where can I stay instead? Padmé was right last night, if I try to go elsewhere reporters will be all over it.”

“You can stay with me. Your counterpart, she has a room in my quarters since she’s my Padawan, but she never actually stays there. It’s basically just an empty room with some never actually worn Jedi robes in your size in it. Plus, no one will question you staying there because, well, you are my Padawan.”

Leia considered it. “Ok.” She nodded. “Ok. I think that will actually work.”

“Wizard! Let me just holo my wife and let her know.” Ahsoka pressed some buttons on the dash, and the holo flared to life. A Mirialan woman, whose diamond shaped tattoos communicated… Leia furrowed her brow in thought. She had studied various tattoo cultures when she was young, why couldn’t she remember what those tattoos meant?

The tiny blue image of the Mirialan smiled. “Oh! Are you coming back to the Temple, Ahsoka?”

Ahsoka laughed in response. “That I am! Hey, how would you feel if Other-Leia stayed with us for however long she’s here?”

The woman blinked in confusion. “She doesn’t want to stay at the Chancellor's apartment?”

“Nah, she likes me best.” Ahsoka gave Leia a winning grin, before turning back to her wife on the holo. “So, you ok with my new Padawan using those empty Padawan quarters we have?”

The woman in the hologram nodded. “Of course. You know I’ve always felt it improper for a Padawan to stay anywhere but in quarters adjacent to their Master’s.”

Ahsoka laughed. “I wanted to make sure first, they are your quarters too.’

The woman in the hologram’s only response was to continue smiling, before suddenly remembering something that clearly was of great interest to her. “I almost forgot! I’ve been combing the Archives to find anything that might help us understand what happened, and I think I actually found something!” Her excitement deflated a little, but she went on. “Well, it’s barely a something, but it’s far better than nothing at all. It’s a start, and might help us know what direction to go in as we continue to investigate the situation.”

“Really? That’s amazing! You’re amazing. I can’t wait to hear more.”

“I’ll show you what I found when you arrive back home.”

“We’re already in the Coruscant System, so that will be soon.” The two exchanged some brief goodbyes before Ahsoka flicked off the holo and turned to Leia. “There, no need to worry, you have a place to stay where you can avoid Skyguy and Padmé to your heart’s content.”

Ahsoka tilted her head slightly to the side, her montrals and lekku dipping with the action. “Although they do both know where my quarters are, and will probably come looking for you.”

Leia smiled. “What’s her name? If I’m going to be staying with both you and your wife I should know a bit about her.”
“Oh! She’s Jedi Master Barriss Offee. She works in the Temple Archives and is on the Council of First Knowledge. Oh, the Archives are where we keep historical records, holocrons, that sort of thing. If you ever want someone to teach you about the Code or the history of the Order, she’s the one to talk to. She’s really into stuff like that.” The cockpit vibrated with the strength of Ahsoka’s feelings towards her wife.

Leia sank back in her seat, ready to land and hopefully get some rest.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: We return to 19 BBY in the alternate universe for a second Interlude.
Chapter Notes

Note: This chapter has multiple segments from the perspective of a person dealing with a variety of postpartum complications. If this is something that will trigger you, it is possible to enjoy and understand the rest of the story without reading this chapter. Please take care of yourself.

So uh, how about that trailer, huh? I don't know about all of you, but I'm feeling inspired to post a chapter!

Thank you again to Sethnakht for betaing this!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sheev Palpatine was dead.

Mas Amedda watched the holonews in shock, watching as they replayed on a loop the footage of the Jedi general slaughtering the Chancellor at the opera.

Of course Amedda knew why Skywalker had done what he had, or at least part of the reason why, he was after all in on the plan to reform the Galactic Republic into a new and far more efficient Galactic Empire. He just had never anticipated that their plans would end in this way, Sheev had always seemed far too crafty to fail when this close to the power he had craved.

There was another banging knock at Mas’ door. He’d turned the ringer on his holosystem off after the news had first broken, and turned off all his comms.

He needed to think of a way to spin this before he did anything.

He had served as Vice Chair for two Supreme Chancellors now, always the one doing the important work of maintaining order and decorum in the Senate as the older Humans stood and listened merely looking important. Finis Valorum, well he had been weak, but Palpatine had promised to change things, had actually been doing heavy lifting and was going to make things better. Bring the Galaxy in line.

It was a wonder both Valorum and Palpatine had been products of the same political party, that both had supported Supreme Chancellor Kalpana so completely in the past.

Mas itched to make sure the plans for the battle station were well protected, that the death of Palpatine at this critical juncture would not ruin everything they had set in motion. He feared doing so would just jeopardize them further.

Mas Amedda had been the Vice Chancellor for so long now. So very very long.

He needed to write a speech, figure out exactly what it was he was going to say.

The knocking on his door grew ever more insistent.

Soon he would answer it.
Soon he would face the reporters and politicians and bureaucrats on the other side.

Soon he would address the Galaxy, no longer as the Vice anything, no, but for the first time as the Chancellor.

He just had to figure out exactly what he was going to do first.

He had never actually been the one in charge before.

We are broadcasting live from right outside the home of Vice Chair Mas Amedda. Or should we say former Vice Chair Mas Amedda, as the rarely used Emergency Assassination Measures immediately granted him the office of the Chancellor when Supreme Chancellor Palpatine was killed. There has been no statement from Amedda as of yet on the situation but we are expecting to hear one soon…

“…Support the neck! Yes, just like that Pooja, that’s right.”

Padmé was exhausted. It had been only a few days since the twins were born, and not only was she adjusting to motherhood, her entire family had insisted on staying on Coruscant to “help.”

“Ryoo! You need to be gentle with your cousins, please sweetheart, gently.”

It wasn’t helping.

“Padmé, I’m sorry, I need to hand you one of them. The girls don’t seem ready to hold their cousins quite yet it seems.”

She looked up from the news report she was reading, detailing the freefall and chaos the Republic was going through, and for a moment she deeply resented her children.

She should not be here, lying down and resting in her apartment as her sister and nieces cooed over her babies, no, she should be in the Senate trying to end this foolish war once and for all, steering things back to how they should be.

One of her temples was stinging, and she rubbed at it with a sigh.

“Padmé? Did you hear me? Can I hand you one of your children?”

Padmé looked up at her sister’s frowning face, and nodded slowly. She was used to being in demand, used to being needed, but never like this. The twins both just needed so much, and with Anakin still unable to leave the Temple…

Oh, if she could only get out there and do some work, she was sure she could turn this PR nightmare around and help her husband restore his good name. Then at the very least he could come home and help with his children.

Sola handed her a twin, and whichever one it was immediately began to make fussy sounds of hunger. Her family all seemed able to tell her babies apart already, but Padmé could not. She supposed that was yet another way she was already falling short as a mother.

If Anakin was there he’d scold her for thinking like this. She didn’t even know what was wrong with her. After Sola had given birth, both times, she’d never mentioned feeling… almost resentful of the children. Of course unlike her Sola hadn’t been surprised in the delivery room to learn she was carrying double the number of babies she had thought she’d have.
Not for the first time Padmé silently cursed the old Naboo traditions that had caused her to request her healer’s total silence on these matters during her pregnancy.

Padmé wanted to feel the connection, the closeness of motherhood she’d been told about so often - that she had fantasized about for years - but mainly she just felt tired.

It seemed the two newborns had conspired to ensure that whenever one was sleeping the other would be screaming. Even with her entire family’s aid in caring for the twins, Padmé had not been able to sleep much at all since the birth.

She was not only exhausted. She was also worried that she still looked as large as she had when she was 6 months pregnant, that the skin of her distended belly was slightly numb, wiggling strangely whenever she moved, burning when she touched it. Annoyed that she wasn’t where she needed to be. That she was somehow supposed to care for these two tiny beings, and deal with her family hovering over her, and her husband’s absence, and the freefall of the government after her husband had decided to assassinate the Chancellor, and her body felt so strange and unfamiliar and…

It was just all far too much.

She shifted the newborn in her arms, pulling her top aside and granting whichever one it was access to her breast, and returned her attention to the datapad in her hand. She hoped to return to work as soon as she could, and she wouldn’t be able to do that if she didn’t fully understand everything going on in the aftermath of Palpatine’s death.

There was some noise behind her as someone - she didn’t care to check which member of her family it was - leaned against the back of the couch Padmé was lying on.

Obviously whoever it was wanted Padmé’s attention, but she really was not in the mood. She only had so much attention to give, so much time in one day, and she really wanted, no needed, to at least finish one article from the day’s news reports.

A throat cleared somewhere vaguely above her, her mother, and with a sigh Padmé put the datapad down and looked up at Jobal.

“Sweetheart, your father and I were talking, and… Padmé, love, you need to rest.” She held up her hand and shook her head as Padmé began to respond. “I know you think that is what you are doing, but you’ve been worrying yourself sick over the entire situation, and I don’t blame you. But you owe it to yourself and your children to get away from all of this for a while. It’s time you came home. You know we’re happy to stay here with you for as long as you need, but at least consider returning to Naboo with us, please?”

“You can do the exact same fussing over the news as you are doing here, but do it with a beautiful view of the lake,” Sola added. “I mean, you’ve always loved the house in Varykino, wouldn’t you be happier there than here?”

Padmé could not help but smile as she thought of her family’s second home. “I had wanted to give birth there, and it’s where Anakin and I got married.”

“If you’re expecting me to ever forgive you for getting married and neither inviting nor telling me, you’ve got another thing coming.” Sola’s laughing tone and smile made it clear there really was nothing to forgive. In the days since giving birth Padmé had apologized to her family endlessly for keeping her relationship from them, and while there was still hurt there, they had made great strides towards repairing the damages to their relationship as a family.
Jobal reached over and took the baby in Padmé’s arms - the baby had ceased suckling and had begun fussing once more. Jobal gave both of her daughters and all four of her grandchildren a fond smile. “Excellent. We’ll be heading home soon then.”

Padmé frowned. “I don’t want to go anywhere while Ani is still unable to leave the Temple.”

“Oh sweetie, I already spoke to Master Kenobi about all of this, and he thinks we might be able to bring that husband of yours with us. So long as we make sure this whole thing is as low profile as possible,” said Jobal.

“Do you think that is even possible? That the press wouldn’t notice Anakin and myself heading to Naboo? We’ve managed to sneak off before, yes, but I would not be comfortable asking someone to stand in for me in this time of crisis.”

“Padmé, relax. The reporters have no time to focus on anything other than…” Sola stopped, aware that the situation in the government was a topic that only brought her sister stress. “Well… you know. The Chancellor’s death and everything about him that has been exposed since then.”

“Yes, but Sola, both Anakin and myself are central figures in all of this. I mean he’s the one who killed Sheev!”

Sola pursed her lips in thought. “Padmé, do you think you can ask some of your friends to give a speech or something when we plan to go? That way we can be sure that the journalists would be distracted and-“

“Sola! I am a Senator! I can’t ask other politicians to make speeches just for a getaway plan! No. The people need to be told where I am going. I work for them and can not just go off and do whatever I want. I have to be accountable.” She worried tremendously that her past disregard for this fact had been Palpatine’s influence on her political education. She would take care to do better from here on out.

"I’ll ask my office to draft a statement about how I need to stabilize things back home in the wake of the revelations about Palpatine. He was a popular politician for a long time among the Naboo, and even if his policies as of late had been diverging further and further from what our people believe in, even if the recent allegations have been correct and he…” The enormity of what Palpatine had done overwhelmed her. “He was the one responsible for the entire Clone War, if what Anakin says is true and…”

Of course what her husband was saying was true, how could she doubt him in this? But if it was all true then… “Oh we are going to need to find a way to spin this. Sheev was a Sith! The most famous Naboo in the galaxy and he was… this is not good. Our planet and our people are going to carry a dark mark against us now thanks to him.”

She gazed down at the datapad in her lap, “You are right. I really need to go home. There is so much work to be done, and much of it would best be done in Theed.”

“Just promise that you will get some rest in.”

“Mom! Honestly, I am 27 standard years old, I don’t need you to tell me to rest.” Jobal kept staring at her daughter, and finally Padmé sighed. “Yes mom, I promise I will rest up when we are home.”

Jobal’s attention shifted to the baby in her arms, “you hear that Leia? You’re coming home with us. You ready to see your home planet? You and your brother are going to love Naboo, yes you are!”
“What I don’t understand is why no one has done anything about the Jedi Order yet. Literally no one is talking about this anywhere but-”

“Hold on a moment Kastle, you’ve been saying that all week, you can’t say no one is talking about it when you are right here on the HoloNet News every night saying it.”

“Anora Fair, you’re just trying to distract from the important point here! The Jedi are clearly mad with power! Here one of them, General Skywalker, feels comfortable assassinating the Chancellor himself in public, and they closed ranks around him, they’re keeping him from answering for his crimes, and we’re just letting that happen! It is an absolute galactic disaster and the people of the Republic should NOT stand for it!”

Chaos.

Utter chaos.

Among the many many senators who worked to maintain the legislature, there was nothing even approaching agreement.

Some believed that everything the Jedi had come forward with about the Chancellor was true, some did not believe any of it, and the chamber echoed with beings shouting every possible stance between those two and beyond.

Sheev Palpatine was the Sith Lord responsible for everything, he was an enemy of the state chipping away at the very foundations of democracy, he was a good man working to preserve the Republic in a time of crisis, he was a politician just like any other, he was unjustly killed and the Sith explanation was concocted to exonerate his murderer, he wasn’t dead at all… Mon was starting to feel that every single person in the Senate chambers was residing in their very own personal reality. Realities where Palpatine was an entirely different man than she had ever known him to be.

The senator reflected, not for the first time this week, nor the last, on the winter when she had as a teenager decided she had wanted to be a historian rather than a politician. She wondered how this moment would come to be known in the years to come. How she herself would be cast. She could only hope she would be remembered as being on the right side of history.

They were fortunate. Thanks to the Loyalists forming their Delegation of 2,000 just prior to this chaos forming, their voting block was more united than any other. Of the countless political factions that made up the Senate, they alone as a party knew exactly where they stood in regards to Sheev Palpatine, and what sort of policy they would like to advance now in this time when everything the Senate had been working towards was in question. Their hard stance against his policies and support of the Jedi claim that he was a Sith was ironic, given he had once claimed membership in their ranks as well.

Unfortunately despite their current unity they were lacking the presence of their most popular and charismatic speaker.

Fortunately their second most charismatic member was still there. Bail was going to address the Senate, tell them of the concerns the Loyalists had about the policies Palpatine had put forth when he was alive.

Mon read over his speech one final time, adding some last moment tweaks and edits to the copy she had just received from Padmé, en route to Naboo but still remaining engaged in the process.

Kriff, Padmé. Mon couldn’t even imagine what her friend was dealing with.
Padmé and Anakin hadn’t gone public yet with their relationship, but Bail had confirmed all of Mon’s suspicious just the day before. He had handed over the credits she had bet him, and informed her that their friend had given birth to twins. Twins!

Mon hoped Padmé would take a full and long parental leave, and wondered if this was to be her moment. The moment where she changed the direction of her career and stood her ground and gave voice to her convictions before the Senate. This could be when she went from just yet another in a long line of her family serving in the Senate, to a senator who defined and made history.

Following the current had never been what she had gone into politics for. Sure in part she was here because it was simply what people in her family did, but she had actively chosen politics over history, and she had done so because she had believed she could make a difference.

Yet she also felt that she might best serve her cause supporting her fellow senators, lending them her strength and adding her voice to theirs... but not making herself the center of attention.

In another world Mon Mothma reacted to the end of the Republic, to the death of democracy and all she believed in and held dear, by speaking out. She became a vocal presence in the Senate against Palpatine’s policies, willing to risk it all to speak truth to power. In time it would be her impassioned speeches on the Senate floor that defined her place in history.

Here the woman who in countless worlds would be known as the leader of the Rebel Alliance, the first and best Chancellor of the New Republic, contented herself with the research and policy work she loved most.

This was her moment, the moment where, had she chosen to take the reigns on this crisis, she would have risen to the same heights she knew in all those other worlds. The most popular and competent leader almost every dimension had ever known.

Yet Padmé Amidala was alive, and could be counted on to be the charismatic speaker Mon had always known her to be. Bail Organa was here on the Senate floor with her, not at home on parental leave with his newly adopted daughter. Mon Mothma did not need to speak out, did not need to become her party’s backbone in a time of crisis, and so, she did not.

Bail Organa delivered a speech today reaffirming his faith in the Jedi Order, as well as calling for the Senate to use this time of uncertainty to reach out to the Separatists and negotiate for peace. While the Senate did move to open channels of communication with the Confederacy of Independent Systems, is this time of crisis where we have no clear strong and centralized leadership truly the time for these talks to begin…

She had requested a meeting with Queen Apailana as soon as she landed, and the swiftness with which her request was met spoke to how dire the Naboo saw the situation. Padmé knew from both of her two terms as queen, and her many years serving in the Senate, just how long these sort of meetings - outside of her regularly scheduled calls with the queen of course - normally took to get.

The twelve year old queen betrayed none of her emotions as she sat on the throne, under all that heavy makeup and royal robes and wig. Padmé did not miss that makeup. Removing it at night had always taken so very very long, and no matter how hard she had scrubbed there always seemed to be some still stuck to her neck or mashed into her pillows in the morning.

It was odd standing in the throne room in person once more, as opposed to phoning in from Coruscant on a holosystem.
“Senator Amidala, the news we have heard about Sheev Palpatine has been most distressing. What of it can you confirm?”

“Your Majesty, I have long suspected that he had turned away from the values we Naboo hold dear. However I had not been aware of how far he had fallen. The Jedi say he was a Sith Lord, and while I cannot confirm this to be fact, I am inclined to believe them.”

“The Jedi who killed him, it was one of the Jedi who saved our planet during the Trade Federation Invasion, when you held this throne, was it not?”

“Yes, Your Majesty, it was Anakin Skywalker.”

“Do you trust Master Skywalker?”

“Your Majesty.. I…” Padmé swallowed and gathered her thoughts. “Yes, Your Majesty. I trust Master Skywalker is telling the truth, he and Sheev Palpatine were always close, ever since Anakin’s heroics here on Naboo. If he says that Sheev was a Sith, then I take him at his word.”

It didn’t feel right, holding the rest of the pertinent info back from her queen. She glanced around at the many individuals gathered around the throne room. She had worked with all of them for so many years, known many since she was a girl. “For the sake of full disclosure you should know Master Skywalker and I are married.” She had said it outloud. She had never done that before, claimed Anakin as her husband while she was acting in an official role.

She half expected the world would end.

It didn’t.

“Senator Amidala, as you know we need to have an official position on this soon. Sheev Palpatine was not just a member of the Naboo, he was a man we trusted to represent us in Galactic Politics for decades on end. He occupied your very seat in the Senate before you. The possibility that one as respected and known as he was in fact a Sith, it calls into question everything that Naboo has done on the Galactic stage for countless years. It even throws doubt on the judgement of every Monarch he had served, yourself included. None of us are untouched by the stain of association, and we must start immediately to counter this before Naboo falls from its privileged and respected place in the Galaxy. We are inclined to trust and believe the Jedi. Yet in doing so, we must confront the fact that the Naboo trusted a Sith Lord for so long.”

Coming up next on this holonews broadcast, we will be taking a closer look at whether General Skywalker’s actions were treason or an act of self defense. Joining us to discuss this issue will be Admiral Wilhuff Tarkin, Senator Bail Organa, Jedi Master Kit Fisto and from the Office of the now deceased Supreme Chancellor Palpatine we will be joined by Sate Pestage. This is sure to be a conversation you won’t want to miss.

Stepping out of the Royal Palace of Theed, Padmé could not help but reflect on how young Apailana was. She hadn’t even been born yet when the Trade Federation had invaded Naboo!

Where would Padmé’s own children be in twelve years time?

She didn’t want this for them. The heavy costumes, the heavier expectations. She wanted them to able to enjoy their childhoods, not feel confined by duty at so young an age.

She had not thought of her children’s future since she had given birth, the surprising reality of twins...
putting a temporary halt to all her many imagined plans. She sighed, feeling some of the tension she had been holding since she had become a parent drain out. Perhaps her ability to be a mother was not damaged after all.

Padmé walked the familiar path to her parents' home from the palace in a bit of a daze. She still had yet to see her husband, and she was worried that her father and Obi-Wan had misjudged their plan to sneak Anakin off of Coruscant.

She was comforted that she and the queen had hashed out a response and official position for Naboo to take, and that she now knew her political way forward. Yet she could not start putting that plan into action, she was confined by her family to ‘relaxing’ here on Naboo.

Couldn’t they see that not doing her job was far more stressful for her than anything else? How could she possibly relax when the government was in crisis and she was not there to help put things right?

Without thinking she headed down a stairway that she knew would allow her to reach home in less time. Her body protested the action, sharp shooting pain emanating through her, somehow more intense and painful than the worst menstrual cramps she had ever experienced, or even the pangs of labor. She sunk over, her body sliding down a few of the steps as she dealt with the incredible pain.

Oh, why had she fought against her mother so hard when she had wanted to come to the palace with her?

There was a shout from someone on the street, and Padmé could hear people running. She pried open her eyes, she had clenched them shut so tight all she saw at first were red streaks of light. Finally her vision cleared, revealing that she was the focus of the commotion. Someone was shouting about getting her to a medic.

Great, just what she needed, a public incident. She could just see the news headlines now: Senator collapses while taking a short and simple walk, half a galaxy away from the Senate where dire conversations are taking place.

She struggled to speak, to tell someone that her home was close, that she would be able to make it there, there was no need to take her to a medical center, her family was waiting for her, but another wave of pain drove the words from her.

As she lost consciousness, Padmé was never even aware of the blood soaking through her dress and onto the ground below her.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Leia and Luke talk. In both universes. Sometimes the parallels going on in these chapters are pretty literal.

Note: It should go without saying, but of course postpartum does not in any way shape or form actually make you a bad parent.
Thank you again to Sethnakht for betaing this chapter!

I don't often warn for spoilers in my chapters, because I often am referencing things that have been out for ages and I figure if you wanted to read/see them you would have done so already.

That said this chapter has rather significant spoilers for one of the very first works in the current canon *Heir to the Jedi* in it. The sort of spoiler that kind of gives away one of the main plots of that book.

When Leia found Luke he was already tugging off his helmet, laughing.

All across the base people were shouting as ships landed, the deck crews running about with repair gear and ladders to simultaneously help pilots out of their ships and make quick work of whatever damage their vessels brought with them.

Leia wanted to do a headcount, make note of just how many beings were missing from each squad.

She didn’t. That was someone else’s job, and sometime soon she’d undoubtedly be given a list of just how many did not make it back, along with information on who they were. Then she’d probably be expected to write letters to their families.

She’d have to ask Madine if there was some sort of letter template. Or if he could do it instead. She was not up for writing personalized detailed letters from scratch the way her counterpart did.

Leia was exhausted, having been through far too much both physically and emotionally for one day, and found it easy to ignore the commotion around her, focusing all her senses on Luke and Luke alone.

He shone, bright and joyous. She could see small beads of sweat fly everywhere as he shook his mop of hair out, and she had to work to contain a laugh. *Her* brother was too much of a neat freak to ever fling his sweat about in that manner. She liked this Luke’s method better.

Of course, it seemed she was not the only one who felt laughter was appropriate for this moment.

He and his fellow pilots were whooping and laughing and shouting good natured insults at each other, the scene reminding her far more of footage she’d seen of racers after their competition had ended than she had imagined soldiers would act.

“Did you see Skywalker take on that last one!” One of the pilots was shouting. “Coming right at me, and Luke just swoops in out of nowhere and blasts that eyeball to smithereens!”

Her stomach twisted as she remembered there had been a pilot inside that other ship. Someone had died, and Luke had been responsible.
How many beings had died today? How many of those lost lives was she responsible for, however indirectly?

Luke turned to her, face lit up with exhilaration. “Leia! Hey! How were things on the ground? We kept the skies nice and clear for you.”

She let herself relax, as always finding it hard not to smile when facing her brother’s joy. “No casualties. We got everyone back to base.” It was amazing how aware she could be that this Luke was not her brother, and yet regard him as her sibling all the same.

“That’s incredible!” He placed an arm around her, and while he reeked of sweat it was a familiar smell, her brother all gross after physical exertion.

“You didn’t keep everyone away from the planet though. We ran into Darth Vader.” Then in a far lower tone she told him, “we fought, but he got away.”

He picked up on her upset, and squeezed her shoulders tight.

They were walking together now, along with his unit… to well… somewhere. She did not know where. The hanger was a very large cavern, and most who crossed it rode vehicles to speed their trip. Leia let Luke’s arm around her guide her, and simply leaned into his comfortable presence. Seeing him now, interacting with his fellow pilots, she could not help but wonder what kind of life her brother led in this world. What sort of friendships he shared, loves he had known.

He rumbled a laugh, and with a start she realized she had been so tired she had sent her last few musings to him through their bond without really thinking about it.

*Leia is my best friend, but really I consider everyone on this base to be my friend. Much better friends than most everyone back home on Tatooine in any case. As for love... well I’ve been far less lucky on that front than with friendship, that’s for sure.*

She let him feel her curiosity, but did not press any further.

He sent her a flash of gratitude, and they walked in silence together once more, listening to the pilots around them as they joked and laughed. After a while however she heard him in her mind again, soft and tentative.

*My first ever crush was a boy I’d grown up with on Tatooine. I’d been totally head over heels for him since… well forever really. I’m sure you’ll find it funny, but he had the dreamiest mustache. An image popped into her head then, of a dark haired man with pale skin and laughing hazel eyes.*

Luke had only learned how to use their bond the day before, and he had progressed with this skill so far in so short a time. She was incredibly proud of him.

*His name was Biggs. Biggs Darklighter. He was a good man, and he knew the risk he was taking, joining the Alliance as a pilot. He told me, before he left Tatooine for the Rebellion, that he didn’t think he’d ever get a chance to come back. He was right. On his first ever mission, mine as well, his fighter blew up - right by me! Maybe... I dunno, maybe I could have done something different during that battle, and saved Biggs. Some Hero of Yavin I am. His arm around her tightened, drawing her close for comfort.*

*The second person I ever fell for... well unlike Biggs I actually did get the chance to tell her how I felt. Actually she was the one who told me she was interested, although the way we started talking about it was... awkward is the best word for it. She thought I was romantically involved with Leia, if you can believe that! Nikari and I were going to, you know, be a real couple. Leia’s the one who*
introduced us actually. Or rather, assigned the two of us to go on a series of missions together. Nikari was… incredible. He sent an image of her then. Dark brown hair and eyes, just a shade or two darker than her skin. Her hair fell in loose curls, her eyes were sharp, her mouth curled in a mischievous grin.

She joined the Rebellion because her mother had been killed in an Imperial work camp, for writing a song of all things. I mean she was rich, her dad’s the founder of Kelen Biolabs, she didn’t have to join the fight! She could have been comfortable with his money. Yet… here she was, throwing the life of an heiress away to be the best sharpshooter the Rebellion had. She died in active service, during a mission we were on together. I wasn’t able to help her. To save her. She had been so supportive as I started to figure my Force abilities out but… when she needed me most, there was nothing I could do.

She gave Luke a squeeze as they walked, projecting the full scope of her love for him. Her joy at meeting him, at getting to know this remarkable version of her twin. He had been through so much, and emerged from it all still full of love and joy and capable of letting others in. She suspected that she would not be able to say the same, that her counterpart in this universe could not say the same.

He was amazing.

There was so much to be grateful for, so much to celebrate.

She debated on letting it be for now, not sharing all she knew until morning.

Yet given all she would be holding back, she would feel terrible not speaking to him immediately of what she could as soon as she was able.

She sighed. “I need to talk to you about something. Well several things, really.”

He smiled at her, nodding. “Of course Leia. You want to talk after the victory party?”

Victory party?

With the arm that was not wrapped around her he gestured to where some pilots were gathering at the far end of the hanger. “Oh, it’s not a big thing. Just a bunch of us and some alcohol the mechanics make in some old busted engines, and whatever actual stuff people can scrounge up.” He smiled. “After missions we tend to let off a bit of steam and have a few drinks to celebrate. We do the same thing after the memorial services when one of us dies, actually. Or when a mission goes horribly wrong or… well we find most any excuse really.”

They had a party after every battle and funeral? Really? She turned back to him, going to say… something, but he cut her off before she could.

“Leia, I don’t mean you I mean the Leia from this universe, she almost never participates, but she insists on the parties happening. Says Mon Mothma told her they build team unity and help us process what we go through. It’s always a real riot to hear that coming from her, since she barely ever interacts with anyone outside of her duties, ‘sept for Han, Sana, Chewie and myself.”

“What?” Leia was astounded. Did this other her really have so few friends?

“Yeah I know, she’s like that a lot though. Full of amazing advice that she absolutely does not follow. Which is a shame. Everyone here would love to get to know her.”

What a lonely life her counterpart led. Her homeworld destroyed, devoting herself fully to this fight, and doing it all practically on her own. Did she really refuse to let people into her life to such an
extent? Leia honestly could not imagine closing herself off to the people around her, much less rejecting their company.

Luke shrugged. “Anyway I’m going to grab some drinks now with the other pilots. You wanna talk after?”

“Actually, I’m interested in joining you at this party.” She couldn’t force her other self to make friends of course, she’d probably never meet her. But she could get the people around here more used to the idea of her being open and socializing, and then when Leia managed to get home to her proper universe, her counterpart would find with those first few steps of reaching out taken care of, it’d be easier to interact with others.

Yeah ok, that plan sounded pretty improbable even to her, but Leia really did not like the thought of this other her being so alone. She hadn’t even grown up with Luke, for the Force’s sake, everything about who she was and the life she led was just so terribly horribly… alone.

She wanted to reciprocate his openness by sharing all she had learned, but what she had to tell him was not pressing and urgent, it all could wait. After the party, or perhaps even the following day.

For now she’d get to know these people who had decided to dedicate their lives to principles Leia had been raised to value, sure, but had never really appreciated before.

It was easy to give lip service to caring about Democracy, or Justice, or Freedom itself.

It was something wholly different to be willing to defend those principles from autocrats and oligarchs who chipped away at them, all the while claiming their actions were protecting those institutions rather than degrading them.

Today’s mission - the battle plan she herself had selected - had been a success. That was a cause to celebrate. Especially in a Galaxy where that vile disgrace to the Naboo, a galactic dictator, had access to weapons capable of destroying whole planets.

It was night as they entered the atmosphere.

Leia had always thought Coruscant was most beautiful at night.

Lights marking the various flight lanes glinted off buildings, and the many screens advertising businesses cast an ever changing multicolor haze over it all.

It was thanks to the spotlights on the landing pad that Leia could see through the viewport four figures waiting for them.

She recognized three of them - Ahsoka’s wife, General Kenobi, and Luke - but the fourth was a stranger. A thin and starkly pale woman of a species Leia could not place, with blue facial tattoos and short blond hair. She stood apart from the others, her body language making it clear she wanted nothing to do with them.

General Kenobi glanced towards the stranger every so often. Leia could not be certain, but she thought he might have been trying to draw her into conversation. If he was, none of his attempts were having much by way of success.

She felt then a familiar presence touch on her mind, Luke, and the profound rightness of letting him in reinforced Ahsoka’s theory. She and her Luke had a bond in her universe. Not having his presence touch up against hers felt stranger than having him there with her.
It certainly did explain why socializing with Luke had always been markedly easier than with any other being she had ever known.

This presence felt… different from her Luke. She couldn’t quite understand how she knew that, or what those differences truly were, but she just knew - bone deep without question - that his presence and her Luke’s were not the same.

Of course they wouldn’t be. He would be no more like her Luke than she was like this universe’s Leia.

Even with the difference, his presence soothed something she hadn’t even been aware was making her uncomfortable.

Ahsoka was frowning as she took in the four beings on the platform, and turned to Leia with a sigh. “Looks like we’re not going to be able to avoid her much longer.” Leia would not have needed the Force to feel the dislike in Ahsoka’s tone, yet it pulsed in the air confirming the emotion all the same. “The Council said we’d have to train you together, and well… Ventress is actually here now. Sorry, I tried putting this off for as long as I could.”

Leia gave the pale figure, Ventress, another glance. She wondered what she had done to be so disliked.

Ahsoka groaned. “I am way too exhausted to deal with her right now, couldn’t she have held off until tomorrow to annoy us?”

“How bad can she be?” Leia started moving towards the boarding ramp, Ahsoka following a few steps behind her.

Ahsoka palmed the controls, engaging the ramp, and let out a bitter laugh. “We used to be on opposite sides of the war, she was a big deal Seppie. I don’t think either of us has ever really forgiven the other for back then.”

Was that all? Many of the Rebellion’s best operatives and leaders had been Separatists during the Clone War. Moreover Leia often had trouble keeping Imperial propaganda and anti-Separatist propaganda apart in her mind. The two were so similar, one clearly evolving out of the other. Maintaining anti-Separatist leanings had been used to justify so many of the Empire’s worst policies, right down to their overwhelming xenophobia.

“She also used to be training to be a Sith, and while she may have fooled Master Yoda and the others on the Council, I still don’t trust her.”

Oh. That made far more sense.

This was the woman who was supposed to assist with Leia’s training? A former Sith apprentice?

As soon as the ship opened the pale woman stalked up to them, lethality and grace on full display in just a few steps. “I believe, Knight Tano, that you are forgetting that your precious Jedi Council assigned me to train her, equally with you. Not to assist you, or stand on the side not getting involved. What could have inspired you take her off-world for an entire day without consulting me first?”

Ahsoka held her hands out in front of her. “I just took her to Ilum to get a kyber crystal, Ventress, that’s all. Or do you feel you needed to be there to babysit even that activity?”

“You’ve had a full day with her, teaching her. I can not know what it is you’ve already told her, and
therefore I will be starting my lessons with her on uneven ground.”

“Ventress, could it be that you actually want to train the girl?” General Kenobi’s voice stayed low and even, holding just a hint of surprise.

Ventress scowled at him. “Her Force presence is… intriguing.”

“Oh, please.” Ahsoka rolled her eyes, and moved closer to her as she did, the two clearly intending to continue their confrontation. “I don’t know why the Council thought dumping you onto us would be a good idea, but know this Ventress, I will make sure you have as little contact with Leia as possible.”

“You admit so readily that your Council is not infallible?”

Leia tuned the two women out. She was already certain she’d be hearing a whole lot more of their arguing for however long she was trapped here, and she was already growing tired of it.

Instead she turned her attention towards Luke, standing there on the landing pad in plain robes. Plain robes that somehow looked far better put together and more expensive than anything she had ever seen her Luke wear. She made note of how his skin was unblemished, and his short cropped hair a mousy brown - both probably from a lack of desert living.

She went over in her mind all the things she actually knew about this boy. He’d been raised by his (their!) birth parents, here on Coruscant, rich and without ever wanting for anything. The man she knew had grown up relatively poor on a desolate backwater in the Outer Rim. He’d always been an orphan, but the death of his aunt and uncle had made him one doubly so - something they had connected over and shared in the immediate wake of their families’ deaths, bonding them close when they had first met. She and this boy had no such shared experience to bond them together.

“So, you’re this universe’s Luke, huh.” Leia raised an eyebrow, giving him an overexaggerated look over.

“And you’re my sister’s cranky body double.” He smirked, crossing his arms in front of his chest.

“Well, you certainly are no farm boy.” She could see so much of her friend in this stranger, yet the difference between them was staggering.

“Farm boy?” He laughed. “What was your other me doing on a farm? I mean I gathered from what you said at the Council meeting that things in your universe are pretty bad, but no one said anything about me having to work on a farm.”

“Your parents didn’t fill you in on all I told them about my universe? I was really hoping to avoid having to tell it all over again.” She sighed. “Retelling my life story is really getting old.”

The others had finished arguing. The pale woman, Ventress, was setting off, mounting a speeder bike parked nearby. Ahsoka was walking towards the Temple, briskly, with Barriss following after her. Leia caught some of the words from their conversation, “mist” and “tide” and “weaving” and “seas.” She did not understand any of it.

Obi-Wan Kenobi drew close then, looking as if he had stepped right out of one of her father’s stories. He smiled at her, and bowed. “It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance in person Leia.”

She swallowed her hero worship, she had never actually had the opportunity to speak with General Kenobi before - he’d died before she had the chance - and nodded her head in return. “The pleasure is mine, General Kenobi. My father always spoke quite highly of you, and I am honored to finally
meet you."

Whatever response he had was cut off when Ahsoka stopped walking, turned to where Leia stood, and then gestured for them all to come along as well.

Leia set off after the tall woman, and Luke and Obi-Wan fell into step next to her.

Luke turned to her, resuming the conversation they had started before his Master came to introduce himself. “Sorry that you keep being asked to recount your life. I’ll ask our parents to tell me everything you already told them when we get home, so you don’t have to. You can just sit there and listen, and correct them when they get stuff wrong of course.”

*Our parents* he said, as if they were her parents as well.

“I’m not going to your family’s apartment with you. Ahsoka offered to let me stay here with her, and honestly that sounded like a far better option than having to deal with the two of them again.”

He let out a snort. “Yeah, mom and dad can be a little… intense sometimes. Dad especially.” As if ashamed of how that sounded he explained, fast and spluttering, “he means well, he loves us a whole lot. They both do.”

“No, Luke, it isn’t *me* your father loves, it’s my counterpart. I’m just a stranger to him, and him to me!” She let out a huff of breath, frustrated with the situation. “No, there are few things I’d like less than to have all the pressure of their expectations and hopes for a relationship on me at the moment.”

“Oh come on, you seem to be making an effort with me! Unless you secretly dislike having me talk to you, and are doing an awfully good job of masking your true feelings about it.” He was teasing her, and she couldn’t hold back the smile lighting up her face. A rush of affection flooded through her system for her friend… no brother. For her brother.


She felt a pulse of emotion from him, it squeezed her insides for just a moment - almost like a hug. “Yeah, you too.” He grinned. “Ok so do you want me to run interference and try to keep them away? Or maybe you want me to join you in hiding out at the Temple. Fair warning, those two are real hard to avoid when they set their minds to finding you, trust me - my sister and I have tried to dodge them more times than I can count.”

“Have much success?”

“Not really. We did manage to run away together for a full *four standard hours* once when we were nine.”

“That’s all, huh?” She was not impressed. “When I was nine I managed to run away and live in the woods for a week.”

“Yeah well our mom is a pretty important politician! Our exploits weren’t exactly low profile around here.”

“I was the Crown Princess of my planet, that is no excuse,” she scoffed.

He gaped at her for a moment, then laughed. “You know, I was worried. You feel so different from my sister I thought... I don’t know, what I thought exactly, but I didn’t expect to… fit with you like this.”
She nodded. “You’re not exactly the same as the Luke I know either. But… well, I can see the man I know in you.”

He nodded as well. “I know what you mean. It sure is weird, though.”

Was that why everyone kept having so much trouble understanding that she did not know them? Was she as familiar to these people as this Luke was to her? As her mother had been to her? She could almost understand their behavior, if that was the case.

Almost.

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Leia O. has an even longer conversation with Luke (and Obi-Wan as well), Leia S. attends another party.
The stark difference between how Palpatine’s Palace was in this dimension and in hers no longer caused even a hint of wonder.

Instead with each being they passed in the halls she was reminded anew that all of these people were dead in her universe.

Just like when she had gone home.

Most of the people in this Temple had probably died horrifying deaths. What had she been thinking, agreeing to actually spend the night within this tomb full of living ghosts?

The five of them were walking together through the dimly lit halls. Ahsoka and Barriss were leading the way, while she, Luke and Obi-Wan trailed behind.

Luke kept giving her curious glances, and his eager expression made him look far younger than he was. “So uh… Crown Princess? I mean, I know you don’t want to tell your whole story all over again Lei, but care to explain?”

“How much did your parents tell you about me?”

“How much did your parents tell you about me?”

“Nothing, really. We’ve spent almost all of the time since I got home worrying about my sister. Your universe sounded like a nightmare place to be stuck.” His lips twitched into an apologetic half smile. “I mean, I know what you said in the meeting with the Council, obviously, but that’s all.”

Hadn’t they told him anything?

“Then I guess I should start by telling you I had no idea my universe’s Luke and I were related until I spoke to your parents yesterday.”

Luke almost stumbled as he walked.

“What? But… but how?”

“For reasons I don’t yet understand, we were raised by separate families. In different parts of the galaxy even. I only met Luke for the first time a few months ago.”

“You don’t know why the two of you were separated?” Obi-Wan asked. Leia had almost forgotten he was there, walking on Luke’s other side.

“No. I have no clue. I was adopted by Breha and Bail Organa, and Luke was raised by his aunt and uncle on Tatooine.” She frowned. “Should I say our aunt and uncle?” The semantics of her situation
were confusing. Were those farmers even actually related to Luke at all?

Luke gaped at her for a moment longer, and then laughed. “Wait, you were a Princess and I lived with Owen and Beru? Talk about an unfair deal! Who decided that?”

“I don’t know!” She laughed with him.

She took Luke’s apparent familiarity with the Lars family as confirmation they had actually been related. How interesting that Luke had wound up with relatives while she had been adopted.

“I really don’t understand how any of this came to be. My parents always told me I was a war orphan. Now that I know what I do, my parents are dead and can’t be asked what actually happened. Same for Luke’s aunt and uncle. Killed by the Empire, all of them.” Her smile twisted sardonically. “They were all murdered within the same week no less.”

“Both of your families were killed in such a short period of time?” Obi-Wan asked.

“The Empire was particularly busy that week, what can I say. That same week they also killed you and blew my entire home planet up for good measure.” She laughed.

She had never laughed about what had happened to Alderaan before, but since she had started laughing with Luke earlier she did not want to stop.

It felt good to treat what had happened like an absurdist joke rather than the horrific event it had been.

Something she could just casually mention while walking down a hall, nothing to it.

(There was a distinct possibility that retelling this story over and over again these past two days was having a negative impact on her mental health.)

Luke did not share in her casual irreverence. He stopped walking, just staring, eyes fixed on her. “Lei… I can’t… I can’t imagine what that must have been like. No wonder I sensed that you were in pain, is there is any way I can help?”

She stopped as well, just looking at him without answering, hoping he understood that she’d really rather change the topic.

He nodded, and his face returned to its earlier humor-filled expression. They began to walk down the hall once more, and Luke moved the topic away from the destruction of Alderaan. “How did the other me wind up training as a Jedi, if he was abandoned on Tatooine of all places? Plus I still want to know why no one has started to train you. We have the exact same midi-chlorian count, why only train one of us?”

She smiled at him with gratitude. “General Kenobi was also on Tatooine. Last time I saw my father alive he was sending me there to retrieve him for our war effort. Before you ask, I have as much of an idea about why he was with Luke as I do about why we were split up.”

Luke’s face wrinkled with thought. “Your adoptive father knew where Uncle Obi was? They must have been in communication with each other, the separation thing, it had to have been planned and coordinated by them both!”

“You’re right, it must have been. Too bad they are both dead, so I can’t ask either of them anything about what happened.”
Obi-Wan had been mostly quiet, aside from the few clarifying questions he had asked. He had seemed lost in thought as he strode through the Temple with them. He spoke then, providing what little answers he could. “Bail has always been a close friend of mine. Considering the Purges you spoke of, it would have made sense for the two of us to have coordinated our response to the crisis. Of course how we each wound up with one of you is beyond me.” He frowned. “I don’t suppose you know of anyone else who might have been a part of what happened?”

She shook her head. “Your guess is probably much better than mine, General Kenobi. Many of my father’s stories about the Clone Wars were focused on you and your exploits. I am nowhere near as familiar with any other figure from that era as I am with you. Which means I am afraid I do not know of any others associated with the Jedi he might have collaborated with.”

“Oh, that would also explain why you keep calling me by my old military title,” he said with a slight smile. “I think it would be wise for us to continue this conversation, rather than follow Barriss and Ahsoka to the Archives. Luke, can you take Leia to my rooms, so we may talk there? I will explain our departure and then join you both shortly.”

Luke nodded and led Leia down a different corridor.

For a brief moment anger flared within her. She wanted to know whatever it was Barriss had learned about her situation, needed any and all information that could help her understand why she was here and how she might be able to return home. She also understood that the information she desired would be shared with her regardless of if she learned it now or waited. These people wanted her counterpart returned to them as badly as she desired to go home, they would not trap her here.

The Temple was large, full of open spaces framed by pillars, yet also covered in endless hallways with small rooms and turbo lifts coming off them (the doors to some of the rooms they had passed had been open, revealing mostly well-used classrooms and empty dark rooms devoid of furnishings) and yet also for some reason dark dimly lit claustrophobic corridors. There was nothing to mark where they were, no helpful signs or guides. The entire place was just a confusing maze anyone could easily get lost in. Leia was not a fan of whoever the architect had been who designed this Temple.

Luke would occasionally look over at her as they walked, and would even occasionally laugh at the expressions she would pull as she glared at the confounding structure around them, but did not say anything. Gave no helpful instructions on how to find her way around, or explanation of the things they saw.

Eventually, they stopped in front of an inconspicuous door identical in every way to all the others in the hall. Leia wanted to ask how he could even tell these rooms apart, but before she had started to ask her question Luke was already entering the room.

As Leia followed after him, she noted that the room was small, about the size of her personal quarters on Horox III, with a smattering of backless chairs and little else. Three doors aside from the one they had just entered from were in the room. Two on the wall to her right, and one to her left. The wall opposite the doorway Leia stood in had a small circular window.

Luke sat on one of the padded chairs and gestured towards a second one by him as the door slid shut behind Leia.

Neither of them spoke to the other, and now that they were alone together the fact this was not the Luke she knew - merely a stranger wearing a familiar face, hit Leia hard.

She sat in the seat he had gestured to and attempted to start a conversation with him once more. She
had felt so comfortable conversing with him in the hall, and hoped if they just filled this space with words that atmosphere would return. “You didn’t seem to like finding out I didn’t grow up with my universe’s Luke, did you?”

“It’s just hard to imagine, and well... wrong,” Luke said. “I mean, sure there have been plenty of times in my life that I’ve wished I was an only child.” He stopped talking for a moment, making a show of gazing at a wall dramatically. “Such a hard sister to live with. You have no idea.”

He stopped again, as if what he was saying really only occurred to him. “You… really don’t have any idea. I mean… you have no idea what having a twin actually is like, do you?”

“No,” she confirmed, “I don’t have any siblings.”

“That is so wrong. Leia, an only child.” He shook his head. “Next you’ll be telling me you’re not stubborn.”

“Are you expecting me to answer that?” She raised an eyebrow.

“Just wondering,” Luke said, “Knowing if you are as gundark-headed as my sister really would help me figure out how to best converse.”

She peered at him curiously. “Is this part of what it would have been like? Teasing each other all the time?”

“Well not always teasing,” Luke said with a guilty smile, “Especially when we were younger we’d fight something awful. We don’t always like each other, but we are always connected. Stuck with each other for life. It’s easy to blame each other for anything and everything.”

“Incredible. You know, I was always fascinated by twins.”

He laughed. “What is that supposed to mean?”

Leia grinned back, “Well... I never could explain it, but there was something about holodocs and the like about twins that drew me in. Of course, my parents always found my interest in the topic so silly and strange. I remember I once was watching this holodoc and... “ she trailed off. “Actually, now that I think about it, my parents probably didn’t like my weird interest in twins because they knew.”

She bit down on her lip, ignoring the faint metallic taste of blood she continued, “they knew everything. Everything! There is a part of me that is just so angry with them. They never told me about... any of this. My Force-sensitivity, my brother... They knew I had a brother!”

Now that she was openly admitting to this the words just would not stop, pouring out of her mouth as she tried her best to make sense of her situation.

“Worse yet, they let Luke struggle to survive on a backwater rock in the Outer Rim that absolutely no one seems to like when they had more than enough money to lift Luke and the entire Lars family out of poverty forever.” She sunk her head into her hands, threading her fingers around her braids.

Luke drew her back out of her thoughts. “I really don’t get why he was sent there either. I mean why not take that other-me to our grandparents or Aunt Sola? Even taking who I’d rather have grown up with out of this, our family on Naboo is better in a crisis than anyone else - why call on some moisture farmers in the middle of nowhere instead?”

Grandparents and an aunt on Naboo? She’d have to look into if they were still alive in her universe when she returned, for Luke’s sake if nothing else. She knew how much he longed for family.
The more she learned about her situation, the less sense of it she could make. “My parents and Obi-Wan Kenobi obviously went through a lot of trouble to keep us hidden, even from one another. It all seems fairly extreme, doesn’t it?”

Obi-Wan had rejoined them while she was talking, and the gentle cadence of his Stewjon accent filled the room. “From what you have said, the Jedi Order was being wiped out at the time of your birth. It is most likely that we were trying to protect you due to your own Force-sensitivity. The two of you, especially when you were young and did not yet have any sort of control... well you create a rather hard to miss presence in the Force.”

“That makes sense,” Luke said, “We were separated so the Sith would not find us.”

Cold horror trickled through her veins. Something inherent to her might have been putting her parents at a terrible risk her entire life. Her very existence a potential threat to their lives, and they had been aware of that even before they first welcomed her into her family.

Her earlier upset with her parents drained out, replaced by this new realization. How amazing her parents had been, how brave and selfless, risking it all to protect and love a child. Had she ever even deserved parents as wonderful as hers? How dare she be upset with them, when they had done so much for her?

Leia was so preoccupied with her thoughts she almost did not hear Obi-Wan when he spoke.

“Yes. The Sith. Please Leia, tell us more about this Darth Vader you mentioned during the Council meeting. You said he had been a student of mine, at some point prior to your birth?”

She pushed her thoughts about her family aside and nodded, not really sure what to say to these two Jedi about her dimension’s black-clad horror.

Obi-Wan appeared to be deep in thought, stroking his beard. “I don’t suppose you can describe his appearance or anything that might help us identify him? In this timeline at least, the only apprentice I had taught before then was Anakin, so unless he is the Sith in question this is a major divergence in our timelines. We have been trying to figure out who could have been this mysterious second student, yet the identity of this Sith truly is eluding us. If we can figure out who he might be, we could help you come up with a plan to bring his evil to an end.”

Leia frowned. Now that she thought about it none of her father’s many stories about Kenobi had ever mentioned him having an apprentice. “Not really, no. I can’t even narrow his species down much past Human or near-Human. None of his person is ever exposed, as he always wears a full body life-support suit in addition to a mask that covers his head.”

Luke gave her a contemplative look. “Have you ever actually met him? If you have, you might be able to recognize his presence in the Force. If he even exists in this dimension, that is. My credits are on his existence being the entire split between our two worlds.”

The memory of her time on the Death Star hit her hard. How desperate she had been to crush Vader on Cymoon 1. The bomb strike that would have eliminated her as well on Vrogas Vas. She kept failing to eliminate him, the enemy she hated above all others. None of her meetings with him were really occasions she had wanted to think of again.

“I… I have met him, unfortunately. We’ve engaged one another on the field of battle a few times, and have… interacted with each other directly in other contexts before as well.”

There was a long period of silence, and Leia almost took back her wording, ashamed she had backed
away from telling them about her torture. It was the most time she had ever spent in Vader’s company, hours of just her and him and the two unspeaking troopers (she often wondered what they had thought, watching her scream and writhe and refuse to break, their exposed faces blank as they stood witness, as if nothing of any particular interest was happening there in that cell).

Luke let out an impressed whistle, shaking his head slightly as he did. “Sorry, it’s just that I can’t believe that both you and my counterpart are actively fighting against the Sith in your timeline. I mean my sister and I are just Padawans, definitely not up for the task of taking on Sith, but from the sound of things the two of you are successfully managing it without any other Jedi there to help. That’s incredible!”

Leia snorted. “Incredible? More like exhausting and absolutely horrific. Vader is… well, he’s quite frankly a monster, one who serves Palpatine, the despot who is oppressing the entire Galaxy with his government of cronies and cult of personality rubbish.” She shook her head. “I want to make clear to you both that I am not ‘fighting against the Sith.’ Mine is not a religious war. I had no idea the Emperor was in any way personally connected to the Sith until I came here. Really I barely even understand what that means, just the limited things about the Sith my father had told me.”

Leia’s father had taught her much about the Jedi of old, including that they had been locked in a holy war with a group called the Sith. He hadn’t really known much about what the Sith were beyond that.

He had also raised her to believe in the Force, even though such belief systems were heavily discouraged under Palpatine’s rule. Yet despite her upbringing, she had always been fairly agnostic, unsure if the Force actually did guide and intervene in people’s lives. She had valued her faith purely because it was something the Empire did not like.

Well, to be more accurate she had been agnostic before she had seen Obi-Wan Kenobi vanish into thin air. It was hard to deny the power of the Force after witnessing an event such as that.

Now she was trying to adjust to the notion that she herself could manipulate the energy field that connected the entire Galaxy, and was expected to play a part in the ancient mystic battle between the Sith and the Jedi… no, the people here acted as if the war she had been fighting had been that in truth all along.

In just a day the Jedi Order had gone from a legend, a collection of fantastical stories told to her at bedtime to help lull her to sleep, to a very real thing she was expected to become a part of.

Through all of Luke’s excited and largely unsuccessful research into the Order, they had continued to feel more like figures from myth than actual history. A strange thought occurred to her then. As much as Luke was all that was left of the Order, by the time she returned home she would have far more knowledge about the Jedi of old than he possibly ever could. Even if her counterpart spent her entire time there training him, Leia would forever remain the only one with first-hand experience of how the Order had actually functioned.

There would be no pleading ignorance, no way to escape her connection to this. She would need to share the knowledge she had gained, or she’d be complicit in the destruction of the ancient religious sect.

The two members of the ancient Jedi Order were still staring at her. One with a look of eager excitement, the sort only those who had never seen true combat could muster up when hearing about war. He wasn’t just staring, he was still asking her questions. Eager questions about the war, about Vader, the battles she fought, the things she had seen.
Leia would never have thought it possible, but this boy was more naive than Luke had been on the day he had stumbled into her cell on the Death Star.

He could only imagine war as a glorious story where good and evil were easy to define, an impressive adventure where the “good guys” always won against “the forces of evil,” and not as the complex nightmare it truly was.

The victory party was in many ways a repeat of the party she had wandered in on when she had stumbled into this world the night before last, just without the banners that suggested it was a birthday party.

As she poured herself a bit more jet juice from the gathered offering of cheap alcohols, she overheard more than a few whispers among the assembled Rebel forces about her being a Jedi.

There was no question that the Leia who belonged in this universe’s reputation had reached incredibly legendary heights.

She glanced about, hoping to catch sight of the Alderaanian officer she had met that morning - she wanted to get to know the woman better and perhaps get her to spill more information about the life Ahsoka had led in this dimension - but she wasn’t anywhere in sight. She did however catch Luke chatting up another pilot from his squad, and Han in a corner arguing with Chewbacca again - with Sana standing next to the two of them laughing at whatever it was they were discussing. She decided to join the three spacers in the corner rather interrupt Luke.

She slid up next to the woman in the green shawl, and turned to her with a grateful smile. “Hey, Sana, I wanted to thank you for earlier.”

“Earlier? Well that’s vague. You finally thanking me for leading the mission after you took off to fight Vader one on one, or what?”

“That too. Mainly I wanted to thank you for not staring or making a big deal of things on the ship on the way back.”

“Make a big deal out of what? You had already told me you decided to share in Blondie’s Jedi delusion, so it wasn’t exactly as if it was new news. Besides, those blankets weren’t going to distribute themselves.”

Han and Chewie’s fight broke off (from what Leia had overheard it had been over what repairs the Falcon did and did not need), and Han turned to the two women with a scowl. “Please tell me I am misreading between the lines here, and you did not tell everyone that you are a Jedi.”

“Sorry, can’t do that.” Leia shrugged, refusing to feel bad about her decision to tell the troops and refugees.

He groaned. “Leia is really not going to like this when she gets back. Not at all. Last thing she needed was the people around here expecting even more from her.” He glared at Leia. “It’s not like she has much more to give, she’s already putting so damn much of herself into this revolution of hers. How could you just go ahead and do that to her?”

To Leia’s surprise, Sana was the one to answer him. “Because you think about her feelings and needs so much when you pull your own stunts? Kriff off Han, give her a break. I can’t believe we’re all going along with this alternate universe poodoo, but if it’s true then the girl is going through enough without having to deal with you on top of it all.”
Han bristled. He took a step closer to the shorter spacer but was cut off when Chewbacca extended one of his long arms, placing it between the two of them. “Stop it. We all get it, you both care about Leia and disagree about how to express it,” he roared, glancing between them both, “Knock it off.”

Sana frowned at Chewbacca. “I don’t care about her the way he cares about her.” She laughed, a jeering mocking sound, “Stars, who cares about her the way he cares about her.”

“Hey! I am NOT interested in Her Worship like that, what do you think you are trying to suggest here?” Han looked angry, and slightly panicked. This was clearly a topic he wanted to avoid at all costs.

“Nothing Han. Nothing at all.” She wore the most innocent and sweet expression Leia’d ever seen an adult pull off. The woman was not lying about being a good con artist, if these were her acting skills. Then again, the best acting skills in the galaxy did not make up for how bad that lie was.

“‘Sides I’m shocked you’re not into her Sana, thought you were attracted to deadly chicks with a massive death wish.”

Sana scoffed. “Han, you’re into being bossed around. You always have been, always will be. I on the other hand, am not.”

“Nah, that’s right, you just like your romantic partners space-cold evil.” Han hooked his thumbs under his belt, leaning slightly as he spoke. “I mean stang Sana, your ex worked for Vader, you can’t get scummerer than that.”

“Yeah, yeah, ok we all get it, dating Chelli was the biggest mistake in the history of my kriffed up mistake filled life.” Her tone was full of regret, there was no question Sana fully owned that chapter of her life as an error.

Leia turned to Sana, startled. “You have an ex who had worked for Darth Vader?”

The spacer groaned. “Oh please, even Luke has made noise about what a mistake I made dating her, I don’t need to hear more of it. ‘Sides, we broke up ages ago.”

“Yeah, but you’re still in love with her, aren’t you?” Han looked smug, smirking at Sana, taking pleasure in her pain.

“Kriffing hell Han, drop it,” Sana growled.

Leia did not want to let this topic drop at all. “How long did she work with him? Did she work closely with him, or just on a ship he was in command of? Can you contact her?”

Han, Chewie, and Sana all stared at her.

“What’s with the interest in Aphra, Leia? She’s bad news, plain and simple.” Han was shaking his head at her, mouth firmly set in a frown.

“Not to mention that she continues to keep terrible company,” Chewie huffed.

Sana for her part looked more contemplative than either man. “You think Chelli might know something of use for taking down Vader, don’t you?” She sighed. “I do know how to contact her, but I’ve got to caution you against this. Chewie aint kidding about those she surrounds herself with.” She shook her head. “The droids alone! But well… last I saw her she was acting properly contrite and regretful over well… everything, and she does owe me more favors than the galaxy’s got stars. If you really think contacting her is a good idea, I can make it happen.”
Leia nodded. “I do. It sounds like this woman could have an unique perspective on him, and the more info we can get on Darth Vader, the better.”

Han stepped up close, the sort of distance that paid no mind to concepts like personal space. “You don’t know the bad Doctor. Leia, the proper Leia, she has a shoot on sight policy for her, and with good reason.”

Luke’s voice cut into the conversation. “Glad to see Han and Chewie stopped arguing! But uh, Han, are you threatening Leia now or something? Am I going to have to intervene?”

“Am I glad to see you, Kid!” Han pointed at Leia, as if there could be any question who he was talking about with the two of them standing so close. “She’s gotten it in her head that contacting Aphra for details on Vader could be a good idea. You need to talk her out of that.”

Luke’s smile vanished. “Leia, Doctor Aphra is just a sad and deluded waste of time.”

What could possibly be so bad about this woman that everyone was so insistent Leia stay clear of her? If Sana was still in love with her, she couldn’t be a total monster.

Well ok, that wasn’t true, plenty of people fell in love with monsters, and remained in love with them long after they showed their true colors, but Leia was desperate for whatever information she could get about the Sith that was once Anakin Skywalker.

Which more than proved the point about people loving monsters long past they’d shown themselves to be the worst kind of people, but she just wasn’t ready to give up on him yet.

Yes, she could talk to Uncle Obi’s ghost to learn more about the Sith her father had become, but the topic caused him so much pain, and she suspected he hadn’t had any contact with her father after his Fall. The same would probably be true for Master Yoda as well, once she and Luke went to him in the Dagobah system.

That made this woman, monster though she may be, her best possible lead for information about Darth Vader as he was now, at present, and not just memories of who Anakin Skywalker had been.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Leia S. is drunk. Leia O. is tired. Both spend time with Luke in their slightly altered state.
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

Thank you endlessly to my friend S for betaing the start of this chapter. The rest of it is still unbetaed, but just having someone look over that opening segment was such a huge help. I know you will never read this S, but thank you for the beta and the great conversation we had after about Luke. <3

There are some pretty major spoilers for the book Leia: Princess of Alderaan in the second segment of this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She was drunk.

The alcohol that the engineers and pilots had brewed here on base was... really kriiffing good.

As much fun as she was having, Leia was so very very exhausted. Yet she didn’t want to succumb to the potent mixture of alcohol and the desire to sleep without sharing at least some of what she had learned that day with Luke.

She was finding that she really enjoyed the company of the spacers her other self had gathered together. Sana’s dry wit complemented Leia’s own, Chewie was thoughtful and caring and… well Han was real easy on the eyes.

Especially in those pants. The tight ones with the blood stripes that framed his… assests. Or maybe it was his tunic that was distracting her. The way he left the top of it undone. Sometimes he’d move in just the right way, and she’d see intoxicating flashes of skin. At one point his tunic had gotten caught on something, was tugged to the left, and she had seen a dark smear that seemed to be made of engine grease, undoubtedly carelessly swiped across his chest as he worked on that ship of his, all sweaty and shirtless and...

Han was a very distracting being to spend time around when drunk.

If she was totally honest, the reason she kept losing her train of thought - the reason she kept forgetting to initiate the conversation with Luke she needed to have, was entirely thanks to the attractive spacer.

It wasn’t all dirty fantasies of course. He had other qualities that captivated her. His eyes would constantly seek her out in the room, lighting up for just a moment, before his alcohol drenched mind remembered she was not the woman he wanted to find. His hands were constantly in motion, his posture slightly slumped with a fully affected swagger. He was so alive, so full of contradictions, so intense, so...

Getting drunk when Han was around was dangerous.

Han had just left their group for a bit - off to fetch them all more drinks. Sana was attempting to finish off the drink in her hand before Han arrived with more. Chewie was fussing over Sana, worried she was drinking too fast. For the first time that night, Leia was without distraction.
Leia bumped her shoulder into Luke’s arm, smiling and gesturing with her head towards a relatively empty corner. He nodded, and together they ducked through the crowd. It was fun, weaving around the assembled soldiers, and Leia was smiling when they reached their destination.

“You seem to be enjoying yourself,” Luke said. He did not try to talk over the volume of those gathered. He kept his voice at its normal pitch, the sound of it cutting through the noise regardless. “Go to this sort of party often?”

She laughed, to her ears it sounded too loud. “Stars no! The Jedi Order isn’t very big on parties. Most of the ones I’ve been to were stuffy things mom was throwing for work!”

A curious smile twisted at the corners of Luke’s lips. “Your… our… our mother… you said she’s a politician like my Leia is, right?”

“Doubtful. That the other me is like her I mean. No one is a politician the way mom is a politician.”

“Right.” Luke rolled his eyes as he said the word. He didn’t believe her!

“No, I mean it Lulu. She’s... Stang honestly I don’t understand politics enough to really describe what she’s like, but mom is scary good at it. Did I mention before that she’s the fragging Supreme Chancellor of the Galactic Republic? I can’t remember if I told you that.”

“You said she was a politician, not that… the Chancellor? Really?”

“Really really!”

“I can’t imagine it. Leia’s life on Alderaan already sounded so weird compared to mine, but yours…” His forehead creased, he looked away from her, watching the crowd. “I can’t stop thinking about that vision you showed me yesterday.”

She was so pleased to have been able to return even a glimpse of his family to him. “I can show you more, if you want. I have a whole lifetime’s worth of memories I can show you.”

The smile that overtook his face was stunning. There was such longing, overwhelming need in his eyes, but then he shook his head. “Maybe later? I’m still trying to process that first one. I want to know more of course but… I think I need to be sober for that.”

His shoulders drooped, he shifted his weight slowly from one foot to the other. As if trying to convince himself he said, “Leia isn’t getting a choice about how she’s having all of this thrown at her, is she? I mean… she was really drunk when the two of you switched, and it isn’t like anyone got her permission before sending her there.”

Leia frowned. “It’s a gift Lulu! She’s getting to meet mom and dad, and train with the Order! What’s wrong with any of that!”

“Wrong? No, no, there isn’t anything wrong with it, I mean honestly I’d give just about anything for an opportunity like that, but well… those aren’t things Leia actually wants, and it’s all… well it’s a lot.”

“Oh come on, there is no way anyone would rather be in this reality than mine. I’m sorry Lu but there really is no comparison between them.”

“I guess… the only thing that is really there for her is... stang... Alderaan. Do you think she went home? That would mess her up something awful.” Luke must have noticed Leia’s defensive expression, he hurried to clarify, “Not that I’d blame her, if I had the chance to see my aunt and uncle
again I’d take it in a heartbeat, but… seeing Alderaan, your world’s Alderaan, that would be… a lot. Kriff, she must be going through so much right now, can you imagine?"

“Lulu, I am going through a lot right now. Everyone I love, except for you, is…” she didn’t want to finish that thought. The next one was almost as unpleasant. “What if she doesn’t want to come back Lulu? What if that means I never can go home? As you just pointed out, in my universe all the dead people she loves are alive and well. What if she doesn’t want to leave them?”

“No way. Leia would never think of abandoning the Rebellion. Don’t worry about her coming home.” Luke smiled. “Once Leia sets her mind to a thing, she gets it done. Toppling an Empire, crossing through dimensions… she can do it. I’ve seen her pull off all kinds of impossible missions before. Leia will return here, and see this war to its end. How could something like this stop her, if even Vader can’t?”

Vader. Leia desperately wanted to tell him the truth about their father. But drunk at a party really wasn’t the time for that.

Oh! She was going to tell him about the ghost, wasn’t she! That was the whole point of this conversation. Well that and letting him know Master Yoda was alive and they needed to leave here so Luke could train with him.

"Hey Leia, what is that you keep calling me anyway?"

"Huh?"

"Lu or Lulu? You keep calling me that instead of my name."

"They're my names for you, nerfbreath. I dunno. I guess they were easier to say when we were babies or something? I've always called you that. Mom and dad do too sometimes, now that I think about it."

Luke nodded, and Leia frowned. She was still trying to think of how to best bring up Uncle Obi's ghost and Master Yoda when Luke spoke again. “Hey, speaking of the vision you showed me yesterday… I have a question. Who was that Togruta? I mean, I recognized Ben, and the other Humans were our… our parents, right? So who was the Togruta?”

“Aunt 'Soka.” She answered automatically, her mind still stuck on how to bring up all the things she needed to discuss with him.

He stared at her for a moment. “Uh. Ok. And um who is that?”

“My Jedi Master.” She snapped back to the moment. “I told you about her when I first got here, I think. She used to be dad’s Padawan before she became a Knight.”


How could she keep forgetting how little Luke knew? She needed make sure he learned as much as he could, make sure this version of her brother reached his potential.

“I know where you need to go to become a Jedi.” She was blurring the words out before she could even process she was saying them.

“Huh?”

“Master Yoda, he’s the Grand Master of the Order, and he’s still alive Lu. I know where he is. You
“What?” Luke interrupted her, loud, almost shouting. “I want to learn, but I can’t just leave the Rebellion!”

“Lulu, this could be the key to defeating the Sith in your world. You can’t do that without proper training.” Didn’t he understand how important this all was?

“Defeat the what? You aren’t making any sense.”

She was getting real tired of how much he did not know. Next time she saw Uncle Obi’s ghost she was going to have to talk to him about how neglected Luke was in this world.

“How do you know about this… great master person anyway?” Had Obi-Wan told him anything about the Order at all?

Wait… she still hadn’t told him about Obi-Wan had she?

“Lulu, I know this is going to sound really out there, but the ghost of Obi-Wan Kenobi told me,” she said.

*That* he did not seem confused by, somehow. “Ben is still around! I knew I wasn’t just hearing things! I thought… well it’s been so long since he last spoke to me I thought he was actually gone.”

“He’s spoken to you before?” Why then didn’t he just tell Luke this stuff himself? Why have her act as an intermediary?

“Just after he died, and during the Battle of Yavin. He helped me figure out what to do, you know, let go and trust in the Force and all that.” Luke’s eyes grew large, “Is that what Jedi do, after they die?” His voice shook and grew louder as he talked. “Do you think I can talk to our dad? I mean he has to be a ghost too, right?” His expression crumbled. “But… why hasn’t he ever contacted me?”

Leia moved closer to him, to put an arm around him and reassure him that this was very much *not* what normally happened when Jedi died (a far easier avenue of conversation than explaining what happened to Anakin Skywalker), but she had only just shifted slightly towards him and said his name when he surprised her by moving quickly, grabbing her shoulder.

“I changed my mind. Show me more of your life. Your family. I want to… no I need to know more. To understand who they were. What it would have been like.” He reeked of sweat and alcohol.

“What? Lulu -” he interrupted her again, a wild look in his eyes. Leia was suddenly reminded that they were both drunk, that Luke wasn’t exactly operating at his best and neither was she.

“Leia, please. All my life, I’ve wanted to know what my life would have been if I had a mom and a dad.” He spoke quickly, the incomprehensible swift rhythm of the inebriated. How much had he had to drink?

She didn’t know what to say, not really. “Lulu, just a few moments ago you said you didn’t want to see more.”

“Because I know that is what I am supposed to say!” He looked ashamed, let go of her shoulder and leaned back before he started again. “If I see it, see that life I couldn’t have, I’ll never be able to get over how jealous I am. All I… I’ve always wanted to have that life, *your* life. I used to spend all my time imagining what it would have been like, and now I am just so angry that Leia got to go there and meet them…” He stopped and took a deep breath. It did not calm him down.
When he next spoke a childish whine was creeping into his voice. “My aunt and uncle loved me. They cared for me. Yet as much as I loved them... they were never ‘mom and dad.’ They were my family, but they weren't my parents. Leia, she already had a mom and dad, now she gets to have mine too? She... you... got to have everything, and meanwhile here I am with nothing. Just like always, stupid Wormie getting left behind. It’s just not fair! I know I am supposed to pretend like everything is ok and I am fine with it all, but I’m not! It should have been me!”

She had not been expecting this. Any of it.

She almost wished he had been the one to fall through whatever hole in reality she and her counterpart had slipped through. That they were conversing back home, where her mother was alive and her dad made sense, not here in this blasted military camp surrounded by drunken soldiers, everyone she ever loved save for him and him alone dead or fallen.

No! She didn’t wish that, because that would be wishing her Luke would be stuck here in her place, and she would never desire her finicky brother experience a world as awful as this.

She took a step back, looking Luke in the eye, calling him by his proper name. “You’re drunk Luke. We’ll talk tomorrow when you’re sober.” She had to believe this was just the alcohol talking. Luke had been her rock since she arrived in this dimension. Stable in a way nothing else in this world seemed to be.

Leia left the party, stumbling off through the base. She was determined to find the room she had slept in the night before, to sleep once more and dream of home. Home, where the people she cared about made sense.

The more questions Luke and General Kenobi asked about Vader, the more clear it became that they would not be able to figure out who he was under his mask. Leia was growing increasingly tired of their questions.

She suppressed a yawn, in addition to being tired of this conversation she was just tired in general. It had been a long and emotionally draining day.

“I see you need to get some rest. Luke, can you please take Leia to Ahsoka’s quarters, I understand she will be spending the night there?”

She nodded at Kenobi, smiling with gratitude.

As she stepped back into the hall, she was reminded once more of her unease. Walking through this place was so disorienting.

Luke, noticing her discomfort, drew closer. His body bumping lightly into her own as they walked.

“You know, that time when my sister and I ran away as kids? We were trying to get at the Temple’s foundation, to figure out why something here felt off.”

Huh? “I thought... well in my universe this is Palpatine’s palace, so I thought that was why I feel so uncomfortable, but there really is something wrong with this place?”

“Not wrong, but there is something there. Well, that’s what we thought as kids. Neither of us can sense anything now. Or at least I don’t, and if my sister still does she never says anything about it to me.” He smiled, just slightly. “It wasn’t much, just enough of a tinge of something to bother us. I remember we both thought it was somewhere beneath the Temple.”
Leia really focused on that sense of wrongness, and Luke was right, it did seem to be coming from somewhere below them. How odd, she would have thought her discomfort would be centralized in that high tower Palpatine had claimed as his office, the one where she had met with the Jedi High Council the day before. Or maybe even his throne room, near the gardens he so prided. Well, whatever it was under this Temple, she didn’t like it, that was for sure.

Luke stopped walking in the middle of a hallway, Leia was sure they had not reached where they were going, since they didn’t seem to be near any door. “Lei, do you think you’ll be able to sleep here? Back when my sister and I kept sensing whatever it is in the Temple’s foundation, we never were able to sleep properly when at the Temple. It’s part of why we haven’t ever moved out of our parents’ place.” He looked so worried, “you look exhausted Lei, please, I won’t even tell mom and dad you’re in one of the guest rooms. Stars, I’ll even help you sneak out in the morning!”

Maybe it was because he wore a face she knew so well, maybe it was her mother’s request that she give her biological family a chance, or maybe it was just her exhaustion. Whatever it was, Leia found herself nodding, allowing Luke to lead her out of the Temple to a speeder parked outside.

She was grateful that during their ride through the city he maintained light conversation. If it wasn’t for her need to focus and respond she surely would have fallen asleep right there in the passenger seat.

He was so refreshing to talk to. An innocent untouched by war. When had she last spoken to one of those? Had any such people ever existed in her dimension at all?

Occasionally as he talked to her she’d look out at the city, taking in sights she had not seen since before that fateful day above Scarif.

So many places where her teen years had played out, so many friends she had to leave behind.

How strange to think that this planet, this giant city that had been her second home for so many years, would have been where she would have lived her life had she never been adopted.

She wondered how many places she and her counterpart had in common. Maybe they even had mutual friends.

No. Former friends.

Most of the people she had known on Coruscant were loyal to the Empire, she couldn’t think of them as her friends anymore. No matter how much she sometimes missed their company.

As they drove, her eyes caught on the gardens on top of the Senatorial Complex.

“My sister and I love those gardens! When we were little and mom used to take us to work with her, we’d play up there all the time,” Luke commented. Clearly she had been staring at the gardens for far too long if he had noticed. “I hope you also have pleasant memories there. It really was my favorite place when we were young.”

“Oh I have pleasant memories there all right.” She smirked, turning her head away from the scenery, looking at Luke instead. “The first time I ever had sex, it was in those gardens.”

“What? Outdoors? That’s a semi-public place!”

“The Senate was in session, so the gardens were totally empty save for my boyfriend and myself.” She felt almost like a normal youth, scandalizing Luke with a memory untouched by the war.
“Right.” He shook his head, smiling. “You don’t do things by halves do you?”

She raised one of her eyebrows, still smirking at him as he drove. “Hey, it was his idea to do it there, not mine. Not that I wasn’t thrilled with the idea, but I didn’t pick the place.”

“So are you still with this guy or-”

“He’s dead.” She cut that question off swiftly, the illusion of normalcy shattered. She hoped he understood she did not really want to go into it further.

Luke didn’t get the message. “…You said your home-planet was blown up, right? Did he die in that attack?”

She closed her eyes, allowing herself to picture Kier’s face for the first time in years.

He had been right, hadn’t he? Her family had been putting Alderaan in danger, and in the end everyone on the planet they both loved so dearly had paid the ultimate price. Funny how knowing that didn’t make her more inclined to forgive Kier. Even considering how it all ended, she would never be able to fully excuse his actions.

“No. He bled to death in my arms four years ago.”

Luke was silent after that. She felt a few pulses of comfort from him in the Force, but she tried to block all of them out. She was getting pretty good at that trick, keeping people from connecting with her. She didn’t need his comfort. Kier’s death had saved the Rebellion. He was going to betray them all! She had long since made herself ok with what had happened. (It was her fault. It was all her fault.)

The speeder pulled up to the penthouse, and Leia stared at the building wondering why she had agreed to come here.

Luke hopped out of the car, turning to her as he did, “Leia, I… I am sorry if I brought up stuff you wanted to forget. I keep underestimating just how bad things are in your world, and I know I hurt you in the process. I don’t want to hurt you.”

She began to leave the car herself, and he gestured for her to stay put. “No, let me make sure mom and dad are sleeping first. You didn’t want to see them, remember?” He grinned. “Don’t worry, I have plenty of experience both sneaking my sister in and sneaking in myself. If you don’t want them to see you, we can do this. Just follow my lead ok?”

She nodded and leaned back against her seat. She made the mistake of closing her eyes, and exhaustion claimed her immediately.

Luke woke her sometime later, shaking her shoulder and helping support her tired frame as she exited the car.

“Luke, I don’t know if I have the energy to make it all the way downstairs.” She yawned, just wanting to lie down already.

“If you don’t, mom and dad are going to see you.”

“I don’t care anymore. I want to sleep.”

“Are you sure Lei? I don’t want this to be something you’d regret.”
“Please Luke, just let me sleep.”

She felt his body shift as she leaned against him, and assumed that was him nodding as he dragged her along. She really wanted and needed to just collapse.

She heard the sound of a door sliding open, and then just a few steps later she was horizontal at last. She curled up where she was, and slept deeply and well.

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Pride surged in her when she found the near-empty room she had slept in the night before.

It wasn’t exactly as she left it. Someone had taken the dirty robes she had left balled on the floor, she did not know where they were.

She sat on the bed. Stared at the datapad still tossed haphazardly on it.

Where was the Dagobah system anyway?

She picked up the datapad, unlocked it and stared at the blank background screen.

She looked the system up, put her astrogation skills to the test plotting out the best and easiest routes to get there.

Then a ping. There was a new message for the Princess.

She knew she shouldn’t but… she opened the messenger client.

She was looking for some sign that there was something worth fighting for in this dimension, some reason it was worth saving.

Most of the subject lines seemed fairly self-explanatory. Impersonal. Professional.

Not all of them though. The newest one, the one that just came in was “Late (sorry) Name Day Greetings” followed by a highly excessive number of exclamation points. It was labeled as being from someone named Amilyn Holdo.

Leia did not open it.

It was a real message, from the subject alone she could tell it was not about the war, not about facts and figures.

Leia smiled. Her counterpart did have a life outside her fight. She had connections and impact and was real in a way she had not seemed to be just moments before.

Leia shut the datapad off, and lay back in the bed, ready for the day to end and the next to begin.

Chapter End Notes

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Next time: Another interlude.
Thank you endlessly to sethnakht for betaing this chapter, and especially for suggesting I split what was originally a super extra long chapter into two.

“Breaking news from Naboo, Senator Padmé Amidala, home to address concerns related to the death of Sheev Palpatine, collapsed today in the streets of the capital city of Theed. We are not yet sure what was the cause behind her collapse, and are waiting for an official statement from her team. She was immediately taken to a private medcenter to receive top notch treatment.”

“Wow, I knew the Senator was under stress, but that is a bit much, isn’t it?”

“I’m telling you, if she can’t handle the pressure of her job, she should not be in office…”

“She just collapsed? In the street?” Jobal was frantic, sick with worry.

“Madam Naberrie, now that she is here and receiving a blood transfusion, your daughter is going to be fine.”

Jabal barely heard the healer’s reassurance. “I should never have let her go out alone, how could I have been so lax…”

“Madam, if the healers on Coruscant had cleared her after the birth, there is no way you could have known she would have hemorrhaged.” The healer kept speaking, technical medical jargon and assurances that Padmé would be fine, that Humans who had just given birth experienced complications with regularity and the facility was prepared to handle them.

Jabal did not hear any of it.

She sat by Padmé’s bedside, clinging to her daughter’s hand, and blamed herself for Padmé’s condition. How had she missed so much that was happening in her daughter’s life? How had she been so unaware? A whole marriage and pregnancy, and she’d only found out at the very last moment? What sort of mother was she?

She should have been there, should have given Padmé the same warnings her mother had given her, that she had given Sola.

Jabal remembered how during her pregnancy with Sola she had somehow expected she would give birth and then recover immediately. That her body would just return to normal, that she would instantly and magically transform into an unrealistic ideal of motherhood free of regrets or doubts related to her role and children.

Jabal had of course discovered how wrong that was.

She had learned that mothers are still sentient, with all the emotional complications that always ensued, and even putting aside all the medical complications of birth, postpartum life had been far
from the return to normalcy she had expected.

Now all these years later she worried that her youngest child had gone into her own pregnancy with the same false expectations of ease and simplicity.

Jobal knew her daughter was a woman who had devoted herself to her work, and had romanticized all other aspects of life. She knew that marriage as well as motherhood were a fantasy Padmé had nurtured from a young age. That when it came to matters outside of her job, Padmé tended to see the good, and avoid the bad. That had always suited Padmé just fine, her job was hard enough, her concerns there were so far-reaching, why complicate her personal life with layers?

Padmé had dreamed of a perfect love and perfect pregnancy and perfect life all around, because all she had ever known was a world where work was hard but personal relationships were perfect and easy. Jobal had not realized Padmé would continue to stubbornly hold onto those fantasies for so long.

Now that Jobal knew about her daughter’s marriage, her secret relationship she had balanced all through the war, she began to suspect she knew why her child was acting as she was. She was starting to form theories about her daughter’s life, and she hated all of them. Jobal had always loved her Padmé’s idealism, but now she suspected that it could have been hurting her child.

Jobal had allowed herself to believe that her daughter, her brilliant prodigy of a daughter who had been elected queen at a young age and then left for distant Coruscant to be a Senator, hadn’t needed her mother to interfere in her life, to help show her the difference between idealized fantasy and what was real. She had clearly been wrong, and now she’d do her best to make up for the years of neglect.

...There are many issues that may have been factors in Senator Amidala’s decision to keep her pregnancy a secret, yet they do not fully explain why the public only learned of her condition because of later complications leading to her collapse in Theed, and her office’s need to explain the event.

Many who work in the political sphere have reported negative effects surrounding their reproductive decisions. This unstated disapproval is widely felt in almost all sectors. Even the Cerean government minister tasked with raising the birth rate, Saff Aleri, said she was worried about juggling motherhood with her work.

This is no new issue. Six years ago, Minister Rumzud Ruszua of Belnar noted while attending an important board meeting a week before her son was due that "people pretended that everything was all right, but would secretly be glancing at my huge belly."

This pressure has a noticeable effect on how Senators live their lives. A recent study by the University of Bar'leth found politicians who can carry children were more than twice as likely as people in the general population to have no children.

And while some things may lift those obstacles - a creche in government buildings, say, or jobshare arrangements for politicians, or allowing politicians to breastfeed in the Senate - the extra scrutiny on women's family lives in particular is often reflected by how voters see candidates.

One politician speaking under condition of anonymity said "Voters recognize a double standard but actively and consciously participate in it. They express anxiety about a childbearing being’s job in office taking a backseat to their role at home and wonder who is taking care of the children, especially if they are young. Yet if a politician is perceived as biologically capable of having children and they don’t, voters worry that they may not be able to truly understand the concerns of families."
Ahsoka stood outside Anakin’s rooms, dreading going inside.

On one hand, she was kinda glad his access to the holonet had been restricted until this trial debacle blew over. She wouldn’t want him learning about Padmé’s medical crisis from watching the news. Yet on the other hand…

She really could have done without having to be the one to tell him.

Squaring her shoulders for the fourth time since she had arrived in this hallway, she resolved to knock on Anakin’s door.

She slumped slightly in indecision again.

“Ahsoka? You’ve been standing in the hallway for a while, is everything ok?”

Ahsoka turned quickly, an overly large and very fake smile on her face.

Barriss stood not far down the hall from her, face wrinkled in worry.

“Barriss! Hi! Uhhh, how are we defining ok? ‘Cause there is a loooot going on right now.”

“Good point.” Barriss’s posture folded in, the worry lines on her face deepening. “I am glad the Republic has decided to no longer have us participate in their military, but the way we arrived at this place truly was…” it was as if Barriss only just remembered what had led to that, whose door Ahsoka was standing in front of. “Oh! I am sorry, I suppose you are far more connected to what is going on than I am.”

“It’s ok Barriss, the entire Order is dealing with so much right now, no one can really be expected to keep track of it all.” Ahsoka gestured towards Anakin’s door, “you are right though, I unfortunately was coming here to deliver some more bad news.”

Barriss’s eyes widened. “Oh no. News about the trial?”

“No,” Ahsoka shook her head, “not that.”

“Oh. Sorry, I shouldn’t pry.”

“No! It’s ok, I don’t mind talking about it, actually it is kinda nice, just…” Ahsoka scrunched her nose up. “Well uh… what do you think of the new Attachment policies?”

“Attachment?” Barriss seemed surprised by the question, “Ahsoka I am not sure I understand what that would have to do with-”

“Humor me?”

“Well, I am a bit unsure to be honest,” Barriss admitted. ”Of course Jedi have always experienced the foundational emotions that build attachments, we are sentients after all, but my understanding of the Code has always been that we were to forgo more selfish expressions of those feelings, and take care to limit situations where we would be tempted to impose our will onto the course of the Force. So…” she chewed at her lip slightly as she thought.

Ahsoka waited, letting Barriss sort her feelings out. She didn’t like where Barriss’ thoughts seemed to
be going, but she wouldn't interrupt.

“I suppose if a Jedi would be able to both exist within such a relationship, and maintain their willingness and ability to let go and trust in the Force and its direction when need be, I have no argument with the council’s decision.” She brightened as her thoughts on the matter became more concrete. “In fact if done properly I suppose it would not be that much different than the level of attachment found between Padawan learners and their Masters!”

Ahsoka smiled with genuine relief. She knew what her own thoughts on the policy were of course, but she had worried she was thinking with her heart and not actually reasoning things through. But if Barriss approved…

“Ok, so then I guess I will tell you why I am here. See, Anakin kinda got a bit of a jump on things, in that he kinda sorta is married. Only with him essentially being under house arrest and all, he’s as cut off from his family as he is from everyone else. So I’m here to give him the oh so bad news that his wife has collapsed and is currently in a hospital—”

“She’s WHAT?!”

Ahsoka had been so absorbed in talking to Barriss she had not heard the door slide open behind her. Now she turned to see Anakin standing there, eyes wide, silently begging her to tell him everything was ok.

...Before the news of her recent pregnancy was made public, speculation about Senator Amidala’s health was mostly relegated to the HoloNet’s conspiracy theorists. After the announcement from her office about her having recently given birth, Amidala’s health has become a case study in how she and her team have struggled to communicate with the public. A struggle that that comes on the heels of news that her political mentor, Sheev Palpatine, may not have been who he claimed. We are left wondering what other secrets the Senator may be keeping from the public…

This was not the way Ferric Obdur had expected his week to go.

He had been hired a little over four years earlier by Chancellor Palpatine to create a propaganda campaign to promote the shift in government structure from a decentralized democracy to a more centralized and efficient dictatorship.

He had done a great job so far (if he did say so himself), stoking distrust in the independent press, making people believe forced and ostentatious displays of patriotism were normal, encouraging people to get their information only from Palpatine himself and his approved propaganda sources, and deriding and tearing apart any person who so much as critiqued Palpatine’s policies.

He really thought he was doing a pretty good job of getting the galaxy ready for the shifts to come.

Just last week Palpatine’s approval ratings had been nearing the highest point of his multiple terms in office!

Yet now Palpatine was dead, and while Obdur was still doing his job, namely throwing doubt onto the Loyalist party by way of tearing down Senator Amidala, and creating anti-Jedi propaganda that cast General Skywalker as a monstrous villain (and to think, Palpatine had originally requested for Obdur to portray Skywalker as the lone good Jedi in a rotten Order)... well he was starting to wonder if without Palpatine, their cause would be best served planting these doubts over a longer period of time.
Obdur wanted to ensure that when they next found a strong political voice capable of leading them into the next era, they would be ready.

Yes, that was it. They would play the long game, and when the time was right the voters would willingly hand over their civil liberties.

A trial date has been set! After endless negotiation the Republic has convinced the Jedi Order that since Anakin Skywalker also holds the rank of General within the Grand Army of the Republic, they do have the legal jurisdiction to call him before a military tribunal. At this point it is anyone’s guess how this will go, with mounting evidence that Chancellor Palpatine was in fact, as strange it may be to believe, a secret Separatist...

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Leia O. has breakfast, Leia S. practices with her lightsaber.
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

I can not overstate how grateful I am to sethnakht for the beta!

This chapter has spoilers for Leia: Princess of Alderaan.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Leia did not want to deal with any more meetings, standing around talking about battles, being expected to know anything significant about military strategy.

Especially not this early in the morning.

So she decided to just not go.

After all it wasn’t like she was actually part of this war effort.

The Sith needed to be defeated, but she wouldn't accomplish that by participating in military strategy meetings. No, she’d be of best assistance confronting the Sith directly.

She’d already fought in an actual battle in an actual war for them just yesterday. She’d dueled against a Sith Lord! An actual real Sith Lord! She'd more than earned a day off from strategy and meetings.

Well ok, far more than just a single day off, since she’d be taking Luke to Dagobah with her as soon as she could.

Which was only responsible of her, really. After all, if anyone in this dimension wanted to have half a chance of defeating the Sith who'd taken over their government, they'd need Luke as well trained as possible.

Which reminded her, she should probably track Luke down and spend the morning training him.

Leia wandered through the base, looking for her twin's counterpart, but unfortunately Luke did not seem to want her to find him. She couldn't even locate his presence in the Force. Where had he gone?

She felt a tug towards a doorway at the end of a fairly empty hall, and she quickened her pace, hoping she had found Luke.

The door slid open to reveal a very large, yet empty room. She recognized it, Luke's training room, the one he had taken her to on her first full day here. The room really was empty, the only things in it were the cabinet against the wall and a pile of training remotes.

Leaning against the wall, Leia sighed, frustrated.

She was pleased to have found this place, but disappointed that Luke was not here.

“You seem troubled, young Padawan.”
She glanced up, a smile overtaking her face. The translucent figure of Obi-Wan Kenobi had joined her in the room.

“I am trying to find Luke, but he doesn’t seem to want to be found,” Leia said.

“Ah, yes. He is remarkably good at hiding, if I recall.” The ghost wistfully nodded his head. “That boy once managed to avoid his aunt and uncle for a full week on Tatooine.”

“You were with him on Tatooine?”

“Yes, I spent the past two decades watching over him.”

“So you were close with Luke while he was growing up?” She wanted to believe one member of her family had been there for at least one of them while they were young.

“Oh no, no. Not at all!” Uncle Obi seemed surprised by her assumption. “I only know about that particular incident because Owen thought I was responsible. Came by my hut and threatened to shoot me due to Luke’s absence.” Uncle Obi laughed, as if being threatened was a minor matter. “I had to explain to him, not for the first time mind you, that I was the one who brought Luke to him. Their home was precisely where I wanted him to be. Why else would either of us have been on that dreadful planet? Why would I take him away?”

Why had he chosen that sand covered rock as their hiding place in the first place?

But the answer to that question would undoubtedly be long and involved, and she wanted him to help her find Luke now.

“Where was he? Back then, when he was hiding.”

“At the time I was not certain. I helped look for him of course, even though Owen requested I not, but in the end I was not the one who found him, nor did anyone explain to me what had gone on,” he reacted as if he had said something humorous, eyes twinkling. Leia was not sure what he found amusing. “Perhaps he was with his friends, the boy was a teenager at the time, and that has always been an age of… rebellion.”

With his friends.

Friends Leia did not know.

Part of a life on a planet she had very limited familiarity with.

She and her brother had never had different friends, yet this version of him had a fully different life from anything she had known.

“Did he have many friends there, in the desert?” She needed to know something about them, even just what they were like, these childhood companions of Luke’s.

“As I said, we were not close,” Obi-Wan reminded her. “Mostly I watched and observed him from a distance, as per Owen’s request.”

“Yes, but you were watching him, weren’t you?”

“But of course! No matter what else was going on I wanted to make sure he was alright. He was…” Obi-Wan’s voice broke, his eyes seemed full of some indescribable emotion, and he looked away from Leia, breaking their eye contact. “He was all I had left, Leia. Not to mention of course… but
no, you don’t need to hear the ramblings of an old man driven mad by isolation and loss.”

“Uncle Obi, please, I want to know.” If listening to him could help him manage his pain, then she would happily hear anything he had to say.

He watched her for a bit, sceptical that she wanted to hear his thoughts. After a long moment he spoke. “I believe that boy is the Chosen One. That he can succeed where Anakin failed.”

Leia laughed, thinking that Obi-Wan was joking with her, pulling her leg to cut the tension. He did not laugh with her.

He drew further into his robes, his face shadowed by his hood, and his presence began to dissipate. Oh kriff, he really was serious about that nonsense.

“I’m sorry Uncle Obi, I don’t mean to laugh at you. It’s just… I’ve never really put much stock in that old prophecy.” She shook her head. “I mean obviously I know my father killed Darth Sidious in my timeline, but what does that really mean? There are still those who follow the Dark path, still those who fall from the Light. I have never been sure if the inherent nature of the Force is something that can really be changed, or if changing it is a goal anyone should ever aspire to.”

She sighed, pushing herself upright from the wall. “Look, I don’t want to wade into the debate about the prophecy and what it means, but I’ve always felt it… it was an exaggeration or not as important as others seemed to believe. I mean we are all the same in the Force, are we not?”

“Child, your father has a midi-chlorian count of well over 20,000 - and both your brother and yourself were also recorded at birth as having an unusually high concentration in your blood. Surely you wouldn’t dismiss this sort of raw power as insignificant?”

“Significant how? Uncle Obi, I really have never understood.” She’d never been interested in this particular topic, always felt incredibly self conscious whenever it was mentioned at all, and didn’t appreciate how they seemed to be gearing up to discuss it at length. “Besides, what makes you so sure it must be Luke? Why not my counterpart?”

“You sound as if you have been speaking with Master Yoda as of late,” he said, dismissively.

She wondered which part of her speech had earned her that comparison. She supposed she’d find out once she reached Dagobah. Speaking of training....

Leia eyed the drones Luke had gathered, clustered together in a corner.

“Uncle Obi, if I were to train here later, could you perhaps offer me some guidance? The advice of a Master as renowned as yourself would be welcome.”

The ghost smiled, “I can not speak to my mastery of any forms. It has been a great many years since I could truly practice, and I have only had one real battle since I went into hiding. But yes, I can help you train.”

“You’re speaking of the duel where Darth Vader killed you?”

The ghost surprised her by laughing. “No, no. I threw that fight. I was speaking of my final battle with the broken man known only as Maul. He tracked me down some years ago, one last final act of desperation on his part.”

“You… you killed Maul? He’s actually dead and gone?” Incredible! The former Sith had dedicated his life to challenging her uncle, and he and her brother were constantly dealing with the desperate
Nightbrother and the crime syndicate he ran.

The ghost gazed at her, tight lipped, one eyebrow raised. “You seem surprised by this news. Didn’t think an old desert dweller had it in him?”

“What? No! Just… in my universe, my uncle, he has never been able to defeat him. Even after everything Maul has done, he still remains out there, dragging others into his suffering.”

A familiar pain crossed the ghost’s face, and then in a voice so low she almost missed it, “Satine. She… she is gone in your world too, isn’t she?”

“I’m sorry. I know that you -”

He interrupted her, voice strained with false humor, “If I remember correctly, you wished to train and hear my thoughts on your forms. Best get to it then. I imagine you have other things you will want to do over the course of the day.”

She understood, dropping the subject and drawing her ‘saber. She gave the ghost a bow, and began to practice.

There was something in the air around her that was… comforting somehow. A blanket of calm quiet. It reminded her of when her family would visit her grandparents in the mountains, and they would get snowed in together.

She shifted slightly, noticing she’d fallen asleep fully clothed. Her basics tugged uncomfortably on her chest as she settled into her new position. It was annoying enough to wake her, making her want to open her eyes just long enough to adjust the cloth around her breasts before she fell back asleep. Instead Leia jolted fully awake, looking around at her birth family’s living room in a panic.

That’s right, Luke had talked her into coming back here with him, and she had dozed off in the car. Rather than move her to an actual bed, he’d left her on the couch. At least it seemed he had put a pillow under her head and a blanket over her body.

She didn’t know where the chronos were in this apartment, and she really hoped she hadn't slept in later than she normally would allow herself to.

She stood, tugging at the clothes she had borrowed the day before, trying to orient herself in the strange apartment. Her stomach clenched uncomfortably, reminding her she hadn’t had much to eat the day before, just nutritive milk and ration cubes. A combo that didn’t exactly leave one feeling particularly satisfied for long. At least the ration cubes had been a step up from the protein paste they sometimes had to make do with in the Alliance.

She remembered that Anakin and Threepio had fetched them all water on her first day here from a room coming off of this one. She walked towards the door they had exited from, and as it slid open she was immediately confronted by a number of pleasant food smells. The room was indeed a kitchen, and in one corner was a small table laden with a variety of breakfast items. All three members of her birth family were seated around the table, and as the door opened they turned to watch her enter.

“Morning Lei!” Luke chirped.

“Luke, don’t talk with your mouth full.” Padmé’s response was automatic, route, a reminder clearly given countless times before.
She gave Leia a nervous smile, glancing quickly at the foods piled on the table. “We didn’t know what you like to have, so we asked the server droids to make all of our daughter’s favorites. If you want something else, please, we can always get the droids to prepare that instead! Whatever it is you want.”

“I’d be surprised if there’s anything they haven’t made already. I’m sure Leia’ll be fine,” Anakin gave her a broad grin, and gestured to the table’s only empty chair. “Come on, join us.”

She was really hungry and the food looked amazing, so she did as he asked without complaint. They truly had figured out her breakfast preferences and then some. They even had a mug of mintea waiting for her at her seat.

The family (plus one) ate in silence.

It seemed now that they actually had her with them at their comfortable breakfast gathering, no one knew what to say.

Anakin cleared his throat, sending a furtive glance towards his wife as he did. He seemed to reach a resolve, gazing at Leia with determination. “So you sure mentioned, uh, Tatooine a lot in your stories about your universe. Have you ever been there yourself?”

She raised an eyebrow at him. This was the best he could do to start conversation? “No, I cannot say I have. I had intended to, my father sent me there to retrieve General Kenobi and ask him to join our cause. Unfortunately the Empire captured my ship above the planet before I had the opportunity to land.” She gazed at the stacks of food on the table, refusing to make this easy for anyone. “That was of course when Darth Vader tortured me for several hours, I was scheduled to be executed, and then forced to witness the deaths of everyone I had ever loved.”

The awkward silence returned. No sound save for people chewing, utensils making impact with plates, nervous shuffling in seats.

Luke was the one to break the silence. “How about Naboo? Ever been there?”

Leia nodded. “Once to Naboo proper, and once to Onoam in the Naboo system.”

Luke grinned. “It’s great isn’t it?”

Leia couldn’t return his smile. “Onoam or Naboo? Naboo has… certainly enjoyed a position of privilege within the Empire.”

“With Sheev Palpatine acting as a despot…” Padmé’s voice trailed off as she gazed down at her eggs, then glanced up with a sigh, finishing her thought. “I can scarcely imagine what Naboo has come to symbolize to the galaxy.”

With a thin smile, Leia answered. “Nothing good. Naboo has grown quite rich under his rule, while the rest of the Galaxy has suffered.”

Luke fixed Leia with a glare. The effect was ruined by his blue milk mustache. “Hey, lighten up, will you? Not everything needs to be all doom and gloom all the time.”

“Luke!” Padmé admonished. Leia was surprised that Padmé was scolding her son. “Let her express her emotions. She clearly comes from an awful place, and wants us to understand that.”

Guilt flooded Leia’s system, she turned to the other politician, “No, he’s right. I was intentionally being unpleasant. Of course not everything is always terrible in my dimension. I just… well, I
wanted to make you all feel as uncomfortable with my presence here as I am.”

Padmé gave her a long searching look, before sighing and returning to eating her breakfast.

There was a clatter as Anakin put his cutlery down. “So Leia, is that the closest to an apology for how you’ve been acting we’re going to get?”

“What?”

“You hurt your mother and I pretty bad the other day. Now I know we didn’t raise you in that timeline of yours, so I can’t say this with real certainty, but I am sure the Organas taught you better manners than that. Now tell your mother you are sorry.”

Was… was he trying to parent her? Treat her like a child who needed to learn her manners?

This was absurd.

She had been taught every sort of decorum possible, she didn’t need this... this over-glorified sperm donor lecturing her about proper apologies!

Leia schooled her face into her best diplomatic smile. “Please accept this apology for my behavior. In retrospect, I believe the situation resulted from the great deal of stress I am under, due to finding myself stranded in an alternate universe with no known method of returning home. While this is by no means an excuse for how I acted, I hope knowing the cause will help you better understand the source of my behavior. Again I am sorry for what happened. I look forward to us putting this matter behind us.”

She had started out using the careful cadence of a seasoned politician, but hadn’t managed to maintain her actual professional tone for very long. About midway through she had practically growled the words out, and after that her voice took on a fake saccharine quality. As she finished speaking she stared Anakin down with an exaggerated mocking smile.

There was a loud sigh from Padmé, and once everyone had turned to look at her she glanced about at the three of them. “Enough. All of you, it’s enough. Luke, I still mean what I said earlier about letting people feel what they are feeling. Anakin, I talked to you about this, she isn’t our daughter and doesn’t want us treating her like she is. I know how hard that is, I really do, but you need to stop baiting her. And you…” She turned to Leia, deflating as she did. “I can’t both follow my own advice about understanding your situation and lecture you, since,” she paused gathering in a breath, straightening her spine as if to brace for the words she was about to say, “I am not your mother, but please, recognize that we’re trying, we really are.”

Hadn’t she promised her mother she’d do the same? Try? “I understand. I let my temper get the best of me, when you had offered me this nice meal. That really was less than civil of me. I can’t promise that it won’t happen again, but I will try.”

“See, Ani, she does know how to give a real apology,” Padmé said in a teasing tone, smiling at Leia, and she could not help but match the woman’s smile with one of her own.

The four of them settled back into eating their food in silence, and Leia’s thoughts drifted to something her father had once told her. “If you don’t mind my asking, my father told me the Jedi of old did not have families, to best ensure they’d keep their judgement impartial. Was he mistaken about this policy, or did you somehow get an exception?”

Anakin almost choked on the food he was eating. “Organa told you that huh?” He let out a shaky laugh, glancing at his wife (who was smiling at him with amusement) as he did. “He uh, he wasn’t
wrong, that used to be the way of things, yeah. But right around when you and your brother were born the Order changed their rules, and Padmé and I didn’t have to keep our relationship secret anymore.”

“You were together before the policy change?”

“Yup. We were married for years before then,” Anakin said, “I mean, I was always in love with her. Had been since I first met her, back when she was a Queen and I was...” he trailed off, visibly uncomfortable.

Leia changed the subject for him, not wanting to press on what seemed to be a painful memory. It was one thing to remind them of her discomfort being there, it was something else entirely to be so deliberately unpleasant. She turned her head slightly to regard Padmé, “you were once Queen of the Naboo?”

“Oh yes, I was elected many years ago, when I was just a girl.” Padmé shook her head slightly, “we tend to favor young girls in our elections since it is believed they have a pure sense of wisdom all others lack. The older I get the less sense that makes.”

Leia nodded. “I know. I was friends with the Queen of Naboo when I was a teenager, she and I were around the same age. Dalné told me a bit about the queens of the past, what her position had meant before the Empire, before it became purely ceremonial.” She paused to take another bite of her breakfast, continuing once she swallowed her food. “This is going to sound like a rather strange question to ask, but... there wouldn’t happen to be any large murals of your likeness on Naboo?”

Luke’s face lit up as he responded for his mother. “Tons! Everywhere. You can hardly turn a corner without seeing something done up in mom’s likeness!”

“Thank you Luke.” Padmé raised an eyebrow at her son’s overenthusiastic response. A slight touch of color on her cheeks was the only indicator of embarrassment, “There are portraits of me, yes. Thankfully there are far less of them than Luke makes there out to be, but they do exist. Why do you ask?”

“I could have sworn a mural of a queen I saw in Theed actually moved its head to watch me as I walked past it a few months ago. Knowing it was probably an image of you doesn’t explain what I saw but well... at least it gives me a bit of context.”

“Oh, that makes total sense!” Luke chimed in, “my sister is prone to Force visions, she even can practice psychometry! You probably are the same.”

Anakin was grinning, nodding along with what his son said.

Leia did not like the idea she had been unconsciously calling upon the Force well before she arrived in this dimension. Her stomach - so happy just moments before from the abundance of good food - sank as she thought about what she had learned last night, how she could have been putting her parents, her entire planet, in danger throughout her life due to her Force-sensitivity.

She was about to return to her breakfast - to force her stomach to calm with the addition of more heavy sweet warm foods - when another memory, half forgotten, rose to the forefront of her mind. She startled, turning towards Padmé with interest. “You didn’t happen to know a Quarsh Panaka when you were queen?”

“Of course I did! He was the captain of my guard, and is still a dear friend.”

It all made sense. How furious her father had been. Why her mother had been so scared.
Why the Moff had been so curious about her adoption.

It hadn’t to do with some past altercation with her father, as she and Dalné had thought. It had been entirely because of this woman. Her birth mother.

Wait.

When they had met Moff Panaka had told her he wanted to tell Palpatine about her, and when she had recounted the story to her mother she had immediately told Leia she had been in more danger than she could ever understand.

They had been hiding the fact of her biological parentage specifically from Palpatine.

What was it about Padmé Amidala that made it so vital Palpatine never knew she had given birth?

“Leia? Why did you want to know if I knew Quarsh?”

“Oh. I met him in my dimension, years ago, when I was sixteen. Actually...” Leia laughed now that she thought about it. “I had dirtied the dress I had worn to the Naboo system and had to borrow one from Dalné. A traditional one worn by the Queen... she called it the Jubilation Dress? I don’t suppose Panaka ever saw you in it?”

“Of course he had... wait, when you were sixteen you looked very much like I did when I was Queen. He knew you were mine, didn’t he?”

“He spilled the tea he had been drinking all over the floor when he saw me. I think he figured out the nature of our relationship in that moment.”

Padmé smiled fondly. “Have you seen Quarsh again since then?”

“No. He was assassinated by a radical arm of the rebellion just after our meeting. The Queen and I almost got caught in the bomb’s blast, actually.”

“What?” Anakin was gaping at her.

In truth Leia had been very upset herself when she’d experienced the bombing. It had been the very first death she had ever personally witnessed, and she had not yet been convinced of the need to utilize violence at all.

She’d been so young back then, so innocent. Still sure they could reform the system from the inside, without ever shedding a drop of blood.

She didn’t tell any of them that. Instead she carefully cultivated an air of indifference, and took a large bite of food.

It was Luke’s harsh glare that proved to be too much. She slammed her hand down onto the table, and turned to him scowling. “What? I’m not the one who killed him you know, I just happened to be there.”

“Lei, how can you be so cavalier talking about this stuff all the time?” Luke didn’t look upset, or even disgusted. No, he looked worried. “All of your stories are so horrible, and you don’t seem to care at all.” He paused, searching her face for something. “No that’s not right. It’s like you are pleased to be causing us pain when you say these things.”

“What is the part of that story that is causing pain for you, that in my universe this friend of your
family’s would chose to be a **loyal Imperial**, or that he had to be eliminated to bring justice to the workers he was oppressing?”

“The part where you apparently almost died in a bombing when you were sixteen!” Padmé’s hand slammed onto the table, echoing Leia’s earlier movement and punctuating her exclamation. “Why would anything else you said matter more than your life being at risk?”

She exhaled, loud and heavy. “First you talk casually about being tortured, now this bombing? Do you expect us to hear these things and not care?”

The anger had drained out of her voice, exposing fear and frustration as the main thrust of her emotional state. “Honestly the most concerning part of all of your stories is that you seem to think so little of your own life or safety. How could it not even occur to you that that is why none of us like to hear these stories of yours?”

Leia looked down at her food. Maintaining eye contact felt too painful. She did not like the look in those dark brown eyes (the same shade of brown she saw every time she looked in a mirror). Did not like knowing she was the cause of the emotions she sensed swirling around this room.

She felt so foolish, like a child. She hadn’t acted so immature in years. What had come over her?

At first she struggled to think of the right words to say, to express that she truly did regret how she had acted.

When the words did not occur to her she resorted to pushing food around her plate, miserable with her situation, but mostly with herself.

The four of them did not talk at all after that, the whir of server droids and clatter of cutlery filling the space the conversation had left behind.

**Chapter End Notes**

Next time: Leia S. has a friendly conversation followed by an incredibly frustrating one, and Leia O. arrives at the Temple to start her Jedi training.
Chapter 32

Hi all!

For those of you who celebrated yesterday's autumnal feast, I hope you had a great day with as few awkward family arguments as possible.

Personally I'm celebrating something a bit more personal. This weekend is my birthday! As my gift to all of you, I'm not only posting this chapter but will also be posting a second chapter either tomorrow or the following day (which is my birthday)!

Both of these chapters are fully unbetal and have never been read by anyone save for myself before, so I am truly interested in any thoughts you may have on how to improve them, or if there are things that feel off to you.

Basically I just am feeling very excited about my birthday and want to share this story with all of you and so, well, here you go!

Leia had hoped that Luke would join her as she had practiced her forms under Uncle Obi’s gentle tutelage, but he had avoided the training room all morning. She did not know why she had expected him to be in the mess instead, when she finally took a break to grab some breakfast.

When she finally found the room, and once more placed her tray of food at an empty table, she still was no closer to figuring out where Luke was.

There was a clatter as someone dropped their tray next to her, and she turned slightly to see Sana slumping over her food, scowling and rubbing her head.

“Shouldn’t have had that last drink last night. I think I’m getting old,” Sana muttered, by way of greeting.

Leia grinned at her, “that might just be it, because I feel fine. Woke up early and got some exercise even.”

“Yeah yeah, rub it in don’t ya. If I was 20 I’d be able to get away without a headache too.” She sighed, shifting in her seat. “Hey uh, I dunno if you actually meant it last night or what, but if you’re serious about contacting Chelli, I can make that happen.”

Chelli? Who... Oh! Right, Sana’s ex, the one who used to work with Darth Vader. The woman who, from the sound of it, might be able to help Leia piece together more information about just what her father’s life really was like in this dimension.

Leia nodded, “yeah, I think contacting her would be a good idea.”

Sana laughed, sharp and bitter, “no, it really isn’t. Talking with her is the opposite of a good idea.”

“Oh come on, how bad can she be?”
Sana stared at Leia, raising her brows slightly as she did. “Let’s just say you even entertaining the idea of talking to her has actually convinced me of that alternate dimension story of yours,” Sana shook her head, “the Princess would never do that, and with good reason. Chelli… well let’s just say she doesn’t play well with others.”

“Yet you used to date her?”

“Yeah, we met back when we were both at the University of Bar’leth,” Sana said with a shrug. Leia hadn’t been expecting that, for this spacer to have once attended such a respected institute of higher learning.

Were many smugglers and bounty hunters similarly well educated, or was that a unique quirk of this particular universe, or just Sana herself?

Sana sighed, slouching back in her seat, “Not much to tell when it comes to how Chelli and I got together. As Han likes to point out, I have real awful taste in women.”

Leia knew Sana didn’t want to contact her ex, that even considering it was a huge favor she was reluctantly doing for her, and her heart swelled with affection for the spacer.

Last night she had overheard both Sana and Han describe themselves as bad people, just there for the money, heartless mercenaries with no care for the Rebellion itself.

Leia couldn’t square that with what she had seen from either of them in her time here. They both had proven to be true friends, and deeply concerned with tending to the needs of the people around them.

She wondered how she would be able to pay Sana back for this favor, to display how much she really appreciated this willingness to get back in touch with a person she clearly wanted nothing more to do with, just because Leia asked it of her.

Leia realized that she didn’t actually know that much about the other woman. She wanted to correct that.

Establishing a real friendship with her would be worth it, no matter how short their time knowing each other might be.

“So, the University of Bar’leth, huh? That’s quite the prestigious school you went to.”

Sana quirked an eyebrow at her. “Yeah, yeah it was.”

Clearly she wasn’t going to take that as the opportunity to share a personal anecdote that it was. Ok then. “Can I ask what you studied?”

“You can ask.” Sana smiled at Leia, not elaborating further.

“Playing that close to the chest, huh?”

“Girl’s gotta have her secrets,” Sana said as she took a bite of her food.

Leia snorted. “What you studied in college? I’d imagine a spacer like you has more interesting secrets than that.”

“Imagine what you’d like, I know what I wanna share and what I don’t,” Sana said.

Sana lifted an eyebrow. “What’s with the sudden interest in me?”

“I can’t just try to get to know you?”

Sana stared at Leia in silence, before turning her attention to her food.

“Come’on, what did you do before you went to Bar’leth?”

“I survived.” Sana’s tone was dry, but she flashed Leia a smile after she answered.

“You are a real easy lady to befriend. Just an endless fount of friendliness.”

Sana’s broad smile returned. “I do try.”

“At least tell me what planet you were born on? So I can at least pretend we are growing closer as friends.”

“Leia, you’re going to talk to my nightmare ex. You don’t get closer than that. But if you must know, I’m from Nar Shadda,” Sana said. “Wormstew Town.”

The Smuggler Moon’s most infamous slum?

Sana’s smile seemed almost sad now. “See, now you’re judging. Funny how most everyone does that.”

“I’m sorry,” Leia said. “I didn’t mean to, I just wasn’t expecting that.”

Sana picked up her glass of water, turning it in her hand. “Why weren’t you?”

“I… I guess because you went to the University?”

Sana shook her head. “I wasn’t asking you as if I was actually curious, I was asking you to think about what it is about me you find so surprising. Why you feel that way.”

“I’m really sorry Sana. You’re right, making a snap judgement like that really was beneath me. As a Jedi I really should know better.” She felt terrible, she really did.

Sana snorted. “As a Jedi. Yeah.”

Leia frowned. “Do you still think I am lying about who I am?”

“I told you, you convinced me when you asked about Chelli,” Sana said dismissively.

Right. She had said that when she sat down, hadn’t she. “When do you think we could talk to her?”

Sana shrugged. “When would you like?”

“As soon as possible?” Surely there were things Sana would have to do first. It couldn’t be that simple.

“Then we’ll go talk to her as soon as we finish our meals,” Sana said, confirming that it was actually that simple.

“What like… right now?”

“Nah, not this instant. As I said, I want to finish my food.”
Leia laughed, easing back in her seat, enjoying Sana’s company.

They made small talk for the rest of their breakfast, Sana deftly avoiding sharing too much more about her past with a series of wry jokes and observations.

When Sana and Leia finished their food, Sana led Leia towards a different hangar from the one the Falcon had been parked in, different even from the one Luke had landed his fighter in the night before.

They came to a well maintained and compact starship. Sana activated the ship’s controls, lowering the boarding ramp, then gestured for Leia to join her onboard.

“Welcome to my baby, the Volt Cobra, which I can guarantee is actually the fastest ship in the Galaxy, no matter what Han might say about that junkheap of his.”

Leia nodded, and followed Sana through the ship’s corridors to the cockpit. Normally she’d be overjoyed to explore a ship like this one, the sort of craft that had been heavily modified well past any standard industry specs. Normally she wasn’t just moments away from a holocall with some unknown stranger who possibly could help her form a plan that might, might, bring a Sith lord back to the Light.

She didn’t care how much of a long shot it was, Leia needed to exhaust every option before she gave up on him.

Sana was watching her, there was wary edge to her expression, casually sprawled in the pilot’s chair though she was.

Leia knew that at even the slightest indication that she did not want to go through with this, Sana would not place the call. Leia needed her to make this call.

She sat in the passenger seat, nodding tersely at Sana as she did, and focused her gaze on Sana’s gloved hands. They flew across the controls, activating the holo and punching in the codes that would connect to the woman everyone had said was a monster.

The Human woman who popped up on the holo, just moments after the call was placed, did not look like a monster.

She seemed fairly non-threatening, young - in her late 20s - wearing an old beat up leather pilot’s cap complete with goggles. She wore standard spacer fare - a plain shirt, a vest - she was bordering on non-discript. There was a large electro-tattoo covering her right arm (who even got those anymore?) Leia suspected it continued past where her shirt sleeve covered it. As the image flickered into focus she peered at the holosystem, moving close so the screen was filled by just her large amber eyes which had an epicanthal fold.

She looked startled by the call, but also pleased, focusing on Sana, leaning back to reveal an eager grin. “Sana! What can I do for you today? Finally realized you aren’t really the joining a cause type? Looking for work? Perhaps to get back together?”

Sana snorted, eyes rolling with disgust. “Sorry Chelli, getting back together is really never happening. Nah, I’m calling because you owe me some favors.”

The smile melted off the supposed monster’s mouth, replaced instead by an expression of profound contrition. This was the woman everyone claimed was irredeemable? She seemed friendly enough, if sad. Like she truly did understand she had done something wrong, and wished to do better.
“Well, there is no denying that, is there. Whatever it is you need from me, you know you’ve got it.”

Sana nodded. “I’m holding you to that. As in I’m recording this conversation and will be playing that clip back at you as many times as needed.”

“Wouldn’t expect anything less! Now what is it?”

“Have some questions that need answers, answers that apparently only you can provide.”

“Well that certainly doesn’t narrow things down, does it?” Aphra must have a rather high opinion of her knowledge base, “Ok shoot, what do you want to ask?”

“Oh no, I’m not the one who will be doing the asking.”

“No? Then who is?”

Sana grinned, winking at Leia as she adjusted more of the controls on the dash. With a start Leia realized that the woman on the other end of the call hadn’t been able to see her, that her presence was to be a surprise.

It clearly was not a pleasant surprise, based on how Chelli Aphra’s face contorted once Sana finished fiddling with the controls.

“Well well well, if it isn’t Princess Organa.” She snorted. “Nice haircut.” Aphra frowned as she met Leia’s eye. “Thought you said you didn’t want to ever see me again. Didn’t take you long to eat those words, did it?”

Leia winced. Right. She was probably never going to get over people she was just meeting for the first time already having an opinion on her due to the Princess. “I need to ask you about Darth Vader.”

“Oh no. No no no no no. I’m already on the big guy’s shit list, no way I am giving him even more reasons to want me dead. Absolutely the krizz not.”

“If he already wants to kill you, telling me what you know can’t hurt.”

“What I know? Stang, Princess, you honestly don’t get it, do you? I am one of the few people left who really understands what he is!”

“What he is?” Had she underestimated what this woman could possibly know?

Aphra was absurdly pleased with the information she had, her desire to share it visibly warred with her need to remain silent. Her face shifted between expressions before with a grin she said, “he’s part of an ancient Order of Force users known as the-”

“He’s a Sith. Yes, we know,” Leia cut her off swiftly. If she was reading Chelli Aphra right, dismissing her information, information Leia undoubtedly knew far better than she did, would throw her off her game. It would make her easier to deal with.

At least that was what her mom always did when dealing with those who thought they had all the answers. Make it clear they didn’t, and they would spill what they knew to you just to prove you wrong.

Aphra proved her right - in a way. She started talking, talking a whole lot, but so little of what spilled from her mouth in her sudden defensive speech was of much value.
“Yeah, ok, but do you actually get what that means? I mean sure, if you know that you probably know that the Sith are bad yadayadayada basic Jedi poodoo, but do you actually get it?” Aphra clearly didn’t expect an answer, barreling on after her question.

“The entire Sith Order was supposed to have been wiped out over a thousand years ago by the Jedi - their defeat was literally the event the Galactic Republic of old was founded upon - but here Darth Vader is, an honest to goodness Sith! A living relic of ancient times! Here he is, just walking around as part of the fascist government that restored order after the devastation and chaos the Clone Wars wrought!” There was something personal there. Aphra’s voice dipped too low when she mentioned the Clone Wars for there not to be.

“I mean that is huge Princess. The implications for our understanding of history alone! What really happened at the end of the Jedi-Sith war? How much of what they told us was blatantly false? Did the Jedi even know that the Sith were still around? What other long lost parts of the past might still be lurking about?” Aphra sounded self satisfied as she concluded her rant, which Leia honestly thought sounded like nothing but conspiracy theorist kyrat spit. “That’s some prime info, you can’t pretend otherwise.”

Leia frowned, annoyed, and turned to Sana for clarification. “When you met her at the University, what was she studying?” Maybe that would allow Leia to form some sort of context to understand that nonsense.

Sana laughed, “archeology. She’s even got herself a doctorate.”

Oh great. An academic obsessed with “unlocking the secrets of the past.” They were always bugging the Order to let them into the Archives, always accusing the Jedi of hoarding relics and keeping the truth from the public, when truly many things in there were frankly dangerous for anyone, let alone those without Force-sensitivity, to handle.

Sana was still talking, “now she’s a ‘rogue archaeologist,’ which is just a fancy way of saying weapons dealer. Not just weapons of course, although that is what she specializes in. She tracks down, steals, fixes up, and then sells all manner of ancient artifacts to the highest bidder, no regard to ethics of any sort.”

Doctor Chelli Aphra gave Sana an impatient frown, “thanks for talking about me right in front of me, as if any of that is new information for either of you. Seriously though, there is more to this Sith thing. You see, Vader’s answering to an even bigger and badder Sith, and I know who that is.” She smirked, leaning back, content that the information she was offering was the sort of thing that she alone had access to.

Leia was rather happy to disappoint her. “We know about Sheev Palpatine, actually. That really isn’t the information we are after.”

Doctor Aphra stared at her, face wide with shock, and moved closer to the holoprojector, upset. “How... how could you know that? Who told you? I was banking on selling that info for a good price! Was it Pers? I’d heard rumor she was still out there, but I thought she’d left the antiquities trade far behind.”

Leia turned to Sana, grateful for her presence and ability to explain the things this woman said.

“Pers was the Sava of the University before you were even born. Foremost expect in the Galaxy on Sith artifacts. No one’s heard from her in years.” Sana leaned in towards the holorecorder, making sure she was centered on it. “You’re trying to distract us from the questions we came here with Chelli. Cut it out.”
Sana sat back in her seat, gesturing for Leia to continue.

“Right. What I came here to ask you about is… well you were around Darth Vader a lot? Before he decided he wanted you dead?”

Doctor Aphra stared at her, confused. “What? What is the question here? I mean, you know that.”

Leia chewed on her lip, not sure how to phrase what it was she wanted from this woman. From what she had gathered last night, if anyone might have a clue as to what remnants of her father’s humanity remained, it would probably be this woman.

Finally she sighed, owning that there really was no way to ask this without it sounding awkward. “What is his daily life like? His habits and rituals, that sort of thing.”

“What?” Aphra laughed, shaking her head. “I’m sorry, say that again? You want to know his habits? Seriously, that is the massive favor Sana is calling in? Karabast, here I was thinking you were going to make me steal something from him and was trying to distract you, that’s really all you want?”

She spread her arms out in a wide gesture, body language open and free. “Right, well if that is all that you are after, I am happy to oblige.”

The awkward silence lasted well past breakfast ended.

It still hung over them as everyone went through their morning routines, Leia once again ducking into a guest bathroom to bathe and dress in the freshly laundered dress she had arrived in.

After everyone was ready to fact the day ahead, Anakin drove both Leia and Luke to the Temple.

Much like when Anakin had driven her there the previous morning, Anakin did not speak to her as they drove. Luke joined in the drive’s quiet, silently watching the buildings fly past. Unlike the day before the atmosphere of the drive wasn’t suffused with a multitude negative emotions directed towards Leia. Instead both Anakin and Luke were radiating worry. It was immediately more frustrating and more endearing than the drive the day before.

Once more Ahsoka was waiting for her at the Temple’s entrance, but this time she was not alone. Ventress stood as far away from Ahsoka one could while still best being described as standing next to her.

This time, rather than dropping her off without a word to the other Jedi, Anakin parked the speeder and got out. Luke followed after him, and Leia trailed behind them both.

“Morning Snips,” Anakin called out to Ahsoka, “Have a nice trip yesterday?”

“Hey Skyguy,” she replied, “I think we did.”

Anakin strolled up next to her, grinning wide. “How’s Ilum this time of year?”

“I bet it was cold. It’s always cold,” Luke said, joining the two of them in their chatter. It never progressed past small talk, and Leia tuned them out.

She was fascinated by Ventress, who seemed similarly interested in her. Ventress narrowed her piercing blue eyes as she watched her, darting her gaze every so often towards Ahsoka as well. Her scowl deepened.

“Tell me, did the two of you establish a training bond during this trip of yours?” Her voice had an
unusual cadence to it, the best word Leia had for it was purr, like a content tooka. Leia hadn’t ever heard someone who spoke quite like this before.

“We did,” Leia confirmed.

Jealousy with a stab of deep hurt flashed in the Force. None of it showed on Ventress’ face. Her expression remained calm.

Luke, Ahsoka, and Anakin’s conversation died out.

“I see,” Ventress stretched the word ‘see’ out. “Was Ilum the only place you visited in your travels yesterday?”

What was she trying to get at? Leia could not tell, and answered the question truthfully, “no. We also visited my mother.”

“No. My mother is Queen Breha Organa of Alderaan.” Leia knew she was playing into whatever game Ventress was playing, but she did not care. The identity of her real parents was a truth she would never deny.

“Fascinating,” Ventress caressed the word as she said it, stretching some syllables out and truncating other. Ventress’ voice rose in pitch, as if all those present were not already focused on her words and she needed to project them to be heard. “Skywalker, were you aware your little pet took the girl to Alderaan?”

Leia turned away from Ventress, watching Anakin instead. He was not looking in her direction, rather his face and eyes were focused on some point in the distance far away from any of the other individuals present. The way his face was contorted made the scar over his eye pop somehow, the line of pink more obvious as the skin stretched and pulled. His jaw was tightly clenched, the cleft of his chin exaggerated like his scar.

Distantly part of Leia’s brain noted that she did the same thing when she was upset - clench her jaw so tight the veins within would jump with a dull throb.

“Really, Ventress? This is how you want to start the day?” Ahsoka sounded pissed, her tall frame holding more anger than Leia had seen the woman display before. “This is exactly why I don’t want to work with you, you always have to do this sort of thing, don’t you?”

“It was an honest question my dear. Truthfully, I am surprised you hadn’t already told him. I suppose the two of you aren’t quite as close as I had assumed,” Ventress said with a smirk. There was no question that she found the discord she was sowing delightful.

Luke looked alarmed, glancing quickly between everyone present. If he felt even half of what Leia was sensing - cold pressing anger sucking the air out of her lungs, jealousy twining around her organs and expanding outward, building pressure that would rip her insides apart as the possessive want and need and no-no-why-was-it-not-me grew and grew and grew - she could understand why he was so concerned.

It hurt and twisted and leached all the warmth and hope out of her as it built in power.

She had only just started to allow herself to acknowledge this power that caused her to feel what those around her did.
What must it have been like to have experienced this for one's whole life? To always know and experience pieces of those around you, to be fully vulnerable to their mental state? Where did she start and these stranger’s emotions end?

No wonder she had blocked it off for so long.

She hoped that her Luke knew how to manage this, to curtail being drawn in by the emotions swirling around him. He was always so open, she had trouble imagining him blocking others out.

If admitting she was Force-sensitive meant dealing with experiences such as these, then she wished she could return to her ignorant state of just a few days earlier. She wanted to be protected from the world around her in full again, never letting anyone in and safe from all the pain these abilities could bring.

Yet… there was something familiar about this pain she was feeling, something that reminded her of… that torture session, when she had so little hope left to cling to.

She shut her eyes. Vader was here. Some part of her knew Vader was close, and she wanted to run as far away as she could. Or better yet locate a good solid blaster and funnel her bad feeling into taking him out once and for all.

She reached out to Luke, desperate he might be able to help her get through this, or explain how and why she was so sure Vader was nearby. The more aware of what she was feeling she became, the more intense it got. She did not know how to make it stop.

Leia! Luke’s voice echoed in her head, alarmed. Oh stars, Leia no, you can’t think about it, that only makes it worse. Never linger on those sorts of emotions. Focus on me ok? Try to breathe with me, and do not think about what the others are feeling, please don’t, you have to let go of their emotions. You need to empty yourself of all emotion… or if you can’t do that think of something that makes you happy. Please Leia there has to be something good in your life that you can think of.

She tried to narrow in on Luke’s breathing, watching his chest rise and fall, forcing her lungs to match his in rhythm. It was so hard, they hurt like she’d just been punched in the solar plexus, fighting her attempts to breath rhythmically, but finally she had them matching his own.

That’s it! For a moment his joy and pride and support broke through the negativity around them, and clarity returned. It did not last. Come on, Leia there has to be something you can focus on. Please. How about racing huh? The feel of a ship hurdling through space at full speed, putting all else behind you? Just you and hyperspace and the hum of the engines? Would thinking of that help?

Racing? Nothing about what Luke was describing was particularly appealing… but there was something there…

The hum of the engine hurdlng through hyperspace...

Curled up on a seat in the Falcon’s cockpit, returning from a mission. Both she and Han worse for the wear, but alive and victorious. Han had a cut on his cheek, the blood dried already. The trail of dried blood, the dirt smudged on his face, the reflection of the blue light of hyperspace all made his hazel eyes shine, the white of his teeth as he smiled glow. He was laughing at some stupid comment he had made, then rubbed the scar on his chin nervously when she didn’t laugh with him.

Her breathing evened out, the cold receded. She was not in danger. Vader was not here. She was just standing on a landing platform in the cool dawn of morning, as three grown adults who really should know better argued and picked at each other with petty empty concerns.
Luke had moved next to her, his hand on her arm, and she turned her head to look at him.

What was that? Why had it happened?

He knew, he could explain. More than that though, her heart was breaking, just a little, thinking about how prepared he was to help her deal with that. She really hoped experiences like that were not normal for him.

If they were, how could he stand it?

He gave her a quick apologetic smile, and squeezed her arm, before turning to the others with a frown. “Stop it! All of you, cut it out! Leia is as defenseless as a youngling who only just arrived at the Temple, and the three of you just go and suffuse the Force around her with this much Darkness? What is wrong with you? You should all know better!”

His voice rang out in the relative quiet of the morning. The normally bustling activity of the city had not started for the day, the hour was still long before the flight lanes would be filled with commuters on their way to work. There was silence, as the others on the platform stood there, appearing started by his words.

Leia wondered how much time had lapsed since they had begun to argue and now. It had felt like an endless expanse of time for her, but no one had moved, and the sun was still in the exact same spot. Even the light haze of morning dew that hung in the air had not moved, and the clouds were in the exact same places they had been in before.

Ahsoka’s presence touched up on her mind, a burst of worry and apologetic excuses and promises to do better. There was something so innately bright about her, now that she was no longer angry, and Leia clung to that light. She had known the woman for such a short time, yet already she felt so comforted by her presence.

Ventress watched her with eyes slightly narrowed, before one eyebrow rose and a contemplative grin came over her face. Leia liked that smile more than the ones the woman had worn before.

It was Anakin who reacted the most dramatically. He looked scared, his eyes wide and brow furrowed. He took deep shaking breaths, and nervously looked between Leia, his son, and the Temple behind them.

Finally he squared his shoulders, and focused his intense gaze on Leia. She felt again what she now knew was him attempting to connect with her in the Force. She was tempted to keep him out, to reject his invasion of her mind once more. She did not. He pressed past her walls and flooded her system with sorrow and self recrimination. He had not meant to harm her, and would try to do better. He wanted to know how bad it had gotten for her, communicating through a wordless sense of profound understanding that he could relate to getting caught up in the emotions of others. She let him touch on her memory of just moments before, and he drew away from her mind, quickly, in a panic.

He gazed at her for a moment longer, tears in his eyes, before focusing on the Temple. Then without another word he set off in long strides towards it, away from her, away from the others, away from the Darkness he had plunged her into.

Luke gave her a quick hug, and then set off after his father, jogging to keep up with the tall man’s pace.
Next time: Leia O. starts her training, Leia S. continues to converse with Dr. Aphra.
Ahsoka, Ventress and Leia stood on the platform together for a while longer, before Ahsoka began to move toward the Temple.

“Right. Well I for one think some meditation is in order, don’t you?” Ahsoka remarked as she walked down the platform.

To Leia’s surprise Ventress nodded as Ahsoka moved past her. “Not a bad idea at all.”

Meditation?

Oh great.

Here she thought she’d actually be training to become a more efficient combatant so she could take down the Empire, and they wanted her to meditate?

She set off after them, focusing on her relief that their petty arguing had vanished, replaced with a soft spoken discussion of her training and how they planned to proceed with it.

Unfortunately from what she could hear, there was going to be a lot of mediating in her future.

She’d watched a lot of Luke’s attempts at Jedi training. For the most part it had seemed to involve either meditating for hours on end, or wearing a blast shield and evading low level blasters as training drones buzzed around him and he waved his lightsaber about. She had assumed that was only because those were the only things General Kenobi had taught him to do.

She was beginning to suspect that assumption had been a mistake.

What was she getting herself into?

The three of walked together to the courtyard with the large golden tree Ahsoka had shown Leia during her initial tour of the Temple. They stopped before it, and the two older woman regarded each other for a short while before Ventress turned to Leia, her brows raised.

“You should learn how to connect to others at will, and more importantly how to guard yourself from being... overwhelmed by what you find when doing so. Based on what happened just now outside… well it wouldn’t do for you be set off whenever you are near Force-sensitive who are upset, especially if your ultimate goal is to fight against the Sith. You’ll find the emotions they exude are far more powerful than anything any of these Jedi could ever dream of experiencing.” Ventress spat the word Jedi out like an insult, her lips curling with disgust around it.

Leia wondered what had led to Ventress being here, both accepted by the denizens of the Temple as someone who was not a threat, and to being assigned to assist with her training.

There was a story there, about rules and compromise and building towards a more inclusive future, and she hoped to learn it before she returned home.

Ahsoka placed a hand on Leia’s shoulder, crouching down slightly to be at Leia’s eye level. “I know meditating doesn’t seem that exciting, but it is vital Leia.”
With the guidance of the two women, who as time went on seemed to be falling back into their pattern of lightly bickering, Leia folded herself into a seated position on the ground facing the tree, and set out to follow their instructions: focus, clear her mind, let the Force fill and guide her, and feel the tree.

Extracting information of actual value from this woman was harder than staring down a gundark. Not that Leia had ever attempted the later, but she was pretty confident it would be easier than this.

Anything would be.

Thankfully, even with the archeologist being as annoying as it was actually humanly possible, Leia was learning some interesting things about Darth Vader from talking with her.

Oh not how Vader took his meals (Aphra had never seen him eat) or how many hours he slept at night (Aphra had never seen him sleep), no but… there was something about her.

Something about the snide snarky way she deflected questions... her cheery banter even when discussing the death mark on her... how quickly her face lit up whenever she remembered Sana was there and then crumbled when Sana made her disinterest clear...

*He misses Aunt ’Soka.*

Leia was sure of it.

He had kept this woman, just a decade younger than Aunt ‘Soka, at his side as a pale imitation replacement for her, and when he’d realized she could never be anywhere near as pleasant to be around as Leia’s aunt, he’d discarded her.

Of course, many of the things Aphra could recall were fascinating. According to Aphra, Vader never took his helmet off, he spent long stretches of time inside some sort of sealed meditation chamber, and while Aphra would not say where it was, he apparently maintained a planetside base somewhere.

As interesting as these tidbits were, nothing they had managed to learn from her (who knew there so many different ways to answer questions without actually answering them) compared to Leia’s realization that he missed Ahsoka.

Some part of him still wanted his family at his side.

Still loved them.

Leia felt she had really learned all she was going to from Aphra, and for that discovery alone she felt this call had been more than worth the trouble.

She still wasn’t sure why everyone had cautioned her so heavily about interacting with the rogue archaeologist, but she wasn’t sad to say goodbye.

“Thank you Doctor, I think that will be enough.”

Chelli Aphra narrowed her eyes at Leia, contemplative. “You sure? Throw in some credits Princess and I can tell you some real juicy stuff - the kind of intel that is sure to blow your mind.”

Leia blinked at her, frowned, and in her very best impression of her mother said, “you were making such a big deal about how simple the information I requested was, I’m sure whatever it is you have
to share still falls under the favor category?”

“Leia’s right Chelli. You said you’d do anything, so spill.”

Aphra laughed, shaking her head chidingly. “Ooooh no. This info is faaar too secret and valuable to part with as just a favor. Sorry.”

Sana glowered. “What could you possibly know that we’d find that valuable?”

There was a twisting sick feeling in the pit of Leia’s stomach, and she knew whatever it was Aphra had to say next could not be good.

“I know why he wants that self-righteous Farm Boy. Why he’s been chasing him all across the Galaxy.”

Roaring silence.

Did she actually know? How? She’d given no indication before then that she might know Vader’s true identity, much less his connection to Luke.

There was a light chuckle from Sana. “Nice try, but we already know that one. It’s ’cause Luke’s convinced he’s a Jedi and the Empire wants all of them dead.”

“No Sana, that really isn’t it. I mean the shining example of good farm living is a Jedi, yeah, or at least he has the potential to be one one day if he keeps eating his greens and grows up big and strong, but no, Vader wouldn’t be after him like this if that was all it was.”

“Then what is it then?” Sana growled out.

“Uh uh uh. No way I’m spilling secrets this big without payment.”

Leia sighed, shoulders slumping slightly. “It’s ok Sana.” She gave Sana a slight smile. “I think we’ve learned enough.”

Doctor Aphra studied Leia before a shocked expression bloomed across her face. “No, that’s impossible! You know too! This, all that other stuff you knew before… How? How did you sniff out this info Princess?”

Leia’s forehead was starting to hurt. She rubbed at it as she tried to come up with a way to end this conversation without giving away her situation.

What was it her mom did when she was pressed?

If she could just think of it… ugh she had to endure watching so much political banthacrap as a kid, how could she not remember how it worked! All those years of having to be quiet and still as she sat on her mother’s lap in the Senate had to have had some benefit.

Wait… that’s right.

Answer the question with another question.

“No, I believe I’m the one asking questions here. How did you come by this information?” There.

Even if it didn’t get any more answers out of Aphra, it should sound Princess-like enough to throw suspicion off her, if this woman was really as good at sussing people out as she seemed.

Leia was almost surprised that it worked.
“He sent me to interrogate, torture, and kill a mortician for him. Wasn’t hard to connect the dots after that, not with how… fixated he was on the boy. I checked the dates, and they added up right too.”

A mortician? What would a mortician have to do with anything unless… oh.

That… that was sick.

Why not just have her corpse exhumed if he wanted to check its medical history?

There was no reason someone else had to die for that information. That body wasn’t her mother, not anymore, and the idea that he thought that corpse was more valuable than an actual sentient life?

What could have possibly happened to him, to cause him care so little about the suffering of others?

To make him so cruel and uncaring?

She was terrified this disregard for others wasn’t a result of a dramatic shift in the timelines.

That it might be a sickness her own father carried within him as well.

No.

No!

Her father was a good man.

He had always encouraged her to help others.

Had always been concerned with making life better for the people of the Galaxy.

There was no way this had always been festering inside him.

It simply could not be.

“Hey, anyone going to fill me in on what the two of you are talking about, or am I just fated to be the odd one out here,” Sana asked.

Aphra’s face softened as she turned to look at Sana, and to Leia’s horror she began to nod.

Leia rushed to shut the holo off, not comfortable with the possibility that this woman knew. That she could tell others.

She was not fast enough, and found herself standing with a hand raised limply towards the holo controls as Aphra talked.

“He’s after Luke because of whose kid he is. Luke’s mom was that famous Queen of Naboo and Republic Senator, the one the Jedi killed.

Sana scrunched her face up. “His mom was killed by the Jedi? But I thought Luke’s dad was some sort of Jedi.” She turned to Leia. “He was a Jedi, yeah?”

Maybe she could still fix this. Laugh it all off as a joke.

“Now there is a great turn of phrase Sana! ‘Was’ a Jedi, past tense, as in ‘this being was a thing but he isn’t it any longer,’” Aphra was enjoying this information far too much. “Wow your highness, from your expression I’d guess you really hate that your pet hero has Sith blood running through his
veins. Worried that the jogan might not fall far from the tree?"

The words echoed in Leia’s head. Worried that the jogan might not fall far from the tree. A statico beat.

Aphra turned away from Leia, ignoring her stunned expression, focusing on Sana once more, “I was wondering the same things you are Sana, so I did some digging around the kid’s last name. Struck me as odd that the only Jedi I could find with that name was somehow also the only one the holos didn’t vilify after the Jedi betrayed the Republic. Plus, even more interesting? His Clone trooper unit during the war? It was the 501st Clone trooper legion.”

Aphra’s smile faded slightly, and she turned to Leia once more, her expression full of genuine curiosity. “Hey Princess, why haven’t you been using this info against the big guy? I mean kriff, it may actually help your little anarchist group fulfill all your wildest terrorist dreams. How long have you known anyway?”

Sana was watching Leia as well, a deep frown on her face, her forehead wrinkled in thought. “Luke is Vader’s son? Leia, you said… oh stang it Leia, how long have you known? Don’t you think Blondie deserves to know this too?” Then her eyes grew wide, “Leia, please tell me Vader doesn’t know. Please tell me that when you fought him yesterday he did not find out, Leia, please.”

“The Princess had another confrontation with him yesterday? Interesting, wonder how many people you got killed in that fight. Still, I hate to say it Sana, really I do, but he knows all about the kid, tracking his son down is basically his number one obsession.”

“What? No, of course he knows about Luke, I meant…” Sana stopped herself, the unspoken words filling the cockpit.

Aphra leaned in close, her face must have been just inches from her holorecorder. She grinned a wide toothy grin. “What are you worried about him knowing, Sana? Is there more to this than I thought? Something you know that I don’t?”

Leia didn’t know what to do.

So she took the path of least resistance, and told the truth.

Or rather a truth.

She hoped doing so might throw Aphra off enough that she wouldn’t figure out that Luke wasn’t the only child Darth Vader had fathered.

“In your research have you ever come across anything related to Alternate Universes?”

“Alternate Universes? What? Ok, I’m confused, what does this have to do with anything?”

Sana shook her head, eyes narrowing at Leia, “Oh no, this? This is a very bad plan.”

Sana didn’t end the holocall, so her disapproval clearly was not too extreme.

“Oooh something the Princess approves of, but Sana thinks is a bad idea? Please fill me in!”

“Answer the question, Doctor,” Leia said. She was impressed by her ability to keep her voice level.

“What do you know about Alternate Universes?”

“What sort of Alternate Universe are we talking about here? Civilizations have over time come up
with all sorts of different theories.”

“The sort created by divergent timelines,” Leia clarified.

“Ah! Well there are some myths relating to the concept, sure. The Tide-Drifters and the ancient Mist-Weavers both had theories about the idea, what it would mean in a metaphysical sense, how to peer into timelines, even some weird discussions about hypothetically visiting other universes - stuff like that. Why are we talking about this again and more importantly, why does Sana think this conversation is a bad idea?”

The Tide-Drifters and Mist-Weavers? Those were real Force using cults that predated the Order! This woman clearly had more knowledge on these matters than anyone else in this dimension. The most she had encountered since arriving here. Could she be her key to getting home?

There was only one way to find out. “Right. Well the thing is, I am not the Princess Organa.”

Aphra let out a laugh, harsh and deep and full throated. “Like hell you’re not.”

“No, see, I’m a Jedi from an Alternate Dimension. I have no idea how I got here or how to get home.”

Aphra stared at her for a long time. Sana was groaning, still muttering about how awful an idea this was.

“Oh, a Jedi from an alternate dimension!” Aphra continued to laugh “Yeah sure, that’s believable. I mean come’on Princess, that may explain your bad haircut, but do you even believe in the Force? Pretty sure that was an important step in becoming one of those monks, wasn’t it?” She shook her head. “Karabast Princess, a Jedi from an alternate dimension? Seriously? You actually expect anyone to buy this poodoo?”

Her face shifted suddenly, into a winning (and very fake) grin. “Tell you what Princess, if you are interested in the Jedi of old, I have a wonderful crystal up for sale. Stars knows you have the credits to afford it, and oh is this ever an item you’ll want to buy.”

Her voice took on a quality that reminded Leia of a particularly deceitful used speeder salesbeing. “This crystal is imbued with the consciousness of Immortal Rur, leader of the ancient Ordu Aspectu, a group that broke off from the Jedi more than a millennium ago! It is just full of Jedi knowledge, the sort that no one else in the entire galaxy can provide.”

Immortal Rur? The Ordu Aspectu? What?

“Maybe Rur has the answers you are looking for!” Doctor Aphra narrowed her eyes at her, leaning in close to the holoprojector once more. “If you chose to act on this offer, and again I can not overstate how beneficial it would be for you to do so, we could work out a simple payment plan of just…”

With the added element of the woman now trying to get Leia to purchase this crystal of hers (which would, if it was real, qualify as one of the most dangerous artifacts she had ever heard of) getting Aphra back on topic of the conversation was useless.

Leia tried, putting in a good effort, but it seemed from here on there would be no getting through to her.

She could focus.
She could clear her mind.

She could not feel the tree.

She sat before the giant golden tree that filled the temple courtyard, as she had for what felt like countless hours already.

Nothing.

No matter how hard she tried, she just couldn’t feel the tree.

Ahsoka had told her she should be able to sense the tree, had promised her it would not be that different from connecting with a kyber, or when she had been able to connect to and form a bond with Ahsoka the day before.

It wasn’t like those things.

It wasn’t like them at all.

Leia could not feel the tree.

Honestly she just felt silly, sitting on the ground “emptying her mind.” She did not have the first clue about what she was doing, and she did not like that sensation at all.

It frustrated her, stuck without a means of returning home, trying to learn an entire new way of thinking, of feeling, that it was all so hard to learn.

Her mind kept drifting to how angry she was with herself for walking away from Han two nights ago, and how scared she was that she might never return home.

What if the Rebellion collapsed without her there?

Her friends captured and defeated without her to lead them?

Or far worse yet, what if they thrived without her, her presence never truly needed?

What if they liked the other her more, the Jedi with command of the vast powers Leia was unsure she’d ever truly understand?

Maybe that Jedi was the leader the Rebellion really needed - not her.

What if Leia was just holding the Rebellion back?

A disorienting rush swept through her, she was fleetingly reminded of when she was little and learning to swim, going underwater and not knowing what to do as the water pressed in on all sides.

Then for a glorious moment she could feel every being in the temple, clear and precise and strong. She knew where to find beings she had never met before in her life, knew their mood and why they felt how they did. Even the birds that fluttered about the Temple and the rodents doing their best to burrow into the kitchens filled her senses. Each and every being sung and blazed with life.

Just as Leia realized what she was feeling, her senses reeled and she jolted back to herself, leaving nothing but the aching knowledge of her potential. The surety of connection with none of the skill needed to feel it again.

Woah.
Was that... was that what she was supposed to feel?

She tried to do it again, and it was akin to trying to hold water in her fist, the substance spilling out as she tried grasping it.

She shifted her seat, wincing as she did, her body had gone cold and numb from being held in one place for too long.

She concentrated hard, hoping to stubbornly will her senses to expand again.

Nothing.

She let out a frustrated cry, standing and abandoning her attempts entirely. She almost stumbled as she stood, her legs in pain from remaining still and folded.

The sound of Leia almost tripping over own two feet caused Ahsoka to open her eyes. She had been meditating next to Leia this whole time.

“You need to relax Leia. Just feel the Force and ease into it. Empty yourself, and let the Force fill you. Then you should be able to connect with the tree’s presence in the Force - full of life and vitality.”

“I don’t understand, just what exactly am I supposed to be feeling. For a moment there I almost thought I had it, but... well I definitely did not feel any tree.”

“But you did feel something? Not the tree, but something else.” Ventress’ voice rang out, and Leia turned, finding the pale woman walking closer to them both from the courtyard, putting a datapad away in one of her jacket pockets as she did. “Something shook you, I could sense your surprise just before you stood.”

Leia nodded, yet when she started to think of her response found she did not know how to explain what she had felt. She shrugged. “I did feel something, yes. It wasn’t the tree though, and it only lasted for a moment, and it wasn’t... I didn’t feel empty before I felt it, if anything I was full of emotion.” She sighed, glancing back at the tree. “I suppose you’ll want me to try again? Empty myself out and connect?”

Ahsoka gave her an apologetic smile “If that isn’t too much sitting still for you to handle in one day, ye-”

Ventress cut her off. “I am not sure if emptying yourself is the right approach. If I understand what you were just saying, it was in the acknowledgement of your emotions that your connection to your power could be found?” Ventress smiled, just slightly, the expression more a smirk than anything else. Her eyes locked onto Leia’s own, and they seemed to sparkle. “Leia, when you are facing down one of your enemies, and feel like you could not possibly keep going for a moment longer without failing... do you find yourself reaching for an inner reserve of strength?”

“Oh no. No, I do not care if Master Yoda himself has searched your essence for all signs of the Dark Side and declared you free of it, you are not corrupting her with that ‘use your anger’ garbage. Leia, do not listen to her, ok?” Ahsoka was no longer seated, instead moving fast to place her body between Leia and Ventress, as if she was shielding the small Human from an attack.

Leia maintained her eye contact with Ventress, and thought about the question the other woman had asked. She contemplated that core of extra power inside, the one that reverberated whenever she thought of her loved ones, of her need to keep them safe, keep everyone safe.
As much as she hated to acknowledge that she had been using the Force all along, she nodded. “Sometimes the battlefield opens up, and I just know where to send troops, what will be the best shot to take.”

Ahsoka turned quickly, staring at Leia aghast. “No! Leia please don’t listen to her. Kriff, I knew this would happen.”

“You heard the girl, it is through her emotions that she feels a connection to the Force. If we use that as a starting point, with time she can be trained to connect in your Proper-Jedi-All-Detached way as well. But to get there we have to acknowledge where she is and teach her, not keep banging our heads against a wall trying to get her to connect with a method that does not work.”

The argument made sense. “Ahsoka, I’m sorry but she is right.” Leia shifted her gaze to meet Ahsoka’s eye. “Normally I’d be on your side here, truly, but I do not know how much time I have in this dimension. I fully intend to leave here with as much knowledge as I can possibly gain, and if there is a faster method of learning this I would like to explore it. We can’t just keep trying something that does not work, over and over. We need to find a path that will actually advance our purpose forward.”

Ahsoka’s mouth quirked into a grin, and she shook her head a bit as she stared at Leia. “Doing or not doing, as opposed to merely trying. You certainly are wise, Leia Organa.”

She sighed, closing her eyes. “However this is one lesson that adage can not apply to.” Ahsoka opened her eyes again, a smile cutting the serious tone of her voice. “Connecting to the Force can be dangerous Leia, one can study proper methods and technique their entire lives and still need to utilize caution. You have had just one morning of learning, far from a point where you can yet say you’ve hit a wall.”

Leia had to admit the wisdom of that argument. Nothing she had ever learned had been mastered in a single day. It would be foolish to give up on this method entirely just because a more attractive alternative was possible. But… why not study both methods to maximize her effectiveness at this task? Surely that would make more sense than refusing to approach an entire avenue of study.

“Regardless of if she will continue learning only your meditation techniques alone, surely even you must admit it is time for her to take a break, or even better move onto other lessons.” Ventress said. “Spending an entire day on meditation and nothing else would be a waste.”

Ahsoka groaned, rubbing at one of her montrals as she did. “Ventress, do you have to make every part of this as unpleasant as possible?”

Ventress bared her teeth in a smile. “Oh, for you my dear? I most certainly do.”

Ahsoka glanced at the shadow the tree cast, before giving Leia a startled look. “I hate to say it, but Ventress is right. We’ve been at this longer than I thought. Why don’t we take a break, and after that get you started on some combat training, huh? I bet you’re dying to move around a bit after sitting still for so long.”

Leia nodded, grateful to finally get to the combat training she desired.

“Oh! That reminds me, where did you put your kyber Leia? I tried to find it on the ship after Luke commed to say you weren’t staying with me after all, but I didn’t find it.”

Leia reached into her pocket, to show Ahsoka she still had it on her, and found there was nothing there.
"I left the crystal at the apartment," Leia said, embarrassed to have forgotten it in the pocket of the vest she had been wearing the day before.

"Hey, there is nothing to stress over," Ahsoka said, "I know the entry codes for the doors, let’s go there and get it, ok?"

“And I suppose I am to simply stand in this courtyard and wait while the two of you go off to fetch this kyber?” Ventress glared at Ahsoka, the lines of her frown further accentuated by her tattoos.

“You can do whatever you want to do Ventress,” said Ahsoka, far lighter and more cheery than she had seemed moments before.

“I fail to see why retrieving the crystal is even necessary at this point in time. In my opinion the day would best be utilized focusing on physical training, particularly with weighted objects, building endurance as she holds herself in a variety of poses,” Ventress said, and noticing Leia’s answering grimace she continued, “do not think I failed to observe how you stumbled at the end of that meditation session. Such weakness is unacceptable.”

“Right. So Leia you can come with me to get your kyber, or stay here as Ventress makes you get into uncomfortable poses while she dangles weights off you.”

Leia had to admit, as uncomfortable as that particular task sounded, the idea of strength training and building was highly appealing. However she also did not want to misplace the crystal she had spent so much time the previous day locating.

“Perhaps I can do the strength training, and then after a few hours of that exercise we can go to the apartment and get the crystal?”

Neither Ahsoka nor Ventress seemed pleased with that plan, which was the closest to reaching a compromise as Leia was going to get with them.

Sometimes a deal where neither party was satisfied was the best you could broker.

In truth she wanted to take a break before launching into the training exercises Ventress described, but she could tell the pale woman was impatient, and felt getting her activity out of the way first would work better than forcing her to wait.

It seemed Ventress realized this was the best deal she was going to get fairly quickly, as her scowl dropped away, and she moved to show Leia a pose she would like her to get in.

It involved her standing on her hands, and already Leia could feel her blood rushing into her head. This pose would be truly unpleasant to maintain.

Ventress moved to correct Leia’s positioning, moving the angle of her arm slightly, bending one of her knees, before taking a step back and saying, “Tano, can I trust you to watch her and ensure she maintains the proper form while I go and get weights?”

There was a resigned grunt from Ahsoka, Leia could not see her from this angle, and then the sound of Ventress’ footsteps receding.

Well if all else failed, Leia would be returning home physically stronger than when she left. Which given how stringently she maintained her physical training regimen was not only no small feat, but also undoubtedly of use for their war effort.

Leia smiled, thinking of the benefit of this task, and shut her eyes, trying to find the exact blend of
distraction (so she would not concentrate on how much her muscles strained, or the blood pounding in her head) and focus (she had to maintain her balance, had to make sure she did not drift out of the exact pose she was left in) she would need to stay aloft in this position.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Leia O. bonds with a kindred spirit, Leia S. finally finds Luke
She was enjoying Ventress’s exercises far more than she’d expected.

The strength training was practical, and fun in the same way she always found her own self imposed exercise regime to be.

It also helped that she was clearly far better at the tasks Ventress set for her than had been expected, based on the hums of approval the pale woman would make when Leia quickly and easily adapted to each addition to the training session.

“My husband, a Jedi Master already when we met, took issue with these tasks when I first demanded them of him,” Ventress said when their session drew to a close. “It is interesting that you find this so much easier than meditation. The two tasks are not that dissimilar, and yet…” She grinned. “You are a fascinating student indeed, Leia Organa. I look forward to continuing your training.”

“But...?” Both Ventress and Leia turned to Ahsoka, confused by her single word addition. “Sorry, that sounded like a statement that is followed by a ‘But.’ I want to know what that but is.”

“...But,” Ventress paused, giving Ahsoka a quick glare, “my comm went off while you were training, and unfortunately I must depart for now.”

Ahsoka frowned. “You’re taking jobs? And prioritizing them over training her?”

Leia wondered if the two of them even noticed how the power dynamics between them were playing out. For all of Ventress’s bluster and prickly attitude, she had deferred to Ahsoka on every matter so far. Even when she had been leading Leia’s lesson, she had sought Ahsoka’s permission. Yet Ahsoka still was acting as if Ventress were the one bullying her around.

Ventress rolled her eyes. “No, Knight Tano, I am not taking bounties at the moment. My Husband commed me, requesting my assistance with a mission for your Order. I must go now and take care of whatever situation he has gotten himself into this time.”

There was a shout somewhere in the square, followed by hushed chatter. A slim blue skinned Twi’lek woman was running towards them, a frown on her face. “Ventress! Ventress, there you are! We need to go, and go now!”

Ventress watched the woman rapidly approaching with a calm facade. Before she reached them, Ventress gave Leia a bow.

Enjoying the way her muscles were screaming in protest, Leia bowed back. She had always loved how alive and in touch with her body she was after pushing herself to her limits.

“Obviously I can’t speak to any talent with the Force, but if you need any assistance at all, I assure
you I am very skilled with a blaster,” Leia said as she straightened.

Both Ventress and Ahsoka seemed surprised by Leia’s offer. Leia did not know why anyone would think she would not want to get involved.

“No. No, you are not ready yet for a mission such as this,” Ventress said, the underpinning of regret clear in her voice.

It was that regretful tone that convinced Leia to stay where she was, rather than push to join them.

“Right.” Ahsoka nodded. “Ready to head to the Nabberie family apartment then?”

Leia nodded in response.

Truthfully she would rather deal with this emergency with Ventress, she could do with some excitement, but since that did not seem to be an option she’d go wherever Ahsoka asked.

Ahsoka began to walk away from where Ventress stood, and it was clear she expected Leia to follow her. Leia gave Ventress a second respectful bow, the move now surprising the Twi’lek woman who had just reached their group, before she set off after Ahsoka.

The pace the tall Togruta was setting was not a particularly easy one after the training she had been engaging in just moments before, but Leia did not complain in any way. She was determined to meet every expectation set before her in this time of training, so that she might return to her home dimension as prepared as possible to take on Palpatine.

That didn’t mean she wouldn’t internally take stock of the cold metallic thread in her lungs, the shooting pain in her side, or how her legs protested every time she put her weight down on one followed by the other. At least the ride to the apartment would give Leia time to sit, stretch and relax.

She was quickly catching a second wind, and was eager to return to the Temple after this and hopefully begin actual lightsaber training. She wondered what it would be like.

The one time she had handled one of the Jedi’s lazer swords herself, during their raid on Grakkus the Hutt’s complex on Nar Shaddaa, she had found the weapon to be wholly unique to use. When she had first picked the blade up it had been surprisingly heavy, yet as she had swung the sword around it had grown increasingly light in her hands.

She tried to imagine what it would be like to have a lightsaber of her own. One made to be used by her and her alone.

Not one that had been found among other Jedi artifacts like the blade she had wielded on Nar Shaddaa, or even a family heirloom like Luke’s. A weapon made exactly to her specifications, to be as efficient as possible.

She could do some real damage to the Imperial forces with a weapon like that.

When they got back to the apartment, it became incredibly obvious that Ahsoka had not needed Leia to accompany her at all.

“You said you left it in your dirty clothes? Why don’t I head to the laundry room and look for it, and you just wait here,” Ahsoka said as they entered the living room.

Had Ahsoka wanted to bring her here simply to get her away from Ventress, or did she have an ulterior motive?
Leia’s question was answered not long after they arrived.

There was a voice Leia heard echoing in the apartment. The noise seemed to be originating from where Padmé had received that holocall from Leia’s father not long after they had met.

Padmé was home, and Ahsoka had rather unsubtly brought Leia here to interact with her.

Great.

Still, Leia was curious, so she moved closer to the office to better hear the conversation taking place inside.

“Oh come on, you can’t be telling me you think they are going to accept that sort of behavior just so they can deregulate the industries further! How can their top priority really be causing bodily harm to countless sentients!” There was a pause, Padmé must have been talking with someone over the Holo and had the volume turned down much lower than her own excited voice.

Leia moved even closer to the office, eager to overhear more.

“Yes, I had lunch with Senator Coarolds the day before last. I really thought we had smoothed everything over and they would hold off! Shiraya’s Word, these Centrists, they find new ways to give me headaches every legislative session.”

There was a longer pause this time. “I am sorry I… I think I have to go. I hear someone,” Padmé shouted those last few words, clearly hoping to get the attention of whoever was home, “in the apartment. Thank you as always for these weekly check-ins, I can’t wait to return to doing them in person when you get back. Until then, enjoy your time home on Chandrilla.” There was a shift in Padmé’s voice, it rose just enough to project through the apartment. “Hello? Who’s home? Is that you Ani? Or is that Luke?”

Leia moved towards the open doorway, offering a smile in greeting.

“Sounds like the people of Arkanis have the same horrid taste in politics in this universe as they do in mine,” Leia said, “unless you were not talking about Senator Ashkyl Coarolds of Arkanis, in which case I can only despair that the senate is forever fated to have a horrid authoritarian with that family name lingering about.”

Padmé responded with an overly exaggerated sigh. “Of course Coarolds’ career would be flourishing in your world. It sounds like it would be paradise for her and her worldview.”

“You would be hard pressed to find a more loyal Imperial. In fact, she was the leader of the majority coalition in the Senate,” Leia said. She contemplated the horrid woman’s career for a moment longer before adding, “at least she was when we still had a Senate. Who knows what vile thing she is up to now.”

“Please don’t tell me that means you’ve had beg her for scrap provision compromises in the past,” Padmé said with a fake shudder. “The idea of having to appeal to her to get anything done is truly a nightmare.”

“Alright, I won’t tell you,” Leia said cheerily. “Nor will I mention how awful her taste is in the sort of establishments she picks for working lunches outside the Senate mess.”

“You’re telling me. I find people will be more relaxed and amenable to suggestion when you let them pick the place to eat,” Padmé said, “but she really tests that policy whenever we need to dine together.”
The two of them smiled at one another, pleasantly surprised by this connection.

“Why are you here Leia? Not that I’m not happy to see you, but I really was not expecting to see you on your own,” Padmé said. As she spoke she reached to where her Holosystem was still sitting open, broadcasting nothing but static, and closed it fully.

“Oh. I’m not. Here on my own that is. Ahsoka is with me,” Leia clarified. “I left the kyber I got yesterday in the pocket of that vest you lent me. Ahsoka is retrieving it from the laundry as we speak.”

“That still doesn’t explain your presence,” Padmé countered. “She could have come here alone, left you with your other teacher to train.”

Leia shifted in the doorframe. “So you were told all about the situation with Ventress, then.”

“Yes, I am generally briefed on things like that,” Padmé confirmed.

“Right. Well, Ventress was called away on an emergency, and Ahsoka… well she seems real pleased whenever I play nice with either you or your husband, so I’m guessing that is why she steered things in this direction.”

Padmé raised an eyebrow at her. “Oh, so you are going to ‘play nice’ then?”

“So long as my boundaries are respected I don’t see why not.”

Padmé nodded. “Point taken. Care to join me and sit for a while? Just until Ahsoka finishes rooting through the laundry, of course.”

“All right. I am interested to hear more about this bill you’re trying to block.”

“Ugh. It’s something the mining guild is pushing in conjunction with Count Vidian.” Leia was not familiar with that name, but Padmé infused it with enough disgust she knew whoever that Count was could only be bad news.

“The bill would drastically deregulate safety standards for mines in the Gorse system. They are arguing that it is just for that one particular system, and that the current standards surrounding the mining of the moon Cynda in particular are too stringent.”

Padmé leaned back in her seat, clearly in her element going over the subject of the Senate’s current debates. “Now of course we won’t know for sure what the impact of relaxing safety standards would be until the appraisal gets back in a month. But they want to jam a vote through before we have all the relevant data.”

Padmé threw her hands up with frustration, clearly unused to bills being voted on before they could be fully assessed.

Funny, in the Senate Leia knew they never waited for the results of full assessments before voting on measures. Waiting for proposed bills to be scored and studied was regarded as needless and pointless bureaucracy clogging up the Senate’s ability to get anything actually done.

It was both heartening and immediately alienating to see the practice Leia was familiar with treated as such an unacceptable mistake.

A stinging reminder of what Leia had normalized, living her entire life under Imperial rule.
Padmé was still ranting about the bill coming up for a vote so early, “it is just unacceptable… especially when there is no reason in the first place why Vidian’s company should need that many thorilide crystals that fast!”

Leia didn’t want Padmé to realize how deeply she had been affected by the discussion of bills moving too fast, so she made sure to add something to the conversation as soon as Padmé fell silent. “Plus you have to worry about the precedent that would set if you let them chip away at freedoms system by system.”

“Yes! Exactly.” Padmé shook her head, frustrated. “Unfortunately they are fighting hard to pass this atrocious thing, framing this as a matter of government attempting to control and stifle industry -apparently making sure miners don’t risk death every time they go to work is somehow preventing job growth. That particular bit of spin is attracting them far more votes than anyone should be comfortable with.”

“You’re right to feel discomfort,” Leia’s forehead wrinkled as she finally recalled why the system in question sounded familiar. “Gorse’s moon, Cynda, it was destroyed in a mining accident over a decade ago in my dimension. I may have been quite young at the time, but I remember because my father was rather distressed by the news…” Leia’s eyes widened and she laughed, “…and I am only now realizing how that sounds.”

“How what sounds?”

“Before they used the Death Star to destroy Alderaan, they blew up Jedha City in a test. Called it a mining accident afterwards,” explained Leia. “It is probably a coincidence, but I should know better than to ever trust official Imperial accounts. Particularly when they use the mining accident story.”

“I see.” Padmé’s eyes narrowed in thought, “I don’t suppose this Death Star you keep mentioning utilized a lot of thorilide in its construction?”

“Based on the plans I’ve studied, it did indeed. Oh.” Leia leaned forward in her seat. “You don’t think?”

“Bail and I have been searching for any and all possible leads on if anything like it may be in the works here.” Padmé said it casually, as if this was a minor matter and not a nightmare steadily developing. “From what you had told us, it was possible construction on it began before our timelines diverged, and if that was the case then it probably still is being worked on somewhere in this universe, in secret. But if what you are saying is true, well… it might be a real lead.”

“I certainly hope that if anyone is working to construct the thing, you manage to destroy it before completion.” Leia frowned, not wanting to imagine the Death Star existing in any form in any dimension. “Something tells me if it is being built in your universe, Erso won’t be there building a convenient flaw in the system for someone else to take out.”

“Erso,” Padmé clearly knew the name from how she said it, “any relation to the Coruscant University professor?”

“I… I think he might have been a professor in the past, maybe.” She tried to remember what information she had read and heard about him, especially after the Battle of Yavin when both she and Galen Erso were blamed for the Death Star’s destruction all over every Imperial News feed. “Yes, I believe that may be him.” Leia arched an eyebrow. “Honestly I’m surprised you’ve heard of him.”

“He used to donate to causes to end war, that sort of thing.” Padmé gave a slight tight lipped smile.
“Never a particularly large donor, but significant enough that I’ve had to talk to him at several fundraising events.”

“Right, he was a noted pacifist before the Empire, wasn’t he. That’s why we thought he had actually joined them,” seeing Padmé’s expression, she understandably did not like one of her pet causes being linked to the Empire, so Leia rushed to explain, “a lot of pacifists got taken in by the Empire’s assurances that they would ensure an end to all wars.”

“Sounds like quite the magnificent lie.”

“It really was. The whole system is rotten on the inside, but propaganda has done wonders to ensure the outside still looks efficient and functional.”

“Isn’t that always how it goes.” Padmé laughed. It was a humorless laugh. “Some would say the same about the Republic, in truth.”

“I know. My father never minced words about how… bad, things got towards the end. But from what I’ve seen here, it clearly wasn’t anything that couldn’t be fixed.”

“Ah, the idealism of youth.” Padmé sighed. “Sorry, you don’t want to hear a bitter old politician gripe about the futility of the system.”

“No, this is precisely the sort of thing I want to hear. Because one day, we’re going to topple the Empire, and when we do we are going to build a New Republic in its place. A better Republic, where everyone will have truly fair and equal representation regardless of their planet’s wealth or standing. To do that we’re going to need all the wisdom of your generation, except well…”

Moments earlier there had been fire Leia’s voice, her spine had been durasteel. As she contemplated the losses her universe had incurred, however, she slumped slightly, and her voice softened. “Sadly in my world most of your generation, at least in our camp politically, well, you’re almost all gone. Hell, most of my generation is gone as well.” She paused, taking in a breath. “Please, let me know what you think we should and should not be doing.”

“What, do you want me to… write a document on what I’d do if I personally was building a brand new government from the ground up? I mean Leia that sounds-”

The idea excited Leia enough that she did not even wait for Padmé to finish before she spoke. “Brilliant! Yes! I mean if it won’t be too much to ask, that would be… do you think it’d be possible to ask my father as well? Or…. I can give you names, names of people who were involved with the Rebellion at the beginning and crucial to our development. Leaders we lost with time, I mean if we could get their thoughts too… then I could show it to Mon and it could help us with our work moving forward.”

“Leia,” Padmé tried to interrupt.

Her attempt did not work.

“No! You don’t get it. So many of us are dead. So many great minds and leaders have been taken, and now we have to figure out a way out of this. Only…”

Leia thought of how she had normalized jamming bills through the Senate, of how there were probably countless other bad habits and practices she had internalized since she had never known any other way. “Only it’s been so long since anyone has known real freedom, and it is hard to try to describe something you have never actually seen, only read about in history texts. Please.”
“I was trying to say I’ll do it.” Padmé smiled at the passionate girl seated across from her. “But I can’t promise you that I’ll have much time to devote to this task. I do have a job to do. Nor can I promise I can ask too many others to join in writing this. I will ask Bail, of course and... Mon as well I guess. From the sound of things the version of her you know is rather different from the overly cautious researcher I am friends with.”

“Right. Thank you. That....” Leia was fighting back tears of gratitude.

If she could return home with a gift as enormous as this… it could help. It could really and truly help. Open new avenues of conversation, new angles to debate.

The future New Republic would be so much stronger just for the inclusion of this one thing.

There was a noise in the hall, and when both of the politicians turned they saw Ahsoka standing in the doorway, watching them with a grin.

“Sorry to interrupt, but… I found it! It wasn’t easy though, I actually had to use echolocation to navigate the laundry situation in there!” Ahsoka let out a laugh. “Also, Padmé, pretty sure Skygal’s not going to be at all pleased when she gets home and finds you’ve used her absence as an excuse to have her room cleaned, or to have all of her belongings washed.”

“Yes well, my daughter should be grateful I’m not just having her dirty laundry disinfected and then thrown out.” Padmé returned Ahsoka’s smile.

“Right,” Ahsoka shook her head with mirth. “Well then, you ready to head back Leia?”

“Yes, I am.” Leia stood from her seat. “It really was nice chatting with you Padmé.”

“You as well,” Padmé said, “whenever you want to discuss politics, please, I’d love to talk some more.”

“I’ll have to take you up on that,” Leia said, “Hear some of your thoughts on ideal government structures in person, not just in writing.” She smiled. “Why don’t we talk more about this over dinner tonight?”

Padme grinned back, not the carefully controlled expression of a politician, but a real grateful smile. “I’d like that, Leia. I really would. Would you like to dine here with the rest of the family, or would you like us to go out, just the two of us on the town?”

“It has been a really long time since I’ve had a nice meal in a restaurant, much less any of my favorites on Coruscant. Who knows when I’ll next get that chance.”

Padme nodded. “Is there anywhere in particular you have in mind, so I know where to put in our reservations?”

“No, I trust your judgement.” Leia glanced over her shoulder, to where Ahsoka was waiting for her to join her. “Just let me know where and when to meet you this evening. Unless Ahsoka objects I should be there.”

As she turned and left the room she overheard Padmé muttering to herself, “Honestly, Mon Mothma leading an army of impassioned freedom fighters. What will I hear of next?”

Leia stormed back into the training room, frustrated with how that conversation had gone. Everyone had warned her, told her not to deal with Doctor Chelli Aphra, but she just had to do so anyway,
hadn’t she.

Something the woman had said kept playing on repeat in her head, like a broken holo.

_Worried that the jogan didn’t fall far from the tree?_

The words just would not stop pounding in her head, a sick twisted heartbeat all their own, because yes, yes she was worried.

Not worried for Luke of course, he somehow had made it through the worst dung this hell dimension had to offer still clean and sparkling, she wasn’t even worried about her counterpart - the woman had a clear goal and direction for her life and a just cause to devote herself to, no she was worried… worried about herself.

A lifetime of being told how much she was like her father no longer felt like something to be _proud_ of.

Leia was so focused on her upset, she almost did not notice Luke in the room. He was seated next to the cabinet where he kept his assembled Jedi artifacts, slumped against the wall.

Nestled on his lap rested his lightsaber, above it he was holding something in his hands, small and blue, and as she watched he broke a small piece off of it and brought it his mouth.

Looking up at her, a sad smile on his face, he held another piece of whatever it was out towards her.

“Want some cheese? It’s nowhere near as good as what my aunt used to make, she made the Galaxy’s absolute best blue milk cheese, but… this block of cheese isn’t bad, not really. It’s not the cheese’s fault nothing is as good as Aunt Beru’s cooking.”

She blinked in surprise. After having been gone all day, she really hadn’t expected him to show up out of nowhere and offer her _cheese_ of all things.

“Whenever I was upset, whenever _anybody_ was upset really, Aunt Beru used to put out some of her blue milk cheese with some blue milk to drink, and she’d listen and offer comfort like no one else could.”

Leia thought she could remember the woman offering them all cheese and milk, that one time her father had taken her and Luke to visit his mother’s sandblasted grave.

She had said something about owning a small restaurant in a nearby town. Anchor something. Leia remembered she had thought it strange, there being a town named after something nautical in the middle of the endless desert.

“I miss her, and Uncle Owen. Before, I thought I knew what missing a parent meant, but… that _never hurt_, not the way not having Owen or Beru does.”

He smiled again, wide and wistful and full of so much _misery_.

Everyone in this dimension _hurt_ so much, was full of near endless pain and suffering.

Leia feared that if she stayed here too long it would infect her, leave her similarly scarred.

Even still part of her wanted to help the people here for as long as she could, bring succor to them from all the injustice they had been forced to bare.

Or, if no one else, help him.

This strange and strong man who both was and was not her twin brother.

“Your parents, the ones who raised you and your brother, the ones who gave birth to me but I never knew… they were never real for me, not like my aunt and uncle were. I dreamed about them though, sometimes it felt like that was all I ever did. Try to imagine who they had been, what they were like. Owen and Beru never talked about them, not really, and that made them the perfect focus for all my childhood imaginings. I’d run around the vaporators, imagining they were there with me, my play companions, playing hide and seek and tag and going on adventures all around the farm.”

He was still smiling that terrible broken smile, and she tried to imagine it, her fussy and precise brother playing in the sand and wastes of that barren world her father so reviled.

“They were just a fantasy though. No more real than any other youngling’s imaginary friends. Beru and Owen were real, and they were good to me, even if Uncle Owen never did let me go to the academy like I wanted.”

He stood, placing the remaining cheese on the cabinet, holding the lightsaber in his hand, his smile slipping off his face.

“I never knew my parents. They died before I was born. But…” He sighed. “But you do. You know them. And so will Leia when she returns home. I don’t know how to feel about that. No, I know how I should feel about that, I just don’t know if I actually can feel that way, not really.”

She was curious, far too curious, about what he meant.

She had been too drunk last night to really appreciate what he had been trying to express, but now… Leia wanted to ask him to elaborate, but he just kept on talking, not seeming to care if she might have something to add, questions to ask.

“Right now I am jealous. Terribly jealous. There’s a place where my imaginary parents are real, where you can meet them as real people - people who sound even more made up and fantastical than my wildest childhood imaginings - and that place is closed off to me. For some reason I can’t begin to understand, I suppose the Will of the Force is as good an excuse as any, Leia was able to go there, even though I can’t imagine she ever wanted to go to any such place, while I was left here. That world where my birth parents are alive and knowable is somewhere I can only hear of, second hand knowledge gained through stories or the visions you so eagerly offer up.”

He turned to her and she was struck by how blue his eyes were, full at this moment of deep resolve and suppressed emotion.

She knew they had been born with the same color eyes, that for the first six months of her life hers had been that same shining blue. How exotic they looked now.

It was an odd thought to have of course, she had looked into a different Luke Skywalker’s eyes so many times over the course of her life, had seen him in every emotional state possible, yet there was something about this Luke’s eyes that was wholly new to her.

She had been misjudging this man, comparing him to her brother when he was someone unique and extraordinary.

Not that her brother was ordinary but… he wasn’t this Luke.
No more than she was the Princess Organa.

Or Vader was her dad.

“This lightsaber, it’s all I have left of my father. Everything I’ve gathered here may be all that’s left of the Jedi Order he served. I never knew my father, but I will carry on his legacy - I will become a Jedi Knight. I need to honor my father’s service and sacrifice.”

He seemed to have reached the end of his speech, or at least come upon a place in it where he needed her to say something in response. She did not know what to say to him. As she tried to think of the proper thing to say, she was filled with a sudden urge to tell him everything, confess it all.

After all, if Aphra could know the truth, why not Luke?

Better he hear it from her than from scum like that.

Or, far worse, from Darth Vader.

She wanted to look away from him. To look somewhere, anywhere, but directly into his shining blue eyes.

She forced herself to maintain eye contact.

“Dad is alive Luke. You may still get a chance to know him, because here, in this dimension? Dad’s alive.”

Chapter End Notes


Note: I gave the authoritarian party the name "Centrists," because that is the name that party has in The New Republic.

I doubt they had the same exact name in The Galactic Republic (especially since I do not think The Galactic Republic had a two party system like The New Republic's)... but at the end of the day why make up a name when there is already a perfectly good in-universe one.

I just wanted to clarify that Padmé doesn't mean people in the middle politically when she talks about Centrists.
Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

Endless thanks to Sethnakht for betaing this chapter!

I am super nervous about this chapter? I really do hope you all enjoy it.

Also ! The Last Jedi comes out NEXT WEEK! I am freaking out that in exactly 8 days - December 14th at 6:00pm est, I'll be watching it for the very first time. I don't know about all of you, but I am beyond excited.

I hope you also have a truly wonderful time seeing it when you do!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The words hung in the air between them.

The calm confident man Leia had been gazing at moments before was gone, replaced instead by a boy full of a terrible desperate need.

“What do you mean our father is alive? Leia, that isn’t funny.”

“I wouldn’t be saying it if it wasn’t true, Luke. Dad’s alive.”

“No. If he was alive he wouldn’t have left me. He would have come back for me or... or... Someone would have told me. That can’t be true. No!” He recoiled, backing into the wall, and started shouting at the air. “Ben! Ben where are you! Please Ben, please?”

“Luke, you have to understand, this really isn’t easy to explain. I mean it when I say he is alive, really and truly alive. Trapped inside a prison of his own making, but he is still in there.”

Those eyes Leia had admired so recently met her own, they no longer shone. There was a manic quality to them, and Luke was shaking.

She had thought their argument the night before had purely been due to exhaustion and alcohol mixing into a potent blend of heightened emotions and loosened filters, that sober, the shining being he had become would be able to… she was not quite sure what exactly, but she had not expected him to react to this news the way he was.

“He’s trapped? Like Leia was on the Death Star? So we can save him. We tell the Rebellion he needs us and we’ll get him back. They’d have to approve that mission, I mean he’s a Jedi Knight, a real Jedi, they wouldn’t say no to us rescuing him.” The words came out in a rush, punctuated by the occasional laugh. “Leia, how did you find this out? Find him?”

He sucked in a breath. “Is Ben here? I’ve never seen his ghost, maybe I can’t? I dunno... Ben! I bet he’ll be so happy when he hears this. Ben! Please Ben, if you can hear me, please?”
The room was charged with a riot of emotions, swirling between one feeling and the next.

Luke had no control of any of them, was filling the space with anything and everything he felt, and Leia felt dizzy.

Suddenly there Uncle Obi was, standing next to the trembling boy. His mouth twisted downward, a quiet fury in his eyes. He shook his head, “why have you done this, young Padawan? Did we not discuss how the time was not yet right for this revelation?”

“He deserves to know, Uncle Obi,” Leia said.

“And know he shall, when the time is right,” responded Obi-Wan.


“Yes Luke,” Uncle Obi said with a nod.


“Why do you think Owen and Beru never talked about your father,” Obi-Wan said, “why do you think they made up a story about a spice navigator to tell you instead of the truth?”

“I don’t understand,” Luke pressed the ghost, “Leia said he was trapped in a prison?”

“Yes, I heard what she said.” Obi-Wan shook his head, “I am afraid I do not agree with her assessment of the situation, although I would very much like for that to be the case.”

“But…” Luke composed himself, just slightly, “but he is still alive?”

“He is,” and then because Obi-Wan was not capable of fully accepting that Anakin and Vader were one and the same, “from a certain point of view.”

Luke, already so conflicted, so confused, drew into himself further. “I… I don’t understand?”

“Anakin Skywalker, the man I trained to be a Jedi, the man I considered to be my brother and loved, he is long gone Luke. He was destroyed by Darth Vader.” From the grief in Obi-Wan’s voice you would think Anakin had fallen just days before, not two decades prior.

“But there is still hope of him defeating Vader, Uncle Obi!” Leia inserted herself back into the conversation. “Vader hasn’t fully destroyed him yet.”

“Nothing the two of you are saying is making sense! He can’t both be alive and dead at the same time,” Luke glanced between the two of them, lost. “Am I an orphan or not?”

Silence.

Luke punched the wall. “What is going on here! Stop speaking in riddles already! Leia, you said our dad is alive and I could meet him, didn’t you?”

“I… I did,” Leia said, staring with surprise at where Luke had struck out against the rock. There were cracks there, fissures in the cave wall that could not have been made by his fist alone.

He was pacing the room, a trapped animal in a cage. “So why won’t you explain what you meant? The two of you know something and I want to hear it!” He nearly tripped over a deactivated remote, and as he righted himself he gave the spherical device a kick. It rolled into the wall, hard, and with a
sharp crack small pieces broke off. The fissures his fist had left widened, and a small chip of the ceiling of the cave tumbled down.

“Tell me! Did my father abandon me, was he murdered, is he held captive somewhere and needs help? It has to be one, it can’t be all three. Why won’t you explain, I don’t know what you people want me to do!”

Leia did not know how to explain that all three things could be true.

Anakin Skywalker had chosen the Dark Side over his family. He had abandoned them.

Anakin Skywalker had been replaced by Darth Vader. He was dead.

Anakin Skywalker still remained, trapped within Darth Vader. He was held prisoner and was in need of their help.

All three equally true, all three equally false.

Leia did not know what to say, she had not thought this through.

Had not anticipated this rage, this confusion - all before she even revealed who Vader was.

She had thought… well she had imagined Luke maybe crying, asking her for details and them somehow bonding over the enormity of the task before them, but this?

Where had this angry come from?

In the time that she spent trying to figure out what to say, Luke destroyed another training remote.

His anger died down a little, just enough that he seemed to realize he was harming the tools he had so carefully gathered, and he froze in the spot where he stood.

Luke gazed between Leia and Obi-Wan once more, jaw clenched tight, eyes blazing.

When neither of them spoke or moved, he let out one last growl of frustration, storming out of the room.

Once the shock wore off, she realized she’d have to chase after Luke, try to think of something to say to him as she did.

“I fear Yoda may be right,” Obi-Wan said. Leia was surprised he was still there.

She turned to him, trying to understand what they had just witnessed. “What was that? One moment he was spouting wisdom like a full blown Master, the next he… he’s having a youngling’s tantrum?”

“Luke is untrained Leia, and far too impulsive. This was information he was only to learn once he had proven himself ready, but now I fear he will just get himself hurt.” Obi-Wan shook his head, staring at one of the broken remotes. “He has such vast potential, moments of wisdom well beyond his years. Yet he lacks focus, is still so prone to outburst.”

The ghost crossed the room to where the journal he had kept in life was kept. It sat on top of the cabinet, Leia wondered if Luke had been reading it before she arrived, when he had been sitting against that wall contemplating the cheese he was eating. “Yoda does not believe he will ever make a good Jedi, that to try to teach someone with his mercurial nature would be a repeat of the exact same mistake we made before with Anakin. That it would be best to leave him untrained and unaware of his true potential.”
Luke was strong in the Force.

Luke was the son of a Sith Lord.

*Worried that the jogan didn’t fall far from the tree?*

“Since my death, every moment I have not spent by Luke’s side was spent with Master Yoda, talking with him about the both of you.” Obi-Wan turned, focused solely on her. “He thinks the girl has a determination and strength of will her brother lacks. That once undertaken she would not abandon a task until it reached its end, and while I do not disagree, I know that Luke… Luke *will* be a great Jedi one day. Remarkable and unlike any before him. He shines with such light, has since he was a just a young boy.”

Luke could be a great Jedi one day.

(Luke could be a great Sith one day.)

Leia as well.

He and her counterpart seemed to be all the hope this universe had left.

If one was not trained to be a Jedi, the other would have to be.

How to decide which, and why not both?

To say neither was to let the Sith win, to concede the galaxy over to Sidious’ tyranny and reign, to allow the Sith to be victorious in full at long last.

She was glad she did not have to make such a choice, that she did not shoulder the responsibility.

“I will not fail him, not like I did his father,” Obi-Wan said. Leia’s mind caught on the wording. Luke’s father, not hers. “Your presence here, it throws those plans into disarray. Now I fear for his training, am unsure of the course you have set him upon.”

*Worried that the jogan didn’t fall far from the tree?*

Leia frowned, it was not as if she had fully blocked off all hope of his training. “Maybe this future will be better for it. Can we really know?”

Obi-Wan shook his head, gazing at the broken pieces of the remotes scattered on the floor. “Or maybe this is the *cause* of the isolation and self-doubt I’ve seen his future will contain.”

“Wait, you had a vision of his future being bad, but you’re *still* upset I changed things?” If all options led down bad paths, then surely the introduction of a new element, one that shook things up, must be a good thing.

Uncle Obi ignored her question. “What were you thinking, telling the boy the way you did? That was not information to be given lightly, especially not before he was ready to hear it. I fear you have proven yourself far more impulsive than anticipated.”

*Worried that the jogan didn’t fall far from the tree?*

“I… I was thinking that he *deserves* to know.”

“On this we do not disagree. Yet sometimes we must focus on a larger picture. Luke also *deserves* to be safe. To be able to approach his training without conflict and doubt building within him. That will
be impossible for him now.” He shook his head. “I am just grateful you did not tell him who Vader once was. I have long feared that him learning that information too soon would lead to him running into his clutches, out of a misguided hope that he could find something there other than a painful death.”

“You are so sure he would try to kill Luke?”

“Leia, I witnessed Vader try to kill Padmé. There is no one he is above attacking.”

Leia frowned, remembering the terrible vision her father’s lightsaber had shown her. “I know that, Uncle Obi, but…”

She still thought Luke deserved to know, but simply blurring that information out before thinking things through hadn’t been the right way of doing things, “you are right, I was acting on impulse. Letting my emotions rule me. I’m sorry.”

“This is no time for apologies Leia, and if it was I would not be the one you would need to apologize to.”

“I understand. I… I should find Luke, try to explain. Try to make things right.”

“Indeed you should.” Obi-Wan leaned against the cabinet, nodding. “Perhaps give him a bit more time to cool down before you do? He is truly remarkable when he is in the proper mental place, he just needs time to work things out. There is a great deal of inner strength and insight within that boy. He just… he needs time to grow.”

Luke was 20 standard years, it was absurd to think of him as a child. Still, Leia found herself nodding, not wanting to have an argument with the ghost of a dead Jedi Master about how Luke (and therefore by extension herself) was an adult.

“He… Uncle Obi, he wants to know his parents so much, he should know his father is still out there.”

“I miss Anakin too, Leia. I wish he was here, that he could have been there for his son.” Obi-Wan moved closer to her. “For his daughter as well.”

“Uncle Obi, I grew up with both of my parents. This really isn’t about me.”

“Isn’t it?” He shook his head, a smile returning to his face. “Leia, teaching is not easy. It is a skill in and of itself.”

She frowned. What did that have to do with anything?

“A large part of being a good instructor is understanding your students limits, when they are and are not ready for what you desire to teach them.”

Oh.

“You may want to provide your student with all the answers you know, but in the end is that for your benefit or theirs? Ask yourself Leia, was sharing that information something you did for you or for him? Were you thinking of what was best for him, or trying to ease your own discomfort, your anxiety over knowing something he did not?”

She couldn’t meet his gaze, choosing instead to look at the deep crack in the wall.
“A good teacher knows they must not flood their student with information, must let them work things out on their own. That often one must build to the larger revelations with smaller ones, otherwise there is no frame of reference to understand what they need to learn. Leia, please, give the boy time to work things out on his own.”

“When, Uncle Obi? When will be the right time for him to know? All of that sounds well and good, but do you have a plan for when he will be ready?”

“The boy has only known of his Force abilities for less than a year, Leia. I did not even think him ready to go to Master Yoda for training as of yet, not until you came and it became clear his training will have to take a very different course.”

“Why are you being so hesitant with him Uncle? I… you never act this way in my dimension.”

“Perhaps that is because the me who exists in your dimension has fewer regrets, hmmm?”

“Uncle Obi, you know if you need to talk through what happened, really talk about it, not just describe the events but the impact they had on you… I am here to listen.” She paused. “Or well, I am here to listen to you right now. I really hope I won’t be here to listen for that long, as I do want to return home as soon as I am able.”

He sighed, image flickering in and out, ready to leave. “I… That is very kind of you Leia. Very kind indeed.” He smiled, a real smile just like the ones her Uncle always had for her in her world. “Now, I believe we were talking about giving Luke some breathing room before confronting him, no? Why don’t you practice your forms more, or perhaps meditate before you set out to find him.”

“Do you know where I can find Luke, Uncle Obi?”

There was no way to know if the ghost even heard her question, because by the time she asked it he was already gone.

Leia wanted to use the trip back to the Temple to talk to Ahsoka about what her wife had found the night before.

It seemed that, in Ahsoka’s opinion at least, that there really wasn’t much to talk about.

According to Ahsoka, Barriss had found some vague mentions in a handful of ancient texts that might possibly be references to alternative dimensions. There was no way to be truly certain what they were speaking of, and Barriss was still looking into what the texts said, trying to find more substantial leads.

Ahsoka had gone on to suggest that they head directly to the practice room for lightsaber training once they got back.

The speeder set down close to the massive stairs that let into the Temple. As she stepped out of the car, Ahsoka turned to Leia with a grin. “Ready for this?”

Leia nodded, and hurried after her, eager to get to the meat of the skills she would need to turn the tide of the war.

There were lightsabers hanging on the wall of the room they walked to together, more lightsabers than Leia had ever seen in one place before, more even than had been in Grakkus the Hutt’s complex on Nar Shadda.
Ahsoka did not hand her one of the ‘sabers hanging on the wall. Instead she handed her a wooden practice sword.

Leia regarded it with a frown.

“When do I get to build a lightsaber of my own?”

The Jedi laughed, as if it had not been a serious question. “Oh, you’ve a long way to go before you can start thinking about that.”

“What?” Leia snapped the question, short and crisp. “Why then did you have me get that crystal right away?”

From the slump of her montrals it was obvious that Ahsoka was embarrassed and wanted to avoid answering.

Leia honestly did not care how embarrassed she was or how much she did not want to answer her.

“Ahsoka, there has to be a reason why. What was it?”

Ahsoka sighed, shaking her head as she did. “…I’m sorry, I really am. I hope you understand that I just wanted some time to get to know you. Before… before Ventress inserted herself into the situation and threw everything off. Besides I knew you weren’t very happy being here, and I wanted you to give Anakin and Padmé a chance before you moved out. It turned out to be a real good thing I did it, though. You were so closed off to the Force until we reached Ilum, so it all worked out.”

Leia wanted to be mad, but she understood that Ahsoka’s intentions really had not been bad.

She sighed, resigning herself to the fact she’d have a while yet before she could truly focus her energy on returning home.

As soon as she had that ‘saber built, as soon as she had something concrete to show for the time she was spending in this world, she wanted to rejoin the fight.

She could only imagine the state of the Rebellion without her there to help.

“Last night, were you ever expecting me actually stay with you?”

Ahsoka’s lekku twitched. “Not really, no. I wanted you know the option was open, but I was also sure that if you were actually given a choice you would pick the apartment instead. After getting to know you a bit I understood that it was everyone just making decisions for you that was causing you to lash out.”

Leia nodded, dropping the subject, focusing on the wooden practice saber she held, and testing its weight in her hand. Then she glanced at Ahsoka and the two lightsabers hanging at her hips.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen someone carry two lightsabers before.” Leia grinned, “you know, in my vast experience interacting with a grand total of five Force-users before this week. Is that common? Having two lightsabers, or.. apprentices having different styles than their masters?”

“Incredibly so. I mean obviously we all learn the same forms as a foundation as younglings, and everyone starts training with just one ‘saber. Some of us though, we feel the call of a second kyber, and then we learn how to fight with two blades and not one.” Ahsoka paused for a moment in thought. “You clearly have had quite a lot of training yourself in the past, both in unarmed combat and in the use of various weapons. Surely you know what weapon styles you do best with already,
Leia considered Ahsoka’s question. “I mainly trained with a staff, is it even possible to have a lightsaber style that is similar to that?”

“Of course! Didn’t you see the temple guards all over the place? They carry double bladed lightsaber-pikes. Some people even have double bladed ‘sabers that can detach into two separate blades and then reconnect together again to form a singular staff like weapon. That’s what Ventress fights with, although her hilts are curved as well. Actually, I should take you to Huyang, he can really show you the different possibilities for ‘saber hilts.”

“And who is this Master Huyang?”

“Master? Oh no, Huyang is a droid, and an ancient one at that,” Ahsoka said. “He’s been around since before the Galactic Republic was even formed, helping younglings build their ‘sabers. He knows everything there is to know about lightsaber construction, and can help you not only understand the various possibilities out there, but also what might suit you best.”

“Right.” Leia nodded, then hefted the practice ‘saber in her hands. “Well, as much as I prefer staff fighting, I have had some training with blades. To be honest, I’ve been looking forward to this aspect of training.” She gave Ahsoka a stiff bow at her waist, making sure to fold her hands the way she knew the Jedi of old had once done.

Glancing at Ahsoka from the lowest point of her bow, she saw the Togruta was bowing to her as well. They stood again in unison, and Ahsoka grinned.

“Before anything else I will be showing you the proper stances and forms. Then once I feel you are ready, and only then, we can spar,” said Ahsoka.

Leia nodded back. “I understand.” She cocked her head slightly to the side. “But what I don’t understand is why you have me using a toy for that.” She held the wooden sword up slightly, giving it a bit of a twirl. “I am not a child. I’ve trained with blades before. Surely if I am not to use an actual laser sword you have practice blades with low level energy blades of some sort. Something with a balance more similar to a real lightsaber than this.”

Ahsoka chuckled, “practice lightsabers do indeed exist, but they are generally designed for hands far smaller than your own.” She seemed to think for a moment, before making a decision. She took one of the lightsabers off of her waist, adjusting the knobs on its side. Then she handed it to Leia.

“I don’t think I need to warn you twice to be careful. That is a weapon that must be taken seriously. Anyway, I’ve placed it on its lowest practice setting, so you can’t actually cause too much harm to anything or anyone with it. I think I’ve also adjusted the height right, I know it’s on the right setting for Skyygal in any case. Give it a swing and let me know if you think it needs to be adjusted further.”

Leia stared at the hilt in her hand for a moment, stunned.

You could adjust a lightsaber’s settings like that?

The moment of levity passed quickly.

In just her first lesson she had already learned something that she would never have imagined on her own.

She shouldn’t dawdle with this task, every moment wasted might turn out to have been the moment
where she learned the key to victory in the war.

She activated the blade, gave the bright green sword some experimental swings and slashes before nodding at Ahsoka, content with the length. Even with it adjusted for her height, it was still so strange to wield. For just a hilt with energy making up the blade, it was so heavy in her hand.

Ahsoka moved closer, silently asking Leia for permission to touch her. Leia nodded, and Ahsoka reached out and began to move Leia’s arms and legs, ensuring they were held in exactly the right way.

They proceeded like that for the rest of the afternoon, Ahsoka showing Leia how to stand, where to place her feet and hands, how to hold her blade.

Sometimes Ahsoka would move Leia’s limbs into the proper place, other times she would simply pose with her other ‘saber, and Leia would copy her the best that she could.

With every pose she showed Leia, she’d say a name or number, explaining precisely what it was and when to use it.

Some of the forms overlapped with the poses Ventress had her hold that morning, while others did not. Only once Ahsoka was satisfied that Leia knew exactly how to hold herself, would they move to the next pose, then the next, then back to one Leia had already practiced, over and over again, the poses falling into patterns, growing easier and easier to replicate, to shift between.

The blade in her hands grew lighter as well, feeling less and less like an object she was holding and more like another part of her body. No. Not her body. But it was light and friendly and comfortable, and welcomed her as a friend.

Leia would have been happy going on far longer than they did, and was genuinely upset when the comm on Ahsoka’s belt beeped.

Ahsoka stepped out of the practice room to talk to whoever was on the other end, and Leia spent the time alone studying the white walled room.

It was far and away the brightest lit space she had seen in the Temple.

The weapons that hung on the walls had hilts of all sorts of different shapes, speaking to what Ahsoka had told her earlier about lightsaber variety.

There were drawings and illustrations on scrolls done loosely in ink, some of the sigil of the Jedi Order, others pictures of the temple itself.

Finally Ahsoka returned. She seemed distracted, and when she met Leia’s eye she was frowning.

“Leia, I am so sorry but I have to step out for a bit. I’ll be back really soon, but I’m needed elsewhere. Keep practicing what I showed you until I return ok? You’ve been doing great, really. Whoever trained you in combat in the past really knew their stuff. You’ll be ready for sparring in no time.”

Before Leia could even respond, Ahsoka was out the door once more.

She continued on her own, doing her best to remember how Ahsoka had showed her to stand, to hold the blade.

She moved from post to pose, enjoying the feel of her already tired muscles adjusting to each new
She got so absorbed in this exercise she almost missed it, but some time after Ahsoka had run off she realized that there was someone else in the room, watching her.

She slowed her movements and turned around.

Anakin Skywalker stood on the edge of the practice room, a smile on his face.

“I suppose you don’t want to hear me comment on how good you are, huh?”

“You are a Master of this, are you not? Your opinion on this matter has weight.”

“My opinion as a Master, but not as a father.”

“Exactly, yes.”

He frowned, radiating a conflicting mess of emotions that almost gave Leia a headache. It lasted for just a moment, and when it passed he looked up at her, imploring, almost needy. “In your world, do you know what happened to me? What really happened?”

She was confused. “I told you already, General Kenobi said that Darth Vader killed you.”

“Are you sure? You’re certain that is what Obi-Wan said?” He sounded desperate.

“I mean, he didn’t say it to me, but yes, that was what Luke often repeats. Darth Vader was a student of Obi-Wan Kenobi’s who betrayed and murdered his father. Luke talks about it quite often, just about every time Vader attacks us, so I am certain I did not mishear him.” She paused. “I figure, combined with what I had always been told about my biological father dying in battle at the very end of the Clone War, that Vader must have killed you during his attack on this Temple.”

Anakin sunk to the floor, as if his knees had suddenly given out on him. He rubbed at his hair with one hand, the one he didn’t keep wrapped in a glove. “None of this makes any sense.”

She didn’t know what she had done to make this man think she cared, that now would be an appropriate time for… whatever this was.

“What is all of it supposed to mean?” Anakin moaned.

In that moment he seemed so young, younger than her even. Most certainly not like a man in his forties. A man who was not only old enough to be her father, but actually was somehow.

There was something else in that moment, in his undeniable resemblance to Luke that called to mind the familiar image of her close friend (no, her brother - it would take her a while to truly adjust to thinking of Luke in these new terms) hunched over after battle questioning his worth and ability to become a Jedi. Before she could stop herself she was across the room and kneeling by his side.

“I used to have dreams. Such horrible dreams. About Padmé dying in childbirth, mostly, but sometimes… sometimes there were dreams where someone was saying that name… Darth Vader. Sometimes there was just breathing, loud endless breathing through a respirator.”

Leia could not recall if she had mentioned Vader’s breathing. She suspected she had not.

“But they stopped, those dreams came to an end on the day you were born, and life went on. For twenty wonderful years I didn’t have any of those dreams. But then… then you came here. You arrived from a world where all my nightmares came to pass, a terrible reality where Padmé really did
die in childbirth, and I may never have even held you in my arms. Now I am dreaming again, of the breathing, of that name, of... such horrible things. You arrive from that world, and you know that name, then with the dreams starting again... I just... I don’t know what else to think.”

“What else to think?” She grabbed his hand, the one in the glove, and was surprised by the weight of it. How hard it was in her grasp. Metal. A prosthetic.

Countless soldiers Leia had known had lost limbs in battle, it was common on the field of war. Anakin had given so much to protect the Republic, literally sacrificing at least one limb to defend democracy. She respected that.

Leia’s own mother was kept alive through mechanical organ replacements, her heart and lungs replaced by pulmonodes that always shone with a comforting golden light. Queen Breha Organa had refused to cover her mechanical parts with synthskin, to hide them away and pretend she had not lived through what she had, and Leia could feel the mechanical hand held in her own organic one was similarly without a covering of spongy artificial skin.

Such a tangible connection between this man and her mother shocked her, and she felt something inside her shift.

He looked at her, and his eyes - oh. They were lost, searching, desperate. She had seen that look in Luke’s eyes so many times before, had comforted him nearly after every battle, when the pressure of being all that was left of the once mighty Jedi Order got to him.

“What if... what if it’s me?” His voice was quiet, she did not know if he actually intended for his question to be heard.

She drew the man into her arms, holding him as she had often held Luke.

She understood self-blame.

Understood waking up after a nightmare, sure that she was the one responsible for all the horrible things that had happened to those she loved.

It made no difference that her nightmares were memories of the past, real events she had lived through, that she actually was the cause of the deaths and pain of everyone she cared about, while his were apparently visions of her world full of misplaced blame.

He clung to her, holding her tight. There was a hitching sob, and her name muttered with absolute love and gratitude.

“I don’t know...” There was so much she did not know, much less what to say. She tried again. “I don’t know the specifics of what happened to you in my timeline. Why things went the way they did there, what led to things being so different here. But I do know that you are remembered as a good man. People still speak of your great deeds, of your heroics in the Clone War. General Kenobi, he remembered you as a good friend, that was important enough to him that he made sure Luke knew that was the case. Whatever it is that is causing these nightmares... he isn’t you.”

The Force twisted around her, catching in her chest. There was something very wrong. She did not know what it was.

“Anakin, I am sorry I cannot give you what you need. I am not your daughter and I never will be. But... I am willing to get to know you, as one person getting to know another, if you wish.”

He pushed away from her hold. He looked so young, almost like a child, with eyes rimmed red from
crying, hair tousled and hopeful expression on his face.

She was reminded of a holo her father had in his office.

It had been taken after one of her martial arts lessons. She had lost almost all of her practice fights that day, but had refused to give up. In the end she had been devastated, but had learned that the fact she had kept trying - had refused to give up, was a victory of a different kind. Her father had loved that holo.

Looking at Anakin now, there was no question that the child in that well loved image was his, the similarity between his expression and hers on that long ago day was too profound.

Anakin shook his head, breathing deep and drying his eyes. “Leia, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have… you never should have to worry about comforting me, that isn’t fair to you. Taking care of you is my responsibility, not the reverse, I’m sorry.”

She groaned.

One step forward two steps back.

“If I was your daughter, you would be right. Yet I am not your daughter, but rather a person you just agreed to treat as someone entirely new. Someone who at most will know you as a friend. Friends comfort each other when that is needed, it is part of what makes friendship a worthwhile venture.”

He laughed, a comfortable and happy grin lighting up his face as he sat back, stretching his long legs out and leaning his back against the wall. “You’re so clever. How’d you get to be so clever?”

“I’d imagine it was the years of education preparing me to take over as the regent of my planet, combined with a life lived on the battlefront.”

He stared at her for a long moment, and shook his head. “I know you don’t want to hear it, but it isn’t just something you learned Leia. It’s innate, inherited from Padmé. My Leia, the one from this dimension, she’s smart too. Not quite as clever mind you, but that’s probably my fault and influence.”

“Why do you do that? Blame yourself for everything? Maybe it isn’t about you.”

“There you go again, being too clever for your own good.” He placed one of his hands - the metal one - on her back, giving her a slight nudge. “Ok then, clever girl, let’s see those forms you’ve been practicing.”

“What?”

“Didn’t you say before that you wanted my opinion as a Master? Well then hop to it, and you’ll get it.”

She stood, grasping Ahsoka’s ‘saber once more. She bowed to him, and as she straightened took in the fact he was practically glowing with joy, no sign of the terror and pain that had overtaken him just moments before.

There was something about that sudden change that bothered her, but she couldn’t say what it was. She wondered if Ahsoka would know what was off, or perhaps maybe Ventress. She’d have to ask them both just to be safe.
Next time: Interlude IV

Also The Last Jedi is coming out that week so you know... there is also *that* to really look forward to. (AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH)

Also to any readers in Australia: CONGRATS!!!! That is major and amazing news! I am so glad for you!
Interlude IV

Chapter Notes

Last chapter before *The Last Jedi* is in theaters!

It is possible my next update won't be for a long while yet, it depends on how Episode VII is, and how much I have to adjust in the fic to maintain canon compliance after I see it. Hopefully, it won't be too long!

Thank you endlessly to Sethnakht.

Not only for suggesting I detach this interlude from the previous one and make them two different chapters, but also for your suggestions about changing the viewpoint of some of these sections, and your thoughts on how to pace things to better communicate the newscasts are being spoken, as well as your always invaluable edits in regards to spelling and grammar, and... honestly you are an incredible beta whose contribution to this fic cannot be highlighted enough.

As with the previous interludes, this chapter has discussion of post-partum medical nonsense. If this is triggering for you, please take care of yourself!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

*Breaking news!* The Confederacy of Independent Systems, in their first true communication with the Galactic Republic since the start of the Clone Wars, delivered to the Republic today a massive amount of evidence supporting the claim of the Jedi Order that Sheev Palpatine was in fact a Sith Lord known as Darth Sidious. Several Separatist leaders are offering testimony about Sidious' deeds in exchange for amnesty in any future War Crimes tribunals. But can one in fact trust anything the Separatists say?

Bail was worried about their line of defense.

Oh, he did not question that Sheev Palpatine had manipulated them all into passing laws and making decisions they never should have, but could they successfully prove Anakin's innocence on this alone?

Mon seemed to think so, but every time Bail spoke with Obi-Wan, or Anakin himself, the conversation always seemed to circle back to the identity of Darth Sidious. They kept talking about the ancient war between the Jedi and the Sith, how trying to tempt Anakin to the Dark Side had been a direct attack on his person.

Bail understood enough theology to appreciate how serious these accusations were. The Sith were, to the best of his understanding, evil Jedi locked in a war with the actual Jedi. If Palpatine were really a Sith...

Not to mention that the name Sidious was appearing in a lot of the Separatists' records. Not only in the official documents being sent to the Republic as a whole, but also within messages Bail was now receiving from old friends of his. Friends he had not spoken to since they had defected from the
Republic three years prior.

Palpatine was the head of the dragon, and if this trial helped Bail fully destroy this evil and seal it away, then it would be of benefit to every being in the galaxy, whether they hailed from a Republic world, or a Separatist one.

He knew introducing the Sith accusation into the trial would complicate things, but surely when the man who stood accused was a Jedi it would be remiss to leave theology out of the case completely. If nothing else it would strengthen the argument that, current state of the investigation into Palpatine aside, Anakin had believed himself to be acting in self-defense.

More importantly, however, connecting Palpatine to this Darth Sidious strengthened his connection to the Confederacy, firming up the argument that Palpatine had been acting against the Republic when Anakin had struck.

His datapad pinged with an incoming message, and he was not surprised to find it was from Mon. She had been absorbed in researching legal codes since this nightmare had started, set on figuring out exactly how they could use this trial to not just save the young Jedi's life, but also build a stronger argument for peace.

What did surprise him was the message's level of encoding, flagged in a way that let him know it contained discussion of materials the Republic had deemed classified. It was to be for his eyes only.

He read the message quickly, curious about what if could possibly contain.

_Bail, have you seen this footage yet? The slicers working on the investigation just pulled it from the Trade Federation's drives. It seems they thought they had deleted the data, but it was still stored on their systems. It's of this "Darth Sidious" figure giving them instruction. You can't see his face, and his voice seems garbled and different, but I swear it's recognizable as Palpatine. More importantly the information he is giving them, it's stuff only the Chancellor could have known. Bail, I think we've got him!_

And there, attached, was the source of all the classification warnings. Holofootage direct from the investigation, to be viewed for official purposes only. Bail settled back into his seat, eager to see "Darth Sidious" himself.

_"We know from some of the Republic's best Slicers that the footage is real, and that previous Senate footage was dramatically tampered with. It's hard not to draw conclusions about Palpatine manipulating events surrounding the war."

_"Yes, but there hasn't been any actual proof yet, has there?"

_"With this much smoke there has to be fire."

_"You want to determine an individual's innocence or guilt on circumstantial evidence? I thought that wasn't how we do things here in the Galactic Republic."

The first thing Padmé asked upon waking was for her datapad. She scoured various news channels, and poured over her personal communications, before dropping the device and turning to her mother in despair.

"Not only did they fail to get Anakin off of Coruscant, he's now being subjected to a rather lengthy trial!"
"I know sweetheart. From what I see however your friends are acting as his defense. They seem like good people." Jobal smiled, squeezing Padmé's hand. "He'll be fine."

Padmé could see there was more her mother wanted to say, but she turned her attention back to her datapad, unable to focus on anything but the events taking place in on Coruscant.

There were a number of messages from both Bail and Mon about the case and the roles they were assuming for Anakin's trial. Mon had been doing research, not at all surprising since the woman absolutely adored reading old texts, looking for any and all legal codes that would support Anakin's side. Bail, being the master orator that he was, had agreed to argue before the tribunal in Anakin's favor.

She shouldn't be here.

She needed to be there.

She trusted Bail and Mon to get Anakin through this, to argue his case in the best way possible, but she should never have allowed herself to be moved home to the Mid-Rim when he needed her with him in the Core!

To make matters worse, her collapse had somehow gotten back to the press, and when the reporters weren't sensationalizing Anakin's trial, they were speculating on her health and mental state. Her office had gone ahead and told the journalists about the twins, but new and ridiculous claims about her health kept cropping up on every channel.

The only positive she could really find was that the people of the galaxy had, by and large, come to accept that Palpatine had been evil. Once contact with the Confederacy of Independent Systems had finally been established, they had provided an outpouring of evidence not only linking Palpatine to the mysterious Darth Sidious but possibly even proving they were the same person.

Mon's messages assured her that this provided the best avenue for Anakin's defense. What Anakin had done in the Opera House could be considered an act in defense of the Republic, if Palpatine had indeed been a traitor.

Bail added in his messages that the Jedi also believed Anakin's action had been in self-defense. They were throwing the weight of the entire Order behind Anakin.

It was as Padmé had always assumed. Anakin's belief that the Jedi did not value him was pure imagination, much like his worries about her cheating on him. A strange paranoid impulse that he somehow kept convincing himself was real.

Or, and as she considered the possibility it occurred to her how close they had come to true disaster, Anakin's belief that no one truly cared about him could have been an invention of Palpatine's imagination.

How many times had Anakin ranted to her at length about how the Jedi did not value him? How many times had he read the worst into every mission, some of which she had been involved in the intelligence briefings behind, and she had known full well why they were necessary? She knew he'd often spent time alone with Sheev, she had even approved of and encouraged their friendship!

She wasn't alone in having been influenced by Sheev for the worst, her husband was probably caught in the same trap.

She could see these paranoid impulses as having been carefully suggested to Anakin over the years until he believed it too. An effective isolation tactic to draw him ever closer to that evil man, while
pushing everyone else away.

"Senator Amidala has been in politics for over a decade! Just because she is now a mother, there is no reason to assume she is incapable of performing her duties."

"Are you really ok with the way she went about this? Keeping this news secret from the public?"

"Do we expect every politician in office to announce whenever they or one of their partners is expecting? I don't remember anyone ever growing concerned before now when a politician became a parent while in office without informing the public of the expected birth. So what is the difference? Why do you feel the public is owed that sort of access to Senator Amidala's life and body?"

"She lied to the public! She could be lying about any number of other things!"

"It is her life and her body, so long as she hasn't harmed another being, I fail to see what keeping her personal life to herself has to do with her job! Besides, she most assuredly did not lie. At no point did she ever directly state she was not pregnant, nor did anyone ask her to make a statement on the matter. Lack of comment, especially on a matter outside of her professional life, is not a lie."

"Do you really think there won't be a strain on her ability to do her job as a result of having to care for these babies?"

"Are you kidding me? Do you ask this of all new parents who work in politics or just new mothers?"

"You are avoiding the question."

"You know what? If you are so convinced it's impossible to both take care of a child and work in this job, the question shouldn't be if the person trying to do both shouldn't be doing one or the other. The question should be how their place of employment can adapt to best enable a person to do both. If the task before the Senator is so impossible in your opinion, then what are the systemic changes you suggest we need to make to how the Senate is run? If you have identified a problem with the system, please make that clear so we can work to fix it! The burden of responsibility should not fall on a single individual, but rather the institutions as a whole."

"You're still dodging the question. Will this impact the Senator's job performance?"

"You really need to stop seeing pregnancy or child-rearing or lack of pregnancy or lack of desire to have kids as barriers in terms of what beings choose to do in their lives. Perhaps start by challenging the notion you can only do one thing at a time - or that pregnancy - regardless of if a being chooses to carry to term or not - derails the course of your life."

"Yes or No Ma'am, will this influence her ability to do her job?"

"I am not dignifying that ridiculous question with a direct response."

"Finally I have to ask you, where did these babies come from? The Senator is, to the best of our knowledge, single."

"This is sick. You are sick, you know that? Who cares? I have not asked the Senator nor has anyone else in our office. It doesn't matter. There are thousands of reproductive decisions any being can make, and none of them are ever, ever, required to be broadcast to the public. Maybe she has a partner, maybe she visited a sperm bank, or had a casual arrangement with a friend. The possibilities are endless, and not a single one of them is anyone's business but her own."
"Right. That was a representative from Senator Amidala's office, essentially admitting that no one knows where these children came from, or how they will impact how Senator Amidala does the job the Queen of Naboo has appointed her to do. Now coming up next on this program..."

It seemed Padmé was lucky she had collapsed when she had.

Sola wasn't exactly sure how her little sister could even pass out in the middle of the street in a fortunate way, but if anyone could it would be her.

According to the medics, one of the twin's placentas had not been fully delivered, and it had gotten infected. The medcenter performed a dilation and curettage, removing the infected tissue.

Unfortunately, her sister didn't seem to care what the healers had to say about her condition.

Her sister just kept staring at her datapad as if her health was secondary to whatever scandal was occupying the Senate's attention this time. She didn't even seem to care that their mother was having a very emotional reaction to Padmé's condition!

Which meant the tasks of actually writing down and keeping track of what was going on with Padmé now fell to Sola. She really hoped her sister would do a better job taking care of her children than she was doing taking care of herself.

The healers on Coruscant had thought they had gotten both of the placentas out during postpartum procedures. From Padmé's medical records it seemed the contractions during the birth had ended in a clenched position, which had caused both placentas to be held in place within her. For all their scanning and efforts, the healers had still missed a large chunk of the second placenta in their efforts to remove them.

Sola made sure to take down every detail, to write out medical terms like "pitocin-induced contractions" nice and large. She recorded exactly what sort of scans the healers on Coruscant had done before clearing her sister, asked the doctors to clarify exactly which ones they had missed. Sola knew as soon as she calmed down her mother would want to read them all, and that eventually Padmé probably would too, so Sola did not even use any shorthand in her notation.

Had Padmé not collapsed when she had, a side effect of pushing herself so hard right after birth and not following adequate nutrition routines, they never would have discovered there was still placenta in there.

Sola nodded as they explained that heavy bleeding after giving birth was the very definition of normal. They would only have started to suspect anything wrong had the bleeding continued after six weeks, and even then they might have doubted that anything of any particular note was going on, even with the fever the infection was causing. None of that surprised Sola at all. She'd bled for well over two months after Ryoo was born. Pooja had been easier - although she wasn't sure how much of that was because she'd known what to expect when she had her second child.

Sola had learned her lessons from her own experiences giving birth well. As soon as she as she heard about the pregnancy and everything, she had run out to buy her sister vital supplies, like adult diapers and other comfortable solutions, just to be extra sure her sister wouldn't ruin any of her expensive clothes in the weeks following the arrival of the new baby.

From what Sola could tell, her sister hadn't made use of anything Sola had bought her.

Padmé was acting as if now that the babies were born, her body would just go back to acting as it normally would.
So really, it was a very good thing Padmé had collapsed. Not only would the incident hopefully force Padmé to take notice of the fact she needed to recover, it had caused the healers to really investigate and find the infected tissue before further complications, like sepsis, set in.

They still had the infection, hemorrhaging, and a host of other medical concerns to look out for, but the healers were hopeful that with the infected issue removed the likelihood Padmé would develop any of these possible conditions was minimal.

Sola's mother had gasped over every new bit of news. The shock of finding out about Padmé's secret life had left her emotionally vulnerable, and this hospitalization was not helping.

(This also led the Doctors to assure Jobal that Padmé would have probably noticed calcified and rock like bits of placenta falling out of her body and come to a medcenter for help before sepsis set in. Sola didn't find that very reassuring. She wrote it down though, just in case it still happened. She didn't trust that this would be their last trip to the medcenter, not with how Padmé kept pushing herself.)

Padmé clearly was not paying any attention to any of it. Sola knew how her little sister looked when she was tuning something out, and that was exactly how she was reacting then. The cautious tones in their voices as they told her to rest, the stern serious warnings about how she needed to take nutritional supplements were all clearly washing over her and failing to be of interest.

So Sola made sure to write the medical advice down multiple times. Underline it. Write it several sizes larger than the rest of the text.

Her stubborn baby sister was going to follow these professionals' advice, so she could get better and actually care for her children, or so help her…

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_How much did Naboo know? When had they found out about Palpatine's hidden agenda?_

_Surely no one expected the Galaxy to believe that Palpatine, their representative for so many decades, had been acting alone without the knowledge of a single person on the planet?_

_That is what the newest statement from the Office of the Queen is hoping the Galaxy will buy._

_She points to Palpatine's 37% approval rating on the planet, as well as Senator Amidala's voting record in the Senate, as proof that the people and interests of Naboo were in opposition to Palpatine's legislative legacy._

_This is what is supposed to exonerate the Naboo people? Random polling data? A couple of votes? Absurd._

_Let's not forget that it was Amidala herself who first called for a vote of no confidence in Supreme Chancellor Valorum, or that Representative Binks was the one to call for Palpatine to be granted Emergency Powers!_

_Every single time the man made a grab for power, there was someone from the Naboo system propping him up, assisting him in his ploys._

_There is no escaping this, everything in Palatine's history points to his home government being fully culpable in his plot to take over, and their current attempts to distance themselves from the situation should be challenged as the lies they are!_
When Padmé finally left the medcenter, her family sent her and her children with her to Varykino.

It was nice being at her family's lake house once more, everything seemed so much better here than it had in Theed.

She had even started to be able to tell her children apart, some of the time at the very least.

Not everything was suddenly better. Since leaving the medcenter, her mother's hovering had become a near constant, as had the strange looks her mom would send her way when she thought her daughter was not looking.

Then there was the private healer her mother had hired to come to Varykino with them.

While it was nice to know that many of the things she was experiencing were normal, she hated how the healer kept claiming that every single parenting guide Padmé had read while pregnant was wrong, simply because she had birthed twins.

Of course some of the healer's advice made sense, such as increasing her caloric intake even more than the amount her doctors had recommended so her body could accommodate the extra milk production, but for the most part the woman simply... hovered and critiqued. Constantly.

Padmé was used to being monitored. She was used to being closely followed. For about half of her life now, she'd had a litany of guards and Handmaidens. Yet there was something about this particular woman's brand of hovering she simply detested.

It probably had to do with the fact she was so good at pointing out when Padmé displayed her ignorance when it came to handling newborns. Padmé was certain she received disapproving looks whenever she delegated tasks related to the twins to members of her staff.

Sure, the healer was kind about it, never daring to say anything that even hinted at disapproving of Padmé's behavior, but Padmé was certain the woman never forgot how bad Padmé was at all of this, focusing on her family as opposed to her work, to being a mother.

Still, it was nice to have someone help identify potential problems. Such as that milk production tip. Padmé would have kept on trying to breastfeed her children herself had the healer not explained that producing milk for two was the source of her newfound dizziness. So she had taken that advice and hired a wet nurse. With the arrival of the new member of staff, there to ensure her children were fed and taken care of, she was recovering so much faster.

Padmé really couldn't wait for the healer to leave.

She looked forward to the healer's departure almost as much as she did her husband's inevitable arrival.

She refused to imagine his trial could result in anything other than their reunion.

Truly she wasn't sure she could do this without him. Hell, she wasn't even certain she could do it with him by her side. It was impossible enough with her entire family on hand.

Every time she turned on the holonews she was reminded that her children had truly picked the worst possible time to enter the world. Even as she let herself relax here, in her most favorite of places, she felt a restless itch that this was not where she was supposed to be. She was needed in the Senate, and the idea of relaxing by the lake when events of such galactic importance were taking place was absurd.
Increasingly she fantasized about simply strapping the babies to her and taking them with her onto the Senate floor.

(Or perhaps far more realistically having her handmaidens care for them in her apartment while she did the work that needed to be done.)

She shifted in her seat, barely having to adjust the child she held in her arms. She had gotten rather good at balancing a baby and her datapad and had even figured out the trick to holding two at once.

Maybe that fantasy of bringing her babies onto the Senate floor with her wasn't too unrealistic. That thought made her smile, content in the reminder that she would not be kept from her work forever, and that she could and eventually would be able to balance childcare and governing. She did not have to choose one or the other, and with time and experience, she was suddenly certain she would figure out the ideal method of fulfilling all of the most important spheres of her life.

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..., Connect the pieces and Palpatine's motivations start to really come together.

...Before the war began, the Republic really understood the need for executive limitations and a diversity of opinions - yet watch any news debate from the weeks leading up to the attacks and you'll see - anyone who so much as disliked the robes Palpatine was wearing would be accused of secretly being a Separatist. Let's be honest - how often have we all heard "if you don't like how we are doing things go join the Confederacy" or "stop disrespecting the office of the Chancellor" in response to even the most basic differences in opinion. That isn't democracy. That isn't free civil debate!

Just look at the security bill Palpatine endorsed last year! Yes, the one I just can't stop harping on all the time on this show, but there's a reason for that. This thing made it legal for his agents to monitor civilian holocalls and messages if they so much as suspected citizens of Separatist activity. Before the war had someone suggested such an expansive breach of civil liberties riots would have broken out, yet that bill passed with only minor objection in the Senate.

Or the very literal militarization of Coruscant's security forces, the slow replacement of all officers of the peace with heavily armed troopers, patrolling as if this very planet was a war zone.

Under his leadership our democracy has been hollowed out from the inside, the institutions here to protect us slowly replaced by the tools of some new and unrecognizable form of government...

"What! What is it mom? You've obviously been holding something in for days now, what is it?"

Padmé's outburst started Jobal, who had been in the process of adjusting the blankets swaddling Luke. The loud voice of his mother combined with his grandmother's sudden tension caused the newborn to let out a wail, and for a moment the confrontation between mother and daughter was averted, as they both focused on soothing the distressed boy.

Once he had been calmed, and placed in his crib to sleep, Jobal turned to her daughter frowning deeply. "What was that about?" Her words were half whispered, but the force behind them still shone through.

"You've been watching me ever since we got to Varykino, mother. It's clear you want to say something, so just say it already."

Jobal did not respond immediately, instead gesturing for Padmé to follow her out of the nursery.

The two walked in silence for a bit, moving further and further away from where the twins slept, and
the longer they went without speaking the more irritated Padmé became. What was with all this build up? If her mother wanted to say something to her, why couldn't she just say it?

They entered one of the estate's many parlors, and Jobal sat on a couch, watching Padmé as she crossed the room to sit down as well. Jobal sighed, nodding slightly as she did. "You are right, sweetheart, there is a lot I've been meaning to talk to you about."

Padmé waited expectantly for her mother to continue.

Yet even now that Padmé had brought things up with her directly, Jobal was uncomfortable, she had wished for a bit more time to think of how to phrase things before coming to her daughter with them.

Finally, Jobal met Padmé's eyes. "I feel as if I failed you. I wasn't there when you needed me to be, and I fear I was not even there when you were a child and needed me to teach you how to best lead a safe and fulfilling life."

"What? I am leading a very fulfilling life. Look at my career, at my family. What isn't fulfilling about all of that?" Padmé tried and failed to keep her voice calm, to prevent herself from yelling.

Jobal did not react to her daughter's shift in tone, she kept speaking in the same sad voice. "I'm not phrasing this right. Sweetie I just mean that I wish I had known some of what was going on, any of it, before this point. That I could have been there for you, helped you navigate your relationship, given you advice during your pregnancy." Jobal paused for a moment, turning away from her daughter, looking down at her lap. When she started to speak again her voice wavered with suppressed emotion. "You were going through so many major things and I didn't know about any of it."

"Mom, you just implied that my life isn't fulfilling and that I am putting myself in danger. That isn't just phrasing things wrong," Padmé said, frustrated and insulted.

"I worry about you. I see you hide your relationship from us, see you push yourself to keep working just days after you've given birth, you didn't even seem to process the news the medics were giving you, and I worry."

"Well stop. There is nothing for you to worry about."

"Do you know how much you scared me Padmé? First, you reject help, and then you collapse bleeding in the middle of the street? Yet even after that, even after I thought I could have lost you, you keep pushing yourself! I know how important your job is, but you are more important to me than anything else could possibly ever be!"

"Mother, the integrity of Democracy itself has been compromised!" Padmé deflated, took a small breath and then continued in a smaller voice, "Mom, if this trial goes wrong Anakin could be-" "No Padmé, I don't care what else is happening, or who is in danger, you have to take care of yourself! I worked too hard to ensure both you and Sola knew that reproductive knowledge is important, to take its power seriously, to watch you treat this like it isn't the major medical event that it is."

"I understand that that childbirth isn't a minor matter! Mom, you know that I understand that!"

"I know you do on an intellectual level. That is what makes this so hard to watch. You aren't endangering yourself out of ignorance, but out of some strange belief that somehow it doesn't apply to you!"
"Doesn't apply to - mother, I am perfectly aware of my limits!"

"Are you? I have heard you give advice to countless constituents seeking out information, by Shiraya you've even championed longer parental leave protections in the Senate. I shouldn't have to explain to you why it is important for you to get rest, you already know all the reasons, know them better than I do! Yet clearly you are incapable of following your own advice!"

"Mother, you are being ridiculous, my husband is on trial, you expect me to be able to… just rest up by the lake?" Padmé's emotions were rising up, blocking her throat and stealing her words.

"Yes, that marriage of yours. I worry about that too. I am so worried that you are playing pretend with him. Lost in a fantasy where you never had to cohabitate, never actually experienced each other at your worst as well as your best, never fought or compromised." Jobal let out a loud sigh and met Padmé's eye as she glared at her. "Please don't look at me like that, ever since you were young you've seen the best in everyone and everything, and I know that's been just fine for you, your job is so hard, it makes sense that you'd want to have a simple life outside of work. That's what made you such a great poet when you were younger, that idealism of yours. But dearest, you can't do that when you have children."

"Just what is that supposed to mean, mother? I understand if my keeping my marriage from you for so many years upset you, but Anakin and I have been married for almost four years now." Four years of struggling to maintain a relationship through a war.

Scattered moments where they could grab them, a lack of stability the only true constant.

Of needing to talk to her friends and family, to seek out advice or just share what she was experiencing, and yet having nowhere to turn.

Anakin's sickening terrible jealousy, how he'd just watched her ex fall to his death.

The many times Anakin had acted as if she should drop her work just because he was available.

The ridiculous ultimatums he would create, telling her if she did not prioritize him over bills and debates then she'd be proving she did not love him as much as he loved her.

They had gotten through all of that together, had committed to working through their issues.

She sighed, there was no way for her mother to know any of this of course. She had thought Padmé was single until just before the twins' birth.

Padmé took in a deep breath and nodded. "Of course our marriage isn't perfect. I have no delusions about that. We have our problems, like any other couple. Which is why we have agreed to go to counseling."

"You are in counseling? That is good to hear. When I heard you had a secret marriage, oh sweetheart, I was so scared. But if he is willing to accept help… Sweetheart, if not for yourself please promise me you will make sure your children have a good home life. They are depending on you, Padmé."

The two continued to argue, to share their frustrations and fears and hopes and joys. Exposing ways they had hurt one another, failures to share or listen or act. In the moment it was messy hurt and raw pain and the occasional raised voice.

In the end, Jobal was no more ready to trust her daughter to take care of herself, but well… maybe that was a good thing since Padmé had not walked away suddenly ready to focus on her own health
and recovery. Jobal reassessed her opinion of the family her youngest child suddenly had, and Padmé her opinion of the one she’d had her entire life.

There were still new things to learn about each other, new ways to see and understand who they were. New parts of their relationship to negotiate, and renegotiate, and then perhaps negotiate once again - never perfect, but… truly, what family is?

With communication channels between the Separatists and the Republic now fully open for the first time in years, it seems as if the war may be over soon. How much of this can be attributed to the actions of General Skywalker will be debated at his upcoming trial, but things are looking good for the Hero With No Fear.

Yet even with Galactic polls showing a high rate of approval for the war finally coming to a close, not everyone is ready to pursue a ceasefire. On the Senate floor today debates raged on...

The debates raged away. More and more evidence of Palpatine's role as Sidious was uncovered, continued contact with the Separatist senators opening up whole new avenues of debate.

Through it all Mas Amedda occupied his new position of Chancellor and planned his way forward.

In time this chaos would be cured. In time things would be set on an ordered and neat path. Palpatine's death was a major setback, but it was not the end of his dream for a unified Galactic Empire.

Far from it.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Leia S. tries to find Luke so she can talk to him, Anakin helps with Leia O.’s lightsaber training.

THIS WEEK
THE LAST JEDI
I AM DYING
AHHHHHHHH

I already have tickets to see the dang movie two times in a row Thursday night, and I just... am so !!!!!!!! I just can not wait to cry endlessly ahhhhhhhhhh.
Hello everyone! I hope you all enjoyed *The Last Jedi* as much as I did! I've seen it seven times already, and may see it several more times before it leaves theaters (why yes, I am a very obsessive *Star Wars* fan, what gave that away?).

Anyway I wanted to assure you all that I have factored *TLJ* into how things will be progressing, and I am working to edit what has already been posted into full *TLJ* compliance. Please let me know if you discover I have missed something in my edits. I am super worried that I will.

A massive thanks to my beta Sethnakht for all the advice regarding this chapter. When reading the original draft of it in late November, Sethnakht told me to gut a lot of the first part. This chapter is so much better without those bits, and I am truly in Sethnakht's debt.

If I don't post another chapter before then, and if it is more than just a date on a calendar for you, I hope you have a happy New Years!

Leia didn’t care that Obi-Wan thought she should wait before talking to Luke.

She needed to make things right.

Needed to make things right *immediately*.

*Luke, please, let me know where you are.*

She was wandering through the base again, looking for him.

Why was she always wandering through this base trying to find him?

This place was too small to keep losing someone, and yet Luke really knew how to disappear.

*C’mon Lu, please talk to me.*

Kwilaan guide her, she would find him wherever it was he’d hid himself. Leia didn’t care if she’d have to go through every single part of this base looking for him.

*Leave me alone, Leia.*

Progress! He was responding to her, finally!

*No can do, Lu. Now tell me where you’re hiding.*

If she had to go on any more hunts for Luke through this base, then soon she might actually know her way around it.

*I’m not hiding Leia, I’m in my bunk. That’s the opposite of hiding.*
Oh.

Ok then.

Where the krizz was Luke’s bunk?

She circled the relatively tiny base over and over, unable to find Luke anywhere.

All she was learning in her attempts to find him was that there was nothing quite so annoying as having people salute you as you passed them. That she needed help should have been obvious, and yet these people kept standing there, posture straight and hand at their forehead, acting as if they could not see how frantic she was.

She turned a corner, and to her relief caught sight of two familiar figures. Neither saluted nor acknowledged her presence in any way.

Han and Sana were absorbed in conversation midway down the hall.

“Am I glad to see you two!” Leia called out to them. They responded with a dismissive wave, and then went back to whatever conversation they were having. She walked closer, physically placing herself beside them both where they would see her. “What are you talking about?”

Han turned to her, smirking. “Sana here is upset the Alliance is paying me more per mission than they’re paying her.”

“I’m just saying, a flat rate would make more sense than this nonsense,” Sana grumbled.

Leia’s eyes flew wide, “wait, why is there a pay discrepancy?”

His smile was wide now, smug and self satisfied. “It’s on account of my being a genuine War Hero, and Sana having only just started contracting with them.”

“There has to be a way to convince them I’m worth the money.”

“Well Sana, it’s not your fault you’re not as impressive as I am.”

“Han, full offense, if you can con these people into thinking you are a War Hero? I should be able to do the same.”

“Hey! It’s no con! I played a key role in the Battle of Yavin, earned my fancy medal and Hero status fair and square.”

Leia shook her head, impatient and bored already with the conversation. “Well, I don’t mean to interrupt, but can one of you direct me to Luke’s bunk?”

Han frowned at her. “Why?”

“I made the mistake of telling him something he wasn’t ready to hear, and he freaked,” Leia said. “So I need your help finding his bunk so I can talk to him.”

Sana glared at her. “You need to let the kid pout. He’s emotional, let him work through his feelings on his own.”

Leia shook her head. “I would just let him be if I didn’t need to make sure he got the proper training.”
“Maybe he doesn’t need you supervising him,” Sana said, “maybe he can figure this Jedi stuff out on his own.”

“I…. I’m not talking about training him myself. I know someone who can help. Someone wise.”

Han snorted. “Oh, so now you want to whisk the Kid out of here? Find some wise teacher only you somehow know about? Come on, you really expect us to buy this crap?”

Leia turned to Han, frustrated and at her limits. “He may know how to get me home! Then I’d be gone and you’d have your precious Princess back. It wouldn’t surprise me if he did know how to do it, he knows basically everything. I just need to bring Luke to him and…”

“Ok, ok we get it, you aren’t just bugging Luke, you have a real reason to need him to listen,” Sana interjected. “Tell you what, you convince Luke to go with you, and you can take my ship.”

“What?” Han shouted. “You’re just going to let her take the Cobra?”

“I’m guessing she didn’t already fill out the paperwork to requisition a vehicle from the Alliance, which means she can’t take one of theirs without it being theft. That would be extra not-fun with the desertion charges they can level at Luke if they felt like it. I doubt they’d go that far since he’s an actual War Hero, but you never know with Military types. That leaves my ship and yours Han, so unless you want to lend them the Falcon,” Sana paused, and Han filled the space with several colorful remarks about him lending out his ship. “See, it just makes sense. I mean, I am assuming you don’t want one of us taking you there, and want to keep this just to the two of you?”

Leia nodded, grateful. “Thank you. I… Sana, that is incredibly kind of you. Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me yet,” Sana said, “I’m just hoping to get even further in the Alliance’s good graces and increase my paycheck.”

“Yeah, because lending your ship out so those two can go AWOL together really is going to endear you to the higher-ups,” Han said.

“Hey, you never know.”

Han placed his hands on his hips. “It’s only common sense.” He gestured towards Leia with his chin. “Are you at least going to tell anyone where you intend to take the Kid, or just vanish outright?”

Frowning at the smuggler, Leia did not respond.

Sana was amused by the exchange - based on how she reacted to Leia’s glare. There was a wide grin on her face as she pointed down the hall. “Five doors down on the right you’ll find the Flight Officers quarters. I’ll be sending my ship’s codes to the Princess’s datapad.” Sana turned and began to head down the hall.

Leia approached the door Sana had directed her to, and Sana called out to her one last time before she and Han wandered off, leaving the hall outright. “Hey Leia? Good luck with Blondie.”

Leia nodded, opening the door as she did. As it slid open she stared, shocked for a moment at the mess within.

Several bunkbeds were arranged against the walls with lockers crammed between them. A metal bench ran along the center of the room, dividing the space in two and providing the only seating aside from on the beds themselves.
Clothes of all sort were scattered everywhere, some hanging from the beds, others spread across the floor. Somehow, inexplicably, there were even items hanging from the ceiling.

The room was pungent, heavy with the sweat of several highly active beings. Dirty clothes and socks and the adrenaline and fear of battle.

It was clear this was a room shared by many, but only Luke was there now.

He sat on one of the lower bunks, reading something on his datapad.

Unlike her oh so tidy brother he did not seem to care at all about the mess around him, or even the stink of the room. His own bunk was no more neat than any of the others, the covers tossed back and unmade, dirty clothes scattered on the floor underneath, various trinkets were gathered - some dangling around the bed, others clustered by the dirty clothes.

He glanced up at her, standing in the doorway. She didn’t really want to step fully into this room but… she couldn’t have this conversation where she stood. So she forced herself to enter, the door shutting behind her.

She was rather proud of herself for only gagging once.

“I told you I don’t want to talk to you,” Luke said.

“I… I am sorry I told you like that.” Leia sat on the bench at its closest point to his bed as she talked. “But you deserved to know. Would you rather I’d kept it from you longer?”

Luke looked up from what he was reading, meeting her eye. “How do you know that he’s alive?”

“The first night I got here, when you told me he was dead? I was so shocked, I reached out to him with the Force and...” She trailed off, suppressing a shiver as she remembered the enormity of Vader’s anger. His pain. The sick horror as she realized the twisted presence she felt was her father’s.

“So if I…” Luke swallowed hard, glancing away from Leia, “If I get better at this, I could contact him myself?”

She didn’t want him to ever feel the bottomless horror of connecting with Vader. For him to struggle to keep him out the way she now did. “Lu, I don’t -”

He cut her off. Voice clipped and angry. “That was a yes or no question, Leia.”

“Yes.” Now she was the one avoiding his gaze. “I suppose.”

“Ok.” He took in a breath, and when he spoke his voice was calm. Serious, but calm. “I need a teacher. Not you.”

“Hey! Not that I don’t agree, but I thought I was doing a pretty good job of teaching you.”


“I taught you how to meditate, didn’t I?”

Luke blushed, and let out a nervous laugh. “Uh, yeah, about that…”

The tension that had been holding Leia straight in her seat drained out of her, and she felt her muscles unclench. Luke wasn’t angry with her! Or at least he wasn’t shutting her out entirely for
days on end, which was always a risk when Luke was in a mood. Well, her Luke anyway. She waited for this new version of him to finish his thought.

“Ben taught me how to mediate. It was one of the few things he taught me in the week before he died.”

“What? But you were having so much trouble with it at first!”

“Yeah uh, that was me debating whether I should say something.”

“And why didn’t you?”

“I, um, just wanted to impress you, I guess, show you I…” He sighed. “Look, growing up I was a bit… unpopular with the other kids around Anchorhead.”

“What does this have to do with anything? Not that I don’t want to hear about your life, but I am confused.”

“No it is related, it is the reason why.”

“Ok, so you weren’t exactly the it-guy in the desert.”

“They called me Wormie, and everyone treated me like I was just a big joke. Then I found out I could become a Jedi, and for the first time in my life I actually felt… special.” He shook his head, smiling. “I thought it was a joke too. Tried to just leave Ben right there and go home and get back to my life.”

Something he said must have touched on a bad memory, because all the humor on his face drained out, replaced with the same pain he’d shown her earlier, before she’d told him that their father was alive.

“That life was taken from me, and becoming a Jedi, it really was all I had left. Flash forward to you showing up and…” He shook his head. “I don’t know, I guess I worried all you’d see is Wormie.”

Luke fell silent, gazing at his hands. The silence did not last long, he looked up again, laughing. “I mean wow, Leia, we’re the same age. Literally actually the exact same age, and you have been training to be a Jedi for like, your entire life and I…” He stopped, collected his thoughts. “I’m just some yokel from the Outer Rim fooling around with things he doesn’t understand. All the impressive stuff people have said about me since I’ve left home? You can easily top all of it. So when you wanted to start teaching me with something I already knew how to do, I thought maybe I’d make you think I’m not as pathetic as I really am.”

“Luke, you are anything but pathetic.”

“No, stop, Leia, I don’t… I don’t want to hear you say what you think I want to hear. It doesn’t help.”

“I’m not just saying that to be nice. Ever since I’ve got here I’ve been impressed by you. You’re… you’re incredible Luke. I really wish you could see it.”

“The problem is I don’t think I can believe that Leia. Not knowing how good at all of this you are, with us the same age and all. It reminds me too much of the things I was made fun for back then.”

Leia really really wanted to board the nearest ship and go to Tatooine. Track down each and every single damn bantha-fodder hick that had ever made fun of Luke, and show them exactly what she
She was self aware enough to know those impulses were more about her and her issues than what Luke actually needed.

Self-aware enough to know she didn’t know what Luke needed.

There was only one way to find that out.

“What do you need, Luke?”

“A teacher. Someone who has actual teaching experience, and well... isn’t the same age as me.”

Oh.

Was that all?

Leia grinned.

“Well, I have some really good news for you then. I tried telling you last night, but I think you were pretty distracted? Master Yoda is still alive, and I know how to take you to him.”

“Right, I… I think I may remember that. You said he was a great master or something?”

“Grand Master. He was the head of the entire Jedi Order, Lu. Has taught more Jedi... well more than you can even imagine!”

Luke sat on his bed, watching her. When he finally looked away, it was to glance down at his datapad. For a moment Leia feared he was ending their conversation there, that he was freezing her out. Instead after a breath or two he looked back up at her, biting at his lip. Then his face smoothed out, resolved.

Luke nodded. “Then take me to him. Please. I need someone to show me how to be a Jedi. To teach me. Take me where you must, push me as you see fit. I just need to speak to… well someone with the authority to clear me to go. If you can find a ship to take us -”

“Sana is lending us hers.”

“You… you were coming here to tell me to go train with him, weren’t you?”

“That was the plan, yes.”

He smiled, eyes twinkling, a sheepish cast to his face.

Leia’s heart leapt at the sight of that smile.

“I gotta take care of some stuff before we go but… let’s meet up in a few hours?”

Leia nodded.

“Let’s meet in the training room.” They blurted it out at the same time, a look of astonished shock on Luke’s face as he realized what they had done. Leia couldn’t help but laugh.

If they were in sync with each other enough to share a sentence, then she really didn’t have anything to worry about.
Ahsoka slipped back into the practice room a few hours later.

Anakin had in that time proven himself to be an exemplary teacher, somehow managing to get actual laughs out of Leia despite her best attempts to remain serious. He had done this while also encouraging her to work ever harder and passing along tips and suggestions she found tremendously helpful.

“I really hate to put an end to this, but Leia has a dinner date to get to.”

Anakin twirled around, facing Ahsoka. “She has a what?”

“With your wife. The two of them are going out to some fancy restaurant tonight. Don’t ask me where. Padmé just commed me to ask if I could remind Leia they are dining out, and to ask her to start getting ready.”

Anakin’s posture relaxed, a lazy smile stretching across his face. “So Luke and I are going to be left to scrounge for food?” He laughed. “Wanna join us for dinner Ahsoka?”

“Just try and keep me away!”

Leia raised an eyebrow at Ahsoka. “This is all nice and domestic, but where were you? Who was the call from, the one that made you run off for several hours?”

She laughed. “Oh, Barriss wanted to talk to me about some of the information she’s uncovered about your situation. Verify certain details about what Skygal and I were doing when your switch happened, stuff like that. You’ll be pleased to know she thinks she’s found references to something like this happening a long long time ago.”

“Please tell me she has more recent info then the Mist-Weaver nonsense she was going on about last night,” Anakin said.

“Sorry Skyguy. We’re still looking at stuff from that era.”

“Ahsoka, that krayt spit predates the Jedi Order! There has to be something more than vague texts from over a millennium ago to explain how to get my daughter back!”

“Anakin.” Ahsoka glanced quickly to Leia before meeting his eye again. “Why don’t we talk about this later. Maybe during dinner?”

“No, please don’t hold back just because I am here.” Leia scowled. “I am very interested in hearing more.”

“There really isn’t more to tell you, Leia.”

“Right. Of course there isn’t. That is why I have been conveniently absent from every discussion on this topic?”

“That isn’t by design,” Anakin said. “You don’t need to worry, we all have your best interests at heart, I promise.”

“Because a promise from a man I only just met means so much to me, I feel so reassured.”

“How about from a friend, huh?”
Damn him for using her words against her.

“Well, then be reassured that we all love and care about your counterpart, and will do everything we can to bring her home,” said Ahsoka, as if Leia could somehow ever forget that. “Anyway, you need to shower and change into clean robes. I’m sure you don’t want to sit through dinner with sweat just drying on you.”

Leia wrinkled her nose. “Thanks for making me imagine that. But, clean robes? Surely if I’m going to eat somewhere on the fancier end of things I should dress up more than that. Does the restaurant have a dress code?”

“Oh, I didn’t ask? Should I have asked? Is that even a thing?” Ahsoka seemed genuinely surprised and confused, which was odd.

Perhaps they had all been focused in the wrong direction when imagining the difference between Leia’s dimension and this one, and the real point of divergence was the existence of dress codes.

Anakin smiled, handing Leia his comm. “Here, give your mom a call and ask her how you should dress. I am sure the question is going to delight her.”

Leia scowled, there he went again, referring to his wife as her mother. Still there was no reason to take her frustration out on Padmè, so when the woman answered her comm Leia kept her voice pleasant. “Padmè, hello, quick question. Ahsoka said I should change into clean robes for tonight’s dinner, but if we are going out I would have expected a stricter dress code than that? Wouldn’t it be more appropriate for me to dress up?”

There was a long silence, then a rush of excited words. “You... you want to dress up? I… oh. Please come over to the apartment immediately, I’ll tell my staff to start getting outfits ready for you.”

Leia frowned, confused. “I’m sorry, I don’t understand. Does this establishment have a dress code or not?”

Laughter. “Leia, as a Jedi you could wear robes anywhere, at any time, and never be underdressed.”

Oh. Well that certainly would make preparing to go out far easier. Still, “I think I want to wear something nice. It has been so long since I was able to enjoy a night out on the town.” Leia wouldn’t be able to fully enjoy herself if she came in robes. Sure, she would rationally know the rules had been waived, but there would be no way Leia wouldn’t spend the whole night thinking about how underdressed she was.

“Oh, this is exciting! I’ll have my staff bring up some dresses for you to choose between!”

Leia groaned, “No, no, I trust them to pick something out for me. I understand the purpose and importance of fashion, know what styles are and are not in season and why, I even appreciate the artistry. That doesn’t mean I actually… enjoy the process behind it.” There was of course a reason she had so many outfits done in similar cuts and styles to each other. She’d wear ceremonial clothes when she had to, and understood when clothes could help her emphasize a point, but her tastes veered more towards the practical end of things.

She could only hope the more lavish aspects of high society were not the same in this universe. She would not be held liable for her actions if anyone so much as hinted at a bioengineered body part.

Leia glowered as she shut the comm off and handed it back to Anakin. She had thought they had made some real progress earlier, establishing some of the boundaries she would need if she was going to get to know him. It seemed she had been mistaken.
Next time: Leia O. gets dressed up for a night on the town, Leia S. waits for Luke to meet back up with her.

Dedicated of course to the most iconic woman imaginable, who drowned in moonlight strangled by her own bra one year ago today.
There were dresses everywhere.

They were in the room Leia had poked her head in that first day here, the one with the mirrors in the corner.

Even more dresses than she had seen when she first looked at this room had been produced from… somewhere. The space was packed with the things, as well as several wigs and all manner of jewelry.

Members of Padmé’s staff were moving about the space, opening even more boxes full of dresses as if there weren’t enough here already.

For her part, Padmé was already fully dressed in an expensive yet tasteful gown, although it was clear her hair and makeup had not yet been finished.

“Leia! I wasn’t sure what your taste tended towards, so I had a broad selection of options brought up. Not just the dresses I’ve purchased for my daughter and she ignores, but also some of my own outfits - we should be around the same size. Hopefully there is something here you will like, and if not we can always...”

Leia cut Padmé off. “I am sure I will find something to wear in this selection, it’s perfect.” There were so many dresses. Looking at them all, it was easy to forget they were merely going out for dinner, and not attending a state function.

How did she always forget how lavish the tastes of the Naboo tended to be?

There were so many layers to these dresses, each one embroidered with fine details that were only apparent when viewed close up.

So different from how they liked to do things on Alderaan, where the fashion was far more simple. Muted. Occasionally Leia or her mother would dress in a more extravagant gown, but never anything like this!

There was a hushed titter from the bustling women in Padmé’s employ. It was clear they wanted to laugh but were holding themselves back. Leia turned towards them, smiling at their palpable excitement. “Is the other me really so bad that dressing me is that exciting?”
One of Padmé’s employees - a pale blond woman who stood out due to how little she resembled any of her coworkers - let out a full throated guffaw. “You have no idea. The last time we tried to dress the Chancellor's daughter, well… there is a reason we all gave up on seeing how she looks when dressed up nice when she was still a child.”

“Ah, so my suffering for fashion will be educational for you then. This here is what Leia looks like when done up like a prize show-anooba, that sort of thing?”

“Can you blame any of us?”

Another woman held up a holocamera. “On that note, I wanted to know if you’d consent to us taking pictures of you after we are done. We’d all really like to savor the memory of how gorgeous you’re going to look.”

“It’s like an army of organic TooVees. Alright, I’ll freshen up, and then you can all do your worst.”

One of the women drew close, talking excitedly about some of her ideas. She asked Leia for permission, and began grabbing various parts of Leia’s current outfit, announcing her ideas for what she could wear. For her part Leia smiled indulgently at the woman, amused by her planning. That is, until one of her hands started to reach towards Leia’s hair.

Leia moved quickly, grabbing the woman’s wrist and holding it tight. “No! You can’t… no one is touching my hair. Sorry. Should have been more clear about that.”

Padmé drew close, placing a hand on Leia’s shoulder and the other on the arm Leia was holding. Leia let go, and Padmé gave the woman Leia had grabbed an apologetic smile. “Remember, we talked about this, this Leia was raised on Alderaan. The people of Alderaan have all sorts of cultural rules surrounding their hair, and I think after that little display it is safe to assume that Leia observes all of them.”

“Well not all of them, there are so many different customs, and a lot of them are only observed by people from specific regions… but yes, please respect that no one may touch my hair without permission. I don’t…” Leia blushed, “well I don’t know any of you well enough to be quite that intimate, thanks.”

One of the women present laughed, and when the others turned to her she turned bright red. “I uh… I used to date someone from Alderaan. She always likened playing with her hair to foreplay, or even a sex act in and of itself.”

Leia’s cheeks burned a similar shade as she nodded in agreement. “Yes. That is… Well it’s a very intimate thing, hair.” She swallowed, gathering her thoughts more, hoping to explain her behavior and get things back to the earlier casual atmosphere.

She decided to focus on a point of commonality between Alderaanian culture and the Naboo, even if it was only similar on the most superficial level. “I mean aside from… that, it is one of the first things people tend to notice about a person, and can communicate any manner of messages.”

All of those gathered nodded, undoubtedly thinking of the many ways hairstyle could be used as a communicative device. Among the Naboo of course that often meant elaborate headdresses, wigs, and other heavy objects Leia really wouldn’t want piled on her head, but the concept was essentially the same between her culture and theirs.

Leia smiled at the woman she had frightened earlier. “I am sure you didn’t know that Alderaanians have so many hang ups around our hair. Perhaps you can tell me what it was you had in mind, and
I’ll see if there is a braid I can do that looks similar? Well, one that looks similar and wouldn’t be broadcasting the wrong sort of message to the world. We’re big on hair symbology in my culture and I would feel awkward putting it in say… a mourning braid, if I wasn’t actually a widow.”

The woman nodded, smiling to communicate that she held no hard feelings towards Leia for what had occurred.

It was Padmé who had the brilliant idea of grabbing a plain wig, hair loose and unadorned. She asked a member of her staff to retrieve not only a wig, but a stand to place it on, and once they were set up in the room, Leia and the handmaidens set to work discussing various hairstyles, how they were done, and what would work best for the evening.

It was nice, working with others on something other than battle plans for a change.

Relaxing in its own way.

The women who worked for her… for Padmé were all so nice. Smart and funny and loads better to talk to about these matters than TooVee had ever been.

Funny that her other self was apparently so averse to dressing up, Leia had been sure that had she been dressed by women such as these and not by her nagging personal attendant droid she would have developed a greater appreciation of fashion than she had. Yet apparently that was not actually the case.

How odd, to be so wrong about her own self and perceptions.

Even odder to think that after all those years of arguing with TooVee, of avoiding her and putting off letting her dress Leia or fashion her hair into all manner of intricate styles, Leia had come to enjoy fashion far more than she would have otherwise.

Leia really wished she could thank her old droid. Apologize for all their fights, and let her know her service had in fact been appreciated in some way. Too bad WA-2V was nothing more than dust floating in the asteroid belt around Alderaan’s sun.

One of the gathered woman noticed Leia’s distress, reached out and placed an arm around her shoulders. Leia jerked away from the touch, an instinctive reaction, and the arm was withdrawn.

Embarrassed by both her emotional shift and her reaction to the gesture of comfort, Leia glanced down, trying to think of what exactly she should say. Another woman drew close, slowly resting her hands on Leia’s shoulders.

Leia looked up, into Padmé’s concerned face. It was always so strange, interacting with someone her own height, looking into eyes truly at her own level.

“Why don’t you go take that shower now, Leia? We’ll all be waiting here when you are done, unless… unless you’d rather there be less people here?”

“No, it… everyone is just so lovely. It’s ok. I just was feeling a little homesick is all,” Leia said.

Padmé stood there, looking directly into Leia’s eyes, hands resting on her shoulders. It was somehow both uncomfortable, and comfortable all at the same time.

Stepping away from Leia, Padmé inclined her head slightly towards the hall. “Go to the fresher, get yourself cleaned up. Then when you get back we can start the important matter of selecting exactly the right dress!” Her voice brightened at the end, at the prospect of getting to drape dress after dress
onto Leia’s frame, and Leia could not help but smile back in return. 

She turned to leave the room, smile still lighting up her face.

Absorbed in the familiar task of repairing a broken training remote, Leia slipped into a meditative state.

She was working on confronting her anxieties around what she had told Luke when she heard it.

Breathing.

Heavy breathing, far too even in its timing to be naturally produced.

“You should not leave in the middle of showing me visions. Not without at least explaining what it was I saw.”

She startled, knocking into one of the remotes, causing it to roll across the room. She looked up, and… how could he be here? In this space with her? Had the Empire found the base? Had she missed some sort of evacuation call?

He just… stood there, in the center of the practice room. Yet as much as he seemed to be there with her… the overhead lights reflected in his plasteel helmet were not the ones in the cavernous practice room.

She wanted to laugh.

She wanted to scream.

She could only hope that the shields he had so clearly torn through had at least held well enough that he could not see where she was, the way she could not see his location.

Just her.

At least if he had, this near empty cave with nothing in it save for a cabinet and a handful of training remotes would not give away too much.

He stood there, breathing marking the passage of time, cape drifting slowly.

Absurdly she started to wonder - if he was somewhere indoors as the reflected lights suggested, how was his cape moving like that? Did he have some sort of fan blowing on him just to make sure the atmosphere for this conversation was suitably dramatic?

It was so very much the sort of silly thing her father might do. Something he had done in fact, when she and Luke were young and had staged epic battles of pretend all across their quarters.

She must have smiled or laughed, as the Sith that had managed to get past all her shields drew closer, one hand raised as if he wanted to strangle her.

She did not know if he was capable of doing it.

Could he interact with her, physically, from however far away he really was? Even if he could, even if their current… conversation enabled him to exert his will upon her, could he choke his own child?
She did not want to find out.

She scrambled to her feet, not wanting to be crouched near the droids, tools scattered by her feet, as she spoke to this intimidating figure. She could not match his impressive height, no, she had not inherited his tall frame, but every inch helped. “I already explained. You know exactly what it was I showed you.”

“Impossible. There was no possible way either delusion could have become reality. Padmé was fated to die in childbirth. It was inevitable. There is no possible way your false visions could have come to be.”

“How can you be so certain?”

“I saw her death. I had been led to believe that I had killed her in my anger instead. That in my desperation to grow powerful enough to save her life, I had lost her by my very hand. I had believed this proved that my true purpose was never to save her at all, but rather to grow as strong in the Force as I possibly could.”

“Had believed? Past tense?”

“When I learned of your brother I had the mortician who prepared Padmé’s corpse questioned. He confirmed what my visions had always known to be true. Padmé died in childbirth. It all happened exactly as I had seen. There is no escaping destiny.”

That would be the interrogation and murder Aphra had described. He really thought so little of taking a sentient’s life? He didn’t even find the death of the man worth mentioning!

Was he really so far gone?

No.

No, he couldn’t be.

He seemed... obsessed almost with the idea of destiny.

As if meant he had no agency in his own actions.

No choice.

But he did.

Everyone always had a choice.

Destiny is never infallible, never set in stone.

“If you would just accept the truth of what I told you, what I showed you, then you’d understand that nothing has to be this way! There was always, is always, another path. You don’t have to keep choosing to stay in the Dark. No one ever has to… to just accept their fate. You can always fight against it!” She paused for breath, parcing what he had said further as she did.

“Wait. You had visions of her dying in childbirth but... if you think what happened in this timeline matches up exactly with what you saw... Oh sweet Force, you knew! In your visions you saw that we’d make it, didn’t you? You knew that even if she died while giving birth, the... well I guess you thought baby and not babies... but still you knew we would have made it.”

She watched him, hoping he would say something to deny what she was saying.
He didn’t.

Her heart pounded in her ears. “Why couldn’t you have stayed, for us? I thought…” She had thought her father loved her just as much (if not more) than her mom.

She had thought she was her father’s whole world.

Well her and Luke of course.

It was just one of those truths she had never questioned.

Her father’s unconditional love for her had always felt just as real as the Force itself.

Yet now, now here she was to believe that neither she nor Luke could have been enough?

That even with the promise of them existing, the threat of losing her mother had transformed her father into… into this

She was suddenly so mad at him.

So lost.

She needed… she needed to clear her head. Do something to dissipate these rolling heavy waves of pain she could feel building inside her. She’d have to wait until he left to do that of course.

Hopefully when she got to - no. No she couldn’t think of that now, not with him here.

Damn it, she was going to have to really build her shields back up before they left.

She swallowed, and remembering the vision of the other her - the one who belonged in this horrible terrible universe - she gazed directly into his mask, hoping to summon even half of that other her’s courage. Into those large bulging red tinted lenses that covered his eyes.

He still was not talking, had not said anything to deny her unthinkable allegation.

He started to move, slowly, circling her. Studying her.

When he was angled just right to see her lightsaber he stopped once more, just stood and stared.

“Your lightsaber. You made it yourself?”

She snorted. “Don’t all younglings?”

He nodded, his gaze moving from the lightsaber to her face.

“If your story was indeed true, then who would you claim as your Jedi Master, young Padawan?”

Her hand flew to her braid, as she suddenly felt self-conscious of the outward signs that she was a Padawan.

She swallowed, and angled her chin stubborn and high. This was her opening. Her opportunity to put what she had learned about him to use.

“Ahsoka. But I call her Aunt ‘Soka far more than I call her Master.”

“Impossible. Ahsoka Tano left the Jedi Order months before your birth.”
“Not in my world. I… I was told what happened to her here, yes. But she… she was never framed in my world. Never put on trial, never experienced any of that. I am sure that even in this world she… she always wanted to be by your side, always be your -”

“I did not ask about the relationship between Tano and… and Skywalker. Her well being does not concern me. I asked you to tell me about your Jedi Master so I may know more about your training.”

She’d had him for a moment, she was certain. That pause, that hesitation… it had spoken volumes. She knew, just knew, his emotions about Ahsoka had to be the key to reaching him.

“She is an excellent training Master. I don’t know what to tell you.” She didn’t, she really truly didn’t. She needed to find some sort of way to force him to admit he still cared, but how?

It was so hard to read him, there were so few indicators of what he might be thinking. He shifted slightly as she gathered her thoughts, his helmet tilted down, still looking at her lightsaber then - but there was no indication of what was going on behind his mask.

“She’s my Aunt, my father’s little sister in every way. So I know that she cares about me a great deal.” She watched him as she spoke, but he just stood there, watching her. Saying nothing.

She moistened her lips, and kept talking, hoping that she could eventually find the precise angle to get under that plastoid armor of his. “And hey, if there ever are things she doesn’t know when it comes to my training, well… her wife is like a walking encyclopedia of Jedi knowledge.”

“Her… wife?” His voice caught and dipped over that last word, his vocoder unable to truly mask the confusion in his tone.

She grinned. She had him now.

“Yes. Her wife. The Order in my timeline allows those sorts of things - I know the debates over allowing them had begun in this one as well. It is a shame things ended before they could have reached a ruling on that matter.”

Irritation pulsed through the room. That had been the wrong angle to take - ok.

“Regardless Aunt ‘Soka is very happily married, I mean how could she not be, Barriss Offee is honestly the sweetest woman I’ve ever met.

There were several ways Leia had thought this could go, ranging from him immediately realizing he still cared about Ahsoka and loved her and wanted her to be happy, to him continuing to pretend this did not affect him in any way.

She should have realized by now that everything to do with this man defied expectations.

He recoiled. Actually physically recoiled. She fell back to her knees, unable to remain standing under the weight of his disapproval. His rage.

“Barriss Offee.” He hissed the name out. Never had Leia heard a name said with such sheer hate. “No. Not her. Anyone but her.”

Wow. And here she had thought her father liked Barriss. He’d never done anything to let on in any way that didn’t like her, in any case.

Maybe he wasn’t as bad at covering things up as she had always thought.
Then again, if there was one thing she had learned in her time in this nightmare world, it was that she had apparently never actually known her father.

“I can see you don’t approve.”

“Of that… that traitor?”

“Traitor?”

“You say someone had told you of the attack on the Temple, yet your knowledge of this matter is woefully incomplete.”

What did this have to do with Barriss?

“It was Barriss Offee who committed the crimes for which Ahsoka was convicted.”

Aunt Barriss? No. That… that was impossible.

He was moving now, pacing. As he paced he moved across the exact space Luke had earlier that same day. The similarity shocked Leia almost as much as the conversation itself.

“Barriss Offee was the one who betrayed her! She was the one who framed her!”

Was it just her, or was his voice sounding more and more like, well him, and less like the machine that regulated it?

Wait.

“Why do you care?”

He stopped pacing, turning his focus towards her once more and barked his next question. “What?”

“Why is this upsetting you so much?”

“She bombed the Temple, murdering many inside. She framed Ahsoka, almost getting her killed. Yet you still think it ideal that in your fantasy world she and Ahsoka have wed?”

“Tell me, why is any of what Barriss did worse than your own actions?”

The breathing sounded louder than ever.

“You still care. Even after all these years, even after all you’ve done you…” she glanced away, unable to keep her gaze trained on that blank and expressionless mask.

It was all so much. So exhausting and unfair.

She just wanted her father.

Wanted him to gather her in his familiar arms and tell her that this was nothing more than a bad dream. It was like this place was an infection, slowly corrupting her perceptions of the people she loved. First her dad, now Aunt Barriss…

She just wanted it to stop.

For him to stop doing this and just come home to his family.

She had found a crack in his armor, she was sure of it. Had for a moment been sure she heard him
speak in what sounded like his own voice.

In part because she hoped it would shatter his false claims further, and in part out of sheer exhaustion, she found herself starting to beg.

“Please dad. Please come back to us. Luke wants to meet you so much. Please, please don’t let him down.” She felt something hot, wet and heavy roll down her cheek, and she wished her tear ducts wouldn’t betray her in this way.

He gazed at her for just a moment longer before he vanished. No indication of his presence remained.

“It’s less of a cape and more of a trail, I’m afraid I’d just get it filthy.”

“Hm, you may have a point there. Ok, why don’t you try the blue one then?”

“Can’t I just take the cape off? I mean I like the rest of the outfit just fine, that’s the only problem.”

“That outfit, without a cape? Oh no, I am afraid that simply will not be happening.”

A heavy sigh, and then, resigned, “Fine. I’ll try on the blue one.”

Leia was not enjoying this. Even the gaggle of staff members happily chatting and complimenting her and taking her holo over and over had started to grate at her nerves.

Couldn’t Padmé just decide on a dress she liked on Leia and get on with it, why must this be such a production?

That said, the dresses the woman owned were really spectacular. Leia ran a hand across one, smiling at the feel of the expensive fabric under her fingers. Each one was more stunning than the last - true works of beauty speaking to vast wealth and phenomenal taste.

Leia didn’t even notice the silence that had descended upon the space as she appreciated the shimmering cloth.

“You know, I should take a look at the older versions of my will,” Padmé said, seemingly out of nowhere.

“Huh?”

“My dresses. I can’t imagine anyone in the entire galaxy I’d want to have them more than you. I should take a look at what my will said would happen to them, around when I died in your timeline, so you know where to go to find them. They really should be yours.”

“And if that means I have to interact with your family on Naboo, it would be an added bonus?” Leia raised an eyebrow, wondering still why the first (and only time) she had heard of them had been from Luke.

Padmé laughed. “I won’t pretend that wouldn’t be a fortunate side effect, but Leia, sweetheart, if possible I’d love for you and your brother to take ownership of everything that had been mine.” Her forehead creased, and her eyes drew distant. “Especially since unlike you, your brother won’t have
anything else to know me by. Just stories and the possessions I left behind."

“Maybe, when you write that document for me about ideal government structures, you can record him some sort of message? I am sure it would mean a great deal to him.”

A curious expression crossed Padmé’s face, before - like sunlight peeking through the clouds - she smiled. “That is a wonderful idea. I’ll ask Ani to do the same.”

Leia nodded, thinking of all the times Luke had talked to her about his heroic Jedi father. She knew how much he idolized the man, and there was no denying that a message from him would easily become Luke’s most valued possession. A status his father’s lightsaber currently held.

Why was she here, and not Luke?

It truly was not fair.

He cared so much about these people, had built so much of his identity around the father he could never meet.

Meanwhile Leia had never given them even a second thought. When she thought of her adoption as a yongling, it would mainly be when her parents would remark on their luck that they were able to find a child as wonderful as her to raise as their own.

At night when her parents tucked her in they would say things like “I can’t believe that of all the children in the galaxy fate brought you to us” while simultaneously exclaiming over her actions, praising each victory, celebrating every triumph. Her adoption had never been anything more to her than tangible proof that she was loved and wanted.

As nice as Padmé admittedly was, Leia had never, not even once, felt her life was lacking in any way due to her absence.

She knew for a fact Luke had not felt the same way about his own family. Oh he loved them a great deal, and based on his stories they had loved him too, but he had always longed for the parents he had never known.

Luke had never said as much directly to her, no, but it informed almost everything that boy did.

He was fanatically obsessed with his Jedi father, slaughtered years ago by Darth Vader. Stubbornly fixated on avenging that death, Luke had run headfirst into danger far too many times to count, determined to do right by a man who died before his birth.

Leia was sure that had Luke been sent to this dimension in her place, Padmé’s attention would have filled him with joy and delight. That it would have been the fulfillment of one of his deepest desires.

What a shame that she could not go back to that party and shove him down that tunnel in her place. Then maybe she’d still be where she was needed, and not here trying on dresses.

That was not fair.

She was learning things here, was she not?

She sighed, thinking of the letter Mon Mothma had written her when she had first been appointed as the Junior Senator for the Alderaan System. One of the lines of that letter - “Love who you are, and if you don’t, find the strength to start over.” - flashed through her mind. She treasured that letter as one of her most prized possessions. Had a hard copy of it that somehow still remained, even after all
her other valuables had become little more than dust and ash.

Did she really want to do this, to keep denying this woman, this legend among the Rebellion’s leadership, from experiencing the connection she seemed to crave? For what reason? Her own mother had made it clear that she wanted Leia to welcome Padmé into her heart. But…

But Leia was scared that if she did, if she really did allow herself to care, that would only mean she would have to say goodbye.

She would have a new parent to mourn, a new death to haunt her.

No, not a new death.

One so old she had never spared it a second thought. So intrinsic to her being, it was literally how her life began.

Could she handle it, if she allowed her birth mother to transform from a mere concept into a real person?

She looked over at Padmé again, really looked. Took in the lines around her eyes that crinkled as she gazed in Leia’s direction, dampened by the makeup expertly applied. The way her skin pulled across her face as she smiled, the way the red of her lipstick made her teeth seem so impossibly white in contrast, how the shade matched her dress just so.

Padmé glowed.

Here, surrounded by her impressive collection of clothes, clearly a collection born not only of the demands of high society but also of a genuine passion for fashion, a love of pairing patterns and colors and styles. Here among it all Padmé seemed so ethereal and at ease. She loved these objects and she wanted to ensure that all that remained of her collection would come into Leia’s hands forever in her own world.

So she would have this reminder of Padmé, always. Could just reach into a box and take out a dress, imagine the woman who had once filled it. Hell, Leia could wear them even if she wanted.

“And…” Leia’s voice broke, she closed her eyes, swallowed, and tried again. “And maybe, you could record a message for me too?”

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Luke meets back up with Leia S., Padmé has dinner with Leia O.

Mon’s letter to Leia, and the exact quote of it come from "The Rebel Files" by Daniel Wallace

The bit about what Bail and Breha said to Leia at night is from Leia: Princess of Alderaan by Claudia Gray.
Leia wiped away her tears, and retrieved the remote that had rolled away. Her hands trembled as she picked up her tools. Biting her lip, she shook out her arm, hoping to regain the fine motor control she would need.

She shut her eyes, breathing in deep, counting the length of each breath. Once she had managed to calm herself back down, just enough, she tried to meditate once more. To refocus on her emotions and process them so she could make her peace and let go.

Somehow she succeeded. Somehow she did it.

The room melted away, and she let herself enter the welcoming embrace of the Force.

Once she had dealt with the most pressing emotional disturbances, she focused on the important task of rebuilding her shields. Of doing what she needed to make sure that would not happen again.

She could have been working on her defenses for moments or for hours, she did not know. She had no idea how much time passed before Luke rejoined her, just that while passable once more, her shields were not yet at full strength.

Luke was standing near the crack he had made when she noticed him in the room with her, gazing at the deep gouge with shock.

It was the same spot his father had occupied before he had vanished seemingly only moments prior.

“Did… did I actually cause that?” Luke asked, voice wavering slightly with worry.

Leia nodded.

“Karabast. How?”

“You lost control.”

He ran a hand over the crack, “Stang. I really need to get more training, don’t I. I mean what if I like… get upset when I’m flying a mission or something and accidentally crack open my ship? That’d be… “ He sighed, turning away from the damage he had done.
“Speaking of, Madine agreed that this trip sounds like a good idea. Mainly you not being here for a bit while High Command figures out what to do about those Leia-is-a-Jedi rumors you started. He didn’t seem to care where you went, so long as it wasn’t here.” Luke smiled, dimples on full display. “You know, you really need to think more about your actions.”

“You break a solid cave wall in a tantrum, but somehow I’m the one who messed up.” Leia snorted. “You sure you were raised like an only child? You really have the annoying brother thing down pat.”

Sheepishly he shrugged, eyes twinkling. “Hey, he’s the one who said it, not me.”

“Did he really?” She couldn’t have really made such a negative impression on the people of this world, could she?

“Yes and no. The General is mad at you about that, yes, but he does have other reasons to want you gone.”

“Which are?”

Luke stepped away from the cave wall, sitting next to where she crouched. “He’s moving on from this base.” He shook his head, “The move was scheduled weeks ago, and his SpecOps troops really are needed elsewhere so they can’t put it off cause of this. Problem is, well… it isn’t like he can leave command of this base’s operations in your hands. So you leaving right now, it gives Madine a good excuse to put someone in charge, without having to explain why that person isn’t Leia.”

“Oh,” Leia frowned. She could see why Madine would want her to leave. She wondered if his desire to see her gone was large enough to allow Luke and her to ask the Rebellion to provide supplies for their trip.

Speaking of their trip… Leia surveyed the training remotes she had fixed, thinking of his comments earlier in his bunk.

“Lu, I should have asked this when I first agreed to teach you, and I am sorry I didn’t think to do so. Would you mind if I turned these on and watched you train with them? So I can see where you are with forms, really assess what you do and do not know before we reach Master Yoda.”

Luke frowned at the crack in the wall again, turned to her, then nodded. “If you really want to assess what I know, I should probably admit that I’ve heard many of the terms you’ve been using and I’ve been bugging you about. I just… never really had their meaning explained to me, and wasn’t sure I could trust the people using them.”

Oh he had had he? “Which terms exactly?”

“Sith for one. I’ve heard a couple of people call Vader that. Oh and Padawan. A homicidal scavenger on Davaron insisted on calling me by that name when he was trying to kill me with an electro-staff. Kept calling me a “Masterless Padawan” to be exact.” He shrugged at her, offering an apologetic smile. “I really wasn’t lying about not knowing what they mean, or wanting you to tell me. I’m guessing from that past context the former is some sort of evil Jedi, and the later means someone is a Jedi in training?”

Leia shook her head at him. “The Sith are way more complex than that, but I can see how one could arrive at the definition you did. As for Padawans, again there is a complexity you are lacking but… yes. For example, I am a Padawan.”

“And Padawan’s normally have… Masters?” Luke asked.
Leia nodded.

“So your Master is…?”

“Jedi Knight Ahsoka Tano, who herself had once been our father’s Padawan.” She could feel tears burning at the back of her eyes, but thankfully none actually fell.

“That’s the Togruta you called Aunt ‘Soka? The one in the vision you showed me.”

“Yes.” She managed to keep her voice even and everything.

“Who… who is my other self’s Master?”

Thank the Light, they were moving away from conversation topics that would remind her of her encounter with Vader. “Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi.”

“Ben? So I… I got to really know Ben, for more than just a week?”

“Just a week? Lu, seriously? A week? That is really all the training you’ve had?”

“Don’t rub it in. Up ‘till you showed up I thought that was all the training I was ever going to have.”

Leia looked away, unable to keep her gaze trained on Luke. The training remotes were still on the ground around her.

Was Luke even capable of deflecting them on their easiest setting? Would this suggestion of hers merely embarrass him, call attention to how little training he had?

She heard the sound of Luke standing, and then of a lightsaber being drawn. Leia glanced up to see Luke… assuming the ready position. His footwork was off, but only slightly. She’d seen Knights who were laxer in their starting pose form.

This was after only one week of actual training?

She flicked on one of the remotes and watched it rise from the ground, float over to Luke to start its routine.

As training remotes always did, it began by ensuring the student knew all four basic defensive stances that made up Form One. Luke did, fluidly moving between them.

He… He was incredible!

It was clear one remote was no match for Luke. He shut his eyes as he deflected blast after blast. No matter where Leia looked, his footwork, how he held his arms, the angle of his spine…. Luke was responding as if he’d had years of training, not just a single week.

She turned on the second remote. Then the third.

Luke managed to hold off all three at once for well over an hour. The settings on the remotes grew harder and harder as more time passed.

Leia lost track of time, she was so absorbed in watching Luke’s movement, his almost impeccable form, how at peace he seemed when she felt him in the Force.

No wonder Uncle Obi spoke about him in such over-exaggerated terms, if he was capable of this with only one week of training.
Luke shut his father’s lightsaber off after one of the remotes got behind him and managed to land a solid zap right to the back of one knee.

Wincing as she watched the laser bolt strike him, Leia stood and moved closer to Luke, to offer him a shoulder to lean on as he balanced on one foot and massaged his calf. Leia knew Luke’s leg would be numb after a zap with the remote at that setting, her own limbs sympathetically tingling.

“I keep forgetting how painful it is when they get you, and am surprised each time.” Luke hissed out between clenched teeth. “It’s almost worth throwing the training session at the start - when they are still on their least painful setting.”

“Yeah, but then you wouldn’t have been able to impress me with your fancy footwork,” Leia laughed.

Luke looked up at her, his bangs were heavy with sweat and dangled over his face, almost hiding his eyes fully from view. “Didn’t I tell you not to just say what I want to hear?”

Leia snorted, shaking her head. “Yeah, I see what you mean about needing a teacher who isn’t me. If I told you that Tatooine is hot would you even trust me then? I mean really Lu, can’t you sense that I am not lying?”

He ignored her, motioning towards the hall instead.

Leia got the message, and together the two of them began to walk to Sana’s ship.

Leia had not been to this restaurant in years.

The last time she had dined at this establishment, she had been sixteen years old and had just been sworn in for her first term as Alderaan’s Junior Senator.

Her father had taken her out to eat here, then her friends from the Apprentice Legislator had surprised her when she’d returned home.

They had dragged her out to a club to celebrate for the rest of the night, dancing and drinking the night away like the overly wealthy teenagers that they were. Leia had been the very first in their class to enter the Senate proper, and even those in the program she hadn’t been friendly with had come to the nightclub to join them in the celebration.

She hadn’t even made it home that night, crashing in Amilyn’s dorm room instead.

It was, overall, a particularly happy memory. In part one of the reasons Leia had never returned to this restaurant after that night was a desire to preserve the specialness of the evening.

It was strange being back here now. Stranger still to see so many unfamiliar buildings and banners outside the restaurant's windows, to see no evidence of the government Leia knew.

Not unexpectedly, given Padmé’s status as the Chancellor, they were ushered to a table as soon as they entered.

This restaurant had made Leia and her father wait for a good twenty minutes before being seated the last time she was here. There had been no rush to ensure both the Junior and Senior Senators from Alderaan were served.
Funny how different service can be when you aren’t known for your dissident views of the authoritarian regime. When there isn’t even an authoritarian regime to speak out against.

Padmé beamed at her from across the table. “Leia, you really look so lovely. Thank you so much for letting my staff dress you.”

“Let? I requested it so I would be appropriately dressed for this restaurant.”

“Yes well…” Padmé laughed, “It gladdens my heart, and we’ll leave it at that.”

They fell into an awkward lull, both using the menu as a prop to avoid looking at one another.

Leia set the menu down, and allowed herself to really study the woman seated across from her.

Obviously she had Padmé to thank for her short height, but it was easy to lose sight of the other woman’s frame when in her presence. She held herself regally, exactly as Leia’s tutors had always wanted her to. Leia had always found it near impossible to hold herself in that way, spine straight, head held just so - but Padmé almost made it look easy. The two beauty-mark like moles on her face, reminded Leia of Luke in ways she had not expected, as did the softness in her eyes whenever Leia caught Padmé watching her. At other times there was a sharpness to that gaze, one that Leia was sure she shared.

She was contemplating the strange and overwhelming sense of familiarity she felt around the woman when Padmé closed her menu and met Leia’s eye.

“I really enjoyed our chat this afternoon,” Padmé said, smiling just slightly. “I… it’s nice, neither of my kids are particularly interested in politics, and Shiyara knows talking with Anakin about anything political can only lead to a headache. Truly, thank you for that conversation.”

Leia arched a brow at her. “I was a Senator you know, right up until they dissolved the Senate entirely. I do know a thing or two about politics.”

“Knowing that simply because you said it is one thing, actually talking shop with you was an amazing experience.”

“Your daughter, she isn’t interested in politics at all?”

“No. I tried to get both her and her brother interested in it, truly I did, but for some reason they always seemed to find lightsabers more exciting.”

Leia laughed, “I was resistant to it myself, to be honest. My father always had to track me down and drag me home for my lessons.” She grinned, reflecting on all the times she had fought against her lessons. "But as I grew older I started to accept that it was necessary for me to understand politics, since I was the heir to the throne. I was even the one who suggested I become my father’s intern here on Coruscant when I was fourteen.”

“You started your professional political career at fourteen! Oh, Leia, that’s how old I was when I was elected Queen.”

“A lot of my parents’ strange glances and comments make far more sense, thanks to this context.”

The two of them smiled at one another for a moment, the connection between them palpable.

“So you came here at fourteen to work in your father’s office?”
“Yes. Then at sixteen I joined the Apprentice Legislator program, but before I had even completed a full year with them I became a Senator in the Imperial Senate.”

“That’s quite the career.”

“Yes well, my father felt after I had joined the Rebellion proper and rooted out a double agent in the Alliance’s Senatorial ranks there was no reason to keep me in the training program,” Leia said, “I was glad to see that era of my life end, really. The only big decision I ever made in the Apprentice Legislator program turned out to be nothing more than an excuse for the Empire to ruin a world. I still feel fully culpable and responsible for what happened to Arreyel.”

“The more you tell me about the political system of your universe, the more distressing it seems,” Padmé said, “it is all so much, overwhelming in its horror. How do you fight it all? Where do you even start when hope has been stripped away so entirely?”

“Oh we still have hope. We always have hope. It is thanks to that hope that we have been turning the tide of the war. We can fight it all... well I suppose because we are not alone. Because we know there are others who will fight alongside us, we do not flinch. No, what I can't imagine is being there when the Empire was first formed. It must have been an awful time for you in my dimension, when you died. You would have had to have seen the end of the Republic without ever knowing of the hope the Rebellion breeds.”

Padmé glanced out the window, at the Senate building. It was lit up as it always was at night, a shimmering gem in the skyline. “I really cannot imagine it at all. There are few things more precious to continued galactic harmony than ensuring every system and sector’s needs are met and voices are heard. Preserving the rule of law is what separates us from... well from the slavery of regimes like the Hutts.”

“Funny you should mention slavery,” Leia responded, “because where I come from it is fully legal.”

“No!”

“Yes. It started as just mandating that prisoners engage in labor for severely reduced pay - fractions of credits per hour - and then expanded from there. The argument was that since the people being enslaved were purportedly criminals, their unpaid labor was justified,” Leia shook her head, distressed with the unfairness of it all. “Of course the government determines what ‘crimes’ deserve to result in this sort of punishment, and the offenses are all laughably minor. Things like small trace amounts of spice, unpaid fines, or disrespecting the Empire. Now we have whole species who have been enslaved, and entire sectors where the only free beings are the Imperials sent in to ‘maintain Order’ and make sure the slaves are doing their jobs.”

“Does Palpatine’s evil know no end?” Padmé hadn’t been expecting this reality it seemed. Or perhaps she had, but had chosen to pretend the Empire was an amorphous undefined evil. Not a functioning government with specific policies. Policies that benefited select parts of the population, and harmed all else within its borders.

Leia inclined her head towards the restaurant’s entrance. “As if that isn’t bad enough, well... last time I was here, there were stormtroopers stationed by the door. You can scarcely go anywhere without seeing fully armed soldiers in uniform posted, even patrolling through the streets. They claim it is a matter of security and law and order, and most believe that lie, but my father and I knew the truth. It was to remind us that we were being watched, everyone - even the elite who frequent these sorts of establishments - is always, always watched.”

“The measures to allow surveillance of citizens were passed during the war. A broad securities bill to
‘ensure civilian safety.’ It was one of the first policies of Palpatine’s we destroyed after his death.” Padmé’s voice sounded distant.

“Can I ask you, how were you able to handle the chaos following the Clone War in this universe?”

“Oh,” Padmé laughed, “now there is a loaded question.”

“Loaded how?”

“I am afraid I was something of a figure of scandal in the post-war era. I think there was hardly an event that occurred in the entire Republic that my opponents did not find a way to blame on me.” She flashed a smile. “I don’t know why I put that in the past tense. They still scapegoat me for every matter one can imagine.”

Padmé leaned forward in her seat, her voice taking on a conspiratorial tone. “Apparently, according to them, I once pushed a man out of an airlock. Or was that two men? I think they were supposed to have been political rivals, or lawyers, something like that. Honestly, it is impossible to keep up with the stories about me.”

“Perhaps I should have been more clear. I didn’t mean you personally. I meant the galaxy as a whole. What happened here following the war?” Leia tilted her head to the side, frowning. "In my universe every schoolchild is taught from the moment their education starts that the formation of the Empire was necessary to deal with the chaos of the Clone Wars. Obviously that is not the case. While that is hardly surprising, I would very much like to hear what the path forward was in this freer galaxy than my own.”

“The answer to that is far too complex for one single dinner conversation. It is also something you should have more than one perspective on. Why don’t I buy you some history texts, ones that study what took place during that period, so you can get a more complete view than just I alone could provide?”

“That would be… tremendously helpful, thank you. Between that and what you have already agreed to write for us… The Alliance to Restore the Republic truly will be in your debt.”

“It is the least I can do, really.”

They were saved from having to find a new conversation topic when a waiter came by to take their drink order.

Padmé ordered a bottle of wine for them to share, a Naboo wine Leia had never tried before. She didn’t know the vintages of the planet well enough to know if the year was a particularly good one, but Leia was certainly impressed with the bottle’s age and price.

“I have to say, it’s going to be real hard adjusting to the Rebellion’s limited rations after the past few days here. I haven’t dined this well in months.”

“Hmm, you do seem a little thin…” Padmé’s eyes widened as she heard the words leave her mouth. “I’m sorry, my daughter hates it when I fuss over her, I am sure that you must truly despise it.”

Leia smiled. “It has also been quite some time since anyone fuss ed over my health.” She paused, “well that’s not entirely true. Several medics have barked all sorts of orders at me, and Luke worries over me sometimes.”

“Would you mind telling me about him? Your universe’s Luke, that is.”
“I don’t know what to say that I haven’t already told you.”

“You just told me the basics of what he does, not what he is like, who he grew to be without us in that world of yours.” She looked wistful. “If he grew up even half as impressive as you did, then I am sure I will be proud.”

“Well, Luke is impressive all right. He’s a real hero. Foolhardy, but his heart is in the right place, most of the time.”

“Foolhardy?”

“He keeps expecting the best out of everyone, including enemy operatives. Someone is going to need to get through to that boy that just because a being is capable of reasoning, it does not mean you can actually reason with them.”

“He sounds very strong.”

“Oh he has strength in spades. That’s not the issue here.”

“No, I mean… to be able to see the good in everyone, regardless of what they might have done, that takes a lot of strength.”

“I suppose that is one way of seeing things.”

“You disagree?”

“The Empire has done far too much I cannot forgive.”

Padmé frowned at her, and Leia felt a sudden urge to explain herself to the woman until she had her approval once more.

“I of course know that most of the soldiers we fight are just people who actually bought the propaganda. They think they are fighting to protect their families, to protect their homes. I mourn them even as I kill them, and I only ever kill when in battle. But when I am in battle? I know better than to hesitate.”

Her eyes drifted back to the doorway, where no guards were posted. She bit her lip, forced herself to make eye contact with Padmé, then continued.

“I am not saying it is impossible for Imps to defect, to turn around and make amends. Of course I know that isn’t the case. More than half of the Rebellion’s ranks are made up of former Imperials. From leaders like Crix Madine to fleet troopers, pilots, and mechanics, our ranks are practically overflowing with those who used to serve the Emperor.” Leia smiled, thin and lipless. “I myself am a former member of the Imperial government.”

She sighed, shaking her head. “I just don’t expect anyone to come to their senses about it all while we are actively shooting at each other. Luke on the other hand likes to yell at the troopers he fights about how much he doesn’t actually want to hurt them, or how sorry he is for their deaths. He doesn’t even know if those are the ones who deserve his compassion! I mean there are many who made the choice to stand with the Empire with full knowledge of what they are doing. Soldiers who would not think twice about carrying out the most heinous commands, to say nothing of the people who actually give the orders that lead to slavery and genocide.”

She looked away from Padmé, glancing down at her hands and finding she had unconsciously grabbed ahold of her skirt. Had gathered portions of it into tight little balls, and twisted the fabric as
she spoke. It wouldn’t be right to damage this dress. It didn’t belong to her. She forced her hands to relax, to let go. “That’s what I find far harder to forgive. Impossible even. I look forward to the day we can give our prisoners the war crimes tribunals they deserve.”

There was a period of silence. Just long enough that Leia contemplated speaking some more, barreling ahead and filling the space with words until she happened upon the perfect combo that would transport them to a more comfortable topic to discuss.

Padmé was the one who broke the silence, however when she did, she steered them towards the most painful topic of them all. “Do you know who it was, who gave the order to… to destroy Alderaan?”

Leia remembered the stench of the man’s lavallel cologne. The sneer in his voice. He’d been after her and her family for years, dropping in unexpectedly during the dinner parties her mother would host for the leaders of the Alliance. She’d had to pretend for ages that Mon and her father were having an affair just to keep the man off their scent.

All of those fake pleasantries, false covers and forced tears, all of them ended that day on the Death Star. She had been caught, and Tarkin had been triumphant.

“He’s dead. Luke killed him.”

She didn’t want to spare that hated man another thought. He had taken everything from her.

Everything.

He wouldn’t take her enjoyment of this evening too.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Leia O. and Padmé’s dinner continues, and Luke and Leia S. actually leave Horox III
Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

How about that Solo trailer, huh?

Given Kasden's record writing Star Wars movies (The Empire Strikes Back, Return of the Jedi, and The Force Awakens) I am confident that the script was good, and with Lucasfilm being willing to fire the original directors for ignoring the script and trying to turn it into an improvised comedy instead, I am sure a lot of care and attention went into getting this right. You don't fire people for disrespecting the characters and material if you don't care about those things.

I dunno, I just am so excited we are getting so many movies and new material all the time, you know?? This is really such an incredible time to be into Star Wars, it is so so great.

I can not gush enough about the work Sethnakht puts into betaing this fic, and pushing me to improve as a writer in the process.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The waiter came by to take their order, preventing Padmé from asking follow up questions about what had happened to Alderaan.

Leia had never been so grateful to be at the sort of upper-class establishment that employed organics. She was certain that Padmé would not have been hesitant to press for more information had their server been a droid. She worried that Padmé would return to asking her about Alderaan once the waiter left, and so she found herself asking ever more questions to delay being left alone with Padmé once more.

Questions about recommendations, the list of specials, possible substitutions… Leia tried not to sway from normal restaurant fare in her awkward interrogation of the poor hapless waiter. It was during this exchange that Padmé suggested Leia try some of her meal, and Leia felt it only polite to extend the same offer in turn.

Leia wondered how the waiter saw them, based on those brief visits to their table.

Did they see a mother and daughter out to eat together, or strangers on their first outing?

What did their body language communicate? The snatches of conversation overheard?

Of course they probably recognized Padmé. She doubted they knew who Leia was, although it was possible they might.

She felt so self-conscious being out in public. She wasn't pretending to be someone she wasn't per say, but she was hyper-aware that people might see it that way. It had been months since she had been so exposed, and the added element of possibly being mistaken for someone else made the whole experience that much more surreal.
What if someone she knew came into the restaurant and looked right through her because in this universe they were not acquainted? Or worse yet, what if she had to talk to someone her other self knew? The thought of being pestered with small talk and not knowing how to make it stop was horrifying.

Leia felt overwhelmed. There had a been a time in her life when an evening out at this sort of establishment would have been route, but she had not had access to this sort of luxury since Alderaan had been lost. Now she could almost feel her head spinning with the sheer number of food options this restaurant had on offer, by the fact she was actually talking to her actual real birth mother, by the existential questions everything in this dimension raised.

There was nothing here to keep her tethered. No Rebellion to focus on, no duties to perform. Simply a menu and the company of a stranger who felt achingly familiar, like a half forgotten memory come to life, simply to alternate between asking Leia painful questions and staring uncomfortably at her face.

Leia decided to to focus on ordering the food.

It was a tangible distraction, with the menu sitting in front of her and Padmé still chatting with the waiter about where the food had been sourced, and certainly easier to think about that than any of the other subjects racing about her head. She had not been kidding about anticipating a harsh adjustment period once she returned home. Being able to sample delicacies such as these after mostly subsisting on polystarch was head-spinning.

It took a lot of deliberation, but she finally settled on her appetizer - green topato soup, with blue milk cheese and an assortment of roasted vegetables. Padmé went with a far more extravagant mott carpaccio to start. For their main course Leia settled on poached nuna in a sweet muja sauce, yet she found herself increasingly looking forward to sampling Padmé’s sikoroot crusted rack of shaak with a side of fried kajaka root strips.

The real problem with focusing on the food was that once her order was placed, she was once again left with only the thoughts in her head, and the familiar-and-yet-not woman seated across from her.

As the waiter walked away with their orders, Padmé turned to Leia, a question obviously on the tip of her tongue. Leia just knew it would be about something she did not want to talk about, and so decided to head her off with a rather drastic subject change. She already felt so uprooted, she wanted control of this conversation at the very least.

The main problem was that she barely knew how to articulate what she wanted to ask.

Were she and the other Leia very different? What aspects of her being were inherent to who she was? How had this woman’s presence in the other Leia’s life altered the fundamentals of who she was?

She knew the rough shape of the questions, but not how to narrow them into something that could actually be answered.

She tried, and she stumbled, and she asked, “So, from the sound of things the Leia who belongs in this dimension is pretty into racing. Do you also share your daughter’s hobby?”

Padmé blinked, then laughed. “No, not really. Honestly despite the best efforts of my family, I’ve never really been able to get into any form of racing at all. Have you ever been?”

“I rode fathiers when I was young, but that’s all.” She hadn’t really considered it racing, not until this
trip into a strange dimension. Suddenly all the endless questions about who she innately was started swirling through her head. Oh she liked piloting ships just fine, sure, but those old mounted activities really were the closest to well… *racing* she’d been involved in. She’d been dwelling on her history with the sport ever since she and Anakin had lunch together the other day.

“Really? I imagine you excelled at that. You were probably were a champion at everything you did.”

“My parents always used to joke that they were running out of room for all my trophies.” Leia grinned, bittersweet, stamping down the part of her that felt the need to remind her that there was no need to worry about making room now - every trophy and medal and ribbon she had ever earned had been thoroughly destroyed. “I *was* pretty good. In fact, I was the Alderaanian Junior Champion in Steeplechase.”

“Have you kept it up?”

“What, riding?” Leia snorted. “It isn’t exactly a skill I make much use of in Alliance operations, no.”

“We could go riding while you are here, if you want. We could do any of the things you’ve been prevented from due to your war. Anything at all. Just say the word.”

Leia laughed. “Are you suggesting I treat this like a vacation?”

Before Padmé could respond the waiter returned, their bottle of wine in hand. After tasting it, Padmé approved of the vintage, so while Leia had never had this particular type of wine before she was sure it would be lovely. She was not disappointed when she took her first sip of the dark red liquid. It was rich and hearty, with an interesting slightly sweet aftertaste Leia could not quite place.

As she set her glass back down on the table, Padmé took control of the conversation once more, steering things again towards the specifics of life under the Empire.

“So. What was that earlier about Arreyel?”

“What?”

“When you were telling me about the political system of the universe you come from, you said something about never forgiving yourself for Arreyel. What happened to Arreyel?”

Leia sighed. “Do you really want to hear about that? It’s not the most pleasant story.”

“Truthfully I’d more rather hear about what happened to your home, but that is a topic you clearly are trying to avoid. So unless this one is similarly too traumatic for you to talk about…”

“No, no, it isn’t anything as drastic as that. I just hate that the first thing I ever really did in my career as a legislator was so… horrible.”

Padmé smiled, “you have a tendency to describe things in such over dramatic terms. It only makes me more curious, you know.”

Leia took a large gulp of the wine, an improper amount for one sip, sure, but if Padmé was going to press the topic then she clearly wasn’t expecting proper decorum.

“It isn’t a complex story, really. We were told the Empire was looking for a planet for a new academy. After reviewing potential candidates, I proposed the academy be built on Arreyel and
convinced my peers before our final vote.”

“What is so bad about that, if anything that sounds like a rousing success!” Padmé laughed. “I didn’t win my very first argument before a legislative body.”

“The academy was just an excuse to conduct environmental assessments of the planet! Of course it was. All the options probably were, but I was the one who picked Arreyel. So it was my fault when they found resources they wanted to mine, and then the entire planet was evacuated. It was considered more profitable to just… get rid of everyone living there. Oh they lied and claimed people would one day be able to return, but of course the whole place was rendered uninhabitable due to industrial waste.” Leia’s voice wavered as unexpected tears fought to enter her eyes.

She’d somehow forgotten how many planets had been destroyed before the Death Star had fired a single shot. Let herself pretend her own home was somehow special, simply for being hers. No. They were just one people out of many without a home. A massive wave of refugees created in the name of Imperial progress.

She shut her eyes, forcing her more morbid thoughts aside. No one ever really wanted to hear the plight of someone without a home to return to.

Oh sure they’d invite her to share, and claim they cared, but her pain always inevitably turned out to be far too much for them, a massive gaping black hole that consumed and destroyed any social situation.

Best to just block it out and barrel on.

Luckily she had told this particular story before, many times before Alderaan had met her fate. She focused on how she had framed this tale then, when speaking with mentors in the Rebellion like Mon Mothma or her father.

“I suppose, if we were to view the Apprentice Legislator purely as an educational setting where future politicians train and learn what it means to work here on Coruscant, that first experience taught me the most important lesson possible.” Leia took another sip of wine, hoping Padmé would leap in, say something, end the conversation there.

She just sat there, watching Leia, focused and listening.

So Leia pressed on, not really wishing to go into too much detail, but compelled to by Padmé’s silence. “Arreyel taught me to never take Imperial bills at face value, to always be suspicious of the bottom line. After that day I have always been cautious with my vote, have always tried to reason out what the Empire is truly after.” Leia smiled wryly, “Although even my caution pales in comparison to the care you take. Our government is far quicker to call the Senate to a vote after legislation is first drafted.”

Leia watched Padmé’s face, still hoping she would do something to indicate she wanted to move on from this topic. It was of course an old diplomat’s trick, sitting quietly in the hopes the other would fill the space with words and inevitably reveal whatever it was you were waiting to hear.

Leia knew what Padmé was doing, of course she did, but she kept talking anyway. “That incident was also what started to break my youthful conviction we could ever enact change from within the Imperial government.”

Finally Padmé nodded, leaning in far more than was truly polite during dinner, even resting her elbows on the table. She must have heard whatever it was she wanted to hear. Good. Leia was done
dwelling on that part of her past.

“Alright, now that we got that bit of unpleasantness out of the way, there had to be good things in that program for you too, no? At least tell me you made a ton of friends among your fellow future leaders!” Padmé’s eyes lit up, her voice growing increasingly excited as she asked after Leia’s friends.

Leia laughed. “I was lucky enough to meet a true friend in the program, yes. A girl I remain close to still, although sadly we haven’t seen each other for quite some time. Last time we spoke the Senate still existed, and we were both working there. Amilyn Holdo. I’d say aside from Luke she is my very closest friend.”

“Wait,” Padmé looked scandalized. “Not… not that strange girl from Gatalenta? The one with the bright hair and clothes who keeps wanting to talk about astrology and animals and similar nonsense, wasting everyone’s time on the Senate floor?”

“I see she is trying to be a politician in this world as well.” Leia laughed. “I know she is off putting at first but—”

“Policy - and ideology - wise her heart is in the right place? Yes, I have noticed that. Well, if she is your friend I suppose there is more to her than I’ve seen. I’ll keep it in mind the next time I visit a gathering of up-and-coming members of the party.” Padmé took a sip of her wine, leaning back in her seat and swirling the glass about rather than setting it down. “I cannot tell you how glad I am you have a friend like her. Someone offbeat and... well not so serious.”

“Oh, Amilyn is plenty serious, just in her own unique way.” Leia thought of all the times her friend had been there for her, holding her hand. For all of her faults, Amilyn had always helped Leia withstand the weight of the galaxy, and she always did it with a smile.

It seemed that Padmé hoped to inspire Leia to comment more with her silence, but Leia did not feel like sharing her memories of Amilyn with someone she had only just met. They were far too precious. The two lapsed into silence, and she was still contemplating how she had Amilyn to thank for getting her through some of the worst her teen years had to offer when their appetizers arrived.

They were, in a word, delightful. The soup was creamy and decadent, the carpaccio silken and well spiced. Leia could not help but compare this dinner to her lunch with Anakin. The bantha-stuffed driss pod and hubba gourd chips he had ordered at that cantina had been nearly flavorless, not to mention tough and dry. Of the small plates she and Anakin had split, the only thing she’d enjoyed at all was the ahrisa with haroun and lamia, but really the meal had barely even qualified as edible.

There was no contest between the food of his homeworld, prepared in the absolute slums and served in a shady bar full of scum and waistoids (and Han) and what she was sampling here at this lavish high end restaurant specializing in the cuisine of Naboo.

She knew that it was an unfair comparison, the cost alone determined which establishment would have the better meal to offer, but the difference was just so extreme.

Padmé’s suggestion that they share parts of their meal proved to have been a highlight of the evening. Not only was Leia grateful for the chance to taste the carpaccio, but the act of taking food off of Padmé’s plate, and sharing hers as well, made the familial atmosphere of the meal tangible.

When they were dining informally Leia always used to steal parts of her parents’ meals, joking constantly that the food somehow just tasted better stolen than on her own plate. Mirroring that action now with her biological mother made their relation feel that much more real, the simple act of
requesting a waiter bring a second spoon so Padmé could enjoy Leia’s soup binding them together in ways Leia had not anticipated.

They breezed through that first course, talking mainly of lighthearted matters of daily life on Coruscant, and what it was like adjusting to life in an ecumenopolis when one came from a lush and nature filled world.

Padmé confessed she was far more comfortable with it all than Leia, her father had brought her family here due to his work when she was a young child, and she had spent several formative years on Coruscant, building connections that would one day assist her with her career.

Leia hadn’t visited often as a child, her parents had not wanted their daughter to spend too much time in the Empire’s capital. Occasional sparing visits only, right up until she became her father’s intern at age fourteen and had to come to the city for her work. For her the term “city” would always relate to a smaller and more accessible place like Aldera, not the imposing endless sprawl of Coruscant.

Her thoughts returned to her earlier questions, her questions about this other her - who she was and what she revealed to Leia about herself.

She honestly could not imagine what it must have been like growing up in this city.

Her thoughts briefly darted to Chassellon Stevis, her fellow in the Apprentice Legislator, and native of Coruscant.

Imagine, growing up surrounded by Chassellons.

Ugh even worse, now that she thought of it, wouldn’t the other her have run into Chassellon socially over the course of her life?

He was a rich boy from Coruscant, her exact age, who collected and fixed up antique speeders for a hobby. Could the other her have actually been close to him when she was young? What a thought!

She put that aside as she and Padmé continued to speak, the conversation happily drifting from politics to stories from either Padmé or Leia’s youths and back again.

Their main courses arrived as Padmé was telling her a story about a Rodian senator her father had been close to when Padmé was young, back when his job had brought her family to Coruscant.

As much as Leia was enjoying the tale, she found her attention captured by the sight of the side order of fried kajaka root strips Padmé had ordered as the waiter placed it on the table. It stood out from the rest of the meal so dramatically. While presented nicely, it was the sort of food a child would eat, not something Leia would associate with a restaurant like this one.

Padmé noticed the focus of her attention and grinned. “I thought you might like some.”

“What?”

“The kajaka roots.”

Leia raised an eyebrow, staring at the fried root strips suspiciously.

Laughing, Padmé explained further. “Honestly I never used to be a fan, not until Anakin started having them all the time. Then the kids came along, and both of them are practically obsessed with the things. They serve them all the time in the dining hall at the Temple apparently, which is where the whole lot of them started eating them. After a while I kind of fell in love with them too. They pair
surprisingly well with just about every meal.”

It wasn’t until now, with the fried starchy root sitting there on the table, and the casual story about her family to explain the dish’s presence, that Leia realised that all of the personal stories Padmé had shared during their meal so far had been about her life before she and Anakin became a couple.

The woman had been making sure to avoid topics she thought might raise Leia’s hackles, had been carefully editing herself to ensure she wouldn’t potentially upset her.

Leia studied the fried roots, sitting there like a physical manifestation of all the parts of her life Padmé was holding back to ensure Leia would be comfortable, and she reached out, grabbing one, and bit into the hot root strip.

It was just slightly crunchy on the outside, hot and soft inside. Not the most flavorful thing this restaurant served, no, but decent enough that Leia could see how and why these things could be somewhat addictive.

Padmé smiled at her, the lines around her eyes and mouth were not hidden by her makeup, attesting to a life lived full of joy and love.

A life that Leia could have been a part of, if not for some quirk of fate.

While there was literally nothing in all of existence she would have ever traded her life with her parents for, well… being this woman’s daughter wouldn’t have been terrible, she supposed.

Walking through the base with Luke actually by her side was certainly a million times nicer than perpetually searching for him, that was for sure.

“Did you plot our course already, or were you hoping to requisition an astromech?” Luke asked as they walked, “Madine was so happy when I told him we already have a ship that he said we could take one if we want.”

“I plotted a course already, but it really wouldn’t hurt to have some help. You wanna take Artoo?”

“That’s what I was thinking, that little droid is the best astrogation expert I’ve ever met.”

They were in luck, Leia spotted both the blue and white droid and C-3PO down the hall. She called out to them both, expecting them to join them but… R2 fired off some loud and rude whistles before rolling away.

“Well it looks like Artoo is still mad at me,” Luke said, watching the droid zoom away from him at top speed.

Leia quirked an eyebrow. “Mad at you?”

“Yeah,” Luke sighed, “there was a reason he didn’t want to fly with me yesterday.”

A second eyebrow joined Leia’s first. “What did you do?”

“I didn’t do anything,” Luke whined, “I was just following orders!”

“Wow Lu that really clears everything up.” Leia rolled her eyes. “I totally understand the situation now.”

“Fine, fine, don’t have a stink.” He frowned. “Threepio had been captured and I was ordered not to
go and rescue him. Artoo is mad at me about it, and now he’s avoiding me.”

“Well obviously somebody got Threepio back.” Leia watched the gold droid following after his partner, complaining about the pace the the astromech had set. “What happened?”

“Artoo stole a ship and rescued him on his own,” said Luke, casually, as if this was a normal thing for a droid to do.

“You’re kidding me,” Leia laughed.

“Why would I make up a story like that?” Luke asked.

“You know, I don’t even know why I am surprised,” Leia said, “Artoo is the most competent droid I know.”

“Why do you think I’m so upset he is refusing to fly with me right now?”

“Wait, who was holding Threepio hostage anyway? Who kidnaps droids?”

“He was on Vader’s ship. It’s a real good thing Artoo went after him when he did, since Threepio was about to be disassembled when Artoo found him.”

That hurt.

Even after everything she had learned about Darth Vader, even after her own painful encounters with him… that really hurt to hear.

Leia’d seen this universe’s twisted version of her father attack her mother for Shiraya’s sake, how could almost destroying Threepio compare to that?

Yet still… it hurt.

“Wait a sec, Leia, why do you sound like… like you know Artoo and Threepio?”

Would he have another outburst? Oh well, it was worth the risk. The less stuff she was keeping from him the better.

“Because I grew up with them. They belong to mom and dad, Lu, have since long before we were born.”

“Artoo and Threepio belonged to my parents? Seriously? Like not a different See-series protocol droid or Artoo unit, those exact droids? That’s… well that’s a hell of a coincidence. I wonder if they have any leftover data from back then?”

“I am pretty certain Artoo’s managed to dodge getting wiped. He seemed to recognize the names of people from back home when I was talking with him the other day.”

“I… I am going to ask a slicer friend of mine to look into his memories when we get back, if I can’t extract them myself. That is incredible.”

“Sure, just… ask his permission first? I mean he’s already mad at you, and it wouldn’t do to intentionally piss him off.”

“Yeah, having him avoid me like this has been pretty terrible. Flying into battle with a different astromech really isn’t the same.”
Leia beamed at him, she was honestly relieved to know her family’s droids had managed to stick with them in this universe, had somehow through all the horror and war remained part of the family.

From the sound of things R2’s loyalty subroutes were the strongest of any droid ever, and C-3PO, despite all his protests, hadn’t left their side either.

It was nice to be able to reliably count on something in this universe.

Leia was surprised that she was starting to recognize their surroundings - she could tell that they were almost at the hanger.

There was someone leaning against the door to the hanger up ahead. As they approached the figure - recognizable as Han as they drew closer - pushed off from where he’d been slouched, blocking the doorway - and their path through it - as much as he could.

“You really going with her, Kid?” Han groused once they were close enough to hear, “what she told Sana an’ me about this trip she wants to take you on sounded sketchy at best.”


“Well, from what she told me, this trip is pretty important,” Luke responded. “I do appreciate your concern, Han. Really, thanks.”

“Important? Important how? First her worship vanishes and some bargain barrel knockoff replaces her, and now she wants to drag you to who knows where to study mystical hoo-hah? Luke, this whole thing had bad news written all over it.”

“Han, please, I know you don’t believe in any of it but my Jedi training is important to me, okay? I trust that she is really going to take me where she says she will, relax.”

“I ain’t relaxing until Leia is actually home.” For the first time since the conversation began, he looked at Leia. Just for a moment, before he turned away, frowning. “It’s like none of the rest of you get it. She isn’t here anymore, Luke. Leia, our Leia, she’s just gone, and… and…” his voice trailed off, and he turned to Leia again, thrusting a finger in her face. “...and I’m onto you. Coming in here with the perfect lies to con each and every one of us.”

Leia started to protest - these accusations were absurd - but Han cut her off midway through her first word.

“Oh don’t you try and deny it sister. You may be good, but I’m better. I see what you’re doing. I don’t trust a second of it.”

Leia turned to Luke, unsure what to say to this man. He knew Han better, he should have some idea how to reason with him, right?

For his part Luke looked more sad than scandalized. “Han, we’re going to get her back,” he said soothingly, “She isn’t really gone Han, I think I’d know if she was.”

“Oh right, because she claims you’re twins. Have you actually confirmed that, or are you seriously letting a funny feeling dictate what you do and do not believe? I bet that if you actually took a blood test the results wouldn’t support her little story.”

“Han, please you’re being ridiculous. Tell you what, if she does anything at all on this trip that makes me doubt what she’s told us, I’ll… I dunno, but I’ll owe you.”
“That only works if you come back. If this ain’t just some elaborate trap.”

“Do you want to come with us? You can if you want,” Leia said, glad to finally say something in the discussion. “No one is stopping you.”

“What, and give you the opportunity to get me killed? No thanks.” He was at least acknowledging her presence, which was a step up from earlier. She just really wished that his attention didn’t mean having one of his digits waved around in her personal space.

This was nonsense, she hadn’t done anything to warrant this sort of treatment! If anything she’d already proved herself to be trustworthy just the day before. “I got everyone through that mission yesterday just fine, didn’t I?” she asked, wondering how he could have forgotten something he himself had been a part of so quickly.

He shifted, uncomfortable. “There were a ton of witnesses around then, and well…”

Luke picked up where Han trailed off, “…and you hadn’t quite made up your mind that you didn’t like her yet?”

“Shut it, Kid. I’m trying to watch your back here.”

“Yeah well, I can take care of myself just fine, thanks.”

The two of them stared at each other for a brief uncomfortable moment. Then to Leia’s surprise Han stepped aside, shaking his head and muttering, but clearing their path all the same.

“I sure hope you know what you’re doing Luke.”

Luke nodded, then frowned. “Will you still be here when we get back, or are you going to leave?”

“Madine gave me some work to do that should last Chewie an’ me for a few more weeks, so no leaving quite yet. Soon though. I’ve got debts to pay off and all.”

“Right. Of course you do.” Luke shook his head. “Well then I guess I’ll see you when we get back, Han. And I’ll be fine, I promise.” His voice lowered, and despite having been unwelcome in the earlier conversation, only then did Leia feel like she was intruding on a private moment. “And so will Leia. She’ll be home soon Han, you’ll see.”

Leia debated on saying something to Han before she and Luke walked further into the hanger, but the stare he had suddenly fixed her with was anything but inviting. Instead she offered him a slight nod - he did not return it, just kept glaring - and then fell into step at Luke’s side.

Was that really how people in this universe saw her?

Several times as they walked across the hanger Leia debated on asking Luke what he had thought of that conversation, but she couldn’t quite put together the right words to ask.

He must have sensed her discomfort, or perhaps just knew that after an encounter like that there would be no way she’d be comfortable, because halfway across the space he reached out, placing his arm around her shoulders.

He still had his arm around her when they reached the Volt Cobra, and Leia broke away to enter the codes Sana had given her to unlock the ship.

She moved through the vessel quickly, plopping herself down in the pilot’s seat as soon as she
reached it. She waited only long enough for Luke to sit down beside her before she powered the ship up, swiftly taxiing outside the covered hanger and then launching from the barren rocky world.

She wasn’t exactly feeling warm and fuzzy feelings towards the base at the moment, and really looked forward to time alone with just her brother and the familiar swirling lights of hyperspace.

As the ship broke atmosphere Luke leaned over the navicomputer, curious. “You said you know where this system is? I’ve never heard of it before.”

“I looked it up last night before I went to sleep. Sluis sector? So… basically nowhere.” Leia grinned, pleased to leave the bad atmosphere behind with Horox III.

“I’m calling not it on entering anything into the navicomputer.” Luke held his hands up, leaning away from the computer he had been inspecting moments before.

Leia laughed, turning to the computer as the ship leveled out in space. “Wasn’t expecting anything else. May I point out you’re the one who grew up in the Outer Rim?”

“Yeah, but I was fully planet-bound till I was nineteen.”

“Yeah, ok. Why haven’t I already learned not to ask about your past?”

“Hey, it wasn’t a bad childhood!”

“Ok, Lulu, keep telling yourself that.”

“It wasn’t! It may not have been perfect, but it isn’t like I was deprived or anything.”

The navicomputer beeped, confirming that Leia had successfully entered the first of the various hyperspace routes they would be taking. The route was clear, and safe for them to enter. She suddenly wished Artoo was with them. There was no question he would have found a far faster route than she had.

She eased the ship into hyperspace and grinned as the Volt Cobra showed off its impressive speed.

“Right, well I’m not sitting here for the entire trip,” Luke said, and then moved towards the passenger hold. Leia followed after him, making note of where the ship had its sleep chambers and fresher as they passed them.

The hold was pretty standard, a galley and seating area with a table and nothing more. Luke was easing himself into one of the seats around the table, and Leia had a fantastic idea about how to pass the time.

“Care to play?” She asked, and before he even answered she had turned the table on, holographic dejark figures flickering to life.

“No,” Luke responded. “...maybe later? I’m not in the mood to play games, sorry.”

Leia nodded, switching the table off and heading towards the ships’ bunks.

She didn’t know which one was Sana’s personal chamber, or where would be the most polite place for her to sleep.

She didn’t really care.

She was going to meditate for the rest of the day, since it seemed Luke wanted to be left alone.
She had already been so full of conflict after her earlier conversation with the Sith, so lost and alone and small. Han’s suspicions and accusations hadn’t helped at all, resulting her current state of unbalance.

She tried to focus on her breathing, but kept distracting herself with new worries and fears.

What if Darth Vader managed to follow her? Use their connection to track down Master Yoda and kill him before Luke’s training could even really begin?

She wished she had asked Sana for permission to tinker with the ship, that she could get at the wires inside as they flew. Clearly letting the sound of the engine lull her into the right state wasn’t enough.

No matter what she did she could not quite settle, could not quite find the peace needed to meditate.

She would not give up on trying, no matter how frustrating it was.

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Luke and Leia S. pass the time in space, Leia O. and Padmé go on a little trip of their own.

While I am sure that as the writer (and therefore the one having to keep track of the timeline) I am the only one who cares, after this chapter I can fully confirm and establish that this fic is set between issues 36 and 37 of the main Star Wars comic. Threepio getting captured by Vader, and Vader ordering he be taken apart, come from the comics. Artoo’s daring rescue of Threepio happened in Issue 36.
Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to Sethnakht for betaing this monster of a fic, and constantly challenging me to improve as a writer.

I dunno about all of you, but I am beyond excited for Rebels to return tonight!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

A knock on the door finally ended Leia’s unsuccessful attempts to meditate.

“Leia, I’m bored. Do you want to talk or something?”

She opened her eyes, stood and stretched. “Sure, we can talk. Or there’s always the dejarik board,” she called to Luke.

“Will you quit it with dejarik? What is with you and that game.”

She hit the panel next to the door, revealing Luke’s annoyed expression on its other side. “I like to play games when on long interplanetary trips.” She shrugged. “It’s fun. People in this dimension do know what fun is, right?”

“Ha ha, very funny.”

They walked together towards the ship’s main living space. Leia eyed the dejarik table - the only seating available - for a moment before folding herself onto the battered bench.

“Oh, you’ve got my attention. What did you want to talk about?”

He was leaning against one of the galley’s counters, fidgety and uncomfortable. “I… Well…” He went through a variety of single word openers. Each time he started he looked so hopeful, only to cut himself off before he even began, frustration flashing across his features. Shooting into the Force around him.

“Take your time, no rush.”

“Look. I was hoping… well before we get to this instructor you are taking me to... I was hoping you could explain more about what you meant? About my father being alive?”

She really had been hoping to avoid that topic until they were on Dagobah. It’d be so much easier to just let Master Yoda explain everything. He’d understand it all so much better than she ever could, and probably would have a better understanding of how much Luke could and should handle hearing.

“See, this is why I’d rather just play a game. Less likely to end in some sort of fight.”

“Leia, please.”
“Weren’t you the one who said it would be dangerous for you to get too upset while flying through space?”

“Leia! I am asking you nicely, please!” It wasn’t the fact he had raised his voice that annoyed her. It was the desperate edge, the stubborn undertone. It called to the part of her that was more sibling than Jedi, to her petty need to attack him just because it bothered him.

If he had actually been her brother, she would have given in to that impulse. Called him one of the thousand mocking nicknames he absolutely hated. Dug in deep, aimed to wound.

But he was not that Luke.

He was someone else, someone who had a perfectly reasonable cause to be upset.

Leia forced herself to relax, to ease back in her seat and unfurl her clenched hand. She stared at the checkered table in front of her, nodding as she did. “Ok. What… what do you want to know?”

“Everything?”

“You have to be a bit more specific than that.”

“Ok. I guess… wherever he’s trapped, do you think we could save him? I mean clearly Ben doesn’t, but I dunno… maybe you have hope?”

“I do. Have hope we can save him, I mean. Ever since I got here I’ve been doing everything in my power to figure out how to get him back. I’m not going to lie, it won’t be easy but… I really think it can be done.”

Luke exhaled, sharp and heavy. Leia shut her eyes, and listened to him simply breathe for just a little while, before he began asking her questions once more.

“You, you’ve been coming up with a plan to rescue him?”

She thought she’d been doing a pretty decent job using vague phrases to mask the true nature of how and why Anakin Skywalker was trapped, but if Luke kept pressing she’d run out of ways to deflect him from the awful terrible truth.

“Yes. I even made a breakthrough earlier today.”

“You did? Why… why not let me help? I want to help!”

“What? No, please, you aren’t ready to-”

“What, come up with a plan of attack? I know I am not much when it comes to being a Jedi, but I’ve been at war for half a year now Leia. I’m not just a soldier, I’m an officer. I can help with this. I need to help with this.”

“I… I’ll tell you what, when we get to where we are going, I’ll see if Master Yoda thinks letting you in on this is a good plan, ok?”

“What? Why… why can’t you just share this with me now?”

Good question. The ‘let’s just ask Yoda’ deflection had been a terrible idea, why had she even attempted it. Especially after that horrid conversation with Han, she must look so suspicious, refusing to answer his questions.
“You know how you are an officer in an army and all, and that means you have to listen to what people of a higher rank tell you?”

“...yeah?”

“Well Master Yoda is the leader of the entire Jedi Order. He’s like my superior officer in a way. I can’t just make a major decision on my own without running things by him. Not unless I have to, but in this case it would simply be because I want to. I’m sure in the end he’ll make the right decision.”

Of course the Order wasn’t strict about these sorts of things at all, but Luke didn’t know that.

The intensity that had suffused the room, the anxiety, the desperation, the cloying pervasive hope… it all dissipated, leaving behind aching pain and stinging sorrow and oh... the hope was still there, just no longer as strong.

“Right. I… I understand that. Sorry, I’ll stop bothering you.” Luke collapsed onto the bench, on the other side of the table. He did not look at her, just stumbled into the seat. As she watched him he began to pick at his cuticles, a habit her mother had tried to break her brother of more times than Leia could count. She reached out, placing one of her hands on Luke’s. He glanced up at her, eyes seeming impossibly huge and sad.

“It isn’t that I don’t want to tell you. I promise you, as soon as I know how and what to say I will.”

“I just… I thought he was dead, Leia. Dead! I want to save him so bad.”

“I know, I do too. And we will. We just have to consult with Master Yoda and train first.”

“You mean I have to train. You’ve already got that covered.”

“I really don’t. I told you, I’m not a Jedi Knight, I’m just a Padawan. A student. I still have so much I need to learn before I’ll be even halfway ready to do this.”

She doubted she could ever train enough to be ready to confront Darth Vader.

“Is it really that dangerous?” Luke asked, peering up at her through his bangs.

“The most difficult task I’ve ever taken on,” Leia confirmed.

Straightening in his seat, Luke frowned. “But you said you had a breakthrough today?”

“I think, maybe… I… I really don’t know actually. I need Master Yoda to help me make sense of it all.”

His hand under hers shifted, flipped around so his palm was now flush against her own. He held her hand tight, smiling as he did.

“Then I guess it’s a good thing we’re hurtling towards this Master Yoda right now then, isn’t it.”

Leia laughed. “Yeah, it really is.”

They sat there for a bit, comfortable with each other’s presence, not wanting to disturb the atmosphere.

After enough time passed for Leia to grow restless, Luke fixed her with one of his incandescent
grins. She wondered if her own brother had that talent and she just never noticed, the ability to smile so pure and bright it made others feel like they could tackle all of their problems and win.

“Hey,” he said, no sign of his earlier upset in his voice, “you said you wanted to play dejarik?”

Sharp humor, decent political views (Leia couldn’t agree at all with Padmé’s pacifism, but aside from that the woman’s head was in the right place), and able to give as good as she got in a debate.

Padmé truly was the ideal dinner companion.

They had just finished their main course. The nuna had been tender and succulent, the shaak hearty and flavorful. The real surprise for Leia, culinarily speaking, was that she’d discovered that she rather enjoyed dipping the fried kajaka roots into the muja sauce the nuna had been cooked in, and they had to have a second order of the root strips brought to their table.

Leia was about to suggest they order dessert - she found herself longing to prolong this social interaction - when Padmé requested the bill.

“I hope you don’t mind Leia, but I’ve made arrangements for us elsewhere.”

She had, had she?

“What did you have in mind?”

“I was hoping it could be a surprise? Of course if you really must know, I’ll tell you, but…”

“No, no, it’s alright. I trust you.”

“You do?” Stunning joy spread across her, infusing her posture, her expression, her voice. “Well, I… thank you.”

Leia didn’t speak much as Padmé settled their bill, too absorbed in trying to figure out where they could be headed next.

The shuttle that was waiting for them when they stepped outside the restaurant’s doors was not the sled that had dropped them off. It was designed for longer distance travel than the open air transport had been, and the sight of it only deepened the mystery of this second portion of the night.

No, not night because the shuttle drove past the dividing line of the sunset, and into the portion of the great city of Coruscant where it was still day.

Then right to the city’s edge where…

Leia’s eyes grew wide at the sight before her. Trees, and streams and grass and… It couldn’t be! She had only heard of it in passing, mentioned in history lessons and whispered about by Senators who had been working on the planet long before the Empire’s formation.

This must be the segment of this world that had once been preserved land, home to a species who lived apart from the city itself, lived here where the planet’s surface was left undeveloped and natural and…

Padmé offered Leia her arm, a smile lighting up her face as she observed Leia’s reaction to their destination. “I got the impression you weren’t the biggest fan of Coruscant on the whole, so I thought you might enjoy a walk through its most beautiful part. I wasn’t expecting you to be quite this stunned.”
Shaking her head Leia found her voice, “How did you know I’d love to see this?”

Forehead wrinkling with confusion, Padmé studied Leia’s expression closely, then let out a gasp. “Oh no. No. Please don’t tell me you’ve never been here before?”

“How could I? It was paved over before I even learned to walk.” She snorted, “or as most people think of it, ‘the Empire reclaimed this land for the people of Coruscant, who had long desired to expand and make use of what they had been barred access to.’”

Padmé made a faint pained noise, looking out at the green spread out before her. “I am going to regret asking, I am sure, but do you know what happened to the B’ankora? This is their home.”

“Oh, the B’ankora people are extinct, of course.”

For several long moments Padmé said nothing, just stood there framed by the shuttle’s door, sunlight streaming in around her. Softly, so much so Leia almost had to strain to hear her despite standing at her side, she muttered under her breath, “Every single time I think I’ve grasped how bad things could have gotten…”

Leia watched her with a tinge of pity. “Then you probably won’t like to hear what happened to all the Legacy Worlds.”

“No, there has to be a limit! How could he have ever justified ending a program so popular?”

“Apparently, would you believe it, each and every protected planet secretly held a Separatist Cell. Had to have all the protections around them lifted, you know, so they could contribute resources to the Empire and make up for their treachery. Or, alternatively, regulations were standing in the way of societal advancement, that mainly being code for economic gains naturally, and those protections had be destroyed.”

“And people… actually bought that?”

“They didn’t really have much of a choice. Disagreeing with the Emperor isn’t exactly encouraged. The Ghorman people were massacred simply for protesting.”

“How silly of me to forget just what sort of dictator he is.” Padmé stepped out onto the entry ramp, turning toward Leia with a sigh. “I had hoped we could put politics aside for this excursion, but I understand if you wish to continue this conversation as we walk.”

“I’m sorry, I must be such a terrible bore. I’m afraid that it’s been a long time since I’ve talked to anyone about anything unrelated to the war.” Leia fell into step at Padmé’s side. “Living on a base full time does that to a person.”

Padmé leaned in slightly towards Leia, smiling. “My husband once fought in a war, I do remember what it’s like to speak with someone in the midst of it all.” She bumped her shoulder lightly against Leia’s. “You aren’t on the front lines now, you are here, somewhere where there is no war.”

“Not one of actual fighting in any case, but I’d say that arguments like the one you will have to have over that mining bill qualify as a battle of its own kind.”

“That is not a fair comparison,” Padmé said, brow heavy as she shook her head.

“Isn’t it? I wouldn’t ever minimize the horrors of the Imperial regime, but my situation began with precisely those sorts of debates.”
Padmé frowned, voice hardening with each word she spoke, “I was present in the Senate when Sheev was still alive. I do remember what it was like.”

Suddenly stopping, Padmé stood on the sun dappled path. She stood in the shade of a tree, posture perfect, and hands clenched at her side. “Don’t compare political debate to war. Don’t pretend they are remotely the same. People die in wars. Families and homes are destroyed. Lives are forever impacted in the most…” Padmé’s voice hitched, and she breathed in deep as her voice trailed off.

Leia looked away from Padmé, instead watching the sunlight dance upon the ground as it filtered through the canopy created by the trees. “Does a child care why they are starving? What is the difference between an end to government subsidized meals, and a military blockade in a starving child’s eyes?” she asked. “At the end of the day the political battles impact daily life just as much, if not more, than the fighting does. Isn’t it more important to ensure the systems are in place to support the people, even if it means bloodshed, than holding to peace just for passivity’s sake?”

Padmé’s voice was softer now, more controlled, but the strong emotions that had filled her earlier still laced through it as she spoke. “The arguments may get ugly on the Senate floor. We may backstab and double deal and swallow our ideals in the interest of compromise… and yes, it is true that lives may be broken and ruined and forever changed with the passage of a single bill. But it isn’t war, Leia. No one senselessly throws their life away, good people are not asked to kill for for their beliefs, no child spends time in a prison camp. The two are not the same. I agree yes, there are times when it is best to fight, times when people put in place policies so terrible no good person can remain silent, but it is our duty as politicians to do everything possible to ensure things do not reach that point, and to always value diplomacy over all else.”

“You’re right. I know that, on an intellectual level at least. I just..” Leia stopped, biting her lip until it almost drew blood. She sighed, and refocused on the patch of grass she had been intently studying. “I hate that even here there are officials with no sense of actual right or wrong, of what it means to uphold the social contract. When I first started to consider what this universe might be like... the galaxy without the Empire to bully people around, the Old Republic having never fallen… I had hoped things would be so much better.” Frustration bubbled in Leia’s chest, and she rubbed at her eyes. Something must have gotten in them. “It… it isn’t ever going to end is it? Even after we win and bring actual democratic process back, these fights are never going to end.”

A hand grasped Leia’s shoulder, jolting her out of her thoughts. She turned to see pride shining through Padmé’s expression. “Leia it’s ok. You’re…” Padmé stopped, simply staring into Leia’s eyes for a moment before continuing. “You can relax here. You are not letting anyone down if you need to rest. No one would expect you to always be fighting, always pushing yourself further. It is ok sometimes to just…” She paused, drawing Leia fully into her arms. “Just, let go. You can’t carry the entire galaxy on your shoulders all the time.”

Leia pushed away from the hug, although one of Padmé’s hands remained lightly resting on her arm. Her response was curt, as she brushed Padmé’s concern off. “I’m sorry. I am not being fair to you at all. This is your time off from work.”

“...and to think, I used to wonder why my mother always looked so stressed around me.” The words were muttered, low and nearly inaudible. Nearly. Not quite.

“Pardon?”

“Nothing, you just… well you really wouldn’t want to hear it, never mind.”

“Clearly you wanted to share something, why else comment out loud?”
“Leia, please, we were having such a pleasant evening, must we fight?”

“I don’t know, must we?”

They both fell silent, walking without speaking further. The only sounds were the leaves and twigs under their feet, and the footfall and occasional noise from the guards following them just a few paces back.

The reserve was beautiful. Even the atmosphere had been left alone, the weather controls that steadied conditions in the city non-existent here. It felt like a real place, a breath of fresh air (literally so, in fact). This is what Coruscant had been like before people had built upon her surface.

One of Padmé’s hands was still resting on Leia’s arm, a casual reminder of her presence as Leia took in the forest. The forest, where yet another duracrete covered neighborhood existed in her timeline.

Nothing remained of this place. None of it, especially not the promise it had once represented.

Leia sighed, thinking of just how shattered that promise truly was. “It is so hard to believe this sanctuary was made to ensure the B’ankora would always have a home, that they and every other member-planet of the Republic would know that no matter what their government has their back. Yet now in my time, they are all gone. Along with the Bodach’i, the Lasat, the Squamatan... the list goes on and on. So many people, so many worlds have been lost to Palpatine’s evil.”

“...the Squamatan?”

“Yes. I mean they aren’t all gone quite yet, but their numbers are rapidly dwindling. Those who are left are enslaved, working to drain their own homeworld of resources for the Empire. Reports are the remaining survivors are dying at a truly alarming rate and—”

“Leia, do you know what resource the Squamatan homeworld is known for?”

“No? Sorry, I really don’t.”

“Thorilide. Their homeworld is known for its thorilide. The same as the Gorse system, the same damn resource Count Vidian made his fortunes on.”

“Vidian. Who is he? You’ve mentioned his name several times already.”

“I’d call him a political opponent, but that would be giving him too much credit. Count Denetrius Vidian is a no nothing business mogul with far too much hot air to blow and no actual thoughts inside his head.”

“How odd. He sounds exactly like the sort of man Palpatine would have loved, and yet I have no recollection of ever hearing his name.”

“That is strange. With the way that man manipulates and maneuvers I’d expect him to have a high rank on an advisory council or some other position where he could wreck maximum devastation.”

“...Didn’t you say at the start of this walk that we should avoid talking about politics?” Leia laughed. “We are really bad at that, aren’t we?”

“We really are.” Padmé nudged Leia’s arm slightly as she grinned, “Oh well. I suppose I can think of worse ways to pass the time than talking politics with you.”

“Oh come on, how can you keep beating me? I mean I may not be that great, but normally I don’t
Leia couldn’t help but smirk. She had just defeated Luke in their fifth consecutive match, and even though he wasn’t technically her brother, her victory streak felt amazing.

She had never really been able to cream her brother at dejarik, they’d always been evenly matched at the game. “I’m afraid I have a very unfortunate advantage. I was taught how to play by the best of the best.”


“Mom. She loves dejarik.” Leia’s smirk softened into a gentle smile. ”She never loses. Didn’t even pretend to when playing against Luke or I when we were younglings, just kept crushing us in game after game until we got to the point where... well occasionally we can sometimes manage to beat her. Rarely. Maybe once.”

She had so many fond memories of playing dejarik with her mom. They always played the game whenever they traveled between Coruscant and Naboo.

Since it was at the forefront of her mind, and Luke had known nothing about their mom when Leia had first arrived, she sent one of her memories set around the game to Luke.

She was on her mother’s lap, watching mom move the holographic pieces about as she played against Luke. Every so often her mom would run a hand through Leia’s hair, and in soft patient tones explain why she was doing what she was in the game.

Whenever one of the pieces would roar or gnash their teeth Leia’d laugh with delight, and each and every time her laughter made mom laugh as well. Leia loved the way her mom’s lap shook when she laughed - so Leia’s laughter kept getting louder and freer because she knew her mother’s answering laugh would follow.

Then it was her turn.

Sitting on the booster seat across from her mother, the one Luke had just vacated. Concentrating overly hard on the board, occasionally glancing at where her mother sat, now with Luke on her lap.

Leia’s favorite monster on the board was the K’lor’slug, for no reason other than she liked how the holographic piece looked. On their dejarik table it was this fun purple color, and it made the greatest squealing noises as it moved! She always favored the K’lor’slug, just as Luke favored the Houjix (he thought the Houjix’s legs were super wizard).

She lost the game, of course she did, but then Luke stuck his tongue out at her, so she called him a name she was not supposed to use, and that made mom mad, and she started scolding them both for upsetting each other, even though Luke started it, and it wasn’t her fault, and it wasn’t fair that they both were being blamed because she had only been reacting to what Luke did first, honest.

Yet even as mom told them not to fight she hugged them, one twin pressed against each side, and promised them that with time they would improve at the game, and that one day they may even beat her.

“Oh.” Luke was staring at the board as the memory faded out. “You know, there was a board at Toshe station, but I never played much. If I’d known this game was something my mom loved I would have played it more. I wonder if I can get Chewie to teach me, or maybe Artoo. He’s weirdly good at playing dejarik.” His voice sounded strange. Distant.
Leia wondered if she should tell him that R2-D2 was good at dejarik because their mom often played against him. She’d had several dejarik strategy disks installed in him ages ago, just so she could have a real challenge.

Looking at Luke again, Leia noticed he was crying.

Every single thing she did just seemed to cause him more pain.

Stang it.

He hadn’t been shielding, had left his mind wide open for her to enter, and she had just thought that meant she was welcome to share whatever she wanted. Had misread his defenses as if he were her Luke, as if he were someone used to this method of communication and could easily block her memories if he so chose.

That was not the case. He was merely inexperienced. Defenseless.

Sure she had taught him how to shield (or so she had assumed. It was possible that was something Uncle Obi had taught him, or perhaps he had been self-taught), but that didn’t mean he knew to maintain his defenses when it was just the two of them.

She felt so bad that her memory had upset Luke, that she had made the assumptions that she had, and Leia wasn’t sure what to do.

What to say.

They stared at each other for a bit, Leia once again taking in all the ways this man did not fully look like her brother, from the hesitance of his smile to the hardness around his eyes.

He had already stopped crying, had figured out how to mask his emotions in this confined space, keeping her from knowing exactly what he was thinking or feeling. She was proud of him for that.

Luke was the one who broke the silence. “So uh, where were you going?”

“Huh?”

“In that memory you just showed me? You were on a ship, right? Where were you going?”

“Oh. We were headed home to Naboo, to visit our family.”

“We have family on Naboo?”

“A bunch of distant relatives, plus our Grandparents, Auntie Sola, and Pooja and Ryoo - our cousins.”

“Wow that… that is a lot of family.”

“I suppose. More than we’ve got on dad’s side, that’s for sure.”

“I know I keep asking this, I must sound like a broken holo, but… can you tell me about them?”

Leia nodded, then paused, remembering that she should probably ease him into things, rather than just dump it all on Luke at once.

She kept assuming that sharing things with him that way would be a kindness, a way for him to experience the family he had been deprived of, but each time it proved to be the wrong move.
Now she worried that all she had done was rub his face in what he could never have. What he should have had, and had always desired.

His mother’s love. The feeling of her holding them tight, benefiting from her endless intellect, the sound of her laughter.

Leia’s love as well. All those squabbles and fights he had been denied. The comfort of knowing no matter how much they annoy you, your twin would always be there.

She tried to think of the safest, easiest way to describe the rest of their family. They were not incredibly close, but she loved them and so did her brother... but she was interrupted before she could speak.

The ship shook, rocking about with a deep low moan.

“What is that?” She had never heard anything like it. It was almost as if something was tearing them out of hyperspace, but that was not possible.

“Oh no, it might be an Interdictor!” Luke shouted over the noise. A moment later he was tossed out of his seat by the ship’s sudden jerky movements.

Leia had no idea what an Interdictor was, what the presence of one would mean or how to deal with the issue - but she already knew she would not like this at all.

Chapter End Notes


...have I mentioned before that my favorite episode of TCW is "The Assassin"? Not surprisingly, the dejariq bit was inspired by the amazing scene in that episode of Padmé teaching Ahsoka how to play the game.

I loved the parts of Catalyst about the B’ankora refuge, and the Legacy worlds. There is never a good reason to destroy protected land, especially when vulnerable populations need that land to live, or maintain their sacred sites. That is true both in this universe, and the Star Wars Universe as well.

I know that Denetrius Vidian’s protegee (Evari Chalis) wound up joining the Alliance, and it is possible that Leia could have heard his name from her (although, and it has been ages since I read Twilight Company so I may be remembering things wrong - I can’t remember when it was that Chalis defected). However given that Vidian was killed when Leia was eight years old, I think it is very unlikely Leia would have any idea who he was? Please let me know if you disagree and think she would have learned about him, especially given his terrible autobiographies and the like, as I am sure you can guess he’s going to play a role in the story to come.

.....thinking about Count Vidian is making me think about A New Dawn which is
making me think about Hera and Kanan and ahhhhhhhh tonight! Two whole episodes tonight! Then just two more weeks, and the show will be over forever. I am so excited, and also terrified, for what the rest of Season 4 will bring us!
As always all the thanks ever goes to Sethnakht for the incredible suggestions and edits. This story wouldn't be even half as coherent as it currently is without your help.

I also want to thank AbsolXGuardian for the enormous task that is helping me keep track of continuity and canon, and helping me cement and plan out this story's end. It may still be some time before we get there, but where we are going with this is far richer thanks to your help my friend!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Luke’s voice strained with adrenaline as he ran past Leia, hurrying to make his way to the cockpit. “Just what we needed, an Interdictor on patrol.”

“Well, I’m glad one of us knows what is going on. Care to fill me in?” Leia asked as she followed after him, trying to understand just how dire the situation was.

“No much to explain, really. They’re these Star Destroyers that generate artificial gravity fields that are powerful enough to rip ships out of hyperspace. The Imps use them sometimes for surprise checkpoints, or when they’ve gotten a tip on Rebel activity.” Luke patted down his pockets. “Oh frag, I didn’t think to grab any of Leia’s fake identifications before we left, so we really need you to just… not be here right now.”

“Wait, what?”

“I’m telling them I’m a hyperspace scout who won this ship off an acquaintance in a game of pazaak. Then, if they don’t buy that, I’ll resort to some fancy flying to get us out of here.”

“You just said we’re caught in a gravity generator. Now I’ve pulled off my fair share of wild piloting maneuvers before, sure, but you can’t outrun gravity. If they truly have a lock on us…”

“I’ve been through Imperial checkpoints before Leia, it’ll be fine, don’t worry.” He reached into an inner pocket of the yellow jacket he wore, pulling out an identification card, waving it slightly in the air. “I have the identification documents all ready to go and everything.”

When he spoke his next words, the strange twang of an Outer Rim accent that threaded through this Luke’s voice was thick and pronounced. “The name’s Marcus. Kori Marcus. Heard tale of some tibanna gas out past this way, some real pure stuff, and thought hey, better go check it out. It’s just me and…” His voice faltered, his accent returning to its usual faint touch, “...I don’t know what we’re going to say if they scan us and pick up your life signs too. I mean I could say you’re my crew, but we don’t have any identification for you.”

“Are you certain they’ll ask for it?”

“Huh?”

“Space-faring types are pretty notorious for hating being asked to identify themselves, in my universe anyway. Can’t you just say I’m your sister - I doubt they’d do any real sophisticated bioscan, but if
they do the story would hold up.” Leia couldn’t help the bitter tone that permeated her voice, still dwelling on Han and his accusations.

Luke bit his lip, eyes moving slightly as he turned the suggestion over in his mind. “…that is a point. Ok, I suppose we could pull it off if we bluster enough. Maybe. We’ll see. Just don’t say anything. Or react in any way.”

“I can’t do nothing.”

“Leia, please, I can’t keep them waiting for too long. Either promise you won’t make a noise, or stay far away from the cockpit.”

She nodded, her need to overhear the conversation that was to take place outweighing her annoyance with the gag rule.

The two of them slid into their seats in the cockpit in unison, working together as a unit. Luke gave her a quick reassuring glance, and then he flipped the flashing switch that indicated they were being hailed on the voice-only comm.

A voice, accent clipped and proper, all cool professional calm. “Unidentified freighter, this is Imperial Patrol 418. You are to transmit to us your registration codes and identification immediately.

“Uh right, registration codes. I think I have those around here somewhere,” Luke said in his heavily exaggerated accent. “Just won this ship off a friend the other day, still getting used to where everything is. Why don’t I send you my ID first while I look for the rest?”

He inserted his ID into the comm unit, and set it to transmit, then gestured for Leia to help him look through the cockpit for where Sana kept her ship’s registration documents.

Finally Leia found them in a compartment under the dash, however she found seven distinct sets of document chips under there, each one with a different name scrawled on it.

She held them out to Luke, and with a shrug he took the chip simply labeled “Cobra” and placed it in the comm next to his fake ID.

There was some silence and then the voice from earlier returned. “You say you won that ship, Marcus?”

“Yessir, that I did.”

“Fascinating. It appears your ship’s former owner was rather busy Mr. Marcus, stealing from the Empire and the Hutts both just a week ago.”

“What?”

“Oh yes Mr. Marcus, our records indicate that Ms. Starros has quite the colorful rap sheet. It is almost as interesting as your own.”

“My… my own?” Luke’s fake accent wavered slightly, as he fought to keep his voice under control.

“You Rebels sure are getting sloppy, using the same identity twice. Or could it be that you are unintelligent enough to give out your real name? Whatever the case may be, patrols around Devaron flagged you as a confirmed Rebel agent quite some time ago.”

The connection cut out, and Luke let out a string of curses before the ship rocked from some sort of

“I dunno. Something near the stern of the ship?”

“One of us should go check that out, make sure it isn’t badly damaged.”

“I’ll do it. You stay here Lu.”

He nodded, and she made her way to the back of the ship, estimating from the source of the noise that it was near the ship’s evacuation pods.

Best case, the Empire was just violating every code of spacefaring conduct Leia had ever heard of, and had shot the pods, fully disabling them and giving the two of them no way to escape if they needed.

Worst case? They had struck one of the engines and the ship was dead in space.

She got to the pods and… oh thank Shiyara they had only hit the Escape Pods.

It looks like we are flying without pods, but aside from that we should be ok.

Luke’s voice crackled over the comm in response, it seemed he was far more comfortable with that then using the Force to converse. “That’s real good to know. Speaking of things that would be good to know, how are you when it comes to turret gunnery?”

Oh come on, I am a pilot.

“So you’ve used them before. Great!”

Errrrr no. But I have gotten some pretty excellent scores on simulators.

“Oh kriff me. Ok, ok, it shouldn’t be too different from a simulator, so just…”

Everything tilted hard portside, and Leia stumbled, struggling to stay upright.

“Get to the turret!” Luke’s voice, frantic and loud, crackled over the ship’s comms. “Go, now! I need all the help I can get destroying these Gravity Wells.”

Right. Say, how many of them are there? Leia asked as she sprinted towards the turret.

“Four. But we don’t need to hit all of them. We’re going to attempt to leave after each one we take out, no need to linger here any longer than necessary.”

Four gravity wells. Ok. What do they look like?

“You at the turret yet?”

No, not yet, I’m on my way there now.

“Ok, well once you’re there you’re going to see the Interdictor out the viewport. On it, there are four domes. Those are the gravity wells.”

Ok, so I shoot at the -

“No Leia, I’m going to take care of them with the ship’s forward guns. Your job is going to be to
keep the TIEs off our back.”

*So you just want me to shoot the enemy ships?*

“Exactly, right. Think you can do that?”

So just like a simulator program. She always got good scores on those, this couldn’t be too different, right?

*Yeah, I can do it. Besides, it’s not exactly like I have a choice, do I?*

“Is that a real yes or a no, Leia. I need to know that I can count on you before I bring us in.”

*Yes, she sent to him as she buckled herself into the gunnery controls, Yes you can count on me Mr. Military Officer.*

“That’s Commander Military Officer to you. I just earned that promotion, and I don’t take it lightly.”

*Sir, yes sir!* She laughed, grabbing at the joysticks in front of her and giving them an experimental tug. The mechanism shifted position with a whirr from side to side as she directed.

Ok.

She could do this.

Just like all the simulations she had done, nothing to it.

There was a horrible sound, high pitched and screaming that seemed to be drawing ever closer to the ship. When she turned to see what was causing it, she saw several round ships with flat solar arrays quickly approaching. She moved to center them on the targeting system, and fired, quick, almost fully thanks to instinct.

It was only once one of the ships exploded, and she could feel the resulting loss of life in the Force around her, that Leia realized she had just killed someone.

She had just ended someone’s life.

As significant and important as that was, she did not have any time to dwell on it. To process her first ever kill.

Swallowing back the bile rising in her throat, she moved to fire on the next fighter, and then the next. There were so many of them, flying in at different angles, showing off impressive speeds and maneuverability, and she was not able to hit them all.

Not at first at least.

As the battle went on she sunk further and further into the Force, letting it guide her hand, tell her where to fire and when, and the number of ships she shot down - pilots she murdered - steadily increased.

Through it all the ship itself danced through the air. Luke’s piloting skills were on full display, avoiding the larger ship clusters, weaving around debris from those Leia had shot down, and dodging the large green laser blasts fired towards them from massive turbolaser arrays.

They were approaching one of the domes, and a swarm of the small enemy vessels was bearing down on them.
For a moment Leia felt an icy thread of despair - how could she possibly shoot down all of the ships in time - but she did her best to remain calm, allowing the Force to guide her to shoot not at the frontmost ship first, but rather one set a little apart from the pack on the side.

She didn’t hit it dead on as she had hoped, instead merely taking out one of the flat panels on its side… except somehow that seemed to work… the ship lost control of its steering, spiraling into its fellows and sending them careening in burning spirals as they crashed. Crashed down and right into… into one of the large domes rising out of the Star Destroyer! The crashing ships did not destroy the Gravity Well on their own, but they created significant damage, damage so significant Luke was then able to blow the thing with a single shot.

The ship began to whirr - Luke must have been firing up to try and reenter lightspeed - but then it sputtered and stalled.

The comms came back on, Luke’s voice echoing around Leia once more. “Ok we’ve got one, but the pull is still too strong for us to get away. I think maybe we just need to destroy one more. This ship’s engines have some real kick and might be able to power through if the gravity was just slightly weaker.”

_Yeah, I noticed the kick. For a freighter, this thing really holds up._

“If there is one thing I’ve learned from my friendship with Han, it’s that freighters are all actually combat ships in disguise.”

_You really think that’s true for all freighters, or just Han’s and his friends’?_

Luke laughed, and then the comms fell silent once more, their brief intrusion bringing Leia back to herself, suddenly startlingly aware that she had not been firing at pretend ships on a computer screen - but real vessels with sentient beings inside.

She didn’t even know how many ships she had shot down. How many people she had killed.

She did know she did not have the time to dwell on it now. That they were still in combat, that even a moment of hesitation on her part could spell their doom.

Yet she kept returning to the war stories she had grown up on, and how bloodless they had seemed. When her father had gone to war his opponents had largely been droids. Machines manufactured to do nothing but kill, not people with homes and families whose lives would be forever impacted by their loss.

She wanted to mourn the pilots she had killed, but instead, she tried to push her feelings down and away, to find her center and let the Force guide her once more.

It was easier this time, letting go of her concern for the pilots as she fired at their vessels, letting their life signatures in the Force tell her where to aim before their ships even entered her field of view.

She lost track of time, falling into a rhythm as she shot down ship after ship, it was almost like a meditative state - in a twisted and awful way.

Finally, with a massive boom the second dome exploded, and with a whine and a whirl that in any other circumstance would have compelled Leia to suggest serious repairs, the _Volt Cobra_ jumped into hyperspace. As the familiar blue lights danced outside the gunnery viewport, Leia slouched back in her seat, robes damp with her sweat, gunnery viewports slightly fogged up, and the heady mixture of exhaustion and consequence filling each of her limbs with an unbearable weight.
They were silent for the next leg of their walk.

Occasionally one of them would point out a particularly beautiful sight to the other, or animals darting about among the trees.

The quiet, and their beautiful surroundings, did wonders towards easing the tension that had wound its way around them.

It was not too long after the silence had overtaken them that it was broken, this time by a lighthearted conversation comparing these woods to those found on Alderaan or Naboo.

Padmé admitted while she enjoyed nature walks such as these, she was not really a fan of more strenuous hikes. Leia, in turn, confessed that she was a comparatively skilled mountain climber, and Padmé confirmed she had already known that. After all, Alderaanian rituals surrounding the ascension to the throne were the same in this dimension as they were in Leia’s own.

Leia told Padmé stories of the hikes she had been on all across the galaxy. From Chandrilla’s mud flats to Eriadu’s mountain ranges.

She told her about all about Kier. She wasn’t sure why she did. But it felt good, talking about him. Knowing that somewhere out there in the same galaxy she was in, Kier was still alive made it easier to talk about him, perhaps.

Padmé had been a receptive audience, giving Leia reassuring squeezes and asking all the right questions in all the right places.

They fell into an easy pattern, conversing, then walking in silence and observing the natural splendor that surrounded them. The guards hung back, giving the two of them a respectful distance, and it was almost possible to pretend that the two of them were the only people on the whole of Coruscant. Or it was possible to imagine that until Padmé’s comm started to beep.

She picked it up with a frown, giving Leia a quick apologetic explanation before she answered. “I made it clear I was only to be contacted in case of emergency. I’m really sorry, whatever this is must be urgent.”

Leia nodded, tensing where she stood. She really did hope whatever was going on wasn’t too dire!

“Hey, mom!” Luke’s voice shouted from Padmé’s handheld voice-only comm, “just wanted to check in and see how things are!”

“Luke, we talked about this. I only wanted to be interrupted if there was an emergency,” Padmé said. “You nearly gave me a heart attack!”

“Nah, I know it’d take far more than that to take you out mom,” Luke said with a laugh, “You’re the toughest person I know.”

“And don’t you forget it,” Padmé said in a mock stern voice. Her face softened into a grin. “Now sweetie, if you really only wanted to say hi then I’m going to hang up now, ok?”

“Errr… actually… uh… do you know where the cleaning droid goes to recharge? I can’t find him anywhere and well…”

Padmé frowned, her voice dripping with concern. “Oh no. How big of a mess is there?”

“Dad let Aunt ‘Soka take over the cooking.” Leia knew that tone in Luke’s voice. She’d heard her
Luke use it a million times when trying to downplay the destruction certain prank-loving pilots had caused around the base.

It was clear from Padmé’s reaction that allowing Ahsoka to cook was about as destructive as the pilot’s ‘harmless’ pranks. “He did what?”

“It’ll be ok before you even get home, I promise. Aunt Barriss and I are cleaning it all up as we speak,” Luke soothed.

“The two of you better not be doing that alone,” Padmé said. “Put your father on. Now.”

There was some rustling from the other end of the comm, and then, Anakin’s voice, confused. “Errrr hello? Who is this?”

“Alli, I hear that our apartment has been utterly destroyed.” False saccharine cheer suffused Padmé’s tone, and was utterly betrayed by the deep scowl she wore as she talked.

“Destroy?” Nervous laughter. “No, no it hasn’t been... destroyed. And besides, it’s almost entirely contained to the kitchen.”

“Auh.”

“Really, Padmé, I promise everything will be set right before you even get home.”

“And Luke and Barriss haven’t been left to clean on their own, while you and Ahsoka crack jokes and cause more havoc?”

“Padmé, come on, I’m an adult, not one of the kids.”

“Could have fooled me.”

“I swear to you, not a single thing will be out of place when you get home. You have my word.”

“I’m holding you to that.”

“Relax, M’lady, when have I ever let you down?”

“Just now, calling me that. You know I don’t like it, Ani.”

“Sorry, sorry! Hey, does this call mean you’ll be headed home soon or-”

“Luke’s the one who called me, not the other way around. Actually, don’t wait up for me tonight, ok? I’ll probably be getting home pretty late.”

“Ok. It pains me to have to fall asleep without you in my arms, but I will do my best. Oh and let Leia know she’s welcome to any bed in the apartment, but just in case for some reason she’s grown attached to the couch, I’m leaving some sheets and a bunch of pillows and blankets next to it for her. I’m not making it up like a bed though. If she decides to sleep there, she has to put sheets on it herself.”

“Yeah, um, let’s talk more about that later.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Can we please not do this now?”
“Excuse me, she’s my kid too, what is there to talk about?”

“Anakin, how are you still failing to understand this situation?”

“What, that our daughter is missing and we have no kriffing idea how to get her back and an orphaned version of Leia from an actual hell dimension has somehow replaced her?”

Leia felt like she had been punched. They didn’t know how to reverse this? She could be stuck in this universe forever?

Was that what everyone was avoiding telling her? She really was... Kriff, no, anything could happen to the Alliance while she was gone.

If the Rebellion fell, then who could ever avenge Alderaan? Who would deliver justice in her planet’s name?

Unless... unless that other her really was an amazing Jedi somehow. Leia couldn’t imagine how she could be when Leia herself was so terrible at it, but if she was, then maybe she could help turn the tide of the war. Keep everyone safe.

The thought wasn’t as reassuring as Leia had hoped it would be, as the absurd thought of a Jedi-robe wearing version of herself with a terrible haircut bonding with Luke and making out with Han danced through her mind.

Leia really didn’t like that scenario at all.

The ringing in her ears finally dulled enough for her to hear the conversation again. When she refocused on it, Anakin was speaking.

“...Look, I’m trying my best here to keep Luke distracted and all, and I think I’ve succeeded tonight, but -”

“Anakin, please, I really wanted to have a pleasant evening out with Leia.”

“Ok, what does that have to do with us talking right now?”

“She can hear us!”

“She can?”

“Yes Anakin, she’s been standing right next to me the whole time! Now put our son back on, so at least one of the messes you’ve made can be taken care of.”

There was a long span of silence on the other end, before the muffled sound of Anakin handing Luke the comm could be heard, followed by Luke’s voice.

“Mom? What did you say to dad? He seems pissed.”

“Never mind that now Lulu. The cleaning droid should be in the fourth closet down downstairs, ok? Please don’t let your father avoid helping you, and do let me know if he does.”

“Ok mom.”

“I love you sweetheart, and if I don’t get home before you go to bed, I hope you sleep well, and send you a tremendous kiss.” Padmé then made an over exaggerated “mwah” noise to the comm, and Leia could hear Luke laughing on the other end of the comm.
“Love you too, mom. Night.”

Leia waited until Padmé had shut off, and put away, the comm before she started speaking.

“So. No clue how to get your daughter back? I assume that means the reverse is true as well?”

“We’re looking into it.”

“Glad to know the research is happening, but have you had any success with the ‘looking into it’ yet?”

“Leia, I promise you, we are doing everything we possibly can to get you home, and that we actually do have several leads at the moment. Anakin just has a tendency to be… overdramatic sometimes, especially when it comes to the things and people he cares about.”

“No. Stop sidestepping around this, I want an actual answer. Has there been any progress towards figuring out how to get me home?”

Padmé looked away, gathering her thoughts. Leia could only imagine she was trying to cherry-pick the best - in this case most evasive - response to her question. “It depends on how you-”

“Stop it. I know what you are trying to do. Don’t. Give me an actual answer.”

“There are mentions of a similar phenomenon in a number of ancient texts. What those texts mean exactly is a matter of debate, and various theories and explanations are being tested as we speak.”

“Tested how?”

“Leia, I am not a Jedi, I honestly know nothing about how any of that works.”

“Three members of your family belong to the Order, but you still claim total ignorance of the Jedi’s workings?”

“Yes. They won’t let just anyone learn their secrets.”

“They seem eager to teach them to me.”

“That’s different.”

“How?”

“Well, you were always supposed to be one of them.”

Images of the imaginary Jedi-robe wearing version of her flashed through her mind, and she bit back her anger. She was never supposed to be anyone other than herself. All of the people in this dimension wanted to shape her into someone she was not, remake her in the image of her alternative self. She had no interest in that, simply in returning home, and possibly doing so with the secret of how to win the war.

“Was I? Funny how my lack of any desire to be a Jedi was never taken into account.”

“Then why did you agree to-”

“When an ancient Order of legendary magical warriors tell you that they can show you the secret to ending a war, how can you say no?” Leia scoffed. “I intend to pass all I’ve learned on to Luke once I get home. His religion means a lot to him, and if this can help him it will be worth the effort of
Passing it on.”

Padmé didn’t say anything in response, simply lay one of her hands on Leia’s shoulder and gave it a squeeze, and Leia let the topic drop. For the moment in any case. There were a few moments as they began to walk down the trail again that Leia expected Padmé to comment on the earlier conversation, but she never did.

The silence faded into a companionable thing, at first strained and tense, but as time went on increasingly pleasant and easy.

Occasionally Padmé would make consilitory gestures, subtle things that invited Leia back into the relationship they had been building during dinner, yet still allowed her to maintain her distance if needed.

Pointing at a particularly interesting flower or insect, Padmé would comment on what it was she liked most about how they looked, and did not press Leia for any form of response, leaving room for her to join her in the simple appreciation of nature, or continue to fume.

If Leia thought too long or too hard about what Padmé was doing it would fuel her anger, leaving her to wonder just how many arguments with her counterpart had taught the woman this particular diffusion technique. Yet she found it increasingly hard to maintain her upset, relaxing more and more. As they walked Leia found herself asking if this was truly worth ruining the evening over. After all, she had been enjoying herself so much prior to the conversation she had overheard.

She realized she hadn’t wanted to fully let go of her enjoyment of the evening when they reached the transport at the path’s end.

It was surprisingly hard to leave the public trails on the edge of the B’ankora refuge and step back into their transport.

Leia knew she didn’t want to return to the city, to the noise and pollution and constant reminders of the life she had once lived.

A part of her also worried she’d be leaving the understanding and camaraderie she and Padmé had started to build behind when they returned to the chaos and expectations of the city.

The transport did not return them to the restaurant, or to Padmé’s apartment. It set down on a landing pad hovering over the city, and waiting at its side was the sled that had brought them to the restaurant earlier.

“With the night we’re having I am almost afraid to ask where you are taking me for dessert. A walk in the actual B’ankora Refuge is pretty impossible to top.”

“Oh, if I were a gambling woman I’d place my credits on this being your favorite part of the night yet.”

“Would you now? Well, you certainly have me intrigued, that’s for sure.” Leia’s eyes scanned the buildings they were flying past, there was something so familiar about this route.

“All I will say is that we will not be having dessert alone, but will instead be joined by companions.”

Leia wanted to groan. She had actually been enjoying this evening, why would Padmé ruin it by inviting others.

Except… wait.
This route was more than familiar it was…

It was taking them home.

The sled was, without question, bringing the two of them to Cantham house.

Leia’s eyes filled with tears, almost blocking out the familiar buildings that surrounded them as her vision blurred.

Cantham house, where her father’s personal estate on Coruscant was located. Where Leia herself had lived whenever she was on Coruscant.

Thinking about going there was affecting her almost as much as visiting Alderaan had just the other day.

Even better, if they were headed to Cantham house, and were to be met there by a companion who would be joining them for dessert… well, that companion must undoubtedly be Leia’s father.

No, Padmé had said companions, plural. So they would be joined by Leia’s father and… someone else.

She wondered who it could be.

Perhaps she was going to meet the girl who got to be her parents’ daughter in her stead, or her mother might have found a way to sneak off-world or perhaps… there were so many possibilities to guess at. It could be anyone!

As they approached the nearest place to park by the building, Leia scanned the neighboring vehicles, easily ignoring familiar speeders she knew belonged to neighbors who lived in the building, just as she did. Overall she didn’t see any cars that really gave her much by way of a clue about who could be joining them.

She sprinted to the turbo-lift, excited to be returning to her family’s apartment. To see her father again.

She reached the doors of the lift, anxiously pressing the buttons to call it to the parking level several times, and shifting impatiently as she waited for the doors to open. From where she had left them behind, still by the sled, one of the guards called out to her, bringing her back to the moment, reminding her that she was not coming home, as much as it felt as if she was. This was not her apartment, not her family estate.

For a moment she had forgotten where she was, distracted by the prospect of having real Alderaanian desserts produced in Cantham house’s kitchen.

So many recipes had been lost along with her home - a minor loss truly in the face of the enormity of the genocide, but a loss all the same. She knew the droids that worked in this apartment’s kitchen made all of her favorite foods just right, exactly as she liked them.

Tonight she could be served favorites Leia had accepted she would never be able to taste again. Many foods Leia loved were either fully lost, or the only surviving recipe for preparing them came from the wrong region, a slight variation that led to something not quite exactly right to Leia’s taste.

Yet her family’s own droids would prepare dessert in the exact right way, and those familiar tastes were simply waiting for her once the turbo-lift reached the penthouse apartment.
Droids she was certain had been dismantled by the Empire in their effort to get at whatever information was within them. Memory cores removed, and sliced into by the best agents the ISB had on offer.

She was also certain that Cantham house had been looted in efforts to uncover Rebellion secrets. Not that either she or her father would have ever been so careless with them when they lived there, but she knew the Imps wouldn’t have taken chances.

Leia wasn’t fully sure what had happened to the apartment after Alderaan’s destruction. She had sent an agent over to Cantham house once, to report on if there was anything salvageable within. The agent had merely spotted troopers inside and promised to return at a later time. That agent had never had a chance to do so, as the Arrth-Eno incident happened just one week later.

Arrth-Eno Prison had been another thing Leia had managed to kriff up, and another group of people she had gotten killed. After that incident not only had six Rebel sympathising Senators been killed, but so had almost all of their spies on Coruscant.

Now Leia was returning to Cantham house, would be seeing the apartment for herself.

Padmé was probably right - this could very well turn out to be Leia’s favorite part of the evening.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Leia O. returns to Cantham House, Leia S. tries to process what she has done.
Leia had not moved since the battle ended.

She felt nauseous.

Leia’s awareness of her limbs had been replaced with nothing but a tingling sense of heavy weights.

Kriff.

She didn’t even know how many people she had murdered.

How was she supposed to pay her proper respects for the severity of her deeds if she didn’t know basic information like that!

She needed to know each of their names.

If they had families she should contact them, tell them how sorry she was for their loss, apologize for the pain and devastation she had brought to the loved ones they would leave behind.

There was of course no way to ever truly make it right, but she needed, she needed…..

“Leia? Hey, Leia, where are you? You make it through the battle ok?” Luke’s voice cut into her thoughts, distorted through the comms.

*I’m physically fine, if that is what you are asking. Otherwise? I’m not so sure.*


*No I, I’m fine. You want me to come to the cockpit?*

“Yes, please. I told the navicomputer to return to the path you’d calculated before, but I’d feel a lot better if you checked things over.”

*Alright, I’m on my way.*

Her hands shook as she raised them to undo the protective restraints keeping her strapped in to the gunnery seat. Getting the clasp off in her state of exhaustion truly was a struggle. Finally however she got it released, and she slumped forward, sliding off the chair slowly, cautiously letting her feet feel for the ground before letting her weight fall onto them.

Her legs protested the action, suddenly giving out under her, and she grabbed the seat she’d just vacated, clinging to it simply to stay upright.

Ok.
So her body was far more worn out than she’d first estimated.

Kriff, she was going to be sick.

She managed to drag herself back into the ship’s main passageway.

She wasn’t quite sure how she managed to do it, there was a ladder between the gunnery and the rest of the ship, but she did it.

Getting from there to the cockpit was far easier, the walls were all nice and solid, and it was easy to find support when her body did not quite agree with her about staying upright.

When she reached the cockpit, she used the passenger seats to drag herself towards the co-pilot seat, collapsing into it with an exhausted grunt.

Grinning from ear to ear, Luke turned towards her, not a care in the galaxy. “That was some shooting!”

Leia closed her eyes. She found the bright flash of an exploding TIE playing out behind her lids. She opened her eyes with a start, and focused on Luke.

“I uh… hey, how does the Empire recruit their pilots?”

“Huh?”

“Who were those people we were shooting at?”

“Oh. Leia, it’s really best not to dwell on that.”

“I take it I really won’t like the answer to my question then?”

Luke shifted in his seat, his eyes glancing about, resting on her face for just seconds at a time before he’d look away. “Probably not. No.”

She slumped back in her seat, unsure what to do. She had always thought that when the day came that she would have to take a life, her father or Aunt ‘Soka would be there to give her advice and guide her through the proper way to deal with the consequences.

She had always thought that when that day came she wouldn’t have to take too many lives, and no matter what she’d know just how many were lost due to her actions. She had been so wrong, so terribly, impossibly, wrong.

Part of her, a small part but the thoughts came just the same, didn’t care how counterproductive it would be, or how twisted he was… part of her wanted to reach out to Vader simply because she needed her father just then.

Needed him to reassure her, tell her it was all going to be alright, and most of all she just needed to sense his soothing presence, a presence that before she came to this dimension had for her always represented unconditional love and security.

That was a very dangerous line of thought. She knew that. If she opened herself up to Vader while she was in this state… no.

So she focused on the only person she did have, both on this ship and in the entire universe.

“How do you deal with it?”
“Deal with what?” Luke’s eyebrows had shot up, confusion written all across his face.

“Killing enemy soldiers, of course.”

Luke’s eyes grew wide, and an expression Leia had never seen on her brother’s face before flashed across those familiar features, just for a moment before they settled into a look of worry and concern.

“Leia... Leia please don’t tell me you had never been in combat before.”

“Ok. I won’t tell you that, if you tell me how you deal with it.”

“Oh kriff, Leia, why didn’t you say anything?”

“What, I thought I made it clear that I’d only ever used simulators before.”

“Ok, but what about yesterday? When you rescued those refugees? Surly you saw combat then!”

“I watched Sana take out some troopers, sure, but I didn’t kill anyone myself.”


Leia cast out towards him in the Force, wanting, no needing, to be more securely connected to him in that moment. His emotions and thoughts were everywhere, full of half started and half finished fragments tumbling every which way.

As soon as he noticed her presence he pushed back at it, and Leia was soon shoved out of his mind entirely.

They sat side by side in silence after that. Leia reflecting on what she had done and Luke... well he was thinking through whatever he was thinking through.

She sighed, trying once more to take stock of what she did and did not know about this man who both was and was not her twin.

Then she remembered what she had read the other day. About the terrifying planet killing weapon he had destroyed. Destroyed with well over a million sentients on board.

This man seated beside her was no stranger to death. Not like she was.

“Do you ever think about it? What you did?” Leia asked, desperate to know how he lived with himself after killing so many. If he could explain it, if she could understand how, then dealing with the lives she had taken perhaps wouldn’t be so hard.

He leaned back in the pilot’s seat, “You mean the Death Star?” Luke glanced over at her, watched her nod before turning his gaze back out at the blue swirling wonder that was hyperspace. “Yeah, yeah I do. I think about it a lot. All the people who died to make my run even possible. All the people who gave it all in the hopes we could wipe that thing out of the sky forever. And there I was. Never flown a real fighter before. Never had a single kill as a pilot. I turned off the targeting system!” He let out a loud laugh, “can you believe it? Just shut it off! I... I really didn’t understand how serious it was. Just a week before I had been on a farm, drinking milk served to my by my aunt, demanding that my uncle let me go to the Academy so I could train to fly a TIE. No one... no one really explained to me what was going on. What was at stake.”

Leia frowned, confused. Did he not care about the people whose lives he had snuffed out? “What was at stake?”
He blinked at her in confusion. “Wait, how much do you know about the Death Star anyway? I’d think the stakes were kind of obvious.”

“I read about it my first night here,” Leia said, “The reports mentioned something about destroying Alderaan?”

“Alderaan.” He nodded. “Also Jedha City, and Scariff. Who knows where they would have hit next. If a million military personnel had to die to keep countless others safe... to remove something as evil as that from the galaxy. Well anything is worth that.”

Luke turned away from the viewport, the start of a grin teasing the corner of his lips. “I’m sure, with father being from Mos Espa and all, you know we live by a certain rule on Tatooine. If someone pushes us, we’ll push back harder.”

“Way I see it, with just a million on the Death Star, well... that death count has nothing on the two billion residents of Alderaan who were home that day, or all the people in Jedha City, or the brave soldiers the Alliance lost on Scariff’s beaches. Maybe one day I’ll be able to say I pushed them back harder, but for now, well...”

He laughed. It sounded broken. He was in another one of those moods, clearly, like when she had found him eating the cheese. His eyes had that same far away look, that same sparkle, although really that may have just been hyperspace reflected within them.

“I only destroyed one station. One. There is so much more I can do, that I need to do, to honor those who were lost. To do everything I can to make sure there is never another Alderaan. Another Jedha City. Another lost group of brave and devoted soldiers like Rogue One. Hell, I even count the entire fragging Jedi Order among those who need to be avenged. Every innocent who the Empire took out, every soldier like Nakari, well it’s in their name I fight, and I won’t stop fighting until every last stinking Imp is dead.”

He was so serious. He really meant what he was saying, as horrible as it was.

Leia didn’t know what to say, so she said the only thing she could. “Revenge is not the Jedi way.”

“It isn’t? No one ever told me that. How could they, when every single Jedi is dead. Well except for this Yoda guy apparently,” Luke said, and then voice taking on an accusatory tone, “and apparently my father.”

She tried to interject, to protest how he was holding the knowledge that his father was alive against her, but he cut her off before she could.

“Look Leia, I can’t say I really get it. I can’t remember the first time I saw someone die. But you...”

He stopped talking, and made eye contact with her.

His smile was gentle, and kind, and she could feel the space of the cockpit fill with a terrible longing and grief. “You weren’t raised like that. From the sound of it our father made sure you never knew what it was like, working for every drop you drank. That’s good. That’s how it should be.” Luke shook his head. “But I can’t help you with this. I don’t know what you need to hear, don’t know what would help. Death was never a stranger to me,” Luke’s voice shifted slightly, and it was clear he intended his next words to bring some levity, “and not just because I thought I was an orphan my whole life.”

He watched her, waiting for her reaction, so she smiled. It was not heartfelt, just a sad weak thing, but Luke seemed satisfied with the sight of it.
He sobered up, slouching back in his chair. “So I’m sorry Leia. I’m sorry that you feel bad about taking down those Imperial pilots, and I am sorry that it hurts. But they deserved it. I know they did.” He laughed, a terrible contrast to the awful words he was saying. “When I can, I try to give Imps an out, remind them that there is another path they can take, that they can make the right choice instead. They never, ever, hear me,” Luke said, and he shifted in his seat.

“But they didn’t have a chance like that here! We never saw each other, never acknowledged the other’s humanity! It was just ship against ship,” said Leia. She knew how depersonalized and removed it was made things easier, and that was part of what made it all so horrible. Maybe if she had been forced to look those people in the eyes, they would still be alive right now.

“Leia, please, I can say with confidence it was kill or be killed. You did what you had to do. You didn’t have any other choice. Had you not done it, well both of us would be dead, and who would be able to save father from Vader then? If both of us died, and Leia trapped in your world, well… where would we be then? Who’d be able to take that monster out, to give him the fate he deserves?”

Her voice wavered, unable to comprehend what she was hearing. “I meant what I said Luke. Revenge is not the Jedi way.”

Luke snorted. “I’m not afraid. I’ll do whatever I have to, to kill that monster.”

“Yes but that path...” Leia couldn’t hold his gaze, she turned to stare out into hyperspace instead. “That path does nothing but create more suffering. It doesn’t heal. I mean all those people you’ve already killed-”

“Were directly responsible for the deaths of countless others.”

“Not all of them.”

“Well they certainly stood by and watched. Did nothing about it after either. There are certain lines Leia, lines that you can’t just let people cross, and blowing up entire planets? That’s a pretty far over the line.”

“I get that, it’s just…”

“I’m not a monster. I’m aware those people had families, and friends, and whole lives outside of their military service. I get it, I do. But what good will it do for me to beat myself up over what has already happened, when the Empire is still causing so much harm out there? When Vader is still… kriff, I have to focus on Vader. On being ready to confront him, honor my father the best I can. After... after this is over, maybe then I’ll really be able to focus on what I’ve done, on all that implies. But right now? I simply don’t have the time.”

“You don’t have the time? How can you not have the time? What you are saying is wrong, and isn’t how a Jedi acts at all!”

“Yeah, well why hasn’t Ben told me off then? ‘Cause until you showed up he been pretty silent.”

Leia bit her temper back. Every part of her wanted to raise her voice and berate Luke for how ridiculous he was being. He was putting himself in real danger! But she didn’t, mainly because she felt if she did it’d somehow be a victory for him and she didn’t want to give him that. Instead she just grew increasingly defensive, ready and eager to fight for anything that might lend credence to what she knew was right. “I don’t know, maybe he thinks you will be able to work it out for yourself if given space?”

She crossed her arms and sunk further into her seat, glaring at the blue lights outside the viewport.
To her surprise Luke started to laugh.

“Feeling better?” he asked, and Leia could see him turning to watch her out of the corner of her eye.

“What?”

“Life goes on.” Luke shrugged. “You can’t get too stuck on these things. I mean yeah, it’s horrible, but that’s war. There is no such thing as a good decision in battle Leia, just ones that lead to your survival. After though… well you can still feel all the emotions you felt before, not just pain and sorrow. Can still feel morally superior even.”

“Wait you were…. You were trying to piss me off?”

“Partially. It’s not like I said anything untrue, but yeah.”

Oh. Ok, so she still would need to talk to Master Yoda about where Luke’s head was at, but perhaps he wasn’t too committed to the bad mindset he had fallen into.

“Look,” Luke said, voice softening into a more compassionate tone, “if Vader had only killed my father, or captured him, or whatever the story is there, I wouldn’t be so set on taking him out. It isn’t about some sort of personal grudge, it’s far bigger than that.”

“Cause he’s a Sith, right,” Leia didn’t want to hear this. Did not not want to know the justifications Luke had for wishing his father dead. At least not now. Once they reached Dagobah she’d be able to rely on Master Yoda to argue her point with her, and hopefully get through to Luke.

Luke snorted. “Do you know what Vader said to me, the first time I confronted him face to face?”

“Obviously not. I only know what you’ve already told me, and I don’t think that came up,” she managed to keep the curiosity out of her tone. He and Vader had encountered one another directly, and yet Luke remained unaware of who Vader was? He hadn’t told him? That really didn’t sound like the Sith she kept dealing with.

“I told him that he had killed my father, and in response he admitted he had killed too many fathers to count. Which I knew, I guess. I mean Leia thinks the death of every single Alderaanian rests on his shoulders, so clearly yeah - that’s a lot of dads - but… it’s easy to minimize pain on a scale that large, take out two billion and not even notice. Obviously as you’ve pointed out I have my own much smaller experience with just a million to compare to. But to not even be able to understand the pain he has caused on an individual level? To look me in the eye and make it clear my suffering, my life, my father meant nothing to him, simply because it was not his own?” Luke didn’t finish his thought, lapsing into silence as he gazed out the viewport instead.

Leia’s mouth felt incredibly dry, and her voice shook as she spoke. “He was responsible for Alderaan?”

Luke turned back to her, frowning. “Leia doesn’t talk much about what happened, but he was there, and she hasn’t made a secret of how she feels about him.”

Genocide.

Straight up genocide.

Two billion people.

Of the two people in this dimension Leia loved, one had killed more than two billion people, and the
other over a million.

Far more frightening to contemplate, now that she knew Luke’s attitude towards death, how many people had her counterpart murdered?

Just what was Leia actually capable of?

The closer the turbolift got to Leia’s apartment, the louder her heart pounded.

Part of Leia wanted nothing more than to bolt down the hall as soon as the doors opened, run into the apartments where she had spent so much of her youth, find out exactly where her father was, and throw herself right into his arms. Another part of her, the side that was somehow winning her internal war, was terrified and wished to move as slow as possible, dreading what may happen once she went inside.

Unlike her mother, her father hadn’t seemed to feel an immediate connection with her the last time she had encountered him in this timeline. What if her need for his affection and approval was not met? Could she handle that, if he rejected a display of her love?

Plus, while the palace back home had been exactly as Leia remembered it, at no point in her visit had she entered any of the more private quarters where her family actually lived.

What would it be like, to enter a place where she had once lived and find all evidence of her presence had been replaced with that of another? No holos of her, no old familiar stains and marks, no personal effects.

Even as she dwelled on how it would hurt, to walk into an apartment absent of any evidence of her existence, to look into her father’s eyes and know she was not the most special being in the galaxy to him… well Padmé was right. There was really nowhere she’d rather be. No other location on Coruscant could ever compare to this one.

Her concerns crowded into the lift with her and Padmé, making the confined space seem even smaller.

She drew back, just slightly, knocking into Padmé as she did. Padmé reached out, giving her shoulder a small squeeze. She left her hand resting there for the rest of their ride. Leia didn’t say anything, but she appreciated the gesture, the offer of comfort.

When they stepped off the turbolift and began to walk down the hall, Padmé let that hand drop from Leia’s shoulder, folding it around Leia’s hand instead. She gave it a reassuring squeeze, while she raised her other hand to knock on the apartment’s door.

It slid open almost instantly, and there in the entryway stood Leia’s father, grin lighting up his face.

“Padmé! Leia! Please, come in! There is dessert and tea and caf waiting for us inside, so please do come in!”

He and Padmé had a brief hug hello, and she disappeared past him, into Leia’s home. His focus then turned to Leia who was standing on the landing outside, contemplating how the bones in her legs had been replaced with jelly.

He wrapped her in a hug, holding her in his arms longer than one would an acquaintance. “Welcome home Leia,” he said, and she fought to keep back her tears.
They broke apart, him gesturing for her to go inside, and she beamed her most delighted smile at him before finally stepping into the familiar apartment.

It looked… strangely identical to how she had left it, last time she was here. Three or four days before the Battle of Scariff? Had it been before Jedha City was destroyed, or after? She really was no longer sure, the exact timeline of the events around when everything had gone so wrong were fuzzy in her memories. A jumble of terror and desperation interspersed with life changing moments she couldn’t forget no matter how hard she tried.

It was incredible how little had changed in this place, between this dimension and her own.

Same impressive view through the picture windows, same balcony where her father preferred to have his morning caf, the same couch and chairs against the wall, where she could see a delightful spread of cakes and jellies waiting on the caf table.

She set off towards them, and the fourth occupant of the space stood from her seat and turned to greet both Padmé and Leia.

“Padmé! There you are! Bail has been uncharacteristically tight lipped about why he wanted me to return to Coruscant immediately, apparently just so I could join the two of you for dessert. Hopefully now that you are here the great mystery can finally be solved.” Mon smiled wide, before her face gave way to surprise as she caught sight of Leia. “Oh, is that Leia? What a surprise! Bail, you didn’t say that Padmé’s daughter would be joining us.”

Seeing this version of Mon was incredible.

She looked so carefree. More relaxed than Leia could have ever imagined.

This was the woman who bore the responsibility of running the entire Alliance. Yet here she only had the leadership of some undoubtedly minor subcommittees to worry about.

She had only just met her, and already Leia knew she would give so much just to be able to see the Mon Mothma of her world spend even a single hour this at ease. Her smile was so bright!

Behind her, Leia’s father rumbled his familiar laugh and Leia’s heart hitched with joy. “I think, Mon, that you’ll find that is far from the only surprise you will be having.”

“What is that supposed to mean? We aren’t going to talk about work, are we?” Mon said, as if the idea was ridiculous. “Not with Leia here. She’d be so terribly bored!”

“Less so than you might think,” Padmé responded, just before she kissed Mon’s cheek in greeting.

“Oh? Have you finally discovered the curse that is caring about politics, Leia?” Mon’s eyes twinkled as she asked the question.

She smiled, and nodded, as she walked toward the seating area. Leia was not really sure how to act around this Mon, and did not want to start things off with her on the wrong foot by being overly familiar.

With the introduction of every new person who Leia knew in her own universe, there was an unusual challenge: trying to figure out what would and would not be appropriate behavior.

It was hard, because every part of her screamed that Padmé was the only stranger in the room.

Her father and Mon were two of the people she was closest to, and she wanted to act suitably relaxed
around them.

How many meetings with the two of them had Leia attended in this very room?

Yet somehow Padmé was the one who knew her best, and both Mon and her father were unknown elements.

The cushions on her favorite spot of the couch were firmer than she recalled them being, and Leia could not decide if she liked them better in this plumped up state than how they were at home.

She found that the slight differences she did notice did not bother her as much as it would say in her family’s library, because unlike the royal palace Cantham house still existed in her world. Not that she expected she would ever return to this place, even after the Empire inevitably fell.

She had no affection for this city, and knew the other former politicians in the Alliance’s ranks felt the same. There was no way this planet could ever be the capital of the Republic they hoped to build. The Alliance didn’t even have any agents left in the city, not since the Arrth-Eno mission had gone south!

...probably best not to think about that total failure on Leia’s part, what with the number of agents and friends of Leia’s from the Senate and innocent bystanders alike who had died. She had been reckless planning and approving that opp, and the Alliance had paid a heavy price. Not to mention of course the later Sunspot prison incident that had occurred due to her mistake.

As she had expected, many of the desserts spread out before her were old favorites she had thought she would never be able to enjoy again, the fruits extinct, or recipes lost. It took some self control on her part, but she managed to keep herself from crying over something as benign as a piece of fruit.

Leia tucked her feet up under her, grabbed one of the plates stacked on the table and piled a slice of cake and a scoop of one of the jellies onto it, and hoped the familiar sweet foods would help distract her from her thoughts.

If nothing else they would give her something to do with her hands, and provide a wonderful excuse for not speaking if things got awkward.

Leia’s father joined her on the couch, reclining comfortably in his usual seat. He smiled at her for moment, before turning to take in all three of his companions. “Well, now that everyone is here, I suppose we should begin.”

“Begin what? Is it too much to ask why we are having this meeting?” Mon asked, “I was hoping to spend a few more days in Hana City before returning to Coruscant, but you made things sound dire on the holo.”

Padmé and Leia’s father exchanged looks that spoke volumes, before Padmé made eye contact with Leia, seeking her permission. Leia nodded, grateful to pass the task of explaining who she was off to someone else.

“Mon, what I am about to tell you is going to sound fantastical, but it is somehow real. There is not a shred of doubt in my mind that as unbelievable as this is, it is really happening.”

“That has to be the most over-dramatic thing you’ve ever said, Padmé,” Mon laughed, “given the line of work we are in, well, that is really saying something.”

Leia’s father cut in, “It’s no exaggeration Mon. Things have taken quite the turn for the strange and impossible, yet somehow it is all real. You have my word on this as well.”
“Well, you both seem set on the idea that I won’t believe you,” Mon said, “I suppose I have your word on this as well Leia? Are you here to let me know that the Jedi Order backs up whatever it is I am about to be told?”

Leia smiled at her mentor, part of her relishing knowing more than her for a change. There were days when it felt like Mon knew everything there was worth knowing. “Actually, I am not a Jedi. The Order does believe this, but I can not speak for them.”

“You left the Order? Why?”

“Mon, will you let us explain?” The eyeroll was audible in Padmé’s voice.

“Sorry. It isn’t every day I am told to rush here just to eat cake and jellies with two of my colleagues.” Mon raised her plate, as if the half eaten pastry on it was an explanation in and of itself. “Even rarer that we are joined by the daughter of the Chancellor - who apparently is no longer a Jedi?”

“Oh, my daughter is still a Jedi,” Padmé said.

“I don’t know if you’ve heard Padmé, but she just said she isn’t,” Mon helpfully countered.

“That is not my daughter.” Padmé smiled apologetically at Leia as she said the words, as if she expected them to sting. They didn’t, they were simply fact.

“Oh?” Mon was clearly taking this as a massive joke. “Then whose daughter is she then?”

The response was firm and sure, “Mine, actually.”

Leia’s heart sang, hearing her father claim her as his own.

“What?” Mon choked the word out between laughter.

Leia decided to try and clarify the situation, to get Mon to understand they were not joking. “I’ve travelled here from another timeline. Switched places with my counterpart from this one.”

“Another timeline?” Mon said, “what are we all here for, really? Obviously not just for these jokes.”

“I think we already established how real this situation is,” said Leia’s father, voice low and serious.

“Fine, you want me to humor this nonsense? How do you wind up with a timeline where Leia is your daughter, Bail, and not Padmé’s?” Leia would not have had to known Mon as well as she did to tell the woman was no longer amused. “It simply makes no sense.”

“Biologically speaking I am Padmé’s child,” said Leia, her every instinct demanding she make Mon approve of her story. A lifetime of viewing Mon as one of her most cherished idols had ingrained those impulses deep. “However I was adopted by the House of Organa as a newborn, which is how I came to be his daughter.”

“But why would such an adoption be necessary?”

“Unfortunately it seems that I died in childbirth. Or was I assassinated? I don’t think we’ve fully worked that one out.” Padmé held a hand up, stopping Mon from speaking until she finished. “As far as tragedies that occured in her universe go, it is truly the least important or devastating event that transpired.”

Mon looked absolutely scandalized. “How can you speak so casually of your own demise?”
“I have to agree with Padmé on this. Everything I’ve been told about the other universe causes me to reinvent my very understanding of the word horrifying.”

“You… you really believe this, don’t you? All of three of you!” Mon glanced about the room, eyes wide. She shook her head, eyes narrowing, “suppose this is all true, and you are not just pulling my leg, why tell me?”

Bail shrugged. “Yours is an important voice to be heard on the topics we are gathering to discuss.”

“Which are?” Leia asked.

Padmé turned towards her with a smile. “The political situation here and what advice you could give us as well as, well, what you should do when you return home.”

Oh, that… that was a truly wonderful idea!

That explanation was not good enough for Mon, apparently. “I’m a researcher! That’s the most valued skill I bring to our coalition! How could I have an important voice on matters I know nothing about?” She snorted, “not that any of this could possibly be real. Now I know you did not call me back here just for a laugh. Can we please abandon this nonsense and move on to the real cause for our meeting?”

“Is there any way I can convince you of the truth of my story?” Leia asked, upset that Mon still doubted her.

Mon arched an eyebrow at Leia, “If what you are saying is true, then how could you be so unsure of how Padmé died? And why do all three of you seem to think things are so dire?”

“Because Palpatine won in her world Mon. He won and transformed her universe into a dictatorship and Leia wishes to restore democracy once more,” Padmé said.

“That answers why she needs our help, but I still fail to understand how an event as remarkable as your death could be a mystery. It isn’t as if you weren’t a public figure when she was born. There would have been media coverage of your death, coverage I have no doubt your child would have been made aware of.”

Leia shifted in her seat, uncomfortable, glancing about the room to… this room. This room where maybe, had their timelines diverged later than she had at first thought, maybe….. “Did you ever form the Delegation of 2,000?”

“What?”

“The Chantham House meetings. Did they ever happen in this dimension?”

The three older politicians gave one another confused looks, before Leia’s father nodded.

“Well the day before Senator Amidala’s death, the day after the Empire formed, sixty three Senators who had joined the Delegation of 2,000 were arrested on charges of colluding with the Jedi against the Emperor.” Leia gave a tight lipped smile. “Sixty three senators, including both Mon Mothma and my father, of course.”


Bail asked a question at the same time as Mon, “we were in jail when Padmé died?”
“What? No! No, both of you were released later that same day. You both swore unwavering loyalty to the Emperor, Palpatine,” Leia said, turning to Mon in the hopes that explained that for her, and satisfied with her brief nod Leia continued. “They let you go after you pledged you would never betray him again,” Leia laughed, “I am only bringing it up to highlight just how much was happening at that time. There was widespread panic and confusion here on Coruscant, and it was easy for the death of someone as famous as Padmé Amidala to get lost in it all.”

Leia gave Padmé a comforting smile before continuing to speak of her death. “Not knowing the late Senator Amidala was my biological parent, I was told throughout my life that my birth mother died in childbirth, and concurrently that Amidala had been assassinated by Palpatine as an extension of the arrests taking place in the Senate. So while I do not doubt that my father would have known what actually happened, I personally have no way of knowing how she died.”

Padmé was staring at her, looking somewhat horrified. “Sixty three Senators, imprisoned? For… for what we wrote? We came that close to… to being silenced on such a massive scale?”

Leia blinked, reminded again of how different her understanding of politics was after a lifetime of Imperial rule. She’d read the Delegation of 2000’s proclamation, had found it unbelievably brave and bold. It somehow was only now occurring to her that at the time it was written it may have seemed less provocative than it did in her own time. No wait, that couldn’t be right. Their first meeting had been only one month before the formation of the Empire. Surely they were all aware of what they were on the cusp of. Could Padmé simply have forgotten what the climate had been like at that time?

“Senators are imprisoned all the time in my universe. It’s a common side effect of having a dissenting opinion,” Leia said, hoping they would all understand why it was so vital the Empire be destroyed. “Hell, after the Senate was shut down a few months ago, everyone who was left on Coruscant got taken to Arrth-Eno Prison together.”

“How can you be comfortable with this? Suggesting a criminal investigation be opened into a fellow politician is always a step too far,” Mon said, “it should not be even possible to talk so casually of actual arrests!”

Leia did not know what to say to that. She agreed, she really did, and she wished she could have grown up in a world where it was possible to feel such outrage over something she had always known as a common political tactic.

It really would be impossible to talk to these people about the Empire, if they would get this offended every time she described even the slightest undemocratic action.

The Empire was not a democracy. That was the very problem they were trying to solve.

“I want to bring this back to two things you said earlier,” Mon said, “the first was you speaking of Bail in the past tense, and the other… well, why would Senators working alongside the Jedi be considered a crime?”

Leia snorted, amused by how impossible the criminalization of the Jedi religion seemed to this version of Mon. “Well, because the Jedi were labeled traitors to the Republic, secret Separatist operatives no less, and for that crime each and every one of them was hunted down and destroyed.”

“Yet you are still alive,” Mon countered.

“I am no Jedi,” Leia responded.

Mon nodded, slightly. “Alright. So you are not a Jedi. You claim to be a politician instead?”
“Yes. I was the Junior Senator from Alderaan for three years prior to the dissolution of the Senate.”

Padmé placed her cup of caf down on the table, and looked up with interest. “You’ve mentioned that several times before, and I must ask, what exactly happened?”

Leia shrugged. “If you mean what they exactly did with the Senators who were on Coruscant and at work when they decided to disband it, I was imprisoned when it happened, so I only heard about it second hand from my colleagues later. For the most part they were taken to prison, and all legislative powers have come to rest solely in the hands of the government’s executive branch.”

Bail let out that familiar and so-missed laugh of his, shaking his head as he did. “We’ve also spent years trying to find the most efficient means of dealing with the Jedi. I just never would have thought even Palpatine would take such extreme measures towards that end goal. Talk about tossing the patient out with the bacta.”

Padmé laughed as well. “It certainly does show a complete lack of understanding of complexity and nuance on the part of whoever is generating their propaganda. Rather than reform systems, just get rid of them entirely! If it doesn’t work exactly as you like why bother with them at all!”

“I suppose that is in part where many who should have known better saw the appeal in this other world of yours. Take for example the Jedi - instead of having to go through each line of code related to them and bring it into open senatorial debate, only to then have to find ways to get the Jedi to actually agree to implement your reforms - you just take the Jedi out the equation and there is no longer any issue to engage with. It’s simple, fast, and effective,” Mon said, and Leia was was so pleased Mon believed that she came from another universe, she didn’t examine her words too closely.

The rest of their meeting was focused on political matters within the universe they were in, familiarizing Leia with the key players and arguments of several bills and measures.

It was so familiar. So akin to how she had spent her teen years. Of course Padmé was a new element to it all, but the team made up of Leia, her father, and Mon had often had a fourth person join them for their meetings. That addition just tended to be the likes of Hendri Underholt, Tynnra Pamlo, Nower Jebel, or Vasp Vaspar. Having Padmé there instead was both like and fully unlike their additions to the flow of conversation.

She was a dominant force, in control and in charge. More than anything else Leia had witnessed, it was Padmé’s ability to take command of this room that earned her Leia’s respect. After all, everyone in that room was a strong-minded leader in their own right, and to have earned the trust of the likes of Mon and Leia’s father in this manner… it spoke volumes about Padmé’s own leadership abilities and competence in her role.

It was clear she had become Chancellor due to genuine skill. She had the ability to hear and improve the suggestions of her fellows, and to redirect conversations when they began to divert from their topic of focus. Being able to ensure a meeting flowed properly without talking over the others present was a difficult skill to master, Force knew Leia had yet to do so, yet Padmé managed to make it look easy.

They were reviewing measures currently before the Senate, catching Leia up with how systems functioned in the Galactic Republic, when a wave of exhaustion hit Leia, causing her to yawn.

That yawn drew all four politicians out of their conversation.

“Perhaps it would be best if we retired for the night, and met again sometime soon,” Mon suggested.
Padmé nodded. “That sounds like a good idea. I think we’ve made some real progress reviewing the situation here, and next meeting can probably leap right into deciding what would be the best steps to address the situation moving forward, as well as get started on really getting to know the political landscape of Leia’s world.”

Leia’s father stood, a wide grin on his face. “My friends, let me see you out then. Thank you as always for your visit.” Then to Leia’s surprise he turned towards her, gesturing with one arm to the hall she knew led to the apartment’s living space. “Leia, if you would like to spend the night here, I’ve had one of the guest quarters prepared for you. You are welcome to it for however long you find yourself in this dimension.”

What?

That… that sounded almost too good to be true!

She turned to Padmé, sure that if there was a reason she couldn’t accept the offer she would know it. If she could, there was nothing that would stop her from staying here and spending the night in her own home.

Grinning, Padmé moved from her seat, placing one of her hand’s on Leia’s shoulder as she drew near to her spot on the couch. “I don’t need to tell you that the staff here is all loyal to the House of Organa and that house alone. They are no more likely to leak the details of the comings and goings from this apartment to the press as they are to commit any other act of treason against their ruling family. That said, if you are not comfortable here, staying in an apartment that is both familiar and not all at once, just say the word and I will see you to the place where you would be happiest spending the night.”

Leia nodded, and then seized by a sudden impulse, drew Padmé into a hug. “Thank you,” she said, “thank you so much for arranging all of this for me. It really means a lot.”

She could feel Padmé’s head move as they hugged, her arms tighten capturing Leia in her embrace. “I am so glad to see you happy Leia. Truly that is all I desire.”

“I am… well if nothing else, I am pleased this catastrophe has allowed me to get to know you. It wasn’t something I ever… I…” Leia fell silent, unable to grasp the words that would best convey what she felt just then.

One of Padmé’s hands came to rest on Leia’s check, and there were tears beginning to gather in her eye. “I am so happy to see how much you love the Organas. How devoted to them you are. It means that even without Ani and I there, you knew love, and you knew joy. That alone alevs so many of my fears and worries when I think about the world you came from. Far too much that you have told me about that life is a nightmare no parent would ever wish upon their child, but in this area I can rest easy knowing you were not without proper care and support. I am glad you feel safe here with Bail, that he raised you so well.”

Leia covered Padmé’s hand with one of her own, and her vision blurred as a strange dizzying blend of emotions hit her suddenly. She laughed through the tears, and nodded her head. “Thank you for understanding that they are my parents. For seeing who it is I actually am. I… I look forward to speaking with you more before I find my way home, and for now… for now I hope you have a good night… Mother.”

A dazzling smile bloomed on Padmé’s face as she drew Leia into another hug. “I hope you sleep well Leia, and would very much like it if we talked more tomorrow. Perhaps the four of us can convene again tomorrow at noon, for a lunch meeting?”
Leia nodded, and then took a step back drawing away from Padmé’s arms. Now that she had crossed this threshold, had acknowledged this familiar stranger as a part of herself, she felt suddenly shy. Unsure of how to act.

She glanced around the room, then focused on Mon, standing a few paces removed from where Padmé and Bail had gathered around Leia. They exchanged smiles and nods, and Leia hoped with future meetings assured she could get to know this version of the woman she admired above all others.

Her father moved towards the lift, and the two other politicians followed after him. Leia watched them go, standing there until the lift had descended down and they were no longer in sight.

Then she turned and headed into the living space of the apartment, heartened by how familiar and right everything seemed.

Leia Organa had come home to Chantham House at long last.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Acceptance, arrivals, bonding and sleep at last.

This chapter referenced the events of the Star Wars comics in several places.
Including:
Vader's comment about having killed many fathers is from the very start of the main comic series when Luke encounters Vader on Cymoon 1.

The story of what happened to the Senators who were on Coruscant when the Senate was dissolved comes from Star Wars Annual #1, The Rebel Jail arc, and the The Rebel Files in universe guide.

The mention of Tatooine culture is lifted almost directly from The Storms of Crait comic.

The Rebel Files is also where the arrests on the first day after Empire day - the day before Padmé's death - come from.

To everyone marching, everyone doing anything at all to take a stand against gun violence: You are a true hero.

Together we can make this change happen. If we have to vote out every single NRA sponsored politician in this country to make it happen, then so be it.

Just a little more than ten years before I started college, a shooter opened fire on what would become my college campus. Almost every day of my college education someone mentioned what had happened there, years in the past. The people who died, the shooter who did it, their specters hung over us all.
I am so fortunate that is my closest connection to these tragedies. Spending each alumni event with the survivors, dealing with the long term legacy of this pain.

For far too long we have let this nightmare continue. When Wayne Lo opened fire at my school in 1992? That should have been the end of it.

Look, we've hit a tipping point, one made from the corpses of bright futures robbed senselessly. It's more than time. It's long past time.

Everyone doing anything at all to stop this violence, to keep it from happening again and again and again... I mean it. You are a hero.
Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

I am eternally in debt to Sethnakht for all the amazing work that goes into betaing this story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Leia stood in front of a door.

She knew what waited for her in the room on the other side would upset her. No matter what was in it would be wrong in every way.

Opening that door could bring her nothing but pain.

Yet part of her was filled with curiosity and needed to know.

Her hand hovered by the door’s controls - she was just as unable to turn away and leave this room as she was to simply press the button that would open the door.

She had to do something.

Anything.

Who knew how long she would have to soak up the atmosphere of this apartment, how long before she returned to her world, where it was deep in Imperial held territory and undoubtedly had been ransacked.

Yet she was wasting her precious time standing here, doing nothing.

Finally with an internal chastisement and a roll of her eyes Leia pressed down on the controls, and with an all too familiar hiss the door slid aside.

The room beyond it was… well honestly Leia hadn’t known what she was expecting.

It certainly wasn’t what she would have found in her own world, that was for sure.

All evidence of this being her own bedroom had been replaced with signs of another Princess, one Leia had never met.

Leia stepped into the room that should have been her own, giving the wooden canopied bed against one wall a suspicious glance. Her own style sense had always trended towards the utilitarian, her furniture modern and sleek, her possessions sparse and easy to keep track of. She knew she had the tendency, when she accumulated more things, to let them get disorganized and jumbled, and so she liked to remove that possibility by keeping her living spaces as minimal as she could.

Her tower bedroom in the royal palace had contained little more than her earned trophies and medals, and the invaluable keepsake box full of the items that held true deep meaning to her. Yes, her furniture there had been carved from priceless Glee Anselm hardwood inlaid with pure gold and silver, but that was less a matter of personal preference and more because it made no sense letting
grandiose antiques waste away with disuse.

In contrast the furnishings of her bedroom at Chantham House had always been plain and white, with scattered datapads heaped about, each one keyed to different bills and texts she needed to reference in her work.

The owner of this room clearly had a very different relationship with her space. Almost all the furniture had an ornate touch, with painted flowers and animals native to Alderaan prominently displayed. The other Princess was certainly a fan of color, the different fabrics draped through the room brighter and more jarring than Amilyn’s winter clothes when she and Leia had first met.

There were also a number of holos sitting on the other Princess’ desk.

Leia was tempted to turn them on, to see just how much of her life this girl had stolen. What would she find if she did, she wondered. She’d undoubtedly be with Leia’s family in most of them, there was no question of that, but beyond that?

What if there were images of this other Princess with Kier, happy and in love. Part of Leia desperately hoped that was the case, that part of her wanted her first boyfriend to be living his life to its very fullest here in this world where he had not had to die so tragically young.

She did not touch any of the holos, turning and exiting the room instead.

Her father was standing in the hall when she left the room. How long had she been standing in front of that door, unable to make up her mind about going inside, for him to have had the time to return from seeing their guests out?

“If you want, I can pretend you merely got confused on your way to your guest quarters,” he said, one eyebrow raised and a slight smile tugging at his lips.

Leia blushed, glancing behind her at the other Princess’ bedroom.

“If there is anything you did not learn about my daughter from poking through her belongings, you need only ask,” Bail said, and Leia was surprised that he did not sound disappointed or upset. Rather there was a hint of laughter creeping into his voice.

She nodded, and then before she could stop herself she blurted out, “Kier Domadi. I don’t suppose you… well… could you tell me how he is?”

“Domadi?” Bail asked, blinking at her, “Ah yes, he was in the Apprentice Legislator a few years back with my daughter, wasn’t he? I believe he’s at Archipelago University, studying the History of the Clone Wars and the role Alderaan played in them.”

Pure joy bubbled within her. “That makes sense, he always was obsessed with the Clone Wars. Did reenactments and everything.”

“Reenactments?”

“Yes,” Leia laughed, “he liked to pretend he was a snorkletrooper.”

“I take it that the two of you were close?”

“We were dating right up until his death.”

Bail’s expression softened, and Leia knew he had questions he was not asking and assumptions he
was making. Well let him assume what he would. If Kier was still alive she would rather it be believed he had died in Alderaan’s explosion, then known he had died betraying them years before the end.

Betrayed them in the name of a warning that had turned prophetic. House Organa’s connection to the Rebellion had spelled Alderaan’s doom. He had been right to fear it.

“I take it from your lack of familiarity with him that he and your daughter never-”

Leia did not get to finish her question, as her father’s booming laugh cut her off. She did not mind. She loved listening to him laugh.

“I’m sorry to laugh at your question, but my daughter has been in a rather serious relationship with an entirely different individual for a number of years now. I am sure she and Domandi became friends when they worked together in the Apprentice Legislator, but you need not worry, it never developed past that, not on her end in any case.”

Leia nodded, feeling somewhat relieved. It was nice to know that this stranger living her life was not another her. That despite sharing homes and parents and roles and duties, they were distinct individuals with separate lives and loves.

There was a part of her that still did not want to know too much about this unknown person living her life, but she felt more at ease with the idea of her parents raising this Princess who loved bright colors and painted animals and embellished fancy furniture. She was not stealing Leia’s life, she was living one all her own.

It made Leia feel better about the woman who wore her face. The one who was in her world, doing who knows what. After all, she had even less reason to be similar to Leia than this Princess did. Perhaps she was not a better version of Leia, one better for the people back home, but rather simply a different person outright - no better or worse, just not Leia herself.

Bail gestured towards where Leia knew the guest quarters would be found. “May I show you to your rooms, Your Highness?” he asked with an overly exaggerated bow, and Leia could not help but laugh. The apartment had always seemed terribly small to Leia, there was just the office area that doubled as the living space, with three bedrooms coming off of that main area - Leia’s room (now this other Princess’), her parents’, and the guest quarters she would occupy. There was no way for her to get lost on her way there, as her father well knew.

She returned his bow as her laughter died down. “Why thank you Viceroy, the offer is quite appreciated.”

They beamed at one another, and Leia’s heart felt so full. Yes, the look in his eye was not quite right, but she could let those worries go when she was the focus of that smile.

The worry that she may never return home, the headache that was dealing with her blood relatives, her fears over what may be happening to the Rebellion in her absence, all of it was worth it just to be here now experiencing this. All the evils she had ever withstood seemed so small when she got to see her father smile and hear him laugh.

The private royal apartments in the palace above Aldera City had been so full of laughter when Leia was young. Warmth and love had suffused the space, and she had almost felt they were tangible features of her home. But that had been before the Rebellion had started to consume her parents, stealing their attention away from their daughter until she had almost feared they had forgotten her.
How long had it been since she had seen her father like this, laughing and carefree?

*Years.* It had been far too many years.

This was what the Empire had taken from her. What she could never win back.

She would not waste this chance, however brief she ultimately hoped it may be, to bask in her father’s company.

He offered her his arm and she threaded hers through his, letting him lead her down the hall and to the guest room she was to stay in.

The room’s plain appearance was comforting, the modern Alderaanian decorating precisely to her taste. She moved towards the bed, pressing the mattress slightly to test the firmness, and had to constrain tears.

For months she had been sleeping on pallet beds in bases interspersed with bunks onboard ships. She had after a lifetime of the most expensive mattresses money could buy done her best to adjust to those conditions, nonetheless she found sleep elusive.

She wasn’t sure how much of that was due to the quality of her beds as opposed to the nightmares she suffered from, but the end result was the same.

But this? This bed? It was perfect in every way.

She would sleep well tonight, surrounded by the comforts of home.

There was a sound behind her, and she turned to find her father standing by the windows, fiddling with the control pad on the wall.

“Are you are familiar with how to work the shutters? We had a new system put in that is just *slightly* different from the old one and-”

She cut him off with an overly fond roll of her eyes, not even thinking of the words as they left her mouth. “Yes dad, I do know the shutters work.”

He blinked at her, and as she geared up to apologize, remorse and embarrassment flooding her system, he grinned.

“It’s always so bright on this planet at night, isn’t it?” Bail asked.

“It’s too bright on most planets at night,” Leia said, glaring at the windows as if the lights beyond them had personally offended her. She regretting taking her eyes off him as soon as she did, the cityscape nowhere near as welcome a sight as he was. She wanted to savor every moment with him, revel in his patience and forgiveness. Yet actions such as these were necessary. She did not want to put him off with the intensity of her feelings, with her need to gain her father’s approval and maintain it.

He laughed, “yes, that is quite true.”

“I’ll never understand how so many find the sight of bright satellites in the sky to be reassuring,” Leia said. “Moonlight does nothing but dim the light of the stars. It’s just so *wrong.* Night should be made of void and stars and nothing more.”

Bail glanced out the windows, up towards the sky where Coruscant’s four moons hung. “What gets
me is tides. No matter how many planets I visit that have them, I can never truly wrap my brain around the concept.”

She and her father had discussed this many times, ever since she was little. Somehow, Leia had never had trouble understanding tides. There was something in their nature that spoke to a place deep within her.

As her father spoke she took in the sight of him, framed by one of Coruscant’s moons in the night sky behind him, and for a moment she was pulled into the memory of the most frequent nightmare that plagued her sleep.

In it her parents stood together on a palace balcony, her mother held tight in her father’s arms. Behind them a moon hung in the sky, eclipsing the sun, the sight of it so endlessly sickeningly wrong.

The world around them shook and pulled apart and literally exploded, and then she heard them speak, just four words between them, two each, her parents' last.

“She lives,” and “I know,” and then Leia would wake in a cold sweat, left to wonder why her subconscious had constructed what it had and forced her to experience it over and over again.

She snapped back to the present, to the sight of her father with a moon shining brightly behind him, and swallowed down the sudden wave of grief.

He was smiling. “But enough about how Alderaan’s nights are ideal,” he said, “you’ve had a long day, and another early start tomorrow. You need your rest.”

He finally figured out the shutter controls, and they lowered with a whirr, blocking out the jarring light from outside the room.

Bail walked towards the wardrobe, and opened it to show both pajamas and exercise clothes within. “Padmé sent over some clothes for you to wear, both tonight and tomorrow when you return to the Temple for your training.”

Nodding, Leia watched him as he crossed the room, drawing close to where she stood. Then he placed his hands on her shoulders, and leaned down to give her forehead a gentle kiss. The conflicting swirl of joy and sorrow almost tore her heart apart.

“Goodnight Leia,” he said, voice soft and low. “I look forward to chatting with you more in the future, but for now, you should sleep.”

He left her then, in the room that was so familiar and entirely new.

She slept uninterrupted by bad dreams that night, no bursts of sleep interspersed with her sitting up and reviewing plans, just solid rest and soothing dreams.

For all that she was trapped in an impossible situation that she hated, she had to admit that not everything about this world was awful.

They had lapsed into an almost comfortable silence before deciding to try and get some sleep.

Luke insisted on them sharing a cabin, on neither of them sleeping in Sana’s quarters, but instead each taking a bunk in the room where Leia had been trying to meditate earlier.
She was tired, and not really thinking, so when Luke started to make motions towards the top bunk she reacted as she would with her own brother, grabbing one of his legs and throwing him down and off the bed as she hoisted herself up in his place.

“Hey! What was that for?” Luke cried as he hit the ground, and Leia could not help but laugh at the sight of him crumpled down there, eyes wide and mouth twisted into a pout.

“I wanted the top bunk,” she responded with a shrug.

“Well why didn’t you just say so?” Luke whined (Leia knew that whine well, it was exactly how her brother’s voice sounded when he tattled to their parents). “Why are you so violent all the time?”

Luke had literally just finished justifying murdering people, but she was the violent one? Simply because she was actually accustomed to having a sibling? Ok. Sure. Whatever.

Now that she thought about it, she didn’t know too much about this Luke’s relationship with his Leia. What their dynamic with each other was actually like.

What an odd thought, meeting her own twin brother for the first time as an adult, forging a relationship with him without a lifetime of history between them.

Wait… “Hey, didn’t you say yesterday that your girlfriend had thought you and the Princess were dating?”

Face turning bright red, Luke pushed himself up off the ground. He took a few steps towards where she sat on the top bunk, then took a step back and scratched at the back of his head. “You uh, noticed that I mentioned that, huh.”

“Yeah, yeah I did. Why’d she think that?”

“Well…” His voice trailed off into a low and incomprehensible mumble. There was only one word she picked up on and understood. A word she knew she must have been misunderstanding. The word “crush.”

“…crush?” She asked, seeking clarification.

“Yeah. I know, I know! But in my defense I had no idea we are related, I just knew that she was the most incredible amazing person I had ever met, and that I honestly love her and -”

“Oh, oh ewww! That’s just…”

“Hey! As I said I didn’t know!”

“I have so many questions I need to ask.”

“Drop it, please!”

“No, I am sorry, you may not understand this because you thought you were an only child, but I am actually literally incapable of letting this, or any other thing that makes you squirm, go.”

“Leia, I mean it, I really don’t want to talk about this. Can you respect that?”

She laughed. “Again, nope, no can do. Welcome to siblinghood Lu, because respect is the furthest thing from what you’ll be getting.”

He groaned, and the bed Leia was on shook slightly as Luke sat on the lower bunk.
“Ok ok, so your crush on your own twin sister is something you don’t want to talk about—”

“Kriffing hell, what is wrong with you!”

“-so tell me more about Nikari then. From the sound of things she’s the only person you’ve ever actually dated?”

“Yeah.”

“And you said her mom had been killed for writing a song? What’s up with that?”

He stood, moving towards the door.

“Sorry. I didn’t realize she was that sort of touchy subject. I’ll drop it.”

He stood in the open doorway, back to her, shaking his head. He turned just enough for her to see the corner of his smile. “No, Leia, I have a recording of the song in my pack. I thought I’d play it for you rather than describe it.” His posture shifted, and he stepped fully back into the room, shutting the door behind him and sealing them inside. “Or you know what, I’ll save it for another day. It’s more of a dance song than anything else, and you seem far too beat to enjoy it just now.”

“You asking me to dance with you? I dunno—” Luke was spared the rest of Leia’s teasing, when to their surprise the ship’s systems began to beep and flash, alerting them both that they were leaving hyperspace. That was part of the problem with traveling to places one had never been before - it was impossible to estimate how long it would take to get there.

Leia jumped off the bed, stumbling only slightly, and somehow managed to make it to the cockpit before Luke. She felt as if all the exhaustion that had plagued her earlier was melting away with the anticipation of seeing Master Yoda at last.

She sat and assumed control of the ship, taking them through all the checks needed to return to real space.

The swirling lights gave way to a streak of stars and then at last Dagobah hung green and lush through the viewport.

“Can you find somewhere we can put the ship down in a clean landing?” Luke asked, buckling into the seat at her side.

“I’m going to have to figure out where on the planet Master Yoda is first.” She cast out her senses, then frowned.

This was where Master Yoda lived? Leia could sense a powerful Dark presence there. In fact, the whole planet seemed to be a nexus of the Force, with several pockets of consuming Darkness. Why would Master Yoda come to a place like this?

She sighed and tried once more to locate the ancient Jedi Master, overwhelmed by just how many life signs she sensed. Finally she located a familiar source of Light on the planet’s surface. She adjusted the computers, calculating the best descent to put their ship down near where she sensed that brightness.

No, wait… there was something wrong with that.

The Force was telling her to land further away, on the top of a hill not too far away from where the Light seemed to be, but further than she would have liked to walk.
She sighed, and turned to the computers, calculating a landing path. Of course she couldn’t account for tree cover in her plans, but she was hopeful they would be able to put down safely, even with the storm clouds and winds that filled the planet’s atmosphere.

As expected, the descent was not easy.

Those clouds turned out to be rather harsh storms that tossed the craft this way and that. Kriff, she really really did not want to repay Sana’s kindness by wrecking her ship. Ideally she’d have returned it without even a single dent, and yet it had to already be covered in carbon scorching from the earlier fight. She didn’t want to damage it any more than it already was.

This planet was not cooperating with her wish.

She banked hard to the right to avoid yet another tree that had emerged from the heavy mist out of nowhere, then to the left as a large winged creature flew right at the ship.

Thank Kwilaan for Luke!

Without his help piloting she might have crashed this ship even worse than their Grizmallti ancestors had crashed their vessel when they had discovered Naboo.

Working together, they managed to bring the ship down in… well not the most elegant landing she had ever pulled off, but not the worst either.

As soon as they landed she sprung from her seat to examine any potential damage. Whatever distress she caused, no matter how minor, she’d want to take care of it before she returned the ship to Sana.

Thankfully the worst of it seemed to just be one large scratch along the hull. Even the earlier battle had barely left a mark, save for the fried escape pods. Fixing this damage should be a breeze! Not that she could do anything about it now, here, in this jungle, but once she had access to the proper tools she could buff it out.

“What a miserable swamp!” Luke shouted behind her, still standing on the landing ramp, “are you really sure the Jedi we are looking for lives here?”

Leia couldn’t help but laugh. “Aren’t you from Tatooine? Shouldn’t you be impressed with how moist and wet everything is?”

“I’ve been off-world for almost a year now. Long enough to get that places like this are not at all nice.”

“Oooo not even a whole year! You’re a real galactic traveler!”

“Oh, shut up.” Luke was grinning at her. He peered around, although Leia doubted he could see much through all the mist hanging over the jungle that surrounding them. “Do you have any idea how we’re going to find this Yoda guy in this?”

Leia glanced at the sun dipping behind the tree cover. “Why don’t we spend the night on the ship, and wait until morning before setting off to find him? I’m not really interested in exploring a strange new planet in the dark.”

Luke laughed. “Yeah, that sounds fair. Ok, a night crammed together on the ship… please don’t throw me on the ground again this time? I promise I’ll stick to the bottom bunk. Then tomorrow we set out. Except… uh, how are we going to make sure we don’t lose the ship? I mean I really don’t want to wind up stranded here just because we couldn’t figure out where we parked.”
That was a good point. A great one even.

“Did you see any tracking devices or anything onboard? We can plant one on the ship and track it from a datapad or something. Sana’s a bounty hunter, right? She has to have something like that.”

“I didn’t go through her things. It’s the this weird thing I do called being polite and-”

“Come’on, let’s go root through all of our kind friend’s possessions until we find what we need.”

“Oh joy, can’t see how this could end badly.”

“Come on, she can’t have her supplies hidden that well, can she?”

“Wait, can’t you just sense the ship with-”

“The Force doesn’t work like that! Seriously, don’t you know that?”

“Obviously not.”

Leia couldn’t help but smile. Sure, Luke was still new to being a sibling, but he was getting there.

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Luke encounters a strange green creature in the swamp (gee I wonder who that is?), Bail and Leia O. have breakfast together.

Leia's dream about Bail and Breha during Alderaan's destruction borrows their actual canon final words to each other from the story Eclipse by Madeleine Roux in From a Certain Point of View.

Also, I want to clarify! Snorkletroopers are not a thing that existed - however Leia doesn't care that much about Clone War era history, so I had her kind of smudge the actual term she was reaching for. Keir spent his reenactments pretending to be a Clone Scuba Trooper.

Also, honestly, how weird would the moon seem (or multiple moons!) if you grew up on a planet that didn't have any? I mean honestly, it's this big ball of reflected sunlight and no one from Alderaan would be used to anything like that - they're used to all evidence of the sun vanishing in full every night (which makes Leia's refrain about hope being like the sun, the one Breha used to say before she died, that much more poignant)!
The mist was gone come morning, the massive dewdrops collected on the plants around them the only evidence the thick blanket of moisture had been there the night before.

It was nippy in the morning, a harsh contrast to the humid heat they had experienced when they had poked around outside during the night.

The light of day had also revealed that the ship wasn’t as untouched as Leia had at first believed. While it did seem relatively free of scrapes, it was snared by a jumble of vegetation. A tangled mess of vines and roots wrapped around it like a net, and getting it free from this stuff and ready to fly again was going to take ages.

Leia gave one of the thick roots wrapped around the ship an experimental tug, and then cursed under her breath. She turned to locate Luke, to ask him to give her a hand with clearing this stuff away, but he was standing at the edge of a patch of massive roots, gazing off beyond them into the unknown.

“Hey Leia, I’ll scout ahead, ok?” Luke called out, and before she could even respond he darted into the swamp.

Great.

Just great.

They were surrounded by muck and mud and bubbling sludge (who even knew what that dirty liquid really was), and the ship was covered in thick and endless branches and debris. Of course that was when Luke decided to run off and get lost.

Perfect.

She kicked the side of the ship in frustration, letting out a bit of a growl.

It helped relieve her frustration.

Kind of. Not really.

Rather than get lost herself, she decided to get to work clearing off the vegetation encasing the ship. It was never too early to get things ready for departure.

She fell into a rhythm as she worked, and was just about to slip into a meditative state when there was a rustle from the bushes behind her.

Leia heard Master Yoda before she saw him. “Young Skywalker. Long have I waited to meet with you. No. No. Not you. The other you, the one who belongs here. Circumstances permit that not.”
Instead, pleasure meeting you it is.”

She turned, relieved they had come to the right place, and greeted the Grand Master with a smile. As impossible as it seemed, he was smaller than when she had seen him just a week earlier in her own dimension. More frail. Yet he was still clearly recognizable as the wisest Jedi in living memory. “Master Yoda, I am so glad to see you! Luke will benefit so much from your training.”

Master Yoda frowned, shaking his head. “The boy? Train him? No. No. You, I will train. When return the other you does, her I will train. The boy? Him I will not train.”

“What? Master Yoda, no. You have to train him!”

“No! Final my decision is.” He gestured at her with his gimzer stick, and with a sinking feeling Leia realized it was not the one she recognized.

Was Master Yoda without his own ‘saber? What had happened to him, where had his ‘saber gone? The idea of Master Yoda misplacing his ‘saber, of not only declaring it a loss but not even building a new one… it felt so wrong.

She reached out to check, and sure enough the only kybers she could sense were her own and her dad’s within the lightsaber on Luke’s waist.

Luke. Who Master Yoda was refusing to train. “Why won’t you train him Master? He needs to learn.”

“So certain I am wrong. Why?”

“He… Master please, he’s incredible. You just need to give him a chance. In the short time I’ve known him he has done little else but prove he has the makings of a great Jedi. Sure he’s a little rough around the edges, but aren’t we all, really, no matter how long we’ve worked to master our impulses?”

“In agreement both you and Obi-Wan are. Told me much the same he has.” Yoda drew further into his ratty old robes, shaking his head slowly. “Wrong perhaps I am. Unwise it is to ignore the unanimous council of others. Test him I will.”

He laughed. “Surprised you are! Expecting old Master Yoda to admit fault you were not?

“I am sorry Master.”

“Disappointing. Clearly no attention as a youngling you paid.”

“What? Master, why would you think that?”

“The classes I taught. Before. Same in your dimension I am sure. Refusing to admit fault… Something a Jedi should do this is not.”

“I… yes Master, you did teach that to my Creche class.”

“Passed along that you told the boy of his father, Obi-Wan has. Why?”

“He…. He deserves to know, Master.”

“No patience. At the Temple you trained, yet still no patience. Troubling. Wrong I may be about the boy, perhaps. The better twin to teach he may be.”
“Doesn’t it make more sense to train both Luke and my counterpart? Why can it only be one?”

“Why? Always a good question, why is. A matter of time is why. Old I am. Luxury I no longer have, time is.”

“Master, how can you be so sure you are close to death?

“So many years since I’ve had a padawan. Being questioned, answering. Thank you. Missed this I have. A unique perspective youth always brings.”

Leia blushed. “You flatter me Master.”

“Convinced me you have. I may train the boy. Test him first, but if he passes, train him I will. You as well. When she returns, train the other young Skywalker, I will. Hmmmm. Train them both, yes.”

“Thank you Master, I am honored. But-”

“Objections, you have?”

“No. No, of course not Master.”

“Then come, much to discuss we have.”

Yoda began to move in the direction Luke had disappeared in some time earlier, and Leia followed after him. They walked together in silence until the two of them came upon Luke crouched by a log, the contents of his pack scattered on the ground. He was was scrambling to put everything back, and Leia suppressed a laugh at the sight.

“Leia, there you are! That little green nuisance threw my bag around,” Luke exclaimed, as he pointed at Master Yoda. “And we’re going to need this stuff if we want to find this great master of yours.”

Leia’s humor drained out of her in an instant, replaced by a cold dread. What had Luke just called Master Yoda?

For his part, Yoda let out a long and high pitched chortle and ran towards Luke’s supplies, merrily scattering them further around the jungle floor, tossing ration bars and other small items every which way.

“Hey, quit it will you!”

“Why?”

“Because it’s rude, and because… well because we have to set out further into this swamp. We can’t do that if you mess up our supplies.”

“Oh? Further you need to go? Why?”

“We’re looking for someone.”

“Oh? Looking are you? Found someone you have!”

Now that she saw that Master Yoda seemed more amused with Luke’s lack of respect than upset, Leia let herself appreciate the humor of the situation. She leaned against a massive root, content to watch Luke dig the hole he was in even deeper.
“Yeah, I found Leia,” Luke rolled his eyes, “speaking of which, can you please help me deal with this pest?”

“Help you?” Leia asked, noticing that Yoda was now standing out of Luke’s sight and shaking his head. “No, sorry, I don’t think I can.”


Leia shrugged, finding it easy to maintain her air of mocking joy while being treated to the sight of the wisest and most respected Master in the Jedi Order terrorizing Luke. Of course she knew the Grand Master had a great sense of humor, he had kept her plenty entertained as a youngling, but she’d never seen him act like this before!

As Leia watched Yoda picked up all sorts of small items from Luke’s bag. He would inspect them briefly before tossing them into the Jungle.

“Ohhh... you're making a mess,” Luke whined.

With another high pitched chuckle, Yoda returned to picking through Luke’s bag, tossing items all over the ground. This time he held up a flashlight, a look of delight on his ancient face.

“Hey, you might break that! Give me that!” Luke cried, lunging towards the ancient Master to retrieve the light.

Yoda easily evaded Luke’s attempt to grab him, and Luke wound up falling onto the ground face first. With a laugh Yoda scrambled on top of the log Luke had been crouched beside, and watched as Luke sat up and tried to brush as much mud off of himself as he could. “Why are you here?” Yoda asked.

Leia stood up straight as she suddenly realized what Master Yoda was doing. This was Luke’s test!

“I already told you, we’re looking for someone.”

“Help you I can. Yes, mmmm.”

“I don’t think so.” Luke shook his head. “We’re looking for a great warrior. Leia, my sister,” Luke gestured towards her as he spoke, “knows him, I am sure we can find him on our own.”

“Ahhh! A great warrior,” Yoda said with a laugh and a shake of his head. “Wars not make one great.” There was so much weight in his last statement, Leia thought Luke would have to be able to figure out what was going on from his tone alone.


“Look, can you please move along, little fella? We’ve got a lot to do.”

“No! No, no! Stay and help you, I will,” Master Yoda said, “Find your friend, hmm?”

“We’re not looking for a friend,” Luke said, “we’re looking for a Jedi Master.”


“You know him?”

“Mmm. Take you to him, I will. Yes, yes. But now, we must eat. Come. Good food. Come.”
Luke turned to Leia, full of confusion and concern. “I guess following this creature is our best shot at finding Yoda, huh?”

It took a lot of effort on her part to maintain a straight face. “Yeah, I guess so. Besides, all the food I’ve had since I’ve arrived in this world was pretty awful, I can’t wait to have what he’s offering instead.”

“You think it will be better than the rations? Really? I mean come on, he’s a little jungle troll, there is no way his food is going to be appetizing.”

Yoda slammed his gimmer stick onto the ground. “Follow. Come.”

He led the two of them then through a swiftly encroaching fog, to a hut that was probably decently sized for him, but Leia doubted both she and Luke would fit inside it at once.

Yoda confirmed her suspicions when he gestured to some roots outside the hut’s door where Leia could sit while Luke followed him inside. Luke paused at the entry, shooting Leia a baffled look when it became clear she would not be joining them within the structure. She gestured for him to go in without her, rolling her eyes at him in frustration. He got the message eventually, leaving her and entering Yoda’s home.

She leaned back against the hut wall. From her seat she could overhear everything going on within the hut, and even better, not long after she sat she was joined by Obi-Wan’s ghost, who did not seem to be as amused as Leia by the wise old Jedi’s antics.

Luke’s voice drifted out from inside. “How far away is Yoda? Will it take us long to get there?”

“Not far. Yoda not far. Patience. Soon you will be with him. Rootleaf, I cook. Why wish you become Jedi? Hm?”

“Mostly because of my father, I guess,” Luke said, and Leia was grateful he couldn’t see her face. Couldn’t see her wince.

“Ah, your father. Powerful Jedi was he, powerful Jedi, mmm.”

“Oh, come on. How could you know my father? You don’t even know who we are!”

“Siblings in search of Yoda, you said. Yes?”

“Yeah, but how could you know who our father is? That makes no sense!”

“How, indeed. A good question to ask oneself, that is.”

“Ask myself questions? What? Look, I’m not here to talk philosophy, ok?”

“For introspection not here, hmm? Then your purpose here, what is?”

“Can you help us find Master Yoda or not? I don’t even know why I let you bring us to this hut! We’re wasting our time!”

“I cannot teach him. The boy has no patience.” Yoda’s serious voice, all evidence of earlier laughter gone, carried out to those gathered outside the hut.

Obi-Wan frowned and shook his head. “He will learn patience.”

“Much anger in him, like his father.”
Leia felt sick. Sure, Luke had said a ton of truly concerning things over the past few days, but Master Yoda thought Luke would turn out like Vader?

...Also, how was that clue Master Yoda just dropped not enough for Luke to figure out who Vader is?

“Was I any different when you taught me?” Obi-Wan said, ignoring Leia as she gaped at him. Imagine, Obi-Wan Kenobi, her unflappable Uncle Obi, acting like anything other than a calm and perfect Master!

“He is not ready.”

“Yoda! I am ready. I... Ben! Leia! I can be a Jedi. Please, both of you, tell him I’m ready.”

“Ready, are you? What know you of ready? For eight hundred years have I trained Jedi. My own counsel will I keep on who is to be trained! A Jedi must have the deepest commitment, the most serious mind. This one a long time have I watched. All his life has he looked away… to the future, to the horizon. Never his mind on where he was. What he was doing. Hmph. Adventure. Excitement. A Jedi craves not these things. You are reckless!”

It was as if he was chastising her and not Luke. Nothing of what he had said was not also true of her. Here she had thought herself ready to take her trials, but by Yoda’s standards, she wasn’t even ready to take the initiate challenges. Leia felt queasy. Had she really fallen so far short of what a Jedi should be?

The ghost seated next to Leia gave her a gentle and reassuring smile. She realized she was projecting her emotions, and quickly reigned them in, embarrassed to let herself slip like that in front of not one but two members of the High Council. Even if one of them was just her uncle.

“So was I, if you'll remember,” Obi-Wan said, once more alluding to a rebellious past Leia had never heard anything about before. What was particularly amazing was that whatever he was referencing had probably happened in her world as well. She made a mental note to ask her uncle about it when she got home, just to be sure.

“Will he finish what he begins?” Yoda asked, resigned.

Leia’s heart leapt, for as put-upon as Master Yoda sounded, if that was truly his only concern then he probably would take Luke on as his student!

“I won’t fail you - I’m not afraid,” Luke pronounced, sure in that way only those who had no idea what sort of commitment they were making could be.

“Oh, you will be. You will be,” Yoda warned.

Leia couldn’t handle listening in without seeing either of them any longer. She shifted so she could peer in through the window, catching Yoda give Luke a glare. He caught sight of her in the window, and his heavy forbidding stare gave way to a smile, and an affectionate shake of his head.

“Too long, alone I have been. My solitude two Skywalkers now disturb. To deserve this, I know not what I have done,” Yoda said before laughing, the serious mood of just moments before giving way to a more friendly atmosphere.

He turned to the pot dangling over the fire, spooning some of the contents into a rough hewn bowl. He handed the bowl to Luke, and gestured for him to bring it to Leia. A few moments later Luke ducked out to hand her the bowl of food, before entering the hut once more to receive his own
rootleaf stew. Leia gave the liquid a sip and grinned. While it was far from gourmet cuisine, it was parsecs ahead of the polystarch she’d been eating for the past few days.

Luke carried his own bowl out of the hut, joining her on the root she was sitting on. Yoda followed not long after. The three of them ate in silence, while Obi-Wan’s ghost simply sat and watched, smiling and pulling at his beard.

Leia woke just as the sun started to rise, the shutters having been set to roll up and let the sunlight in with the dawn.

She felt far better rested than she could remember being in a long time, and as she bustled about the guest quarters, making use of the fresher and getting dressed for another day of training at the Temple, she couldn’t stop smiling.

Everything was so comfortable here. So easy, so right.

It was the little things that really got to her. The smell of the apartment, the way the shower controls worked, the detergent that had been used to wash the sheets she had slept in. Details she had never consciously noticed before, but that added together to create an overwhelming sense that she was where she was supposed to be.

When she emerged from the room, she found her father seated by the table. It was laid out with his typical breakfast fare - sweet green juice, fruit loaf, and caf. He cut her a few slices of fruit loaf as she sat, putting the datapad he had undoubtedly been reading the news on down as he did.

She almost told him that in her dimension her father never bothered putting it down for her sake, but thought better of it. If her father wished to give her his undivided attention, she would not turn away such a gift.

She poured herself a mug of caf, and her father watched her with an eyebrow raised. “If I didn’t know for a fact this world’s Leia is the same height as you are, I’d remind you that—”

She interrupted, affectionately rolling her eyes. “That caf is supposed to stunt your growth. Yes, I know, my father only told me that every single time we’d have breakfast together.”

“Did he now? Have you found us to have similar sentiments then, in the limited time we’ve known each other?”

She smiled at him, at this familiar and oh so missed atmosphere. “Very much so, yes.”

“Fascinating,” he said, “so much of your situation is just… truly remarkable.”

“I suppose so,” Leia said. “I haven’t really had much by way of distance to observe it, but I can see your point. Mainly I’ve been too busy dealing with one doozy of an existential crisis while also being confronted with how very foreign so much of my life here is.”

“You weren’t expecting Anakin and Padmé to be quite so… intense, huh?”

“I wasn’t expecting them at all, in truth.”

“No?”

“Of course not. When I first arrived here and was told my counterpart’s parents would be waiting for me on Coruscant, I was expecting you and mom, not them.”
“I see. I suppose that makes sense. Who your parents are is a rather fundamental building block of one’s identity, and one a person hardly expects to suddenly change.”

“Exactly, yes. It’s not that I dislike my birth parents per say, but they… well they simply aren’t you and mom.”

He laughed, shaking his head. “You know, some of my friends who are not Alderaanian come from cultures that don’t give adoption the respect it is due.” He paused, considering what he’d said. “I imagine you know that all too well given your own lived experience, but the point stands. It is amazing how often people belittle and demean non-biological families, even going so far as to suggest they are less real than those where there are blood-ties.”

Leia nodded, hands wrapped tight around her mug of caf. “It is such a strange obsession and prioritization of genetics over the connections and experiences that truly matter! I mean of course I am aware that not all adoptees feel the way I do, but I just… I fail to see the value in worrying over it! Take Luke for example. From all that I’ve heard he had two perfectly loving parents up until just a few months ago. Yet they refused to truly accept that role, taking a position of deference to two deceased individuals, and he spent his whole life fantasizing about them and feeling as if his life was missing something of significance.” She snorted. “I just… can’t see a single reason why that would be preferable to feeling fully accepted.”

Bail’s brow furrowed. “Did you… did you ever sense his absence? Your brother’s that is. From every interaction I have ever had with the Skywalker twins they always seemed to be rather… well in each other’s heads for lack of a better way to describe it.”

Leia blinked, and stared down into her caf, unsure how to answer. She had never known she had a sibling out there to feel connected to, but… now that she thought about it, she had, when she was younger, briefly had an imaginary friend, a boy her own age with blond hair and eyes like the sky over Appenza Peak, dressed in ridiculously oversized white rags. She had almost forgotten about him entirely, could no longer even remember what she had called him. Her parents had discouraged her from talking about him, and with time she had simply… forgotten.

They sat in silence together, until it almost became uncomfortable. Just before it did, Bail changed the subject, telling Leia of the various bills and measures he anticipated would come up in that day’s legislative session. She offered her thoughts and suggestions on each one, relaxing more and more in the face of this long absent normalcy.

She was in many ways a creature of routine, and she had missed her morning chats with her father more than she could properly express.

It was with great regret that she stood and left her caf and fruit loaf behind, when her father made note of the time and that they were both going to be late for their respective duties.

Since the Temple was on the way to the Senate, he dropped her off on his way to work. When they had arrived at the Temple and she was exiting the vehicle, he reached out, placing one of his hands on her shoulder.

“Leia, I just… I wanted to tell you that, well… Breha and I, we spoke yesterday, just after Padmé asked if you could stay at Chantham house and… truly for however long you are here, please do not hesitate to reach out to either of us. As you said, biology is not what makes a family. No, family is defined by a commitment to one another, a pledge to make one another’s well being a priority and well… I am proud to be your family, Leia.”

She hadn’t known what to say. Had simply thrown her arms around him, and held him tight, holding
back tears. Eventually she let him go, and stepped out of the car. Leia had trouble taking her eyes off his speeder as he flew off.

What a morning. What a perfect impossible morning.

Leia of course understood the unspoken motivations behind this action. She both acknowledged them and dismissed them as irrelevant.

She knew her father, and this version of him was similar enough to the man she knew that there was no question her knowledge applied here as well. She knew what he was apt to do, and the likely rationales behind his actions.

As she thought back and reflected on her recent experiences with her mother as well, she could only conclude she too had been acting with similar motivations.

They were, after all, both truly caring people. The sort of people who would extend a helping hand to a person in pain without second thought. Both of them would do or say whatever they thought would best help her heal.

Moreover, they both knew that her stay in this dimension was a temporary matter. That she would not be here forever. Therefore what harm could such an offer have for them or their family?

Their love was freely and sincerely offered of course, but it was not as if they were inviting her to remain with them permanently.

If anything, her father’s warmth, and his kindness… it reminded her of why she needed to return home. Why she had to do everything she could to burn the Empire’s rot out of the galaxy forever.

The Empire had taken these wonderful perfect people from the galaxy.

Had taken them from her.

She would make them pay for that crime. The longer she stayed in this world, the longer her parents murderers went unpunished.

After all, Bail and Breha Organa were not merely good parents. No. They were good people.

Leia had always wanted to emulate them, to live up to even half of the example they had set. This version of her father had reminded her just how massive an example that was to live up to.

She was committed to being a force for positive change, both here and now, and when she returned to the dimension where she belonged.

Leia could only hope the rest of her day would be half as good as its start had been.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Lots of talking about Jedi stuff.

As I am sure you noticed, this chapter included quite a few direct quotes from The
Empire Strikes Back. I can take no credit for Leigh Brackett and Lawrence Kasdan's genius.

Of course I can't take any credit for the idea that Yoda wants to train Leia and is grumpy that he got Luke instead. After all, that is fully canon, and you can find it being explored in depth in There is Another by Gary D. Schmidt in From a Certain Point a View.
Chapter 46

Chapter Notes

Today marks a full year since I posted the first chapter of this fic online.

This isn’t the first fic I’ve ever written, but it is the first I’ve posted online since I was teenager. I quit sharing my writing when I was sixteen, thanks to the misguided belief that I was never going to be able to create anything that anyone would ever want to read. I wonder now what sort things I might have created had I not gotten in my own way for well over a decade.

I can only hope that you are not getting in your own way right now, and are creating and sharing whatever things that make you happy.

Thank you to everyone who has read this fic, left kudos, bookmarked it, or left a comment. I can not overstate how much I truly and deeply appreciate each and every one of you.

This chapter was betaed by tumblr user the-weight-of-wings. Thank you endlessly!

Note: there is a conversation in this chapter that compares the Dark Side of the Force to substance use. I want to be very clear that in making this comparison, I no way intend to even slightly imply that substance use is a moral issue. I also want to warn that in this chapter there is also talk of the Star Wars universe's version of slavery. If these are particularly sensitive topics for you, please tread carefully.

Leia stood on the platform, watching her father’s speeder vanish into the distance, not feeling any desire to vacate that spot until it was absolutely necessary.

“How good of you to show up, finally. I suppose you found far better uses for your time than your training?” Ventress drawled from behind her.

“Says the woman who literally ran off in the middle of the day yesterday,” Ahsoka said, alerting Leia to her presence as well.

“My husband was in need of me. While I have made this task a priority, he will forever be more important to me than whatever else is going on,” Ventress hissed.

“See Leia, that is what we call letting an attachment get the better of you. The trick when dealing with attachments is to acknowledge their siren call, and resist them and keep your focus on your duties regardless.”

“Not only does this highlight why I will never regret existing apart from your Order, it also shows why I truly pity you and the equally deluded fool you call your spouse.”

“You take that back you harpie!”

Right. Leia had forgotten the main reason she had been almost dreading returning to her training.
“Knock it off, both of you! How either of you expects me to learn anything with the two of you constantly at each other’s throats is beyond me. Can’t you at least pretend to get along?”

Both of the older women looked properly chastised, so Leia softened her tone, well aware that such critiques were best received when they were combined with encouragement.

“I know you both have a lot of wisdom to pass on. That is why you were selected, out of all the potential instructors in this entire galaxy, to teach me. It is also why I know you are both capable of putting your differences aside to work towards your shared goal. It is doubtful you would have been chosen to carry out this assignment together if it was impossible for you to complete it as a team.”

For a moment both Ahsoka and Ventress looked stunned, but then - almost in unison - they smiled. Leia smiled back, pleased to see them in sync, unintentional though it may be.

“That flows wonderfully into your lesson for today,” Ahsoka said, gesturing for all three of them to start walking off the platform where they stood.

To Leia’s surprise Ventress nodded. Perhaps she really had gotten through to them. “More meditating. The standard kind, not the exercises I had you do yesterday. I am sure you must be thrilled with the prospect of more sitting still.”

Leia suppressed a groan. “Surely there are more important things for me to focus on?”

Ahsoka stopped walking, turning to Leia with concern. “You raise a valid point, young one. A conversation about the nature of the Force and the value of activities like meditation may be more prudent.”

With a quick glance around, Ahsoka located some benches not far from where they stood, and gestured for their group to move towards them and sit down.

“The most important thing when connecting to the Force,” Ventress said as they walked, surprising Leia, “is to let go and discard your ego.”

“So, you and Ahsoka are in agreement. Meditation must come before all else?”

“Meditation, or other activities that allow you enter the right state of mind.” Ventress smiled, a softer and kinder smile then she normally wore. “The Force is not a series of skills one masters. Connecting with it is a matter of having the right mindset, one that is difficult, sometimes impossible to achieve. If you reach for its power without proper training…”

“You are hinting at this Dark Side everyone keeps mentioning? It can’t be as bad as everyone claims, can it?”

“Take it from one who once was consumed by the Dark, it can be intoxicating and addictive.” Ventress sat on one of the benches, brow furrowing as she spoke. “In many ways it is a drug, with gratification followed by horrible crashing lows. Lows that can be quickly addressed by using the Dark Side more and more and more. Somewhere in that cycle you lose sight of how much better it is to feel the belonging, acceptance and peace of the Light. You lose sight of everything but power.”

Leia chose not to share Ventress’ bench, instead sitting on one facing it a short distance away. “Are you suggesting that everything the Empire has ever done in my world, it was all because Palpatine is chasing a high?”

Ventress laughed, short and clipped. “In a sense, yes. Gaining that power, keeping that power… it is more important than anything, so important you no longer care how much suffering you cause, even
if that suffering is your own.”

“The Dark Side is a short cut Leia. It is easy to use and access, and the power may seem worth it…” Ahsoka’s voice faltered, she seemed lost in a memory, and Leia wondered what had happened in her past to cause this woman who was so set against anything to do with the Dark to consider its use. The strange moment passed quickly, and Ahsoka finished her thought. “The consequences of giving in to the Dark can destroy not only those who use it, but everyone around them as well. Avoiding it is hard, it is a struggle all who are sensitive to the Force must engage in, the temptation to use it never truly goes away. That is in part why Jedi training starts so early.”

Thinking of the Imperial stories of the Jedi’s evil, and especially the tales of them kidnapping children, Leia asked, “How early did you start your training Ahsoka?”

“I am not a good example. I was younger than most when I arrived at the Temple.”

“What do you mean?”

Ahsoka glanced at Ventress, clearly unhappy she was here to hear this tale. She sighed, closed her eyes and drew in a deep breath.

“Well… like many I started to show my Force abilities young. Floating toys around my room, unconscious expressions like that.” The way she spoke of it, it really was as if these things were normal.

Had Leia done similar things when she was young?

If so, how had her parents manage to hide her abilities from everyone for so long?

Unless…

Something snapped into place then for Leia, in a way it never had before.

While her mother had always had Human attendants who played music within their quarters and cared for all her needs, the vast majority of the staff who worked within the royal quarters, especially all of the staff who worked directly with Leia, were droids.

Oh there were reasons for this of course.

Reasons Leia knew quite well and had never questioned.

The House of Organa didn’t want to show off their wealth, didn’t feel comfortable employing too many sentients in subservient roles, had felt that as they increased the numbers of refugees on Alderaan’s surface an equal push had to be made to make sure no one accused them of welcoming those who needed a home simply so they could exploit their labor.

Yet…

Yet by ensuring the vast majority of the servants who interacted with Leia when she was young were droids....

Leia’s heart rate speed up as the implications settled into place. As it became apparent that her parents had to have worked to keep her abilities hidden, not just from herself but from the galaxy at large.

With an inorganic staff tending to Leia, memory wipes were possible. Any show of power from her
when she was a child, and her parents could make it go away with a quick and simple routine procedure.

What else in her life had been designed to mask her powers?

How much had her abilities influenced her life?

Ahsoka was still speaking, still telling the tale of her own past, when Leia focused back in. “My parents, on Shili, they contacted the Temple right away. What an honor it must have been, knowing there would be a Jedi from their family! Only they did not think to use a secure connection, or perhaps they could not afford one? I honestly don’t know. Regardless, the call was listened in on by pirates.”

“What?” Leia interrupted, “surely they knew that was a call the Jedi would follow up on!” Why would pirates knowingly involve themselves in a situation that would undoubtedly lead to Jedi attention?

Ventress laughed, but Ahsoka ignored her, continuing her story. “Yes, of course the Jedi would respond to those calls. But only once the child is old enough to leave and join the Order, and never before then. When a family calls the Temple so early, well…” Ahsoka sighed, “it could be years before anyone from the Order will come to bring the youngling home.”

It was odd, Leia’s father had taught her the truth about the Jedi Order her whole life, had made it clear to her that the Empire-approved “facts” she had to be able to regurgitate when in public had been nothing but lies. Even still, hearing this frank confirmation that the Jedi had never stolen babies was significant, incredible.

“That’s when the pirates strike,” Ahsoka said, “the Order of course does what it can to prevent these kidnappings, have employed tons of measures to make it stop. But short of being able to dispatch a Jedi to protect every Force-sensitive youth out there until they can be assessed and brought to the Temple, or bring younglings home before they are ready…” Ahsoka frowned, shaking her head, “there really isn’t too much we can do. We’ve tried countless strategies over time, but we’ve yet to find a perfect solution.”

Leia wondered about the recordings she had seen of parents crying about the babies the Jedi had kidnapped. Who had those people been? Was this, the pirates who intercepted calls to the Order to tell them of Force-sensitive youth, the truth behind those stories (and wasn’t that also a kick in the Imperial propaganda, that the Jedi only ever knew of children in the first place because their parents had contacted them)?

As much as knowledge of these schemes answered some of her long standing questions, it raised others as well. After all, Leia could not imagine the reward being worth the trouble of making an enemy of the Jedi Order.

“It sounds like quite the risk for them to take. Why are these kidnappers so persistent?” Leia asked.

Ventress’ voice cut into the conversation. “There is always a market to be found for Force-sensitive slaves.”

Ahsoka glared at her. “Right. Least any of us forget where you stand politically, Seppie.”

Ventress rolled her eyes. “The Confederacy merely believed it was up to individual systems to set their own laws, and choose for themselves if they wanted to allow slavery or not. It was a matter of system’s rights, no more or less.”
“All these years later, and you still justify slavery? You are true filth Ventress.”

“Ever one for moral grandstanding, aren’t you Tano? Forever on that high hoversledge.”

Leia snorted. “I have known many former Separatists in my life, but never one who actually defendeda the Confederacy’s abhorrent organics rights violations. Sentients aren’t droids, they deserve freedom and respect!”

“This is hilarious coming from one who claims to be a Princess. What could you possibly know of what it is like to be on the bottom of the social ladder. I have actually lived as a slave, my opinion is based on more than just posturing.”

Both Leia and Ahsoka spoke at the same time, their voices overlapping.


“No, we are listening to Ahsoka’s tale, not mine,” Ventress said, interrupting them both. “Continue, I believe you were just about to be kidnapped by pirates, ever the perfect innocent victim, until some Jedi came and saved you?”

“I was a toddler,” said Ahsoka, “how could I have been anything but an innocent?”

Ventress made a face, then turned away, her feigned disinterest retaking hold. Ahsoka sighed. “Well Ventress isn’t too wrong. I wasn’t even delivered to my buyer before Master Plo Koon found and rescued me. He had been on a mission on Shili when he heard about my capture, and he saved me. He brought me back to Shili, I was still going to live there with my parents and village until I was old enough to come to the Temple, but…” Ahsoka broke eye contact with Leia, looking down at her hands. “I was too traumatized by the kidnapping. I no longer felt safe or happy there with those people. But I did with Master Plo.” Ahsoka looked up, her blue eyes looking into Leia’s brown once more. “So he brought me home. All of three years old and already coming to live at the Temple, starting my training younger than planned.”

“Oh such a tragedy,” Ventress said. “Did you even spend a full day in the pirate’s custody before someone came rushing in to save you?”

“You know what Ventress, I am done talking about my past. Maybe it is time to hear about yours.”

“Why? How would this benefit Leia’s training?”

“Would you rather I be left to my assumptions, but never your own account?” Leia asked. “How can I have any empathy, any… connection, if you don’t open up to me?”

Ventress grumbled and shifted in her seat, finally settling back, her gaze trained in the distance, refusing to look at either of her companions.

“As part of a deal to protect my coven, a pirate took me when I was an infant. He brought me with him to the the stinking ruin of a world where he conducted his business, and raised me there. I know firsthand that slavery need not be the nightmare you claim, as my… my owner treated me kindly. When he died, I mourned him as if he was my parent.” She turned, glaring at Leia and Ahsoka, challenging them to claim her former owner had been anything less than the closest thing to a father she had ever known. Leia was not sure who Ventress was trying to convince more - the two of them, or herself.

Ventress frowned. “Like Tano I was also found by a Jedi, I suppose he thought he was rescuing me.
He was stranded on that awful planet, and neither of us had any hope of leaving.”

Leia could not help but feel sorry for this woman, it sounded as if every person she had ever depended on as a youth had let her down.

Ventress took in both Leia and Ahsoka’s expressions. “As Tano no doubt told you I began training in the Force when I was older than even Skywalker had been. Now you know why that was.” Ventress laughed, sharp and bitter.

Biting her lip, Leia couldn’t remember if it was something she was told or not. It was becoming clear however that starting your training at an older age was not something people in this dimension looked kindly upon.

She wondered how she must seem to them, fully unaware she even had the potential to learn these sort of things until just a few days ago.

Perhaps in part this was why everyone was so insistent she focus on her training, she must seem so far behind to them all. She hated the implication of it, the idea of lagging behind the average made her blood run cold. Leia had excelled at most things she had put effort into for as long as she could remember, and the thought of being late to key milestones in any area of study was foreign to her.

Ventress’s laughter reached its end, and she continued to speak. “Jedi Knight Ky Narec trained me for ten whole years, before he met an untimely end. I swore to avenge him, to not rest until I saw every last pirate involved in his death impaled by my lightsaber’s blade.” She seemed to relish the memory of these murders, her voice caressing the words.

“My rage and thirst for vengeance was so strong Dooku himself felt my pain and took notice, worlds away. He found me on that awful crime infested rock, and promised to show me how to harness my true potential.”

Ahsoka snorted, interrupting. She was going to say something, her lips moving, sound already starting, but Ventress cut her off, ignoring her.

“Oh course with time I learned he could not be trusted, and I left, uniting with my coven at last. We tried to eliminate each other, Dooku and I. Each of us constantly escalating our personal war. Then he made a winning move, and it was all over. Everything was over, and I knew then that I would never find a place I would belong.”

She stopped, and when she spoke again her voice was clipped and short, the song like quality gone. “I had gone home to my people. Home. I was welcomed, and shown the ways of our clan. But then Dooku… he killed them. Killed them all. In just one day a massive genocide was carried out. All that is left of Dathomir now is Maul and myself.”

Leia stood, and took a step towards the bench the pale woman sat on. She could feel tears welling in her eyes, understanding blooming from deep inside.

“I was there that day. I fought in those battles, I watched as one by one my sisters died. I observed this knowing all of it was done just to get at me.” Ventress’s voice raised into a shout. “You want to speak of understanding? Of empathizing with my pain?” She let out a sharp bitter laugh. “None of you could understand. No one could. Watching your home be so thoroughly destroyed just to punish you is a torture without compare.”

A broken bubbling laugh spilled from Leia’s lips. Her knees felt suddenly like jelly, and she sat hard back on the bench. She forced back her tears, looking up and meeting Ventress’ eye. “You’re
wrong. I understand that pain all too well.”

Ventress’ brow furrowed, her head tilted to the side. “You… you do, somehow. What have you lived through child that you-”

Leia closed her eyes, bracing to yet again share the most traumatic event of her life. She opened them, gazing at the distant traffic as it flew by rather than meet either Ventress or Ahsoka’s eye. “They reduced it to rubble, right before my eyes. Just to break me, just to make me suffer. Alderaan. A shining jewel, one of the first planets to ever take to the stars. The role we had played in galactic history, the legacy of wonder and exploration and culture… all of it, gone in an instant, just because they could not find another way to make me break.”

“And after?” Ventress asked. “Did you break?”

“In part, yes, I believe so. I know that something within me is truly broken. It will probably never be repaired, but even after they destroyed my home I still refused to give them the information they wanted. I held my tongue, I refused to speak. I was going to go to my death, so clearly deserved, and I would not sully that execution by betraying my cause.”

“Yet here you are, alive. The plans must have changed.”

“Yes. Fate intervened. I suppose some would call it the Will of the Force. Once I had fully accepted my oncoming death, my cell door sprung open, and standing there was… was my brother. He was so innocent. He said a line straight out of a bad holo, as if he would sweep me off my feet and away from that prison.” Leia laughed. “I had to make sure that brave fool of a boy didn’t die, he was going to get himself and whoever he had come with killed! Then he told me he had brought the plans I had been willing to die protecting with him. My last and only hope, and he had returned it to me. Those plans had to get to the Rebellion, there was no choice in the matter. So I resolved to live. To see my home avenged, the Empire fully destroyed. I will go down fighting or not at all.”

Leia closed her eyes, ending her story there. Talking about her loss with someone who actually understood it felt different. Freeing.

She couldn’t speak so openly with her fellow Alderaanian survivors, because they needed her to be strong for their sake. But here with Ventress… there was no need to be strong. No expectation for her to save her people, lead them to the best possible future.

It was ok for her to simply experience her pain.

She could feel Ventress in the Force, so present, so full of familiar pain. It was long scarred over but the wounds were the same. She reached out to her, and Asajj let her in, past all of her defenses. Leia’s senses reeled for just a moment, as their new bond anchored in place.

When they had finished eating, Yoda handed his bowl to Leia, and gestured with his stick that she was to bring the empty bowls inside. She did, and once inside could not resist glancing around the hut, at this place where Master Yoda had spent so much time.

She thought she could recognize the blanket on Master Yoda’s bed, something about it looked familiar in some way. She moved closer to examine it, and was surprised to discover it was an old Jedi robe. From the size of it, its former owner must have been quite tall.

The whole tiny hut was dark and dilapidated, with mildew and strange growths dangling from the
domed walls. One such growth brush against her shoulder, startling her. She turned quickly, in the process knocking some of Yoda’s possessions onto the ground.

Then, feeling especially guilty for creating even more mess in this place, she scrambled to pick up and set right what she had disturbed. A snake, an actual live snake, slithered across the floor as she did.

Everything here was damp, and dank, and really made her worried about what sort of life Master Yoda had led in this dimension. What other sacrifices he had made, and what could have ever caused him to choose to stay in place such as this? Was he punishing himself for some perceived wrong, or was there something she was missing, an unknown benefit to this location?

When she was done she joined the others outside, finding the three of them deep in conversation.

“Ah, Leia, you return,” Yoda said, “some time that took. Lost in there, were you?”

“No Master, I just thought I would tidy up a bit,” Leia said as she sat back on the root, pressed up against Luke’s side.

“Done an old man a kindness, you have,” Yoda said.

“I must say Master, your hut is certainly in a better state than it was the last time I visited.”

“Insolent, Obi-Wan is. See? Teasing a lonely old-”

“Oh come off it,” Obi-Wan said, “I was on my own for just as long as you have been.”

“When dead I am, rude I will not be.”

“I doubt that, old friend.”

The four of them lapsed into silence, the noises of the swamp filling the space conversation left behind.

There were so many questions swirling through Leia’s mind. Questions either of these two could easily answer.

Most of them were questions she knew she shouldn’t ask in front of Luke, at least not yet.

But not all of them. There were some things she didn’t have to worry about asking with him there. Fortunately the most pressing question on her mind belonged to that category.

“Master, have you ever before heard of anything like what I’m experiencing?” Leia asked Yoda, hopeful that at some point in his 900 years of life he had at least heard about a situation like hers before.

“No. Unfortunately, no. New to me, this is. Closest to this, I have experienced… hmmm.”

“Master?”

“A quest, a journey I embarked on just before you were born. To find answers, to understand the greatest mysteries of the Force.”

“And you saw other worlds?”
“Perhaps. Perhaps no. Many things I saw. Always known that through the Force, things we could see. Other places. The future... the past. Old friends long gone. Spirits and guardians, on this journey, all of them I saw, felt, sensed.”

“Maybe if I retrace your steps-”

“A quest taken lightly, this was not.”

“This journey was how you learned to become a ghost, was it not?” Obi-Wan asked.

“Yes,” Yoda nodded, “yes it was.”

Leia gaped at the Masters with awe. “Amazing. I never would have thought something like this was possible.”

“Once thought like you I did. Then Qui-Gon returned. Spoke to me he did. Sent me on my quest.”

“Qui-Gon Jinn? Really?”

Luke watched them all, flooding the space between them with confusion. “Wait wait, who? Is that someone I should know? And the ghost thing, it uh, isn’t normal?”

“Qui-Gon is the Jedi who found dad on Tatooine! He identified that he was the Chosen One, and brought him back to Coruscant with him and-”

“The what?”

Obi-Wan smiled at them, and Leia could not discern if the sad cast to his smile was simply the pain that seemed inherent to this version of her uncle, or thanks to the memories they were dredging up.

“The Chosen One. There was a prophecy that one day…” Obi-Wan paused, shutting his eyes before finishing his thought. “The Chosen One will destroy the Sith and bring balance to the Force.”

“...wow. But wait if my father is this-”

“Anakin wasn’t. He… I failed him, and he…”

“Hmmmmm too hung up on prophecy we were. Too sure of the future, unable to see the present. May have misread the prophecy. May have never been true. Many mistakes we made, with young Anakin. Failed to see what was happening, until it was too late.”

“Wait, what was happening? Failed him how?” Luke turned between Yoda and Obi-Wan, profound confusion all over his face.

Silence reigned, no one quite sure what to say to Luke about what had happened to his father. Finally Yoda broke that silence. “Failed him in ways I will not fail you. Careful I must be, to not repeat mistakes of the past. Learn from past experience, we all must.”

“I still don’t understand, and-”

“Hmmm. Start your training I will. Yes.” Yoda tapped one of Luke’s legs with his gimmer stick. “Long legs you have. Good for running. Jumping. Climb to the top of a tree, run around the bog. No touching the ground. From tree to tree you shall go. Then return here, talk more after, we will.”

“What? But-”
Yoda whacked him, lightly, with his stick. “Go I said! Ask me to train you, then refuse training? No! Off you go!”

Luke stood, but did not move to leave the spot by the hut. “I want some answers! Leia said she couldn’t give them until she spoke to you, but we’re here now! Someone please tell me what’s going on!”

“Hmmm. Reason I want you training this is. Discuss this matter in private we must, before we speak with you. Much to talk about there is. Delicate topic. Proper planning needed before with you we talk.”

“That doesn’t make sense!” Luke sat back down. “Please, if my father is still alive I need to know. I’ve got to save him!”

Yoda sighed, shaking his head. “An impossible position this is. Ready for this information you clearly are not. All but told you directly I have, figure it out yourself I had hoped.”

“Well I haven’t figured it out for myself. I don’t think I can. I’ve never been very good at puzzles, or riddles, or whatever this is. Please, Master, I need actual answers. Everyone keeps saying they’ll tell me later, or responds with contradictory nonsense and I just… I just need to know. That’s all I’m asking for, please.”

“Alive, he is. Able to be saved… remains to be seen that does.”

“But we’ve got to try!”

“Try? No. No, a Jedi does not try.”

Luke was so offended, so upset by that response, it spilled over the confines of his own self, unconsciously flooding Leia. She hadn’t intended to talk over Master Yoda but she needed to do something to ease what she felt from him.

“He doesn’t mean we shouldn’t save dad, Luke. Master Yoda just means that a Jedi should only start things they know they can finish. Until you are able to see a task to its end, well you aren’t ready to attempt it at all. Or as he would put it…” Leia trailed off, realizing she was about to quote Master Yoda right in front of him. He was watching her, smiling slightly, encouraging her. She blushed before leaping in with the refrain Master Yoda always used to share with her creche when she was growing up. “Do or do not, there is no try.”

“Ah! Know this lesson do you? Not follow it well, not well at all. Confused the boy you have. A mess you made,” Yoda turned to Luke, frowning. “Promise of the full truth, I will not make. Ready you are not. When ready, then know, you will,” Yoda sighed, “However, already been revealed, too much has. Another way, I wish there was. Forced my hand, your sister’s actions have. It is time, Young Skywalker, to learn more about your father.”

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Leia O. learns more about the weapon of the Jedi, while back home in her dimension Luke learns more about Anakin Skywalker.
I hope you are all having a great May the 4th!

Ventress' backstory was of course adapted from *The Clone Wars* episodes "Nightsisters" and "Massacre" and the book *Dark Disciple*.

Ahsoka's backstory was adapted from various panels Filoni has done about unfinished *The Clone Wars* episodes, her reflections on her past in the novel *Ahsoka*, and some of the guidebooks.

Of course both the *Servants of the Empire* books and *The Last Jedi* novelization established that Imperial Propaganda claimed that Jedi stole babies. Honestly I have no idea if that was common propaganda or just Brendol Hux's personal delusion, so¯\_(ツ)_/¯.

When Leia had been younger, before she had taken her initiate challenges, before she had become a Padawan, she like all other Jedi had been taught by Master Yoda. She remembered what it was like to be the sole focus of his attention. She did not envy Luke his position.

Luke nodded excitedly. “Well, my father was born a slave. His name was Anakin Skywalker, and he came to Mos Espa - a city not far from where I grew up - when he was about three years old with his mom - Shmi. They were lucky, when they got sold off they were taken as a set and not split up.”

Luke’s voice faltered, and his forehead wrinkled with thought. He sat on the root, unspeaking. Several things she could say to lighten the mood flitted through Leia’s mind, but she said none of them. She wondered if this was all he knew about dad. For all she knew, for someone growing up on Tatooine, that might have been all he’d needed to know.

When he resumed speaking, he was quieter, less eager to speak. “He… he was freed somehow when he was young - Uncle Owen said the way he did it was a dangerous stunt I would try to repeat if I learned what exactly it was, so he made sure I never found out what happened.”

He wasn’t making eye contact with any of them, staring instead off into the bog. “My father left Tatooine after he was freed and basically never came back. He… well Ben said Vader killed him but apparently that isn’t the case. Um… I was always told he was a navigator on a spice freighter, but now I know that isn’t true either. According to Ben he was a pilot in the Clone Wars, and a Jedi, and may not be dead at all.” Luke fell silent again.

They waited for him to resume, for him to continue telling them what he knew.

Luke turned to look at each of them, tears shining in his eyes. He shook his head, distressed. “I… I really don’t know anything else about him.”

Yoda nodded, and then turned, fixing Leia with an expectant glare. “And you? Of your father’s life, what do you know? From the beginning you start.”

Leia blinked, confused. “What, me?”
“Other Padawan behind you, that I not know of? Yes, you!”

“But… but I thought you were going to tell Luke about what happened in this dimension?”

“Understand what happened in both worlds, we must. In difference the lesson lies.”

“The lesson?” There was something Yoda was trying to teach her? But she already knew this story, what purpose could retelling it possibly have?

“For myself. For Obi-Wan. Failed we did. In hearing of your world, understand exactly where we went wrong, I hope.”

Oh. Oh! He wanted to learn from her! That was… truly an honor, but intimidating to say the very least.

She nodded and wet her lips. “Well, like Luke already said dad was born a slave. He worked at a junk shop, and raced ships for his owner. But I am pretty sure he was always lying to me about that, to soften the reality of the story and all, since working with mechanics and racing are like two of his favorite things to do, so how unlikely is it that they’d be his jobs when enslaved?”

Uncle Obi’s ghost let out a snort. She glanced over at him, his eyes were twinkling. “He wasn’t lying, young one. Those truly were the things Watto had him do during his enslavement.”

“Huh.” Leia tried to think of anything else she knew about her father’s early life. “Oh! We have no grandfather on dad’s side, Luke didn’t mention that.”

“Because it isn’t that interesting?” Luke said.

“Not interesting? How is that not interesting! Dad says his mom would always say she just . . . became pregnant.”


Leia shrugged. “Doesn’t change the fact it’s what she always told dad.”

“Wait… so you hear that our father worked as a mechanic when he was a slave, and you think ‘yeah this is probably a lie to dress up what actually happened,’ but then you’re told that and you just believe it?”

“That was not an addition made to soften the truth of what happened Luke,” Obi-Wan said, “I do understand your doubts, I have felt them myself, but there were always those who believed that Anakin was conceived by the Force itself.”

“But Ben, what she’s saying is impossible!” Luke whined, and Leia rolled her eyes at him. It seemed this Luke was just as prone to pouting as her brother was.

“No, not impossible.” Yoda leaned forward, closer to the two of them. “Part of the reason we believed Anakin was the subject of prophecy, this is.”

“Well, knowing nothing else about it, I think I’ve identified your prophecy problem,” Luke groused. “I mean, it’s horrible but the fact is that my grandmother was a slave.”

Leia turned to face him, causing the root they shared to shake. “Are you saying you think our grandmother was-”

Luke cut Leia off. His voice wasn’t raised per say, but it was certainly louder than it had been
moments before. “She was owned by a Hutt when father was born, and everyone knows how Hutts treat their slaves!”

“Is…” Leia’s voice faltered, not sure how to put to words just how horrible that scenario sounded, “is that really where you think dad came from?”

“Of course it is! Did you really think that she had any sort of control over anything in her life before she was freed?”

The two of them stared at each other, silent.

Sounds filled the bog, the calls of animals Leia did not know the names of, the wind rustling through the plants, even the odd low tone from the strange bubbles that kept rising in the muck before loudly popping.

Luke frowned at her. How had he not been frowning before this point, how was her not agreeing with him the upsetting part, and not all the talk of sexual assault?

Shaking his head, Luke broke the silence. “Leia, just what did you think being a slave meant?”

Leia did not know what to say to that. She honestly had never given much thought before to the full implications of her father and grandmother’s enslavement. Why would she have?

“Not yet reached divergence, yet disagreement we already have.” Yoda punctuated his words with small jabs at the air with his gimmer stick. “What does this tell us, hmmm?”

Luke snorted. “That the story my grandmother made up to cope with her situation, was somehow far more convincing than it ever should have been?”

“One way of seeing things, that is.” Yoda nodded. “Look beyond that, hmmm?”

“What, you want me to believe my grandmother just was suddenly pregnant out of nowhere?” Luke leaned closer to Yoda, his side brushing against Leia’s as he moved. The close contact made Leia realize he was avoiding looking at her.

“In question your belief is not. What is learned in the disagreement, is what I ask.”

Nothing but the thunderous sounds of the bog.

Luke’s voice did not join the cacophony of their surroundings for a good stretch of time, before, finally, he asked, “...I’m sorry, I really don’t understand what you are asking me?”

“Valuable lesson, contained in this discordance there is.”

“There is?” There was something to how Luke asked that made him sound so much younger than he was. Leia was not sure what it was.

Yoda shook his head, huffing as he did. “And you? Understand do you?” He pointed his stick at Leia, tapping her arm lightly with its end.

“Errr…. You can’t believe everything you hear?” Leia guessed.

“Ahh. Close, close that is, yes.” The stick moved away from Leia’s arm, returning to Yoda’s side. “Hard to know, the past is. Many perspectives, many views. Of any one event may exist contrary accounts.”
“How do you determine what is real?” Luke asked. “I mean there has to be a way to separate the
truth from the lies.”

“Listen. Challenge that which you already hold true. Only understand if you have an open mind, you
will.” Yoda nodded. “Subjective the truth is.”

“I… I think I understand.” Luke responded. “Are you saying if someone enters into a conversation
already thinking they know what happened, they won’t hear what the other person is saying, and
might miss things?” His face scrunched with thought. “Or… that what is true for one person isn’t
necessarily true for another, so you have to stop and consider all the possible truths before reaching a
conclusion?”

“Yes! Good, good! A Jedi you may yet become!”

“But Master Yoda, which one was it?” A whine had returned to Luke’s voice. “You didn’t answer
the question!”

Yoda laughed, rocking the root he was perched on, before hopping down and moving into the
clearing. “Now, exercise you will, yes? Later we will talk more, plenty of time to talk, now is the
time for a physical lesson.”

Luke stood, nodding. “All right. What was it you wanted me to do again?”

“To top of tree climb. Find the best path to the top, then down once more. Start simpler than with
running a path, yes? Up, then down, then move on to the next tree, and the next.”

Luke bit his lip, giving the tree closest to them a suspicious look. “You want me to climb this one?”

“Yes.”

“And… this is going to help me train with the Force?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t see how.”

“Yes, clear that is,” Yoda said, shaking his head. He turned to Leia, “While climbing Luke is, your
saber forms I wish to see. Where you are in your training, I will assess.”

Leia got up from her seat, standing by Luke’s side. She gave his arm a quick affectionate squeeze
before moving to where the swamp had receded a bit, creating a clearing. Then she bowed to Master
Yoda and flicked her lightsaber on.

Yoda frowned at Luke, still standing at the base of the tree, gazing up at its canopy with concern.
“Well? Climb! Daylight not last forever!”

With that final bit of encouragement Luke shed the jacket he had been wearing, carelessly tossing it
on the ground, and started to climb.

As Luke climbed, Yoda’s attention rested fully on Leia. He nodded to her to begin, and Leia shut her
eyes, and fell into the well practiced rhythm of her forms. She could hear the patter of Master Yoda’s
feet as he circled her, watching her.

“Hmmm, yes, yes, well taught you have been.”

The sound of praise from the Grand Master himself filled her with warmth, and she injected extra
vigor into her movements.

“She said her training Master is Ahsoka,” Obi-Wan commented.

“Explains much, that does. Yes.” A sigh punctuated Yoda’s speech. “Shame it is, that lightsaber I have not. Otherwise spar with her I would.”

“Do you really think you would be up for that sort of movement?” Obi-Wan teased, “you’re not as young as you used to be.”

Yoda made an offended noise, and Leia could easily picture him waving a dismissive hand at the ghost.

For her part Leia tried to tune their banter out and focus on the motions of her exercises. It wasn’t every day she got to benefit from Yoda’s individual attention, and she hoped to impress him with her skill.

Her focus was good, but not so good that she was able to ignore when Luke came toppling from the trees, crashing into the bog with a loud splash.

She snapped her saber off immediately, running to his side and helping him out of the muck he had tumbled into.

Luke shook the mud out of his hair as he stood, sending it flying right into Leia’s face.

“Hey! Watch it, will you!” she cried as some of it got in her eye.

“Yes, good advice that is,” Yoda said as he made his way over to them. “Aware of surroundings, one always should be.”

“Those trees are way too tall!” Luke complained as he stretched.

“The height of the tree?” Yoda gazed up into the canopy before shaking his head. “Your problem this is not. Pay attention! Focus on this task you must, stay in the here and now. Not what you will do next, not how you hope to do.”

“...you want me to start over, don’t you.”

“Yes! Again you climb!”

Luke groaned, moving to the base of the tree.

Leia resumed her stance, and started her warm up over, only to be interrupted by Luke falling again. After the fourth time this happened, she noticed Yoda giving her a disapproving glare as she resumed her exercises.

By the sixth she was certain he was not pleased with the way she kept stopping to help Luke get back on his feet.

The seventh time she continued going even after Luke fell, tuning his shout and impact out, finally completing her warm up and moving through her forms.

She didn’t know how many times Luke fell after that. She was so focused on her footwork she was blocking everything else out.
Convincing Asajj and Ahsoka to let her do some physical training before meditation had been surprisingly easy. All she had to concede was a promise that she would focus on meditation in full for the rest of the day when she returned from her lunchtime meeting, and the two of them had been quite happy to take her to a lightsaber practice room and help her with her forms.

It was help she sorely needed, not just with adjusting to a weightless weapon and the concerns therein, but embarrassingly also with basics she had thought she had learned years earlier with more traditional weapons.

“No, your foot needs to be pivoted out at a 45 degree angle, not a 20 degree one.”

“Like this?” Leia asked, struggling to keep the blade still. Somehow she hadn’t noticed yesterday how unstable a lightsaber really was, the incredibly light weapon moving on its own unexpectedly, vibrating and almost spinning as it did.

“Yes, better. Now lift that elbow up, it’s drooping.”

“Right,” she grit out, and focused on her posture and pose.

Frustrated with how the blade was trying to escape her grip, she squeezed the handle tighter, knuckles turning white with effort.

“You know, I think you might be ready to start sparring,” Ahsoka mused as she watched Leia train.

“She is rather impressive for just two days of training,” Asajj said, “I wish I could take credit for this, how long did you work with her on this yesterday?”

Ahsoka laughed. “I didn’t, Anakin did.”

“Hmmm, I hate to say it, but Skywalker should be commended.”

“Aw, thanks Ventress, how much did it hurt you to say something nice about me?”

Leia started at the unexpected addition to their conversation, the blade going wild in her hand.

“Woah there!” Anakin called out, then laughed. “And here I was, ready to accept that compliment and everything.”

“Sorry!” Leia said as she grasped the lightsaber hilt with both hands. Slowly she let her second hand off of it, resuming the pose she had been in earlier, with the exception of her head which she turned so she could see Anakin. “I wasn’t expecting to see you.”

“Yeah, that much is clear.” His smile faded, and doubt flickered across his face. “You want me to go?”

“No, please stay. No offense to anyone else present, but you really have a knack for explaining the technique involved with using this thing.”

“Well then, speaking of lightsaber training tips, it looks like that kyber and you are out of sync.”

“Huh?”

There was a bark of laughter from Ventress, and Ahsoka gave her an embarrassed grin.
“All three of us forgot that bit of instruction, huh?” Anakin said, “why do you think lightsabers are best used in the hands of a Force-sensitive person?”

“Well… I know that kybers connect with people through the Force.” She reached into a pocket, and pulled out the crystal she had made sure was on her ever since the previous day’s confusion. Looking at it now, it no longer appeared clear and colorless as it had when she had first found it. Instead it had started to take on a purple hue. It pulsed comfortably in her hand, like it was alive and wanted to be there, with her.

“Yes, and what does that tell you?”

“Well if they power lightsabers, and they… bond with people, it would make sense that the weapons themselves are bonded to people.”

“Yes.”

“Are you saying that to properly wield a lightsaber, you have to be bonded to the kyber inside it?”

“That is exactly what I am saying! The one you are using right now, it seems to regard you as a friend. But it also only just met you, so it would make sense for it to grow tired of being used by you after too long.”

“But in my world, Luke, he only fights with his father’s lightsaber, and he’s always appeared quite comfortable with it.”

“As I am sure you would be, if you tried to use it,” Anakin said. Cocking his head slightly he mused, “actually, maybe we should switch Ahsoka’s out with mine, that might be a good idea until you build your own.”

Leia frowned, the implication of Anakin’s offer obvious. But… she did need to learn this, and as an added bonus it wouldn’t hurt to be comfortable with Luke’s weapon. Who knew when something like that would come in handy.

Shutting off and then handing back to Ahsoka the lightsaber she had been holding, Leia held out a hand and took Anakin’s. It hummed in her hand, the vibration setting her whole body at ease. She really hated to admit it, but this hilt was far more comfortable to wield than the other.

It made absolutely no sense.

Leia’s hands were so much smaller than Anakin’s, his weapon should have felt large and cumbersome in her grip. Yet somehow that was not the case. It felt right, like it had been made with her in mind. She examined the hilt closer, making note that it actually was the same girth as Ahsoka’s. If anything that made even less sense. If the two lightsabers were the same size, what caused this one to be so much more comfortable to wield?

“The kyber, more than anything, determines how right a lightsaber is for you. A lightsaber is an extension of a Jedi’s Force awareness,” Ahsoka said, she sounded as if she had said this many times. Given the softer cast to her voice, and the slow pace of her words, possibly to children. “There is a bond between the Jedi and the kyber. The vibration of the crystal in the blade should help you center yourself and find balance. That vibration, that humm of connection, it helps center your attention beyond the distractions of combat. That is the main reason why a lightsaber’s full potential can only be reached in the hands of a Jedi.”

“What of the Sith? Surely they are also masters of lightsaber use. I’ve seen the crimson blade Vader carries, he certainly seems quite capable with it.”
Asajj barked a short clipped laugh. “I am certain he is. However Sith do not use them for defense. No, in their hands lightsabers are used only for attack, domination, and execution. Encounter a Dark Sider on the battlefield and they will seem deadly indeed. Their kybers, though, are anything but in harmony with them, and they do not take into account all the possibilities of their blade’s use.”

“What do you mean, their kybers are not in harmony with them? If bonding with a kyber is so important for lightsaber use, then how can that be?”

Asajj’s hands twitched, and she took a deep breath. “It is impossible to establish a bond with a kyber when there is hate and fear clouding your mind. To get around this you must overpower a kyber, forcing it to submit.” Her eyes darted between Anakin and Ahsoka, before she drew two curved lightsabers from where they had been dangling on each hip. She flicked them on, their blades glowing crimson. “That is what causes the blade to be red. The kyber is bleeding, screaming, forcibly weaponized into something it should not be.”

“If… if bleeding a kyber is so wrong, if kybers are living things and making them red well… hurts them, then why… why are yours…”

“These lightsabers have been with me for a long time, and they are mine. Like the rest of my past, I will always carry them with me.”

She snapped her blades off, clipping them at her sides once more. Then, aware that the attention of the others in the room was still on her, Asajj continued, “Tano was not entirely correct. Much as Dark Siders and their kybers have no actual bond, being able to connect with a kyber is not the reason why lightsabers are best used by those who are strong in the Force.”

“What is the reason then?” Leia asked.

“Anyone at all can pick up a lightsaber and use it, but as I am sure you’ve already found, they are tricky weapons to wield. Their weightless nature can confuse and throw off those trained with similar physical weapons, and even the slightest error when handling them will have the most dire of consequences for all involved. No. You need the senses of a Force-sensitive individual to handle something so deadly without accidently causing harm to yourself or others.”

Ahsoka nodded, agreeing. “Ventress is right. It is only through rigorous training and with senses that have been enhanced thanks to the Force that a Jedi can use a lightsaber to its full potential. Even then though, it takes a lifetime for a Jedi achieve true mastery with their weapon.”

“Some Jedi, others just have natural talent,” Anakin interjected.

“Even you were not just born with your lightsaber skills perfected, Master.”

“You wound me Snips, truly.” He laughingly placed his gloved hand over his heart, turning to look at Leia with a cheeky grin. “Despite what Ahsoka may claim, with what I saw yesterday, plus my experiences with my daughter, I think it’s safe to say you are a natural as well. It just runs in the family, if you ask me.”

“No one did,” Asajj cut in.

“Don’t you have a bounty to take care of or something?” Anakin asked. “Why are you even here?”

“She is here to help teach me,” Leia said. After all the progress she had made getting Ahsoka and Asajj to get along, she did not appreciate Anakin just strolling on in and putting Asajj back on the defensive.
“Well, she isn’t wanted and doesn’t actually have to be here.”

“I want her here.”

He stared at her, brow furrowed, and let out a hiss of breath. “Right. Ok. So all of three of us working with you together, huh? This is going to be quite the day.”

“Just until half an hour before noon.”

“That is oddly specific. What happens then?”

“I have a lunch meeting at your apartment at noon. Your wife and several others are planning to go over the political situation of my dimension, so we may strategize for a more just future.”

“Your fourth day here and you already have meetings like that arranged? Politicians sure are scary,” Ahsoka said.

Leia laughed, falling back into a training stance. “That’s just scratching the surface of why politicians are the ones to really watch.”

“What, you really think all that empty debating over nothing is interesting?” Anakin seemed to be mocking her more than actually asking a question. His hand on her back as he helped adjust her stance was gentle and steady.

“Politicians are the only ones who truly have the power to create or ease suffering.” After Ahsoka’s lightsaber, using his felt like throwing off training weights. It took so much less effort and concentration to make all the right motions, everything flowed so free, almost as if the sword wanted her to succeed as much as she did. “All of the systems, everything that makes society what it is… that’s on us. Nothing in the galaxy is as important as due political process.”

The hand at her back drew away, and the space between Leia and Anakin spiked with emotion. “You can’t actually believe that!”

Glancing over at Ahsoka and Asajj to see what they made of this, Leia noted that they had moved to the edge of the room and were talking together. She reached out to them both, a bit awed with how easy she was beginning to find that sort of thing, and both were quick to tell her they wanted to keep out of this.

Right.

She really was being left to deal with this man on her own.

“You don’t? Your wife is the Chancellor and you…” Leia drew in a breath and move from one stance to the next, “you don’t find her work to be important?”

“There are exceptions to the rule. People like Padmé, and you too, of course.” He reached out, adjusting her arm, lowering it slightly. “For the most part though politicians don’t do anything.”

Leia lowered the weapon entirely, shutting it off and relaxing her posture. “You really believe that?”

Anakin shrugged. “I’m not going to pretend I get politics, but if the politicians actually cared they’d have done something about the suffering of people outside the Republic.”

She sighed. “You… you think the politicians of the Republic are ineffective because people outside the Republic are suffering?”
“The Republic does nothing, nothing about the horrors that happen outside of it. It took until the Clone Wars for the GAR to even exist, that’s a problem. Hell, we’ve been working to slowly dissolve the standing army ever since the war ended… kriff! I mean the entire government in Hutt space needs to be taken out and replaced with something better! We have more resources, more men, we could build the clone army back up if need be, if we went to war with the Hutts we would win. But no one listens to any of my thoughts ever, even if I used to be a General.”

He had a point. The Hutts were unquestionably a scourge to the galaxy.

Yet starting a war when there need not be one was no small matter.

Far more troubling, his reasoning was very much in line with the Imperial baseline justifications for the expansion of their armies and invasion and colonization of the galaxy at large.

“What has your wife said when you raised these concerns with her?” She cocked her head to the side, curious just how different this Republic really was from the Empire she knew.

“I try to keep my mouth shut whenever my wife asks what I think of politics.” Anakin was pouting. That was the only word for it, pouting. The expression looked remarkably similar to the one Luke wore whenever Leia gave him an order he didn’t like. Had she any doubts earlier that this man was Luke’s father, that expression alone would have been enough to erase them. “It’s not a topic we talk about at all.”

“What? Your wife is the Chancellor of the Republic, don’t you speak with her about her work? Ask her about her day?” Leia’s parents always shared every aspect of their day with one another, with her as well. Half of her education had come from simply listening to her parents converse about their days and what they had done in terms of work. Was it any wonder that Padmé complained her own children had no interest in politics if it was not a common topic of conversation in their home? “I don’t understand… she should be able to confide in you and in turn you should be able to speak with her about your concerns about the Republic’s demilitarization!”

“We prefer to keep our home a safe haven from work.” His posture straightened, his voice taking on the hint of a lecturing tone.

It made no sense.

How were Padme and Anakin supposed to help each other through all aspects of their lives as partners if such a large part of Padme’s day to day life was never shared between them?

No, no, not just Padme’s day, hadn’t she said yesterday that she knew nothing of what went on among the Jedi?

That must mean that his day was similarly withheld from her!

When he said they did not talk of work at home, it really applied to them both.

Anakin was grinning, he was clearly very proud of this aspect of his marriage. “A place where we can both relax and put those concerns of the day aside, not rehash them. Besides, it isn’t as if I’m suffering by not talking to her about these things. Just because you don’t like what I have to say-”

“I never said that! I truly do not know if diplomatic measures have failed with the Hutts and military intervention is needed, I have been here for less then a week. Besides, I only asked because you had already made a comment that expressed that you had a strong opinion to share.”

Anakin sulked, face slightly red, frown deep. He reminded Leia of a petulant child who felt scolded,
which was funny in its own strange way given that he was her birth father.

“Come’ on Master, you gotta admit, Leia’s got you there,” Ahsoka said, looking on with a large sharp-toothed grin.

Asajj laughed, loud and delighted. “Oh, I like her. I really do.”

She walked over, and gently held the hand Leia was using to grip Anakin’s lightsaber. She slowly raised the hand back into place. “Yet as much as I like you, child, that does not mean I will allow you to divert your training time into other things.” With her other hand Asajj quickly grabbed Leia’s shoulder and jerked her into the stance she had been in just before she shut her lightsaber off. “You are no master of this art yet, and until you are, conversing during practice will only take place once you are able to do it without stopping.”

Anakin’s irritation surged in the Force, a siren call to Leia’s own, feeding it and making it grow stronger. Her heart was pounding and for a moment she wanted to lash out at Asajj for her behavior. She didn’t, thanks to a soothing wave of calm being sent her way from Ahsoka’s direction.

It was all so much.

Too much.

How was she supposed to focus on the weapon she held and moving her body just right when her senses were reeling like this?

“Forget them and focus,” Asajj hissed in her ear. “Do you think a Sith on the battlefield will not try to overwhelm you with their anger? Give you time to recover rather than benefit from your sloppy mistakes due of the emotions they feel? Block them out!”

Leia nodded, swallowing hard. Block them out. Right. She’d done that before, hadn’t she? Done that with Vader even, way back on the Death Star.

The thought of that experience sent a chill down her spine, hardening it as it went.

She needed to practice so she could destroy Vader.

No sense losing sight of that, letting the petty problems of this dimension get in her way. She knew what she needed to do, the only thing standing in her way of achieving it was herself.

There was a dull pounding in her ears, but that was all. The sword in her hand thrummed in time to it, pleasantly. She relaxed into it into the rhythm, letting it flow through her and around her and…

Oh.

Oh!

Coming back to herself, Leia stumbled. She found her footing, and drew in a deep breath, listening to her heart pound, echoing the rhythm she had felt moments before. As her sense of self returned she felt self-conscious.

There was a slow echoing sound, Asajj clapping her hands. “Very good, young one. Very good indeed.” Her voice dropped and became more serious. “Now do it again.”
Next time: Jedi training, and eavesdropping.

I am so excited for Solo I think I may burst, you all have no idea.

Even better? Once I have a handle on how Han came to be the grumpy cynic we all know and love, I can actually work out what the deal with AU Han would be and have him show up in the story again, possibly to do more than just be a drunken mess. Yay!
Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

In honor of the 41st anniversary of *A New Hope* opening in theaters, here is the next chapter - a week early.

I hope you are all get a chance to see *Solo* this weekend! I saw it at a fan event yesterday, and enjoyed it enough that I went and saw it again for a second time today!

(No worries, there are absolutely no movie spoilers *anywhere* in this chapter)

Thank you to everyone who helped beta this chapter, Sethnakht, *the-weight-of-wings*, and *AbsolXGuardian*. Your suggestions and encouragement push me to keep improving.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“And again!”

Nodding, Leia sighed and readjusted her grip on the lightsaber.

She had been at this for ages now. She shook her head, turning to speak instead.

“Not that I object to focusing on my forms,” she said, “but I thought we were going to talk more about how to best tell Luke about Darth Vader?”

Master Yoda’s ears drooped as he closed his eyes. “Here you both are. Training.” He opened his eyes, looking up and into hers. “Urgent it is not. Time we have.”

“Yoda does have a point, young Padawan,” Obi-Wan said. “So long as Luke is committed to seeing his training through, we have time to ease him into this knowledge. There is no need to upset him with a confrontation.” Obi-Wan smiled at Leia. “This is not something to open one’s training with, but rather a conclusion to be reached through the process of learning.”

Digging one foot into the mud, Leia shrugged and looked away from both Masters, instead gazing up through the trees to where Luke was struggling to climb. “I guess that makes sense.”

Yoda’s stick tapped at her shin, returning her attention to him. “Still questions you have?”

She nodded. “Yes, Master.”

“Ask! Impossible to answer, an unasked question is,” Yoda said. “Wish to speak of Luke and his father, then speak! Stopping you, no one is.” He gestured for her to resume her practice as they spoke, so she did.

They had left the training drones behind on Horox III, so rather than have lasers trained on her, Master Yoda levitated a near endless stream of rocks into the air around Leia. They danced around her, and she in turn moved swiftly to slice them with her lightsaber. She got most of them, but Master Yoda successfully jerked a few away before she had the chance to strike at them.
“Why are you having me tell Luke about my father in my world? My father and Vader are different, would understanding one really help understand the other?”

“Share a past they do. Where the difference began, unknown to either Obi-Wan or myself.” Yoda sighed heavily. “Learn this with you, we will.”

“Master Yoda and I are hoping that as you tell us what happened in your timeline, we will be able to better identify what led to Anakin becoming Vader in this one. As it is we…” Obi-Wan’s voice faltered, twisted with pain that had had two decades to fester and root into the core of his being, “we have our theories and our suspicions about what happened of course, but we don’t know anything for sure.”

Distracted, Leia missed one of the rocks and she had to duck to avoid it hitting her. She ground her teeth together. “Well, what are they?”

“What are what?” Obi-Wan asked in turn.

“Your theories and suspicions of course!” She chanced a glance over in the direction of the two of them, not ceasing to cut down the spinning rocks sent her way.

The ground around Yoda bore the marks of his almost triangular footprints with three stubby toes in the front and one in back, evidence he had been pacing around her. He was hunched over his stick, leaning on it as a cane even as it sank deeper into the mud.

Not for the first time Leia wondered what his homeworld must have been like, and how odd it was that she knew nothing of where he came from. For all that he was an inescapable presence around the Temple, he did not share much of his own personal history, preferring instead to help those around him with their own problems. Whose advice did Master Yoda seek when he had a problem or needed help? Was there anyone who was there for him in his moments of need?

Obi-Wan on the other hand stood straight and proud a pace or two behind Yoda. From how he carried himself, it suddenly occurred to Leia that he had full control of exactly how he appeared when he showed himself to others, and that he probably chose to appear older.

At first all she had seen when she looked at them was how tired and lonely they both were - how old they had gotten in this universe where all the things they had ever cared about had been taken from them. Yet now as Yoda turned to look at Obi-Wan and had a silent conversation with him, she could see the strength that suffused them both. How profound a victory it was that they both had retained their sense of humor through all the horrors they had witnessed. It would have been understandable, closing themselves off from it all in reaction to what they had endured, yet for all that they had hidden away in isolation, it was clear they had never been truly alone throughout either of their exiles.

Leia had to glance away several times to focus back on the rocks Yoda tossed her way as he and Obi-Wan carried out their silent conversation. But whenever she could risk it she’d look back over at them, wondering when enough time would have elapsed for her to demand a response without seeming rude.

“We shall share our theories with you when you get to the appropriate place in the recounting of your known history,” Obi-Wan finally said. “We wouldn’t want to influence the story of your past by alerting you too much to what topics and areas we are most interested in.”

“But that will take forever!” She knew she was whining. She just didn’t really care that she was.
Yoda laughed. “Going somewhere are you?”

“Home,” she said, punctuating the word with a spin that took out several of the rocks at once, “hopefully.”

“Hmmm. A good point you raise. Yes. The mystery of how to send you home, we must solve.”

Worried that he was just trying to placate her so he could change the topic, she pressed further. “Do you have any ‘theories and suspicions’ about my situation? You have to have something more than just a quest you went on decades ago.”

She looked away from the rocks, looked at Yoda, and the two of them made eye contact, gazing at one another for a long moment.

Finally he closed his eyes, sighing and shaking his head. “Of your situation know nothing we do.”

“Given that I am quite literally One with the Force, the fact that even I do not know how to send you home is quite odd.” Obi-Wan had the gall to laugh at that. Laugh and stroke at his beard, as if it was an interesting fact and not him condemning her to a life in a strange universe. “However I can say with confidence that you are not stuck here forever and have no reason to panic.”

Leia shut her lightsaber off. This conversation was too important for her to split her attention between training and the two Masters. “Oh you can promise me that, can you?”

“Yes.” Obi-Wan flashed her his most charming grin. It was the sort of disarming easy charm Leia knew had succeeded in convincing parties far harder to convince than she to agree with him. Yet it did not work on her at all. “I have seen it Leia, you will not be stuck here forever.”

“Well who am I to dispute visions of what will come.” She frowned, thinking of her conversation with Vader the day before, the one where he declared his fall as an inescapable fact of destiny. Obi-Wan’s words echoed his, in a strange parody of the close bond she knew her father and her Uncle Obi shared in her world, and once did in this one as well. “Apparently visions are set in stone and cannot be changed in any way.”

“Leia, come now, don’t be like that.” The chiding tone to his voice was so familiar - her uncle scolding her after she had spoken out of turn or had given a wrong answer when he knew she knew the right one. The familiarity was so out of place, just further mockery from the world she was trapped in

“Be like what? Tired of being stuck here? Tired of not having answers, of being told to simply wait and see?” She was shouting, having a tantrum like a youngling half her age. She did not care. “Of having to deal with- with Darth kriffing Vader banging away at my mental shields at all hours doing all he can to speak to me through the Force?”

Just the thought of the way he had gotten past her shields the day before weakened them enough for her to feel him pressing against them now. Would he ever give up in his desperate attempts to contact her? What could he possibly want to speak with her about, unless he still thought he could talk her into falling?

All humor and good cheer drained from Obi-Wan’s face. Somehow despite already being transparent he grew even more pale. Leia thought he felt it, that he knew that Vader was attempting to invade her mind even now as they spoke. His words proved her wrong. “He- he’s spoken with you?”

The reality of it, that she was confessing to two members of the High Council that she had been in direct contact with a Sith Lord hit her. She was in contact with that Sith Lord still, even now, and she
was not sure what to say, how much to tell them. “I… he… yes. Yes, he has.”

Obi-Wan’s eyes grew wide, and his ghost took a step closer to her, the air between them buzzing with frenetic energy. “Leia, this is important, does he know who you are?”

“Yes,” she admitted, “he knows everything.”

Her head was pounding, the effort of holding Vader back starting to take its toll.

“Everything?” Obi-Wan’s voice raised into a shout. He paused, gazing up at the tree canopy where Luke still was climbing, and shook his head. When he resumed speaking his voice was pitched low, but the pain that filled his words was unmistakable. “After how hard we worked through the years to keep the twins safe, to protect them both, you tell him everything?”

She hadn’t considered that she had undone someone else’s planning and work when she had reached out to Vader. She had simply been scared and confused and had wanted her father more than anything. She had let her emotions dictate her actions, seeking comfort in a scary and confusing situation. “I… I didn’t think-”

Obi-Wan cut her off. “Yes, clearly you were not thinking,” each word was clipped and stern.

Insides flooding with cold oily remorse and panic Leia bit her lip and-

No!

No.

No sense letting her emotions get the better of her here, not now. Not when she needed her senses firm. When she was in a private council with these two Masters. When she was sure that Vader could feed off of her negative emotions.

She breathed in deep, counting back from five internally, letting go of her guilt and releasing it into the Force.

By the time she reached one, she could no longer feel Vader’s presence, she had successfully blocked him out.

Yoda sighed, heavy and resigned. “Troubling this is. Change things it might.” He turned to Obi-Wan, frowning. “Hmmm. Meditate on this we must.”

Leia nodded, grateful she had grounded herself, kept herself from reacting like a child caught ordering the culinary droids to bake them sweets between meals. “Of course you will, I-”

“Included in that we, you were,” Yoda said, raising one of his eyebrows at her.

“What?”

“A Jedi, are you not? Hmmm?” Yoda pointed his stick at her as he spoke, tapping her shin with its mud covered bottom as his question ended.

Leia’s forehead wrinkled with confusion. “Yes, of course I am but-”

“This you will meditate on. As I also will. Then together a decision may be reached.” Yoda nodded as he spoke. “Not made quickly. No, the way of the Jedi, that is not.” He raised an eyebrow at her, lecturing her as if this was a normal lesson, not a response to her throwing plans years in the making into disarray. “Patience, reasoned debate after reflecting on all possible paths, the way we shall act,
“But I know nothing of how this world came to be how it is!” What help could she be in this debate? What valuable input could she possibly provide?

“To Vader, spoken, you have,” Yoda said. “Spoken more recently than anyone else.” Yoda shut his eyes, turning to walk back towards the hut. “In this conversation, an important voice you have.”

There was a loud noise above them, followed by the now familiar sound of Luke’s body hitting the ground on the other side of the clearing.

“I’m not hurt,” Luke moaned as he stood. “I just, well, can that be enough climbing for the day? Please? I’m fine doing anything else.”

“Hmmmm. Yes. Another task for the two of you I have.”

“For both of us?”

“Yes, both of you. This hut, too small for all three of us to stay in. Other, larger hut, up the hill there is. For rainy season. Yet, no crops, no rootleaf! Gather plants, you will. Big arms, good for carrying. Then together to other hut we shall go.”

“Farming. You… you want us to do some farming.” Luke laughed, bitter and resigned. “I travel clear across the galaxy, and pledge to study under a legendary warrior… and he sets me to work farming.”

The clothes Leia was wearing when she arrived at the apartment were still uncomfortably damp and slick from sweat. Everytime she moved she caught another waft of unpleasant odor.

Upon stepping through the apartment’s door, she was met by a fussy-as-always C-3PO who would not let her past the entryway until she promised him she would visit the fresher first and get herself clean. She took a quick shower, and found a fresh outfit waiting on top of the toilet as she stepped out of the steamy water.

Robes. Jedi Robes.

Vaguely Leia tried to recall if any of them had thought to inform C-3PO that she was not actually the Leia he knew, or if the droid thought she was his usual mistress, just with a radical change in hairstyle. She suspected that if someone had actually explained this mess to him, he would have gone out of his way to make sure she was given an outfit she’d be comfortable with. He was always mindful of details like that. It was proper protocol to ensure a guest’s full satisfaction, after all.

Oh shavit, why hadn’t she remembered to tell him to bring her something other than Jedi robes when she was dealing with him earlier? She knew she was tired, but she hadn’t thought herself that exhausted. Still, she really didn’t want to wander out of the ‘fresher naked seeking him out to ask for different clothes, and putting the sweat stained clothes she had been wearing when she entered the fresher back on just wasn’t an option. Wearing the clothes of the woman whose life she was already occupying was not an enjoyable prospect, but she didn’t really have a choice.

As the loose light fabrics settled against her skin, and she tucked her holdout blaster into the soft cushioned boots, Leia thanked the Force that at least these clothes were practical. Even if she was stuck wearing something she disliked, at least she was comfortable. She would have preferred to be
properly dressed, but at least she was only going to a meeting with people she felt at ease with. Her father, Mon, and… well the Chancellor of the Republic. Yet for all that she had just met her, Leia felt at ease around Padmé. So much so that she did not feel too awkward going to meet her in the plain simple robes that belonged to Padmé’s daughter.

She stepped out of the ‘fresher, and headed to the office where she had met with Padmé just the other day, but the room was empty. Had she somehow misunderstood where it was this meeting was supposed to take place?

There were voices in the living room. Mon’s voice and her father’s.

She was in the right place then.

She moved from the office to where the two of them were gathered, deep in conversation about some bill or another.

Her father seemed startled when he saw her. “For a moment there I thought this whole situation had been resolved,” he said, “I hope you do not mind my saying so, but I almost mistook you for this universe’s Leia.”

“Almost?”

“Your body language along with how you look at both Mon and myself, make it impossible to truly confuse you with girl we know. Well that and there is no mistaking your planet of origin with your hair braided as it is, of course.”

“Of course,” Leia said, suppressing a grin. Best to play this off casual, and not let on just how thrilled she was to hear not only that they were immediately identifiable as two separate people, but that her father had truly cared enough to study and memorize her tells. “I don’t see Padmé here, is she arriving late?”

“I believe she was dealing with some official business downstairs,” Mon said. “Which should have concluded some time ago, however. It is unlike Padmé to be late to appointments, especially ones she has made without consulting the schedules of all involved.”

How odd. The Mon Leia knew was always putting together last moment emergency meetings without consulting anyone's schedule at all. Although she supposed that after two decades of managing and leading a rebellion against the government, her universe's Mon had developed very different notions about what was and was not rude. This Mon had no such experience.

“Come now, Mon, she knew you still had a day of vacation left, and with how frugal you tend to be there was little chance you’d spend it traveling home and then back again.”

“That is still no excuse to be rude,” Mon said.

“I don’t think she saw it that way.”

“I reserve my right to be offended, thank you very much.”

“Of course, my friend, of course.”

Leia snorted, cutting through the chatter. “So she’s late? Given how this meeting was arranged, I agree that this is a problem. You said she would be downstairs?”

“Yes, but-”
“I am assuming that, if whatever she was doing was classified or of extreme import, she would be at
a more official and secure location?”

“Of course, but that doesn’t mean—”

Rolling her eyes Leia opened the door that separated the stairwell from the rest of the apartment and
started to head down the stairs. If there was one thing living in a royal household had taught her, it
was the importance of the signals meeting locations sent.

When she was little, Leia had learned that while the Queen’s presence in tax negotiations was
tremendously important, so too was their prearranged mommy-daughter time. If the Princess was not
welcome to remind her mother of their play time, then the Queen would not have been meeting in a
room to which she had access in the first place.

She knew as well as she could recite the Aurek-Besh when she could duck her head into a meeting
and send the silent reminder to be somewhere else, and this meeting Padmé was in was clearly one
such occasion. There were far more official locations Padmé could have gone had total privacy been
required.

Leia made a point of making noise as she headed down the stairs. Not enough noise to be considered
disruptive, but enough to be sure that she was heard. She didn’t want her presence to be a surprise.

Beyond that, she was sure if she truly was intruding on a private meeting, security personnel would
prevent her access. Since no one barred her from continuing down the stairs, she could only assume
that so long as she did not too dramatically interrupt the meeting, everything would be fine.

Everything was not fine.

As Leia entered the room Padmé greeted her with just the slightest shift in her focus, a small smile
and easy to miss nod. It was an acknowledgement, and also a request for Leia to remain silent and
out of the holoprojector’s focus until the meeting wrapped up.

Leia barely noticed any of it, because her focus was fully absorbed by the figure projected into the
center of the room, listening to Padmé speak to him with rapt attention.

Tarkin.

Wilhuf Tarkin himself, in a uniform that looked so much like an Imperial uniform Leia almost missed
the differences as she took in the sight of him.

Leia wasn’t stupid, she knew that the people of this dimension were not who they were in her own,
but Tarkin’s crimes were so enormous and inexcusable that she truly believed they carried over
across dimensions. As far as she was concerned there was not a version of Tarkin in all of
conceivable existence who was worthy of life.

A shame he was not actually present. Leia would enjoy having the chance to kill him. To look this
monster in the eye at the moment of his death.

She let herself fantasize about drawing her blaster and firing a shot or two right into his smug face.
Better yet, she wished she had Anakin’s saber. Decapitating that horrible man would be so
satisfying, and killing him with a kyber powered weapon - one where the kybers were being used in
a respectful manner at that - really would be a fitting end for him.

The longer Leia gazed at the blue tinted holo, the more she could feel her rage building within her,
and now that she had opened herself to it… she could hear the Force as well, promising her the
ability to track Tarkin down to where he was physically present so she could make him pay for the genocide of her people. The Force would answer her command if she desired it, and oh did she ever desire it.

The holoprojector gave off a spark, and Tarkin’s image began to flicker.

“It seems, your excellency, that our connection is breaking up,” he drawled. Each word - so benign and casual - ignited the rolling hatred within Leia further. She had never expected to hear that voice again. As she did she couldn’t help but remember the last time she had heard him speak - of that horrible terrible moment when he had forced her to witness the destruction of her home.

How he had mocked her. Telling Vader that she could be reasoned with, that she was far too trusting with her desperate hope that by naming Dantooine, Alderaan might have been spared.

She bit down on her lip to keep herself from vocalizing her hatred of him - as massive as her feelings were, she was self aware enough to remember that she shouldn’t interrupt the meeting. But Leia tasted blood.

Then with a loud whine the holosystem shorted out entirely, even going so far as to burst into flames.

Funny, she thought that system had looked expensive and new, not like the sort of thing she’d have expected to combust at all.

Padmé had shouted at the sight of flames. Now the women who had assisted Leia with getting dressed the previous evening streamed in from the hall, some of them dousing the flames and others checking both Padmé and Leia over to ensure that no one had been injured.

Padmé was watching Leia with an incomprehensible expression. Leia simply didn’t know her well enough to parse out the meaning behind it, but whatever she was thinking she did not seem to wish to share with her handmaidens present.

There was noise from the stairway behind her, no doubt more people coming to investigate the source of the trouble, and then both Mon and her father joined them in the room.

Padmé turned to face the stairs, posture shifting slightly.

"Is everything alright?" Mon asked as they entered the room. "We heard a shout!"

"Yes, yes we're fine, there just was a small fire."

"A fire!"

"My holosystem shorted."

"That must have been some short for the whole thing to ignite."

"Yes," Padmé said as she gave Leia an indecipherable look. "Yes, it must have been."

"I hope whoever you were conversing with will be understanding of the technical difficulties."

"We were wrapping our conversation up, so I am sure the Fleet Admiral will forgive being cut off as he was."

Oh of course. Of course the scheming manipulative piece of banthashit would have a high rank in this dimension.
"Ah, and how is Wilhuff doing?" Bail asked.

Leia could not handle this, could not handle hearing her father speak of the man who had murdered him in such a pleasant tone. How could they not see how evil that man was? What sorts of unforgivable atrocities he was capable of?

"Leia, are you alright?" Mon asked. "You look pale, like you've seen a ghost!"

It poured out of her then, her rage, her grief, her need to see that sadistic evil man pay.

"He's a monster!" She hadn't meant to scream, she really hadn't, but her voice betrayed her, loud and pained and breaking around each word.

"Leia?"

"That man destroyed everything I ever loved!" She turned, catching her father's eye, and the anger drained out of her, leaving behind nothing but pure naked grief and sorrow. "He made me watch him commit genocide, and he did it all with a smile. No - not just witness. He made me… he made me party to it. To your murder."

Bail was searching for something in her gaze, his deep brown eyes staring into her own. "You… you saw the man who destroyed Alderaan in your dimension? Leia, who is he? You don't mean…" He frowned and turned to look at the smoldering holosystem. The name came out as a broken whisper. "Tarkin?"

"Yes, of course it was him, who else could it have been?" Leia snorted. "Who else would be so cruel?"

"Well, that may be the most concerning thing I could possibly learn about the man in charge of the Republic's armed forces. To think I've been letting policy be written by someone capable of -" Padmé started what Leia was sure would have been an impressive attempt at calming the situation. She didn’t care to hear it.

"What does your military even do?" Leia asked, remembering Anakin’s frustration with the lack of action taken against the Hutt gangsters, "why did you maintain it after the Clone Wars reached their end? Why allow that vile man to have any power at all?"

"Excellent questions all around," Mon responded, "I especially enjoy how quickly and immediately you zeroed in on the fact we have no need for a standing military. If only all people were as reasonable when it comes to demilitarization."

"What? No I mean… what does he actually do? What is his actual role and function, and how easy would it be for you to remove him from a position of power?"

"What he does is maintain the forces of the Grand Army of the Republic, ensure that there is no further talk of secession and most importantly that the GAR enforces the rules and mandates of this Republic." Padmé was not looking at Leia as she spoke, but rather directly at Mon. This was clearly an old argument. "We have reduced their numbers as much as we possibly can without significant pushback. You know that every time we so much as slash the military budget we face riots."

"Yes, here on Coruscant and on other worlds that have never tried to leave the Republic. Not all systems share that sentiment."

"Mon, you know I agree with you," Padmé said. "I never wanted us to have a military either! My career was built on trying to stop it from being created in the first place! But we're long past that..."
point, and, once created, a military is a hard thing to disband. In part,” Padmé said, her attention returning to Leia, “the GAR at present is acting in the role the Jedi once occupied, just in a far more accountable manner.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“In the past the Republic had no military of its own. Individual systems often had something in place of course, but the Republic itself only had the Jedi to maintain the peace.” Padmé’s voice was soothing, slow and calm and pleading through tone alone for those present to hear her out. “Yet for as much as they were substantially under the command of the Senate, they did not allow government officials to monitor or be part of any of their internal debates or meetings. The situation between them and the government was growing increasingly strained over the course of the Clone War and after…” Her voice faded out, Padmé was frowning now.

Leia wanted to interrupt, to take back command of the conversation, but Padmé seemed to know precisely when her patience had run out, for it was at that exact moment she began speaking once more. “After my husband was so profoundly stupid as to murder Palpatine in public the way he did, the Jedi Order fully lost the public trust in full. It was clear that we could not move forward as a government with them remaining in a position with any power or authority.” She raised an eyebrow at Bail and Mon and the two nodded, agreeing with her assessment of the situation.

Padmé offered her fellow politicians a thin smile, and reestablished eye contact with Leia. “The GAR presently acts as the galaxy’s peacekeepers, and the Jedi are kept far away from tasks that have any deep governmental meaning. It is far from ideal, but it is how things need to be.”

“What do the Jedi do then, if not maintain the peace?” Leia snapped.

“Meditate? Explore ancient sites? Teach children how to perform stunts with dangerous glowing weapons? As I have already told you, the doings of the Order are kept from those of us who are not part of it. Even though I am the Chancellor, they tell me very little about what they do. That’s precisely why we had to remove all the power they held.”

“And give it to Tarkin instead?”

“He’s accountable.”

“Accountable? He’s a monster!”

“Maybe in your world, but in this one-”

“I don't care what you think you've done to constrain him, I'm telling you that - that you can't trust him! He's capable of war crimes beyond measure”

“And I am telling you that the Wilhuff Tarkin of this universe is not the same as the Wilhuff Tarkin of yours.”

Leia couldn’t take it, could not stand listening to this woman defend Tarkin, defend him with both her father and Mon standing by her side. She turned and began to make her way up the stairs once more.

Padmé’s voice followed her up the stairs. “Leia, Leia - we are not done talking, come back here, you can’t just storm away when you disagree-”

Leia shut the door at the top, sealing the noise away.
Chapter End Notes

Chapter 49

Chapter Notes

Endless thanks (as always) to Sethnakht and The-Weight-Of-Wings for all their wonderful suggestions and edits. Thanks to AbsolXGuardian for making sure I don't stray from established canon in my world-building, and to Leia1998 for all the encouragement.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The trek to the larger hut Master Yoda had set up for the rainy season was long, and was complicated by the baskets full of roots both Leia and Luke carried with them. Every step Leia took, she could feel a wet slimy puddle of mud inside her boots, slowly oozing through her socks.

They had spent most of the day pulling roots out of the ground, hard work that left all three of them covered in more mud than Leia had ever thought possible. The whole time they had worked, Luke had provided a running commentary based on his experiences working in a hydroponic garden of all things. According to him, everything about how Yoda had been growing the roots was wrong. Leia had never known farming could be so complex.

Master Yoda had appreciated Luke’s tips, and he made the whole process that much longer, requesting Luke show him the best way to do everything, slowly going over it all with him over and over. Leia had learned far more about irrigation systems than any being had any right to know. Ever.

After what felt like an age they had finally managed to fill every possible basket, and set out together for the new hut.

Only the whole trip to the second hut long Yoda had asked Luke even more farming questions. He’d been alone on this planet for decades and had to live off the land. He knew how to survive just fine, why did he keep the conversation on this boring useless topic?

Finally, she could spot the domed mud structure through the twisting vines that covered everything on this planet. Now that they were here, hopefully the endless discussion of farming would draw to an all too welcome end.

Master Yoda had been right, the other hut was large enough for two humans to sleep comfortably inside.

That was about the nicest thing Leia could really say about it though. It had even more snakes inside than the other one, and Leia was certain that spending the night on the floor watching them slither in the corner wasn’t going to be very restful.

She wondered how Master Yoda would react if after all the effort of relocating to this spot she insisted on spending the night back on Sana’s ship. At least there were no bog dwelling critters there. Well, she hoped there weren’t. She didn’t know how she would be able to explain it to Sana if they returned to find the ship infested with some annoying lifeform or another.

For his part Luke seemed oddly comfortable with the idea of sleeping on the floor. As they’d deposited the first of the supplies they were carrying at the new location, and Leia had pointed out
where they’d be sleeping, he’d merely shrugged and headed back out to see what else Master Yoda might need of them.

Master Yoda seemed very concerned with putting away the only two possessions he had taken with him in this first supply run - the ratty old Jedi robe she had seen on his bed in the other location, along with a broken clay bowl. He hadn’t brought any other personal effects, and he handled both of these items with the utmost care.

To her surprise, Leia recognized the bowl. Her Uncle Obi had made it. He had always liked making things like that, always creating odds and ends that decorated the personal quarters of everyone he knew. Both she and Luke had over the years been gifted with countless similar bowls, along with the same homemade toys Uncle Obi made for every youngling in the Temple.

As for the robe, Leia didn’t want to know who it might have belonged to before Master Yoda had started sleeping with it. Whoever it was, they had been taller than Leia’s father.

The three of them trudged back to the hut they were abandoning to pull up even more roots and create a sizable stockpile. While there Yoda served them the rest of the rootleaf stew for lunch.

Yet as they sat crowded together on the roots outside, the camaraderie Leia had felt earlier that day seemed gone.

Her back hurt, she was tired, and quite frankly she simply wanted to go home already.

“Hmmm. Where were we?” Yoda asked as he finished his meal.

“Where were we with what?” Luke responded.

“In the telling of your father’s story,” Yoda said, giving Leia an expectant look.

“Not very far,” Leia said. “I think we stopped off on the very fact of his birth.”

“Ah, yes. Anakin’s father, or lack thereof,” Obi-Wan said, startling Leia with his sudden appearance. The way he could materialize and then vanish was off putting to say the least.

“Then of how your father was freed from slavery, what do you know?”

“About thirteen years before Luke and I were born, the Trade Federation invaded Naboo and two Jedi were dispatched to negotiate - “

“Sorry, but what does the history of the Mid-Rim have to do with father?”

Leia rolled her eyes. “Those Jedi were Uncle Obi and his Master, and the person in charge of Naboo at the time of the invasion just so happened to be our mother.”

“Father was like ten when he was freed. How could our mother already have been a - you said she is a senator right? - all the way back then?”

Again Uncle Obi laughed. “Ah, no, of course not Luke. Padmé was not yet a Senator when she met your father. No, she was a queen.”

“A queen?! What?” Mouth slightly slack, eyes wide, Luke peered around at the three of them. “Wait, does that mean I am a prince?”

“Of course not, don’t be silly,” Leia said, rolling her eyes. “The monarchy on Naboo isn’t hereditary. It’s a democratically elected position, we’re quite proud that nepotism has no place in our
politics!”

Luke frowned. “That… that kinda makes it worse? How old was she to have a job like that if she didn’t inherit it?”

“Fourteen.”

“…and here I thought having my questions answered would make this story make more sense and not less. I really have to stop assuming that.”

“Yes, many assumptions you should not make.”

“What other assumptions have I…? …Oh! You mean this morning, in the swamp when you pretended to be-”

Leia laughed, remembering how Master Yoda had thrown the contents of Luke’s bag through the swamp that morning, and then had left Luke to puzzle out his identity on his own. Luke hadn’t reacted well at all, mistaking Master Yoda for nothing more than an annoying resident of the bog.

“Pretending was I? Perhaps always how I act that is, when not dealing with obstinate Padawans.”

“…I’m making assumptions again, aren’t I?” Luke hugged his knees against his chest.

“Hmmm… learning you are. Good!” Yoda turned back to Leia. “Continue with your story, share your history with the boy.”

Leia tried to recall what she had been saying. She had gotten caught up in watching Yoda use this story to train Luke. A lesson in assumptions and keeping an open mind really had not been where she had expected him to take this. "Apologies, Master. Where was I?"

“My Master and I had been sent to Naboo to deal with the crisis.”

“Right!” She met Obi-Wan’s eye, and he nodded at her. Great. Nothing like talking about events you hadn’t actually witnessed in front of a person who had been there. “So it wasn’t safe on Naboo anymore for mom, so she and her two Jedi escorts left, and wound up crashing on Tatooine.”

“That’s some real bad luck, winding up on Tatooine when you don’t have to be there.”

“I recall being rather grateful when we finally left. I thought I’d never have to go there again,” Obi-Wan said, stroking at his beard. He smiled, eyes twinkling with humor. “Little did I know.”

“So how’d they meet father?” Luke asked impatiently.

“They needed parts to repair their ship, and met dad at the shop he worked in.”

Not seeing any signs of disagreement on Obi-Wan’s face as she described his past, Leia glanced at Luke. He seemed almost disappointed. Maybe he had hoped his parents’ first meeting was more romantic than someone trying to hire a mechanic? Well if that was what he wanted, she could provide.

“Dad fell in love with mom right then and there, when she walked into the shop. He still waxes poetic about how she looked in the Tatooine suns and all.”

“Did he now.” Obi-Wan leaned back, shaking his head.

“Grave mistake we made, not noticing this from the start.”
Luke’s face was scrunched up, it was the same expression her brother wore during lessons where he didn’t understand the point of the lecture. He squinted at both of the Masters for a few silent moments, before turning back to Leia, incredulous. “So, what? They’re on this epic quest and they hire our father the ten year old slave to be their mechanic?”

“Nine, and I dunno, for some reason they bet on dad’s next race to get the funds to pay for their ship repairs.”

“Huh? Our mother is royalty, or… is that the right term if it’s an elected position? Regardless, I bet she was rich and they had to bet on the races to pay?”

“Naboo’s in the Republic, so we use - used in this dimension I guess - Republic Dataries. Which is all anyone had on them. But Tatooine -”

“Tatooine was never part of the Republic, and at that time the Republic had like a whole trade embargo thing going on, so their creds would have been totally worthless. Of course. Sorry, as the one from Tatooine you’d think I’d have known that. Still, why gamble for the parts? I mean there had to be a way to get the currency exchanged somehow, right?”

“By that point my Master was enamored with your father,” Obi-Wan explained. “I was not with them for this part of the story, I stayed with our ship, but he and I were checking in regularly over our comms. He had hatched a plan that would allow him to properly test Anakin’s abilities, and, if his suspicions about him were correct, free him so he might be trained.”

“So they gambled on the - oh, oh no, when you say races you don’t mean podracing do you? Those are the only races with any real money in them.”

Leia grinned, she wished Yoda and Uncle Obi weren’t there and watching so closely so she could spend more time on this, her favorite part of the story. “That is exactly what I mean, yes. The Boonta Eve Classic.”

Sure the Boonta Eve Classic was a minor race in an out of the way system, but her father was the only human ever known to make it all the way to the end of a Podrace, much less win the whole thing. She could gush about it all day if she was permitted to.

“No wonder Uncle Owen never wanted me to find out how my dad got free!” Luke laughed. “Talk about dangerous stunts, wow, it’s a wonder he survived at all.”

The rest of it was boring compared to the podracing. “After that they took him to Coruscant, to the Council, and well… obviously the rest of the whole Trade Federation Invasion nonsense happened, but when the dust settled dad was a Padawan, and Uncle Obi was his Master.”

“He really won the Boonta Eve?”

“That he did!” Leia hoped he would ask for more details. She wondered if she could find footage of the race on the holonet to show him, if all went well she was sure that could be a great way to pass the time on the ship when they inevitably left Dagobah.

“Unbelievable,” Luke said, “all these years fantasizing about what sort of man my father might have been, and now I learn he’s far greater than even my wildest fantasy.”

Yoda shook his head, frown etched deep on his face. “No desire to steer the course of this conversation, I have. However, of the time when your father acted as your mother’s bodyguard, what do you know?”
“You mean the mission that resulted in their wedding?”

“They were married for that long?” Obi-Wan placed one of his hands on his brow as if he had a headache (could ghosts get headaches?), ”I knew he was in love with her, and obviously they had started to see one another, but to think they were that serious from the very start!”

“Missed, too much was. Much leeway given. Knew of his feelings we did, yet censure him we did not. Perhaps if less permissive we had been…”

Leia bit her lip to keep from interrupting. She so desperately wanted to ask them more. Everyone always got cagey back home whenever those of Leia’s generation asked too many questions about the reforms the Order had gone through when she was little.

This was the most she had ever heard those old policies actually discussed. She was sure the conversations were still happening, far from where she would have been able to observe them, and she wanted to understand everything she could about them. Everything she never felt able to ask in her own dimension.

“No, the fault does not lie with the Council, but solely with me and me alone. I well knew that Anakin had feelings for Padmé when you gave him that assignment. I should have been more insistent that he be given a different task. Should have not allowed my attachment to him to prevent me from seeing how enamored with her he truly was.”

“Wait I don’t get it,” Luke interjected, “what’s bad about our parents getting married?”

“It wasn’t something Jedi were supposed to do,” Leia explained, hoping if she quieted him quickly, the two Masters would return to their discussion.


”Now that will be a long conversation indeed. Far too complex an idea to sum up in just a few words. If you want Luke, Leia can put a hold on the rest of her story about your father, and we can discuss attachment instead. Or we can save it for a later time. Although, in part, one might argue your father’s story is the perfect example of why these sort of things were not permitted.”

Yes! Yes that was exactly what Leia wanted to talk about, something new, something she could actually learn something from - not just this rehashing of the past!

Before she could speak, Luke gave his reply - in opposition to her own. “Save it then, I want to know more about my parents.”

Leia sighed, frustrated that she wouldn’t be able to learn what she wanted. She tried to let that frustration go, and continued with the story. “When it comes to what happened to lead to their wedding, well, it’s simple enough. There was a hit out on our mom, placed by Count Dooku. Or maybe Palpatine?” Leia hoped that if she just got through it fast enough, they could get to the more important conversation.

Luke laughed. “You call that simple?” His eyes were wide, inquisitive, and Leia knew there was no way he was going to let her keep this story short. She could sense that he was determined to learn more about his parents - it almost reminded her of the way her brother got all obsessive and weird about certain aspects of their studies. He may not be the same person as her brother, but she knew better than to try too hard to distract him once he had that look in his eye.

“Oh hush,” she playfully pushed against his shoulder, knowing full well that nothing could really keep his questions at bay, “So, there was a hit out on mom, and dad was assigned to keep her safe.
They fell in love while he was watching her, and then got married.”

“Is that all you know?” Obi-wan was intensely studying her. “No further details?”

“Just that they holed up at Varykino, our family’s house in the Lake Country, when he was guarding her. They get embarrassingly mushy about it whenever we go there, so I’ve always tuned all that stuff out, sorry. Oh, and there was all the business with his mother’s death that happened while he was guarding mom.”

“Oh hey, I actually know this part!”


“Oh, I don’t know too much. Just that my grandmother was taken by the Sand People one day while she was out collecting mushrooms, and they killed her. They snatched up Grandpa Cliegg not long after that when he went looking for her. Took his leg and everything. Father dug her grave himself.”

“That…” His step-father had been mutilated, and her dad had dug his mother’s grave? Why didn’t she know these things? “…that’s actually more than I know, honestly. Dad really doesn’t like to talk about it, it’s kinda a touchy subject for him.”

“That is putting it mildly,” Obi-Wan said, “Anakin never was comfortable speaking about his mother’s death, and in deference to how personal the subject was, I never pressed him on the details.”

Had that even happened in her world? She wished she knew. Maybe if she understood what had happened to him, then she’d be better at helping Vader come to his senses.

Oh! That… that was probably the entire point of this exercise, wasn’t it.

She was going to vocalize that thought, but Luke - in sync with her, despite having only recently met her - beat her to it. “So it’s entirely possible that we still are never going to figure out where things started to go different. I mean all sorts of things we don’t know about could have happened on that trip that changed the course of history forever.”


Leia ran up the stairs to the main living space of the apartment. She didn’t think she’d be able to stand still in a turbolift on her way down to a pedestrian level. Unfortunately she’d forgotten that she had been driven to this landing pad, and did not have a vehicle of her own to leave with.

She could still take the lift of course, but she felt far too restless for that. Which meant she was essentially trapped for the time being. She considered heading back down to that office, or finding some way to hear what they were saying in there in her absence. She imagined what she would do if someone came upstairs to find her, to confront her, to apologize for not even trying to understand how indefensibly evil a person like Tarkin truly was.

No one came to find her.

At least not from downstairs.

A speeder, moving well past the set speed limits and codes, made a rather dramatic landing at the pad.
“Leia,” Anakin shouted as he leaped from the vehicle, “what’s wrong!”

Surely if his wife had contacted him to deal with her, he would have been informed of what had happened? Why pretend he did not know?

“Please tell me you’re ok.” He pulled her into a hug as he drew close. She tried to break free. She didn’t want anyone touching her, but he was so much larger than her and his arms were wrapped rather securely around her. He held her firmly against him, hunched down to match her height. “Who made you feel this way, Leia? I could feel your distress all the way from the Temple!”

He could?

That was concerning.

“Is Padmé ok?” His eyes kept darting to the door that led to the lower level, no doubt he was planning to sprint down there if need be.

She escaped his embrace, shoving him away. “Your wife is fine!”

“Oh, oh! She’s the one you’re mad at?” His concern gave way to a slight grin and a knowing gleam to his eye.

Leia glowered at him. “Yes.”

He did not meet her glare. Instead he kept his eyes focused on the door that separated the staircase from the rest of the apartment. “So did she do something or-”

“She’s a stubborn fool who refuses to own that she is wrong about the people she chooses to trust!” Leia couldn’t keep it contained. This was not a childish dispute, as his earlier infuriating grin seemed to indicate he believed.

Anakin’s brow furrowed. “Wrong about who?”

“Wilhuff Tarkin.”

“Wilhuff? What’d he do?” Oh lovely, they were on a first name basis.

Well, best expose just how horrid his choice in friends was then. “He killed my parents!”

The confusion drained from Anakin’s face in an instant. His hand flew to where his lightsaber was clipped to his belt, and his voice dropped into a low growl. “He did what?”

She could feel the anger returning with the reminder of just what sort of evil Padmé had been willing to entrust with military powers. “He’s the one who did it, who destroyed Alderaan. Of all the people in existence there is no one I-”

“You want to take him out, don’t you? Let me help you.” He looked so serious, crouched down to be at her eye level, refusing to break eye contact.

Leia blinked, and then let out a bark of laughter. “What?” This was absurd! He was willing to kill for her, just like that?

Anakin was still watching her expectantly. “Well?”

“No I… Padmé’s right, the things he did in my world they… he didn’t do them here.”
“He’s still the same man, different timeline or no,” Anakin growled out.

Leia nodded, agreeing but... “No, I... thank you, really thank you, but... killing him here, it just wouldn’t make any sense.”

...She may have been acting a bit nonsensical herself, just expecting these people to discard someone they had a decades long working relationship with based on nothing but her word.

Anakin had succeeded at his goal of getting her to see the foolishness of her actions, she had to hand it to him.

He was still crouched to be at her eye level, hand resting on his lightsaber’s hilt. “Please tell me he’s long dead in your world?”

Leia frowned at him, unsure why he was still maintaining his act of being ready to commit murder. He had made his point, no reason to keep this facade up. “He died when the Rebellion eliminated the weapon that was used to destroy Alderaan. Luke was the pilot who successfully pulled off that run.”

“Attaboy!” Anakin’s hand finally moved off his lightsaber.

What an odd reaction. Could his offer to kill Tarkin earlier have possibly been serious? “You are surprisingly pro-extrajudicial assassination,” Leia mused.

“All when the killing is for the people I care about.” He rose to his full height, cutting an impressive figure. The image was only helped by the jut of his cleft chin, by how the light of the mid-day sun reflected off his hair, and made the scar that cut across his eye that much more apparent.

That statement was just shy of being a Luke-like thing to say (Luke had certainly never pledged to do anything as extreme as that for her, but he was always going on about how he would do most anything for his friends), and surprisingly Leia couldn’t keep a smile off her face. Heroic fools, the both of them.

Anakin shrugged, gesturing to the car once his shoulders dropped back down. Leia nodded and climbed into the passenger seat, eager to get away, no matter where he took her. Besides, Anakin was proving himself quite adept at making her feel better, so staying with him simply made sense.

They didn’t speak until long after the car was in motion.

The silence between them was thick.

Anakin wanted to say something, she could tell. Whatever it was, it wasn't easy for him - uncertainty buzzed through the speeder. “My mother died when I was about your age. Well, when I was nineteen, so a bit younger than you are now, but close enough.”

Leia turned away from the mix of familiar building and entirely new ones, to watch him as he drove. “I am sorry to hear that.”

Anakin’s gaze remained fixed on the air space in front of them. He seemed determined not to glance in her direction.

Leia recalled reading a report once about the use of tasks like operating a vehicle in getting people to open up and confide things they otherwise might not. The article had posited that the excuse to avoid eye contact eased tension and made the process easier for those involved. She hadn’t been sure of the validity of those claims when she read them, and hadn’t integrated those methods into any of her personal information gathering techniques.
Clearly that had been a mistake, if he was willing to open to her so drastically in this setting.

Perhaps if she took those reports to heart now, and pressed him for more information he would oblige? “Anakin, why did you share that with me?”

“I just mean… she died right in front of me, ok? I know… I know how that feels.”

She watched Anakin for some outward sign of what he was feeling. Something more than the general sense of grief that suffused the car. She suspected that she was the one feeling that, not him. Reaching out as Ahsoka and Ventress had been teaching her, opening herself up to him fully, Leia tried to figure out what he was feeling… and found he had put a rather strong wall between his mind and hers.

Fine, he could be that way.

Like she cared what he thought anyway.

She turned to watch the buildings they were flying by, but they couldn't hold her interest.

She glanced back at him, and surprised herself by speaking, restarting the conversation they had let fizzle out. “Funny that your mom died at nineteen, what with my planet being blown up when I was that age, and Luke’s aunt and uncle dying just a week before then. It’s like we’re all cursed.”

“Huh? Luke’s…” He frowned, shifting in his seat. “What happened to them, was it the Sand People?” Anakin spat out the Tatooine local’s pejorative for the planet’s indigenous population.

Leia recognized the tone as the same one she had used to speak Tarkin’s name earlier.

“No, they were murdered by Vader’s Fist, sent to retrieve the data I had hidden.”

“Vader’s Fist?”

“That’s what the ‘troopers who serve under Darth Vader call themselves - technically they’re the five-oh-first legion.”

Anakin’s emotions swirled through the car in a cacophony of incomprehensible overwhelming pain. It put what she felt earlier to shame. She felt it for only a moment before his shields slammed back in place. Even as his shields returned, she could feel the bond between them. It wasn’t like the one she had with Ahsoka, or Asajj. Yet it wasn’t like the one between her and Luke either.

His breath hitched slightly, bringing her back to the moment, and he asked, “did Luke see it happen?”

“Luke said he found their bodies burned to a crisp outside their farmstead just afterwards. Are you close?”

“Huh? Oh, we should be back at the Temple really soon, yeah.”

Leia rolled her eyes. “No, are you close to Luke’s aunt and uncle, to your family!”

“Those pathetic farmers are not my family!” His raised voice startled her, she hadn’t expected him to shift from contemplative and in pain to loud and angry quite so quickly.

“No need to get so upset, Luke always speaks quite fondly of his aunt and uncle.” What had happened for him to dislike Luke’s guardians so much? He clearly knew them, he wouldn’t have had such an emotional response otherwise.
Anakin snorted. “That’s not saying much, it isn’t hard to get on Luke’s good side, is it?”

“You’ve never met my Luke.”

“Yeah, well, I’m right aren’t I?”

Leia forced a laugh, hoping to cut the tension. She leaned back in her seat, eyes drawn to the way Anakin clung to the steering wheel - as if the entire vehicle would fall out from under him if he didn’t hold it tight enough.

He had been so willing to do anything she asked earlier.

“Thank you,” she said, “for talking me down. I can’t imagine what you must think of me, wanting to kill someone for a crime he committed in an entirely different universe. How did you know that actually offering to murder him would snap me back to reason?”

Leia didn’t say anything more, just sat there in silence letting him work through his thoughts.

Finally he spoke. “After my mom died I… I was full of so much rage. I wanted to punish anyone even slightly connected to what happened, no matter how involved they actually had been. I understand how you feel Leia, I really do. The thing is… anger like that, giving into it, as good as it can feel in that moment, as right as those murders may be… living with it after is so much harder.”

She looked down at her lap, a slight headache forming. This was where her temper came from, wasn’t it? From this man. He had never been a part of her life in any way, and yet he had still somehow managed to contribute to such a fundamental part of who she was.

“You look so much like mom,” he almost whispered it, the words barely audible over the sounds of the speeder’s engine and the air whipping around them as they flew. “It’s incredible.”

Leia frowned, reminded again of the way she used to pretend there were physical resemblances between her and her parents. Yet for this man, such games were not needed, as she apparently looked so much like his mother it… what? Hurt him the way seeing Bail in this world hurt her? A welcome and joyous sight, yet suffused with the reminder of what she had lost all the same. A reaction that could only be further complicated by the fact she wore his daughter’s face. “You have to be used to that, though? I mean your daughter-”

“Yes… and no. I think it might be the hair? I don’t know, but as soon as I saw you… yeah, I think it’s your hair. She also wore it long and pulled back in a pretty braided bun. Nothing as fancy as yours of course.”

They lapsed back into silence.

Leia sat there, reflecting on what he had said, and the emotions she had felt from him. On his pain, his anger, and how familiar his words had been.

Sometimes Leia felt like if that anger burned out she’d be left hollow, unable to keep going without her goal of overthrowing the Empire to live for.

But what he had described, it had been years ago for him. He must have figured out how to push past it all.

She said, “it all hurts so much, everything about them being gone hurts,” but he already knew that. There was no reason to say it, so she cut herself off and internally chastised herself for stating the obvious. To avoid more misstarts she just barreled ahead with the question she wanted to ask most.
“Was there anything that actually helped you with the pain, after your own loss?”

“Padmé. She was there for me,” Anakin took his eyes off the airspace in front of them to look at her, “if you’ll let me, I’d like to be that person for you now.”

They were getting closer to the Temple, to the end of their conversation. Once they reached that place other people would intrude, would want to know why she had returned early, to train her and lecture her about the “need to let go of her emotions.”

Kriff that.

“Would it be possible to just… not let Ahsoka or Asajj know that I have returned?”

“Yes, of course. I get it, you want to be alone.”

“No, please I don’t think I could stand being left by myself just now.” The words surprised her as she said them, but she could not deny the truth to them.

“Then what do you want?”

Seeing Tarkin, it had shaken her to very core in a way she had not expected. The thought that he might have been thriving in this world had not occurred to her until she had actually seen him, had heard his horrible smug voice. She had let her guard down, and paid the price… yet somehow getting it back up was proving more difficult than it should. “Could you stay with me?” She hated how her voice sounded. Small, and vulnerable.

“Of course.”

They lapsed back into silence, the speeder landing at the Temple, and both of them getting out, strolling towards the massive structure side by side.

On one of the occasions where she glanced at Anakin, he was watching her, the two of them inadvertently making eye contact. He grinned at her. “If you feel up to it, do you want to be let in on the research we’ve been doing on how you got here?”

Leia stopped short, eyes wide. “Yes. Yes of course I do. I’d like nothing more than that. Please, can you tell me what you know?”

“Yeah, but I can do better then just trying to explain stuff I barely understand myself.”

“Oh?”

“I think maybe it’s time we went to the Archives to pay Barriss a visit, don’t you?”

Leia grinned. “Now that,” she said, “sounds like a wonderful idea.”

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Interlude V

For those wondering whose robe that was (since that won't be in the fic itself), in the canon short story There is Another by Gary D. Schmidt, in the book From a Certain
Point of View, it is established that Yoda sleeps wrapped in one of Qui-Gon Jinn's old robes, and always keeps a clay bowl Obi-Wan made with him (although he broke it by accident on the day Obi-Wan died).

In another story in that book (Time of Death by Cavan Scott) we learned that Obi-Wan would carve toy ships out of Japor Wood for Luke when he was growing up. He'd always leave them on Shmi's grave, and Beru would give them to Luke.

Which is all to justify why I am sure AU Obi-Wan must have made the twins (and all the other younglings as well of course) all sorts of toys. He clearly really loves making things and sharing what he makes with those he loves. One can only imagine how many bowls Anakin has received (and accidentally broken) over the years.

A quick note on this fandom in general:
I know leaving notes like this is considered gauche, I certainly heard that enough when I left that note on chapter 20, when I posted that one a week after the nightmare that took place in Charlottesville. Besides, if you don't want to read this sort of thing, nothing is stopping you from reading this fic over on Fanfiction.net, where I don't leave author's notes at all. Regardless I do feel that something needs to be said. I have no idea if what I have to say is really the right thing, I don't, but it is how I feel at the moment so here goes.

It didn't start this week, or even over the past year, but once again just how horrible and toxic and downright evil this fandom can be has been exposed. I have met some incredible people in this fandom, have build friendships I hope to always treasure. I have also seen so much of the absolute worst of humanity in this fandom. I'm sure many of you can relate.

The fact is, we are all responsible. All of us. There is no one segment of the fanbase whose hands are truly clean of this, and it is up to all of us to do the hard work of truly reckoning with the entitlement that leads to this behavior together.

It doesn't matter what you think about a work of fiction or how much it means to you. It really doesn't. There is no fictional work in all of creation that is more important than real human beings. No work that justifies one person attacking another.

If you don't like a science fiction movie aimed at kids... it's not a big deal.

Don't harass anyone about it. In fact don't send anyone involved with making it unsolicited feedback over and over again about your personal preferences.

This fandom has a very well earned reputation for being one of the (if not the) very most vile cesspools in all of fannish history.

It's time for us to rather just shrug our shoulders and say "well *I* never participated in that so I'm innocent" to take a real good look at ourselves and our own circles, and really think about what behaviors we are giving a pass to. What we are enabling, what we ourselves are engaging in.

Something needs to change, and like all cultural/community changes we must start with own behavior, and then radiate out by not accepting this sort of nonsense from anyone we personally know and interact with.
I love Star Wars, and I love this fandom, and I just... I have faith in our ability to do better, to be better. I really do.

But as things are at the moment? It isn't ok. None of it is ok. What happened (and happens) to Kelly Marie Tran, to John Boyega, to Daisy Ridley, to Rian Johnson, to Carrie Fisher, to Hayden Christensen, to George Lucas, to Ahmed Best, to Jake Lloyd... the list goes on and on... it is evil, plain and simple, and it needs to stop.

Please don't think I'm saying people should just sit by when horrid stuff is said and/or done. Just the opposite, given just how most of these attacks are tied to misogyny and racism. It is vital to always point out oppressive behavior and address it.

If there is something in a film that needs to be addressed (misogyny, racism, transphobia, etc), you should make sure your feedback is structured. That it is designed so that the people reading it will understand the impact of the issue, why they must address what they did etc.

Don't just turn it into a performative action. If there is actually something wrong make sure that shit is properly addressed.

Most of all never forget that they are all real people.

Star Wars is fiction.

Now on a much more positive note: I got myself a five day pass for Star Wars Celebration 2019. I've never gone to Star Wars Celebration before, so I'm pretty excited. If you are also going, I'd love to know!
Interlude V

Chapter Notes

Endless thanks (as always) to Sethnakht and The-Weight-Of-Wings for all their wonderful suggestions and edits. Thanks to AbsolXGuardian for checking things over to make sure things make sense in regards to established canon, and to Leia1998 for all the encouragement.

I am sorry it took so long to get to another interlude. For a long while I was sure I had to do the one about the trial before anything after it, and since I am struggling with that segment I kept delaying adding this to the story. Sethnakht thankfully and correctly assured me that I don't have to hold off until the trial segment is done, so here is another interlude segment!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

He should have known they’d put all kinds of hoops and hurdles into the new attachment policies. Obi-Wan and the others were just waiting for him to flub them all up and then surprise him with some new punishment.

They thought he was in their debt after the trial and couldn’t leave.

Well, they were right, he was in their debt. So he’d play nice for now, get through this session, and then go home to the twins.

The twins.

Leia had made eye contact with him last week. Her eyes had just… suddenly focused on his. She wasn’t just looking around aimlessly, reflexively, she had actually been looking at him. He was sure she knew who he was.

Not to be outdone, Luke had smiled that morning. Anakin’s heart had nearly stopped, he had never seen a better smile before in his life. He would do anything to keep seeing that smile.

As soon as this session ended he was going to head home and hoist both of his babies in his arms and give them the galaxy’s biggest hug. Inhale that amazing baby smell (he was pretty sure something Padmé’s staff was using when they changed the kids was actually the source of that. He wanted to know what product it was so he could ask them to wash their clothes with it forever, make sure they never lost that scent).

He had missed so much time already, what with the trial and all. So many crucial moments he would never be able to snatch back. Nothing was ever going to separate him from his kids again.

Nothing. He didn’t care if that meant he was being possessive and selfish. They were his kids.

His!

“Ani! Ani, are you listening at all?”

Huh?
“You see what I mean? He’s really in quite the distracted state.” Padmé’s voice, always welcome in his thoughts and fantasies, filtered in.

Then a strange man’s joined hers, and Anakin’s attention snapped firmly back to the present moment. “Well with the trial only just completed, I am sure you have quite a bit to deal with, don’t you Master Skywalker?”

The youngest Jedi Master by well over a decade - the youngest in the entire history of the Jedi Order - someone who should have been trusted to know what he was doing without people constantly looking over his shoulder, frowned at the man the Council had assigned to speak with him and his wife. “What is that supposed to mean?”

“I just meant it must be a lot to adjust to, everything that has changed in your life since the assassination.”

“You mean like I’m suddenly famous?”

“Ani, I think the word you wanted to use was infamous.”

“I know what I meant Padmé. You don’t have to correct me.”

“Sorry.”

“That was very good, Master Skywalker! I know we have only been working together for a few months now, but we’ve mostly been focused on your wife’s feelings. I am so glad you are starting to open up to us. Is there anything else that you would like to address?”

“Huh?”

Perhaps we’ll save that for next time, then. Still I am really pleased with the progress we’ve made here today.”

The books had all promised the twins would be talking by now.

Yet they never did, just watched her, silent. Nothing about their development at this stage matched what the books told her, and Padmé was beyond worried that she was doing something wrong. They cried like normal children at least, but even when they played they never made any other noise.

What was going on?

She checked every book, did everything short of calling the experts on the holo to demand they explain why her babies were not talking, were not even making baby noises anymore.

She watched her twins at all times, hoping to puzzle out why they had stopped making noise.

The answer came on a day like any other. They were home on Naboo, enjoying some time at the house in the Lake Country. The Festival of Glad Arrival was coming up, and Padmé was looking forward to enjoying all the pageantry with her children. But that excitement was still a week away, and for now they were all relaxing. The kids were playing on the lawn, while she sat on a nearby balcony and tried to focus on a bill she was writing.

Luke grabbed at a toy Leia had been holding, taking it for himself. Leia shoved at him, and as she did she let out a loud and indignant cry of “Luuluu!! Nooo!”

Padmé came running immediately, not sure if she should praise Leia for speaking or scold her for...
pushing her brother once she got there.

Luke was crying, on the ground and not at all happy with being shoved, but Leia managed to hold her mother’s attention. “Maaaa!” she squawked as Padmé drew near, her little face scrunched up with distaste. “Lulu too’it!”

“Leia!” Her voice caught, she didn’t really know how to respond. She wanted to encourage her daughter to speak more, those words she had uttered had sounded so wonderful, high pitched and shouted as they were. Her daughter was talking!

“Mama! Lulu too’it!” Leia repeated, stamping one chubby leg to accentuate her point.

It seemed Luke did not appreciate his sister’s insistence he had taken her toy. Even though it was clearly held in his arms, he stood back up shaking his head, making a loud noise to indicate his objection.

“Gi’v’it’baaack!” Leia moaned out the words as if they were just one, slurred by a mouth figuring out how to form words.

Luke hugged the toy closer to his chest, “Mama!” he chirped. “Mama, Lei push-ed me.” He spoke slower than his sister, each word slowly and carefully enunciated. He looked so serious, eyes wide and tiny brow furrowed.

Leia huffed, stamping her foot once more. “Lulu, gi’v’it’baack!”

That night, as Padmé lay in her husband’s arms and told him of the twin’s fight, and of how well spoken they both were for children trying out their very first words, he rumbled a laugh and drew her close.

“They’ve been communicating for ages now, my love. Just not out loud. I thought you knew.”

“Have… have they spoken to you?”

“Just fragments, nothing as concrete as a full thought. I think they find it easier to talk to each other. Sometimes I can sense them passing things between them, but can’t hear it myself.”

“Are there any other major milestones I am missing out on because I can’t use the Force?”

“Hey, I got to experience them feeling their way about with the Force, and you got to hear them speak out loud. Sounds pretty fair to me on the first word front.”

“But what about everything else, Ani? I… I think I am only just starting to understand how… how different raising them is going to be from anything I ever imagined, they have these powers, powers I could never understand and-”

“So you can’t understand their abilities. Leave that to me. They don’t need that from you though, they just need you to love them.”

“How can you know that, Aní?”

“Because that’s all I ever needed from my mom, and she was the best mother to ever live. And hey, you’ve already got the loving part down, so I’d say you’re doing just fine. Now, what was it Leia called Luke? I think we may have a lifelong nickname on our hands here.”

“What is even the point of being on the Council if we have no power to make any decisions!”
Anakin punched one of the cushions on the couch for good measure.

“Anakin, calm down.” Obi-Wan chided. “You know no one here is pleased with the current state of things.”

“I just don’t understand how they could do this!” Normally Obi-Wan would have scolded Anakin for this sort of behavior, but the dark bags under Anakin’s eyes spoke to how his young children were running him ragged. Refusing to let their parents sleep through the night, and demanding all their energy and attention during the day - getting up to all sorts of mischief if left unsupervised for even a moment.

Slowly, soothingly, Obi-Wan responded, taking great care to keep his voice flat and calm so not to provoke Anakin’s bad mood even further. “As I understand it, the Senate cited your entry onto the Council as the evidence that they have the authority to make changes to the Order.”

Eyes narrowing with suspicion Anakin hissed, “So you’re saying this is my fault?”

“No Anakin, I’m saying that there was a prior precedent,” Obi-Wan sighed, “a precedent that proved that the civilian government does indeed get to decide what should be the inner dealings of the Council.”

Anakin pouted. “Yeah, but- but my being put on the Council was different from this!”

“Was it truly, Anakin?” Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow. “Why do you think we were all so opposed to that in the first place?”

“Because the Council had it out for me!”

Obi-Wan laughed, but there was no humor in it. “It was never about you Anakin. It was about the government exceeding its bounds of control over us.”

“But… but they can’t ban us from all contact with the GAR!”

“We can still interact with Rex and Cody when they are off duty.”

“I don’t care! I should be there with the troops! Not here sitting around talking philosophy!”

“Anakin, you know I don’t like it either. But there is nothing any of us can do.”

Anakin flipped through the documents displayed on the datapad some more, frustration shooting into the Force around him, nervous energy leading to his leg to shaking up and down wildly.

“At least I might be able to stop going to counselling,” he muttered. That was one good thing the Senate had done, at least. Relaxed all the damn conditions on the new policies around attachment.

“And here I thought you didn’t agree with what the Senate is doing.”

“Well maybe not all of it, but I do like some things. That’s what being a Jedi is all about, right? Being able to understand that it is possible to see things from multiple views all at once?”

Obi-Wan laughed, a genuine grin breaking across his face.

What had she been thinking?

The twins were three years old! They were still babies!
She should have known they were not ready for this!

Riyo Chuchi was giving a speech on the Senate floor, yet Padmé had no idea what she was even talking about. She was sure the people in the pods around her were similarly distracted. Like her their attention was undoubtedly fully captured by the unhappily squirming toddler testing out their full vocal capacity in her arms.

As if the crying baby was not enough to deal with, her comm crackled to life, and Sabé’s voice filtered in alerting her to the fact that Leia had decided the Senate’s halls would be so much fun to run through as fast as she could, and that not a single handmaiden had come close to capturing Padmé’s wayward daughter quite yet.

She was slippery, that one.

Not to be outdone by his sister’s antics, Luke shoved against Padmé’s chest in time with his next wail, startling her and causing her to lose her grip on him. He slid out of her lap, and… oh. Oh no!

“No!”

“Luke stay away from that ledge!” Padmé hissed, not wanting to disturb Chuchi’s speech more than she already was.

Already halfway to the rim of the pod, Luke turned from his climbing to give her an innocent grin, as if he was doing something that wasn’t about to give his mother a heart attack.

Padmé grabbed one of his short chubby arms, and lightly tugged him off the ledge, fully certain that a return to his previous wailing would be far preferable to her child falling from a great height.

It was worse than wailing. Luke simply gave her a heartbroken stare, pouting and crumbled in her lap.

There was a banging noise behind them, before the pod’s entry door slid open, revealing Leia on the other side.

At first Padmé’s heart leapt, hopeful this meant Leia was done with her little adventure and had perhaps exhausted herself enough to be manageable for the rest of the meeting. Instead Luke perked up, and made a break for it, joining his sister in the hall.

The two of them ran off together, and Padmé did not know if she should follow or stay and at least try to catch some of what Chuchi was saying.

Her comm flared to life again, Eirtaé this time, letting her know that the twins had discovered the Senatorial gardens, and were happily preoccupied. Saché, Karté, and Hollé had managed to block off all the exits from the gardens, so Padmé need not worry about them running off again.

Why hadn’t she thought of bringing her kids to the gardens in the first place?

Perhaps the better question to ask was why she had thought bringing them to work with her could have ever been a good idea.

Exhausted Padmé slumped back in her seat, and glanced to her right confirming that everyone in the pods surrounding her own was watching her. Great, just great.

Even Chuchi seemed to be staring her way. Padmé would have to obtain a copy of what she had been saying, and then write her a truly detailed letter of apology. The scene her children had caused during the speech hadn’t been fair to the young woman, not in the least. Maybe she should invite her
over for dinner to smooth things over - no.

No that wouldn’t do, not unless having the twins coat her colleague in food debris counted as an apology. Maybe lunch, when the twin terrors were off studying whatever it is they studied at the Temple.

Yes, that sounded like a good plan.

As soon as the speech ended she turned to where C-3PO stood at the back of her pod. “Threepio, do you happen to have a record of Riyo Chuchi’s speech?”

“Indeed I do, Mistress Padmé. As you know I record everything said here on the Senate floor. Would you like to hear a playback of it now or-”

“Why don’t we save it for my office later, Threepio. Thank you.”

“Of course. If there is any other way I might be of assistance-”

“Do you know anything about Pantorian lunch customs?”

“Do I? Why of course I-”

“Wonderful. I’d like to go over those with you, not now though Threepio. That will be all for now.”

She turned back to the Senate floor, to the next pod floating towards the center, the Senator within getting ready to speak. Maybe this day wasn’t unsalvageable after all.

There was a quick intake of breath, then the whistling hiss of it being let out from between sharp teeth.

“How did you even get injured like this?” Barriss fussed as she checked over the wound.

“Can’t tell you specifics,” Ahsoka said, frowning at the gash on her side. It was definitely going to leave a scar. “I was on a mission.”

Barriss nodded, knowing better than to press for more information. She got out some bandages and began to wrap the wound for her friend.

She wondered if Ahsoka’s injuries were worse than they seemed. Every time she touched anywhere around the wound Ahsoka would flinch, no matter how gentle she tried to be.

“You almost done?” Ahsoka bit out. Her face was flushed. Did she have a fever?

Wanting to be sure, one of Barriss’ hands flew to Ahsoka’s forehead.

“What now?” Ahsoka grumbled, shifting back on her seat as Barriss moved towards her face.

Wait… what was a Togruta’s normal body temperature again? Were they supposed to be slightly warm to Barriss’ own senses, or was that abnormal?

She pulled away, embarrassed that she had not thought to check what Ahsoka’s normal body temperature should have been before checking her over like that. At the very least she should have used a thermometer, something she could match against Ahsoka’s medical records just to be sure.

Ahsoka was watching her, the most peculiar expression on her face.
“What is it?” Barriss asked, concerned that Ahsoka might have been concealing even more injuries.

Glancing away from Barriss, Ahsoka fiddled with the bandage around her waist.

“Is it too tight?” Barriss asked. “Should I redo the wrapping?”

“Huh? Oh! Oh no, that’s… that’s not it.”

“Then what is?”

“I… I just… thank you.”

“For?”

“For dropping everything to help me with this. I know you were in the middle of some research and-”

“Of course I helped you! You came in here covered in blood, and you thought I wouldn’t help?”

“That’s… ugh I am really bad at words today. Maybe it’s the blood loss,” Ahsoka grinned, as if she had just told a joke.

Barriss didn’t find it amusing. “Why did you come here and not to a healer, Ahsoka?”

“I needed to see you.”

“What?”

“I… look I just… there is something I need to tell you. Something important. I only figured it out when I was… what I was doing when I figured it out isn’t important. But what I have to tell you-”

“Ahsoka, please, don’t stall,” Barriss cut in. “You can tell me anything.”

“I… I don’t know how to say it,” Ahsoka confessed.

She sat there, still and quiet in a way Barriss did not associate with her in the least. Ahsoka was normally so vibrant and loud and sure. Whatever this was had to be serious.

“I’ve never had a conversation like this before,” Ahsoka near whispered, “never even thought I ever would.”

“A conversation like what?” Barriss inquired.

Ahsoka stared at her, then shut her eyes tight.

“If you can’t find the words,” Barriss began, when the silence became unbearable, “would it help to show me in the Force?”

Ahsoka nodded, eyes still scrunched tight, and then slowly, carefully, opened herself up to Barriss and...

Oh.

Oh!

Barriss flushed, accelerated heartbeat pounding in her ears.
“I…” She didn’t know how to respond, what to say in the face of what Ahsoka had just revealed.

Ahsoka started to fidget, eyes open and darting between Barriss and the door.

“I should go,” she concluded, moving to leave her seat.

“No!” Barriss shoved her back down. “You need to rest for a bit longer. Don’t jostle your wound!”

“Barriss...” There was something to how Ahsoka said Barriss’ name. Something that made it sound different from any other time she’d ever heard it said before. “Barriss, please. I can’t stay here. Not after...”

Barriss didn’t know what to say. Like Ahsoka this was not a conversation she ever expected she would have. Had never imagined possible. Had never planned for.

She did know that what Ahsoka had just shown her, that heady rush of emotion that twisted up her insides while warming her to her core… well she felt that too.

So rather than say anything, Barriss did the next best thing.

She hesitantly leaned in close, not breaking eye contact, giving Ahsoka plenty of opportunity to stop her, or bolt or…

It was the first kiss either of them ever had.

Awkward.

Unsure.

Perfect.

_____________________

He grabbed another drink, hoping if he stayed by the wall no one else would notice him and force him into another conversation about trade treaties and taxes. “Master Jedi, perhaps you’d like to weigh in on this?” was quickly becoming Anakin’s least favorite collection of words in Basic.

He wasn’t the only one lingering by the open bar.

Not too far from where Anakin was trying to blend into the wallpaper, there was a tall man in a well tailored military uniform nursing a glass of wine. From the way he kept scowling at the room, he must have shared Anakin’s opinion of the party.

Anakin knew him from somewhere, but where?

Well, only one way to find out.

“Not too interested in mingling, huh?”

The man turned at the sound of Anakin’s question, mouth set in a near lipless smile. He said Anakin’s last name in greeting, but nothing more than that.

Anakin nodded his head. He was still unused to being recognized on sight, there really was something off putting about everyone knowing his name before he knew theirs.

“I never did properly thank you for rescuing me from that prison. Whatever else you might have done, I can’t begrudge your part in ensuring I was not a prisoner of war forever,” the man drawled
with a heavy core accent. Too heavy. Affected by the sound of it, no one actually from these parts tried that hard to sound like they did. Anakin wondered where he really was from.

Wait, rescued him from a prison? Oh! Oh yeah! He knew who this guy was!

“It really was no problem at all, Captain Tarkin.”

“It’s Admiral now, actually.”

“Admiral? Wow. That’s a lot of promotions since we last met.”

“Yes, well, a lot has happened since then.”

“That it has.”

“So tell me Skywalker, what brings you to this party? I didn’t peg you for the sort who cavorted with this crowd.”

“My wife.”

“Ah, yes. I’m sure being married to Padmé Amidala would carry certain... obligations.” Tarkin punctuated his sentence with a sip of his wine, peering at Anakin over the top of the glass.

“Now there’s a good word for it, obligations. I miss the days when no one knew we were together and I didn’t have to come to these things.”

“Not a fan of the hors d’oeuvres?” the man asked, bored, eyes scanning the room.

Remembering the conversation they’d had when escaping the Citadel together, and how he had actually agreed with everything the other man had said then (a very rare occurrence when politics were involved) Anakin took a chance with his response. “Oh those are fine, what I could do without is the political chatter. All these people always agreeing with each other’s worst ideas and impulses, removing every single reform Palpatine put in place without considering that maybe some of them had merit.”

“Weren’t you the one who killed Palpatine?” Tarkin raised an eyebrow. “One would think you’d be celebrating the destruction of his legacy.”

“Look, the man was a Sith, but that didn’t mean he was incapable of having good policies. Just because he was evil doesn’t mean his politics were.”

Tarkin swirled the glass of wine in his hand, glancing at Anakin out of the corner of his eye. “And here I imagined you would agree with your wife’s platform of demilitarization and decentralization.”

“Not at all.”

“Fascinating.”

“I did what needed to be done to keep the Republic safe.”

“I understand that is what you thought you were doing, yes.”

“You disagree?”

“Your actions are what put us on the course we are now on, were they not? A course that is only going to weaken us considerably over time.”
“Regrettably, I have to agree. Too bad no one else seems to.”

“You know Skywalker, I am part of a… network of individuals who agree with us both.”

“You are?”

“Yes. Yes I am. I think that perhaps the others in my group would enjoy meeting you, and hear more of your thoughts on these matters. It could be interesting to hear a Jedi such as yourself weigh in on the situation.”

C’mon! Leia mentally hissed, ducking behind the stacks.

There was a momentary pause, then the sound of soft boots and cloth against the floor as Luke slid into place beside her.

They both stayed where they were, motionless. No other eight year olds in the history of the galaxy had ever sat as still as they did. Each day they got a floor further. Each day they learned the sentry droids schedule exactly.

*Lei, I think we’ve gone far enough.*

_You’ve been saying that for past three floors, Lulu. Don’t be a coward._ Leia sent back, rolling her eyes dramatically despite knowing full well her brother couldn’t see her as he peered around the stacks.

Luke turned to face her, glowering. _I’m not coward! If we get caught now, that’s it. There is no way we’d be able to do this for real. You know that!_

One day the two of them would make it all the way to the bottommost level, and when they did, they would discover just what it was deep beneath the Temple that bothered them.

But today was not that day.

_Fine._ Leia shoved her foot against Luke, too slow and gentle to qualify as a kick. _We’ll head back, but only if you agree to clean my room for a week._

He narrowed his eyes at her, knowing better than to make noise when they were on one of their scouting missions. _That’s not fair!_

_You wanna head back, then you have to clean my room._ Leia smirked.

Luke drew in a breath, mouth opening, his intent to make noise obvious. Before he could, Leia panicked, mentally shouting _Lulu! No!_

Luke winced. _Ok. Ok. I’ll clean your room. Can we just head back now? I don’t want to get in trouble._

_Of course you don’t._ They were moving now, back up the stairs, ducking behind a new set of near identical stacks.

_What does that mean!_ Luke scowled. _What, you enjoy getting in trouble?_

Leia poked her head out to make sure the sentry droid was where they needed it to be in its rounds. _At least I’m not afraid of it._
I’m not afraid! Luke whined.

She grinned, provoking such a strong reaction a victory all its own. Sure, Lulu.

I’m not! He grabbed at the braid that almost reached her shoulder, tugging it hard.

Hey! She slapped his hand away, glaring. Ok, I believe you!

Luke grinned, triumphant, and signaled for the two of them to run up the steps.

They repeated the process five more times, bickering all the while, escalating things between them.

Yet still they remained silent.

Finally they were just one staircase away from a part of the library where they were allowed to be. One away from being able to make noise. Once they were there….

Leia grinned, and punched her brother soundly in the arm, knocking him into a shelf of datacrons, almost causing them to tumble to the floor. Before he could react she was off, up the stairs and safe and out of danger of getting into trouble.

Well getting into trouble for being in places where she wasn’t allowed to go, that is.

Unlike Luke, who had missed their window, and would have to wait before making it up the stairs to safety.

Ugh! I hate you! Just you wait until I get up there!

Of course, by then she’d be far away from the library, and more than ready for whatever retaliation he tried to throw at her.

Love you too, Lulu!

Over the years Anakin had maintained a passing interest in the podracing circuits.

It wasn’t that he really followed the sport per say, but he liked to check up on who was racing what tracks, how they were doing, things like that. Not really out of interest in the races themselves (although he did always watch highlight reels) but more just to check in on the people he’d once competed against.

At least that was what he always told himself.

That had changed two weeks ago, when Leia had stumbled into the living room in the middle of the night, headed to the kitchen for a glass of water.

She had found him watching a race, and plopped down by his side and refused to be put to bed again until he’d explained the rules to her.

Then Leia had asked to stay up late to watch the races with him the next time one was on. Anakin, desperate to get her to go to bed, had agreed without thinking.

Of course Leia being Leia had immediately looked the date of the next race up on the holonet, and marked that she was going to get to stay up late with dad on every single calender she had even the slightest hint of access to, including her mother’s work one.
This had led to many a talk about letting their children watch dangerous extreme sports, what sort of ideas this may put into their heads - especially if they found out their father had raced and even won one of those things when he was their age, and the need to consult with Padmé before deciding things like letting their kids stay up that late on a school night.

Padmé was 100% right about all of her concerns. Of course she was. She was always right. Especially with the way Leia barreled on into everything without really stopping to consider the consequences of her actions, he was starting to really worry about having to stop his nine year child from entering illegal podraces behind his back.

He knew all too well how dangerous those races were, and there was no way he’d be letting either Leia or Luke near them. He was starting to have nightmares about standing in near empty stands, watching one of his children compete in a podrace, marvelling over how they were excelling before one of their engines suddenly disengaged, leading to a fiery wreck. Those nightmares were so severe he questioned if they were really visions.

But Leia’s little heart was set on watching the race with him, her personal datapad growing increasingly full of racing stats and info in preparation for the big night, and he didn’t have it in him to tell her that daddy didn’t really want to watch the race with her.

So Anakin did the only thing he could think of. He started refreshing his racing knowledge. He learned the names of all the top racers, and exactly what sort of mods they had made to their pods. He looked up all the most important races since he’d left the circuit behind, learned just what had happened in them that impacted how the sport was run and enjoyed.

If Leia had any questions during the race, he would be ready. If she had a factoid she had learned and wanted to talk about with him - he’d be ready for that too.

Finally the big night came. Luke didn’t want to join them - when asked he had yawned a huge yawn and said he wanted to be well rested for his lightsaber practice - so it was just Anakin and Leia, sitting on the couch together watching the races.

Leia was full of questions - was the Prime part of Ando Prime pronounced “Pr-ime” like the “prime” part of the phrase “prime numbers,” or “Pri-me” to rhyme with cream? Why wasn’t it against the rules for the racers to use secret shortcuts through the race? Were they really allowed to kill each other like that?

Anakin leaned back on the couch, and answered her the best he could. Leia snuggled up against him, her body curled up by his side, his mechanical arm holding her tight. Her tiny head was resting against his heart, and the vibrations of her voice filled his chest as she asked question after question.

But sometime after the pack leader (Slide Paramita in his Pizer-Errol Stinger 627 S) finished his first lap, Leia’s questions tapered off. Anakin sat up just enough to check, and discovered she was fast asleep. Careful not to wake Leia, he shifted into a more comfortable position. Hoping that Padmé wouldn’t miss his presence in their bed too much, Anakin drifted to sleep himself, his daughter cradled in his arms.

The next race was on Hradreek. Anakin found himself actually looking forward to it. Another night with his little girl, just the two of them awake in an apartment made foreign by shadows and a damping of sound.

He was joined that night not by one child, but two.

And so it went, for every race after that. Anakin and Leia, together, sharing their own unique
thing. Sometimes Luke would join them, and when he did he provided questions that needed answering, and increasingly Leia would be the one with the response. Each time she’d glance over to him for approval after she’d finish explaining things to her brother, and he’d reassure her with a grin and a nod.

With Anakin she’d excitedly chat about the ships, about the racers, about shortcuts they could take or improvements that would help them win. They’d speculate about what might happen and review the highlights of each event.

It spiraled over time. What started as just podracing expanded to include more and more and more racing circuits, and they’d go to watch the races in person and not just on holos.

Padmé wasn’t too thrilled with the prospect of her children going to the arenas to cheer on these deadly adrenaline sports, but she couldn’t argue that as long as Anakin kept Leia occupied, the thought of joining a race herself didn’t seem to occur to her.

What was he doing in there?

What could possibly take so much blasted time?

Ugh! She kicked the door with frustration. The movement jostled her bladder, reminding her of why she needed to get in there so bad.

Kriff this.

She marched down the hall to her parents’ room, ignoring their protesting squacks as she stormed through their morning routine.

She sealed herself in their fresher, and at least relieved herself. She’d still have to wait to bathe, none of her soaps were in this bathroom, but at least she could pee.

When she opened the door both of her parents were gathered on the other side, frowning at her.

“Leia, what did we tell you about knocking before you come in here?” Leia’s mom arched an eyebrow, her mouth was a thin line as she waited for Leia’s response.

Leia rolled her eyes. “Mom, it’s like right before we have breakfast, there was no way you and dad would be going at it this late in the morning.”

“Leia!” Her dad sounded scandalized. Did he think she was some kid who didn’t know why they didn’t let her or Luke just barge in here without knocking?

“Come on dad, I know you two do it all the time. I’m eleven standard years, I’m not a child.”

“Sweetie, your father and I were only half dressed,” said her mom. “You shouldn’t be walking through here as we get ready.”

Leia snorted. “Why not? I mean we’re all related, it isn’t like it’s a big deal if I see either of your bodies, right?”

“Leia,” her mom was really finding new and interesting disapproving tones to say her name in this morning.

“Come’on mom, I really really needed to pee, and Lu takes way too long in the fresher. Either you accept that I have to use yours sometimes, or we have to move to somewhere where Luke and I can
each have a bathroom of our own.”

“This is a joke right? This apartment has six freshers in it, if you count the ones downstairs. You know when I was growing up -”

“...yeah yeah yeah, you lived in a hovel and had nothing except endless irritating dust and sand. I get it dad, everything was awful when you were a kid and I need to learn to appreciate how good I have it. Doesn’t change the fact that this is the closest fresher to my room after the one Lu hogs up, and therefore the one I’m most likely to use after that one.”

“Leia.”

“Hey, neither of you have to share with him. I am so sick of sharing everything with him!”

“Leia, please let us finish getting ready. It is far too early for this.”

“Ok, but you know I am right.”

“Leia.”

“At least consider moving?”

“Leia!”

“Fine, fine, I am getting out of here, sheesh.”

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: A visit to the archives, a confusing conversation, levitating some roots.

One of the segments in this interlude is dedicated to Rymu, who requested some Barrissoka. Happy Pride Twentygayteen!

There is only one word for any person who thinks there is anything even slightly defensible about what America does to immigrants and asylum seekers. That word is "evil."
Chapter 51

Chapter Notes

As always I really need to offer Sethnakht all the thanks there is to give. Both for fabulous editing and suggestions, and also for just being a wonderful friend. You really inspired me earlier today to try and write that thing I've been thinking about writing for years now, and I just can't thank you enough!

Thanks are also due to The-Weight-Of-Wings, AbsolXGuardian, and Leia1998 for all of their encouragement.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There were two Royal Libraries of Alderaan.

One of those libraries was located in the royal family’s personal apartments in the palace, and was an intimate place full of datacrons, comfortable chairs, and a cheerful spherical fireplace that cast warm friendly light and shadows across the room, catching on the constellation globes and various personal nicknacks collected over the many generations of the Organa family’s rule. An entire shelf in that library was even full of ancient paper books, rare and precious beyond belief. It was where the royal family spent most of their time together, when they were not preoccupied with ruling the planet.

The second Royal Library of Alderaan was a massive structure open to all citizens. When she was little Leia had thought that every datacron in all of existence was stored there, all the secrets of the universe hidden on those twinkling blue shelves.

The Royal Library of Alderaan was miniscule in comparison to the Jedi Archives.

At first Leia had not been that impressed. She and Anakin had entered into a fairly standard library, two stories in height with countless shelves of datacrons lined by severe looking busts. Had that been the entirety of the Archives, they would have been sufficient, but not extraordinary.

Yet Anakin had led her through the library, past the youths browsing the shelves as various robe-clad individuals tended to the datacrons, and down winding staircase after winding staircase. Each shelf-lined level they visited had high multi-story ceilings, and was illuminated by both the sun shining through the massive windows, and by the familiar blue glow of the datacrons themselves. With each level they descended there were more and more paper texts mixed in with the datacrons, and fewer and fewer people browsing through the stacks, until eventually the two of them seemed to be entirely alone.

About four levels down the windows vanished, replaced by elaborate light fixtures, and the two of them were approached by an ornately decorated droid. Anakin stopped to stand in front of it, and Leia hovered by his side.

“Hello,” the droid said. “Bioscans indicate match to Jedi Master Anakin Skywalker. Your presence on this level is authorized.” Anakin nodded his acknowledgement of the droid’s scan as it turned its attention to Leia.

She held her breath as it performed its scan of her, unsure what would happen when the droid...
identified her as an outsider to the Order entering a clearly restricted space. Finally the droid moved, processors lighting up as it spoke. “Bioscans indicate match to Jedi Padawan Leia Skywalker. Your presence on this level is authorized.”

Anakin rested one of his hands on her shoulder, grin lighting up his face. “Guess those security measures weren’t calibrated with your situation in mind, huh?”

After that they were stopped on every level by a new droid, each one granting them permission to be there.

“This is a lot of security for a library,” Leia mused as they made their way down what must have been their tenth staircase so far. This was absurd. Leia hadn’t dealt with so many stairs since the Massassi temple on Yavin IV. Her legs were really starting to feel the strain of this, and she dreaded the inevitable trip back up the steps.

As if that was not enough, the faint sense of discomfort Leia had felt every time she had been in the Temple so far was only increasing the further into the Temple’s bowels she went.

Anakin laughed, gesturing for her to follow him through the stacks of one of the levels, rather than continue to climb further and further down into the Archives.

“There is a lot of dangerous stuff stored in the Archives,” he explained. “The collection here includes artefacts from all sort of Force-worshiping cults and sects, including a whole lot that once belonged to the Sith.”

“So this is to prevent theft? Do people really attempt to steal from the Jedi Order?”

“No, not theft. It’s to keep people safe.”

“Safe? From ancient relics?”

Anakin chuckled. “Anything that once belonged to a Sith is… well dangerous is putting it lightly. They tend to perform all kinds of dark rituals over their belongings, sick stuff like coating their masks in the ashes of people they killed, and well… it gets to a point where their things become so full of their evil that even people who aren’t particularly sensitive to the Force will be consumed by the Dark Side if they get close enough to them.”

That raised several frightening questions. Mainly, if the Jedi were gone, and Palpatine resided within this structure, then what was he doing with the artifacts gathered here?

Consumed with pondering the implications of Palpatine’s possession of all the Jedi had been guarding, Leia remained silent for the rest of her and Anakin’s walk.

The labyrinth of datacron shelves gave way to a large and imposing high security door. Anakin punched a code into the panel next to it, causing it to open with a slow and high pitched hiss.

Yet another droid stepped forward to scan them before they entered the room.

Inside, the room was small and claustrophobic, lined with paper books and scattered objects in glass cases positioned through the meager space.

Barriss Offee sat at the lone table within, carefully examining a larger paper tome. She had been in the process of turning one of the pages with white gloved hands when they entered, and now her hand hovered above the text, page in hand.
“Master Skywalker,” she said, voice soft and calm, “how did you get her past all the security droids?”

He laughed, the sound so much louder than Barriss’ muted tones it seemed to boom through the near silent room. “Well, it seems that the security measures simply recognize her as my daughter.”

“I see,” she said, casting Leia a resigned glance.

Leia eyed the security droid standing by the door. “Why have all these security measures anyway, if an apprentice like the other Leia can access this all?”

Barriss sighed. “Normally a Padawan would not be permitted this deep into the archives, no. However Leia…” she trailed off, and a burst of dark green flared up under her diamond tattoos. “Leia is apprenticed to my wife, and it seemed prudent to enable her to have access to much of my workplace. Not only in case she needed to fetch me in the case of an emergency, but because I often assist with her training.”

Leia had to admit, being able to do research with access to this enormous catalogue of texts did sound like an appealing prospect. Far more appealing than meditation in any case.

Barriss was still watching her, a curious expression on her face. “I suppose now that you are here you can answer some questions for me directly.”

“Wait, can’t you answer some of mine first?”

“I’ll probably be able to answer whatever questions you have better once I’ve heard what you have to say.”

“Right.”

Barriss set the page she was holding down, and placed a thin rectangle of cloth on the page before she opened the book to a part in the middle, seemingly at random. Rather than say anything to Leia, she moved towards one of the shelves, grabbing another massive tome and setting it on the table, opening it as she did. Then she moved to pick up a third text and laid it with the others.

Once all three books were settled and opened to the pages Barriss desired, she gestured for Leia to come and examine them. “Please tell me if there is anything here that is in any way of interest.”

The first book had fragments of text in a proto-Huttese, alongside a translation of what was written in an archaic form of Outer Rim Basic. Even once one got past the strange spelling and grammar, the letters themselves were near incomprehensible, several of them fully unrecognizable. Leia found the proto-Huttese easier to make sense of than the translation into Basic.

What she could understand of what it described was similarly opaque. Something about floods, dams, overflow, and surface runoff? Why was Barriss having her read an antique text about irrigation systems?

The next text was written in the same form of Outer Rim Basic as the other, although there was a liberal amount of Bogolan mixed in. Around the text itself were faded handwritten notes in Futhark, crammed tight into the margins. Leia was nowhere near familiar enough with either Grizzmaltian or Naboo culture make any sense of what the Futhark said. She probably wouldn’t have been able to understand it even if it had been written in the far more common and recent Futhork script instead.

It took her some time, but Leia was able to parse a passage about holes in nets and… wait, something about a tunnel? That might be promising.
The third text she looked at, the one Barriss had been reading when Leia and Anakin had entered the room, didn’t have any writing for Leia to decipher. Instead it simply had a picture splayed across its two open pages. Three drastically different figures, two who appeared male and one who appeared female, stood together surrounded by various animals. Leia knew her eyes were strained from reading the previous books, because for a moment she could have sworn the convor resting on the woman’s shoulder turned its head to look directly at her, but after she rubbed at her eyes it had returned to facing the woman.

Leia gestured to the image, careful not to touch the pages with her bare hand. She knew how delicate physical texts could be, and how possible it was to damage them with the oils on one’s skin. She had studied calligraphy when she was younger, after all. “Is it supposed to do that?”

“Do what?” Anakin stepped closer, brushing against Leia and almost knocking her onto the delicate texts. She managed to balance herself before she touched any of them, shooting Barriss an apologetic glance.

The Mirialan woman seemed to appreciate the gesture, smiling warmly at Leia.

Anakin goggled at the book. “Hey Barriss, this one is new. Well not new, I mean it’s ancient, but like… you weren’t looking at Mortis stuff yesterday.”

“I know,” Barriss said. “But something Ahsoka said to me last night made me wonder if perhaps it might be connected.”

“Huh? What’d she say?”

“Morai had been on Horox III just after Leia vanished.”

“So? Morai always follows Ahsoka around.”

“When important things are happening in the Force around her.”

“Yeah. I think it is safe to say that my daughter’s disappearance, and the arrival of Leia here of course, counts as something major going on with the Force.”

“Still, I felt it was an avenue worth exploring. The three of you barely recall anything about your time there, and we know so little about Mortis from the texts themselves…”

Leia waited to see if Barriss would resume her thought, but she seemed preoccupied with staring at the picture in the book. It was probably safe for her to speak without worrying about interrupting.

“First of all, who is Morai, and what is Mortis? If you are going to discuss matters that may be relevant to my situation in front of me, at least do me the courtesy of providing me with the proper context to understand you. Secondly, you should probably know that I thought I saw the convor in that picture move just now. I am pretty sure that doesn’t ever happen with things recorded on paper.”

Barriss frowned. “You’re right. That should be impossible.”

As soon as she finished speaking Anakin blurted, “Morai’s the convor.”

“What convor?” This conversation was going in circles.

“The one in the picture,” Anakin said, “the one you thought you saw move?”

thousands of years old. There is no way that the bird pictured there could still be living.”

“She isn’t a normal convor, Leia.”

“Oh, so you expect me to believe this Morai of yours is an immortal bird who is so magical images of her can come to life?”

Anakin at least had the decency to look embarrassed. “When you put it that way it sounds… well like pure krayt spit, but… you’re not wrong.”

Leia fixed him with her best glare. The one that never failed to make hardened soldiers break down mid-report. “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“The Force works in mysterious ways, Leia. Morai’s far from the strangest thing I’ve ever heard of.”

“What, pray tell, could be weirder than that?”

Both Barriss and Anakin responded at the same time. Barriss sighing the name Leia had heard before, Mortis, but Anakin… Anakin’s response was far more perplexing.

“My birth.”

Leia laughed, loud and full throated. It was ridiculous, and very much not what Leia expected to hear. “Please tell me you know where Human babies come from,” Leia choked out around her laughter. “I think my own birth would be a rather pitiful event otherwise.”

“What? Hey!” His cheeks flushed, “That is not what I meant.”

Eyebrow raised, Leia asked, “Then what did you mean?”

“Well…” Anakin flushed, “I don’t have a father.”

“That’s not exactly uncommon,” she snorted, “you’re going to have to do better than that.”

“No,” he groaned, frustrated, “I meant that I literally don’t have a father, just a mother.”

Why was he drawing this out? Nothing about this was interesting. So his mom hadn’t had a partner. So? “I am failing to understand what you find strange about having a single parent.” She dismissed the topic, turning to face Barriss instead. “Why don’t you tell me more about this… Mortis was it?”

“No, that’s not what I’m saying! My mother, she wasn’t just a single parent - she was literally my only biological parent. As in she didn’t procreate with anyone.”

Leia rolled her eyes, turning towards Anakin. He seemed almost as aggravated as she was. “That’s impossible. I’m sorry, but that must have been a story she told you, to prevent you from asking questions about your birth father.”

“I’m sure I would have sensed it if she was lying.” Anakin smiled at her, although it didn’t reach his eyes. He was acting as if he had definitively proved his point, had made it so this banthacrap was actually reasonable.

“Maybe she wasn’t lying, maybe she just didn’t remember,” Leia said, “There are many different reasons why someone might suppress the memory of-”

“No, Leia, listen to me.” Stepping closer to her, so close he was in her personal space, his voice dropped into a serious tone, “This is important, ok? I was conceived by the Midi-chlorians
themselves. That means that a quarter of you, a full quarter, comes purely from the Force.”

She shoved him away, trying to move as far from him she could in the confined room. “That doesn’t make any sense! For one thing, if that was true and your mother was the sole being contributing to your genetics, wouldn’t you be identical to her?”

“Look I don’t get how it worked, ok? I just know what I know!”

Leia scoffed. “What you are describing is nonsense!”

“The same way people crossing between alternate universes is nonsense? Or perhaps it is impossible like moving images in a paper book? Or for a convor to be immortal and follow my wife everywhere across the galaxy?” Barriss cut in, voice firm. “The Force is a very mysterious thing. Even those of us who have spent our whole lives studying it do not fully understand it.”

Leia gaped, unable to respond. Barriss certainly had a point. She had witnessed so many impossible things, what was one more to add to the list?

No.

No.

She knew why this one was different. They weren’t asking her to accept that the universe was made up of strange phenomena. They were telling her that she was the product of mystical claptrap. That it was a fairly significant part of her very being. Leia couldn’t accept that. Would never accept that.

She had to draw a line somewhere.

“Maybe you aren’t actually fully Human. There are plenty of species that reproduce asexually. While I am not aware of any Near-Human species that-”

“We’re fully Human, Leia. At least according to every blood scan I’ve ever had.”

She swallowed, gathering her thoughts. “The Jedi Council, they believe this story of yours?” There was no way the a group of beings so wise and all knowing could approve of this absurd tale. None.

“Yeah, of course they believe it,” Anakin sounded bitter, or perhaps Leia only read that into his voice because she could feel his thick and cloying resentment ooze through the room. “It’s the only reason anyone wanted me to be a Jedi in the first place.”

“I fail to see how those two things would be connected.”

He let out a short caustic laugh. “Yeah, a lot of things about the Order make no sense.”

“Anakin,” Barriss’ voice was firm and chiding, “what do you mean by that?”

A flash of surprise cut through the heavy atmosphere, and Anakin’s head swiveled towards Barriss. In any other situation Leia might have found his reaction humorous, he had clearly forgotten she was in the room with them.

“Nothing!” he sputtered, and glanced through the tiny room. Leia could practically feel the gears in his head turning as he came up with an explanation for what he had been saying. She wondered if she would learn what he really been trying to communicate, or if this version would be the only one she’d get to hear. “Just that my being the Chosen One is the whole reason they let me in the Order, that’s all.”
Even his excuses made no sense.

Of course nothing in this dimension really did, why should this be any different.

“You mentioned that title before, on my first day here. Didn’t you say that it identified you as the person who killed Palpatine in this universe?”

“No, that’s what Snips said when you asked about it. I didn’t say anything.”

“Well, then what does it mean?”

Barriss perked up, and started to move towards one of the bookcases. She didn’t get very far before Anakin waved a hand, stopping her. “She doesn’t need to see the whole history of it, Barriss, ok?”

Actually, that sounded pretty helpful.

“It’s… well it’s what we were just talking about Leia. There was a prophecy, it said that one day there would be someone who brought balance to the Force. That that individual would be conceived by the Midi-chlorians themselves.”

“Bring balance? What does that mean?”

Anakin let out a shaky laugh, “well, it depends on who you ask.” He took a step back, and to Leia’s surprise gestured at the illustration she had been looking at earlier. “Closest thing I ever got to a confirmation that any of that prophecy stuff was real, it was from them.”

“So it is connected to what is in the book?”

“No, I mean… I meant they told me that. Well, the Father did anyway.”

“Told you, as in you met them?”

He looked up and at her, and Leia was again struck by the oddity of eyes shaped like hers, the same shade of blue of Luke’s. They were full of turmoil, those eyes. She wan’t sure if she was picking up on his emotions in the Force, or from his body language and expression, but she knew he wanted this conversation to be over just as much as she did. That he was struggling to hold it together. It was strangely important to him, for her to accept his impossible story. “I just… Leia, you gotta understand, our family? It’s tied up in the Force. It’s strange and impossible and downright absurd, but it’s literally part of who we are. So when you say there are limits to what you will and will not believe, or call things impossible it… “ He shook his head. “You don’t have a grandfather on my side, Leia, just the Force. How can a person with a background as messed up as that dismiss things on the grounds of them being too weird?”

Barris interjected, calm and steady. “If you find it hard to believe Leia, perhaps view it as a story for now.” She smiled, slight and gentle. “That way we can keep on discussing the things that need to be discussed, things that you may find even more ridiculous and absurd than the circumstances surrounding Anakin’s birth.”

Leia nodded, willing to accept that if she wanted to understand what had been researched about her situation, she’d have to at least listen to whatever nonsense these people had to say. She focused on the books on the table, on the illustration of the three strange figures, reminding herself that mythology and storytelling had always been crucial parts of how people came to understand the world around them.

What difference did it really make if the person convincing themself of impossible things was her
birth father, and not some distant ancient figure who couldn’t possibly know any better?

She didn’t quite sell herself on that excuse for Anakin’s bizarre story, but it eased the lump of tension at the back of her throat and that was good enough for the moment.

Leia was finishing up telling Luke about how their Aunt ‘Soka came to be their father’s Padawan when Master Yoda decided they had spent enough time sitting and talking together.

Well, that Luke had spent enough time, in any case.

“A return to physical training, Luke must have.” Yoda said. “This time watch your surroundings! Aware of them you must be.”

Luke groaned, and Leia laughed. Compared to the sort of exercises initiates at the Temple were put through daily, the climbing Luke had done earlier was nothing. He really had nothing to complain about!

Yoda hmmmmed and tapped Luke with his stick. “To the top of the canopy you will climb. Once there, find a path to the new hut without touching the ground, you will.”

Luke sighed, and shoulders hunched with resignation he began to climb. Again.

Leia moved to Yoda’s side, watching Luke make his way up the tree.

After Luke vanished into the canopy of vines and branches and leaves, Leia was able to track his movement thanks to the rustling, distinct from the noises the animals caused. Leia focused her senses on him, internally cheering as he successfully moved from the tree he had started at to the one beside it, and then to the next.

Her sense of him in the Force expanded, as he let the swamp around him into his senses, letting go of his own sense of self. But then, suddenly, his presence snapped back in, fast and sharp.

“Master Yoda, Leia, I think I’ve got it!” He called, and Leia was not surprised when the exclamation was followed by a flare of panic, and then he was falling again, shouting the entire way down.

She wanted to help him, but Yoda shook his head in disapproval, causing her to back away from where Luke had landed “No, no,” Yoda said. “Concentrate you must.”

“I was concentrating,” Luke said with a massive grin, “for a moment I could see a path through the trees!”

“And then?”

“And then I -” his expression fell. “Well, I didn’t want either of you to miss it.”

Leia understood the impulse. She had spent most of her early childhood sharing her every triumph with her brother through the Force. It was habit she had learned to abandon early on in her training, before it could have caused too much of a distraction.

“Miss it? Miss the branch you did!” Yoda laughed. “Your mind, ahead of your body it was.”

Leia expected Luke to ask Master Yoda to allow them to stop, to put an end to the lessons for the day. He didn’t.

Instead he said, “all right, I’ll go again.” He seemed determined to get things right, to learn the lesson
Yoda had set out to teach him. Leia was proud of him for that.

“Yes. This time, go with you I will,” Yoda said with a sigh. Leia had not been expecting that. She had of course seen Master Yoda perform all sorts of feats over the years, but that was back home in her dimension, where he was filled with more vitality than his counterpart in this universe. This Master Yoda had an infirm quality to him, that caused her to worry over him engaging in strenuous activity.

“Really?” Luke let out a surprised laugh. “Great!” His voice dropped, embarrassed. “This’ll be easier if I could follow you.”

“No, not follow.” Yoda glanced around the clearing where they had been sitting, pointing to Luke’s rucksack full of roots. “Carry me, you will!”


“Hmmmm,” Yoda looked contemplative, stopping to ponder Luke’s concern. “Then concentrate you must, or fall we will.” He laughed. “Worse for me then you, I think.” He kept laughing, the amount of high pitched laughter disproportionate to how amusing his statement actually had been.

“What of the roots we came here to retrieve?” Leia asked.

“Transport them you shall, while the boy trains.”

“You want me to carry all of them by myself?”

“Resourceful, you are. Smart. A method of transport you will find.”

“Of course Master, but-”

“Reflect on what we will speak of when talking later tonight. Hmmmm?”

“We’re going to return to talking about father later?” Luke asked.

“Hmmmm, not a part of this conversation, you will be. Private it is.”

“Aw, come on, what is so important I can’t know about it? I came all the way here to learn stuff, not be left out!”

Leia turned to examine the roots in their baskets and bags, rather than allow Luke to see her wince. He really had no idea just how much he was being left out of.

“An inquisitive mind, the boy has,” Yoda said, drawing Leia’s attention back to the conversation.

Luke scratched at the back of his head. “Isn’t that a good thing?”

“Often. Often yes, yes it can be,” Yoda nodded. “Still. Learn to know when it is time not to ask... Serve you well, that would.”

Yoda shuffled over to the root filled pack and prodded it with his stick. “Hmmm.” He glanced to the side, spotting a basket that was not yet full. “Ah! Can these roots fit in there, hmm?” He grabbed an armful of the roots - not very many really when considered the span of his arms, and moved them over to the basket instead. He seemed pretty satisfied with how they fit, nodding with contentment, returning to the pack to grab more. When he ran out of room in the baskets to place roots within, he merely piled the rest on the ground, giving Leia a strange glance as he did. When the backpack was
empty, he picked it up, grinning at Luke. “Come. Much to do. Daylight not last forever.”

“But how will Leia find the other hut without you there to guide her? She’s only made the trip there once.”

“And then once more back here, no? Almost fully trained, the girl is. Able to find her path on her own, she should be.” He spun, facing Luke and shaking his stick at him. “All her life the girl has trained. Unlike you!”

“I don’t understand. If it is such a bad thing that I am only starting my training now, then why didn’t Ben try to teach me when I was younger?”

“Hmmmmm. A good question this is. A good question indeed.”

Obi-Wan’s voice floated in the air, startling Leia. “I did want to teach you, Luke. Had plans to do so when I first brought you to Tatooine. Unfortunately an incident that occurred when you were just two years old led to your Uncle banning me from doing so.”

It was different from when one used the Force to communicate directly with another’s mind, as Leia was clearly hearing Obi-Wan with her ears and not in her head. Overall she found it pretty creepy, and she wished he would just manifest in his ghost form instead, even if it was only to speak briefly and then vanish.

“You’re the one who brought me to Tatooine?” Luke’s eyes grew wide. “Why?”

“Ah. Now there is a story for a later day.”

“Seems like everything is for a later time,” Luke huffed.

“You must learn to have patience, Luke,” Obi-Wan soothed.

“Which is it that you want? Me to have patience and wait for things to happen in the future, or to focus on the here and now and live in the moment? Because I feel like I’m getting really contradictory advice here from the two of you.”

“Mutually exclusive, these things are not.”

“Huh? Of course they are! They are two separate things!”

Yoda sighed, stepping into the backpack. “Begin your training, we should.”

“Begin? I thought we already started! I mean what was all of that earlier if not-”

“Always talking, this one is. No appreciation for silence, for listening!” Yoda drew the last word out, each syllable almost becoming its own word.

Yoda pulled the sides of the backpack up, so that only the very top of his chest and his head were still visible. It was strange seeing the venerated Master inside a bag. Leia could barely take him seriously in there. As if to emphasize the ridiculous picture, Yoda lifted his arms in the air towards Luke, like an infant trying to get their parents attention. “Come, come. Up we go now.”

Leia helped Luke get the bag onto his back, and watched as Luke made his way up the tree, Yoda’s arms wrapped around his shoulders, muttering to him as they went.

She did not envy Luke’s position in the least. Just the thought of Master Yoda whispering in her ear… *Uck*. It gave her shivers.
Once the two of them had vanished into the canopy she glanced about, half expecting to see Obi-Wan’s ghost. He didn’t materialize, and he said nothing to her, so she set about trying to figure out how she was supposed to get all the roots to the other hut.

Looking at them now, really trying to figure out how she could transport them, Leia realised that even if both Luke and Master Yoda had been helping her, there were enough roots gathered here to warrant multiple trips.

Yet somehow she was supposed to transport them all by herself?

There were far too many of them for to carry in arms so maybe she was supposed to drag them or…. Oh.

Oh!

That…. That was a lot of things to levitate all at once, especially when she was going to need to be hiking across a still unfamiliar planet, focused on finding her way back to the hut.

Leia had never lifted so many things before all at once, but she supposed it wouldn’t hurt to try. One big and heavy thing, sure, that was easy, but having to focus on so many things all at once? She had always found ways to avoid doing that.

Shutting her eyes she reached out, extending her senses out towards the various overly full baskets. She’d have to be careful, any sort of jostle and roots would tople out and to the ground.

When she opened her eyes, every root that had been piled into the various containers was cheerfully floating at her eye level. It took no strain at all to simply lift them, but maintaining her focus on so many small objects all at once for an entire hike?

No. She wouldn’t allow herself to doubt her ability. The moment she stopped thinking she could carry out this task, she would have failed.

Reaching out even further, Leia felt for the best path through the bog to where she wanted to go. Opening herself up fully to the swamp, she allowed the Force to rush in and….

Bad idea!

Baaaaaad idea!

She had in the process of letting the wetlands in allowed a crack to form in her shields. Just enough for him to pry his way through.

His breathing rang in her ears, heavy and regular. Everything about that sound was wrong. Right down to the fact that she knew, just knew, that his form was a reflection of how he perceived himself.

She had been dwelling on it ever since their last meeting, ever since she had heard him, for just a moment, take on the familiar welcome tones of her father’s voice.

How twisted had things gotten, for him to visualize himself in his own mind within that armor. To be unable to escape his prison of gleaming plasteel and metal even in his thoughts.

“Leia,” the all too wrong baritone boomed, “we speak again at last.”

The roots dipped as Leia’s grip on them slackened. She did not let them fall, tightening her hold and
defiantly starting her trek, refusing to give him the attention he craved.

Unfortunately it seemed this was not a conversation she could simply walk away from. The mechanical breathing followed her as she stepped out of the clearing and into the tree line. The volume of it consistent and even to her side. Still she did not look his way, focusing instead on her task, and getting comfortable enough with it that she might work on rebuilding her shields all at the same time.

“Suppose what you told me is true,” Vader said, “and you indeed are from a world where… your mother survived childbirth…” He drew silent, his turbulent emotions swelling in the Force, washing up and over Leia’s hold on the roots she was trying to transport, causing them to wobble.

Great. Just great. She had to engage with him, because if she didn’t he was going to make her drop everything.

“Well? What are you asking after? Because that is exactly where I am from.”

“Padmé,” he said, and Leia could not tell if it was simply desperate hope that caused her to hear the love that suffused the way he said that name.

She waited for him to keep speaking, but he didn’t. He just breathed.

“What about mom?” Leia finally prompted.

“I am asking after her.”

“Yes. What do you want to know, specifically? I mean something tells me you don’t wanna know where she goes to get her hair dyed, and thinks no one knows about.”

There was a sharp sound, almost like someone choking, and with a start Leia realised it was an abortive laugh. How long it had been since he had properly laughed? Just what sort of existence was he subjecting himself to? Why would he choose this half-life of his, when there was another way? Even death seemed preferable to this suffering.

Still, as pitiable as he was, this was a promising start.

“You laugh, but I made the mistake once of pointing out a grey strand that was visible, which ok - I was being rude - but she wouldn’t stop wearing wigs for like a week inside our apartment after that. She never wears those things at home, only for work!”

He didn’t respond. If it wasn’t for his breathing she would have thought he’d left.

They covered a good distance this way. Her half-ignoring him, and him breathing.

It was irritating in ways she didn’t count on, that breathing.

She almost wished he’d speak more, just so she’d have something to listen to other than that rhythmic hissing wheeze.

Still walking through the bog, she turned to look at him, not that the sight of him revealed anything. His mask was as placid and blank as ever, unnaturalness emphasized by how the light dappling through the trees didn’t reflect off it, didn’t influence it in any way. Instead it shone with the reflection of the fluorescent lights of whatever ship he was on. Her eyes met the dark lenses that covered his eyes.

She wished she could see his actual face, even as she feared his eyes would be all wrong. She would
have some indication of what he was thinking then, her father’s face was so expressive that even her mother, who was about as Force-sensitive as a droid, could accurately predict what he was thinking.

“You have been well supplied with information,” Vader finally spoke. “If I did not know such things to be impossible, I might have believed in the farce you keep trying to convince me is real.”

Farce? Seriously? She almost stumbled over a root before she responded. “How are you so sure my life is a story I am making up?”

“As I told you before, there was no other path through the events of the Empire’s rise than the one I took. It was my destiny.”

Oh great, more destiny nonsense. “Is it really that hard for you to admit you might have been wrong? Really?”

“There were no other choices to be made. I did what I had to do.” He declared it as a fact, without hesitation or pause.

It was as if he needed to pretend his decisions were not his own, so he didn’t have to take responsibility for them!

…Wait, as far as explanations went, that actually made sense.

“With time you will come to understand,” Vader continued, “you are merely confused because of the lies Organa told you.”

“Yeah uh, how many times do I have to explain this to you?” Leia rolled her eyes, seriously it felt like every time she was forced to deal with the being her father had become in this world, she had to go over the basics of her situation all over again. “I was not raised by the Organa family, I was raised by mom and you.” She paused, not wanting to link him and her father so directly, it felt too much like saying that the man she knew in her own dimension was the same as this Sith. “Well not you, but by the Anakin Skywalker of my universe. My dad.”

“Impossible.”

“In my experience, the Force tends to make the impossible, possible. Besides, do you sense me lying to you?”

“All that tells me is that you have deluded yourself into believing this farce.”

“Oh, and the memories I shared with you before, I suppose you think those are an elaborate fabrication as well?”

“It is the only explanation.”

“And why, may I ask, do you think I’d construct such an elaborate fantasy?”

“Your desire to be with your real family has motivated you to retreat into this illusion. There is no need for this. I assure you that you may join me. Together we will crush the Emperor and-”

“Oh please, save your Dark Side song and dance for someone who wants to hear it… which by the way is nobody. Literally nobody wants to hear it, because going to the Dark Side is a terrible idea.”

“Perhaps if you will not join me, your brother will.”

Leia laughed, the roots jostling and almost falling. Huh. She had almost forgotten about them,
focused so hard on the conversation she was having as she walked. Strange that they were still levitating at all, really.

She turned to look at him again. His black mask tilted slightly to the side, she supposed with confusion. “Have you ever actually met Luke?”

She hoped he couldn’t feel her worry. Luke’s display yesterday in the training room had shown her how vulnerable he was to falling. If Vader really wanted to tempt him to the side of evil… no.

She couldn’t allow herself to think about this with Vader around.

“We have met on the field of combat,” Vader declared. It seemed he hadn’t picked up on any of her concern about Luke. Good.

Wait, did he just say he and Luke had fought with each other? Luke was good, but nowhere near good enough to face Vader. At least not yet. That was another thing she didn’t want Vader to know, how easily he’d be able to take Luke down.

Her confusion must have been written across her face, or leaked into the Force, or something, because Vader addressed her unspoken question. “It was a short engagement, nothing more.”

“Right.” So the two of them had barely even met.

She wondered if his contact with the other Leia was restricted to torturing her.

How sad would that be, him only ever knowing his son from times when they were actively fighting each other, and his daughter from torturing her.

She hoped for the sake of this universe’s Luke and Leia that they could have more than that from him some day. If not, she feared he’d be a terrible specter looming over their memories for the rest of their lives.

Karabast, what were they even talking about? Thankfully she didn’t think he’d said anything since she had gotten lost in her thoughts, but still, she had to refocus...

Vader interrupted her thoughts. “It is inevitable that both you and your brother will take your rightful place at my side.”

“So, from that one short meeting, you think you’d be able to get him to join you?”

“It is the rational thing to do.”

“No, no, it really really isn’t.”

“With time you will come to think differently.”

“I doubt that.”

There was a beeping noise, loud and intrusive. It almost startled Leia enough for her to lose sight of the path she needed to follow. It couldn’t have come from the marsh she was in, could it?

Vader was pressing at buttons on his chest, and raised his arm to stare at something on his wrist. His shoulders heaved, and that impossible to read mask turned its gaze back on her. “I must leave for now, daughter, but know I will return as soon as I am able.”

Before she could respond he was gone, the swampland strangely quiet in the absence of his
breathing.

Frowning, it occurred to Leia that he had acted far calmer than he had during any of their other encounters. Were their conversations making a difference?

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Food can often bring people together, regardless of the situation.

Note: Some of the dialogue between Yoda and Luke in this chapter was borrowed from *Forces of Destiny* Season 2 Episode 7 "The Path Ahead." If you would like to hear this dialogue as performed by Mark Hamill and Frank Oz, the three minute long episode can be found [here](#).

Things here in the US have somehow managed to go from bad, to worse, to somehow even worse. Right now, I'm seeking comfort from fiction, and one of the lines in one of my favorite franchises has been sticking with me as of late.

"Hope is like the sun. If you only believe in it when you can see it, you’ll never make it through the night."

We're in the night right now. There is no question about that. When the government keeps refugees in cages, when racist measures like the travel ban are enforced, when our reproductive freedoms are fundamentally threatened... we are in the night. But I have faith that it won't always be this way. That there is a better future that is possible, so long as we fight for it.

So if you, like me, have been feeling just a bit lost as of late, and more than a little scared... please remember, there is always a reason maintain hope.
Chapter 52

Chapter Notes

A large chunk of this chapter would never have worked without Sethnakht’s help. I am so fortunate to have someone so talented looking this fic over, and I want to extend all the thanks I possibly can for the many brilliant suggestions and edits that make my drafts actually work.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The first thing Leia noticed when she reached the clearing with the hut was Luke doing a handstand. The second thing she noticed was Yoda balancing on top of one of Luke’s feet.

She was glad she got to see both things as she entered the space, because as soon as he noticed her, Luke lost his balance and went toppling to the ground. She managed to use the Force to catch Yoda before he fell, setting the elderly Master on the ground gently.

He nodded his appreciation at her, and gestured towards the domed structure they would be staying in. “The hut, set the roots next to, yes.”

She had somehow forgotten about the roots, still hovering behind her at her eye level. How had she not dropped them?

Not only had she not been thinking about them, she had been distracted by trying to find her way through the strange terrain . . . and by her fath - by Darth Vader. Somehow she had still successfully transported them to the new location on her own.

“Master,” she said to get Yoda’s attention as she returned to where Luke was still lying on his back, “How did you know I would be able to levitate so many small items all at once?”

Yoda chuckled. “Earlier, trouble concentrating you had. Push you, show you more is possible, I hoped to do. Complacent, comfortable with your limits, you had become.”

“How did you know I was capable of more?”

As they spoke Luke lifted himself back into a handstand, the movement reminding Leia of his presence. He was glancing between them as they spoke, eyes darting this way and that, but he didn’t say anything, his face slowly turned red.

“Always capable of more, we are,” Yoda nodded, looking up to meet her eye. “A good conversation you had, I hope?”

“Master?” She heard herself say. How did he know she had been talking to Vader?

“Think old Master Yoda noticed not, hmm?” He narrowed his eyes at her. She could tell that he had more to say, the unspoken words hovering in the space between them.

Leia frowned. Vader hadn’t threatened to harm her, outside of his desire to make her fall of course. He’d mostly been equal parts curious about the life he could have had, had he stayed in the light, and
in denial that such a timeline was even possible. So, to answer Master Yoda’s question… “I do think it was a good conversation Master… he seemed almost calm this time. More willing to hear what I had to say.”

“Good. Good! If through to him, you got, excellent news, that is. Yet careful you must be. Good, hope is, but not, too much misplaced hope is. Hmmm. Listening, understanding what others meant, never a strong point for that one. Possible it is, that what he heard was not what you said.”

Leia could sense Luke’s unasked questions. His desire to know what they were talking about. Part of her knew they should hold off on continuing this conversation until later, have it somewhere where he would not hear them. She didn’t care though if he heard or not, so she pressed on with her own question. “Is there anything we can do to make sure he’ll listen?”

Yoda sighed, ears drooping and posture folding in, “Up to him, that choice is.” He hummed, watching Luke struggle to maintain his pose. “Glad you transported all the roots I am. Unexpected that was.” It seemed he felt they had said enough here with Luke, and wanted them to shift topics.

“Unexpected?”

“Yes. Think you would be able to bring them here I did not. To the tree line, or few paces into the woods. Not all the way here. Easy to carry things over a distance it is not.”

It wasn’t easy, no. Or at least, it shouldn’t be.

Every lesson Leia had ever had reinforced that she should be feeling strain, that getting things to interact with the world in a way that was not natural for them for an extended period of time should have sapped her energy away, left her with a headache or some other sign of exhaustion.

She could recall countless lessons where her classmates would complain about pressure behind the eyes, or nausea or any one of hundreds of other ailments. But now that she thought about it, really thought about it, she couldn’t actually remember ever experiencing those things herself. Pain in her muscles after training with her lightsaber for too long, sure. Eye strain and headaches after days spent combing over texts in the Archives, of course. But never after her lessons in the Force itself.

Huh.

She felt fine now too. Not even winded. She had been doing so many things all at once, and yet… she felt good. Like she’d taken a quick jog, nothing more than that.

Yet still, as successful as her attempt had been, that didn’t change the fact that Master Yoda had apparently assigned her a task he never expected her to complete.

“Why did you ask me to do it if you didn’t expect me to succeed?”

“How you react to failure, I wished to observe.”

“Master, why are you telling me you set me up to fail?”

“Surprised me already you have. Shown yourself capable of tasks I did not expect. True of other matters as well, perhaps.”

Leia grinned. “It’s the masters who learn and the students who teach.” She had never really understood that phrase, had heard it cited time and time again as key Jedi wisdom, but thought she was starting to see what it might have meant.
“Yes. Challenged, it has been too long since I was.”

“When did you last have a student?”

“Twenty years ago, when the order fell. My students all were…” He sighed, shaking his head. “No, dwelling on the past will help us not.”

“But isn’t that exactly what we are doing here? Going over past events so we can better understand the future?”

“Lived with this pain for a long time, have I, alone. Used to talking about it I am not, but right, you are. Yes. Talking, processing, valuable actions, these are. Needed to let go, to move on, they are.”

“You’re not alone Master. You can lean on others for help.” She gathered her thoughts, remembering how alone Vader had felt, how his loneliness had almost felt like a gaping wound in and of itself. No being was ever supposed to be isolated like that, ever. “We are all connected in the Force, the emotions of one of us influences all others. The burdens one Jedi carries should be shared by all.”

“Hmmm. Thank you. Needed to hear this I did. Yes.”

“Leia’s right,” Luke said, from where he had seemingly fallen flat on the ground from his second failed handstand. “If you need people to talk to, we’re here for you. It’s the least I can do, what with you agreeing to train me and all.”

“Seeing what is before you, you both are, not just the distant horizon. Much progress we have all made today, yes? Yes!” Yoda nodded, glancing between them both and grinning. “Time to eat it is, and then rest.”

Luke’s face twitched, a passing quick expression Leia would have missed without a lifetime of pushing her brother's every boundary. What was bothering him?

Yoda picked up some of the roots, showing Leia and Luke how to cut them properly as he set up a pot to stew them in.

Occasionally as she worked Leia would imagine describing the scene to people back home, once they solved this problem.

“What did you do when you were trapped in that alternate dimension?” someone would ask, possibly Master Yoda himself! (Of course if it was Master Yoda asking the question the syntax would be all different, but Leia ignored that in her fantasy of one day looking back on this all from the comfort and safety of home).

Leia would say: “deep in a swamp, Master Yoda showed Luke and I how to cook him his dinner. He’s kind of a fussy old man about these things, you know. Needs the veggies cubed down to a certain size, otherwise they just ruin his meal. It reminded me a lot of working with the culinary droid back home, actually. So obsessed with proper knife cuts! He did have a lot of nice things to say about Luke’s gardening skills though. Kept thanking Luke for some boring thing he had told him about pruning even as he complained about how I was chopping the roots all wrong.”

It was a nice story, and while it in no way made up for everything else Leia had experienced since entering this dimension, she knew she’d always look back on this particular night, and smile.
“So who are they then?” Leia asked, eyebrow arched. “The people in the illustration?”

“They are called the Father, the Son, and the Daughter,” Barriss explained, “images of them show up all over the galaxy, some older than space travel itself.”

The book Leia had seen their images in had certainly been ancient, but nowhere near *that* old.

“Perhaps *who* was the wrong question then. What are they? Or rather, what do they represent? They certainly never showed up in any of *my* art history classes, and I can assure you that as a member of Alderaan’s royal family my education in such matters was quite extensive.”

“No, they wouldn’t have. Almost all depictions of them appear at sites where the Force is strong, places where Force-sensitives have gathered for as long as anyone can remember to live and study.”

“Oh, which is to say sites that belong to the Order?”

“Yes,” Barriss confirmed. “More often than not, where there is a depiction of the Mortis motif, there is also a Jedi temple.”

“Which means there could have been one on Horox!” Anakin sounded excited, obviously this had a level of significance that went over Leia’s head.

“What?” It wasn’t a well articulated request for more information, no, but she was far too stressed to really vocalize her questions properly. She consciously relaxed her forehead, worried that the way it was scrunched was contributing to her faint and building headache.

“The reason Ahsoka and Leia were on Horox was to try and find an ancient Jedi site,” Anakin grinned, triumphant, “so it’s entirely possible that there was a mural related to Mortis there! Barriss, that connection’s brilliant!”

Leia suppressed a groan, would these people ever actually *explain* things rather than assume she had access to the same information they did?

“So there are paintings all over the galaxy. What does art have to do with my situation?”

“Mortis murals have a very distinct presence in the Force,” Barriss said. “Even with how long we’ve been studying them, researchers still haven’t worked out what that presence means or does. All we can say with certainty is that they aren’t just paintings.”

“Maybe we should back up a bit and explain what we know about Mortis?” Anakin asked Barriss.

“Yes, maybe you should,” Leia sighed, wondering when the things they were telling her would finally make sense. “Context could only help.”

Anakin shook his head. “When it comes to Mortis, that does anything *but* help.” He gave her a strange look. “It’s a place. Kind of. I went there once? Maybe. It’s all… jumbled up in my mind. I can recall flashes of things, but when I try to focus on them too hard they slip away.” Anakin frowned. “Obi-Wan thinks it was just a dream, that the three of us were connected in the Force and just shared a dream, but Ahsoka swears it felt real and honestly I agree with her. It was…” Anakin paused gathering his thoughts, seemingly looking everywhere in the small room but actually at her.

He told her then about the… vision he had shared with Obi-Wan and Ahsoka. It was full of gaps and missing pieces, but it did involve the three figures from the book. The Father, the Son, and the
Daughter. The three of them had wanted to know if Anakin was truly this “Chosen One” figure, and had demanded he submit to a test.

Anakin did not remember what the test was, or if he had passed it.

Leia still did not understand what any of this had to do her situation.

Neither did Anakin, it seemed, which was why he had been surprised to see the book out when they had first arrived to speak with Barriss.

Barriss for her part was reticent to share information, couching everything in countless disclaimers that she had only just started down this avenue of research, and was not sure it would go anywhere.

The main reason she had brought the topic up at all was because she had found a mention of people occasionally vanishing around Mortis related murals, and then reappearing in other locations, sometimes years later.

That mention, combined with the possible sighting of Morai on Horox III was all they had to link Mortis to Leia’s situation. It was also, with two different factors possibly connecting Mortis to what was going on, currently their best lead. The other two passages Leia had looked over when they had entered the room were the next best guesses at an explanation.

The first was from a group of Force-users known as Lew’elans.

They were not, as Leia had first assumed, an ancient sect that had died out. Rather they were a group of Humans that had split from the Jedi thousands of years ago, and went on to settle a planet all their own and live apart from the rest of the galaxy. They were still alive and thriving in this dimension, and Leia wondered if they still existed in her universe as well. She made a mental note to learn as much about them as she could while she was here. After all, if they were still out there… well Luke would really love to meet them. A whole planet of Force-users out there with generations of knowledge to share!

She didn’t let her hopes get up too high, of course. Palpatine had made a point of exterminating as many Force-worshiping cultures as he could.

Still, there was a chance that some of the Lew’elans were still around. Unlike non-Human cultures like the Lasat, who had faced genocide and near total extinction due to the simple fact of their faith, Human-centric Force-worshiping groups tended to simply be made destitute, their members arrested on trumped up charges and unable to display any symbols of their worship. That was where the popular fad of wearing red cloth had come from - with all symbols of faith destroyed and made illegal, people found new ways to communicate that they believed. Until of course the very act of wearing red dyed clothes became a dangerous activity in and of itself. She took heart in the Lew’elans’ isolationist tendencies, and hope that had been enough to keep them safe, protecting them from the horrors of the Empire’s enforced atheism.

The sect of Force-users responsible for the second text Leia had looked at was extinct. Had been for quite a long time. Their religion predated the Jedi Order, and was known as the Mist-weavers. Not much was actually known about them.

Barriss, Leia, and Anakin lost track of time, looking through books and discussing theories about how and why Leia and her counterpart swapped places. They didn’t come anywhere near close to solving the mystery of what had brought Leia to this strange new dimension, but it was one of the most enjoyable afternoons Leia had experienced since the exchange had occurred, second only to her trip home to see her mother a few days prior.
She knew most other people her age would find it boring, but combing through ancient texts in the hopes of finding the key to an almost unsolvable puzzle was thrilling.

Sometime after Barriss and Anakin’s sixth time rehashing the same gibberish in their attempt to explain Mortis to her (it really just didn’t make any sense), Leia’s skipped lunch caught up with her. Her stomach let out a horribly loud gurgle, the noise impossibly loud in the small room.

After that both Barriss and Anakin no longer seemed interested in continuing their conversation. All they wanted to talk about was getting Leia some food.

Leia was set on dropping the topic so they could keep working - it wouldn’t be the first time she had fewer than three meals in a day, nor would it be the last - until Luke’s voice rang in her head.

*Leia? Dad? I’m really hungry all of a sudden. Do either of you want to get dinner? Also, Leia where are you? Aunt ‘Soka says you just ditched on her training? What’s going on?*

Several things happened in quick succession. Leia startled at the sudden mental intrusion, knocking into the table. One of the ancient texts on the table toppled off it, and Leia dove to try and catch it. Barriss let out a yelp of surprise, moving towards where the book was falling with one hand outstretched. Leia and Barriss knocked into each other, and the book hit the ground. Its spine bent on impact, and the book splayed open on a random page.

There was something... *something* about that page… but before Leia could even so much as make a noise, Barriss had scooped the book up and began fussing over it, lamenting at the damage the fall had caused.

Leia wasn’t sure what had caught her attention so she let the matter go. Instead her cheeks flushed and she filled with shame. Shame that she had damaged such a valuable text.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “It is no excuse, but Luke just started speaking in my head out of nowhere.”

Barriss’s features smoothed out, and she nodded. “Is there an emergency?” she asked. “Is that why he decided to forgo using a comm?”

“No, no emergency,” Leia responded. “Not unless an empty stomach counts.”

Anakin grinned. “If the two of you are experiencing rumbling bellies in sync and all, that’s probably a sign that we should be getting ourselves to some food as soon as possible.” He began to move to the door, the matter seemingly decided.

“Wait,” Leia said, hoping to regain some control of the situation. At the sound of her voice Anakin stopped and turned to face her. “Please tell me we aren’t returning to the Cantina you took me to the other day.”

Anakin looked hurt, but just passingly. “I uh, don’t exactly have too many other places to suggest. Unless you want to have dinner here in the Temple’s cafeteria?”

“Is there anywhere you would recommend, Barriss?” Leia asked.

Barriss was surprised by the question, and when she answered her words were quiet and hesitant. “I don’t eat outside of the Temple very often. Jedi don’t typically carry credits unless we are on assignment.”

Anakin laughed, palming the controls to open the door. “Don’t worry Leia, I have plenty of credits on me, your mom always insists our family carries chips linked to her accounts.”
Leia nodded. “Good to know. Still doesn’t settle the question of where we should eat, but it is helpful to know what sort of price range is available to us. I’d imagine given whose bank account we’re taking from, our options are near unlimited?”

Luke’s voice drifted into her mind again. **Hello? Did either of you even hear me? Food. We should go get some.**

**Yeah, we heard you Luke.** Not seeing Anakin’s lips move as she heard his voice was a surreal experience. **We’re just trying to figure out where would be the best place to eat.**

**We can figure that out on the way out!** Somehow, Leia did not understand how, she could feel Luke’s eyes roll.

Slowly, carefully, she reached out and touched Luke’s mind. Felt his exhaustion and hunger. It mirrored her own, almost exactly. There was a roll of amusement from him as she had that revelation, and with a start she realised he must have heard her thoughts. The shock of that revelation was enough to snap her fully back to herself.

Anakin was watching her, warmth and pride radiating from his being. Barriss was still fussing over the book, the air around her swirling wildly with worries and concerns that seemed to keep increasing and multiplying, spurtling into the Force around her like wet calligraphy ink.

Leia felt faintly sick. What was happening to her? Her senses kept reeling. One moment things were as they always had been, made sense and worked the way they were supposed to, and the next - like a filter was dropping in front of her eyes, or perhaps falling away - everything would shift.

Even as she watched Barriss’ emotions twirl about, she could faintly detect generations of readers pouring over the texts around her, the echoes of their questions and findings still there in the room with them.

**It was all too much.**

She turned to Anakin again to ask what was happening to her, but the words died in her mouth. He was so strange to look at, she didn’t have any of the vocabulary needed to understand what she was seeing at all. She faltered, blinked and rubbed at her eyes. When her hands fell back to her sides she was so grateful to discover the world had been put right. The colors had muted back to their familiar hues, she no longer saw things she knew were not really there, and the intensifying vibrating sense of connection had died away.

Anakin was standing in the open doorway; she hadn’t even noticed the door opening.

“Come’ on Leia, let’s not leave Luke waiting. He sounded half ready to gnaw his own arm off.”

Leia nodded distractedly, smiling at Barriss in parting as she stepped through the doorway and back into the library. She was quiet as as they left the archives, barely even noticing the endless stairs as she ascended them.

**Occasionally her vision would shift, like it had in the room with Anakin and Barriss.**

The empty stacks around her would hum with the activity of readers long past, and even more alarmingly readers who had not yet been born. How she knew that impossibility was beyond her.

It was all so loud. Too much happening all at once around her. An entire timeline condensed so that rather than occurring over the course of years, generations, centuries, it was all taking place in that single instant.
She blinked hard hoping to dispel what she saw, and when she opened her eyes she saw the library ransacked and empty.

Dust swirled in the dark cavernous space, between the broken shelves and deactivated datacrons. The security droids lay in broken rusted pieces on the floor, cobwebs gathered around discarded computer terminals.

She shook her head, rejecting the forsaken impossible fantasy.

What was happening?

How was she seeing these things?

The library returned.

It was full of too much (too little?) time, but it was a functioning library. Well maintained. Unbroken.

Was Anakin aware there was something wrong?

He didn’t say anything about what was happening, but neither did she...

Maybe he was cognizant of it all. A strange knowing air was radiating out from him as he watched her.

Even when he wasn’t looking at her, when he’d face forward or glance to the sides, she somehow still knew his attention was unfailingly trained on her.

He shone. Vast, tremendous. It wasn’t overwhelming. Unlike everything else...

There was something about his presence that calmed her, that moored her to the here and now, made sure she did not get lost in the endless thens and eventualities.

More and more as they climbed his presence engulfed her, like basking in the heat of a fireplace during a blizzard, warm and comfortable and reassuring.

As more people, real currently present in the here and now people, began to appear, things started to stabilize.

The confusing visions receded, the world acting more like it always had before.

It was a relief, stepping back onto the main floor, with its bustling activity.

Leia felt the present moment solidly. Before standing in that room, or climbing those stairs, she had always taken the linear progression of time for granted. Now… she was grateful there was a discernible now.

Anakin slipped one of his arms around her shoulder, pulling her close to him. She did not fight it, his touch made her feel that much more securely anchored and here.

“I forgot to ask if you want to see Luke,” he said. “Sorry about that. I know you said you wanted a bit of distance from everything. You want me to come up with an excuse for you?”

She craned her neck to watch his face, the angle was awkward since she was pressed to his side. He was smiling down at her, no hint of falsehood anywhere in his expression. He was committed to making sure she was comfortable with what they did next, she couldn’t think of any ulterior motivations he might have.
Leia smiled back at him. “No, it’s ok. I don’t mind eating with Luke.”

His grin widened, he didn’t seem relaxed exactly, there was a tension hanging about him that kept his body language from fully easing into that state, but he did seem more comfortable. “Ok. So let’s track him down then. You, uh, want me to show you how?”

Leia nodded, more because she could tell Anakin needed to occupy a set role, to be needed and in control, than out any real desire to learn. She was exhausted and had experienced enough new things for one day. The world had only just righted itself, and part of her was terrified that if she tried to do anything with the Force she’d be adrift in that swirling infinite timelessness again.

His eyes sparkled, and she wondered if he knew she was indulging him, or if he was just that happy to teach her.

Idly it occurred to her that she could find out which it was, that she was capable of slipping into his thoughts and knowing for sure what it was he was reacting to. The impulse scared and repulsed her. She pressed closer to Anakin’s side, needing the comfort and reassurance of something real and tangible like human contact.

“Can you focus on your connection to Luke? Just picture it in your mind, that way you feel when you are with him, the unique emotions he and he alone can inspire when you are together,” Anakin said.

Leia frowned. “I don’t know your son that well. I’ve only met him a handful of times.”

The arm around her twitched, and she heard Anakin let out a puff of breath. “Fair point. But from what I understand, you had no trouble connecting with him as soon as you met him.”

She nodded, recalling how right it had felt to let him in, how easy it had been to slip into his mind when he had been the one reaching out to her earlier. Was that what Anakin was asking her to do? Enter Luke’s mind? She wasn’t sure she wanted to do that.

As if sensing her ambivalence, Anakin continued speaking. “Open yourself to him, like you did when we were with Barriss, but this time don’t go to him. Just try and locate him. Figure out where he is, nothing more than that.”

“I feel like whenever I try to do anything I either overshoot or fail outright,” Leia confessed. “Not to mention that….” she trailed off, not sure how comfortable she was sharing what she had experienced when they were on the stairs.

They were outside the library now, strolling down one of the Temple’s massive halls. A group of small children, around ten or eleven years of age, each in small robes with braids dangling at the sides of their head, ran past them, shouting and laughing.

Anakin stopped walking, his arm dropped away from her shoulder, and he stepped back half a step watching the younglings cavort until they turned a corner and disappeared out of sight.

“I…. I understand how frustrating that is Leia. It used to happen to me all the time.” He made eye contact with her, looking particularly serious. “As for the… the other stuff…” he was talking about the strange way reality was twisting around her, she just knew it. She hadn’t even said anything and somehow he knew what it was she was experiencing. “Obi-Wan always said I was overstimulated when things got all… distorted and weird. Would you let me help you? If you let me guide you, maybe then….” he trailed off.

Leia let him gather his thoughts.
“I don’t want to overstep your boundaries Leia. You’ve made it very clear that you… well that we’re not exactly there yet. And I know that Ahsoka and Ventress are supposed to be the ones teaching you, but well-”

“Yes,” Leia interrupted. “Please, if you can help me make sense of what is happening to me, then I give you permission to do that.”

Anakin’s smile was stunning, his joy was almost a tangible thing Leia could reach out and touch. “Why don’t we do that after you’ve had a chance to eat and rest up? You’ve had a long and hectic day, and sometimes that can… well I wouldn’t be surprised if things are particularly strange for you right now. Back when I first arrived at the Temple and my senses started waking up to everything around me, the Force seemed to push back and refuse to let me ignore it on the days when I had pushed myself to my limits.”

Was that what this was? Exhaustion? It was both a comfort and aggravation all on its own. While it was encouraging to know she could avoid things … getting fuzzy… just by getting a good night's sleep, she was far too pragmatic to delude herself into thinking adequate sleep was something she could work into her schedule. She was in the middle of a war. Sleep was a resource in short supply.

“Bet you’re grateful for all those meditation techniques Snips undoubtedly has tried to teach you now, huh?” Anakin quipped, and Leia’s brow furrowed.

Huh? What did that have to do with-

“When I say you need to rest up, I don’t necessarily mean you need to sleep. I mean obviously you do need to sleep, all organics do. You should be getting sleep. Still, meditating, it can help you find your focus and ease the pressure. When things start to feel all sideways and uncontrollable, that’s generally a good sign that some meditation is in order.”

“You know, Anakin, you really don’t strike me as the meditation type.”

“Yeah, I know. I’ve found some methods that work for me though. Leia - my Leia - she always liked them too, ever since she was little. If you want I can show them to you as well.”

Leia nodded, and they started walking again, strolling down the massive hallway side by side.

“Oh and Leia? If it is too much for you right now, then there is no need for you to try and find Luke. If you’re really disoriented and all that, you shouldn’t be pushing yourself to try new things. I can care of it, ok?”

She was tired and she was hungry, but when wasn’t that the case? She had entered into battles in far worse states than she was in now. Still there was no denying how off things had gotten for her earlier, and she wanted to avoid experiencing that again as much as she could.

She indicated that she would rather Anakin find Luke for them. What an impossible day this was. All of them since she had come to this universe were, really.

Still, as she slipped her hands into the pockets of the robes that belonged to a different her, and strolled through the Jedi Temple’s impossibly pristine halls side by side with her long dead birth father, she found she wasn’t upset by it. She looked forward to eating a good meal, and to getting to know both Anakin and the Luke who had grown up by her side better.

Maybe, she thought as she glanced at Anakin and studied his smile, not everything about this situation was terrible.
Next Time: Few things can be as annoying as a sibling. Especially when they're doing it on purpose.

If you are interested in the Lew'elans or the Mist-weavers, please check out "The Legends of Luke Skywalker" by Ken Liu. It's a really cool book about the stories people in the GFFA tell each other about Luke.
Chapter 53

Chapter Notes

Endless thanks to Sethnakht for continuing to be such an amazing beta.

Note: Some of the dialogue in this chapter was borrowed from *The Empire Strikes Back*. Some of it is from *Star Wars Rebels*, Season 2 Episode 18 "Shroud of Darkness."

Vague Solo spoilers, maybe?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There were all manner of establishments Leia had figured they would choose to dine at, especially after she had learned they were eating on Padmé’s dime. A greasy retro diner in the middle of Coco town had not been where she had expected to wind up.

Luke sat pressed up against her side in a sticky vinyl booth in the back corner of the place. Anakin was seated across from them both, nursing a cup of jawa juice.

He had seemed to know the proprietor of this place, a sloppy looking Besalisk whose ill fitting clothes were stained and full of holes. Given that he was married to the Chancellor of the Republic, it was odd that Anakin seemed most comfortable far away from the comforts of the upper classes.

Leia couldn’t really blame him. Coruscanti culture was so artificial and over the top, the people beyond droll and insufferable. At least the people here seemed more real. And unlike the establishment he had taken her to for lunch the other day, this place was on an actual surface level, with nothing above it but sky and heavily filtered air.

Luke was telling them a story. Something about the gang he and Obi-Wan apparently spent most of their time investigating. Crimson Dawn. Hadn't they disbanded in Leia’s universe, around three or five years ago? She thought the Rebellion might have gotten an influx of former members into their ranks, seeking protections when their affiliations no longer had meaning, but she couldn’t be sure. There were a lot of former criminals and lowlifes in the Rebel ranks. A lot of current ones too, she mused, thinking about Han.

“What are you smiling about?” Anakin asked, interrupting Leia’s thoughts.

“Huh?”

“You were smiling down at your menu,” Anakin explained. “Dex’s food is good, but not *that* good. Come on, what put that beautiful smile on your face?”

Leia felt her cheeks grow warm, and she glanced out the window at the foot traffic going by, not able to look at either of her companions. “Nothing.”

Luke was laughing. “Ooooo, what’s their name?”
“What?”

She turned to glare at him, and he was grinning back at her. Obnoxious. That was the best word to describe his particular smile.

“Oh c’mon, I know you’re not my sister, but if you think I’ve never seen that look on her face before—”

“I have no idea what you are talking about!”

“Yeah, sure, of course you don’t,” he was still grinning at her in that annoying manner, and Leia had to resist the impulse to lash out at him for his over the top boorish behavior. He seemed to pick up on her discomfort, raising an eyebrow at her expectantly.

She resolved not to stoop to his level.

Anakin didn’t help the situation at all, excusing himself to go to the fresher after a long period of awkward silence, leaving her pressed tight in the booth with a still grinning familiar stranger.

If Luke would not respect her emotional boundaries she really had to insist he at least observe her physical ones. “Could you please move over? Your elbow is jamming into my side.”

Deliberately, slowly, staring at her the whole time, he lifted the offending elbow and… and rested it right on top of her shoulder.

“Maybe you misunderstood me? I meant can you please remove it from my person,” Leia was quite proud of herself for managing to keep her voice level.

“But why wouldn’t I rest it here, when your shoulder is the perfect height?”

“Please, I really am not in the mood for this.”

“I was commenting on how short you are, just in case you didn’t pick up on that.”

Why was he like this? Her Luke never pushed her buttons like this. No, her friend was always patient and understanding and got that she had boundaries and didn’t want him to cross them.

Stars, she really missed Luke.

“You are aware that you’re not that much taller than I am, right?”

“Ah, but I am taller. And older.”

“How lovely for you. Now can you please move your elbow somewhere else?”

“Make me.”

What kind of stupid childish nonsense was this? She grabbed his arm and shoved it away from her, absolutely fed up with his behavior.

For some reason that amused him. Luke started laughing, and to her surprise he moved over on his own accord, giving her the space she needed.

“Wow, you really weren’t kidding about being an only child, huh? I mean I was barely even touching you and were acting like I’d insulted your pet worrt or something!”
Leia’s nose scrunched up with distaste. “If I for some reason had a worrt, you’d be doing me a favor by pointing out how awful it was. Who the kriff would want to have a pet worrt?”

“Yes! Exactly!”

“What are the two of you talking about?” Anakin asked as he returned to his seat.


Anakin’s face fell. “I still don’t get what happened to Slimey. Worrts are supposed to live so much longer than he did. The one that hung around the slave district when I was kid had been there my whole childhood, and everyone said he’d been there for years before then too.”

Leia snorted at the absurdity of it all. “Don’t tell me you honestly had a pet worrt named Slimey!” Then her brain caught onto the rest of Anakin’s statement, and her eyes widened with surprise. “Wait. Slave district?”

Anakin refused to meet her eye, craning his neck to look around the diner instead. “Where’d FLO go?” he asked. “Sure is taking her a while to come and take our order, huh?”

“Anakin, how and why were you spending your childhood near a slave district?”

“Oh, that’s ‘cause dad was one,” Luke said casually, the information anything but interesting to him. “Back on Tatooine.”

Anakin still wasn’t looking at her.

“You… oh! Oh no wonder you didn’t like the fact that Luke grew up there.” Her eyes narrowed, remembering how he had reacted to her mention of the Lars family earlier that day. The suggestion that they were part of his family had set him off in a manner she hadn’t been able to understand then, but with this new context… “Anakin, please don’t tell me that Luke’s aunt and uncle are slave owners.” She didn’t include Luke, it hurt too much to consider that the kind and gentle boy might have unquestionably accepted those kinds of abhorrent behaviors. Or worse yet… “Tell me you don’t suspect that they were capable of… using Luke for slave labor.”

The table was shaking, tiny jolts up and down. It was easy to identify why. One of Anakin’s legs was shaking.

Anakin said nothing, just kept glancing through the diner, adjusting how he was sitting in his seat over and over again. Leia was contemplating shouting at him to just sit still already, when he spoke.

“The Lars family owned my mom,” he said. “Set her free so she could marry one of them, but they paid money for her and had a deed of ownership and everything.”

Leia felt sick.

“I’m so sorry, I had no idea. Luke never said anything to indicate that-”

Anakin interrupted her. “Why would he? It’s not exactly something people on Tatooine like to dwell on, or talk about at all. Just another fact of life under the Hutts. Besides it’s all ancient history now, right?”

His behavior suggested he wasn’t as over it as he would want her to believe, but she didn’t press the matter.
She was only one generation removed from slavery. Kriff, but that was a lot to process.

How had Anakin gotten free? He must have, somehow. Perhaps he’d managed to escape Hutt space and come to the Republic as a refugee? Leia wanted to ask, she had so many questions, but he obviously wanted to drop the topic, and she wasn’t going to force him so far past his comfort level.

Leia didn’t know if she would ever really have the chance to learn about him once she got home. It was possible that Luke would know more, but she was terrified of what she would find out about Luke in the process. Still, if Anakin didn’t want to talk about it, she would respect that.

The WA-7 droid finally rolled over to take their orders, effectively slamming the door on any further discussion of Anakin’s past.

After the droid left their table, they stayed on light hearted topics of little consequence, Luke and Anakin chatting away as Leia gazed out the window.

For a moment she thought she saw… out the window… but no. No, that wasn’t possible.

She turned back to the two chatting men, they had returned to talking about Crimson Dawn. Mostly the conversation concerned the leader of the gang, who had some sort of grudge against Obi-Wan.

How a criminal came to have a personal grudge against a Jedi was beyond Leia. It would make more sense for him to be concerned with the Order as a whole, why focus on just one individual?

She appreciated not being expected to really participate in the conversation. Free to let her mind wander, Leia focused on watching the pedestrians strolling on the sidewalk outside.

It was startlingly ordinary.

Sure, there were more aliens in the crowd, some from species who would never have been on a surface level in her world (of course even on the surface level Coruscant had always had more aliens mixed into the crowd than anywhere on Alderaan)...

But the way people acted was the same. The flow of traffic, the bustle of daily city life.

Even the fashion was depressingly similar.

Loose flowing dresses, capes, vests and billowing sleeves. Yes the starched high collars and the jumpsuits were missing, but the fashion trends were close, too close to what she knew.

The biggest difference from her universe was there were no Stormtroopers milling through the crowd, but she did see… people in uniforms, cloth uniforms, acting as the stormtroopers always had.

The Empire may not have risen, but this world was not fully different from the one she knew.

She imagined an overlay of the streets of Coruscant she had known with what she saw out the window - at least she hoped she was imagining it - and things really were practically the same.

How disturbing.

The WA-7 returned with their food in hand, loudly placing the plates down on the table before rolling off.

Leia gazed down at her hastily ordered meal (she had simply asked for the same thing Anakin had ordered, as he seemed to have opinions about this food and Luke’s fried Naboo sardines hadn’t sounded very appealing) and realized she’d never actually had greasy diner food before.
She had gone directly from being one of the richest individuals in the galaxy who ate only the highest quality gourmet meals, to consisting on the polystarch and dehydrated ration bars of an underfunded rebellion. There had been no sampling of the vast array of foods that bridged that gap, and the transition had been as harsh as the explosion that had ended her world.

Leia knew the bantha-burger sitting in front of her was as average as a meal could get, the sort of thing countless beings across the galaxy ate each day… yet she simply had never had anything like it before.

She poked at the seed covered bun with one finger, hoping to see if it was structurally sound enough to be eaten as a sandwich. Anakin was consuming his own burger as if it was, but grease dribbled out of it, dripping onto the plate as chunks of meat fell loose, and she was not certain it really could hold up to such a manner of consumption. Beside her Luke let out a bellowing laugh.

“No! Please don’t tell me you’ve never had a burger before,” Luke shoved one of his fried fish strips in his mouth before continuing. “Kriff, what sort of life have you had?”

“Hey!” Anakin said with a mouth full of food, “language!” He swallowed his food. “Your mom would want me to mention the talking with your mouth full part as well, but that’d make me a hypocrite.”

Leia had spent too much time in military barracks to find their table manners surprising or offensive. She sighed, leaning back, still regarding the burger with faint suspicion. “I was merely trying to ascertain if I wanted to eat this with my hands or with the silverware,” she explained, not wanting to get into the specifics of her diet. She gestured at Anakin, “it seemed apparent that this meal may be too sloppy to-” she cast about for a good excuse, one that would get Luke off her back. “-to pick up in that manner while I am wearing someone else’s clothes. I would not want to insult your sister by staining her robes.” There. That should make him feel guilty for making her feel awkward about never having one of these things before.

“Oh.” Luke shook his head. “Lei won’t mind. Stars, she’s a sloppy eater herself, she really wouldn’t care if you got grease on her robes or something.”

Leia had been planning on attempting to eat the thing as a sandwich, but now that Luke had thrown so much attention on the issue she grabbed the flatware and began to cut into the bread and the meat patty it contained. “I merely wish to be polite,” she said, before popping what she had cut off from the sandwich into her mouth.

It was good. The excessive hot grease and oil made the cheaper meat seem juicier than it normally would have been. The cheese and spices mixed into the patty worked well together, and the bread soaked up a lot of flavor. It wasn’t the best thing Leia had ever had, but it was far from the worst. Loads better than the lunch she had with Anakin her first day in this place.

“Oh come on!” Luke exclaimed, still uncomfortably invested in Leia’s actions, elbows on the table, leaning over her plate, “eating it like that is so wrong.”

Not letting her frustration alter how much pressure she put on the knife, she made no noise as she cut into her meal, just as her Aunts had always taught her. Impeccable royal manners on display in a greasy spoon diner. She didn’t even glance in Luke’s direction as she swallowed her first piece and consumed another.

“Are you kidding me? This is Dex’s, not a state function. You don’t have to eat like that!”

She couldn’t properly describe it, the sick heady satisfaction she was getting from both ignoring
Luke’s ire and increasing it all at once. It was better than the burger - better than the food she’d had for dinner with Padmé the night before.

She finished the burger, the fried root strips all that was left on her plate. Rather than give Luke the satisfaction of watching her eat them with her fingers, she offered them to Anakin. His expression suggested he knew what she was doing, but he accepted them anyway, shoving them into his mouth by the handful.

Luke leaned back, finally, giving Leia that much more room to breathe, squeezed on that tiny booth between him and the window.

She returned to gazing out onto the street, trying her best to catch differences between this world and her own, real tangible proof that the culture of the Republic of old was nothing like the Empire she knew.

She caught sight of a few vague differences, the odd person in a dress that would have been at home in Amilyn’s wardrobe, but that was about it.

Still, if she could locate a store selling those dresses, it would make for a great gift for her friend. Was one supposed to get gifts for their friends when stranded in an alternate dimension? There wasn’t any set etiquette for this situation to fall back on.

“What are you looking at?” Anakin asked.

Leia turned away from the window, looking at him. He was still eating the remains of her meal.

“The fashion. It’s remarkably similar to my own dimension.”

Anakin’s face scrunched up. “And that is interesting because?”

“Because dad, fashion - like all art - is a reflection of the cultural forces at play,” Luke answered for her. He frowned, before reaching some sort of epiphany, the lines of his face smoothing out in a flash. “Hey, I have an idea. Why don’t we go to the history museum of the Republic and really examine just where things went different? Even the difference in how events are framed would be fascinating.” The suggestion was just a touch too eager, the words rehearsed. Leia was not sure she would have even caught it without a lifetime in politics under her belt. No, even then she would not have, she thought. It was the three years she had spent as a spy that made her think the words were not Luke’s own.

Still the idea wasn’t terrible, and she could not think of any reason to argue against it.

Luke was distant during dinner. It wasn’t that he didn’t speak much, it was how he didn’t seem to be listening to anything anyone else said. Kriff, he wasn’t even eating. He would alternate between swirling the stew around his bowl and gazing into the swamp. He wasn’t even looking in the direction of the other hut.

Leia couldn’t figure him out at all. In part that wasn’t too surprising, since she’d known the guy for less than a week. Yet every one of her instincts reaffirmed that he was still her brother, still someone she should know better than she knew herself.

It was disorienting, looking into such a familiar face, feeling such a familiar presence, and yet knowing he was almost a total stranger.
Even Master Yoda, for all that he was… well… Master Yoda, was someone entirely new. Someone who she had only just met today.

The logistics of dimensional travel sure were confusing.

She knew nothing about this Master Yoda. How could she just assume he was the same as her own? She was nothing like this dimension’s Leia, and Luke certainly wasn’t like her brother. Why would Master Yoda be any different?

She wanted to get to know him, this version of the wise grandmaster living in a swamp covered planet all alone. She tried to remember anything he might have mentioned about himself while they were speaking earlier, and the only things she could really think of were an attempt to avoid speaking about the end of the Jedi Order and a vague reference to some sort of journey he had undertaken at some point in the past.

That wasn’t the worst starting point.

“You said something about a quest you went on, Master Yoda, one that may be related to my situation?”

“Say something did I? No, no. Not pertinent.”

“I’d still love to hear about it. You never know Master, it could be connected somehow.”

“Hmmm. No, no. No connection. Talk more of your timeline, your past, we should.”

“Please, Master Yoda? I’m tired of just sharing stories from my timeline, especially because they’ve all been things you already know. We can resume talking about my father tomorrow, but for now, I really want to know more about you.”

Yoda moved closer to the pot, filling his bowl with more stew. He waved off Luke’s attempt to do it for him - with their longer arms neither Luke nor Leia had to move from their seats to reach the food. He sat back, looking between the two of them as if expecting the topic to shift if he just waited long enough. Finally he sighed. “Hmmm. Fine, recount it I will. During the Clone War, it was. Near the end. Heard the voice of Qui-Gon Jinn, I did.”

“What? But… but he died a decade before the war even began!”

“Hmmm. Yes. Confused by this I was. Left to discover how this was possible.”

“And did you?”

“Like Obi-Wan he was. One with the Force, yet still here. Still an individual. Learned how to become the same, I did.”

As far as Leia knew, no one in her dimension could do anything like this. Yet Qui-Gon, he’d died ages before she was born. Way back during the trade federation invasion! Why didn’t Master Yoda think this was the divergence?

No. No, that was the wrong question. Before she asked that she had to understand what exactly they were talking about anyway.

“How does one learn how to do that?”

Ok, she had to admit, she wasn’t just asking because of pure intellectual curiosity.
If she returned home with the secret to this mysterious technique… they’d have to make her a knight then! No better yet, if Leia figured this out they’d skip knighthood outright and make her a Master. Youngest Master ever, even younger than her father. She’d never dreamed of surpassing her father in any way before, had always accepted she’d live her life in his shadow, but this… this could put her into his limelight.

“Hmmm.” Master Yoda was nodding at her question. “Not easy. Know yourself, you must. Understand the Darkness within you, the weakness and the strength.”

Luke glanced over, confused. At least he seemed to be paying attention, finally. “So what, you just… do some self examination and suddenly you’re immortal?”

“No! No. Immortality it is not. All life ends. No way around that truth. Denying the course of all life… that way lies the Dark Side.”

Luke looked upset. Leia didn’t blame him too much, it was often hard to understand that the Force, for all one could do with it, was just a facet of life itself. Using it to alter the very foundation of the natural world… it simply could not be done.

Shifting in his seat, Luke leaned forward. “The Dark Side, is it stronger?”

Leia didn’t quite get where the question was coming from.

Yoda shook his head. “No... no... no. Quicker, easier, more seductive. Anger... fear… aggression, the Dark Side of the Force are they. Easily they flow, quick to join you in a fight.”

“I’m supposed to trust in the Force, but it can lead me astray if I’m not careful? So when the Force shows me things or guides me in a certain direction, just how am I to know if that is coming from the good side or the bad?”

Frowning, Leia examined Luke’s face and posture. He was fully absorbed in his conversation with Yoda, that much was clear, but she couldn’t figure out where this was coming from.

“You will know. When you are calm, at peace. Passive. A Jedi uses the Force for knowledge and defense, never for attack.”

“Never for attack?” His face drew tight with confusion, “Why can’t I-”

“No, no, accept this you must.”

“What? But-”

“No!” Master Yoda slammed his stick against the ground. “Accept it you must,” he repeated.


“Hmmm. Clear that is.”

Luke shifted in his seat. He had been leaning forward from the start, attentive and hanging onto Yoda’s every last word. Now he was on the edge of his seat, one leg shaking, the way dad’s did sometimes. His expression reminded her of their father too, although she couldn’t say why or how.

“Can you at least tell me how I’m supposed to fight in a war while also not attacking?”

“Once, fought in a war myself, I did. Mistake this was.”

“A mistake?”
“Yes. A long time, fought I did. Consumed by fear I was, though see it I did not.”

“You were afraid?” Leia asked, feeling her eyes go wide with shock.

“Yes, afraid. Hmm, surprised are you? A challenge lifelong it is, not to bend fear into anger.”

Leia blushed. She knew that the Dark Side was something all Jedi had to always stand against, that there would never come a time in anyone’s life when they would be free of its temptation. Yet somehow she had always imagined Master Yoda to be above that sort of thing.

Sure he meditated like the rest of them, but the fact he was still trying to clear his mind of conflict, to examine and understand his intentions and actions and achieve emotional balance… kriff, to have spent nine hundred years doing all of that, and to still struggle?

It really put things into perspective for her. All those times as a child she had complained to him about how boring she found the mental exercises of her training, as opposed to the more physical stuff. The way she often wanted to be done with self examination forever. To never have to worry over what was going on internally again, and just let things be. How silly she must sound, all of twenty years of age, thinking she was above something he’d spent centuries working on.

Even worse, if the Leia of this universe truly was who she would have become under different circumstances, and she was as competent as everyone made her out to be? Then Leia certainly had it in her to properly dedicate herself to her one and only responsibility.

“It can’t be wrong to stand up against the Empire!” Luke suddenly yelled. “It can’t be wrong to protect people! To protect—” Luke cut himself off, flushing and forcing his posture to relax. The rest of the sentence hung unspoken, leaving Leia to wonder who Luke was worried about protecting. “I can’t just stand by and do nothing!”

“Ah, do nothing I did not say. Use the Force to defend, this was my council.”

Luke’s frown grew even deeper. “So I’m just supposed to let Vader attack me? Attack my friends?” He shook his head, body tensing again. “What you’re saying makes no sense!”

“No sense do I make? Quick to judgement you are!”

“Will you quit speaking in riddles already and just answer my questions?”

”Hmmm. Already told you much, I have. Yes. Tomorrow. After more reflection, then we will return to this conversation.”

“No! Don’t… don’t shut things down, not when—“

“When what Luke?” Leia asked, ready to know what had Luke so worked up. “What’s wrong? What is so urgent that this conversation can’t wait until tomorrow?”

Luke did not answer her, did not even look at her. He was gazing out at the bog again, attention seemingly captured by the way winged creatures flew through the heavy fog and avoided ever hitting the trees.

Leia wanted to press him for an answer, but Master Yoda held up a hand and shook his head, indicating she should hold back.

“Rest for now, we should. Early start tomorrow. Much to learn. Seem different in the morning, everything might.”
Hadn’t Master Yoda told her he wanted to talk more about Darth Vader?

“Master, do you still want to talk with me tonight?”

“Hmmm. Decide you can. Speak together tonight, or first thing tomorrow.”

The sun was only just setting, the glimpses of sky Leia could see through the trees a hazy orange shot through with splashes of pink, and yellow. Even putting aside how early it seemed, it was always hard after arriving on a new planet to adjust to the local sleep cycle. However neither Leia nor Luke had gotten a lot of sleep the earlier night, and they’d had a very long day being pushing to their limits both physically and mentally.

Sleep really didn’t sound like a terrible idea right then.

“I think I’d rather talk tomorrow, Master,” Leia decided.

She began to really think about how tired she was, how much she wanted to sleep, the reality of their sleeping arrangements intruding on her fantasy.

Both she and Luke were going to sleep on the floor of Yoda’s home. Rather than lying directly on the stone floor, there were furs scattered on the ground. These were also to be used as their blankets as they slept.

Leia recalled the snakes she had seen slithering about Yoda’s living space earlier, and had to suppress a shudder.

Before sleeping, Leia wanted to check to be sure the space was clear of those awful creatures. She stood, and began to make her way towards the hut, yet was stopped by the sound of Yoda calling out to her.

“Before we sleep, meditate we all should. Put our minds in order. Long day we had, full of confusion. Let go of lingering emotion, we must. Hmmm?”

Right, of course, meditation, how could she forget.

Kriff, hadn’t she just promised herself to take her training and role as a Jedi more seriously?

She headed back towards where Yoda and Luke were sitting, placing herself between Luke and the swamp he was still staring out at.

He scowled at her, then examined his lap and his feet, seemingly determined to continue sulking like a being half his age. How appropriate, she thought. He was acting like one of the younglings the Grand Master usually taught.

Irritated, she decided to share that thought with him, and was satisfied with his immediate reaction.

Luke’s face was bright red, his frown was deep, and his attention was fully focused on her. It took far more than a few words to get her own brother to react so strongly. Usually things were the other way around: Luke making her react while she failed to penetrate his unflappable calm. While this was not her Luke, Leia couldn’t help but feel like this was retribution for all the times her brother had gotten her into trouble over the years.

“Hey!” Luke exclaimed, standing from where he had been sitting “I am not -”

Whatever else he wanted to say, Leia did not hear it. Of course she didn’t, what with Master Yoda
“Calm ourselves we should,” the wizened Master said, voice firm. “Sit down, process our emotions, understand and let them go before they get the best of us, no?”

The color drained from Luke’s face, and he gaped down at Yoda, still seated by their pot of stew.


Leia suppressed a smile, schooling her face into a mask of perfect innocence as she rejoined them, folding her legs into a comfortable position for meditating.

“I’m sure meditation will help Luke with his mood swings, Master,” she said, somehow managing to keep her voice steady. “He’s just tired and new at this all. Please don’t be mad at him.”

There were few things as satisfying as knowing that her words just provoked Luke further.

Sure, tomorrow she’d start taking her training that much more seriously, but for now? Now she was going to have as much fun as she could with this version of Luke who hadn’t been raised with a sibling.

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Art critique, playing in the dirt, a scavenger hunt, a night at the museum.

In case you were wondering, this is a worrt.
Chapter 54

Chapter Notes

I know I sound like a broken record, but the amount of help Sethnakht gave me in finally completing this chapter and getting it ready to be shared is astronomical. All the thanks I could possibly ever extend is warranted.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The History Museum of the Republic was housed in the same building as the History Museum of the Empire. Leia wasn’t exactly sure why that surprised her, but it did.

The premises was empty, devoid of the bustling crowds Leia recalled from her many trips to the Museum when she was in the Junior Legislature.

It still hurt to think about how Kier had loved the Clone Wars segments of the museum. Empty propaganda though all the displays were. He had been so obsessed. Reenacting battles when he could, hanging onto her every word whenever she shared one of the stories her father had told her about the war.

The entry to the museum was much as Leia remembered it. Statues depicting important moments in galactic history lined the steps, arranged in a seemingly random order. Although she could spot one difference among the monuments already. One of the statues, an abstract representation of Palpatine in her dimension, seemed to be depicting a Jedi instead. Oddly the statue erected in memory of those lost during the Clone War was fully identical.

The lobby was the same, the same grand pillars, the same dimly flickering holo-signs, the same staircases and ancient wooden doors. One of those doors caught her attention. Leia didn’t really want to go there, but knew there would be no avoiding it tonight. There was no question what she was supposed to look over and talk to Anakin and Luke about. But-

But Leia had avoided entering any of the exhibits relating to the Clone Wars for almost four full years. Going back in there would not be easy. She hadn’t returned to that part of the museum since Kier’s death. It had always hurt too much.

When she agreed to this, she hadn’t even considered that the museum she was being brought to was the same one she and Kier had once visited together. Had gone on dates at.

So here she was, standing in a lobby that may as well have been in her own Universe. Leia could only hope that the exhibits would be different enough, that what was inside them would not be reminiscent of the propaganda she and Kier had once viewed together.

She feared that it wouldn’t be different enough.

That wasn’t the only reason she had that fear.

Glancing to her side, she noticed Anakin was scowling at the same door she was. He didn’t want to go there either, then.

Good.
She could work with that.

Not to avoid going there forever, of course. She only wanted drag her feet a little. Work her way up to the Clone War wing.

On Leia’s other side was Luke, examining some statue or another in the lobby. She was sure if she started a banal conversation with him, it wouldn’t be hard to get him to say that he wanted to visit some other hall, anywhere other than the Clone Wars wing would do. Then the request to go elsewhere would not be coming from her.

Before she asked her question, her attention caught on a poster for a special limited exhibit, lit up just behind Luke.

From the looks of it, it was an exhibit she would need to see.

An exhibit of the personal effects of one late Sheev Palpatine. The poster even promised recreations of his offices and personal apartments.

While she was sure knowing what sort of interior decor the Emperor preferred would not make or break the war effort, this seemed like an unprecedented opportunity to gather intel on the despot. To peer behind the mask of the kindly old man he presented to the galaxy at large and see the monster he truly was.

Leia’s attention shifted from the poster to the empty ticketing area.

She moved through the empty lobby to the counter, covered in bright electronic signs and pictures, advertising special exhibit after special exhibit. Nothing caught her attention aside from the Palpatine installation. Of all names, someone had decided to call it “Sheev’s Secrets.” Somehow she doubted they really had all of the man’s secrets on display for the public.

Where was everyone? She was used to priority experiences while touring museums on Alderaan, the number of other guests reduced and heavily vetted. Even so, she had never seen a museum emptied out quite like this before. There had always been staff on hand. People tasked with ensuring her visit went as smoothly as possible, insisting she and her companions be accompanied, no matter how official the visit or the amount of warning she gave before arriving.

Leia leaned over the cold stone counter, peering to the side, to try and locate someone in the dark office who she could speak to.

“Oh excuse me!” She called out. “We’d like to know more about the exhibit on Palpatine? Can we get a tour guide? Someone? Anyone?”

“They already know we’re going to see that exhibit, Leia.” Padmé’s voice rang out behind Leia, startling her, “and I thought Anakin and I would more than suffice for tour guides.”

Leia twirled around, frowning at the woman who had apparently slipped in while Leia had been peering behind the counter, and was now moving towards Leia with an apologetic smile on her face. “I’m sorry to ambush you like this, I was afraid you wouldn’t come if you knew I would be here.”

Leia didn’t know what to say. As it turned out she didn’t have to respond, since Padmé barreled on without waiting for her speak.

“I also owe you an apology for this afternoon,” Padmé said.

She paused, waiting for Leia to respond this time. Leia simply stood there, continuing to observe the
other politician, waiting. After all, she was correct. She did owe Leia an apology.

Padmé nodded, and began with her apology. “I should have been more sensitive to the emotional impact of encountering an individual involved with the genocide of your people, with the murder of your family.” Padmé frowned, then smiled, soft and gentle. “Leia, I am so sorry I wasn’t able to be there for you in that moment. I was so wrapped up in…”

A glance at her husband, then her son. They were both smiling encouragingly at her. There was some old argument or discussion there, and it was not hard to imagine about what, “in the political argument and trying to explain the ideology behind my actions, and I didn’t see the pain you were in, that you needed your-” Padmé cut herself off, shaking her head. “That you needed someone to hold space for you, to comfort you. Not to debate with you.”

It was infuriatingly hard to stay mad at this woman.

Force knew Leia herself often had trouble recognizing when the time for political debate ended and personal considerations began.

Not that her objection to Tarkin’s role in the military was a personal one, but she was willing to look past the dismissal of her position to accept the apology.

Leia nodded, there was no need for more of a response than that.

A stunning smile broke out across Padmé’s face, as she gestured at the empty ticket counter Leia was standing at. “The museum was nice enough to shut down for the day so we could come here without worrying about what might be overheard as we discuss your situation.” Her gesture ended, and now by his side, she hooked her arm around her husband’s. “I thought it may be best to start with the exhibit about Sheev. Strategizing ways to undermine his regime is of highest priority,” Padmé said. Her attention shifted, leaning in closer to Anakin, her next words directed at him. “Far more important than figuring out where our timelines diverged, or anything like that.”

A flurry of emotion played across Anakin’s face before it settled into a frown. “I was right, Padmé.”

Right about what?

Padmé placed a hand on Anakin’s chest. Lifting herself onto her toes, she leaned up to say something directly into his ear. He leaned down to make it easier for her, and she wrapped her arms around his shoulders, kissing him. He responded enthusiastically, and the moment quickly went from a sweet and short kiss into a far longer and passion filled occurrence.

“Seriously?” Luke groaned. He walked over to Leia, grabbing her arm and dragging her with him toward the exhibit on Palpatine. “Let’s get out of here. They’re probably going to be at it for the rest of the evening.”

They were almost in the exhibition hall when Anakin called after them. “Oh I’m sorry, does our love offend you?”

“Yes,” Luke responded, “when you make out like that in front of us, yes it does.”

“Oh, honey, that was just a simple kiss.” Padmé laughed. “Now if you want to see what it looks like when we actually-”

Not even turning to look at his mother, Luke’s face glowed red and his hand clamped down on Leia’s arm as he sped up his pace, dragging her with him. “That’s ok mom, can we please just get this over with?”
“I thought you liked going to museums?” Anakin called to them, and Leia did not know if he and Padmé were following them yet or not.


“What are your favorite exhibits?” Leia asked, eager to ensure they’d have some sort of buffer between the exhibit they were about to enter and the Clone War wing after.

Luke didn’t take the bait. Instead he sullenly asked, “Why?”

Leia sighed. “Well, I thought maybe we could go to one of them after this one. After all, it’s been quite some time since I was able to just enjoy a museum.”

“See, that’s the sort of thing I am not looking forward to,” Luke whined. “Reminders of how awful your life is. Of how uncertain things are for my sister, stuck in the nightmare you come from.”

“Then why did you suggest this trip in the first place?”

“Because mom asked me to. Because it makes sense, on an intellectual level at least.”

She could understand that divide all too well.

Sometimes what was best for one’s emotions was the opposite of what was actually best.

Leia sighed and concentrated on finding her footing as she was dragged out of the lobby, letting the matter drop.

Luke was right. Getting this over with, focusing fully on the topics they came here to discuss, that was what made sense.

Anything else would be an indulgence. Merely a selfish waste of time Leia knew better than to entertain.

Her arm was asleep. Keeping her eyes clamped shut, refusing to cede that she was awake, Leia adjusted her position. She shook her arm, trying her best to be careful and not hit Luke. Still, she swung out a bit too wide, and braced herself for the argument that would surely follow.

There was no bodily contact.

Leia reluctantly opened her eyes, disoriented and wondering if the tossing and turning that had led to her arm being pinned had also brought her to a different part of the hut. No, she was exactly where she had been when she had fallen asleep. She turned to where Luke was supposed to be sleeping on the floor beside her - Luke was missing.

How strange. When she had complained about their sleeping conditions earlier, he had grumbled something about her complaining over nothing, and claimed that the provided furs were more than enough. He’d been out like a log as soon as his body was in a horizontal position, with no indication that he might have trouble staying asleep.

Luke was nowhere to be seen within the structure, but Leia could hear a rustle outside the hut. Rather than leave the ball of furs she was wrapped in, she cast her thoughts out towards Luke, sleepily prodding him with her curiosity.

He didn’t respond.
Groaning Leia climbed out of her makeshift bed, and stumbled outside, banging her head on the door in the process.

It was dark out. Far too dark. Silently Leia cursed the lack of any moons orbiting Dagobah. A proper night sky should have at least three moons illuminating it, as far as Leia was concerned.

He was the source of the rustling noise outside, at the very least. She was halfway certain she’d encounter some unpleasant local wildlife as the reason behind both Luke’s absence and the noise. Yet it was just Luke, digging through each and every one of the packs scattered around the clearing. Roots had piled around him as he removed them from bag after bag.

“Looking for a late night snack?”

Luke didn’t answer her, just kept digging through the pack.

“I don’t think there is anything in there other than those roots, nor do I think those things are going to taste good raw. You’re welcome to try them though. Let me know how they are.”

He kept ignoring her.

Frustrated, and just wanting to resolve things so she could get back to sleep, Leia walked over to Luke, and grabbed the bag he was searching, moving it away from him.

“Hey!” Luke exclaimed. “I was looking through that!”

“Yes, I did notice that. Now can you tell me what you were looking for?”

“The tracker we put on the Volt Cobra. I can’t find it anywhere.”

“Why do you need the tracker right now? That seems like the sort of thing you can worry over in the morning, not the middle of the night.”

“I need to verify something.”

“What?”

“I… I keep seeing something, and I need to put my mind at ease.”

“You think it was a vision of the future?” Leia asked.

Luke was having visions? What of?

“Is something like that even possible?” he asked, voice small, reminding Leia of how little he knew about the Force. “Or am I having a really bad recurring daydream?” He laughed. “Well both daydream and dream. I had myself convinced it was only nerves until I tried sleeping and I saw it again. It seemed so real.”

“I’m not going to lie to you Luke, whatever you saw, it is possible that it was more than a dream.”

His eyes flew wide, the white of them standing out in the dark of the night. “Then I need to find that tracker more than ever!”

Leia frowned at him. “Are you going to the ship to try and use the comm equipment, or to rush off? Because I’ll help you do the former but not the latter.”

“The- the comm equipment.”
He didn’t seem to be lying, so Leia nodded and dumped the contents of the bag in her hands onto the ground. It was all roots, nothing but roots.

She opened the front and side pockets, but they were all empty. Huh. Hadn’t they put supplies in the front pockets of both of their bags?

“Do you think Yoda threw it into the bog when he was rooting through our stuff earlier?” Luke asked.

Leia didn’t respond, not wanting to consider that they might have lost Sana’s ship.

“Leia, you were able to find this campsite on your own earlier, do you think you could find our landing site the same way?”

Forcing them to do that was probably why Master Yoda had gotten rid of the tracker, if it indeed was one of the things he had thrown through the swamp. Still, Leia was unsure she could find the ship, not without opening herself up for another confrontation with Vader.

Leia put down the backpack she was holding, and grabbed the one Luke had carried Yoda in. All of the pockets were empty.

Slightly panicked, Leia cast her senses around the campsite, looking for any technology at all. In a place so vibrant with life, where every inch of soil was full of growth and small lifeforms, it wasn’t hard to pinpoint the places that read as a void to her senses.

There weren’t many non-organic objects in this place, but they did exist. A few scattered objects inside the hut, a few scattered object by the edge of the clearing, one small object near where they had their dinner, and something large on the other side of the hut.

She and Luke would have to check out what all of those things had been.

Leia decided to start with the object near where they’d had dinner. Of all the places where she had located non-organic matter, that seemed the most likely spot for the tracker.

Whatever it was was buried under the dirt. It seemed unlikely that the tracker had gotten under the ground like that, but it was also possible that this was a test Master Yoda had created for them. Leia didn’t want to fail that test due to the self imposed limits created by making assumptions.

“Luke, there is something over by where we were eating earlier, but we have to dig for it,” she showed Luke where to start digging, and the two of them got to work, kneeling together and scooping piles of dirt with their hands.

Bizarrely, Leia was reminded of playing in the sand on the shore of the lake at Varykino. She and her brother had loved to dig massive pits, determined to reach the watery core. Once their mother had asked them just what they planned to do once they hit the water all the land on Naboo floated on. The answer had seemed obvious to them at the time. They’d scoffed at their mom, and informed her that they’d swim to their uncle Jar Jar’s house for a visit. Looking back, Leia could understand why that response had made their mom laugh, but at the time her reaction had only annoyed Leia.

She leaned back on her feet, watching Luke dig. He certainly was making quick work of it, the piles of excavated soil at his sides impressively large.

“Hey Lu, did you play in the sand much as a kid?”

He stopped digging, and gave her the oddest look.
“Did you forget where I grew up or something?”

“No! I just mean… nevermind, it’s stupid.”

Luke looked contemplative, then grabbed some of the soil piled next to him and packed it into a ball. Then to Leia’s complete horror he flung it right at her face.

“What the - ! Jerk!”

He laughed, the carefree sound a spectacular contrast to the worry that been consuming him when he was telling her of his visions.

“You know, during the winter we’d get these rainfalls every couple of years or so. They were far more destructive than even the worst of the sandstorms, and because the water had a hard time penetrating the ground everything always flooded. Every time at least one person in our farming community would die in those storms.” Despite the fact he was describing an event where people died, Luke smiled wide, his eyes twinkling in the dark.

“When the rain ended? That was always the best. For like a week after there would be these streams flowing through the canyons, and the sand was dense and stuck together like… well like this mud.” He packed the dirt together into a second ball, patting it over and over with his hands as he spoke.

“We’d have massive dirt-ball fights, and splash about in the water.” He tossed the dirt-ball at her lightly, hitting her on the shoulder. “I mean yeah, we also would dig around in the sand itself normally, looking for old mining equipment and the like, and of course everyone would make the occasional sand angel… but it had nothing on those post-rainfall games.”

He frowned, gazing down at the hole they had been digging. “Wouldn’t father have told you of those kind of things? I mean I know he grew up in the city, and life there is nothing like it is in the boonies where I’m from, but Mos Espa isn’t that far from Anchorhead. If you take the safer roads it’s only like 200 miles away. I used to go there a lot, on account of Begger’s Canyon being right next to it and all.”

“Dad just said that he’d had more than his fill of sand when he was a kid, and that he didn’t want to play with us when we were in it. We uh… used to chase him around with buckets full of it, try to dump it all over him, whenever we were at our family’s vacation house.”

“You have a whole house just for vacationing?”

“Yeah. It’s back home on Naboo. It came up in my stories about dad earlier - it’s where he took mom when he was acting as her bodyguard, and where they got married.”

“Wow. We only had the farm, and could never afford to take any vacations at all.”

“You should go there Lu. I mean, even if no one knew about us when mom’s will was divided up, our grandparents, or Aunt Sola or Ryoo or Pooja or someone in the family has to be still alive. They’d be the ones who own it. I’m sure they’d not only love to meet you, but to take you to Varykino. You and your Leia too, of course.”

“Of course.” He sighed, returning to digging the hole. “I’ll keep that in mind. Actually, if you could write all those names down for me, and good addresses to start searching for them at, that could be helpful. I mean, Naboo’s the Emperor’s homeworld, so no one from the Alliance’s probably going to go there anytime soon, not unless we really start to turn the war effort around somehow. As soon as it’s possible though, it would be really wizard to meet them.” He laughed, “Well so long as they aren’t ardent Imperials or something. That may be too large of a canyon for us to bridge, what with
Leia frowned, thinking of Darth Vader. He certainly qualified as an ardent Imperial. Would he ever be able to reconcile things with his children? Not only did his worldview drastically differ from theirs, he had actively harmed his daughter and fought against his son.

Even if he got his act together and turned away from the Dark, was he too far gone to ever rectify things? She wondered if Vader could ever be capable of the sort of true understanding of the depth of his misdeeds that would be needed before any sort of relationship with his children would be possible. Not that either of them had any obligation to ever forgive him for any of the things he had done, even if he did feel true remorse.

“I got it!” Luke said, breaking Leia out of her thoughts. She watched him pull something out of the ground. It wasn’t the transmitter, she was able to see that before Luke brushed the dirt off it. It wasn’t shaped quite right. No, the item in question was an old and cracked datapad.

Luke was checking it over, a slight grin on his face. “If I can fix this thing up and get it working, do you think Master Yoda would let me keep it?”

“Seriously? That thing has probably been under the ground for as long as we’ve been alive.”

“Yeah? So? I know you’ve been using Leia’s fancy datapad, but do you think the Alliance has those things available for just anyone? Datapads are a precious resource. Besides, it’s way nicer than any I’ve ever had before.”

Leia gave it a dubious glance, shaking her head. “Ok weirdo. C’mon, we have more things to check out.”

The collection of small items by the clearing’s edge turned out to be broken droid parts. According to Luke it was an Imperial surveillance drone, and it was best to keep the various pieces away from each other.

“I guess we should check inside the hut next,” Leia suggested, wiping her hands on her robes.

Luke wrinkled his nose. “Didn’t you say there was something else out here?”

“Well yeah, but it’s big, and probably underground or something. Unlike the stuff in the hut, which is small and not under a pile of dirt.”

“Oh, but Master Yoda is in the hut, and we might wake him up.”

“So we wake him up, big deal.”

“I’m not comfortable telling him about my visions, ok?”

“Why not?”

Luke kicked at the ground.

“Lu, if you’re worried about him liking you, he only just met you. Keep training, and you’ll be fine.”

Luke shrugged. “I just want to investigate the big thing you sensed before we go through his stuff, ok?”

Oh! Luke was worried Master Yoda would think they were trying to mess up his personal possessions! Of course!
Leia nodded. “Right, well we’re going to the other side of the hut, then. It’s a bit of a walk away from here, but close enough.”

The Force helped Leia avoid tripping on roots in the darkness of the night, but Luke had no such luck. He stumbled a couple of times when they first set off, but he managed to keep himself from falling. The longer the two of them walked, the more sure his footing became. Had Master Yoda devised this as some sort of lesson, it was working.

More than half an hour of walking, and over fifteen minutes since the last time Luke tripped, Luke fell into swamp water. There was a cry, and then a big splash followed by tons of tiny frantic splashes. Leia quickly jumped in the direction of the noise, thinking she’d have to save the poor desert boy from drowning. As it was, the water barely came to her waist, which meant Luke was in no danger to speak of.

Leia waded back to dryer land, reaching out to make sure they were close to the object they were seeking. It was, unfortunately, right in front of them. Digging wouldn’t be possible, because of the water. Hell, digging wouldn’t be possible because of the sheer size of the damn thing.

Maybe she could lift it with the Force?

She reached out to the object, testing to see if it was buried under dirt as well as swamp water. Thankfully it was only water, the soil, teeming with life as it was, was easy to feel in the Force and there was none of it around… around the ship. A spacecraft? Yes. Yes, the object was a spacecraft.

“Hey Luke, it’s a spacecraft!” Leia called out, and Luke shook the water off himself and drew closer. “Do you want to see if the comms still work?”

Luke was close enough that Leia could see his face, even with the lack of light.

“I don’t want to risk using a comm that hasn’t been checked over by Rebel security.”

“Even if its been in the ass end of nowhere for decades?”

“You never know what frequencies are being monitored, and I don’t know all the scrambling codes off hand. They’re kept in a safe compartment on the ship.”

“Right.”

She opened herself up to the swamp, extending her range as far as it would go to find the Volt Cobra. There was something to the east of them that-

Leia, there is something you must know, Vader’s deep baritone boomed.

Oh, not him again.

She threw her energy into keeping him out. Preventing him from speaking to her.

“East.” She said. “There is something to the east.”

“Well let’s head that way then!” Luke cheered.

“Luke, no! Wait! It’s late, can’t this wait until the morning?”

“No Leia, I don’t think it can.”

She sighed, “Master Yoda isn’t going to like this.”
Luke was frowning. “Leia, please, I wouldn’t be asking if it wasn’t important.” His serious tone gave way to a hint of a whine as he continued. “Plus it isn’t like we won’t get enough sleep, I mean he had us go to bed at sundown! There is going to be plenty of time to sleep.”

“Luke, please. We-”

“Besides, there are beds on the ship. Wouldn’t it make more sense to sleep there, and wake up actually rested, rather than struggle to sleep and wake up with new aches and pains?”

There was no arguing with that.

Eager to return to the beds they had used the previous night, Leia gestured in the direction of the metal object. It would be a long hike, and not one she particularly wanted to embark on in the dark, especially while Vader was trying to press past her defenses… but a comfortable bed would be the end result.

A bed where snakes wouldn’t be anywhere near her as she slept!

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Family bonding???

Breaking from the common imagining of Tatooine as a place with no rain at all, but I used to live in a country covered by a lot of desert that is in the midst of a several year deep drought. A true crisis where all water usage had to be heavily monitored. When it rained there (only ever during the rainy season), they were really harsh rains, and never drained properly. Given that the canyon formations we've seen on Tatooine all show signs of water erosion (the joy of using actual locations for filming instead of just sets), I always imagined Tatooine would be a much more extreme and harsh version of a real desert in this respect as well. Especially after enjoying production stories about how the rains made filming scenes set on Tatooine that much more difficult for the crew while working on The Phantom Menace. I also figure that is a great explanation for the 1% surface water guidebooks tell us the planet has. Temporary streams, rivers and lakes due to rain, that all dry out quickly after they form.
Chapter Notes

Endless thanks to Sethnakht, for all the patience and willingness to just let me ramble to her in a chatbox about what I wanted to do with this chapter vs what I felt was actually being produced, and for assuring me that what I had written did indeed make sense.

Before anything else, I want to highlight some amazing fanart this fic has gotten. I am so sorry it took me so long to figure out how to post it. 

[link to fanart]
and Badassspacemum drew this amazing picture
I believe I have seen some other pieces, but am having trouble locating them to post here (I know I was sent one via a chat at one point, and while I of course know who the chat was with, I don't know if they want it publically shared). If you did send me something and I didn't post it, please let me know so I can correct that error immediately.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The Naboo were a people who loved intricate design and patterns.

Leia had always known that, of course, but her awareness had been fairly academic. One fact among many she had memorized to use in diplomatic situations.
Another fact about the Naboo she had studied was that, similar to the populations of countless other systems, the humans of the Naboo system had fashioned much of their culture around the story of their initial immigration across the stars.

Leia had never investigated the Naboo much past those facts.

It hadn’t occurred to Leia that the start of the exhibit on Palpatine’s life and career would have such a focus on his life on Naboo, or what it would mean to visit an exhibit on this subject with not just one, but two citizens of Naboo. Both of whom seemed particularly concerned with educating Leia about everything to do with their culture.

It was clear that Padmé deeply loved Naboo. It was impossible not be swept up when listening to her speak about her people, as the woman’s oratory skill was truly without peer. Myths and history spilled from her lips, each one infused with unparalleled passion. Leia could have happily listened to Padmé describe the particularities of semi-historical figures like Kwilaan all day.

At times Leia found herself almost wondering what it would have been like to have this woman tuck her in as a child, and drift off to sleep hearing her recite these very stories.

Luke on the other hand just seemed to enjoy knowing more than Leia did. He kept quizzing her, pointing at artefacts on display and demanding Leia tell him what she did and did not know about them, often going so far as to try and hide the museum's explanations from her so that she could not rely on them to answer his inquires. As if that wasn’t enough, he kept making sure she was listening to Padmé's stories by quizzing her on them.

Each time he’d turn to her, his face schooled in an expression of pure solemnity, and then ask about some obscure random detail from something his mother had told her several stories earlier. It was never the important parts of the stories either, always the most random details, and when she inevitably wasn’t able to recall whatever he was asking after, he’d clutch at his chest, moaning about her lack of care for her very own cultural heritage.

It was too ridiculous for her to even feel offended. In fact, it was all she could do not to burst out laughing whenever it happened. Anakin had no such reservation. He seemed to be enjoying his son’s antics more than the exhibit itself, eyes glancing off the displays time and time again, and focusing on his family.

Leia hadn’t known what to make of the attention at first, but before they had even reached the start of Palpatine’s career in politics, she realized it was endearing. Anakin may not have been enjoying the museum itself, but he was enjoying their company.

It was all too soon when they reached the beginnings of Palpatine’s time on Coruscant, the sweeping displays on the Naboo giving way to information and videos about the massive ecumenopolis as it was when Sheev Palpatine had first arrived there several decades earlier.

They rounded a corner, and to Leia’s delight a clip from a holovideo she had always adored was playing. She hadn’t been expecting it at all, the movie was one her father had always hated, whenever he caught her watching it he’d lecture that the lead actress had turned out to be a Separatist operative, and that the only reason that particular film hadn’t been banned was that it was a highly embellished retelling of the Emperor’s rise to power as the Chancellor of the Republic.

Leia had not cared. The film made no real attempt to pretend it was historically accurate, instead playing up the camp and drama of the tale. Leia had always enjoyed the sweeping theatrics, the pageantry and grandstanding speeches.
The scene being played was even Leia’s favorite part!

Padmé groaned, loud enough to drown out the glorious monologue Leia knew by heart. Honestly, she couldn’t blame her.

It was one thing to watch a terrible holo loosely based on historic events. It was something else entirely to be the subject of that sort of film.

A hand grabbed Leia’s shoulder, spinning her until she was gazing at Anakin’s beaming face. “Please tell me you’re also a Madam Synata fan!” he enthused. “She’s something else, isn’t she?”

“No!” Padmé exclaimed. “Risha was a Separatist! She tried to murder us, remember?” She continued in a voice that could only be described as sullen, “I never said any of those things. Why is the museum preserving this fiction over what actually took place?”

Leia didn’t find the inclusion of the movie puzzling. It concretely displayed the difference between what had occurred and what was remembered. The way political events are often replaced in the memory of the masses with more exciting revisions. A fitting point to make when exploring the legacy of a master propagandist like Sheev Palpatine.

The holo flickered, and the scene from the drama was replaced by footage from the real speech Queen Amidala had given that day on the Senate floor.

Much like the movie, this too was familiar to Leia, the events surrounding how and why Sheev Palpatine had assumed the position of Chancellor a cornerstone of every Imperial citizen’s education.

Here Amidala’s voice was measured and slow, filled with authority well beyond her meager fourteen years of age.

Leia had always wondered what had made the call for a vote of no confidence seem like a good idea. Chancellor Valorum had been sympathetic to the Naboo’s plight, and had been doing the best he could for them in absence of evidence. Not even one holo had been played to support the claim that prison camps were being used, the senate asked to simply trust the word of a single individual. Queen though she may have been, the senate would have needed far more than just her testimony before any action could have been taken.

She wanted to ask the questions she had already carried with her about this moment in history, but she did not.

No sense starting an argument when there need not be one, not so soon after they had settled their last blow up. In the less than a week she had known her, Leia had realized that Padmé was just as stubborn as she was when it came to the whys behind her actions. The chances of her owning that she had made the wrong move when defending her people were extremely slim, and all raising the point would do is antagonize her.

Keeping her opinion to herself was difficult. She could feel Padmé’s gaze constantly on her, wondered what sort of non-verbal indications she was giving off. She knew how to control her body language of course, had spent years effectively operating as a spy, but based on reputation alone she was certain Padmé Amidala would be able to read her tells regardless.

Leia had never been able to lie to her mother. Why would keeping things from this woman be any different?

Whatever it was Padmé could tell from Leia’s body language, she kept it to herself.
The exhibit flew by far faster than Leia had expected. She was similarly surprised by how little new
information there was. She could scarcely think of anything there that she had not studied in her
lessons as a girl. Leia could swear that the writing on some of the displays were word for word
recreations of lectures her old tutor droid - CZ-70B - had given. She had found those lectures
unspeakably boring all those years ago, stuck in her classroom, just her and SeeZee-Seven shut away
from anything even remotely worth focusing on.

And yet, somehow, here, with Padmé’s stories, Luke’s quizzes, and Anakin’s warm gaze… Leia
didn’t feel anywhere near as bored or turned off by the information being presented to her. It all
seemed to take on new life, transforming from rote information memorized from stuffy history holos
into something real, tangible, and above all else fun.

While he was mostly silent, or merely adding sly jokes to the conversation, Anakin’s skill as a
teacher was still on display, as the man seemed to have a preternatural sense of just when Leia could
use an encouraging smile or nod.

Then again, he was a Jedi. It was entirely possible he actually did have a sixth sense informing when
Leia could use that extra boost of encouragement.

It was astounding, how well she… fit… with these people. Dwelling on it made her uncomfortable,
so she tried not to think about it too much, but… there was an ease to their interactions she rarely felt
with people she had known for such a short period of time.

In fact the only person she could remember ever getting along with so well so quickly was Luke. Her
Luke, that was. Her actual honest to goodness twin brother.

What would it have been like, had she known her Luke for more than just a few months?

Would he have teased her, grated at her nerves and annoyed her, the way this other Luke seemed to
enjoy doing with her counterpart?

Or would their dynamic have developed into something completely different?

Even odder, increasingly Leia would catch herself wondering what it would have been like, if even
one of her bio parents were still living in her own timeline.

Who would they have become under Palpatine’s dreaded regime? How much richer might the
Alliance’s efforts been with either one of them there to aid the cause?

Anakin was a dashing hero, with a true knack for teaching others. Leia had benefited first hand
already from his martial instruction, and had heard tale of his abilities as a pilot. She could only
imagine how much better the Rebel fleet could have been run under his tutelage. Why, with his
instruction, more of their pilots might have been able to outfly the likes of Darth Vader himself! (An
added benefit of this line of thinking was how it would deflate imagined Han’s ego, for he would no
longer be able to boast about being the only pilot to ever goose Vader’s TIE Advanced.)

As for Padmé, well… Leia could not stop herself from wondering who this brilliant woman would
have become under the revolution. The way her addition to the fraught conversations might have
changed their course. The invaluable addition she would be to the Alliance’s propaganda efforts.
Perhaps in a world where Padmé had survived, she and not Leia would have been the face and voice
of the Rebellion.

There was no question in Leia’s mind that both of them would have been Rebels had they lived long
enough to see the Alliance. After all, they were good people, and all that remained of them in her
world lived on in both her and Luke, two dedicated members of the Rebel forces. How could the people who had birthed Leia possibly stand for the tyranny of Palpatine’s cruel regime?

As she reflected on these possibilities, Leia tried to avoid thoughts of where she herself would be in a world almost identical to her own but for the survival of one of these individuals. Her parents’ death was far too recent for her to consider what it would mean for her to have never loved them the way she did. To never have loved Alderaan prior to its loss (the few times her brain started down that path, she would wonder if Alderaan would still exist if it simply had never been her home. That thought was far too painful for her to dwell on it for too long).

When she considered what it would have meant to grow up with Luke, she pictured them on Alderaan, together. Luke alleviating the boredom of her lessons with CZ-70B, Luke and her challenging each other to find the fastest route from the royal apartments to the kitchens, crawling together through the secret passages in the walls, listening in together on meetings they were supposed to have no knowledge of.

She’d return to these fantasies during lulls in the conversation, few though those were.

As the lush Naboo decorations gave way to statues and paintings that alluded to Palpatine’s religious beliefs, Anakin began to speak more and more, offering what he could of his impressions of the tenets of the Sith faith. His words were hesitant, and he would intersperse his comments with apologies. It seemed the Jedi honestly didn’t know that much about the Sith, and the knowledge they did have generally dated back several thousand years.

According to Anakin, aside from the brief period of the Clone War, the Jedi Order had by and large viewed the Sith as a historical curiosity and had not thought of them very much. An attitude that had only bit them in the ass when the Sith launched their full on assault against the Republic during the Clone Wars.

Anakin told her about the Sith he had fought against personally, but not the Emperor. She knew he had been the one to kill him, an achievement she desperately wanted to replicate in her own world, but did not press on that front. As he spoke Anakin would take constant breaks, often staring at the other’s present as he gathered his thoughts.

It was all fascinating and new information for Leia. All she had ever known about the Sith prior to this was that they were the historic enemy of the Jedi, that the Old Republic had been founded in conjunction with the Sith’s defeat at the Jedi’s hands, and of course her own experiences dealing with the dreaded Darth Vader. With how the Jedi Order had reacted when she had come before them, she had assumed they were accustomed to dealing with the Sith, but that didn’t seem to actually be the case.

For some reason, even after her many years in a position of command, after knowing the intricacies of being in a position of power, Leia had imagined the Jedi as different. Perfect and all knowing, with magical superpowers that enabled them to save the day without fail. She had pictured them without flaws, forever in that moment of perfect victory and glory. From the way Anakin - a member of their high council! - spoke, it was clear the reality wasn’t like that. They were no different from any other group of sentients in the galaxy - just making it up as they went along.

Sure the Jedi had powers, but Leia was increasingly discovering that being able to access those sorts of abilities was not easy. They were akin to an unstable shipment of coaxium, a tool that when used correctly could give you the power needed to win a war, but equally likely to blow up in your face and take your entire war effort with you.

That was, unless you observed draconian safety protocols and treated the situation with nothing but
the utmost care and attention.

Leia had volunteered to personally escort many hyperfuel shipments herself, because as much as she feared what would happen if the carrying container was jostled, she had disliked the thought of ordering others to do it instead.

Could she, in good conscience, really ask Luke to dedicate himself to the rules being a Jedi would require of him, all on his own? To the self-monitoring and second guessing his abilities required?

...Her abilities too. She couldn’t deny that anymore.

Leia shut her eyes as the weight of it all hit her.

Was it not her duty as Luke’s commanding officer, as his sister, to not expect him to make sacrifices in the name of their war effort that she was not prepared to make herself?

Around her her birth family was laughing, at some comment or another one of them had just made. She did not join them. Her heart was pounding, and when she opened her eyes and glanced around at the three of them, at the items in the museum around them, everything was wrong.

The Emperor’s possessions seemed…. Off.

Twisted in on themselves.

Shining here with an eerie red glow - there a gaping absence. Like a black hole held inert in a museum case.

Looking at at any of the beautiful statues and paintings straight on made everything ache. They were all so full and so empty and so very very wrong.

In contrast to that gaping darkness, Luke and Anakin shone with an intensity that should have stung Leia’s eyes. Yet instead of pain or eye strain, looking directly at them caused only a sense of warmth and comfort. She was drawn to their brightness, it called out to something in her.

Padmé did not glow the way her husband or her son did. Yet Leia could see the ways that bright light was attracted to the petite woman, flowing over her, tying her securely to them. There was something wrong however, there was a cord connected to all three of them that seemed … broken somehow. The energy Leia sensed from it was almost familiar, but she could not quite figure out why.

Experimentally she reached out towards one of the tendrils of that broken cord, swirling in the air around them. Her hand went right through the cord, and as she tried to jerk back the gleaming tiles and glass displays of the museums gave way to a humid swamp in the middle of the night. Around her she heard animals crying out, and then a voice, familiar, Luke’s, cutting through the dark saying her name. She turned to to respond, but before she could she was back in the museum, surrounded by her birth family.

Ok.

So apparently they had some sort of weird connection to a swamp.

Maybe it was some place that had significance to them on Naboo?

The floor moved under her feet like a wildly piloted ship, and she was suddenly terrified of falling into a display and touching the wrong wrong wrong within.
Remembering how the one of the things that had helped her when disoriented in the library was Anakin’s presence, Leia grabbed at his arm, drawing him close.

Her vision was fluctuating between the strange too intense colors and bright lights and how things should have been, but it wouldn’t stabilize on any one view.

At least Anakin seemed happy. He was grinning down at her, the light of his being flaring, going supernova, enveloping her. Plus there was no way he’d let her fall, let her disorientation get her hurt.

Looking at the others, at Luke and Padmé as she clung to Anakin’s arm, she could see they were smiling too, all of them so pleased to see her… what? Fitting into their happy family dynamic?

But she didn’t fit.

She didn’t belong here.

She couldn’t let herself get too attached to this, grow too comfortable with her place here with them.

It was only temporary, and then she would be returning to the war and the aching horrible knowledge that she was alone.

Her home, her friends, her family, everyone was dead and gone.

No.

Not everyone.


And so was Mon. Mon who had known her her whole life, who had taught her so much, had believed in her when no one else would. Mon, who time and time again would take Leia aside to remind her that there were people who cared about her. Not as a symbol or military leader, but personally as a friend.

And Amilyn, and Evaan, and Chewie, and Sana and… and Han.

They were all counting on her. Relying on her to hold it together. Learn what she needed to be the most effective leader she could be, and restore justice to the galaxy.

It was easy to get lost in this, to turn away from the pain of the hellish reality she came from and instead be a part of a family in a world where the laws made sense.

It felt good, healing almost, but that did not right make it right.

It was her duty, the duty of every right minded Imperial Citizen, to stand against the darkness that had consumed their government. To never stand complacent, to never merely accept the Emperor’s rule.

Slowly Leia let go of Anakin’s arm, and instead focused on her commitment to her cause, to the the pain of witnessing horrors untold be justified as the rule of law. She focused on the certainty of raising one’s voice against unjust laws, of joining others in a chorus. A chorus that demanded these nightmarish tyrants cease their rule by the minority, lest the majority of actual clear-headed beings take the power back from them by any means available to them.

By any means, including mastering the Force.
She also had to figure out how to keep these new powers from *distracting* her from conversations that might reveal her greatest enemy’s weakness. Her head pulsed and the exhibit spun around her, as if to mockingly remind her of how much the unintentional use of these abilities took out of her.

“Leia, are you ok?” Padmé’s voice intruded on her thoughts.

Leia blinked hard, and when her eyes opened the world was stable and solid. She was confident that if her senses started to reel like that again she would be able to solve the problem on her own. It was a reassurance she needed.

“I am now,” Leia said, smiling.

“What was that?” Luke asked, frowning at her. “You…. something happened.”

She nodded. “Yes, I think it might have. But whatever it was, I figured it out.”

Anakin gave her an odd look, and it occurred to Leia that he might be seeing her the way she had been seeing both him and Luke in that strange headspace she had just been in.

Interesting.

She wasn’t sure if she wanted to try and figure out how to do that on purpose. At least, not so soon after she had discovered a way how to return to her normal perception of the world. Yet she could see how being able to do so might have its uses.

He was about to say something, his mouth in the process of moving, sound starting to emerge, when Leia interrupted with a question.

“Those broken cords, do you see them?”

“Cords?” Luke was clearly confused, and Anakin…

Anakin frowned, and was about to answer when Padmé’s comm went off, the noise seeming that much more intrusive in the empty hall.

“Is there something to report?” Padmé asked into the device.

Leia was close enough to make out the tinny response from the woman on the other end of the conversation.

“Someone just slipped past us Ma’am, into the museum.”

Padmé sighed, one hand pinching at the space between her eyes. “It’s alright. I’m sure we can take care of whoever it is.” She clicked the comm off, and looked around at the three of them, smirking, a familiar expression Leia knew she herself must have worn in the past when preparing troops for battle. “You’d think by now everyone would have learned that ours is not a family anyone would want to get into a fight with.”

There was humm as first Anakin and then Luke switched on their lightsabers, nodding as Leia glanced at them both.

She turned back to Padmé, and there must have been a blaster concealed somewhere on Padmé’s person earlier, for she held a shining silver one aloft now. “What do you all say we go and take care of this interruption?”

Leia nodded, and reached into her boot, taking out the holdout blaster she always kept there. It
wasn’t as good as either of the blasters she normally carried on her, but with her bio-family by her side she was sure she’d be fine.

She and Luke walked in silence, side by side, listening to the sounds of night on an uninhabited planet.

Well, Luke was listening to the sounds, Leia supposed. She wanted to talk to him, but she was busy focusing on keeping Vader out. He was persistent, refusing to let up in his attempts to talk with her. There was an odd moment where he must have overwhelmed her defenses in another desperate ploy to get through to her, as everything had gone strange and sideways for just a second before she tripped over a stray root and Luke helped her, joking all the while about how she was making him feel better about his own late night stumbles.

Honestly, if it wasn’t for Luke, Leia would just tell Vader to shove off. But she didn’t want Luke to notice anything was happening, not after his outburst back on Horox III, and especially not without getting Yoda or Obi-Wan’s permission first. She’d be in enough trouble with Master Yoda for leaving in the middle of the night to find a better place to sleep.

“So the other me studied under Master Yoda when he was little?”

“Huh?”

“Earlier, during dinner, you indicated that I was acting like a little kid, and sent me an image of the other me as a child with Yoda.”

She had? She hadn’t meant to send him anything.

“So? Did your brother study under him when he was a youngling?”

“Everyone studies under Master Yoda when they’re a youngling.”

“Oh. So the stuff I’m learning, it’s kiddie stuff?”

“Huh? Oh! Oh Lulu, no. No. The lessons we had as kids were nothing like this.”

“Then what were they like?”

“Master Yoda’s classes mainly focused on how to read and write, basic history, understanding political systems, maths, the cultures of the galaxy and how to conduct oneself when visiting various systems, just appreciating the Force in general, how to connect with others and find your center, meditation, lightsaber basics, how to understand your emotions and identify which ones you need to let go of… you know, the foundations of all Jedi training.”

It was only as she and Luke went back to their suddenly uncomfortable silence, that it occurred to Leia that she had no idea what sort of education Luke had access to as a child.

“Uhhhh, what about you?” she asked, not sure how to be subtle and deciding to just barrel on in to the topic.

“What about me what?”
“Well, you know. When you were a youngling, did Owen and Beru teach you how to-”

Luke cut her off. “Just what sort of life are you imagining I led? You think we didn't have a school in Anchorhead?”

“Right. Sorry.”

“I mean yeah, sure, Aunt Beru would sit with me and one our one datapad, helping me figure out how to read, and Uncle Owen always went over what I was learning about math and showed me better ways of doing things, but just because I lived out in the middle of nowhere, that doesn't mean you can make assumptions.”

“Owen’s good at math? I mean sure I only met him the one time, but I didn’t expect that.”

“What, did you expect his entire life to revolve around working on and fixing up machines, like vaparators and generators and the like, yet he’d know absolutely nothing about how they work? You need to know math for that stuff.”

“I… I guess. I never really thought of him like an engineer before.”

“That’s obvious. You really have no idea about anything to do with Tatooine, do you?”

“Well I know you guys have slavery, and that’s probably why dad doesn’t like to go back? He… look, he doesn’t like to talk about his childhood that much.”

“That’s fair, I guess. Although if you think all we do is sit about and think about the Hutts, you’re really really wrong.”

Leia wasn’t really sure what that meant, so she dodged the subject slightly.

“Oh! Also, I know that’s one of the places Worrts are from.”


“Hey! The pet Worr we had when I was a kid was… well literally named Slimy so I can’t dispute that, but he wasn’t gross!”

“You had a pet Worr! Of all the stupid things a person can do, you kept one of those things as a pet!”

“What, is that…” Leia felt her brows furrow, thinking back on her beloved childhood pet, “…is that not something people do?”

“Sure it is. Camie and Biggs and a bunch of the others I grew up with had pet Worrts. Doesn’t make them any less gross.”

“Both Dad and I loved him.”

“…doesn’t ever visit Tatooine, barely ever speaks about living there, but he has a soft spot for Worrts. Just what kind of guy is he?”

Leia grinned, prepared to deliver a quip, but blast it, of course Vader would push extra hard against her shields just then. She’d almost forgotten about him. Great.

She managed to avoid actually dealing with the Sith, but the reminder of his existence dampened her

“Please. Can you… can you tell me more? My aunt and uncle, they always avoided talking about him. Dodged the subject whenever I brought it up. But you actually know him, not just as another person but as a father.”

“They didn’t tell you about him?”

“Just little stuff, you know, he was freed years before my grandmother came to live with them, so it isn’t as if they ever actually knew the guy. Mainly when they spoke about my history it was to talk about her, but even then… well Uncle Owen had trouble talking about her too much. Aunt Beru always said it was because he loved her, and her loss still was affecting him all those years later.”

“The same could be said about dad. He never talks about his mom.”

“According to Aunt Beru, she was an amazing lady.”

The awkward conversation was interrupted when they reached the object Leia had sensed, and to her relief it was the ship.

Luke rushed to the comms, and Leia followed after him. Oddly the system was flashing the yellow light that indicated someone had left a message.

Normally Leia would have advised them not to touch it, but it seemed this was the sort of system where it was impossible to send a new message until all previous messages had been reviewed.

When Luke hit the switch to key the system on, Dr. Aphra’s small likeness appeared above the dash.

“Oh come on,” Luke moaned, “not her again!”

“Everyone really dislikes her, huh?”

“Leia, she once tried to sell me to a hive of Abersyn symbiotes.”

“She what?”

“Exactly.”

The image flickered. She’d been standing there without speaking for quite some time now, looking hesitant and unsure. Finally she spoke. “Sana, hey, sorry I know you hate it when I message you but well.. I’ve been thinking, about that story the Princess told me? Well not the Princess… which is kind of the point isn’t it. Anyway I was doing some digging, and the Empire has some records of weird shit going down all over the galaxy, but there was a case of someone vanishing into a wall or a cliff face or something on Lothal a couple of years back? The people who were involved were a bunch of Rebels they were chasing after, and there was a Jedi involved, so if anyone could track them down and question them about it, it’d be her. I -” She cut herself off, glancing away from the holorecorder. “That’s all I’ve got right now. Sorry. For everything, I’m just…” She turned back to the projector, impossibly sad for a moment, before moving to shut the device off.

As soon as the message ended, Luke turned to Leia. “How did Aphra learn about your situation? Didn’t we all specifically tell you she is bad news and you should avoid her?”

“Yes, but I was trying to get information on Darth Vader, ok?”

He shoved up against her shields again. She really did not want to do this with Luke present.
One of the great things about being in the ship though was that there were separate rooms. Places she could go where Luke might not be aware of what was taking place.

“Why don’t you get on the comms and talk to whoever you needed to talk to. I’m heading to bed.”

She hoped that would be enough.

She stepped out of the cockpit, rushing back to the cabin the two of them had slept in the night before. As she made her way down the hall she felt him pressing past her shields. She was going to give him a piece of her mind for acting like she wanted to talk to him at all hours when she very clearly didn’t.

_You must be informed of the events that took place over the past hour_, Vader’s baritone echoed in her mind.

She shoved him out of her head again, longing for the peace and comfort of a good night’s sleep. She was _way_ too tired to deal with this.

There was a noise behind her, and she turned to identify what it was she heard. Luke was standing in the entryway between the hall and the cockpit.

“Leia,” he said, voice low and cautious, “who have you been you talking to?”

How much had Luke heard?

How much did Luke know?

Vader had only communicated one sentence, so far in any case. Had he said anything that that couldn’t be explained away?

Would she be able to completely block Vader out before he said anything more revealing?

“Well? Come’on Leia, you’ve been talking to whoever this is nonstop since you first got to this dimension.”

He’d… he’d sensed that?

“Based on your conversation with him earlier, you’ve obviously told Master Yoda about whoever it is too, why can’t you tell me?”

She heard a laugh echoing around her, and realised that it was her own. She clamped her mouth shut.

What could she say? After that first time she’d connected with Vader, Luke sitting by her side seemingly none the wiser, it hadn’t even occurred to her that he might be aware of their conversations.

“Luke, I-”

“Is it him? Are you talking to father?”

Now _there_ was a doozy of a question she didn’t want to answer.

Vader chose that time to smash his way fully through her shields, a vision of him appearing in the crowded hall.

_I have something you desire_, he said, his helmet tilting slightly as he spoke, _If you care at all about_
its well being, you must come and speak with me in person.

“You’ve been talking to Vader?!” Luke shouted.

Oh kriff!

This kept going from bad to worse.

*Luke. You are with your sister.*

Luke’s eyes narrowed. “How do you know that?”

*I am pleased. My message is for you as well.*

Leia really was not liking this at all.

Neither was Luke apparently, since he looked about as mad as she’d ever seen.

She threw everything she had, every last reserve of strength left, into shutting Vader out.

Turning to Luke, she tried to explain. “He keeps talking to me, not the other way around,” she said. “I’ve been doing my best to shove him out entirely.”

Luke gave her a suspicious glance. “How can he do that?”

She scrambled to think of a passable explanation. “When I first got here, remember how disoriented I was and how I passed out, only to wake up knowing what was going on?”

“I’m sorry I told you about his death like that.” His apologizing to her was just the most dramatic indication that she was forgiven.

If this had been her own brother, she would have left things there. Claimed his apology as a victory and moved on.

He wasn’t her brother. For all that he had shown her over the past few days a remarkable strength and battle hardened sensibility, he was in a lot of ways more delicate than her brother. More sensitive, more prone to take insult to heart.

So she explained things for him the best that she could, made sure he understood he had done nothing wrong. “You couldn’t have known how I’d react, Luke.”

“Yeah, but you were already acting so weird, I mean you had suddenly out of nowhere told me we are twins!” He snorted. “Of course I guess I was acting pretty weird too, just accepting *that* and all. Stars but that long lost twin thing should have felt way stranger than it did.”
“Well it is the truth. You were probably sensing that, or had been aware of it on some level for some time… possibly forever! Still, I swear Luke, I have been doing my best to avoid Darth Vader ever since then. He keeps on trying to talk me though. That’s what I’ve been trying to get Yoda to speak with me about, how to handle his intrusions into my mind.”

Luke nodded. He smiled, but it was fleeting, the expression chased by worry and sorrow. “Leia, I don’t want to accuse you of anything but… is it possible Vader figured out the location of our base from his conversations with you?”

She frowned. “I don’t think so, why?”

“Because earlier, on the comms? I couldn’t hail Horox III no matter what I did. Their comms are all dead. Combine that with what he was saying about having something of ours…”

“You don’t think?”

“Either he attacked the base, or he’s talking about father. Although when you factor in the vision I keep having? The former seems most likely.”

Mother of moons, what had she done? Had she inadvertently put everything her counterpart cared for in jeopardy?

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Who interrupted the family outing? What is Vader up to?

I know that the junior novel Star Wars: A New Hope: The Princess, the Scoundrel, and the Farm Boy by Alexandra Bracken says that Luke was homeschooled. However that book has several continuity errors, and the other books in that series are based more on the movie scripts than the finished products themselves. Because of that I don't personally consider it fully canon, so please feel free to just read your own headcanon into that part of this chapter.

It's amazing how after struggling with several drafts where I described the items in the exhibit at length, I figure out that this only made sense if/when the exhibit itself was inconsequential and all of Leia's learning and growth had to do with herself.
They moved to exit the exhibit at a brisk pace, not quite jogging but not walking either

It was familiar, comforting almost, to feel the weight of a blaster in her hand as she rushed down corridors to deal with a threat.

Was it a bad thing that running towards combat made her feel more at home than anything else she had experienced in this dimension?

She tried not to dwell on it, but it felt more familiar than returning to Alderaan.

The four of them acted like a unit, and Leia had no trouble falling into step with the others.

It figured that while she hadn’t learned anything new about the Emperor from the museum exhibit about him, she had apparently learned new things about herself.

That seemed to be the theme of everything in this kripped up alternate universe, didn’t it? Grand self-realizations, massive shifts in how she understood her life and being, and all of it happening with her actual Force-damned bio family smiling down at her.

That wasn’t fair to them.

They were only trying to help.

She knew that. She did.

Still, Leia was in about as much of a mood for another sweeping discovery as she was in the mood for a blaster bolt to the head.

Luke and Anakin dashed ahead of Leia and Padmé, vanishing around a corner, which made sense since they had lightsabers instead of blasters. As they pulled ahead there were some shouts from whoever had made the mistake of interrupting their museum trip. The recognizable sounds of combat and…

And one very familiar voice Leia had not been expecting to hear at all.

Turning the corner and returning to the ticketing lobby, Leia’s attention was immediately on the small group of hooligans in the center of the cavernous space. They had already been incapacitated it
seemed, so Leia let her blaster arm fall to her side.

Anakin was blocking the museum's main entrance, cutting off the four invaders' escape. Scattered across the floor were what must have once been blasters. They were red and smoking where lightsabers had cut them, lightsabers that remained on. Luke’s green blade was hovering near the neck of the man who was clearly the leader of the group.

Leia recognized him immediately, and she had to stop herself from screaming. 

_Han_ was the security breach?

Trust Han to be the galaxy’s biggest nuisance, no matter the fragging dimension!

At least when they locked eyes across the marble floored room he had the decency to look surprised.

“Aren’t you the lady from that bar?” he asked, then shook his head, dismissing the question, his fingers briefly fluttering by his bare arms, drawing attention to a tattoo on his wrist Leia _knew_ his counterpart in her world did not have (not that she had paid close attention to Han’s arms on the occasions when he’d pushed up his sleeves).

How had _Han_ made it past the security protocols?

That voice on the other end of the comm had to have represented a sizable and impressive team. The women who had helped Leia dress for dinner the night before had held themselves like trained guards, and as Chancellor, Padmé must have had a retinue of guards beyond her own personal security team.

Yet somehow here Han was, standing in the museum flanked by three individuals who were impossibly more shady than Han himself. He had been spotted by the security teams on his way in, yes, but clearly they had not been able to stop his entry.

Luke’s reaction to Han was almost the most interesting part of it all. His lightsaber remained worryingly close to Han’s neck, and when Han spoke to Leia, Luke visibly tensed.

“I assure you that you do not know her,” Luke spat. “There better be a good reason for this. I am not in the mood to play any of your boss’ games right now.”

Leia wasn’t in the mood to hear whatever nonsense chauvinistic banter was sure to follow. “Cut the crap, both of you.”

Han grinned a cocky little half smile, “I like your girl, Skywalker, she’s got real backbone.”

Leia snorted. “I’m _not_ his girl. Even if that _was_ the case I’d still ask you not to speak of me in such demeaning terms.”

“Right. Sure thing, sweetheart.”

“Why are you always like this?”

“Now that’s not fair. You seem to know me, but I have incredibly limited memories of you. Care to change that?”

Luke let out a snarl. “Shut up.”

Han laughed. “You two on the same page about the not dating thing? Kid’s real overprotective.”
Leia frowned. “We’re siblings, so yes, very much not dating.”

Han gave an awkward half nod, the lightsaber preventing him from moving his head more than that. “Heard about the twin thing, yeah. Sorry to interrupt a family gathering. Thing is, you’ve done such a good job sweeping this place for listening devices that it made a perfect setting for this sort of private meeting.”

“And what sort is that?”

“The sort of meeting where… look, the four of us, we’re looking for a way out, ok? He… please, you Jedi, you’re supposed to help people, aren’t ya?”

“He?” Leia asked, one eyebrow arched. “Are we supposed to just divine who that pronoun was in reference to?”

“Our boss. You know. Scary Zabrek, red, all covered in tattoos and not fond of shirts?”

Amazing. He had acted as if he was answering her question and managed to say absolutely nothing in the process.

He was almost as annoying as the Han she knew.

Almost.

No one could possibly be as annoying as that oafish lout.

At least this Han had embraced his natural talent as a leader, what with the way the rest of his team was looking at him. That spoke quite a bit in his favor, that he wasn’t wasting his vast potential to flit about doing seemingly nothing at all.

How many times now had her universe’s Han left to pay off the people he kept complaining he needed to pay off? How many times had he returned still whining about the same gangsters as ever, no closer to paying those debts than he had been before? Honestly the man was probably just making things up for the attention given how little he was doing about any of it.

It was refreshing, seeing someone who looked and sounded like Han taking actual steps to improve his future instead of avoiding them. She wanted to help him, to see his efforts rewarded.

Luke on the other hand kept his lightsaber by Han’s neck, glaring at Han like he was nothing more than something unpleasant stuck on the bottom of his shoe. The light of the saber cast unsettling shadows against Han’s adam’s apple everytime Han spoke or swallowed. It was, to be honest, making Leia rather uncomfortable. As much as she knew this man wasn’t her Han (well not HERs but… well the Han she knew) she didn’t exactly relish the idea of watching Luke behead him. Just thinking about the possibility was enough to turn her stomach.

“Luke.” Anakin’s voice cut through the tension. “It’s ok, you can ease up.”

Annoyance surged through the lobby, harsh and acidic, but Luke took a step back, letting his arm drop slightly. He still didn’t turn his lightsaber off.

Leia glanced to where Anakin stood by the entrance. He was regarding her with that smug knowing grin of his. “That’s your smuggler, isn’t it?” he asked, “the one from the bar?”

“Smuggler?” Han’s face scrunched up. “You know not all Corellians are-”
“He wasn’t talking to you, scum.” Luke stepped forward, clearly intending to threaten Han again, and Leia shouted for him to stop at the same time as both Anakin and Padmé.


“You haven’t seen the things Crimson Dawn does, mom. They’re monsters, every last one of them.”

“Yeah, which is precisely why we want out of this life, ok?” Han glanced to the side, toward where the three gangsters who had come with him were standing. “You think asking for help with this is easy? Come’on, why don’t you put that weapon down and we can talk about this like adults.”

Talk like adults indeed. Han sounded startlingly mature compared to the scoundrel Leia knew. Sure there was a lightsaber at his throat, but to avoid sarcastic remarks entirely?

Luke’s expression remained uncompromising. It was clear he was neither interested in nor capable of empathising with what it would take to leave a cartel behind.

Leia had heard stories from former members of all sorts of syndicates before. The Rebellion collected people looking to escape their past like a monkey lizard collected mole-fleas, and in all the tales she had heard, one thing was fairly consistent. Unless the gang was collapsing in on itself (like Crimson Dawn was in her own timeline) leaving was nearly impossible.

There was little question of Han’s sincerity here. His three accomplices hadn’t even drawn their blasters as Luke threatened their leader. Leia had noticed them scowling and tensing, hands flexing near holsters, and yet for all the clear signs they wanted to protect Han, they held still.

Clearly they were determined not to fight, even if it meant the loss of their own lives. That made Leia trust them.

Glancing toward the door, Leia caught Anakin’s eye. Her eyes darted towards the three goons. When she resumed eye contact with Anakin he nodded, and his gaze moved slightly to meet Padmé’s. Out of the corner of her eye, Leia watched her nod her acknowledgement. Luke remained fixated on Han, unaware of anything else going on.

Padmé touched her son’s shoulder, chiding him in a soothing tone. “Sweetheart, I understand that you spend a lot of time working to bring down their cartel, but they have come here with a sincere plea for aid. We have to respect that.”

“I don’t trust them.”

“Yes, you have made that clear. However I believe I raised you better than to deny people their rights due to mere suspicion.”

Luke allowed his mother to lead him back a few steps, away from the four gangsters.

Clearing his throat loudly, Anakin held his comm up and shook it to draw attention. “I’m going to call Obi-Wan and let him know the four of you want to cooperate from here on out.”

Han’s hands flew out, gesticulating wildly. It was such a Han thing to do, Leia could not help but smile as she watched. “Woah, woah, hold up!”

“Oh, so you don’t actually want to make this defection official?” Luke snapped.

“What? No, that ain’t it. I just… the boss has people who can slice into comm channels. You sure that yours is secure? ‘Cause if it ain’t all of us are dead.”
“You’re really scared of your boss.” Leia observed, frowning. Han was careless and irreverent about everything. It was part of his… well not charm, since Han wouldn’t know charm if it bit him in the ass.

Han frowned at her. There was no sly humor dancing in his eyes, no ego, no plan to bolt. It was the same expression he had worn on Vrogas Vas when she told him she intended to engage Vader directly. Intense and worried. “Isn’t everyone?”

Leia shrugged. “I still don’t know who this employer of yours is.”

The confused look on his face was familiar, at least. Han wasn’t often serious. He was often lost.

“You’re brother is one of the Jedi that foils all our schemes, and somehow you don’t even know basic kripping info like that? That makes no damn sense.”

“You’ll find that there is a lot about me that makes little to no sense.”

“I look forward to puzzling your mysteries out then.”

“I’m sure you-” Leia wasn’t able to finish her retort, as Anakin cut her off.

“As much as I am loath to interrupt your flirting,” Anakin said, eyebrows waggling in a truly aggravating manner, “I am sure that the comm line is secure and no one will listen in on my conversation with Obi-Wan.”

Leia flushed at the misinterpretation of their conversation. She hadn’t been flirting. She didn’t… she wouldn’t… he was a criminal! A criminal wearing the face of the most annoying and frustrating man she had ever met. There was no possible universe where she would ever flirt with the likes of Han Solo!

How dare he make such a salacious claim. She’d expect that sort of behavior from gossiping fighter pilots, not a Jedi Master!

Self-conscious after Anakin’s slander, Leia ignored his conversation on the comm and instead looked around the room to see how everyone else was reacting to that oh so rude suggestion.

Her attention was immediately captured by the way Han was grinning at her.

It seemed Han being the most annoying being in the entire galaxy was a constant across universes. Leia wasn’t too surprised by that revelation.

She glared at him in response, which, somehow, only made his grin take on a self satisfied bent.

Arrogant prick.

A hand tugged at Leia’s arm, drawing her attention away from the idiotically smirking Corellian.

The hand wrapped around Leia’s arm belonged to Padmé, who upon getting Leia’s attention leaned in close to her ear and whispered “I take it you know him in your dimension?”

Leia nodded.

“Is he trustworthy? The version that you know that is.”

Reluctantly, Leia nodded again.
“Do you know him well?”

Leia turned, looking at Padmé directly. She really didn’t like what Padmé was implying. “What does that have to do with anything?” She hissed, voice almost raising enough to be heard by others aside from Padmé.

Smiling, Padmé explained. “I am trying to determine the nature of this man’s character. Since everyone of repute only knows him as a member of this gang, your insights are helpful right now. This may be the key to helping us bring down a fairly powerful crime syndicate.”

While she didn’t like the way people in this dimension always seemed to be smiling whenever the topic of Han came up, Leia’s posture relaxed. “I know him well enough. Han’s a criminal, but he… you can count on him to do the right thing when the chips are down.”

“Then let’s hope he’s as much like his counterpart as you are,” Padmé stepped away before she could respond, leaving Leia to wonder how like the other Leia she really was.

Still, taking stock of the only other person in the room she had ever met in her own dimension, Luke, she wasn’t sure how trustworthy this Han could be. Luke was still glaring at Han with naked suspicion. If she took a step back from the situation, it all was somewhat surreal. Luke treating Han like an enemy rather than a friend. Still, she supposed that single minded devotion was something she had seen Luke display before in her world, just towards things like his Jedi training or protecting his friends. A category that had always, for as long as Leia had known him in any case, included Han.

Seeing Luke’s focus turned against Han, rather than in his defense… well it was something Leia would have normally paid good credits to witness. Han often relied on exploiting Luke’s friendship to get him out of situations. One day he was going to wind up pushing things too far, and no one would be able to save him. In the context of her dimension a scene such as this would have meant Han had finally gone too far, and perhaps that he would wise up and learn to take better care of himself in response.

Then again, Leia wasn’t sure if her dimenson’s Han was even capable of learning lessons. She could only hope, now that she had vouched for him, that this dimension’s Han was able to do things hers was not.

Perhaps he was indeed as much like his counterpart as she herself apparently was.

When they had arrived at the ship, Leia had been exhausted. Her only goal had been to find a secure and comfortable place to sleep, so she could be the best student possible for Master Yoda come morning.

Now, perched in the co-pilot’s seat of the Volt Cobra, she gazed out at hyperspace, the blue light echoing the worries swirling around her mind.

She had tried sleeping, but every time she shut her eyes she’d imagine Master Yoda’s disappointment when he woke to find them gone, or what they’d find when they arrived at Horox III.

She didn’t know which was worse to imagine.

So she had given up on sleeping, and come here to stare out at space and turn the situation over in
her mind.

She had let the ease with which her counterpart apparently did it all lull her into a false sense of comfort, had thought she would be capable of handling the Sith Lord who was once her father, and in the process had done…. well, who knew what.

Which was the worst part.

Luke wasn’t talking to her, no matter how many conversation starters she tried, each one fizzling out and dying in the oppressively tense cockpit.

He’d assured her that he wasn’t angry with her, but there was a wall between them that seemed to suggest otherwise.

She didn’t know what he had seen in his visions, did not know what to expect, and her imagination was running wild creating one nightmare scenario after another.

She considered reaching out to Darth Vader, just to demand some answers. Whatever he had done, knowing what it was had to be better than all this uncertainty. She didn’t. With her luck, once she was talking to him she’d just kriff things up even more somehow...

It was tempting though.

For now she just kept watching the familiar blue glow out the viewscreen, and continued trying to start conversations with Luke, seated to her right.

He didn’t even look at her.

He clung to the yoke, knuckles turned white, desperation in his eyes.

Moving with the effectiveness born of suppressed rage and fear, he had been at it for hours now, not taking any breaks for rest himself.

They had already changed hyperspace lanes, Luke had mapped them a route that avoided the site of their dramatic battle on the way to Dagobah, and there had been no incident as they went from one lane to the other.

He must have been tired, he could have easily set things on an automated system, or asked Leia to take over, or something so he could get some rest.

Kriff, but Leia was exhausted.

Not that she could picture herself sleeping, not when her stomach was still sinking with the weight of her mistakes, but her eyes were starting to burn something fierce, and a pressing insistant headache was setting in.

More than anything, Leia wanted to go home.

Home to a world where the people she cared about made sense, where she knew how to interact with them properly and didn’t ruin things in the process.

Home to a world where her mother was alive, where her father had never hurt her. Hadn’t hurt anyone who hadn’t deserved the hurting. Home to a world where even when she was too tired to fully keep Luke out of her head, she could trust that he would be maintaining his own boundaries.

A place where the stakes were not so dire, where the consequences of her actions could mess her
own life up, or the lives of the people she loved, but couldn’t influence the fate of the entire karking galaxy. Where there was a Council to seek advice from, to clean up any mistakes she may make, to look out for her and make sure she never bit off more than she could chew - and when she did manage to kriff it all up they were always able to not only clean up her messes but minimize them in scope, make her feel better, find her some other assignment that would cheer her up.

Stang, but what twenty year old could be expected to carry the fate of the entire blasted galaxy on their shoulders all the time? With minimal supervision? It was pure nonsense!

It was funny, she had always kind of resented the Council before. Had imagined that without their meddling influence she’d be able to rise past anyone’s wildest imaginings of what she could be capable of, somehow even surpass her father in the scope of her deeds.

Now, on this ship barreling away from the only surviving member of the Council, she wished nothing more than to stand in the Temple’s highest tower and ask the twelve Masters who presided there for guidance.

Leia did not know how long she had been gazing out at the swirl of hyperspace, but it felt like it had been both ages and no time at all when she felt the familiar clench of her stomach that indicated they were returning to real space.

As soon as they were fully out of hyperspace and the stars had returned to tiny pins of light, Luke grabbed at the comms, sending message after message to the Rebel base.

He got no response.

Horox III hung out the viewport, and Leia was not particularly looking forward to discovering what its grey rocky landscape would reveal when they got closer.

Luke did not stop his attempts to contact someone as they entered the atmosphere. Occasionally the ship’s com unit would crackle. Every time, without fail, the static gave way to another noise and the two of them would lean forward in their seats, peering at the coms with interest. Each time it would turn out to be nothing.

They flew past a canyon, and then up on the horizon they could see a giant smoke plume, rising into the air. It was early evening for this part of Horox III, but the smoke was thick enough to darken the sky, making it seem later than it truly was. As they drew closer the source of that smoke became evident. The *Falcon*. The *Falcon* was smoldering, and the base itself… oh kriff.

Kriff no.

At least the place was not a total loss. They were close enough now to see people, clearing the rubble, digging others out. There were survivors.

It was not as bad as it could have been.

That really was the most optimistic thing Leia could think about this situation, with the base her counterpart had been in charge of in such a state.

She didn’t want to think about the wreck of the *Falcon*, about what that might mean. She had not known him long, but Han…

Oh kriff it to hell, Luke! She may have only just met Han, but Luke had known the guy for far longer. He was close to the surly man, his friend.
Leia tore her eyes away from the disaster of a base, focusing instead on Luke. He wasn’t doing so great. His face was pale, drained of all color. His lip was bleeding, probably from biting it too much. She reached out to him in the Force, and the sense of desperation was nauseating.

She caught sight, briefly, of what she assumed was one of the visions he had been having. Han, covered in blood and being dragged off by soldiers in white plastasteel. She could see the *Falcon* in the background, in the same place and state it was in before them now.

As horrid as the vision was, Leia focused on the fact that if it had actually come to pass, Han had survived whatever had happened. The man who clearly meant so much to her brother was alive, which meant he could still be saved.

She ignored the voice at the back of her mind that reminded her that all it meant was that he had been alive *then*, not that he was still alive *now*. No. If he was actually gone, the Force would not be so insistent on them returning here to help him. The fact it had been prodding Luke the way it was, she would hold onto that as proof that there was still a Han left to rescue.

She’d trust in Luke’s visions and in the Force itself, and do the best she could to right this tragedy she had caused.

Luke brought the ship down for a abrupt landing near where the *Falcon* lay, as soon as the *Cobra’s* landing gear touched the ground he was moving, running out of the ship and towards the ruin of his friend’s ship and home.

Leia moved with far less speed, dreading all that awaited her outside the *Cobra’s* doors.

Would they know she was the one responsible for this, that it was all her fault? She was certain it was obvious to anyone who looked at her, that her guilt was being shouted through the Force and was plainly written across her face.

She disembarked the ship, and entered the chaos of the base in rescue mode. People did make note of her, but no one seemed aware that she might have played a part in what had occurred. Instead as they ran by, hoses and shovels and stretchers all in hand, people would shout questions her way, or try to tell her where to find the people currently running this recovery effort.

Leia ignored their directions, heading instead to the ship Luke had run to as soon as he could, needing to know what exactly had happened to his friend.

She did not make it all the way there, intercepted by Sana, who seemed so put together and untouched compared to the destruction around them.

“I get it, you want to check on what happened there,” Sana said, grabbing onto Leia’s arm. “Thing is, med team’s already taking care of Chewie and Han… well that’s not a issue we need to worry about right now.”

“He was taken?”

“Yeah. We think he might have been the main target of the attack, the ‘troopers who hit us sure did leave once they had him all secure.”

“Kriff, Sana I-”

“You, miss-claims-to-be-a-Jedi, need to be helping us dig people out. You say you have training with the Force? Great. Let’s see those powers put to good use, ok? Like lifting heavy rocks and the like, there are people here whose lives are in your hands.”
Leia frowned, gesturing back towards Sana’s ship. “Actually I was thinking we should go after Han and-”

“They wanted him alive. That means as important as rescuing that fool is, taking care of the people who actually are about to die is a higher priority.”

“But.” Leia knew she was letting her attachment to Luke, her need to make sure he was ok, take priority over the greater good, but still she pressed.

“Dig people out, then go save Han. Look at it this way, sooner you help with the rescue efforts here, the sooner you can go join the rescue effort out in space.”

“Wait, there is a rescue effort already-”

“Of course there is! What, did you think we’re all fully incapable of taking care of things when you are not here?” Sana’s admonishment reminded Leia of the lectures she had heard throughout her training, about trusting in the rest of the Order. How no one Jedi could carry everything on their shoulders, but when everyone did their own small part and allowed others to do theirs, together they could achieve amazing things. The similarity stunned her, yet Sana was not done laying into her. “Obviously that ain’t true, since you only just arrived in this kripping universe less than a week ago.” Sana scoffed, shaking her head. “Now go prove the tales you’ve been telling are true, and get some rocks off of people so they can stay alive.”

Still Leia need to know, “How long has it been since-”

Sana ignored her. “I promise, you do that and you can rub how real your abilities are into Han’s face for the rest of… well however long you’re here. Since again, there is already a squadron of fighters chasing after the assholes who took him, and they’ll get him home.”

Leia frowned at Sana. “For someone who keeps insisting you aren’t a part of this Rebellion, you sure are confident in their abilities.”

“You don’t need to be a true believer to see that they know what they’re doing,” Sana said as she lead Leia toward a massive pile of rubble with rescue workers frantically running around it.

“You don’t need to be a true believer to be part of an army.”

Sana laughed. “Never been much of a joiner. In my line of work it’s best to never get too involved.”

Leia wanted to ask why that was, but as they drew closer to the remains of the base, there was a shift in the Force. She could feel the people buried under the rubble. Their fear, their hopes, their pain, their despair.

Closing her eyes, and breathing in deep, Leia consciously let go of her thoughts about Han and his capture. The weight of her worries released into the Force her focus narrowed to lifting the rocks, the physical weight of them as she freed the people underneath. While removing the rocks was simple on its own, she had to make sure as she lifted the debris that she didn’t cause further harm to the injured. Once she had carefully balanced the sediment in the air above them, she held it steady so med teams could come and to retrieve the injured, moving them slowly and carefully out of the way, to makeshift sickbays where they could be given proper bacta treatments.

The work was delicate and precise and it consumed her attention. Here among the smoldering remains of the base, surrounded by the chaos of people mourning the dead and calling out for help for those still living, she had to keep her head clear and her emotions balanced. Any other concerns she might have had, had to be on hold until every person she could sense under the rubble was freed.
All around her were the noises of desperation, ships roaring to life, buildings falling, but she blocked it all out. She could think about the rest of the base, about Han, about the frantic crushed way Luke had gazed at the ruin of the Falcon, after everyone else was safe and no sooner.

The more she focused, the more the commotion fell away. Behind her closed eyes for just a moment she could almost imagine herself floating in a starfield, far from the chaos and the strife. There was no fear, there was no time, there was only the task before her and the warmth and support of the Living Force.

Chapter End Notes

Next Time: Leia continues to be distracted by Han's arms and his smirk and his face in general and as always is unable to tell the difference between annoyance and attraction. The Skywalker family (and Leia) continue to deal with Han and his people. Meanwhile Leia Skywalker appraises the damage.

I was so worried, back when I said at the end of chapter 40 that this fic is set between issues 36 and 37 of the comic series, that someone would point out that the Empire killed everyone at the Horox III base in issue 37. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to everyone who guessed that this attack might have been coming but didn't say anything. With this chapter I've also officially progressed the setting of this story from between issues 36 and 37 to between issues 37 and 38! Wooo!

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