Legacy

by myrlendi (thehistorygeek)

Summary

Three months after the Battle of Endor, Luke Skywalker goes in search of a rumoured Jedi temple in a secluded part of the Mid Rim. He finds within the temple nothing but a strange artifact, which unexpectedly brings him much closer to the Jedi of old than he ever thought he would be.

When Luke fails to return from his mission, Leia goes after him, retracing his steps to the ancient temple — and to the past, to the time of the Clone Wars and the waning years of the Old Republic. Under suspicion by the Jedi Order, the twins struggle to find a way back to their own time while trying to keep their knowledge of the future from affecting the past.

This, however, turns out to not be as simple as it seems.

Notes

I know time travel AUs are a dime a dozen in this fandom, but I’ve had the idea for this fic for a while and I decided to give it a go. my original idea was to try and and write a time travel fic that could theoretically fit into star wars canon, i.e. without drastically altering any major part of the canon storyline. I've got the outline for this fic pretty much done, and I think it accomplishes that pretty well, but we'll see how it turns out when I actually get it all written.
anyways, I hope you enjoy this first chapter!
Raban

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Raban was a quiet planet.

Luke Skywalker could tell that much just from the cockpit of his ship, slowly orbiting the golden planet beneath him. It was not a place he had ever heard of until recently—it had no well-known exports, no famous cities, no successful inhabitants. It had never even had its own Senator in any form of galactic government, Republic or Imperial; instead, its few interests had always been cared for by a sector representative. His X-wing’s cursory scans of the planet picked up large amounts of flora and fauna, but only a few small, scattered settlements. Raban was, in short, one of the most unremarkable planets Luke had ever heard of.

Which made his reasons for being there all the more curious.

He eased his ship down towards the planet, gently slipping from orbit and into the atmosphere. He set his course for one of the larger settlements, near the coast of the northern continent. Most of Raban was grassland, stretching across two landmasses bisected by a strip of blue ocean that wound its way around the planet’s middle. The fields of yellowed grass rolled like waves beneath him as he shot towards the distant town, and he could see the ocean far off to his right, pale and calm.

The settlement didn’t appear on the horizon until he had almost arrived. Even from a distance he could tell that it was small, with only a handful of buildings that were taller than one storey. He could see a number of speeders parked along the outskirts, and two small ships that didn’t look as if they were even capable of leaving the atmosphere. He set down near them, cutting the engines and pulling off his helmet. A few people milled about outside, and they cast him curious glances, obviously unaccustomed to visits from strangers.

R2-D2, positioned in the droid socket behind the cockpit, let out a string of concerned beeps, swivelling his domed head as he took in their surroundings.

“Someone around here has to know something, Artoo,” Luke assured him. “The Empire seemed convinced that something was out here, and so did that old man on Chalacta. I want to find out what it is.”

R2 didn’t seem entirely convinced, but he didn’t say anything else.

Luke retracted the canopy and climbed out of the cockpit, hopping down onto the ground. The buildings that made up the town were small and rough, most of them made out of dark stone. A very generous estimate would place the population at around two hundred, though Luke guessed it was actually somewhat less. From what he had seen, most of the inhabitants appeared to be human, wearing simple, roughspun clothes that reminded him of his youth on Tatooine. That corroborated what little information he was able to find about Raban — with no native sentient species of its own, the planet’s population was made up almost entirely of immigrated humans, most of whom made their living by ranching on the expansive plains.

“Wait here, alright?” Luke said to R2, and the astromech beeped his agreement.

Luke approached the town cautiously. His lightsaber was tucked into his flight suit, hidden from
view but still easily accessible. He knew how people thought on these isolated backwater planets—he had grown up on one, raised by an aunt and uncle who had always been suspicious of strangers. Though Raban seemed to not be as coarse or crime-ridden as Tatooine, it was still best to make it clear that he wasn’t a threat, while also protecting himself from anyone who might see him as one.

His plan was to seek out a cantina or some other place where people gathered, and ask around until he found a local willing to speak with him. They would likely be wary of him, and some probably wouldn’t even know what he was talking about, but Luke knew that there was something on Raban—something to do with the Jedi. He could sense its presence, humming through the Force, calling out to him. It wanted to be found, and so he would find it.

People stopped and stared at him as he passed, whispering to each other as they watched him go. Luke could see caution in their eyes, but no hostility; most seemed to be more curious than suspicious, wondering who this stranger was and why he had come to their village. As far as he could see, there were no signs to differentiate the shops and businesses from homes; in a place this small, everyone knew everyone else, and it was assumed that you would know which building was which.

A pair of boys stood nearby, whispering to each other and watching Luke. They were probably in their late teens, if not younger, and they seemed more curious than anything, so Luke decided to try his chances and wandered over towards them, a warm smile on his face. Their eyes widened as they realized that he was walking towards them, but they stayed where they were, either too scared or too curious to move.

“Hello,” Luke greeted. “I’m looking for a cantina, or some other place where I can talk to some locals who might be willing to answer a couple questions. Do you think you could point me in the right direction?”

The two boys were silent for a moment.

“Are you a pilot?” the taller one blurted out, and his friend smacked him on the arm, rolling his eyes as if to say, “Of course he’s a pilot!”

Luke just continued to smile. “Yes, I am.”

“And you’re with the Rebellion?” The boy’s eyes glanced to the Alliance starbird stamped on the left breast of Luke’s vest.

Luke nodded, and both boys’ mouths fell open a bit in awe. From what Luke could tell, the Empire’s curiosity in Raban had been relatively recent, and they had never actually made it out to the planet before their forces were scattered at Endor. With nothing besides herds of grazing animals to offer the Empire, Raban had lived out the decades after the Clone Wars in relative peace, leaving its people isolated from the horrors of the Civil War. These boys had no doubt heard stories of the war, but Luke would be surprised if they’d ever even seen a stormtrooper before. He hadn’t at their age, before a pair of crashed droids had brought Imperial interest to Tatooine.

“Have you been in many battles?” the tall boy’s friend asked, unable to contain his curiosity anymore.

Luke nearly laughed; he remembered asking that same question nearly five years ago, in his uncle’s dusty garage. It felt like it had been so much longer than that. “I’ve been in a few, yes,” he said.

“What are doing out here?” the tall boy asked. “Are you on a mission?”
“I’ve heard some stories about your planet,” Luke explained. “I’ve come to see if they were true.”

The gleeful curiosity in the boys’ eyes vanished, and their faces both took on serious expressions. They glanced at each other, shifting nervously. “The one you want to talk to is Mayzee Lanith,” the short one said. He lifted a hand, pointing to a nearby street. “She runs the mechanics shop down that way. She’ll tell you what you need to know.”

And then the boys were gone, hurrying off in the opposite direction. Luke stared after them, brows furrowed in confusion. Whatever he had said had spooked them—which just confirmed what he already knew. There was something strange on Raban.

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The shop wasn’t difficult to find. Though there was no sign, the piles of scrap and junk metal flowing out of the wide door were sign enough. A narrow walkway through the trash had been cleared, and Luke followed it inside. The interior of the shop was dim, and the air was filled with the smell of grease and oil. More scrap was strewn along counters and worktops, piled in the corners and balanced precariously on rickety shelves. Larger pieces of machinery were scattered throughout, most with their guts exposed and half taken apart. It was impossible to tell which was a work-in-progress and which was being used for parts.

An old woman sat on a work bench at the back of the shop, magnifying goggles riding low on her nose. Her skin was wrinkled and tanned, and her long white hair was pulled back from her face in a messy braid. She had to be at least seventy, if not older, but her hands were steady as they picked through the miniscule parts of a servomotor. She didn’t look up as Luke approached, though unless old age had made her hard of hearing, there was no way she wouldn’t have heard his footsteps.


“I am,” the woman said and she glanced up at him, only briefly, before turning her eyes back to her work. “And you’re Luke Skywalker.”


“You’re famous, boy,” Mayzee Lanith said, motioning with one of her tools to the old holoprojector flickering in a corner of the room. It was broadcasting the HoloNet News—the recently-established channel set up by the fledgling New Republic to replace the Empire’s old propaganda machine. “Your face is all over the HoloNet.”

“Ah. Right.” Luke had been famous before the Battle of Endor, but the fact that he was no longer an enemy of the state brought with it an entirely new form of fame. Namely, his face being plastered across every holoprojector in the galaxy as the poster boy of the New Republic and a better, brighter future. It was a fame he hadn’t quite grown accustomed to yet.

“So, to what do I owe this great honour?” Mayzee asked.

“I have been told that you can help me,” Luke explained. “I’m looking for something that I believe is somewhere on Raban. I recently came across reports from an old Imperial outpost that mentioned rumours of a Jedi temple in the Mid Rim. A man I spoke to on Chalacta told me of folk tales from Raban, about a strange temple on the northern coast.” He paused, trying to gauge Mayzee’s response to his words. Her expression remained neutral, her gaze focused on the servomotor in her hands. She felt steady even through the Force, entirely unsurprised by what she was hearing. “Do you know what I’m talking about?” he asked.
Mayzee nodded her head. “Oh, yes, I certainly do. There have been stories about that temple for as long as there have been humans on Raban. It was here before we were, and I’ve no doubt it’ll be here after.”

Excitement soared in Luke’s heart. “Was it built by the Jedi?” he asked. Though he had been kept busy by the continuation of the war, he had already begun collecting whatever information he could find on the Jedi religion, preparing for the day when peace in the galaxy was finally achieved and he could begin rebuilding the Order. Unfortunately, the Empire had not left much for him to find. If this temple truly turned out to be Jedi in origin, it would be one of the strongest remnants of the old Order he had ever discovered.

Mayzee made a noise low in her throat. “Now that, I don’t know. You’re the Jedi here, not me. But I do know that there’s something strange about that place. It doesn’t like visitors.”

“What do you mean?”

“People go in and then they wake up back outside, with no memory of what happened in the temple. Sometimes only seconds will have passed since they went in, but other times it will have been hours, days, or even weeks since they entered. I’ve heard tales of people gone for months, only to return exactly as they left, with no memory of the time that passed.”

“And people still go in the temple?”

Mayzee looked at him, her thin brows raised. “Is that not what you’re planning to do?”

Luke ceded that she had a point. “Have you ever been to the temple?” he asked.

Her wrinkled lips turned down in a frown, and she nodded. “Once, when I was younger and more reckless than you are now.”

“How long were you gone?”

There was a long pause, where Mayzee’s focus seemed to shift even more to the servomotor. Her mouth drew into a thin line, and Luke could see her bony fingers shaking slightly. “Longer than most,” she answered finally.

“Will you bring me to it?” Luke asked. He had no idea if the Force was capable of such things—of messing with time and altering people’s memories—but there was definitely something going on at the temple on Raban, and he wanted to know what.

Mayzee shook her head. “No, I’ll not be going back to that place,” she said. “Not ever. If I were you, boy, I’d turn right back around, get back in my fancy ship, and fly far away.”

His questions had shaken her. She may not remember her time in the temple, but from what she’d said, it sounded as if she had been in there for months; it couldn’t have been easy to lose so much of her life.

“I want to help,” he said. “I’m a Jedi. If this is somehow the work of the Force, I might be able to stop it.”

Mayzee finally stopped her tinkering, setting down her tools and placing her shaking hands flat on the countertop. “I’ll not go with you,” she said, looking straight at him for the first time since he had entered her shop. “I’ll tell you the way, but I’ll not go with you.”

Mayzee’s directions were remarkably simple — fly south from the village until he hit the coast, and then continue west until he reached the temple. It was apparently built right on the edge of a cliff overlooking the ocean, and impossible to miss. Luke left the old mechanic with many thanks, and she gave him a rather sombre goodbye, which he supposed was meant to serve as one final warning.

“Come see me when you return,” she told him, “if I’m not dead by the time the temple sees fit to spit you back out.”

He made his way quickly back to where he had left his X-wing. R2 was still there, snuggled in the droid socket. He let out a loud beep as Luke approached, annoyed at having been left alone for more than half an hour.

“I told you I would find what I needed,” Luke said, jogging through the tall grass towards his ship. “I know where the temple is.”

R2 whistled a question, retracting the canopy as Luke began to climb the side of the X-wing.

“It’s to the southwest,” Luke answered, sliding into the cockpit and grabbing his helmet. “It won’t take us long to reach it.”

And it didn’t. They got to the coast after only ten minutes of flying, and then it was just a short cruise to the west before the shape of a tall stone building materialized on the horizon. It was perhaps three storeys high, and made of the same dark stone as the buildings in the village. From what Luke could see, its architecture was simple and roughhewn, with very little regard for any sort of design. As he grew closer, he could see that it actually continued down along the cliff face, built into the hard rock.

He landed his ship not far from the temple entrance. There was no door, just an open archway that led into the darkness. He could see only a handful of small windows, high up on the temple walls. Retracting the canopy, he climbed out of the cockpit and jumped down. Here, the golden grass reached past his knees, undisturbed by animals and the comings and goings of humans. A cool ocean wind whipped past, bringing with it a fine mist and the smell of salt.

Luke took off his flight suit, retrieving his lightsaber from one of its pockets before tossing it up into the cockpit. He had no idea what could be waiting for him inside the temple, and he didn’t want to be encumbered by a baggy, bright orange flight suit. As he clipped his lightsaber onto his belt, R2 lowered himself from the droid socket, letting out a nervous tone.

“Don’t worry, Artoo,” Luke told him, giving the astromech a gentle pat as he rolled up beside Luke. “We’ve faced worse than this before.”

But even he felt uneasy. The Force rippled and pulsed around the temple, its presence strong and forceful. It did not feel evil, and Luke could sense no signs of the dark side, but the light did not flow easily here, either. If anything, the Force felt... unsure. Wary. Caught somewhere between the light and the dark. The temple did not belong to the Sith, but it did not belong to the Jedi, either. It belonged to the Force, and to itself.

Luke started towards it, wading through the tall grass. R2 whimpered, but followed obediently, his domed head rotating anxiously. The Force seemed to grow louder and louder the closer Luke grew to the temple, but he did not know what it was trying to tell him—whether it was trying to warn him away or beckoning him forward. He hesitated at the doorway for only a moment, before
stepping through.

The Force quieted as soon as he passed the threshold, diminishing from a shout to a soft murmur. Strangely, despite the stone walls and the damp ocean wind, the interior was warm. The section that rested aboveground was simply one big entrance hall, with a towering ceiling that stretched high up. Several small windows were carved into the stone, near the top of the walls, and they let in thin shafts of light, illuminating the room with warm sunshine.

There wasn’t much to illuminate. The walls were bare—no murals, no inscriptions, no tapestries. No statues were carved into the stone, and no pieces of furniture lingered. If anyone had ever lived here, it seemed as if they had cleared out long ago, before even the Empire had risen.

There was only one doorway in the room, at the opposite end of the hall from the entrance. Luke crossed the floor slowly, his footsteps echoing loudly around the vast, empty chamber. He was unsurprised to find that the doorway led to a staircase winding down into the cliff face, where the rest of the temple waited.

He looked to R2. “You should stay here,” Luke advised him. He had no idea how far down the stairwell went, and R2’s treads wouldn’t make it easy for him to maneuver. The astromech seemed more than happy to comply. “Wait outside. If I’m not back by sunset, get on the X-wing’s comms and contact Leia.”

R2 beeped an affirmative, and Luke stepped onto the first stair. Thin slits in the wall let in streams of light, but after only a few steps, the stairs curved to the left, and the doorway and R2 disappeared from sight. The stairs continued straight down for a while, until they reached a landing. The landing was bare, with no doors and only a few small windows near the top of the wall.

He descended further, down to a second landing. This one had a door, which opened into a windowless hallway. With no source of light, the hallway was dark, and Luke could only see a few feet in, to where the light from the landing ended. He had a small glowrod with him, and he illuminated it, shining the beam of light through the door into the hallway. It stretched deep into the side of the cliff, lined with numerous dark doorways. Just as in the entrance hall, there were no adornments on the walls, and no signs that anyone else had ever even been there.

Though the stairwell continued down behind him, Luke stepped into the hallway. He kept his free hand near his lightsaber, shining his glowrod into the doors as he passed. They were all empty, nothing more than four plain stone walls and a ceiling. The silence was eerie—all he could hear was his breathing and the sound of his footsteps. The temple was, as far as he could tell, entirely empty. Mayzee had told him that it didn’t like visitors, but it had yet to do anything to him besides instill a small sense of unease.

One of the doors led to another staircase, slightly narrower than the other. It went in only one direction, down, and so Luke began to descend. It was short, twisting into a sort of U shape before ending in another hallway. It was nearly identical to the one above, with plain stone walls and small empty rooms. Luke could see no stairwell at the end of the hallway, as there had been with the other, but after a quick investigation he discovered that one of the doors led to another corridor, with a set of stairs at the end.

He continued this way for a short while, searching through empty hallways and climbing down, deeper into the temple. All was silent at first, but as he climbed lower, he began to hear things—voices, whispering past his ear. They were unfamiliar and incomprehensible, speaking words he didn’t understand. As the voices grew, so did the Force; it had weakened when he had stepped through the temple door, but it gained strength now, pushing against him. There was something
deeper in the temple—he could feel it, reaching out for him.

He pushed on, and the whispers grew harsher. He had thought at first that he was imagining things, but it quickly became obvious that they were real. He had no doubts that they were coming from whatever thing waited for him at the bottom. The temple was a maze of stairwells and corridors; there was no obvious pattern to it all. It was as if it was designed to confuse.

Luke tried to listen to what the whispering voices were saying, but there were so many of them that they melded together. At one point he thought he heard his name, and after that, the voices began to grow more familiar. He still could not understand the words, but for a moment he would think he had heard Leia’s voice, or Obi-Wan’s, or Han’s, even his father’s, but the second he tried to focus on the voice, to single it out from all the others, it vanished, melting back into the crowd.

They only grew louder the deeper he went, which he supposed meant he must be getting closer. He tried to reach through the Force, to sense whatever this thing that was calling out to him was, but it was like trying to swim through sand. The Force was thick and murky, a storm through which he couldn’t see. There was no way for him to know if this thing was good or evil—a product of the light side, or of the dark. He would just have to find out.

Eventually, stepping into his sixth or seventh hallway, he noticed light up ahead—sunlight, shining through an open doorway. He hurried towards it, finding yet another set of stairs. This one was short, and went straight down. The hallway at the bottom was larger than any of the others, and windows lined its northern wall, looking out to the sea. This floor rested nearly at the water line, and as Luke descended towards the hallway, he could see waves crashing against the side of the temple, always coming just shy of dumping water in through the open windows.

There was only one doorway in this hallway, located at the very end. It was larger than even the temple entrance, and unlike all the others, it actually had a door. Not a mechanical door, but an ancient one, with a handle that had to be turned and pushed.

The whispers grew to an almost deafening roar as he stepped off the stairs and into the hallway. He could feel tendrils of the Force reaching out to him from behind the door. Whatever was in that room, he knew it didn’t want to hurt him, but its intentions were still unclear. Nothing that could cause so much terror for the people of Raban could be wholly good.

Still, Luke approached the door without hesitation. It was made of wood, somehow still sturdy after what must have been eons. He reached out to the handle, and the door opened at his touch, swinging inward.

Inside was a metal disc.

It was the only thing in the room, resting in the middle of the stone floor. It was flat and ovular, small enough to fit in the palm of his hand, and it looked to be about two inches thick, with smooth, rounded edges. There were no markings of any kind on it, and no way for Luke to know its purpose. As far as he could see, it was nothing but a hunk of metal. But the Force whipped around it as if unsettled, and Luke could feel its presence, powerful and arcane.

He stepped into the room, as plain and simple as all the others, and the disc began to rise, lifting itself up into the air. Markings and glyphs began to appear on its surface, glowing pale blue, and the light pulsed as if it was alive. The whispering voices continued, as if beckoning Luke towards it. Now he was certain that he could recognize some of the voices, though many remained unidentified, and snippets of what they were saying became audible. Some phrases were unfamiliar to him, but others he had already heard, months or years ago.
I was once a Jedi Knight, the same as your father.

I know. Somehow, I’ve always known.

The Force will be with you, always.

From my point of view, the Jedi are evil!

Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter.

For over a thousand generations the Jedi Knights were the guardians of peace and justice in the Old Republic.

Your son is gone. He was weak and foolish, like his father, so I destroyed him.

The glowing marks grew brighter, and Luke stepped closer, lifting his hand and stretching it out towards the disc. The whispers reached a crescendo, and the disc urged him on—to take that final step, to stretch his arm that bit closer.

And he did. The tips of his fingers pressed gently against the cool metal of the disc, and the whispers immediately quieted. For a second, there was complete silence. Not even the waves crashing outside could be heard.

Then there was a flash of brilliant white light. Something slammed into Luke’s chest, knocking the wind out of him and sending him careening backwards. He struck the ground hard, and the white gave way to darkness.

Chapter End Notes

if you'd like to say hi or discuss this fic or any of my other writing, you can find me on tumblr at leiaskywalkvr
Chapter Summary

Leia goes off in search of her missing brother.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was early morning on Chandrila, but Leia Organa already had a to-do list as long as her arm.

It had been three months since the Emperor’s death over Endor, but the Galactic Empire lived on. Ending a war was no easy task, and it was made all the more difficult when you were trying to create a brand new state at the same time. This was what many of the Senators in the recently-created Senate of the New Republic had spent the past weeks discovering, and Leia was no exception.

She hustled through her apartment, a stack of datapads balanced in her arms. She had just finished a correspondence with Senator Seena Dronos of Commenor regarding the liberation of Tirahnn, which had taken place just a week prior. More and more planets across the galaxy were being liberated, but for every planet freed, there were two more still struggling under Imperial control. The New Republic’s forces were spread too thin to aid them all, far too occupied by the Imperial remnants still fighting across the galaxy.

After Endor, most people had expected the hostilities to end and the war to be over. They had thought that, with both the Emperor and his enforcer Darth Vader dead, what remained of the Empire would surrender without a fight. But three months on, the war continued to rage, with no end in sight.

Leia settled her datapads on the dining room table and took a swig of caf. The call from Senator Dronos had interrupted her before she had been able to finish her morning drink, and she grimaced as the lukewarm liquid filled her mouth. It hadn’t been very good caf to begin with—she’d had to make it herself, and she’d never been very good at cooking or brewing. Unfortunately, the procurement of a new cooking droid rested rather low on her to-do list.

Putting the mug down, she pushed it away, not planning on picking it back up again. The tall windows lining the dining room showcased the Hanna City scenery, bathed in the warm light of morning; the sun was just beginning to rise above the distant mountains, dispersing the nighttime mist that had settled over Chandrila’s capital city. The Core World planet had been selected as the capital of the New Republic and seat of the Senate shortly after the Battle of Endor, and so it was where Leia and Han had come to make their home.

Their apartment was located only steps away from Eleutherian Plaza, where an old Chandrilan government building was in the process of being renovated into the home of the Galactic Senate. Until it was complete, Senate meetings were taking place in the nearby Old Gather-House. Though it had been over a month since Han and Leia had moved in, there had only been a handful of nights where both of them had slept there together; most of the time, at least one, if not both, of them was away on one mission or another for the New Republic. Leia had hardly seen her husband for more than a week at a time since they were married on Endor three months ago.
A door down the hallway swished open, followed by the sound of bare feet tapping softly along the hallway. Leia turned to see Han entering the kitchen, wearing nothing but his briefs with his hair mussed and eyes still squinty from sleep.

“Good morning,” she greeted with a smile.

He grumbled something that sounded vaguely like “Mornin’” and began shuffling about the kitchen, preparing himself a cup of caf.

“Did I hear you talking to someone earlier?” he asked, filling the brewer with several spoonfuls of pre-ground beans.

Leia nodded. “Seena Dronos. She called to update me on the situation on Tirahnn.”

“Good news?”

“Fortunately, yes. They’ve resolved the supply lines issue, so they’re able to get the necessary supplies out to the refugees. Apparently, they’ve already started some of the rebuilding efforts. Most of the New Republic troops were pulled out yesterday.”

“And what about the Imps that were captured?”

“They’ve all been transferred to holding facilities to await trial,” Leia said. “Unfortunately, most of them were just stormtroopers, so they’ll likely be released once a peace is brokered.”

Han’s brows raised. The brewer hummed on the counter behind him as it ran hot water through the grinds. “You really think the Empire’s gonna sign a peace treaty?”

“Eventually,” Leia said. “They’re losing more and more ground every day. I don’t think it will be tomorrow, or next week, but they’re losing this war. They can’t hold out like this forever. Either they’ll agree to a peace treaty, or they’ll surrender entirely.”

“Yeah, well, they could hurry up on that bit,” Han said, pouring his freshly-brewed caf into a mug.

“I’ll be sure to pass the message on to Admiral Rax.”

Han snorted, shaking his head, and took a sip of his piping hot caf. “Would you like a cup?” he asked her, but she shook her head.

“I don’t have the time,” she said. “The Senate session begins in less than two hours, and I told Tai-Lin Garr I’d meet with him beforehand. She gathered her datapads and crossed over to the kitchen island, leaning across to place a kiss on Han’s lips. “I probably won’t be back before you leave for Dorin, so I’ll see you next week.”

Han nodded. “If everything goes smoothly, it’ll be sooner than that,” he said. “But I doubt everything will go smoothly.”

“Knowing your luck, flyboy, it won’t,” Leia said with a grin. “Stay safe, alright?”

“I always do.”

She started towards the door, and had made it halfway across the living room when a sudden icy feeling gripped her heart like a vice. She stopped, dead in her tracks, as an echo rippled through the Force towards her.

Her knees went weak, and she had to throw out a hand, bracing herself against the wall to keep from falling to the ground.

He was gone. Her brother’s presence in the Force was gone, vanishing in an instant like a snuffed-out candeloid. She could usually sense him anywhere in the galaxy, and she had always been able to, even when she hadn’t known to look for him.

But he was no longer there to look for.

It felt like her body was going numb. She could hardly see, and all she could focus on was the glaring hole in her mind where her brother had once been. He had taught her, not long ago, the basics of reaching out through the Force, of sensing for people and reading their emotions. She had never done it before outside of practice, but she did it now, stretching her feelings as far as they could go, reaching for Luke.

She found nothing.

A choked gasp worked its way up her throat, and tears stung her eyes. There was only one reason she could think of that would blind her to Luke in such a way.

Han’s hands settled on her shoulders, turning her to look at him. She hadn’t even heard him walking towards her. His expression was concerned, his eyebrows drawn together as he studied her face. “Leia,” he said, taking the datapads from her loose grasp and placing them on the nearby couch. “Leia, sweetheart, what’s wrong?”

She opened her mouth, but the words took a moment to make it out.


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It had been two weeks since Leia had last seen her brother, and several days since they had last spoken. He had recently gone off on some mission, and all she knew was that he was searching for a rumoured Jedi temple somewhere in the Mid Rim. It had been nearly a week since he had left, jetting off in his X-wing with R2; he had told her in their last conversation that he had a lead on the temple’s location, but she hadn’t heard anything since.

It only took Leia a few minutes to recover from the shock of losing her connection to Luke. The only explanation for the severance was that Luke was dead, but she refused to believe that—whether it was the Force or gut instinct or pure denial, she didn’t know. But she wouldn’t believe her brother was dead until she saw his cold body for herself.

Han tried to get her to sit down, to relax for a minute and actually explain to him what was going on, but she refused. Luke might not be dead, but he was more than likely in some sort of danger. She needed to find him, as soon as possible.

It was action that had kept her sane after the destruction of Alderaan and the loss of her parents; she had thrown herself into the Rebellion, dedicating every ounce of her being first into the destruction of the Death Star and then into the Rebel Alliance’s continued survival. It was action that would keep her sane now.

She hurried down the hallway towards her office, a confused Han trailing after her. Her desk had a comms unit that would be capable of contacting R2, no matter where he was in the galaxy—so long as the little droid hadn’t gotten sucked into trouble alongside Luke.
“Leia, just hold on a minute,” Han said, following her into her office. It was still very spartan, furnished only with a desk, a chair, and some empty shelves. Like acquiring a cooking droid, she had yet to make any time for decorating her home office. “What’s happened to Luke?”

“I don’t know,” Leia said, settling into the chair and pulling up the desk’s comms interface. She would need to contact C-3PO first; he had gone ahead of her to her Senate office, and she needed to let him know that she wouldn’t be making her meeting with Tai-Lin Garr or the Senate session. “It’s like he’s just… gone.”

“What do you mean ‘just gone’?”

“Like he’s dead, Han,” Leia snapped. “I can’t… I can’t sense him anymore. I don’t know where he is or what he’s feeling or even if he’s alright. He’s just gone.”

Anything related to the Force would usually have Han saying some snarky quip about magic and old wizards, but he seemed to realize that just then wasn’t the best time for such a comment.

“Do you think he’s really dead?” he asked, his voice quiet.

Leia shook her head. “No. I don’t think so. I feel like I would know for certain if he was truly dead, and I don’t, so maybe…” She trailed off with a sigh, running a hand along her brow. “Maybe I’m just being too hopeful.”

Han reached over, wrapping his hands around one of hers. Her fingers felt cold, but his palms were warm against them. “We’ll find out what’s happened to him,” he said. “We’ll find him.” Leia could hear his unspoken words — whether he’s dead or alive.

She let the weight of her husband’s hands comfort her for a moment longer before pulling her arm away. To find Luke, they needed to find R2.

3PO was quick to answer, his wide-eyed metal face materializing as a blue hologram on the surface of Leia’s desk.

“Ah, Princess Leia,” he greeted. “I was beginning to wonder where you were. Is everything al—”

“No, Threepio, something’s come up,” Leia said, interrupting the droid. “I need you to contact Senator Garr and let him know that I need to reschedule our meeting. Then you need to let the vice chair know that I will not be attending today’s session.”

“Oh, dear. Is it really that urgent?”

“Unfortunately. I’ll explain once I know more.”

“Of course, Princess,” 3PO said with a short bow of his head. “I will contact Senator Garr and Vice Chair Vand immediately. Let me know if there is more I can do.”

“Thanks, Threepio,” Leia said, and ended the communication. The hologram of C-3PO disappeared with a flicker.

She tried contacting Luke’s X-wing first. It took a few moments, but a connection was eventually made, meaning that, wherever the X-wing was, it was still functional. But no hologram of either R2 or Luke appeared on the desk. She glanced up at Han, and their nervous eyes met for a brief moment.

“Hello?” she said, looking back to the empty holoprojector. With a connection open, anyone near
the X-wing would be able to hear her; with any luck, that would include R2. “Luke, Artoo, are you there? Come in. Artoo, come in.”

Seconds passed in silence, and Leia could feel her hope deflating. With the X-wing still online, she would be able to track it and find its location, but it would take time and technology she didn’t readily have access to. She began forming a plan in her mind—she could go to the New Republic military, and ask them for help. The Alliance and Republic navies were, at the moment, practically one in the same, and Luke was still technically a commander, even if more of his current focus rested on the Jedi. He hadn’t been on a mission for the military, but Leia was sure they wouldn’t hesitate to help, particularly when three war heroes were involved.

But then she heard a quiet beeping, and a hologram of R2-D2 rolled onto her desk. Leia practically sagged with relief at the sight of him.


A translation of R2’s binary beeps and trills appeared on a small screen near the hologram projector. <Luke is in the temple.>

“The temple? You found it? Where?”

R2 beeped an affirmative. <It is located on the planet Raban in the Kastolar sector of the Mid Rim.>

Leia had never heard of Raban, and the information she knew about Kastolar was limited. It was close to Hutt Space, and most of the planets within it were little more than agricultural backwaters. She vaguely recalled meeting the sector representative for Kastolar as a teenager in the Apprentice Legislature, a Sneevel whose name escaped her recollection now.


<Yes. There were stairs, so he foolishly told me to stay up here.>

“Artoo, can you get into contact with him?” Han asked, flattening his palms against the desktop. “We think something might have happened to him.”

R2 let out a worried tone, and set about trying to hail Luke’s personal comms unit. Several moments passed in which nothing happened, and then the astromech let out a series of confused beeps and trills. <I cannot reach him. His comms unit is out of range. I do not understand.>

Leia’s brows furrowed. For Luke’s comms to be out of range, he would have had to leave the planet entirely.

“It could just be busted or something,” Han pointed out.

A small radar dish appeared on the top of R2’s head, and it swiveled slowly for several seconds before retracting. <I sense no signs of life anywhere within the temple or nearby.>

Leia’s eyes slipped closed and she bowed her head. If there were no life signs in the temple, then Luke was either dead or, somehow, he was no longer there. She knew which outcome was more likely: no life signs meant there was nothing alive within the temple, meaning no one could have killed him, but plenty of inorganic things could have done away with him, from droids to traps to a simple accident.

But she still couldn’t believe he was dead.
She lifted her head. “Artoo, stay where you are and transmit your coordinates to me. If anything happens, contact the Falcon. Han and I are coming to you. We’ll be there as soon as possible.”

< You got it. >

With a nod, Leia ended the communication, and the holographic R2 winked out of existence. She looked up at Han.

“You don’t mind delaying your mission to Dorin?” she asked.

“Oh, I’m sure the New Republic military and your Senate will mind a bit,” Han said, but he shrugged, a reassuring smile on his face. “But I don’t.”

△▽△

The Millennium Falcon came out of hyperspace above Raban some hours later. The trip had been long but straightforward enough, and no messages had come through from R2, which was both good and bad. Good, because it meant the situation had not gotten any worse, and bad, because it meant there were no updates on Luke or his whereabouts.

Leia had spent most of the journey either reading up on what little information on Raban she could find, or staring through the cockpit viewport, watching the fuzzy blue tunnel of hyperspace twist around them. She felt… strange. Not empty, not incomplete, just… not herself. Like manka stew without sikoroot; still delicious, but just not quite right. She could feel the hole in her mind where Luke’s presence used to rest more keenly than if she had lost her hand. She had realized, as she had stared at the swirl of stars outside, that his was a presence she had always been able to feel, even before she had even known he existed, when they were children on planets in opposite corners of the galaxy. In all of her years of existence, she had never truly been without her twin brother.

That made the thought of him being truly gone even more frightening.

She watched the golden planet in front of them grow closer as they approached. Chewbacca, usually one to accompany his best friend Han on such expeditions, had been sent ahead to Dorin alone in an attempt to placate the aggravated New Republic; while Han had done his best to explain the situation and the military brass had expressed concern for Luke, they were, at the moment, slightly more concerned with the supposed Imperial presence on Dorin. Leia supposed they would just have to make do for the moment.

The coordinates R2 had sent her placed the temple on Raban’s northern continent, near the coast. As they approached the planet’s surface, entering the atmosphere above a wide expanse of grassland, Leia confirmed what she had read during the journey—there was not much of anything at all on Raban. A few scattered settlements, a couple thousand residents, and miles and miles of uninterrupted prairie. It made her wonder why, of all places, the Jedi had decided to build a temple here.

With the flat terrain, the building was not difficult to spot. They approached it from the north, flying low to the treeless ground. Its design was simple, and it stretched only a few storeys into the early morning sky, but even from a distance Leia could tell that it was ancient. Luke’s X-wing was docked nearby, and Han set the Falcon down beside it.

R2 was waiting for them at the bottom of the gangplank when they emerged from the ship. He beeped a greeting, and then reported that nothing had changed since his call with Leia several hours earlier. There had been no signs of Luke, or anyone else.
“How long ago did he go in?” Han asked, surveying the tall stone edifice in front of them with a distrustful eye. Leia didn’t much blame him; just the sight of the temple left her with an uneasy feeling.

She could hear R2’s worry in his mechanical tones as he answered. He didn’t know the exact time, but they had arrived at the temple in the late afternoon, local time; it was dawn now, the sun casting a brilliant orange reflection on the calm ocean beyond the temple. Luke had been gone for approximately twelve hours.

Leia checked that her blaster was attached to the holster on her thigh. There was no knowing what could be waiting for them in that temple, and she wanted to be prepared.

“Artoo, you stay here,” she ordered. “Han and I are going to go into the temple and see if we can find Luke, or at least some clues as to what happened to him. If we aren’t back by nightfall, comm Threepio and tell him what’s happened. He’ll contact the New Republic and let them know we’re missing.”

R2 trilled his understanding. He followed them as far as the temple door, and watched them enter with a nervous whimper.

Inside, the temple was dim. Not much light made it in through the small, scattered windows carved near the tops of the walls, though Leia suspected that would change once the sun was fully risen. She felt the same unease inside the temple that she had felt outside; it was like there was something pressing against her mind, some sort of presence, but it was wholly unfamiliar. She didn’t know if it was harmful or benevolent, but though she was nervous, she wasn’t scared. It didn’t feel as if there was anything in there that wanted to hurt her.

Han produced a glowrod from his pocket and shone it around the dark room. It was entirely empty. The bare stone walls stretched up and up until they met at a point at the very top of the structure. It seemed to be a sort of entrance hall, but it was entirely void of any adornments or signifiers of the temple’s use—whether it had been built by the Jedi or some ancient people, its purpose was entirely a mystery.

The only other door in the hall was on the other side of the room. Leia and Han crossed towards it, and Han shone his light through the doorway to reveal a staircase, twisting down into the hard rock of the cliff.

“I guess there’s only one way to go,” he said, and stepped onto the stairs.

Leia followed him down. Orange sunlight seeped in through the narrow windows lining the stairwell, painting golden slits on the wall. The first landing they reached was bare, but the second had a doorway, leading into a long, dark corridor. They ignored it, and kept climbing down.

“This place gives me the creeps,” Han muttered, shining his glowrod down another empty hallway shooting off from the staircase. Leia wasn’t sure how she felt about the temple; nothing about it frightened her, but she certainly wasn’t at ease, slowly creeping down the empty stairwell. The building around them was entirely silent. She couldn’t even hear the sound of waves from the ocean outside.

They made it a few more levels before the stairs ended abruptly. The final landing opened into a hallway, and they turned into it. With no windows, the hallway was much darker than the entrance hall and the staircase, so Leia pulled out her own glowrod, adding a second source of light to cut through the darkness. Doorways lined the walls, but when they flashed their glowrods into them, they found nothing but small, empty rooms. Perhaps they had once been intended as living
quarters, but Leia could see no signs that anyone at all had ever lived there. If the temple had once been inhabited, its former occupiers had left behind no trace of their presence.

One of the doors lead to another descending staircase, much shorter than the first, and they followed it down into a second hallway, identical to the one up above. They inspected each room carefully, looking for anything that might tell them where Luke was. Leia discovered a third stairwell at the end of the corridor, and as she peered down it, trying to gauge how far it might go, she heard a voice whisper past her ear.

It was an unfamiliar voice, too quiet for her to understand what it was saying. She turned to look at Han, inspecting rooms near the other end of the hallway.

“Did you hear that?” she asked.

He shone his light towards her. “Hear what?”

She glanced quickly into the rooms around her and, finding nothing, shook her head. “Nothing,” she said. He wouldn’t believe her if she told him she was hearing voices. “There’s another staircase here. Let’s keep going.”

But as they descended the stairs, Leia heard it again; this time it was louder, and there were more of them, undeniably voices whispering in her ear. She still couldn’t understand what they were saying, but she could tell they were trying to tell her something. She just didn’t know what.

They went through another empty hallway full of empty rooms, and the voices became more persistent. Someone, or something, was trying to reach out to her, and Leia had the feeling that, whatever or whoever it was, they were somewhere within this temple. All she had to do was find them.

She continued downwards, climbing another short staircase. The voices were becoming more familiar; every few seconds, she thought she heard one that she recognized, but a moment later it had dissolved back into the crowd, undistinguishable. As she stepped into the new hallway, she thought, for just a split second, that she heard Han. She turned back to look at him, to see if he had actually spoken, but he wasn’t there.

“Han!” she called, and she hurried back up the staircase. He wasn’t in the hallway, or any of the rooms she quickly searched. “Han! Han!” She went back down to the lower corridor, thinking that maybe he had somehow passed by her while she had been too busy listening to the whispering voices. But he was still nowhere in sight. She didn’t know if she would sense it if anything happened to him, but she figured she must; he was her husband, after all. She would know if anything bad had happened.

The voices continued around her, undeterred. She was certain now that she could recognize some of them, though they were still unintelligible. They were urging her on—she could feel them pulling her deeper and deeper into the temple, like insistent hands pulling on her arms and legs. She needed to find Han, and she needed to find Luke, but she also needed to know what rested within this temple. It was all connected somehow. She could sense it—they were all strings tugging her along to the same destination.

So she went deeper. She kept her eyes open for any signs of Han or Luke as she passed through hallway after hallway, but she found nothing. Eventually, she reached a staircase where sunlight shone once again, and she put away her glowrod, tucking it back into her pocket. The voices were louder now, and she followed their urgings, descending what she knew was the final set of stairs.
Like all the others, it opened up into a hallway. But unlike the others, this one was lined with windows that looked out to sea, and there was only one door, at the very end.

Leia walked towards it and the voices swelled, as if excited. The door was wooden, built in the ancient style, but it swung open readily at the press of her fingers against the handle.

Inside, she found nothing but a small metal disc.

Though it looked entirely unremarkable, Leia knew that this was what had been calling out to her. This was where the voices were coming from. She stepped into the room, and its presence immediately enveloped her; not warm, but not cold, either. As she watched, the disc began to rise, and a glowing blue light traced out strange designs and symbols on its surface.

She took another step, moving closer to the disc, and the whispers clarified, as if before her ears had been blocked. Some, though not all, were easily recognizable, and they spoke to her, many saying things she had already heard, but others uttering words not yet spoken.

_The Force is strong in my family._

_My daughter is hereby invested as crown princess, heir to the throne of Alderaan._

_I know._

_Your father has become Darth Vader._

_I saw him. Leia, I saw our son._

_No one’s ever really gone._

_Hope is a light brighter than the deepest darkness—but only we can keep it lit._

Leia lifted a hand, stretching it out towards the disc. The markings glowed brighter, a blue the colour of hyperspace, and the voices continued to whirl around her. They pushed her forward, guiding her fingers those last few centimetres it took to press them against the disc.

For a moment, there was nothing.

Then Leia was blinded as a white light filled the room, and she was sent flying backwards to the ground.

Chapter End Notes

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Delusions of the Past

Chapter Summary

Luke finds himself face-to-face with a squad of old Clone Wars-era droids. Leia discovers signs of her brother's whereabouts.

Luke woke to the sound of battle. He opened his eyes, and found himself staring not at the stone ceiling of the temple, but rather at a dark canopy of branches weaving together overhead. It was nighttime, and he could see the bright pinpricks of stars shining through the leaves above. The ground beneath him was damp and hard, littered with rotting vegetation and small, sharp rocks. He could hear shouts and blasters in the distance, highlighted by the occasional boom of heavy artillery. His chest ached slightly where he had been struck, and his vision spun, disoriented.

Slowly, he sat up. The covered stars provided little light, but explosions and blasterfire flashed distantly among the trees. He wasn’t directly in the middle of the battle — no blasts rocketed past his ears, and no trees splintered in his vicinity — but he was close enough for it to be dangerous.

He didn’t think he was on Raban anymore; as far as he knew, the prairie planet wasn’t home to any forests, and it certainly wasn’t the sort of place a battle would occur. With the Civil War still raging across the galaxy, however, there were any number of planets he could be on. Battles were happening every day in every corner of the galaxy, and it seemed the artifact in the Rabani temple had dropped him right in the middle of one.

Staggering to his feet, Luke fished around in his pockets for his comlink. Pressing the transmit button, he held the device to his mouth. “Artoo,” he said. “Come in, Artoo. Are you there?”

Nothing came through, not even static. The comm wasn’t transmitting, not to Artoo, not to anything. Frowning, Luke held it close to his face, looking for any signs of damage in the dim lighting. The red light still shone, meaning the device was functional. Maybe the Empire, or even the New Republic, had blocked all transmissions on the planet; it was a common enough occurrence in war zones. In any case, he wasn’t going to be able to use his comlink to get into contact with R2.

He shoved it back into his pocket and looked to the distant flashes of battle. His best course of action would be to find the New Republic and figure out where exactly he was. He had never heard of the Force transporting people to different planets, but everything was far too stable and real for it be a vision. The sound of the fighting, the cool earth beneath his hands, the chilly nighttime wind — none of it had the cloudy, shifting presence of a Force vision. Which meant that, somehow or another, the strange artifact in the temple had sent him barreling across the galaxy in the blink of an eye.

There was the loud boom of an explosion, and Luke watched as a tree, trunk blazing, fell to the ground with a groaning creak. Beyond the flames, he could see soldiers running — helmeted, wearing the white armour of stormtroopers. His hand went to his belt, where his lightsaber hung—

But it wasn’t there.

He spun, eyes going to the ground. It must have fallen off when he landed, but he couldn’t see it. It
was too dark, and there were too many shrubs and leaves covering the ground. Flashing a glowrod around would only draw attention to himself, and with a group of stormtroopers so close, he didn’t want to risk it. He kicked around plants with his foot, hoping to catch a glint of metal reflecting the stars or the blasterfire.

“Freeze!”

The voice was mechanical, and Luke looked up to see a squad of droids standing only a metre away, all of them with blaster rifles pointed directly at him. They were spindly, with long snout-like faces, and though his knowledge of military history was somewhat lacking, Luke recognized them as B1 battle droids. At least, that’s what they looked like; B1s hadn’t been used since the Clone Wars.

“Hands in the air!” the lead droid demanded, taking a step towards Luke. He obeyed, slowly raising his arms above his head. “Don’t move, Republic scum!”

These droids were Imperial, then. That was rather unexpected; no battle droids had been used for over two decades, not since the Separatist Droid Army was shut down. It didn’t make sense for the Empire to use them — as far as Luke knew, there was no shortage of stormtroopers, even months after the Emperor’s death. Maybe they had found a hold-out somewhere, manned by still-functioning droids; there were stories of such things happening before, though they were of course very uncommon.

Luke looked to the ground again, searching for his lightsaber. If he found it, he could take care of them no problem. Hoping to buy some time, he asked, “When did the Empire begin using droids to do its dirty work?”

“Empire? What Empire?” The droid moved closer, the rest of its squad fanning out to surround Luke. “This planet is under the control of the Separatist Alliance.”

That made Luke look up, his brows drawing together. That couldn’t be right — the Confederacy of Independent Systems had been fragmented at the end of the Clone Wars, when the Republic was transformed into the Galactic Empire. These droids couldn’t really think that they were fighting for a government destroyed nearly twenty-four years ago. They could be from a Separatist hold-out, but that didn’t explain why they were fighting here.

His thoughts were interrupted by the grip of a metal hand on his shoulder. “You are being apprehended to be taken in for ques—” the droid began, but Luke cut it off with a fierce kick to the gut, using the Force to send it flying into the trees. The rest of its comrades were momentarily taken aback, and he used that to his advantage, sending a blast of the Force rocketing towards those closest to him. Three of them were down in an instant, landing roughly several feet away.

“Jedi!” the lead droid cried. “Blast him!”

The remaining droids opened fire. Luke dodged as best as he could, but without his lightsaber, he couldn’t deflect any of the bolts that flew too close. One grazed his left shoulder, slicing through the fabric of his sleeve, and he hissed as it burned along his flesh.

“Stun him! Stun him!” the leader ordered. “We want him alive!”

Luke ducked low, avoiding another shot, and he straightened just in time to see a stun ray bubbling through the air towards him. He attempted to dive out of the way, but it struck him in the leg. For a split second, he could feel every nerve in his body singing in pain, before he hit the ground and darkness took over again.
Jedi Master Luminara Unduli pressed close to the trunk of a nearby tree, her lightsaber humming in her hands. Blasterfire burst all around her, scorching the ground and the trees of the forest that surrounded the capital city. It had been six hours since the battle to retake the planet of Ucarro had begun, and Luminara could tell that the end was drawing near. The Separatists were losing ground, retreating further and further from the city, towards the open farmland that rested beyond the forest. Once they reached it, it would be all too easy to force a surrender.

She could see the shapes of her troopers moving through the dark trees, their blasters spitting laserfire. Her Padawan, Barriss Offee, was slowly making her way through the brush towards Luminara, visible by the blue glow of her lightsaber, whirling through the air as it deflected bolts. The Force was as turbulent as it always was during battle, as it seemed to have been since the start of the Clone Wars, nearly two years ago now.

But she could feel something shifting within it, like the swell of an ocean before a wave crashed against the shores. The Force was uneasy, unsure. Luminara frowned, probing it gently with her senses. She could feel all the clone troopers under her command, their emotions roiling in the heat of battle. Barriss was as calm and determined as ever, a bright spot in all the darkness. But it was as if the Force was fraying — it recoiled from the touch of her mind, skittering like a frightened animal.

And then it burst. The shockwave that was sent rocketing through the Force collided with Luminara at full strength, and she pressed a palm to the tree behind her to steady herself. Not far away, Barriss paused, no doubt feeling the same disturbance. It only took a second or two for the Force to resettle, but it felt… off. It continued to shift uneasily, as if it could be set off again at any moment.

There was something else there. Another presence now burned in the Force, one that Luminara was certain hadn’t been there before; it was far too strong for her not to have noticed it. Whoever it was, they were powerful in the ways of the Force. They seemed to be the source of the disturbance — the Force rippled around them in strange ways, ways that Luminara had never felt before. It was as if they had been created by the Force.

A blaster bolt exploded into the trunk near her head, and Luminara flinched away. The strange event had distracted her from the battle raging around her, and she was quick to refocus her attention to the fight at hand. She could investigate more deeply later, when the planet had been won.

Luke came to in a cell, some indeterminable amount of time later. His body ached even more than it already had, and the wound on his shoulder stung. He was lying on his side on the hard metal floor, and he sat up carefully, testing himself for any other injuries. Thankfully, there appeared to be none.

The cell was small and dark, with only dim overhead lighting and no windows or viewports. He could tell that he was on a ship, could feel the humming of the hyperdrive resonating through the floor, but it was quiet and distant. It was a large ship, then. The cell looked the same as those on every warship and cruiser that Luke had ever seen.

He stood a bit stiffly, stretching out his locked joints. There was a metal bench along one wall and a small button on another, stamped with the universal symbol for a refresher. The cell was otherwise entirely bare. The door looked to be made of tough, solid metal, and though he was sure
his lightsaber would have made quick work of it, it had been left behind on whatever planet he had
been whisked away from — a situation that was not ideal. His comlink was gone, as well, likely
confiscated after he was stunned.

He sat down on the bench with a heavy sigh. Unarmed, captured by the Empire or some delusional
Separatist hold-out or some other organization he didn’t know, and being transported to some
unknown region of the galaxy; he wasn’t sure how his situation could get much worse. At least by
this point, R2 would know that something was up and would have alerted Leia. She would know
he was in some sort of trouble and, hopefully, would come looking for him. The trouble now was
that she would have to find him.

Closing his eyes, Luke leaned back, resting against the hard wall of the cell. If he could reach Leia,
he could warn her about the temple and the strange artifact that rested within it, as well as give her
some clue about the predicament he currently found himself in. The Force pulsed around him,
unsettled, like the sky before a storm. He had taught Leia how to reach for others through the
Force, so it should not be difficult for him to get the message through to her; he had done it on
Bespin, injured after his duel with their father, before they had even known of their connection.

But when he searched for her in the Force, seeking out the presence that was most familiar to him,
he found nothing. It was as if Leia was simply gone, her presence erased, leaving behind not even
an echo. He hadn’t felt it happen, though he was sure that he should have. Her presence had always
been with him, before they had even met, but now it was gone, and he hadn’t even noticed, too
distracted by the Rabani temple and his capture.

He didn’t know what could have happened to her to cut them off from each other like this. She
couldn’t be dead; he was certain he would have felt it had she died, would have noticed earlier, no
matter what. Perhaps it had something to do with the artifact. When it had thrown him across the
galaxy, it could have somehow done something to their connection, severing their bond. Why,
though, he had no idea.

Breathing deeply, he reached further into the Force. Leia wasn’t there — he knew that he wouldn’t
find her — but he hoped, desperately, that someone else would be.

_Ben_. He sent the message rippling through the Force, as far as he could manage. Ben’s presence
had always been elusive, which Luke supposed was due to his not actually being alive. He hadn’t
seen or heard from his old mentor since the celebration after the Battle of Endor, when he had
appeared alongside Master Yoda and Luke’s father. Despite Luke’s best efforts to contact all three
of them, especially his father, none had appeared, not even as voices whispering cryptic advice in
his mind.

_Ben, help me, please._

Of all of them, Ben was the most likely one he would be able to reach. Luke knew him the best,
and he had appeared to him before, on Hoth and many times on Dagobah. All Luke needed now
was guidance, to help him figure out what had happened to Leia and what the artifact on Raban had
done.

It took a few moments, but he was able to find Ben, picking him out amongst the swirling energy
of the Force. His presence was distant, familiar enough for Luke to recognize, but… different,
somehow. It felt more solid than it had ever felt since Ben’s death, and he seemed lighter, less
burdened by darkness.

_Ben, I need your help._
The presence grew stronger as Luke focused on it, and as Ben became aware of him. The connection felt tenuous, as if it could snap at any moment; Ben’s presence was guarded, and instead of the comforting familiarity of an old teacher that Luke had expected, he instead felt confusion and wariness. He probed deeper, hoping to reassure Ben, to figure out what was troubling him. Ben pushed back, keeping Luke to very edges of his mind.

*Who are you?* Ben’s question echoed in Luke’s mind, and though his voice was recognizable, it was not wholly familiar. Like the rest of him, it was changed somehow.

Luke finally opened his eyes, a frown tugging on his face. He was about to reply, to ask Ben what he meant, when the sound of footsteps came echoing down the hallway towards his cell. His attention diverted, the connection to Ben disappeared, vanishing in an instant and retreating into the murk of the Force.

His cell door opened.

A Fillithar slithered into the room, flanked by two droid guards.

Luke tried to hold back his surprise. He had expected an Imperial officer, dressed immaculately in a crisp white uniform, their face contorted into a triumphant sneer. The Empire’s sentiments towards non-humans were no secret, and he had heard of very few serving within their ranks, even among the stormtroopers. A Fillithar was even more unheard of; their unique anatomy made it difficult for them to live in environments made primarily for humanoids. Only a handful of them had served in the Rebel Alliance.

So whoever it was who had captured him, they likely weren’t with the Empire.

“So, this is the Jedi,” the Fillithar said, drawing fully into the room. Luke remained seated on the bench.

“And you are?” he asked.

“I am more interested in knowing who you are,” the Fillithar said.

This was definitely not an Imperial ship, then. The name Luke Skywalker was well-known throughout the Empire as the name of the last Jedi. Somehow, this Fillithar seemed to be living the same delusion as his droids.

“Skywalker,” he said. “My name is Skywalker.” It was a name the Fillithar was bound to recognize, no matter what era he believed himself to be in.

The Fillithar’s eyes lit up, as Luke had expected. “Ah, yes, I have heard of you,” he said. He observed Luke for a moment, his lipless mouth curling up into a smile. “You’re not quite how I expected, I must admit.”


The Fillithar nodded, bowing the top half of his long body. “General Mosssk of the Separatist Droid Army,” he introduced.

Somehow, this Fillithar had survived for over two decades believing himself to still be a member of the Separatist Alliance. Droids were one thing, but for an organic sentient being to live for so long in isolation, believing the galaxy to still be embroiled in a war long ago ended? Luke wasn’t sure if
it was even possible. But he had no other explanation for the beliefs of the creature in front of him.

“What do you want with me?” he asked.

“I know many people who would be pleased to have the great Skywalker in their possession,” Mosssk said. “It will help to make up for the loss of Ucarro.”

There couldn’t be somebody else still believing themselves to be fighting in the Clone Wars; one was improbable enough as it was. A disconcerting thought flitted through Luke’s mind, but he dismissed it quickly. It was already crazy enough that the Rabani artifact had somehow transported him across the galaxy.

“What are you taking me to?” he asked.

Mosssk’s long, skinny tongue flicked from his mouth as he let out a high-pitched, hissing laugh. “You will find out soon enough.”

He turned his massive body and crawled from the cell back out into the hallway. His two droid guards, their metal faces betraying no thoughts or emotions, followed quickly. The door slid back into place behind them.

Luke was left alone.

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Sunlight fell on Leia’s eyes, and she opened them slowly, awareness coming back to her in bits and pieces. The first thing she noticed were the trees; their long limbs, clothed in bright red leaves, clustered together to form a ceiling above her. Warm sunshine filtered down to where she was laying on the forest floor, the cool earth damp against her skin.

The second thing she noticed was Luke. He had slipped back into her mind sometime between the temple and here, and she could sense him as she always had. She wasn’t as good as Luke at reading these signals in the Force, but she could tell, at least, that he wasn’t injured. She didn’t know where he was or what had happened, but he was alright. The relief would have been enough to make her smile, had she not been lying on the ground in an unknown forest.

She sat up slowly. Her surroundings were strange and unfamiliar; thin white-barked trees fanned out around her, their trunks blackened in spots as if scorched. The ground was blanketed in decomposing red leaves, which covered the sandy-coloured dirt that made up the rest of the forest floor. Bushes with green and blue leaves filled the spaces between the trees, but no creatures darted through them and no birds sang in the branches. In the distance, something was burning. She could smell the smoke, and could see plumes of it rising above the canopy.

Her eye caught sight of something metal glinting from beneath a nearby fern. Leia stood on wobbly legs. Her chest ached slightly and she felt a bit disoriented, but she wasn’t too bad off, all things considered. Bending down, she pulled the metal object from its hiding place — and found her hand wrapped around Luke’s lightsaber. He had been here, which meant that whatever that strange artifact had done to her, it had also done to him. That explained why R2 hadn’t been able to sense any life forms within the temple, and why Luke’s comlink had apparently been out of range. He wasn’t on Raban anymore. And neither was she.

But she had no idea where she actually was. The trees of the forest, though widely spaced apart, stretched on for as far as she could see. There were no woods on Raban, at least not any this large, which meant that, somehow, she had been transported to another planet in what seemed to be a
manner of seconds.

Tucking her brother’s weapon into the inside pocket of her vest, Leia quickly took stock of her situation. Her blaster was still strapped securely to her thigh holster, and she still had her glowrod, but no comms unit; she hadn’t brought one into the temple with her, knowing that Han had one and not thinking that they would be separated. Which meant that she had to get out of this forest and find a town or village or somewhere she could get in contact with Han, R2, or even Luke.

Which meant she had some walking to do.

She decided to head for the source of the smoke. With any luck, it would lead her to some friendly locals happy to lend a hand. Just in case, though, she undid the clip on her holster, giving her quick access to her weapon.

It took her only a few steps to realize why the forest was so unusually quiet, and what the likely source of the fire was. A foot, hidden before by brush, revealed itself as she walked past. It wore a boot of white plastoid, and though much of the rest of the body was obscured by foliage, she could see plates of white armour — a stormtrooper. She realized then that the blackened spots on the trees were not some quirk of nature, but actual scorch marks from blasters. A few more dead stormtroopers could be seen not too far away, slumped pitifully in the dirt. Strangely, a pair of what looked to be droids were lying in pieces beside them.

Leia moved forward with caution. The battle was over, but it was obviously recent. There were struggles happening all across the galaxy between the Empire and the New Republic, and it seemed as if she had somehow found herself in the aftermath of one.

She just hoped that the Republic had come out on top.

There were no signs of life anywhere. As she continued deeper into the forest, the carnage and destruction only increased. Holes had been blasted into the earth by heavy artillery, and several trees had been toppled, splintered like sticks. The source of the smoke turned out to be the smouldering wreckage of some sort of speeder; twisted as it was, Leia couldn’t recognize the model. She only looked quickly at the bodies she passed, but they all either seemed to be stormtroopers or droids; none wore the uniforms of the New Republic.

Curious, Leia stopped near a fallen droid. It seemed to be mostly intact, felled by a blaster bolt to the chest. She nudged it with the toe of her boot, readjusting the twisted neck so that the face was looking at her. She frowned, observing its small, slitted eyes and long, mouthless face. She had thought the droids had looked familiar — they were B1 battle droids, employed by the Confederacy of Independent Systems during the Clone Wars. Their production had been discontinued decades ago, at the end of the wars. But it seemed as if enough of them had survived long enough to do battle with the Empire.

Voices up ahead pulled her from her musings, and she ducked quickly behind a nearby tree. It wasn’t quite wide enough to hide her completely, so she crouched down, shielding herself behind one of the blue bushes. Glancing through the leaves, she could see a group of stormtroopers, travelling perpendicular to her location. There were five of them, and they all carried blaster rifles at the ready.

Leia pulled her own blaster from its holster. The troopers seemed to be searching the battlefield, most likely looking for any survivors, both of their own troops and their enemies. That meant there were probably more squads out there and that, in all likelihood, it was the Empire who had come out victorious here.
That made things slightly more complicated for her.

One of the troopers looked in her direction, and she ducked quickly back behind the cover of the bush. She hadn’t quite been fast enough, however, because a few moments later, one of them called out to her.

“Who’s there?” he demanded. “Show yourself!”

Leia muttered a curse under her breath. The voice was followed by the sound of footsteps tromping through the foliage towards her. As outnumbered as she was, she didn’t have many options. The only thing she could do was try and make a run for it.

Peeking through the leaves, she fired two shots in the direction of the stormtroopers. They cried out in surprise, and Leia bolted from her hiding spot, running off back the way she had come. She didn’t think she had hit any of the troopers; she could hear numerous pairs of feet chasing after her and, glancing back, she saw all five of them running behind her. They had their blasters in hand, but they weren’t firing on her.

She looked forward again just in time to see a hand reach out from behind a tree and grab her by the arm, yanking her to a stop. She nearly fell to the ground from the suddenly lost momentum, but the grip on her arm kept her upright. They were a stormtrooper, their hand gloved in white plastoid and their face covered by a helmet—

But it wasn’t a stormtrooper’s helmet.

Leia had spent a lot of time studying the Clone Wars as a teenager. Her history tutor had been a bit of a military buff, and had made her study all the major battles and confrontations of the war. He had droned on and on about the weapons and the tech used by both sides, and as such, Leia was intimately familiar with all models of droid used by the Separatists, as well as the clones used by the Republic who had given the conflict its name.

Which is how she knew that the helmet staring back at her was that of a clone trooper.

It was sleeker than a stormtrooper’s, with narrow eyes and an angled slit for a mouth. She knew that the clones had often painted their helmets as a way to individualize themselves, as well as to signify rank, but this trooper’s helmet was just a plain white. He reached over, wresting her blaster from her hand, and she struggled against his grip, trying to shake herself free.

“Calm down, there, missy,” the trooper said. Leia had only met one clone in her life, but from what she could recall, he had had the same accented baritone as this one.

The rest of the troopers caught up to them quickly. They, too, were all wearing clone trooper masks. One had a stripe of dark green paint along the centre of his, as well as markings on each arm and four small circles along his left breast which, if Leia remembered correctly, meant he was a sergeant.

“Who are you?” the sergeant asked, in the same voice as the other trooper. “What are you doing here? This is a restricted area.”

“You’re clones,” Leia said, looking from one to the other. She hadn’t thought there were any clones left, at least not many; like droids, their production had stopped at the end of the Clone Wars. They had all been transferred to stormtrooper units, before eventually being phased out and replaced by natural-born recruits. If they hadn’t been killed in action, their advanced growth had killed off most of them by the time the Battle of Endor happened.
“You’re very observant,” one of the troopers joked.

“Are you real clones?” she asked. They could just be reenactors, though the level of detail and realism of the battlefield was a bit extreme for most re-enactment groups that she had heard of. The mangled battle droids she had come across had certainly been real.

But the clones couldn’t be real — it wasn’t possible.

“What sort of question is that?” the sergeant snapped.

She couldn’t run; that one trooper still had her arm gripped in a vice, and even if she could, she would only make it a few feet before she was riddled with blaster bolts. The troopers seemed to be real clones, as far as she could tell, which meant… she wasn’t entirely sure what it meant. The only explanation she could think of was one so absurd she wasn’t even willing to entertain it.

“You’re with the Republic.” She said it as more of a statement than a question.

“Of course we are,” one of the clones replied.

They could mean the New Republic; maybe an old squad of surviving clones had been found and recruited into the Republic army, and Leia just hadn’t heard about it yet.

But she doubted it.

“I’m not trying to cause any trouble,” she said. “I’m just looking for my brother. I think he was here at some point, but I don’t know where he is now.” She paused, looking to each trooper; even with their helmets, she could tell that they were apprehensive, untrusting of her. “I’m not a Separatist, I promise you.”

They didn’t immediately laugh, or call her crazy, which meant that they must have been seriously concerned that she was a Separatist. Which meant something just a bit too mind-boggling and terrifying for Leia to confront at this very moment.

The sergeant produced a pair of binders from one of the pouches attached to his belt. Her arms were twisted behind her back, the binders clamped around her wrists.

“We’ll see about that,” he said.
The clone troopers brought Leia to a camp not far from where they had found her. It was little more than a gathering of a dozen tents, filling up a large clearing in the middle of the forest. There were two LAAT/i gunships docked nearby, and groups of clones loitered around them, lounging on the seats inside and against the hulls. More of them moved between the tents, chatting amicably with each other. Nearly all had their helmets off, revealing dozens of copies of the same tanned, chiseled face.

Leia’s heart stuttered at the sight. She had almost expected to get to the camp only for it to be revealed that these men weren’t actually clones — that beneath their helmets they would all have different faces. But as they stepped into the camp, several of the troopers that had captured her reached up to remove their own helmets, and beneath the identical white armour were more identical faces.

And they were all young; these were men in their prime, most of their faces free of wrinkles or other signs of age. Their advanced growth meant that most were likely between the ages of ten and fifteen chronologically, but physically they appeared to be in their twenties. The oldest among them didn’t look older than thirty. Rex, a veteran clone whom Leia had met briefly before the Battle of Endor, had had the appearance of a sixty-year-old man, his face covered by a thick white beard. Even the clones made at the end of the war would look older than these men by now, if any had survived so long.

The implications of this were unsettling, to say the least, but Leia refused to jump to any conclusions before she had more solid proof.

She was brought to the largest tent, in the centre of all the others. It was dark inside, and a holotable in the middle of the room cast a blue tinge over everything. A holo of a planet spun slowly above the table, which Leia guessed was the planet they were currently on. Two women stood in front of the table, their backs to Leia, speaking with a clone.

The sergeant who had apprehended Leia stepped forward. “General,” he said. The taller of the two women turned to look at them. She was a Mirialan, with yellow-green skin and black diamond-shaped tattoos arranged in a thick line beneath her chin. She wore a dark brown head covering that
fanned out on either side of her face, and long, flowing black robes. Her deep blue eyes focused on Leia with a curious intensity that made Leia shift uncomfortably, her bound hands wringing together.

“We apprehended this woman on the battlefield,” the sergeant continued. “She claims to have been looking for her brother.”

The other woman turned towards them now; she was also a Mirialan, younger than the other with more yellowish skin. Her tattoos created a strip along the bridge of her nose and onto her cheeks, and she wore a dark blue cloak with the hood pulled high over her head.

“What is your name?” the older Mirialan asked. Her voice was gentle and calm, even as her gaze continued to pierce through Leia.

“Nellith.” The name was out of Leia’s mouth without even a second of thought. She was standing, hands bound, in a strange camp surrounded by clones; she didn’t know if they would recognize her name, but she didn’t want to find out what would happen if they did. “My name is Nellith Lars.” It was an alias she had used before, during a reconnaissance mission prior to Han’s rescue from Jabba’s Palace. Luke had come up with it.

“I am Jedi Master Luminara Unduli,” the woman said. She bowed slightly at the waist, and the folds of her robe shifted to reveal a lightsaber hanging from her belt. She motioned to the younger woman beside her. “This is my Padawan, Barriss Offee.”

Leia struggled to keep her face from revealing the shock she felt. She had heard of Master Unduli, in the quiet stories her father would tell her as a child before bed. She knew the Empire’s official story about the Jedi — that they were traitors who had turned on the Republic, criminals who were justly destroyed. In the hushed hours of the evening, however, Leia’s father would tell her the truth, reciting tales of heroes who had served the Republic for millennia. To Leia, they had been more like fairy tales than history lessons, and so part of her marvelled at the warriors in front of her. The rest of her recoiled from the impossibility of it all.

The Jedi had been wiped out at the end of the Clone Wars, when the Empire had succeeded the Galactic Republic. Only a handful of them had survived, and now, as far as anyone in the galaxy knew, Luke was the last of that ancient religion.

Leia was a rational person. She knew what was possible and likely, and what wasn’t. But even she could not deny the truth in front of her — the battlefield, the droids, the clones, and now the two Jedi. All of them impossibilities, that when added together presented only one explanation.

The artifact on Raban had sent her back to the Clone Wars.

She felt a sickening lurch in her stomach, and swallowed hard. She didn’t want to believe it — almost couldn’t — but she didn’t know how else to explain everything that had happened. She could try to rationalize it, to make sense of it all, but there was a certain point where those rationalizations would become delusions. And trying to rationalize the presence of hundreds of clones, two Jedi, and dozens of destroyed battle droids stretched far beyond that point.

“Why were you looking for your brother on a battlefield?” Luminara asked, pulling Leia from her silent conflict.

She forced herself to be calm. She knew that Jedi could sense emotions; there was no doubt that
Luminara knew how nervous she was. But Leia had been interrogated before. She knew how to lie, and how to spin believable stories out of unbelievable situations. There was no way she could tell Luminara that some unknown artifact in a decrepit temple on a Mid Rim backwater had hurled her into the past; no one in their right mind would believe her. She needed a more realistic explanation.

Unfortunately, she had few details to work with; she didn’t even know the name of the planet she currently found herself on. For once, she was thankful she had learned politicking in the shadowy Imperial Senate.

“He carries out relief missions to planets affected by the war,” she said, meeting Luminara’s hard gaze with one of her own. She clasped her hands together, forcing them to be still. “He was on one such mission when he contacted me, nearly a day ago now. Something had gone wrong with his ship, and this was the nearest planet. He informed me he was landing here to carry out repairs. I haven’t heard from him since, and have been unable to make contact, so I decided to come after him.”

It was a weak lie, one which likely wouldn’t hold up well to scrutiny, but it was the best Leia could come up with so quickly.

“A day ago, Ucarro was still under the control of the Separatists,” Barriss said. “The entire planet was surrounded by a blockade. No one associated with the Republic would have been allowed to land.”

“I think he would have been desperate enough to try,” Leia said. “I promise you, we are not Separatists.”

Luminara observed her for a moment, her face impassive. “If you really think he attempted to land here, I doubt he would have been able to. The Separatist fleet would have shot him down or captured him before he could even enter the atmosphere.”

“The Separatists would capture a civilian?”

“If they believed him to be a threat,” Luminara said.

Leia realized that was why her hands remained bound — the Jedi believed her to be a threat.

She didn’t know what had really happened to Luke. It was likely that he had ended up at or near the spot where she had awoken, and then... something had happened to him, something which had caused him to leave his lightsaber behind. She doubted he would have done it purposefully, which meant he had been forcibly taken away. If the Republic had him, they would have said something about it by now; that left only the Separatist Alliance.

The fact that the battle was over and the Republic was still here told Leia that the Separatists had lost. They would have left the system by now, taking their fleet with them — and likely Luke as well.

“Please, I just want to help my brother,” Leia said. If he had been captured by the Separatists, she wouldn’t be able to rescue him alone. She would need help, and at the moment, the Republic was her best bet. “We’re citizens of the Republic. You can’t just abandon him to the Separatists.”

Luminara observed her for a moment, her face unreadable. “We will take you back to Coruscant with us for further investigation,” she said eventually. “If we find you are telling the truth, we will do what we can to find your brother. But until that moment, you will remain in our custody.”

Leia nodded. “I understand.” She didn’t blame them for not trusting her; she doubted that she
would, were she in their position. She just hoped that it didn’t take them long to develop that trust — the sooner she found Luke, the sooner they could figure out what had happened and how to get back home. The sooner she could get back to a war whose fate was still undecided.

The sergeant’s hand clamped down on her shoulder, and he pulled her from the tent.

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Leia slipped back into Luke’s mind as quietly as she had left.

Sometime after General Mosssk’s visit, the ship had exited hyperspace, and Luke had felt it shudder as it had entered a planetary atmosphere and docked. He hadn’t known how long it had been since his capture; with no chronometer in the cell, it had been impossible for him to keep track of time. But he didn’t think it had been more than a day.

A pair of droids had come to collect him almost immediately after docking. They had brought him through the corridors of the ship, entirely unfamiliar to Luke, and out into a bustling hangar. It hadn’t taken him long to realize he was in some sort of prison — squads of droids patrolled the hallways they passed through, separated into blocks by thick metal doors. Innumerable cells lined each corridor, and Luke heard angered shouts from within as they passed.

After a confusing walk, full of turns and stairwells, the droids had stopped in front of one such cell, opening it up and tossing him roughly inside. This new cell was almost completely identical to the one on the ship, with dim lighting and windowless walls. He had paced for a bit, trying again to strike a connection with Ben, but failing every time. Eventually, pure exhaustion had caused him to fall asleep, slumped over on the hard metal bench.

When he woke up, Leia was there again, the same shining presence in the back of his mind that had always been there. His heart jumped with relief at the sensation; it had been strange, to be without his twin’s presence for so long, and he was glad to know she was alright.

He sat up, stretching his sore limbs with a wince. He didn’t know what had severed their connection, or what had brought it back, but he supposed that now it didn’t really matter. He could get a message through to her, telling her what had happened and where he was. It might take her a while to figure out who exactly had captured him and what prison he had been taken to, but with the resources of the New Republic, she could see it done.

He began to reach for her in the Force, stretching his mind towards hers—

His cell door opened, snapping his concentration. Four security droids stood in the hallway. Two stepped through into the cell, one holding a pair of magnetic cuffs, the other a blaster rifle aimed at Luke’s chest.

“On your feet,” the droid ordered.

Luke stood slowly, and the two droids stepped forward. “Hands out.” He lifted his arms, and one of the droids snapped the magnetic cuffs onto his wrists. They activated with a gentle whine and snapped together, binding his hands. The droid with the blaster grabbed his shoulder, pushing him forward.

He stumbled into the hallway, and the droids quickly fell into formation around him, with one in the front, one on either side, and one in the back. All were armed with rifles. The lead droid began to walk, and the droid behind him got him moving with a sharp nudge of its blaster muzzle.

“Where are you taking me?” Luke asked.
“Silence,” chirped the droid to his left.

They lead him through the prison’s winding hallways. The cavernous metal building was silent save for the sound of their feet against the floor and the distant angry shouts. Whoever these people were, they were certainly powerful; not even the Hutts had prisons on this scale. They stopped at a turbolift, which took them several floors down, deep into the prison. Luke had yet to see any windows, so he couldn’t even begin to guess what time of day it was or what the planet he was on looked like. Though he supposed it didn’t matter much what the planet looked like; he likely wouldn’t recognize it either way.

The turbolift stopped, opening up to reveal a long, narrow hallway, much smaller than the ones above. There were only a handful of doors lining the walls, and the droids took him to one at the very end. The front droid pressed the activation panel, and the door slid open.

The room beyond was simple. A short, round pedestal rested in the very centre, with what looked to be a control panel on the far wall. The droids ushered him in, and he was directed to stand on the pedestal. One of the droids went over to the control panel, while another clamped another set of magnetic cuffs onto his ankles. Straightening, it looked over to its comrade by the controls.

“Ready,” it said.

“Roger, roger.”

“What is th—” Luke began, but his words were cut off as the droid pressed a button on the control panel. A beam of faint blue light shot up from the pedestal beneath him, and his body went forcibly rigid as he was lifted several feet into the air. It was like a bag was placed over his head — he could still see and hear, but his sense of the Force had gone blind. Panic began to roil up inside of him. Even before he had begun training as a Jedi, he had never felt so cut-off from the rest of the galaxy.

The droids spread out across the room, each going to a different wall. They stood there in silence, metal claws gripped around their blasters. Luke closed his eyes and breathed deeply, trying to calm himself. In these situations, he would usually reach into the Force, tracing the connections between everything in the galaxy and sensing how the Force brought them all together. But whatever this contraption was, it blocked him completely, leaving him untethered and senseless.

It was only a minute or two before the door was opening again. Luke opened his eyes, watching as an elderly man strode into the room. His face was covered by a well-groomed grey beard, and his white hair was slicked back from his face. He wore a deep red cloak, clasped across his chest by a silver chain. Luke would have placed his age in the seventies or even eighties, but the man walked with the purpose and strength of someone decades younger. He looked vaguely familiar, but Luke could not place a name to his face.

He stopped in the centre of the room, before the platform over which Luke hovered, and regarded him with a sneer. “You are not Skywalker,” he said.


“Do you think I am a fool, boy?” the man snapped. “I am well-acquainted with Anakin Skywalker, and you are not him.”

Luke’s eyes widened. Anakin Skywalker — his father. This man thought Luke had claimed to be his father. But as far as anyone in the galaxy knew, Anakin Skywalker had died decades ago, massacred alongside the rest of the Jedi at the end of the Clone Wars. Only he, Leia, and Han
knew the truth: that Anakin Skywalker had died only three months ago, in the skies above Endor, after renouncing his former identity as the Sith Darth Vader.


The man’s eyes narrowed, suspicious, but he still answered. “I know what most people know, and what I am sure you know. He is the Hero With No Fear; one of the greatest warriors of the Republic. The Jedi believe him to be the Chosen One.” He took a step closer, scrutinizing Luke with cold brown eyes. “You speak as if you know something that most don’t.”

The man spoke of Anakin and the Jedi in the present tense; to him, they were not yet a thing of the past. Ice filled Luke’s veins, and he tried once again to place where he had seen this man’s face before. “Who are you?” he asked.

“I think I am the one who should be asking that question,” the man said. He clasped his hands together behind his back, brushing aside his cloak and revealing a lightsaber hanging from his belt. Luke frowned. This man couldn’t be a Jedi; if he was, he wouldn’t be interested in capturing Anakin Skywalker. He continued, “If you are not Skywalker, then who are you?”

“I didn’t lie when I said my name is Skywalker,” Luke said. “But I never said my first name was Anakin.”

Confusion sparked in the man’s eyes, and he stepped closer to the platform. “A relation?” He looked Luke up and down, scrutinizing him. “You do not look much like him. And you are not a Jedi. I am sure I would have heard of you if you were.”

Almost unprompted, an image popped into Luke’s mind: this man’s face, expression hard and determined, set against a backdrop of deep red. It was some sort of official photograph, surrounded by text, like an article or a passage from some sort of educational document. Luke remembered reading it, back when he had first joined the Rebellion. The Alliance had had a good-sized archive, some of which included recovered articles from the Old Republic, and, in the wake of Ben’s death aboard the Death Star, Luke had gone searching it for any information he could find on the Jedi. He’d stumbled upon an article about Count Dooku, the leader of the Confederacy of Independent Systems — and a former Jedi, who had left the Order after decades of service. The article had been accompanied by a picture of the man currently standing in front of him — or at least, it had looked remarkably like him.

But that couldn’t be possible. Count Dooku had died in the Battle of Coruscant, in the closing months of the Clone Wars. If this man were Dooku, he would be looking rather well for having been dead over two decades. But Luke had seen other images of Dooku; old holos and vids of an elderly man with the same long face and trimmed beard as the one standing before him. He didn’t want to believe that they were one and the same, but he needed to know.

“You were a Jedi once,” he said, “weren’t you, Dooku?”

Amusement flickered across the man’s wrinkled face. “Ah, so you’ve finally figured it out,” he said. “You are not totally incompetent, then. Yes, I was once a Jedi. Which is how I know you are not one. But if the reports from the droids on Ucarro are to be believed, you can use the Force, and with some amount of skill.” He grinned, and it was a grin that reminded Luke uneasily of Emperor Palpatine; not in appearance, but in intent. “Perhaps, then, I will be able to find some use for you, even if you are not the Skywalker I had hoped to find.”

Luke barely registered the man’s words. He had admitted that he was Count Dooku without even a moment of hesitation. All at once, every piece of the puzzle clicked into place — the battle droids,
their claim that the planet (Ucarro, Dooku had called it) was under the control of the Separatists, the unfamiliar ship he had been taken aboard. This man standing here in front of him, claiming to be the Separatist leader Count Dooku. It was too many coincidences to be able to explain in any other way.

Dooku looked to the security droid standing nearest to him. “Return him to his cell,” he ordered, “and see to it that he doesn’t get any ideas.” He looked back to Luke, giving him a quick nod. “It was a pleasure to meet you… Skywalker.” Turning his back to Luke, he strode to the door and out into the hallway.

The droid near the control panel pressed a button, and the field around Luke dissipated, dropping him to his knees on the platform. His sense of the Force came rushing back to him, but he couldn’t even find it in himself to be relieved. All he could think of, even as the droids roughly pulled him to his feet, was what the artifact on Raban had impossibly done.

He was trapped in a prison, on some unknown planet in some unknown region of space, while the galaxy around him was ravaged by the Clone Wars. The artifact had not just sent him across the galaxy.

It had sent him through time, decades into the past.

Chapter End Notes

Leia’s alias of Nellith is a reference to some pretty obscure Star Wars trivia, so props to you if you know what it’s from!
Leia was brought to another tent near the outskirts of the camp. Clones milled about nearby, some sitting on upturned storage crates, most with their helmets resting in their arms or on the trampled grass. They all watched Leia with evident curiosity, no doubt wondering what this petite young woman had done to get herself in binders. She resisted the urge to scowl at them, reminding herself that these men weren’t her enemies; they weren’t stormtroopers, no matter how familiar their white armour might seem.

The clone sergeant ushered her into the tent. It was significantly smaller than most of the others, and there were no furnishings besides a simple metal table and chair. Two more troopers followed them in, dressed in their full gear, but they remained near the entrance as the sergeant brought her to the centre of the room and undid her binders.

“Don’t try anything,” he warned, before taking a step back. “Feet apart, arms out.”

She obeyed, jaw clenching. Her only blaster had been taken during her initial capture, but Luke’s lightsaber remained tucked into the inside pocket of her vest. Her mind scrambled for a way to explain her possession of a Jedi’s weapon as the sergeant began patting her down, his hands running up and down her arms and legs, but her mind was drawing a blank.

Leia tried to keep her face neutral as he stood and pulled open her vest. The lightsaber was immediately noticeable, its top peeking out from the interior pocket. The sergeant paused a moment before carefully extracting it; there was no mistaking what it was. He held it for a moment, silent, before turning to the two troopers guarding the door.

“Go and notify General Unduli,” he ordered. “Tell her to come here right away.”

One of the troopers nodded. “Yes, sir,” he said, and quickly disappeared through the tent flap.

The sergeant looked to the remaining guard and handed him the lightsaber. The trooper took it
without a word; Leia couldn’t see his face, but he seemed uncomfortable with the weapon, unsure of how to hold it. The sergeant returned to his task of searching Leia in complete silence. She knew that he would be leaving any questions regarding the lightsaber up to Master Unduli, and so she did not even try to explain herself.

Finding nothing else of note on her, the sergeant replaced her binders, seeming to clamp them a bit tighter than before. Grabbing her elbow, he pulled her over to the chair and instructed her to sit. She did as she was told, and he grabbed her hands, placing her wrists on the table. He walked over to the other side and flipped open a compartment, revealing a small control panel. His hands, shrouded from Leia by the panel covering, moved quickly over the buttons and controls. After a moment, it suddenly felt as if gravity had increased on her hands, pulling her wrists into the table. When she tried to lift them, she realized that the binders had become attached to the table’s surface, most likely magnetically, preventing her from getting up or moving away from the table.

Satisfied, the sergeant closed the panel with a soft click and took a few steps back. He said nothing, his hands clasped behind his back, gaze focused on the opposite wall as he waited for Luminara to arrive. The other trooper kept a nervous grip on Luke’s lightsaber, obviously conscious of where he placed his thumb in relation to the weapon’s activation button. He looked as if he was holding a live animal, one that would strike him at any moment.

It was only a few more minutes before the flap of the tent was being pulled back again and Master Unduli stepped through into the room, followed by the trooper who had been sent to retrieve her. The sergeant immediately stepped forward, giving her a hasty salute.

“Sir, we found this hidden in the prisoner’s vest,” he said, motioning to the other clone, who held the lightsaber out to the Jedi.

She took it carefully, her eyes narrowing slightly. She stared at it for a moment, turning it over in her hands, before walking over to the table where Leia remained sitting and placing it in front of her, as if to lay the proof of her wrongdoing before her.

“Howse lightsaber is this?” Luminara asked. Her voice betrayed no emotions, not even anger. It was as calm and collected as her exterior.

“It isn’t mine,” Leia answered.

“I didn’t think it was. I am asking who you took it from.”

“I didn’t steal it,” she said. “It’s my brother’s.”

Luminara’s eyebrows raised, skeptical. “So your brother stole this?”

Leia shook her head. “He didn’t steal it. No one stole it. He made it himself.”

“Only a Jedi can craft a lightsaber,” Luminara said. “Are you claiming that your brother is a Jedi?”

Leia tried not to wince. It was a slight wrench in her story for the moment, revealing that Luke was a Jedi, but perhaps it would help her out in the long-run, if the Republic did decide to help her find him. At least, that’s what she hoped. “Yes,” she said. “But he isn’t a member of your Order.”

“How, then, is he a Jedi?”

“It’s a… complicated story.” One that she didn’t entirely have figured out yet — not unless she wanted to reveal to Luminara that she came from a future where the Jedi Order had been wiped from existence. Which Leia suspected was a story that wouldn’t go over very well.
Luminara picked up Luke’s lightsaber once more, inspecting it closely, as if the truth of the story could be found within its metal workings. Keeping it tight in her grasp, she held her hands together behind her back. “Fortunately,” she said, “you will have plenty of time to explain it to me on our journey to Coruscant.” She looked to the sergeant. “See to it that she is taken up to the Tranquility. And keep her under a close watch.”

The sergeant threw his hand up in a salute. “Yes, sir.”

Luminara gave him a nod of acknowledgement and turned to leave the tent. Before ducking out of the flap, she looked back at Leia, her expression hard but unreadable. It was obvious that she trusted her even less now, which made things slightly more difficult when it came to getting help from the Republic.

She disappeared with a rustle of fabric.

The sergeant reopened the control panel on the table, pressing a few buttons and releasing Leia’s binders. “On your feet,” he ordered. “Let’s go.”

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The Tranquility was a Venator-class Star Destroyer, hovering in low orbit above the war-torn planet. Barriss Offee had called it Ucarro, and though Leia wracked her brain, she couldn’t remember ever hearing of it before, not even in the context of the battle that had so recently ravaged its surface. So many such battles had taken place during the three-year-long Clone Wars, with planets changing hands so often that it was impossible to keep track of them all.

Leia was brought up to the Tranquility in a small shuttle. She had parted ways with the sergeant on the planet’s surface, and was now guarded by two clone troopers; they kept their helmets on and said nothing to her on their short journey up to the Star Destroyer, surrounded by cargo being transported from the camp.

The sight of the imposing wedge-shaped ship sent a shiver of fear through Leia’s veins, and she had to remind herself that it was a Republic ship, not Imperial — that the white-armoured soldiers positioned on either side of her were clones, not stormtroopers. But after so many years of fighting, these fears remained ingrained in her, and the binders did little to help the situation.

The ship’s main hangar was a mess of activity when they landed. Troopers were arriving in droves from the planet below, while others worked to unload the shuttles of cargo being sent from the camp. Leia was pulled to her feet, one guard on each elbow, and escorted down the gangplank into the chaotic hangar. They led her through the bustle, weaving a path between the shuttles and troopers.

It became quieter as she was led away from the hangar, down a small corridor off to the side. They passed only a handful of clones there, none of them wearing combat armour. To Leia’s surprise, there were even a few non-clone officers, dressed in the uniforms of the Republic military. Like the rest of the ship, their high-collared green-grey uniforms reminded her starkly of the Empire. It was a grim reminder that, though they were very different, the Galactic Empire had found its beginnings in the Republic.

She was shuffled onto a turbolift, and it brought them down, to the very bowels of the ship. Leia was almost certain that she was being brought to the detention level, and those suspicions were confirmed when the lift’s doors slid open to reveal a corridor lined with cells, very much like those she had seen aboard the Empire’s Imperial-class Star Destroyers. She was led down the hallway, to a cell near the very end. All the doors they passed were unlocked, their control panel’s glowing
green; the ship’s detention level was almost entirely unoccupied. It was a fact that was both comforting and disquieting.

The troopers shuffled her into the cell, where her binders were finally removed. Two red rings now circled her wrists from where the binder cuffs had rubbed against her skin. The guards stepped out of the room, and Leia remained where was.

“General Unduli will arrive shortly to interrogate you further,” one of the clones said, and then the door to the cell was sliding shut. She heard the lock mechanisms activate, and then the sound of footsteps retreating.

She was, once more, all alone.

△▽△

Leia. Leia.

Luke sat in his cell, his legs crossed and his eyes closed. He could sense his sister as strongly as he always could, somewhere out there in the galaxy. She felt... not distressed, but uneasy. Unsure. They were feelings that he shared, tumbling around in his restless mind, no matter how much he tried to calm them.

Time travel wasn’t possible; science had long ago deemed it a relic of fiction, never to be realized, and he had never heard of the Force accomplishing such a thing, not from any of his teachers or from his (admittedly limited) research. It was supposed to be impossible.

But it seemed as if the small artifact in the temple on Raban had done the impossible. It had been connected to the Force, in some way that Luke couldn’t explain but that was undeniable. The Force had surrounded it, had seemed to emanate from it. And in some way or another, for one reason or another, it had sent Luke back to the time of the Clone Wars.

It seemed to have somehow done the same to Leia. Luke had no other way to explain why he could still sense her, in a time when neither of them were even supposed to exist yet. The lapse in their connection had likely been a result of the interval between his arrival in the past and her own. He wasn’t sure how she came into contact with the artifact, unless she had followed him to Raban, or there were other artifacts like it scattered around the galaxy...

Luke took a deep breath and attempted to push all thoughts of the how and the why from his mind — those didn’t matter yet. What mattered was getting into contact with his sister and finding out where she was.

He reached out to her through the Force, encroaching on the edges of her mind as he had done numerous times before. She almost immediately let him in, and her feelings of relief mingled with his own. In the strange galaxy he found himself in, she was a familiar embrace.

Leia. The name unconsciously slipped past his lips, whispered into the empty cell as he sent it across the galaxy towards his sister.

Luke. Her response was loud but gentle, filling his mind with her voice. Luke, where are you?

I’m in a cell. I’ve been captured. I don’t know — Leia, do you realize—

She interjected, her voice overpowering his thoughts. We’re in the Clone Wars. I don’t know how, but Luke, I’ve seen hundreds of clones today, I’ve seen battle droids, I’ve met Jedi...
Leia sighed; not audibly, not in any way Luke could hear, but he could feel her weariness. *Luke, how are we going to get out of this?*

*First things first, I need to get out of this damn cell, and we need to find a way to get to each other. Then we can figure out how to get home.*

*I’ll take care of it. I’m on my way to Coruscant; I’m going to try and get help from the Jedi.*

*Leia, you can’t tell them who we really are or where we’re from. We have no idea how they’ll react — I’ve never heard of anything like this happening.*

*I know. Don’t worry.*

Leia paused, her awareness momentarily retreating from him. She returned after a few seconds. *I’m sorry, I have to go. Please don’t worry — I’ll get you out.*

And then she was gone, their connection quieting, retreating to the background. With a sigh, Luke opened his eyes.

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The door to Leia’s cell opened and Luminara Unduli stepped through. She was unaccompanied, Luke’s lightsaber held in her hand. Her expression was calm and confident, though her eyes narrowed slightly in suspicion as the door hissed shut behind her, as if she had heard part Leia and Luke’s conversation. It was, Leia supposed, not entirely outside the realm of possibilities; she wasn’t entirely sure how her connection to Luke worked, or if anyone else could sense it.

But Luminara said nothing about it. Instead she held up Luke’s lightsaber, displaying it for Leia. “You say this is your brother’s,” she said, “and that he made it himself, but he is not a member of the Jedi Order. I’ve inspected it further, and… I’ve decided to believe you. Its design is like ones I have seen before, but… simpler. It is well-crafted, but there are some components that were obviously improvised, ones that would be near-impossible for anyone who is not a Jedi to acquire. How he found a kyber crystal, I don’t know, but I sensed no dishonesty in you. I believe you told me the truth.” She paused, lowering the weapon. “But I still do not know your true intentions. You were deceptive when you didn’t immediately tell me that your brother was a Jedi. Why?”

“I didn’t know how you would react,” Leia explained, which was the truth. “He’s a Jedi, but not a member of the Order. From what I understand, such things aren’t… well-accepted. And as I said earlier, it’s a complicated situation.”

Luminara hummed, thinking. “Would you care to elaborate on that? How could your brother be a Jedi if he was never a member of the Order?”

Leia had had some time to come up with some semblance of a story, though Luminara was almost certain to ask a question to which Leia hadn’t thought of an answer. If that happened, she would simply have to improvise. “My brother was never part of the Jedi Order, but my… my father was. He left the Order shortly before we were born. He trained my brother to be a Jedi.”

“But not you?”

Leia shook her head. “It… wasn’t something I was interested in pursuing.”

“What’s your father’s name?”
“Josiah Lars.” At the thoughtful look on Luminara’s face, she was quick to add, “I’m almost certain it was a fabricated name. I never learned his real name. He died a few years ago.”

Luminara frowned. “Why would he hide his true identity, even from his own children? Plenty of Jedi have left the Order. He had nothing to fear from us.”

“I don’t think it was you he was afraid of.” It was a vague improvisation to fill a hole torn through her flimsy story, but she hoped it was one that would satisfy Luminara.

“Do you know what he was afraid of?”

“No. He never spoke of his life in the Order, aside from what he taught Ben.”

“Your brother?”

Leia nodded. Now that she knew when she was, it was impossible for anyone to recognize her or Luke’s names, but she figured it was best to keep playing it safe with aliases. She had no idea what pieces of information could affect the past and cause irreparable damage — all the more reason for her to find Luke and get back to their own time, as soon as possible.

“So what was Ben really doing on Ucarro?” Luminara asked, one dark eyebrow arched.

“I didn’t lie when I said he was on a mission,” Leia said. “But it wasn’t necessarily a relief mission. Since the start of the war he’s been going to Separatist-occupied planets and doing what he can to help the people there sympathetic to the Republic. He was supposed to return from his mission to Ucarro three days ago, and when he didn’t show up I went after him. I found his lightsaber on the battlefield, and then your troopers found me.”

Luminara said nothing, simply observing Leia with her sharp blue eyes. Then she looked once more at Luke’s lightsaber, her fingers still curled around its hilt. Leia struggled to read her expression, to figure out whether she believed her story.

“Will you still help me?” Leia asked. “My brother’s been captured by Separatists, and I can’t rescue him on my own. I need the Republic’s help.”

Luminara looked back to Leia, tucking Luke’s lightsaber into an interior pocket of her robes. “That is for the Council to decide,” she said, and then she turned and left the cell.

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The Tranquility jumped out of hyperspace several hours later; Leia felt it only as a gentle shudder, emanating from some distant corner of the ship. She didn’t know how long they had been travelling. There was no chronometer in her cell, and she had fallen asleep sometime after Luminara’s interrogation, too tired to stay awake any longer. She had not slept for over a day, and waking up the previous morning in her comfortable bed on Chandrila, Han snoozing soundly beside her, seemed like it was a lifetime away. In a way, she supposed it was.

She hoped Han was alright. The thought of her husband all alone in that temple on Raban, wondering what had happened to her, left a wrenching feeling in her gut, and so she pushed it away. It wouldn’t do to dwell on such things — she needed to focus on convincing the Jedi to help her find Luke. Without her brother, it would be nearly impossible for her to make her way back to Han, and she couldn’t get Luke out of whatever hole the Separatists had put him in without the Republic’s help.

Leia barely felt it as the Tranquility entered Coruscant’s atmosphere. There were no viewports in
her cell, so all she could do was sit silently in anticipation, waiting for someone to come retrieve her and bring her wherever it was they were going to take her. She assumed it would be the Jedi Temple; the thought sent a small jolt shivering through her veins.

For all of her life, the Temple had been known as the Imperial Palace, where Emperor Palpatine had made his home. She had only ever gone there once, very briefly as a child for a short appearance at a gala celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Empire’s formation. The building had frightened her, and from the moment she had entered it she had been overwhelmed by a sense of darkness and unease. It was as if evil had lived in its very walls.

She wondered how different it would feel, when it was being occupied by its original inhabitants.

She wondered how different all of Coruscant would be. It had been several years since she had visited the planet which for so many years had been like a second home to her. After she was outed publicly as a Rebel shortly before the Battle of Yavin, it had of course become impossible for her to go back, and since the Emperor’s death over Endor, the entire planet had been embroiled in a viciously escalating civil war. Though she had long wanted to, Leia had yet to be able to make it out to assess the situation for herself. But she had always dreamed of seeing Coruscant as it had once been — the Coruscant from her father’s stories about the years before the Clone Wars, when it was still a shining beacon for democracy, unspoiled by Palpatine’s tyranny.

It was perhaps another half an hour before the clone troopers arrived at her cell, binders in their hands. They clamped them around her wrists and escorted her out into the corridor, back the way they had come several hours earlier to the turbolift. They said nothing to her as she walked, and she asked no questions. She was taken to a different hangar, smaller than the one she had arrived in, and loaded onto a shuttle.

Barriss Offee sat in the small passenger area behind the cockpit. She regarded Leia with obvious suspicion, standing as Leia and her clone guards ascended the ramp into the shuttle.

“Thank you, troopers,” she said, nodding to the two guards. “You can leave her with me.”

The clones stepped back, each giving Barriss a quick salute. “Commander,” they said, and then they turned and walked back down the gangplank into the hangar.

Barriss returned to her seat, motioning to the bench across from her. “Please, sit,” she said.

Leia did so, resting her bound hands in her lap. “I assume you’re taking me to the Jedi Temple,” she said, and Barriss nodded.

“You’re to be interviewed by the High Council,” she explained. “They’ll decide what to do with you.” She observed Leia a moment longer, her expression more guarded, before looking away, down into the hangar.

Figuring she wouldn’t be able to pull any more information from the young woman, Leia leaned back. For a minute or two she simply watched Barriss, who seemed to be pointedly avoiding looking at her. The name Barriss Offee was familiar to her, but she couldn’t place where exactly she had heard it from, or in what context. Perhaps Barriss had merely been mentioned in the retellings of some of the battles of the war, though Leia felt that it was more significant than that. She couldn’t remember how, though.

It was only a few minutes before they were joined by Luminara, who gave Leia a small nod by way of greeting. “Miss Lars,” she said. “I assume Barriss has informed you of where we are going?”
Leia nodded. “Yes.”

“Very good.” Without another word, Luminara continued into the cockpit, where a clone pilot sat waiting. She settled herself into the co-pilot’s seat, while Barriss remained in the back with Leia, her gaze once more trained on her.

The shuttle’s engines whined to life, and the gangplank slowly retracted itself, sealing them inside the ship. Leia could hear the pilot’s chatter as he requested permission for take-off; it was granted after only a few seconds, and then they were rising into the air. There were no viewports in the back of the shuttle, but Leia could just barely see through the front viewport of the cockpit. She shifted closer, straining to see more as the shuttle escaped the confines of the Star Destroyer’s hangar and shot out into the world beyond.

They were in a shipyard; Leia could tell that much. She caught glimpses of other Star Destroyers docked nearby, and numerous gunships and shuttles like their own zipped through the air. Beyond that, she could see the tips of Coruscant’s skyscrapers, surrounded by zooming black flecks that she knew to be speeders. They moved in organized lines that criss-crossed the bright blue afternoon sky in nearly every direction.

The shuttle merged into one of those lines, heading no doubt towards the Jedi Temple. Leia had no idea what part of the planet the shipyard was on, but she assumed that if it was being used by the Grand Army of the Republic, it had to be relatively close to the Temple.

She turned out to be right. After only about ten minutes in the fast-moving lane of traffic, the shuttle exited, descending quickly to a landing pad below. It was only as the shuttle was settling onto the pad that Leia caught sight of the Temple.

Its exterior looked much like it had in her time, its base a squat ziggurat of light stone, with five spindly towers that jutted up from its centre into the sky. But unlike the building she knew, no Imperial banners hung from its face, no walkers patrolled the perimeter, and no TIE fighters screeched through the air. It exuded a much more peaceful aura, despite being the headquarters of an order currently embroiled in a galaxy-wide war.

The ramp descended and Luminara stood; Barriss did the same, and so did Leia. One hand on Leia’s shoulder, Luminara guided her down the gangplank onto the landing platform, where three Jedi stood waiting for them.

The man in the centre was a Zabrak, dressed in light brown robes with long dark hair that hung far past his shoulders. He regarded Leia with interest, his hands folded behind his back. It was impossible to tell what species or gender his two companions were, as they both wore identical long white robes, the hoods pulled high over their masked faces. They approached Leia immediately, each grabbing one of her elbows.

Luminara walked over to the Zabrak Jedi, and they bowed to each other in greeting. “Master Kolar,” she said.

“Master Unduli.” He looked past her, eyeing Leia. “This is her?”

“Yes. This is Nellith Lars. Her situation is quite… interesting.”

Master Kolar nodded, and motioned towards the Temple. “The Council is waiting.”

He and Luminara led the way, Leia and her two guards following close behind with Barriss bringing up the rear. The landing pad was connected to the rest of the Temple by a short walkway,
which brought them to one of the building’s side entrances. Another white-masked guard stood sentry at the doorway, but he stepped aside as the party approached, opening the door for them.

It led to a tall hallway, the floor tiled in colourful stone. The ceiling arched high above them, and one side was covered by a bank of towering windows, while the other looked down into what Leia assumed was the main entrance hall, several storeys below. She had seen the room once before, during her visit to the Imperial Palace, but back then, all it had done was make her afraid; now, she stared in awe at the cavernous room and its impressive architecture. She had grown up in palaces and great stately buildings, but almost none of them compared to the sheer size and design of the Jedi Temple.

She wished she could stop to admire it longer, but the guards kept her moving, their grips tight on her arms. They passed several Jedi as they walked, most of them alone or in pairs. They were nearly all either very young or elderly, but all paused a moment to acknowledge Master Kolar and Luminara, simply nodding their heads or uttering a short greeting. The young ones, most of them not even teenagers yet, stared at Leia as she passed, not even bothering to hide their immense curiosity regarding the prisoner being brought into their home. Leia wondered how many prisoners were brought to the Jedi Temple, if any; she didn’t even know if it was equipped with the cells, or if the Jedi even had the authority to detain someone.

At the end of the hallway was a circular bank of turbolifts. One, in the very centre, was guarded by two more of the masked white-robed Jedi, but they didn’t protest as Luminara approached and pressed the button to call the lift, and they allowed the entire group to board when it arrived.

There was only one floor option for the turbolift. It shot up, climbing higher and higher, and Leia realized that they were in one of the five towers that stuck out from the top of the Temple. When the turbolift finally came to a stop, the doors opened into a small atrium. Windows on either side looked down upon the Temple grounds and the rest of the city, and cushy benches were placed beneath them. A large wooden door took up most of the wall opposite the lift, made in the ancient style so that it had to be opened manually.

The three Jedi headed for the door, but Leia’s guards pulled her off to the side, near one of the tall windows.

“We must report to the Council first,” Luminara explained, pausing in front of the door. “Barriss will come retrieve you when they are ready.” Then she turned the handle, and the three Jedi filed inside. Leia caught only a glimpse of the room inside, seeing numerous seated figures arranged in a circle, before the door was closing again.

She sat down on the bench, and waited.
Luke received an unexpected visitor, and Leia pleads her case to the Jedi High Council.

The Force was quiet.

Luke had seldom heard it so silent before. It still swirled with all emotions of the people around him, moving with the ebb and flow of the galaxy; it still contained the restless chaos of a galaxy at war. But for the first time, Luke could sense no direction from it. It did not point out to him the right way to go, did not illuminate any paths before him. No matter how deep he delved, how far he reached, the Force remained still around him.

He listened, but it did not speak.

He closed his eyes, crossing his legs underneath him as Yoda had taught him, and tried again. Beyond his cell, he could sense the rest of the prison; it was vast, with innumerable corridors stretching above and below. Many, but not all, of the cells were occupied. The feelings of the other prisoners were a vicious mix of anger, distress, and hopelessness. Some still held a spark of defiance, but most seemed resigned to their fate.

Besides the prisoners, the only Force signature that Luke could sense was Dooku’s. Though he had been unable to sense it during their meeting, his connection to the Force dulled by the containment field, it was impossible to mistake. It was dark and empty, similar to the signature of many other dark side users that Luke had encountered. Though it was not the endless pit of cold that had characterized the Emperor, the maliciousness it held within it was still palpable.

Luke was careful to stay far away from Dooku’s senses, not even brushing the edges of them before pulling away. Beyond him and beyond the prisoners, the vast building appeared empty, though Luke knew it wasn’t. The guard droids who patrolled its corridors simply gave off no Force signature, something which could complicate any attempts at escape.

He expanded his senses past the prison itself, reaching into the core of the planet. It was small, with a miniscule population huddled as far away from the prison as possible. He could sense limited flora and fauna, giving the impression of a rather barren world. In other words, not a bad place for a prison.

But there was still nothing. It was simply a prison full of hopeless inmates on a dusty rock of a planet.

He pulled back, retreating into his cell, and opened his eyes.

A figure, blue and translucent, stood in the corner.

At first Luke thought it was Ben, or perhaps even his father, though he wasn’t sure if that was even
possible, seeing as both men were currently alive. But it took only a second or two for him to realize that he did not, in fact, recognize the man standing in front of him.

He wore robes similar to Ben’s, though even in this ghostly form Luke could tell that they were in better condition, not as ragged or worn. He had long hair pulled back into a half-ponytail, and a short beard covered his chin, with a mustache that rested beneath an aquiline nose. His hands were clasped behind his back, and he regarded Luke with some curiosity.


The man’s eyebrows raised slightly, as if surprised that Luke could see him, before his expression settled into a pleased smile. “My name is Qui-Gon Jinn,” he introduced, his deep voice marked by a Coruscanti accent. “And you are Luke Skywalker.”

Luke blinked, stunned. “How could you know that?”

“Time moves differently in the Netherworld of the Force,” Qui-Gon explained. “I know many things that have yet to happen. I know of your father’s fall to the dark side and of the rise of the Empire, and I know that you will save Anakin and help him bring balance to the Force. I also know many things that even you have not yet seen.”

“You’re a Jedi.” Luke had never heard of this “Netherworld of the Force” before, but it sounded very Jedi-like.

Qui-Gon nodded. “Yes. I was Master to Obi-Wan for many years, and I was supposed to be Anakin’s Master when he was brought to the Order as a child… but my death saw that task fall instead to Obi-Wan.”

“But Ben told me his Master was Yoda,” Luke said. “He never mentioned you.”

“Most Jedi train under Yoda at one point or another,” Qui-Gon explained. “And Obi-Wan, I know, has a habit of avoiding things that are too painful for him to talk about. I believe my death was very hard on him, even many years later.”

“When did you die?”

“Oh, it was long ago now,” Qui-Gon said. “Your father was still only a child when it happened. But it is no matter. And besides, I did not come to you to speak of my life, or of my death. I came because this is not your time, and yet the Force remains at peace around you. Such a disturbance should have had repercussions felt the galaxy over, and yet… there is nothing.”


“It is… unexpected. Of course, nothing like this has happened before, but even the smallest upset can create large ripples in the Force. And I would characterize this as more than a small upset.”

“It was the Force that sent me here,” Luke pointed out. “There was some sort of… artifact, in a temple that I discovered. I could feel the Force there, and it seemed to be concentrated on the artifact. When I touched it, it sent me here.”

Qui-Gon was silent for a long moment, his pale features twisted into a thoughtful expression. “If it was truly the Force that sent you here,” he said eventually, “then I believe it sent you here for a reason. You have a purpose here in the past. But what that purpose is, I cannot say.”

Luke frowned. He didn’t know what that purpose could possibly be either; the past was the past,
and he wasn’t sure what he could do to change it. Especially since he was stuck in this cell. If the Force truly had some grand purpose for him, he figured it would have at least kept him from being captured.

Footsteps sounded outside, echoing down the long corridor, and Luke’s eyes snapped to the cell door. Moments passed, but the door never opened, and the footsteps quickly receded, moving forward to some other destination.

When he looked back, Qui-Gon Jinn was gone.

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Luminara stood before the council, her hands clasped together in front of her. Master Kolar had taken up his seat between Master Kenobi and the holographic form of Master Kcaj, while Barriss remained at Luminara’s side. The Grandmaster of the Jedi High Council, Master Yoda, sat in the centre of the nearly-complete ring of chairs, his clawed hands curled around the top of his gimer stick.

“An incident on Ucarro, you have to report,” Master Yoda said.

“Yes,” Luminara said with a nod. “The retaking of the planet went very smoothly. We were able to quite easily oust the Separatists from their stronghold, and after that from the planet itself. However, during the initial battle in the outskirts of Ucarro’s capital city, I sensed a… disturbance, in the Force. It was unlike anything I had ever felt before, like the aftershock of a violent explosion. Afterwards, I could sense a new presence in the Force, somewhere on the planet — one that was incredibly powerful.”

“Do you suspect that this… presence was the source of the disturbance?” Master Windu asked, his shimmering blue hologram leaning forward in his seat.

Luminara nodded. “I believe so,” she said, “but I was unable to investigate further. The battle at hand required my full attention, and by the time it was over, the presence had dimmed. But it was while we were negotiating the terms of the Separatists’ surrender that I felt the second disturbance.”

Master Mundi’s long white eyebrows rose in surprise. “A second?”

“Just the same as the first, and the presence that appeared after was just as strong. I did not know if it was the same presence as before, or a completely new one. Once the negotiations were completed, I began to prepare a team to go and discover the source of the presence, but a group of my men returned from a patrol with a prisoner in tow. They had found her wandering the battlefield, and I knew immediately that she was the source. Her Force signature is quite obvious, and though it was quickly apparent that she is untrained, her shields are rather impressive.”

“This is the woman you brought back with you?” Master Windu asked, and Luminara nodded once more.

“Her name is Nellith Lars,” she said. “I do not believe we have anything to fear from her. Though she seems to be aware of her Force sensitivity, I do not believe she has great control over it. I was unable to sense any maliciousness in her, so I doubt she is associated with the dark side. That said, I am entirely unsure what she has to do with the Force disturbance I sensed, though the two are doubtless connected.”

Master Yoda hummed, his thin lips pressing together in thought. “So sure are we, that she is not of
“That is why I have brought her here to you,” Luminara said. “She told me that she was looking for her brother. She said initially that he was a civilian who carried out relief missions, and that he ended up near Ucarro after encountering trouble with his ship. When she didn’t hear from him for several days, she came after him. It seemed as if her brother might have been captured by the Separatists, and I was inclined to offer her our help, but then one of my men discovered this on her.” Reaching into her robes, Luminara produced the lightsaber that Sergeant Keen had found on Nellith. A ripple of shock circled the room, and the council members exchanged quick glances with one another.

Master Yoda reached out his hand for the weapon, and Luminara stepped forward, placing it into his palm. He studied it for a moment, his wrinkled features drawn into a frown, before he looked back up at Luminara. “Bring the girl in,” he said. “Many questions for her we have.”

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It was not long before the doors to the council room opened once more and Barriss reappeared. She motioned Leia forward, and Leia stood, following the Padawan into the room. The guards remained outside in the atrium, and Barriss closed the door behind them with a soft click.

The room was circular, with wide windows placed at regular intervals that provided a stunning view of Coruscant. The sky outside was clear, and the sun was only just beginning to lower towards the horizon, filling the chamber with warm natural light. Twelve chairs sat in a circle around the room, all of them in varying shapes and sizes, but all upholstered in the same rich red fabric. Each seat was occupied; these, Leia assumed, were the members of the Jedi High Council. They were a variety of species, from human to Cerean to Ongree, and a handful were presented as holograms.

There was a small gap between the chairs near the door, allowing someone to enter the ring, where Luminara Unduli stood in the middle of the room. This is where Barriss led Leia, in the centre of a simple circular design painted on the floor in deep shades of red, yellow, and blue.

A small creature sat in the chair directly in front of her, of some unknown species. He was shorter even than R2-D2, and his wrinkled green skin gave him the appearance of something ancient. He held Luke’s lightsaber in his gnarled, three-fingered hands, and observed her with wide, curious eyes, and though Leia had never seen him before, she knew immediately who he was, from Luke’s stories of the wizened old master who had taught him on Dagobah and the tales her father had told her when she was young.

“Master Yoda,” she greeted, bowing her head in his direction. “It’s an honour to meet you. I’ve heard many stories about you.”

Yoda hummed, his eyes narrowing slightly. “A Jedi, you are not,” he said, and he lifted Luke’s lightsaber, “but a lightsaber, you had. Why?”

Leia glanced over her shoulder at Luminara, wondering what the Jedi had told the rest of her comrades about Leia. “It isn’t mine,” she said, looking back to Yoda and the other council members. “As I told Master Unduli, the lightsaber is my brother’s. And neither of us stole it. He made it himself.”

The human male sitting beside Yoda raised his eyebrows. He was one of those attending the meeting remotely, but despite the blue translucency of his face Leia could still easily sense his skepticism. “Are you suggesting that your brother is a Jedi?”
“Yes,” Leia answered, “in a way.” And she told them the same story she had told Luminara aboard the Tranquility — that her father had been a Jedi who left the Order and trained her brother in the ways of the Force, that her brother went from planet to planet helping however he could. That when he had failed to return from Ucarro, Leia had gone after him, and that was when Luminara’s men found her.

“And you believe your brother to have been captured by the Separatists?” the man beside Yoda asked, and Leia nodded.

“I’m certain of it,” she said. “There’s no other reason why he would leave his lightsaber behind.” *And he told me so himself,* she thought, though she decided it was best to leave that piece of information out, at least for now.

“If it was your father that taught your brother to be a Jedi, why did he not teach you?” the Cerean Jedi asked. “You have no lightsaber of your own.”

“I didn’t want to be taught,” Leia replied. “It’s as simple as that.”

“Do you know when your father left the Order?” the Cerean asked. “Or what rank he was?”

Leia shook her head. “He never talked much about his time as a Jedi. All I know is that he left the Order sometime before I was born.”

“And how old are you?” a Togruta woman asked.

“Twenty-four.”

“And your brother?”

“The same. We’re twins.”

Leia knew she was being interrogated. Each of the Jedi seemed to have a question of their own, each trying to figure out a part of the story. She knew there would be investigations into her tale, but she just hoped that they wouldn’t find enough to prove it entirely false.

“Is your father still living?” asked a human man, sitting a few seats down from Yoda.

“No,” she answered. “He died a few years ago, before the war even started.”

“And you said you never knew his real name?” Obi-Wan asked.

“I only ever knew him as Josiah Lars.”

Obi-Wan settled back in his chair, a thoughtful expression on his face.

“I know you don’t trust me,” Leia said, before any Jedi could interject with more questions, “and I know my story seems difficult to believe. But it’s the truth, and my brother is in trouble. I won’t leave him to the Separatists, but I can’t help him on my own.”

“Our help, you ask?” Yoda said.
“Yes. All I want is to find my brother, and nothing more.”

There was a beat of silence; all twelve Jedi masters seemed enveloped in their own thoughts, trying to figure out their own opinions of her. The silence lasted no longer than a second or two, but to Leia it felt like an eternity.

Finally, Yoda spoke again. “Padawan Offee,” he said, looking past Leia to the young Mirialan Jedi. “Return young Nellith to her guards. To the cells, she is to be taken.”

So that answered Leia’s earlier question as to whether the Jedi had prison cells.

“Yes, Master Yoda,” Barriss said. She stepped forward, gently touching Leia’s shoulder, signalling for her to come with her. Leia cast one last glance around the room, before turning and following Barriss from the chamber.

She had no idea what the Jedi would decide. She hoped that she had convinced them to help her, but they had all seemed distrustful and suspicious. If they didn’t help her… she didn’t know what would happen, to her or to Luke.

And she did not want to spend the rest of her life twenty-five years in the past.

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Obi-Wan was unsure.

He didn’t know what to make of the girl that Master Unduli had brought to them. Her story had been strange, and while it was certainly plausible, he didn’t know if she was telling the truth. She had been incredibly difficult to read; her shields were quite impressive, and while he had sensed no dishonesty from her, he had also sensed little honesty. The only thing he was absolutely certain of was that she wanted to help her brother — it was the only thing she had been certain of as well.

“I don’t trust her,” Mace Windu said, and his hologram scowled. It was an expression Obi-Wan was used to seeing on him, especially in recent months as the war continued to drag on. “I sense that she is not telling us the truth.”

“But I do not believe she was lying, either,” Obi-Wan said. “At least, not entirely.”

Yoda grunted, nodding. “The truth, she says. But not all of it.”

“I agree with Master Unduli,” Kit Fisto said, nodding to the Mirialan woman, who remained standing in the centre of the chamber. “I could not sense any trace of the dark side on her. I do not think her intent is malicious.”

“But her Force presence was remarkably strong,” Plo Koon pointed out. “One of the strongest I have felt in a long time. I have no doubts that someone that strong in the Force could easily hide their true intentions.”

A murmur of agreement circled the room. Obi-Wan leaned back, his hand stroking absently at his beard. What Master Koon said was certainly true — the girl, Nellith, had a Force presence to rival Anakin’s. But whether she was trained enough to hide her intentions was another question; she had said herself that she had never been interested in learning the ways of the Jedi.

“I am personally most concerned about this brother of hers,” Master Unduli said. “If Nellith was the cause of one of the disturbances I felt on Ucarro, then I believe her brother was the cause of the other. And his whereabouts are as of yet unknown. I believe we should focus on finding him; if
these two really are a risk, it would be best to have them both under our watch as soon as possible.”

“Do you really believe he was captured by Separatists?” Saesee Tiin asked.

“It is certainly likely,” Master Unduli replied. “Until we arrived, Ucarro was surrounded by a blockade and the area around the capital was heavily patrolled. Nellith claims she found her brother’s lightsaber in the forest that surrounds the capital. If he somehow ended up there, it is not unlikely that he would have run into a patrol of some kind and ended up captured. Nellith seems convinced of it, in any case.”

“It could be a lie,” Master Mundi pointed out, “part of some larger ruse — a Separatist trap.”

“A trap?” Obi-Wan asked. “For whom?”

“For any Jedi she can get,” Master Windu said.

Obi-Wan shook his head. “I do not believe so. I sensed uncertainty in everything she said, except for when she spoke of her brother. Every other part of her story might be a lie, but I do not believe that this is. She is truly worried for him, and she asks in honesty for our help.”

“I agree,” Master Yoda said. “Help her, we will. And then investigate further, we shall.”

“Then I believe one of us should be put in charge of her,” Master Windu said. “I do not believe this is a task we can assign to anyone less experienced.”

Obi-Wan didn’t even spare a second of thought before he spoke next. “If I may, Master Yoda, I would like to volunteer for the position.” There was something about the girl that intrigued him — something familiar, yet entirely strange.

Plus, there were few other council members available for the job.

Master Yoda nodded. “If you wish, Master Kenobi.”

“We will likely need her help,” Master Koon said. “I have no doubt that her brother is as strong in the Force as she is, and if they are twins, then they will have a strong bond that could help in our search for him. But I do not think she will cooperate unless we have gained her trust, and we cannot do that if we continue to treat her as a prisoner.”

“So we will use her?” Master Unduli asked. “Gain her trust to get to her brother, and then betray her?”

It was an uncomfortable situation; Obi-Wan could sense his fellow councillors’ unease, which matched his own. But it was the quickest, and easiest, way to find Nellith’s brother. She might be able to sense where he was, or even communicate with him, which could cut down their search time by days. And the sooner the Jedi had both twins under their watch, the better. Obi-Wan knew the Order well, and a pair of extremely powerful Force-sensitives on the loose throughout the galaxy was not something most Jedi would be comfortable with.

“If we must,” Master Windu said.

“I suggest, then, that we remove her from the cells as soon as possible,” Master Mundi said. “She should still be kept under careful watch, and should not be allowed to wander unaccompanied, but we cannot allow her to feel like a prisoner.”
“We should also look into this matter with her father,” Shaak Ti interjected. “If we can find records of a human male Jedi who left the order approximately twenty-four years ago, then we can begin to corroborate her story, and discover whether she is telling the truth.”

Master Windu nodded. “I agree with both points.”

“Then I will see that it’s done,” Obi-Wan said.

Chapter End Notes

I promise that Anakin will make an appearance soon!!
Chapter Summary

Luke and Leia both receive visits, with different results.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Leia had had more than enough of prison cells.

She sat on the bench in her cell in the Jedi Temple, her hands curling and uncurling into fists at her side. Compared to every other cell that Leia had ever been in, this one was by far the most comfortable; the bench was actually padded, and she had even been provided a blanket, as rough and scratchy as it was. There was small slit of a window at the very top of the wall, letting in the last dregs of light as the sun set below the Coruscant horizon. If Leia stood on the bench and stretched onto the very tips of her toes, she could just barely see out the window into the city beyond.

But none of this disguised the fact that she was in a prison cell, and none of it made her any less uncomfortable.

This discomfort was compounded by the fact that there was something in the cell, in its walls or in the ceiling or somewhere, that dulled her connection to the Force. It was not a connection that she relied heavily upon, or that she even took notice of most days, but it was something that had always been a part of her, even when she hadn’t known it. When she was younger she had thought that she just had good instincts and intuition, that she was skilled at reading people, but now she knew that a lot of that stemmed from the Force. And its absence was… disquieting.

Though she was exhausted, running on only a few hours of sleep, she refused to even lie down, not wanting to fall asleep just yet. She hoped that the Jedi would let her know their decision as soon as it was made, and she did not want to be woken, half-groggy from sleep, when that happened.

Thankfully, she did not have long to wait.

Not even an hour after she had been put in the cell, the door opened. She expected to see more of the Temple guards, with their expressionless white masks, but instead it was Obi-Wan Kenobi who stood on her doorstep, his hands folded behind his back.

He smiled at her, and bowed his head by way of greeting. “Miss Lars.”

“Nellith, please.”

“Nellith,” he corrected. “I am Master Obi-Wan Kenobi. I’ve been assigned to handle your case. Would you come with me?” He stepped aside, motioning out into the corridor.

Leia stared at him for a moment, surprised. She couldn’t see any guards out in the hallway, and Obi-Wan continued to smile pleasantly, waiting. She stood and, slowly, walked out of the cell. Her connection to the Force came rushing back, and she breathed a nearly-audible sigh of relief.
“This way, please,” Obi-Wan said, and he began to walk away down the hallway, back the way Leia had been brought less an hour before.

“No binders?” she asked, and Obi-Wan shook his head.

“You are no longer our prisoner,” he said. “We have decided to trust you, and we’re going to help you find your brother.”

Even more relief coursed through Leia. They were going to help her. With the Jedi, and by extension the Grand Army of the Republic, on her side, they should have no issues rescuing Luke. And then they could figure out how to get themselves home. With any luck, they could be back in their own time before anything catastrophic happened, either in the past or the present.

“I’m very grateful to you,” Leia said, hurrying so that she matched Obi-Wan’s long strides. “I am sure that it wasn’t an easy decision to trust me so implicitly, but I’m thankful that you did.”

Obi-Wan simply nodded. “I’ll be taking you to your new accommodations,” he said. “I’m sure that you would like to rest and bathe, and I’ll have food brought to you.”

A pair of guards stood watch at the entrance to the detention area, but they allowed Leia and Obi-Wan to pass without even a question. Obi-Wan pressed a button to call the nearby turbolift to bring them back up to the Temple’s higher levels.

“What about my brother?” Leia asked. “What’s being done to find him?”

“At the moment, not much,” Obi-Wan admitted. The turbolift arrived, and he stepped inside; Leia followed. “We have a list of Separatists prisons where he might be held, but it is impossible to know which one. That is where you will come in.”

The turbolift started to ascend, climbing up from the underground detention level.

“If you can’t figure out where my brother is, how can I?”

“Because he’s your brother,” Obi-Wan explained. “You said you were twins, correct?” Leia nodded. “And you are both Force-sensitive, even if you, Nellith, remain mostly untrained. The bond between Force-sensitive siblings is powerful, even more so amongst twins. Would I be incorrect in assuming that you have been able to contact your brother before, without the use of a comlink or other technology, despite being separated, even by a great distance?”

Leia nodded. “We’ve done it before, a number of times.”

Obi-Wan smiled again, and the turbolift slowed to a stop. “And that is how we will find your brother,” he said. “Even if he cannot tell you where he is, you can use your Force bond to pinpoint his location.”

Leia nodded, and stepped out of the lift after Obi-Wan. She had, after all, been able to find Luke after his duel with Vader on Cloud City, though the search area then had been much smaller. Still, she was confident that she could to do it. And Obi-Wan seemed confident as well.

“I’m not entirely sure I know how to do that,” she admitted, “but I can certainly do my best.”

“Don’t worry,” Obi-Wan said, leading her down a long hallway. “We’ll help you as best we can.”

It was a quiet corridor, the ceiling much lower than in the rest of the Temple. Both walls were lined by doors, each one numbered; these were the living quarters, Leia realized. A long skylight
spanned the length of the hallway, filling it with the warm glow of sunset.

“When do we begin?” Leia asked, eager to find Luke, as soon as possible. She was desperate to get back home, back to Han, to the Senate, to the war they were still fighting.

“Tomorrow morning,” Obi-Wan said. “You need time to rest.”

Leia wanted to protest. It was not just her desperation to get home that made her anxious to find Luke; she was worried for him, and though her senses told her that he was, at the current moment, fine, she didn’t know how long he would remain so.

But she was bone-tired, and starving. Her last food had been a pre-frozen meal partially heated up in the Falcon’s newly-added but still incomplete galley, eaten on the journey to Raban. She wanted to find her brother, but she didn’t know how much help she would be, as tired and hungry as she was.

So, she simply nodded, and let Obi-Wan lead her the rest of the way to her new room. It was small and sparsely furnished, but infinitely more comfortable than any of her cells that day had been. The bed was small but plush. A desk and chair sat against one of the walls, a window above it that looked out onto a walkway through a green garden. A datapad sat on the desk, and on the opposite wall was a door that Leia assumed led to a refresher. There were no decorations on the walls, but it was the type of room that Leia would expect from the Jedi. She assumed that, with more long-term occupation, the room would gather more individuality.

She, of course, would not be here long enough for that to happen. But it would do well in the meantime.

Obi-Wan remained just outside the door as she inspected her room. When she turned back to look at him, he gave her a reassuring smile. “I’ll leave you to get cleaned up, then,” he said. “I’ll have some food brought to you shortly, and will come to collect you in the morning. We’ll be starting first thing.”

Leia nodded again. “Thank you, Master Kenobi. I must tell you again how grateful I am.”

“Think nothing of it. Have a good evening, Nellith.” And then he was gone, walking off back down the hallway.

Leia closed the door, and sank into the desk chair. Obi-Wan Kenobi was not quite the man she had imagined; he was not the wizened hermit of whom Luke spoke so fondly, but he was also not entirely the great general of her father’s stories. But he was kind, and she was glad of the opportunity to get to know the man behind the legends. Even if it was not under the most ideal of circumstances.

She picked up the datapad that rested on the desk; it was an old model, one that she hadn’t seen used since she was a young child. But the design was relatively the same as many modern models, and so she had no trouble starting it up. The screen illuminated, displaying a list of downloaded books, articles, and other materials. The date hovered in the top right corner.

According to the datapad, it was the very beginning of the year 15 — over halfway through the Clone Wars, and approximately a year and a half before Luke and Leia would be born. Almost twenty-five years in the past.

She set the datapad back down, and looked away.

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The Jedi Archives were silent, as they always were. Some Jedi perused the shelves or pored over information, seated at the tables scattered throughout the library, but at this time of day, it was mostly empty.

Obi-Wan found Master Jocasta Nu at her desk in the centre of the library’s rotunda. The Chief Librarian looked up from her work as he approached, smiling warmly.

“Master Kenobi,” she greeted, her voice soft in the hushed atmosphere of the Archives. “Is there something I can assist you with?”

“In fact, there is,” Obi-Wan said. “I require access to the records of all members of the Order. Particularly those who are no longer members.”

Master Nu nodded, and stood. As a member of the Jedi High Council, Obi-Wan had access to all areas of the Archives, even the highly-restricted Holocron Vault. As such, Master Nu asked no questions about what he needed with the personal records of former Jedi.

“Follow me,” she said, and Obi-Wan did as he was told, following the elderly librarian as she led him to one of the Archives’ back rooms, located off to the side of the north wing.

The walls glowed like the shelves out in the library, alight with information stored in shining sheets. A computer terminal sat in the centre of the room, and this is where Master Nu went, pressing a button to wake the machine. A hologram appeared above it, showing a field where one could enter various search parameters.

“Who exactly are you looking for?” Master Nu asked, her fingers hovering above the input keys.

“I don’t have a name,” Obi-Wan said, “but I’m searching for a human male who left the Order approximately twenty-eight to twenty-four years ago. He was likely a Knight, but he could have also been an older Padawan.”

Master Nu’s fingers danced over the buttons. Dozens of Jedi had left the Order over its millennia-long history; most had been Knights, Padawans, or even Initiates. Only a handful had been Masters — the Lost Twenty, whose busts lined the main walkway of the Archives, serving as a reminder that the Order was not faultless. Dooku, the master of Obi-Wan’s master, stood among them. But while it was uncommon for a Master to leave the Order, it was not so for a Knight or Padawan; in fact, it was becoming ever more common as the war continued and more and more Jedi became disenchanted with the Order’s role in the conflict.

After a moment of calculation, a list of results appeared — two men in total, both of them Knights. A tally of information appeared below their names: one had been just barely twenty years old when he left the Order; the other had been in his late twenties. The younger had left twenty-seven years ago, the older twenty-six years ago, which meant that, in the two years leading up to Nellith’s birth, no human male Jedi had left the Order. Though that, of course, did not eliminate the possibility of one of these two being Nellith’s father, it made it less likely.

“Do we know what happened to them, after they left?” Obi-Wan asked.

Master Nu shook her head. “We see no need in keeping tabs on those who are no longer part of our Order,” she said. “When they left, they became regular citizens of the Republic.”

He would have to go to the government, then, to find out about the lives these men had led after they stopped being Jedi. There was no saying how long that could take; forms would have to be filled out, and he would have to jump through an endless barrage of bureaucratic hoops just to get
the most basic information. Or he could take their photos and show Nellith, asking her which one was her father — but she might lie, telling him one was her father when, in fact, neither was. Such a simple lie would be easy to mask, even for someone untrained in the Force.

“Do we still have their blood samples on record?” Obi-Wan asked. A blood sample was taken from every Jedi when they were brought to the Order, and afterward it remained stored in the Archives. Obi-Wan wasn’t sure what the protocol was for Jedi who had left the Order.

“I believe so,” Master Nu said. “Speak with the analysis droids in the information centre at the end of the east wing. They’ll be able to assist you.”

Obi-Wan nodded. “Would I be able to get a copy of this information?” he asked, motioning to the hologram above the computer terminal.

“Of course.” Master Nu pressed a few buttons on the console, and a moment later a thin datapad slid out, the kind that could only hold a very limited amount of information. She passed it to him.

The information from the hologram appeared on the datapad screen — two files, on two different Jedi who each had a small possibility of being Nellith Lars’ father. Their names were Kel Varik and Dralin Sett. He didn’t recognize the names, or the photos that accompanied their files — he had been quite young when both left the Order. But hopefully their samples would still be in the Archives, and they would be able to tell Obi-Wan what he needed to know.

He thanked Master Nu, and took his leave of her.

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It was not long after Qui-Gon vanished that Luke received another visitor, this time of a much more corporeal form.

Count Dooku arrived alone. He wore another luxurious cape, this time of a deep purple hue, fastened by golden clasps. He smirked at the sight of Luke, taking one step into the cell. The door remained open behind him.

“Good evening, young Skywalker,” he greeted. “I trust that you have been finding your stay with us comfortable?”

“Unbelievably so,” Luke replied. He remained where he was, seated on the bench.

“I’m afraid that I never caught your first name during our initial meeting,” Dooku said.

“Luke.” He realized too late that perhaps he shouldn’t so casually share his name with his captor, but then he decided that it likely didn’t make any difference — Dooku already knew his last name, and in any case, there would be no records of any Luke Skywalker in this time. There was very little that Dooku could do with that information.


“I don’t know,” Luke lied. “I’ve never had the pleasure of meeting him. But you should know, Skywalker is a very common name in the Outer Rim.” Another lie, but Luke hoped that Dooku wouldn’t know any better.

Dooku quirked an eyebrow, as if he didn’t quite believe Luke. “In any case,” he continued, “you are as strong in the Force as Anakin Skywalker. Which makes me wonder why you are not a member of the Jedi Order. They doubtless would have found you long ago.”
“Perhaps I’m not a Jedi now,” Luke said, “but that doesn’t mean I wasn’t one once. You left the Order. Who’s to say I didn’t do the same?”

Dooku was silent for a moment. “I doubt that is the case,” he said eventually. “But it’s of no matter now. You are powerful in the Force, and you lack the training of a Jedi. You will serve your purpose well enough.”

“And what purpose is that?” Luke asked, though he had a relatively good idea. Dooku’s void of a Force signature marked him easily as a Sith. Luke knew little of the Sith, but he knew that Palpatine was one, and that Anakin had been his apprentice. In this time, Palpatine was still alive, but Luke’s father was still a Jedi — he had yet to fall to the dark side. Which meant that Palpatine must have another apprentice.

And Dooku was the likeliest candidate.

“You are a powerful Force user,” Dooku said, “but your limited training means that you have only had a taste of your true potential. I can show you how to access that potential — how to become one of the most powerful beings in the galaxy.”

“And how would your master feel about you taking on an apprentice of your own?” Luke asked. Surprise sparked in Dooku’s eyes, but he quickly extinguished it. “My master does not need to know,” he said. “You have an anger in you, Luke Skywalker. A darkness that longs to be freed. I can sense it. I can help you set it free.”

Luke nearly laughed. “Stronger men than you have tried to turn me,” he said, “and none so far have succeeded. You’re a fool if you believe that power can only come from anger and darkness.”

“You are the fool,” Dooku spat, his face twisting into a sneer. “You are the fool, like those misguided Jedi. In time, I will make you see this.”

“You can try.”

Dooku gave a snarling scoff, and then turned on his heel and marched from the cell. The door slid shut behind him.

Luke leaned back, resting his head on the wall. He wasn’t particularly worried about Dooku — if Palpatine and Luke’s own father had been unable to turn him, he didn’t think he had anything to fear from the Count’s weak threats. But he would not like to stay around to see if he carried through with them.

Qui-Gon had said that Luke had some sort of purpose in the past, and though Luke doubted that it was the purpose Dooku had in mind, the Force wanted him here, for one reason or another. Perhaps it hadn’t intended for him to be captured by Separatists, but it had intended for him to end up in the Clone Wars.

But why? Why had it torn him from a galaxy still embroiled in chaos, in desperate need of help?

Realization hit him suddenly, and he lifted his head. The chaos of his galaxy was caused by the civil war, which was caused by the tyranny of the Empire. But here, now, the Empire was still at least a year off. Without Palpatine, the Empire would never be formed. Anakin Skywalker would never fall and become Darth Vader. Luke could stop the civil war from happening, stop the seeds of it from ever being planted and save the galaxy from even more destruction and devastation. He could end the chaos before it ever even began. He could save his father.
He just needed to kill Palpatine.

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Obi-Wan arrived at Leia’s door shortly after she woke up. She had fallen asleep early the night before, just shortly after the sun had fully set, and had woken just as it began to peek back over the horizon. Exhaustion had overridden her anxiety over Luke, and she’d descended into a deep sleep. When she woke, she felt surprisingly well-rested.

The clothes she had arrived in were filthy, streaked with dirt and reeking of sweat, but the Jedi had kindly provided her with a new set of outfits. They were not the clothes she would have chosen for herself, but she was glad to see that they were not the neutral-toned robes that most Jedi wore. A simple green tunic with matching pants, and a long brown vest with swirling embroidery along the hems. She wore her own boots.

She had just finished getting dressed when Obi-Wan’s knock sounded on her door. She pressed the button to open the door, and was unsurprised to see him standing there in the hallway, just as he had promised.

“Good morning, Master Kenobi,” she greeted.

“Good morning, Miss Lars,” he returned.

She repeated what she had told him the evening before. “Nellith, please.”

He smiled, and nodded. “Of course. I’m glad to see that I didn’t wake you. Are you ready to start the day?”

“Master Kenobi, I’ve been ready since last night.” Emotionally, at least, if not physically.

“Alright, then.” He stepped aside, allowing her to step into the hallway, and followed her out.

Guards, like those who had escorted her through the Temple the day before, stood at either end of the hallway. Leia didn’t remember seeing them last night, but she had been so tired that it was possible she had missed them. In any case, they were both far enough from her door that she didn’t believe they were guarding her — or at least, that’s what she hoped.

“We’ll be going to the Halls of Healing first,” Obi-Wan said, falling into step beside her. At her confused look, he added, “It’s the Temple’s medical wing.”


“No, everything’s perfectly fine,” Obi-Wan assured her. “You needn’t worry. The Council has simply requested an analysis of your midi-chlorian count, which requires a blood sample be taken. The med droids in the Halls of Healing will carry this out.”

Her confusion deepened. “What the hell is a midi-chlorian count?”

“A midi-chlorian is a microscopic, intelligent lifeform that resides within all living beings,” Obi-Wan explained. He said it as if it was a definition that had been pounded into his brain for years. “They act as a sort of… conduit, which allows their hosts to connect with the Force. Typically, the more midi-chlorians an individual has, the more Force-sensitive they are. The Council is curious to see what your count is.”

Leia’s eyebrows furrowed together. She’d never heard of these midi-chlorians before, and if she
was being honest, it sounded like a bunch of pseudo-science nonsense, the sort of thing her old Apprentice Legislator friend Amilyn Holdo would believe. But the General Kenobi of her father’s stories was a rational, level-headed person, not prone to Amilyn’s eccentricities, and so Leia decided to roll with it.

“Alright,” she said. “Let’s see how my midi-chlorians size up.”

Obi-Wan gave a quiet laugh.

The Halls of Healing were not far from the residential quarters. They took up much of the southwest wing of the Temple, with a large infirmary, at least a hundred bacta tanks, and dozens of beds in both private rooms and larger wards. Obi-Wan took her to the infirmary, where the less serious wounds and illnesses were treated. A number of med droids rolled about, carrying supplies or speaking to the few patients present at this early hour. They were the same models used by the Rebel Alliance, top-of-the-line in this era but depressingly outdated in hers.

One of the droids greeted them as they entered the infirmary. “Hello, General Kenobi,” it said. “Is this the patient Nellith Lars?”

Obi-Wan nodded. “Yes,” he said. “We’re just here for a simple blood test.”

“Understood.” It looked to Leia. “Please follow me.”

She did as it said, following the droid to a small curtained-off area. A number of chairs sat arranged around the room, and the droid directed her to sit in one. It hobbled over to a small cart in the corner, picking up a small, opaque needle.

“Please roll up your sleeve and extend your right arm.” She did so, and the droid approached her, needle grasped carefully in its metal hand. “This will only take a moment.”

The droid inserted the needle in her forearm; it pinched, but Leia didn’t wince. A moment later, the droid pulled the needle out. It removed the needle tip, so that only a metal vial of her blood remained. A bead of crimson pooled on Leia’s forearm, but the droid quickly covered it with a small bacta patch.

“I will send this sample off for analysis as requested,” the droid said, inserting the vial into a small machine near the cart. It disappeared with a soft whirr. The droid walked back over to Leia and removed the bacta patch; it had done its work, and the small insertion wound was already gone. “You are free to go,” the droid told her.

She stood, and followed Obi-Wan out back through the infirmary. “What next?” she asked. “Would you like a urine sample, as well?”

Obi-Wan chuckled and looked back at her, smiling. “Now, we try and find your brother.”

Chapter End Notes

The year 15 comes from the Great ReSynchronization, established in 36 BBY, which tentatively puts this story in early 20 BBY, after the Battle of Sullust but before the mission to Mortis, just for some context!
Chapter Summary

Leia has an encounter she would have preferred to avoid.

It was good to be back on Coruscant. Anakin had missed it, in a way he never thought he could have. When he had first arrived on the planet, all those years ago, he had found it cold and oppressing; there were too many buildings, too many people, too much happening. The Jedi Temple had seemed too vast, a maze of hallways and rooms that he didn’t think he would ever be able to find his way around. And he had missed his mother fiercely.

But over the last twelve years, the Temple, and Coruscant, had become his home. And weeks away at a time, sleeping in tents on muddy battlegrounds or in cramped ships quarters, always made the return so much sweeter.

As did the prospect of Padmé, waiting for him in her apartment. He could not wait to go to her, to sweep her up in his arms and not let go for as long as possible. The thought of being with her again after so many weeks apart nearly brought a smile to his face, but he pushed it back down. He may be back on Coruscant, but there was still business for him to attend to.

This particular mission had only taken him away for less than a week, but it had been much longer than that since Anakin had last visited his wife. Nowadays, it seemed he was only back on the planet for a day or two before they were shipping him back out again on another assignment. There was rarely time for him to sneak away, and so they had had to survive on quick, secret calls once every few days. It would be good to see her again, to be able to hold her again.

But first, the damn Council report. The skirmish over Yaga Minor had been resolved quickly enough, with limited casualties — a cut-and-dry success that unfortunately meant very little in the rapidly-escalating situation of the war. But Anakin had been promised at least three days of leave after his return, which he looked forward to greatly — so long as the war cooperated.

Walking beside him, Ahsoka let out a deep groan and stretched her arms high above her head. “It’ll be so nice to sleep in a real bed again,” she said. “Let’s hurry up and get this over with so I can go take a nap.”

Anakin smiled. “Agreed.”

They continued down the hallway, turning off in the direction of the Council chambers. The corridors were not very busy — it was early in the morning, so Anakin assumed that most Jedi were either just waking up or busy eating breakfast. It was a bit of a surprise, then, when he spotted the familiar figure walking ahead of them.

“Hey, it’s Master Kenobi!” Ahsoka said, catching sight of him at the same time as Anakin. She took off into a quick jog, hurrying to catch up with him.

A young woman walked beside Obi-Wan, and both turned to look back when Ahsoka called out to them. Anakin had never seen her before, and she didn’t wear the robes of a Jedi or carry a lightsaber. She was short, even more so than Ahsoka, and her long brown hair was pulled up into a
braided bun. Her eyes were dark, the same shade as her hair, and they carried in them a spark of familiarity that Anakin couldn’t quite place.

Despite her lack of a lightsaber, the woman’s Force presence was incredibly powerful — more so than almost any Anakin had sensed before. She had some mental shields in place, but they were quite weak, a sign that she wasn’t formally trained in the ways of the Force. Still, she carried herself with incredible confidence, her back straight and her head high. It was a stance that reminded Anakin of Padmé.

“I’m glad to see you’ve made it back safely,” Obi-Wan said, smiling at them. “You had little trouble at Yaga Minor?”

“Nothing we couldn’t handle, eh Snips?” Anakin said, pulling his gaze away from the woman and placing a hand on Ahsoka’s shoulder.

She grinned up at him. “All in a day’s work.”

“Well, that’s good to hear.”

“And you’ve been keeping busy, as well?” Anakin asked, his gaze going back to the woman at Obi-Wan’s side. She looked right back at him, the smallest crease appearing between her eyebrows. It was an expression that almost made her look even more familiar, though Anakin still couldn’t place it.

“As busy as always,” Obi-Wan said. He glanced over at the woman, then back to Anakin and Ahsoka. “This is Nellith Lars,” he introduced. “Her brother was captured by Separatists, and she requested our help in finding him. I’ve been assigned to assist her.”

Anakin’s eyebrows rose as Obi-Wan said her name. Lars was the surname of the man who had married his mother, back on Tatooine; perhaps, then, this young woman was related to them. That could also explain why she hadn’t been found by the Order as a child, despite her strong connection to the Force. The only reason Anakin had been discovered on Tatooine was because of his encounter with Qui-Gon Jinn.

“Anakin Skywalker,” he said, bowing his head in her direction. “This is my Padawan, Ahsoka Tano.” Ahsoka smiled, tilting her head in greeting.

At the mention of his name, Nellith’s eyes widened. A torrent of emotions came spilling out past her shields, unchecked; Anakin could sense shock, anger, distress… but most of all fear, and hatred. Directed specifically at him.

But a moment later it was gone. She had thrown up another barrage of shields, bottling her emotions back up inside her mind. Her face betrayed none of what she must be feeling, but there was no mistaking what Anakin had sensed — for a split second, she had been overcome with absolute hatred towards him. A woman whom he had never met before in his life.

There was a moment of silence, as if everyone was trying to puzzle through what had just happened. There was no doubt that Ahsoka and Obi-Wan had been able to sense Nellith’s emotions as clearly as he had; they had been so overwhelming, so powerful that it would have been impossible to miss them.

Nellith smiled, as if nothing at all was wrong. “It’s wonderful to meet you both,” she said. “I’ve heard a lot about you.” Her gaze settled on Anakin, and her eyes were like a mask, unreadable.

“I… thank you,” Anakin said, not sure of what else he could say. He looked to Obi-Wan, one
eyebrow quirked, and Obi-Wan gave him a look that said he was just as confused.

“We should be getting on,” Obi-Wan said after another moment of strained silence. “We have lots to do, and I’m sure you do as well.”

“Yes, of course, Master,” Ahsoka said.

Nellith gave them one last pleasant smile, and then promptly turned on her heel and marched away from them. Obi-Wan gave a quick nod to both Anakin and Ahsoka, before hurrying off to catch up with her.

Ahsoka looked up at him, folding her arms together. “What do you think’s up with her?” she asked.

Anakin simply shrugged.

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Leia felt like she was going to be ill.

Her stomach was twisting into knots, as if it was preparing to upend itself, and her hands shook violently at her sides. She curled them into fists, pressing her nails into the skin of her palm, hard enough that she worried she might have drawn blood.

She hadn’t expected to see him. She had known it was a possibility, but the Temple was so big and the Jedi were so busy with the war, she had thought the chances were too slim to worry about. She hadn’t even recognized him at first — of course she hadn’t; she had never seen him as he truly was, outside of that damned black suit. But a part of her had thought that, if she ever did come close to him, she would sense him approaching, as she had with Vader — she would sense that same cold, that same void of a soul that had haunted her for so long.

But she had felt nothing, not a single thing out of the ordinary. He had felt the same as all the other Jedi who had filled the hallway around them — just an ordinary man, no eviller than any others.

He and the Togruta girl had approached Obi-Wan in the corridor, exchanging warm pleasantries with him, and Leia had simply wondered who the young man with the lovely blue eyes was.

Then he had introduced himself to her, and she had felt her heart drop to the soles of her feet.

Anakin Skywalker, her biological father, the man who had served as the right hand to Emperor Palpatine, who had tortured her for hours, whose evil had haunted her for the past four years.

And here he was standing in front of her, smiling kindly, with shining blue eyes that reminded her so much of Luke’s that it almost hurt.

She had never wanted to see him again. Luke had told her how he had changed, in his final moments before death — that he had become Anakin Skywalker again. But she didn’t think she could ever see him as anything but the monster Darth Vader. Luke had tried, in the weeks following Endor, to change her mind, before she had finally begged him to stop. Even the mere thought of being related to that man had sent her reeling. It had hurt Luke, she knew, but it wasn’t something she had been able to face; not then, perhaps not ever.

She certainly didn’t want to face it now.

She had tried her best to conceal her emotions regarding him, not wanting Anakin or Obi-Wan to sense what she was feeling. Evidently, however, she hadn’t done well enough.
“Nellith, are you alright?” Obi-Wan asked, falling into step beside her. “You seem… distressed.”

“I’m fine,” she lied.

“Are you sure? I want you to feel that you can trust me. You can tell me if something isn’t alright.”

Leia wanted to laugh, but was certain it would come out sounding nearly hysterical. Things were quite far from alright, but she couldn’t tell Obi-Wan any of it — she couldn’t tell him that she was from the future, that Anakin Skywalker was her biological father, that he had fallen to the dark side and tortured her for hours inside the belly of a moon-sized battle station that had destroyed her home planet, that she hated him with every piece of her being.

So instead she just gave him a tired smile, and lied some more.

“It’s just my brother. I can’t shake the feeling that he’s in danger, that something bad is going to happen to him.” It was not entirely a lie — just an exaggeration of the truth.

“Did you sense something?” Obi-Wan asked.

“I…” Leia paused, and tried to collect herself. “I’m not sure. You’ll have to forgive me, I’m not very well-versed in these things.”

“No need to worry,” Obi-Wan assured her. “We’ll help you figure it out. And we’ll help you find your brother, as soon as possible. I won’t let anything happen to him, if I can help it.”

Leia nodded. “Alright. Thank you.”

She tried to still her mind, pushing away all thoughts of Anakin Skywalker. She told herself that she likely wouldn’t have to see him again — that this was just a one-off thing, a fluke. Soon she would be too busy dealing with Luke to worry about him.

But deep down, even as she thought it, she didn’t believe that was true.

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Obi-Wan brought her to a room on the ground floor of the Temple. It was some sort of meditation chamber; there were several large, squat ottomans scattered about the room, and the entire far wall was made up of horizontal wooden slats. It seemed that they could be opened or closed at the occupants’ desire; at the current moment, they were half-open, and Leia was able to catch glimpses of a peaceful courtyard garden. The sound of wind rustling through the leaves drifted in, brought by a cool breeze.

They were the only ones in the room. Obi-Wan took a seat on one of the ottomans near the slatted wall, crossing his legs. He gestured for her to do the same and, slightly uncomfortable, she sat down on the ottoman opposite him.

“You seem apprehensive,” Obi-Wan asked.

Suddenly self-aware, Leia tried to roll the tension from her shoulders. “I’m not entirely sure what you’re expecting of me,” she admitted. “I told you, I’m no Jedi. I’ve never meditated before, and honestly, I don’t think it’s something I’m cut out for.”

Obi-Wan gave her a reassuring smile. “Anyone can meditate, given enough practice,” he said. “But don’t worry — that’s not what we came here to do. I’m not expecting you to do anything you haven’t done already. At least, not yet.”
Leia nodded, though she remained somewhat unsure.

“Just relax,” Obi-Wan said. “I want you to try and reach out to your brother, to communicate with him. You said that you’ve done that before, yes?”

She nodded again. “He’s usually the one to initiate it, but I’ve done it a handful of times before.”

“I have the utmost confidence in you. Just close your eyes, and think of him. Stretch out to him through the Force.” He paused, and Leia let her eyes fall close, her hands settling into her lap. “What’s your brother’s name?” Obi-Wan asked.

It took Leia a second to remember the false name she had given Luke. “Ben.” After you.

She felt a small ripple of surprise from Obi-Wan, and she opened her eyes. He had a thoughtful look on his face.

“What?” she asked.

He shook his head. “It’s nothing. Close your eyes.” She frowned, certain this it wasn’t nothing, but did as he said. Obi-Wan continued, “Now reach out to Ben. Find his presence, and focus on it.”

“I know what to do, thanks.” As he himself had said, this was something she had done before.

Obi-Wan laughed quietly. “Then I’ll leave you to it.”

Leia took in a deep breath, letting it out slowly through her nose. She could sense Luke, as she always could, in the back of her mind. Zeroing in on him, she stretched her mind out across the parsecs of space that separated them, brushing her consciousness against the edges of his.

Luke. The voice she sent to him was gentle, as if she was rousing him from sleep.

He responded quickly, opening his mind to let her in. She could sense immediately that he was doing alright; he was calm, almost surprisingly so, but she could sense his worry, as plainly as if it was written on his face.

Leia! He replied. Where are you? Are you alright? I could sense your distress.

I’m fine. I’m on Coruscant right now; the Jedi have agreed to help me find you.

There was a moment before Luke replied, and Leia could feel him probing around in her mind. She didn’t expect he would have to dig too deeply to tell that she was lying about being alright; there was very little she could hide from her brother.

You’re not alright, Leia. What happened?

Her hands clenched in her lap, and she fought to keep herself from grimacing.


She didn’t have to specify who he was for Luke to understand. She felt his thrill of excitement, quickly stifled and replaced by concern. He knew intimately what her feelings towards their father were like. Where? Where are you?

At the Jedi Temple. I’m with General Kenobi. We were in the hallways, and we just ran into him. I didn’t even realize who he was at first, not until he said his name.
He isn’t Darth Vader, Leia. Not here, not yet.

I know that, Luke. But to me, Anakin Skywalker and Darth Vader are one in the same. I can’t separate them the way you can.

There was another moment of silence. I’m sorry.

Don’t worry. I’ll be alright. I promise.

She could sense Luke trying to comfort her, and she let him, his mind nudging against hers in a strange sort of emotional hug. But while she loved her brother dearly, she found herself wishing that Han were there. She didn’t think she and Luke would ever agree when it came to their father, and so it was a difficult topic for them to discuss. But Han was far enough removed from it that she could say anything about Anakin Skywalker that she wanted, without worrying about offending or upsetting him. She didn’t feel that way with Luke.

More silence, like neither of them quite knew what to say now.

Leia was the first to break it. Where are you, Luke? She asked. General Kenobi is going to help me get you out, but we need to know where you are.

I don’t know. I’m in a Separatist prison on some barren rock of a planet. Count Dooku is here; he seems to have some idea that he’s going to take me on as an apprentice.

Leia’s forehead creased, her brows drawing together. Count Dooku? Does he know who you are?

He knows my name, and he thinks I’m related to Anakin Skywalker, but he doesn’t know how. All he knows is that I can use the Force and I’m pretty damn good at it — hence the whole apprentice thing.

And you have no idea where you are? Not even a hint?

Nothing. I didn’t even get a glimpse of the planet as we were arriving. But… He paused, as if thinking. Let me try something.

A moment passed. Leia could feel Luke withdrawing from her slightly, and wondered what he had in mind. But then she could feel a tug, as if someone was pulling at her through the Force. She let it drag her along, and was overcome by the sudden sensation of falling forward. She opened her eyes in shock, and found herself standing in a prison cell.

Luke was sitting on a bench, his legs crossed and his eyes closed. She was about to ask him what he had done, taking a step towards him, but as she put her foot down it landed not on the metal floor of the cell, but rather on stone ground. She was outside, in a field of grey rock. Standing before her was a large, bleak building, almost entirely windowless. The landscape around her was like that of a barren moon — no plants, no animals, nothing but stones and dust. Confused, she looked around, wondering if Luke had come with her, and then suddenly she was floating high above a planet, gazing down on its bleak surface. She blinked, overcome by this odd vision of hovering in space, and when her eyes reopened, she was back in the meditation room. It had all happened in the span of perhaps five seconds, and her mind whirled from the sensation of it. Luke had told her of these visions, sent by the Force, but she had never experienced one herself.

Obi-Wan still sat across from her, watching her curiously.

“You were successful, I assume?” he asked.
“I… yes.” It took Leia a moment to clear her mind, to bring herself back from that strange experience. “I spoke with Ben, and then he showed me… something. A vision, of wherever he is.”

Obi-Wan’s face brightened. “Do you think you could locate it?”

She frowned, considering. She could still feel that pull on her mind, like the hands of a child tugging at her clothes. After a moment, she nodded. “Yes, I think so.”

Obi-Wan stood and walked over to the far wall. He pressed a button on the control panel near the door, and a short, skinny pole rose from the floor in the centre of the room, with a small bowl at the very top. He dug through one of his robe’s pockets, and produced a miniscule glass ball, no bigger than a convor’s egg. Flipping the switch to close the blinds, darkening the room, he walked to the pedestal and placed the ball in the bowl at the top. The meditation room was immediately filled with hundreds of thousands of tiny pinpricks of light, spinning slowly around them.

“A map reader,” Leia said, pushing herself to her feet. “Of the whole galaxy?”

Obi-Wan nodded. “Most of it.” He weaved through the tiny, glowing planets, prodding gently at one near the centre of the map. “This is us — Coruscant.” As he touched it, the planet’s name appeared above the shining sphere.

Leia’s eyes darted from one planet to the next. The Force pushed as her, urging her on, much as it had in the temple on Raban. She let it carry her across the room, through the field of softly shining planets. She could feel Obi-Wan’s gaze on her, following her carefully as the Force guided her.

It did not take her long to find what she was searching for. At the edge of the room, in what she assumed was the Outer Rim, was a planet that looked the same as all the others, a small light blue dot shining in the air. But there was no doubt that this was the planet she was looking for; the Force practically sang as she reached out and touched a finger to the glowing dot. This was where Luke was.

The planet’s name appeared above it. Janus VII.

“This is it,” she said. “This is where they have Ben.”

Obi-Wan walked over to her, looking down at the small, unassuming speck of a planet. He didn’t ask her if she was certain; he seemed confident enough in her abilities to believe her. “Good work,” he said. “We’ll begin planning right away. With any luck, we’ll be on our way to Janus VII in the next few days.”

Leia felt relief course through her. Soon, she would be reunited with Luke, and they would find a way back out of this forsaken time.

But from what Luke had told her, that might not be as simple as she had hoped.

“There’s… one more thing,” she said, looking to Obi-Wan. “When I spoke to my brother, he mentioned Count Dooku. It sounded like he might be there, at the prison.”

Obi-Wan’s eyebrows drew together. “Interesting… That might make things slightly more complicated.”

“Do you think he will be an issue?”

“Perhaps. But I have faced him before, as has Anakin. My former Padawan could be quite useful in this situation.”
Leia stiffened. She didn’t know if she could even stomach the thought of seeing her biological father again. “Do you think we need him?” she asked.

“I think we are going to need all the help we can get,” Obi-Wan said. “It won’t be easy breaking into a Separatist prison, especially if Count Dooku is there. I suggest we bring along Anakin’s Padawan, as well. They’re both very capable, I assure you. I’ll see if I can get permission from the Council to bring them aboard.”

Leia didn’t argue any further. Obi-Wan was right that they would likely need help if they wanted to break Luke out of prison, and she could find no logical reason to argue against bringing Anakin, at least not one that wouldn’t lead to uncomfortable questions to which she had no answers — no matter how much the thought of having to work with Anakin Skywalker twisted her stomach into knots.

For Luke, though, she would bear it.

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Obi-Wan walked quickly down the corridors of the Jedi Temple. It was nearing midday; he and Nellith had spent the rest of the morning researching what little information they could find on Janus VII, joined a short while ago by Ahsoka. A quick message to the Council had been all that was acquired to get Anakin and his Padawan assigned to this mission; the other Council members had acquiesced quickly when they learned that Dooku might be involved.

Though Ahsoka had only just returned from the field, she had seemed eager to help, most likely excited by the prospect of breaking into a Separatist prison. Obi-Wan had yet to be able to get into contact with Anakin to ask for his assistance, but at the current moment he had more pressing concerns than his wayward former Padawan.

The results of Nellith’s DNA analysis were in.

He had sent her blood sample off to the analysis droids in the Archives, asking them to compare her DNA to that of Kel Varik and Dralin Sett. He had also, more out of curiosity than anything, asked for them to complete a full midi-chlorian count. He felt guilty about deceiving Nellith and lying about why he needed a sample of her blood, but if she was lying about who she was, it was likely she wouldn’t have consented to a DNA test. As it was, he preferred not to think about the dubious ethicality of what he’d done.

The Archives were busier in the middle of the day than they had been the night before, but no other Jedi occupied the Analysis Rooms. Obi-Wan went and sat down in one of the rooms. A JN-66 analysis droid hovered behind the glass, where all the sensitive analysis equipment was stored, safe from the infecting hands of organics.

“Greetings, Master Kenobi,” the JN-66 said. “I assume you are here for the results of the blood analysis you requested?”

“Yes, thank you.”

The screen set into the desk before Obi-Wan lit up, displaying a multitude of data. It was separated into two sections — midi-chlorian and DNA. His eyes went first to DNA, also divided into two, one side for Kel Varik and the other for Dralin Sett. Both included a long list of scientific facts and figures that Obi-Wan couldn’t decipher, but at the end of both sections, in blaring red letters, was written NO MATCH.
Nellith Lars’ DNA did not match that of either Varik or Sett; neither was her father.

“As you can see,” the JN-66 said, “the subject’s DNA did not match that of either sample you provided. All three were human, but there was no close familial connection between any of them.”

Obi-Wan nodded, his lips drawing down in a frown. “I see.” That was a setback, and a bit of a disappointment, but he hadn’t really expected either man to be Nellith’s father. That, it seemed, would have been far too easy.

His eyes landed next on the midi-chlorian section. It seemed as if his curiosity in this sector had been warranted.

“Her midi-chlorian count is over fifteen thousand?” he asked, looking up at the analysis droid in shock.

“Yes. It is an uncommonly high number, but accurate.”

“Uncommonly high” was something of an understatement. Anakin had the highest midi-chlorian count on record, just five thousand higher at twenty thousand. Most Jedi barely surpassed ten thousand; a powerful one, such as Master Yoda, might come close to challenging Nellith’s levels, but for an untrained Force-sensitive who had seemingly dropped right out of the sky, the numbers were astounding. Anakin was the Chosen One, prophesized to bring balance to the Force; his high midi-chlorians had a meaning. But for a random woman to have such a high count… it was unheard of.

“I’d like a copy of this information,” Obi-Wan said. This was certainly something he would have to bring to the Council’s attention; it could change their plans for Nellith, and for her brother, once they recovered him.

“Of course.”

“And I’d like you to perform another round of testing, using the same blood sample.”

The JN-66 bobbed its head. “Certainly. Which tests would you like done?”

“Another DNA test. But this time, I’d like you to compare the sample with those belonging to every human male member of the Jedi Order currently aged thirty-six or older, including both present members and those who have left the Order.”

It was an incredibly broad range to test. Obi-Wan knew that it was bordering on impossible that someone who was only twelve-years-old when Nellith was born would turn out to be her father, but he wanted to cast as wide a net as possible. Finding out her father’s identity was no longer just an issue of determining whether she was telling the truth; if they found her father, they might find the cause of her unusually high midi-chlorian count.

“Testing such a large pool of samples will take a considerable amount of time,” the analysis droid pointed out.

“I understand,” Obi-Wan said. “Just send me the results as you get them.”

He stood, and a thin datapad, like the one Master Nu had given him, popped out from an ejection port on the desk. He took it, tucking it carefully into the folds of his robes.

The droid bobbed its head. “Of course, sir. Is there anything else I can assist you with?”
“No, that will be all. Thank you.” Obi-Wan ducked out of the room, a small frown pulling at his lips.

He had come here hoping to find answers, but now all he had were more questions.
Best-Laid Plans

Chapter Summary

Luke has another conversation with Dooku, and Leia works with Ahsoka on a plan for her brother's rescue.

Chapter Notes

sorry that this chapter took such a ridiculously long time to finish, but I've had a very busy few weeks with school and other commitments, and unfortunately it's probably only going to get busier, so it's likely the next chapter won't be out until some time in the beginning of December. thank you all so much for your patience!

Luke was roused from sleep by the sound of his cell door hissing open. It had been hours since his last communication with Leia, and even longer since his visit from Dooku. He wasn’t sure whether it was night or day; with no window or chronometer in his cell, time had ceased to exist. He could not even begin to guess how long he had been in this prison.

The group of droid guards who now stood before his cell, then, were almost a welcome distraction. There was little for him to do besides meditate and sleep, and there was only so much of either that someone could do before they grew bored.

“On your feet,” one of the droids commanded, motioning Luke forward.

He stood, his back aching from the hours spent curled up on a hard metal bench. The droid produced a pair of binders, and Luke stretched out his arms. The binders were clamped securely around his wrists.

“Where are you taking me this time?” he asked, as the droid pulled him out into the hallway.

“Silence,” it ordered, and shoved him roughly towards its compatriots.

They formed a blockade around him, with two in the front and two behind, their blasters pointed squarely on his back. Dooku seemed to still considered him to be more of a prisoner than a potential apprentice.

He followed the droids in silence, but as they walked, his eyes carefully scanned his surroundings. The corridor in which his cell was located was long; he glanced back, quickly, and saw that it stretched on much further beyond his own door. In the other direction, it continued until a circular intersection, with a turbolift in the very centre. Several other hallways lined with cells branched off in every direction. The turbolift was guarded by a pair of B2 battle droids, much sturdier than the B1s currently escorting Luke.

They guided him into the lift. Like the first time he had been taken to see Dooku, it descended several levels, halting deep within the prison. They stepped out, and Luke quickly looked around;
he wasn’t sure if he recognized this part of the prison, or if it all just looked the same. It appeared to be the same narrow hallway that led to the room with the containment field, where Luke had first met Dooku, only a day or two before.

He saw no ways of escape. This level was, he assumed, deep below ground level, and he had no idea what level his own cell was located on. The other hallways near his own could lead to an exit, but he had no way of knowing if that was the case or not. To get out, he would likely have to make it to a turbolift, and past the B2s guarding it.

The droids stopped him in front of a door, which opened to reveal the same room with the containment field from earlier, or one very similar. They nudged him inside, but instead of bringing him directly to the pedestal that rested in the centre of the chamber, they stopped. Dooku was already there, waiting with his hands clasped together behind his back.

“Leave us,” he commanded. The droids snapped to attention, bowing their heads in obedience, before quickly filing from the room. The door closed behind them.


“I have a few… questions for you,” Dooku said. He remained where he was, his eyes narrowed slightly, his gaze piercing through Luke like a laser. “You see, I tried to do a bit of research on you, to figure out who, exactly, you are. And I must say, you are quite an elusive man. No records of you turned up in any database. There was nothing — not even a mention. So, either you have somehow managed to keep your identity from being recorded, or you are lying to me. I would like to figure out which one.”

“Would you not be able to sense if I was lying?” Luke asked, eyebrows raised.

“I would like to think so,” Dooku said, “but you are strong with the Force, and it is not outside the realm of possibilities for you to be able to mask your lies. So, I will ask again — who are you?”

“I assure you, Count Dooku, that I told you the truth. My name is Luke Skywalker. What reason could I have for using the name of one of the Jedi Order’s most famed Generals, if it was not also my own?”

Dooku watched him carefully, and Luke could feel him probing through his mind. He tightened his shields, keeping the tendrils of Dooku’s senses from finding anything that could betray him. All he projected was the truth — his name was Luke Skywalker.

Dooku’s lips turned down in the smallest hint of a frown. “Oh, I am sure there are many reasons that you could have to fabricate such a lie,” he said. “To convince me of your importance, perhaps, so I don’t have you killed? That the Hero with No Fear will come to rescue you?”

“Well, if I wanted you to believe that, I would have told you I was certain we were related,” Luke said. “But I didn’t. I’ve never met the man, and I honestly doubt that we’re of any close relation.” That, of course, was a blatant lie, but Luke did his best to mask it and project nothing but truth through the Force.

“If Luke Skywalker truly is your name, then, why could I find no record of you?”

“I prefer to keep a low profile. I’m sure I’m not the only one in this galaxy who’s difficult to trace.” Dooku gave a quiet chuckle. “And why would that be?”

“Do you have such a thorough interview process for all your potential apprentices?”
Dooku sneered. “Only the ones who are found in the middle of an active battlefield.”

“That was not by my own choice.”

“No?” He raised a brow, his jaw clenching. “Then whose choice was it?”

“The Force, it would seem,” Luke said. “As I’m sure you know, it tends to work in mysterious ways.”

A sudden flare of anger sparked through the Force, visible in Dooku’s face. “Enough of this,” he snapped. “I did not bring you here to play games with you, and I have no patience for your petulance and arrogance. Duty calls me away from this place, and I will be bringing you with me. Soon enough you will learn to hold your tongue.”

Luke’s amusement at Dooku’s temper was dulled by a spark of worry. “Where are you taking me?” he asked. Leia knew he was here; she could already have a plan to get him out, could already be on her way. He could let her know that he was leaving, that he was being taken somewhere else, but he had the horrible feeling that wherever Dooku planned to take him, it would be a lot more difficult to get into or out of than this place.

Curiosity flickered across Dooku’s face as he sensed Luke’s panic. “Reluctant to leave?” he asked. He took a step closer to Luke, his dark eyes searching as he probed into Luke’s mind. Luke redoubled his shields, sealing up all his thoughts and emotions, but he realized quickly that he had underestimated Dooku. The man was cunning and intelligent, even without the aid of the Force.

“Wherever I take you, it can scarcely be worse than this,” Dooku said, “and you don’t seem the type to be frightened by these types of things. And you aren’t frightened — you’re concerned, not just for yourself, but for someone else.” He paused for a moment, seeming to think. “Is someone on their way to fetch you? Are you concerned that this will disrupt their plans?”

Luke said nothing, his teeth pressed together and his jaw tight. He needed to warn Leia, to tell her what was happening, but if he opened himself up to her in the Force, Dooku would be able to sense it almost immediately.

“Well, you don’t need to worry,” Dooku said. He raised his hand, and then a force like a strong shove sent Luke tumbling backwards. He stumbled onto the pedestal, and Dooku curled the fingers of his raised hand, constricting Luke’s airway. An image of Vader, of his father, flashed through his mind, one gloved hand raised just the same as Dooku’s was now. Luke’s nails scratched at the skin of his neck, clawing at fingers that weren’t there as he struggled to suck in air.

Dooku held him there, his feet dangling just a few centimetres off the ground. He gave a lazy flick of his free hand, flipping a switch on the nearby control panel, and the containment field snapped to life around Luke.

The fingers vanished from his throat, and he breathed in great gulps of air, coughing violently. His connection to the Force had disappeared alongside the grasp on his neck, leaving him stranded once more; he could no longer contact Leia even if he wanted to risk trying. His hands, still trapped by the binders, were locked in place at his side. Dooku stood before him, a triumphant smile on his wrinkled face.

“You are not so arrogant now, are you, young Skywalker?”

“You don’t even know that anyone is coming,” Luke rasped, still heaving to fill his lungs.

“Oh, I am quite confident — confident enough to put my other plans on hold, for the time being.
Don’t worry; I will give your friends a very warm welcome.”

And then he strolled from the room, leaving Luke alone, with no way to warn Leia.

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The plan was coming along quickly.

Once they had the name of the planet where Luke was being held, it had not been difficult for them to track down reports of a Separatist prison there. It was practically the only notable thing about Janus VII; the population was small, and the only real industry was a low-level duralium mining operation. The prison was located on the opposite side of the planet from its only major settlement, and housed mainly political prisoners. There was nothing to suggest it was any different from the multitude of Separatist prisons throughout the galaxy.

Except, of course, that Count Dooku was likely there. But Obi-Wan had seemed confident that, along with Anakin and his Padawan, they would be able to take him on; Leia hoped that he was right.

She looked up from her datapad, where she had been analyzing the schematics of a different, but hopefully similar, Separatist-run prison in the Outer Rim. Ahsoka Tano sat across from her, staring intently at a holograph of Janus VII. Leia had overlooked the young Togruta during their first meeting, too overwhelmed by the presence of her biological father. She had caught her name, but it wasn’t until Obi-Wan had brought Ahsoka to help them plan their rescue that Leia realized who, exactly, she was.

Without Anakin there to distract her, Leia had recognized her instantly — the first Fulcrum, one of her (real) father’s most important spies in the Alliance before the start of the Civil War. Ahsoka was the one to create the role of Fulcrum within the Rebellion, and the symbol used by Fulcrum agents had been derived from her white forehead markings; markings that Leia could see clearly now, the two diamonds more distinctive on Ahsoka’s face in her youth than they would become as she grew older.

Leia had met Ahsoka several times throughout her life and her time in the Rebellion. She had, of course, never known her as anything besides Fulcrum; she didn’t know if anyone besides Bail had known her true identity. Certainly, Leia hadn’t known that she was Anakin Skywalker’s Padawan, or that she had even been a Jedi. It had been something of a shock, then, when the realization had finally clicked and she had recognized the much younger Fulcrum in front of her.

Ahsoka looked away from the map, her eyes meeting Leia’s across the table.

“Have you found anything?” Leia asked, leaning forward, as if her interest had been on the map all along.

“I think so.” Ahsoka reached forward and, with one quick gesture, expanded the size of the map, making the planet’s few topographical details easier to see. “The coordinates I found for Janus VII’s only town place it here.” She pointed to a region in the planet’s eastern hemisphere, near the equator. “If the information we have about the prison is correct, then, it should be located around here.” She spun the holograph, pointing out an area in the western hemisphere. “Unfortunately I can’t pinpoint where, exactly, it is. It could be anywhere in the northern or southern hemispheres. But that’s where you come in.” She gave Leia a smile.

Leia nodded. They would need to use her connection to Luke to find the prison’s exact location, but if she had been able to locate him half a galaxy away, she was sure she could do it when they
were on the same planet. “Easy enough,” she said.

“The whole thing should be pretty simple,” Ahsoka said. “The only complicated factor might be Dooku, but that’s why I’m here.”

Leia smiled. “I’m very grateful for your help. And I’m sure that my brother will be, as well.”

“Don’t mention it. I’d never pass up a chance to go head-to-head with Dooku, and Anakin wouldn’t either.”

Leia’s smile grew tight-lipped at the mention of Anakin, and she looked back down at the schematics on her datapad, fiddling with them for a moment. “So how do you suggest we should go about this?” she asked. She’d infiltrated her own fair share of tightly-secured places, but those had always been guarded by stormtroopers; she had no experience with droids.

Ahsoka launched into the rough outline of the plan, based on what little information they’d been able to gather about the prison on Janus VII and her own previous experiences. It seemed solid enough to Leia, and she nodded approvingly as Ahsoka began to describe the details. Of course, there was only so much they could plan ahead when breaking into a prison whose layout was almost completely unknown to them; it was a strategy that was going to have to rely on brute force slightly more than Leia was comfortable with. But there wasn’t much time for them to sit around trying to gather information; certainly not when Dooku was involved.

“Master Kenobi didn’t tell me much about you,” Ahsoka said, when the main bones of the plan had been laid out. “Or your brother. I know that Master Unduli brought you in. Her Padawan, Barriss, told me that they found you in the middle of a battlefield out on a planet in the far Mid Rim, but they didn’t say what you were doing there.”

“I was looking for my brother,” Leia said. “Ben. He’s… not a Jedi, but he has some training in the ways of the Force. He was on Ucarro helping the people there being oppressed by the Separatists. I hadn’t heard from him in a few days, so I became worried and went after him. Master Unduli’s men found me near their camp, and she brought me here to Coruscant, where your Council agreed to help me.”

Ahsoka nodded. “I see. And you have no training in the Force yourself?”

“Nothing beyond the few rudimentary skills my brother has taught me.”

There was a moment of silence, and Ahsoka’s eyes focused again on the holographic map in front of them. Leia could sense that she still had some questions, but she didn’t force her, instead allowing her to work up the courage to ask them.

“Earlier today,” she began slowly, “when we first met in the hallway, you had a very… emotional response towards my Master. Why?”

Leia was a bit surprised by the directness of her question, but then she supposed that she should have expected nothing different from a future top Rebel agent. “I… have some bad memories associated with someone named Anakin,” she explained. The lie came easily enough; it was, after all, partly the truth. “I wasn’t expecting to hear that name again. It caught me off guard.”

Ahsoka observed her for a long moment, her blue eyes searching. Leia couldn’t tell if Ahsoka fully believed her or not, though she suspected that she didn’t. But she seemed satisfied enough, at least for the moment. “I’m sorry to hear that,” she said, “but you should know, my Master is a good man. Once you get to know him, you’ll see.”
“I’m sure he is.” Leia’s smile was strained, and she looked away, back to her datapad of schematics.

They worked for the next few minutes in silence, the only sound the gentle hum of the holoprojector. Leia was trying to think of something to say, to break the tense quiet, when the door to the room opened and Obi-Wan walked in.

He had left over an hour ago, saying that he had a quick errand to attend to and leaving the planning to Leia and Ahsoka. Leia had been beginning to wonder why this “quick errand” was taking him so long, but when she turned to greet him, she saw that he was not alone. Anakin followed him through the door, his hands folded into the sleeves of his dark robe.

Obi-Wan had been unable to contact Anakin earlier in the day to request his help with Luke’s rescue, but he’d obviously been successful since leaving to complete his errand. Anakin looked slightly disgruntled, as if there was somewhere else he would much rather be, but he gave both Leia and Ahsoka a kind smile as he entered.

Leia kept her gaze focused on Obi-Wan. He came to sit down next to her, and Anakin took the seat beside Ahsoka. “My apologies for taking so long,” Obi-Wan said.

“Where have you been?” Ahsoka asked, looking to Anakin. “You wouldn’t answer your comms, and we couldn’t find you anywhere in the temple.”

“I had other matters to attend to,” Anakin said.

“As we do now,” Obi-Wan pointed out, interrupting their little spat.

Ahsoka raised her eyebrow markings, telling her master that she would certainly be asking more questions later.

“We’ve pretty much got a plan figured out,” Leia said. “There are still a few details to iron out, but we can do that on the way. I suggest we leave as soon as possible. Janus VII is located out between Yavin and Ord Radama, so it will take us a while to get there. Do we have a ship?”

“We’ll be using one of the Order’s *Eta*-class shuttles,” Obi-Wan said. “We’ll also be bringing along a few of the 501st for backup. I don’t want to take any chances — not with Dooku involved.”

Leia’s heart stuttered for a moment at the mention of the 501st. In her time, they were a stormtrooper legion, made up of the best of the best and serving directly under Darth Vader — granting them the moniker “Vader’s Fist”. Until the death of their commander, they had been the most feared stormtrooper legion in the entire Imperial Military. She hadn’t known that the 501st had also served under Vader’s command during the Clone Wars, when he was still known as General Skywalker.

She masked her surprise under a genial smile. “Likely a good idea,” she said.

“So this is where we’re going?” Anakin asked, eyeing the hologram of Janus VII still rotating slowly in the centre of the table.

“Yes,” Leia said.

She’d had to deal with people she disliked in the past; that was half of being a politician. She’d interacted with loathsome Imperial officers and Senators, all under the guise of being a loyal Imperial herself. She’d become a spy and Rebel agent at age sixteen; she could handle speaking to
her biological father, especially when it was about saving Luke.

So she put on her best politician face, and explained to him what they knew about Janus VII and what their plan for Luke’s rescue was. She kept her gaze focused solely on the hologram, scared that if she looked at Anakin and saw Luke’s eyes looking back at her, she would lose her composure. Ahsoka interjected every now and then with points of her own, and Anakin occasionally stopped her to ask a question, but she was able to get through it as quickly as possible.

“It seems like a solid enough plan,” Obi-Wan said when she was through.

Anakin nodded in agreement. “There are a few elements we should discuss— “

“Like I said, we can do that on the ship,” Leia interrupted. She looked to Obi-Wan. “When can we leave?”

“Tonight, probably,” Obi-Wan said. “We just need to gather all the supplies needed.”

“I’m going to need a blaster,” Leia said. “Mine was confiscated before I was brought here.”

“Are you sure that’s necessary?” Anakin asked. “We might not even need you to come in with us.”

Leia shot him a strong look. “I’m going in with you. He’s my brother — you’re going to need my help to find him.”

“Can you handle a blaster?”

“You don’t need to worry about me,” she snapped, glaring at him. “I’m going in with you, and that’s that.” She looked back to Obi-Wan. “I’d also like my brother’s lightsaber. If we have to fight our way out, he’s going to need it.”

Obi-Wan’s mouth tightened. “I don’t think that’s going to be possible,” he said. “Your brother is not a Jedi and therefore, per our rules, he is not allowed to carry a lightsaber. There is nothing I can do about it — the Council is currently in possession of his lightsaber, and they would be unwilling to release it. I can, however, procure a blaster for him.”

Leia frowned. They’d have to find a way to get Luke’s lightsaber before they left to return to their own time, if the Jedi were still unwilling to give it back. But for now, her focus was on rescuing Luke. “I understand,” she said.

Obi-Wan nodded, and stood. “Then let’s get started.”
**Mistrust**

Chapter Summary

Leia travels with the Jedi to Janus VII.

Chapter Notes

one very busy month later...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Anakin and Ahsoka were already waiting for them in the hangar when Leia and Obi-Wan arrived. Leia carried on her shoulder a small satchel, filled with the few possessions she had. The clothes she had been wearing when she had arrived in this time had been cleaned and returned to her, and she had been glad to put them back on. She had also been given back her blaster, now strapped snugly to the holster at her hip. She had tucked the pants and tunic from the Jedi into the satchel, along with a datapad and an extra power pack for her blaster.

The temple hangar was small and quiet, with only a few docked ships, most of them shuttles, and a crew of droids performing maintenance. Their shuttle was docked near the hangar doors, and Leia could see Anakin and Ahsoka standing around it, speaking with a group of clones. They all wore their helmets, and the white armour sent a momentary jolt of fear coursing through her, more out of reflex than any actual alarm.

They paused their conversation as Leia and Obi-Wan approached. “General Kenobi,” one of the clones greeted, saluting Obi-Wan. His white armour was painted with blue designs, and the rest of the clones followed his lead, lifting their hands in salute to the Jedi general.

Obi-Wan nodded at them in acknowledgement. “Rex,” he said, looking to the trooper who had spoken. Leia straightened in surprise; she had met Rex before the Battle of Endor, what to her was only a few short months ago. He was a good soldier, and had been a friend of Fulcrum’s. She cast a quick glance to Ahsoka, who stood leaning against the hull of the shuttle.

“This is Nellith Lars,” Obi-Wan continued, gesturing to Leia. She looked back to Rex and smiled, nodding her head in greeting. “It’s her brother we’re going to rescue.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” Leia said. “I’ve heard many stories.”

“All of them good, I hope,” Rex said, and she could hear the smile beneath his helmet. “These are some of my men — Tup, Fives, Jesse, and Fox.”

As he said their names, each clone nodded. Various markings and designs on their armour distinguished them from one another, and Fives and Jesse both wore a different kind of armour from the others, with dark grey pauldrons and plating around the arms and legs. Rex continued, “We’ll be coming along on this rescue mission.”
“I’m grateful for the help,” Leia said. She had been nervous about the clones accompanying them, largely because they were under Anakin’s command, but knowing now that Rex was among them made her much more amenable.

“Is everything ready?” Obi-Wan asked.

“Yes, sir.” Rex gave a quick nod, shifting back into the soldier. “Everything is loaded, and we’re ready to depart.”

“Then let’s not delay any longer,” Obi-Wan said, and climbed up into the shuttle. Rex and the other clones followed.

A string of familiar beeps sounded suddenly behind Leia, and she turned to see, much to her surprise, R2-D2 rolling across the hangar floor towards her. She blinked, taken aback. The first thought in her mind was that it wasn’t possible — she and Han had left R2 outside of the temple on Raban, with strict instructions to stay put. The second thought was that perhaps it wasn’t actually R2. But as the little droid rolled closer, she realized that it most certainly was; she would recognize him anywhere.

She nearly called out to him, wanting to ask him how he had gotten here, when she realized that he was headed for Anakin, not her. She watched, shocked and confused, as Anakin greeted the droid with all the same affection as Luke would have.

“Hey, buddy,” Anakin said, giving the astromech a gentle pat on his domed head. “You ready to go?”

R2 beeped an affirmative, and headed with Anakin and Ahsoka towards the shuttle ramp, where Leia still stood, trying to wipe the astonishment from her face.

“Ah, Nellith,” Ahsoka said, smiling as they approached. “This is Artoo! He’s Anakin’s astromech. Artooie, this is Nellith.”

“It’s, uh, nice to meet you, Artoo,” Leia said, the words Anakin’s astromech echoing in her ears. Before the Civil War, both R2 and C-3PO had been in the care of Captain Antilles aboard her father’s ship the Tantive IV. She had assumed that they had always served her father; it had never occurred to her that either of them had had a history beyond that — certainly not working with her biological father during the Clone Wars.

R2 beeped back, and Leia frowned. “That’s rather rude, don’t you think?” she asked. This droid was definitely her R2.

Anakin’s eyebrows lifted with surprise. “You can understand him?”

“For the most part,” Leia said. “My brother has an R2-series astromech. Very similar to yours, actually.”

Anakin shook his head, his hand resting on top of R2. “There’s no astromech quite like Artoo.”

“Yes, I’d have to agree with that.” She cast the little droid a curious look, one brow raised, before climbing up into the shuttle.

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The cockpit was silent. Anakin and Ahsoka were in the passenger hold, with the clones and Obi-Wan, and Leia could just barely hear their quiet murmurings from where she sat, watching the
swirl of hyperspace through the cockpit’s viewports. They had been travelling for approximately three hours now. A holoprojector on the dashboard was displaying a map of their position in hyperspace as they moved closer and closer to Janus VII; they had just passed into the Inner Rim only a few minutes ago, journeying along the Hydian Way.

Reaching towards the map, Leia zoomed it out, retreating until the Mid Rim came into view. She found Raban easily, focusing in on it. It was such an unassuming planet — she was certain that if she asked any of the people on this ship, none of them would have ever heard of it. And yet it was home to an artifact that had done the impossible, sending her, and Luke, into the past. How and why, she didn’t know, and she didn’t think she ever really would.

But she was beginning to feel as if it wasn’t just some fluke of fate.

Glancing over her shoulder, she looked into the passenger hold, her gaze quickly finding Anakin. It couldn’t be coincidence that they had ended up here, together. Though she would be the first to admit her lack of knowledge in these things, even she could see the Force at work here. No matter how much she disliked it.

She looked away with a frown, and shut off the map projector.

A moment later a voice sounded from the cockpit entrance.

“You look deep in thought.”

She was relieved to recognize it as Obi-Wan. He came to stand beside her, a kind smile on his face.

“I’m just worried,” she said, with a dismissive wave of her hand.

“That’s to be expected.” He glanced to the empty co-pilot’s chair beside her. “Mind if I join you?”

“Go ahead.” Leia gestured to the chair.

Obi-Wan sighed as he sat down, his hands resting on his knees. He was silent for a moment, and Leia watched him carefully from the corner of her eye. She knew this move — he wanted to ask her something, but wasn’t quite sure how to phrase it, or thought that it might upset her. Or perhaps both.

She cut to the chase. “What is it?”

Obi-Wan seemed slightly taken aback by her forwardness, but he didn’t try to make it seem like she was wrong. “I want you to tell me more about your family,” he said.

“What about them?”

“What was it like for you and your brother, growing up? What were your parents like?”

She looked at him, a slight frown pulling at her mouth. “Why do you want to know all this?”

“I’m curious,” he admitted with a shrug. “It isn’t often that I meet someone who was raised by a former Jedi.”

“My childhood wasn’t that interesting,” Leia said. “We lived in a small town on a quiet planet you’ve probably never heard of. My father trained Ben in the ways of the Force, and I stayed out of it. We never got along very well, my father and I. I left when I was old enough and moved to Alderaan. Ben came with me, but he left when the war started. He felt like he had to do something
to help.”

She spoke with confidence, as if it was a story she knew well, though she had only come up with it the day before.

“And your mother?” Obi-Wan asked.

“She died when Ben and I were young. We never knew her.”

“I’m sorry.”

Leia shrugged.

“Do you know why your father left the Jedi Order?”

She shook her head. “Like I said, he never spoke much about his time with the Jedi.”

“Did Ben ever think about trying to join the Order?”

She sighed. “Master Kenobi, is there a point to all these questions, besides plain curiosity?”

Obi-Wan was silent for a moment, his lips tight. “I want to find out who your father really was,” he admitted.

“And what would that achieve? My father’s dead.”

“Nellith,” Obi-Wan started, and then stopped with a sigh. He seemed to think for a moment about how exactly to word his next phrase. “The Council doesn’t trust you. We want to know if you’re telling the truth. Finding out who, exactly, your father was would help us do that.”

“Master Kenobi, I assure you, I’m here to get my brother, and that’s it. As soon as I have him, we’ll be gone from your lives forever. I know precious little about my father and the man he was, and I don’t particularly care to delve deeper into it.” She stood quickly, giving him a rushed, polite nod. “Now please, excuse me.”

She hurried away, towards the shuttle’s small refresher. But even as she closed the door behind her, she could feel Obi-Wan’s eyes on her back.

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They arrived in the Kalamith sector several hours later. Janus VII was located at the very edge, near the spot where Kalamith met the bordering sectors of Esstran and the Gordian Reach — the latter of which was home to Yavin and its many moons.

Leia had not been to this region of the galaxy since the Battle of Yavin had forced the Rebel Alliance from their base, five years ago. Or rather, she supposed, twenty years in the future. If they were to drop from hyperspace now and land on Yavin IV, they would find no trace at all of the Rebellion that would one day call the small moon home. The Great Temple that they had used as their main headquarters would still be there, but there would be none of the equipment that the Rebels had left behind in their hurry to escape the system. Of course, there might not be any of it left in her own time; the Empire could have taken it all away, when they had no doubt scoured the moon for any information they could find after the Rebellion’s escape.

Anakin, Ahsoka, and Obi-Wan all squeezed themselves into the cockpit with her as they entered the sector, staring at the small hyperlane map on the dashboard.
“The Janus system is located here, just past Tandun,” Obi-Wan said, pointing to the map. “The only way to reach it is along the Toprawa Route, but I think it’s safe to say that the Separatists will be watching that hyperlane very closely. Especially since we’re so close to Serenno.” He pointed to a planet, on the opposite side of the Hydian Way from Janus VII. The two planets couldn’t have been more than a thousand parsecs apart.

“What’s so special about Serenno?” Leia asked.

“It’s Count Dooku’s homeworld,” Obi-Wan said. “And if what you said is right, and Dooku does have some sort of interest in Ben, it could explain why he was brought to Janus VII. It’s likely the Separatist prison closest to Serenno.”

“There’s gotta be another way to get there,” Ahsoka said.

“I doubt it. The Janus system is not heavily travelled, so there’s no need for more than one access point. Particularly since it houses a prison world.”

Leia leaned in closer, frowning. The Toprawa Route branched off from the Hydian Way, passing the planet Tandun before terminating with the Janus system, less than a parsec from the Gordian Reach. She recognized the various hyperlanes that criss-crossed the sector, connecting all the planets within — but there were some that were missing, some that she knew wouldn’t appear on any official maps, that the Rebels had discovered during their time in the region.

“There is another way,” she said. “Here.” She traced a path on the map with her finger, connecting the planets Pho Ph’eah, on the Hydian Way, with Kushibah, in the corner of the Gordian Reach closest to Kalamith. The path passed right by Janus.

“There’s no hyperlane there,” Anakin said.

Leia had to suppress a smirk. “Yes, there is — just not an official one.”

When the Rebel Alliance had first took up Yavin as their base, the Hydian Way had been closely watched. If they had used the official Korphir Trace to travel from the Hydian Way to Yavin, there was a chance they could have been followed. The first Rebels to go to Yavin had thus paved their own way, forcibly connecting a portion of the Hydian Way with the Pinooran Spur in the Gordian Reach, which they had then ridden all the way down to Yavin. This new hyperlane had only been used briefly, until scouts had confirmed that the Korphir Trace wasn’t being watched, but Leia had travelled it herself, on her first visit to Yavin with her father.

“Then how do you know it’s there?” Anakin asked, his expression skeptical.

“I’ve spent some time in this region of the galaxy.”

“Travelling along unofficial hyperlanes?”

Leia shrugged, attempting to appear nonchalant. “It’s solved our problem, hasn’t it? We use this lane to get as close to the Janus system as possible, we jump out, and then it’s only a short ride the rest of the way. We enter the system undetected, and keep surprise on our side.”

The three Jedi cast each other questioning looks. Leia could see them trying to work it out, to decide if they should trust her or not.

“Listen,” she said. “if I wasn’t absolutely certain that there was a safe hyperlane here, I wouldn’t suggest it. Because if there wasn’t, chances are high that we would run into some interstellar object and all burst into a million sparkly little pieces. That’s not really a risk I’d be willing to take.”
There was another moment of silence. Leia sighed.

“This isn’t something I would lie about,” she insisted. “I promise you, there is a hyperlane here.”

“I trust you,” Ahsoka said, with a nod of her head. “I say we do it.” She looked to Anakin and Obi-Wan.

A short pause, and then Obi-Wan spoke. “I agree.”

Anakin frowned, but he nodded. “You better hope you’re right,” he told Leia, “or we’re all dead.”

She gave him a hard look. “Don’t worry. I know what I’m talking about.”

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“I don’t trust her.”

Obi-Wan looked up from his datapad to find Anakin standing in front of him, his arms crossed over his chest. He had a discontented look on his face, and Obi-Wan could see the muscles of his jaw working as he clenched his teeth. He didn’t have to ask who his former Padawan was talking about; he glanced quickly towards the cockpit, where Nellith still sat, staring out at the blue tunnel of hyperspace.

“About the hyperlane?” he asked.

“Partially.” Anakin took the empty seat beside Obi-Wan, sitting close so that they could talk quietly and not be overheard. “I believe her when she says that it’s there; she doesn’t seem the type for a suicide mission. But the fact that she knew where it was — that’s what I find suspicious. What kind of person knows the location of an uncharted hyperlane, especially all the way out here?”

Obi-Wan nodded. “I must agree with you there,” he said. “And there’s this.” He held the datapad out to Anakin.

His eyes quickly scanned the screen, his forehead creasing. “What is this?” he asked.

“Results from a great many DNA tests,” Obi-Wan explained. “When the Council first questioned Nellith, she told us that her father was a Jedi who left the Order before she was born. I took a sample of her blood and had it tested against that of every male member of the Order physically old enough to be her father. I was just sent the results.”

Anakin observed the datapad for a moment, scrolling from one result to the next. “There’s not a single match,” he said.

“Not one. Whoever he was, her father was never a member of the Jedi Order. Which means she lied to us.”

“But why?”

“Apparently, she had a lightsaber with her when she was captured. She said that it was her brother’s, and that he had made it himself, but he wasn’t a Jedi. She told us that their father taught him the ways of the Force.”

“That’s a pretty elaborate lie to explain why she had a lightsaber.”

“I think she wanted us to trust her. Whatever the truth is about her father and the lightsaber, she
truly does seem concerned about her brother. It seems getting our help was her only option for rescuing him.”

“So why are we still helping her?” Anakin asked. “It seems pretty obvious to me that she stole that lightsaber. She’s probably just using us to help her break her brother out of prison, and then the two of them are going to make a break for it. Combined with the fact that she just happened to know about an undocumented hyperlane out in the middle of the Outer Rim leads me to believe that her and her brother are involved in some less-than-honest work. We should turn around and bring her right back to Coruscant to stand trial.”

“On what grounds, Anakin? We have no proof she stole the lightsaber; we have no idea who it originally belonged to. For all we know, her brother did make it. Trust me — the Council has its reasons for this mission.”

Anakin raised his eyebrows. “And what are these reasons?”

Obi-Wan looked once more to the cockpit; Nellith hadn’t moved. “Nellith was found by Master Unduli’s men on Ucarro,” he explained. “Shortly before she was captured, Master Unduli and Padawan Offee both felt two strange, unexplained disturbances in the Force. Considering Nellith’s unusually strong presence in the Force, the Council believes her to be the cause of one of the disturbances, and suspects her brother to have been the cause of the other. It’s likely that Ben is just as strong in the Force as Nellith, and the Council is unwilling to leave such a strong Force-sensitive in the hands of the Separatists. We’re to help Nellith free her brother, and then bring them both back to Coruscant.”

“And do what with them?”

“That has yet to be decided,” he said. “I was wary at first of the Council’s decision to use Nellith in such a way, but now I believe that the choice we made was right. Before requesting the DNA tests, I ran a scan of the midi-chlorians in Nellith’s blood. Her count measured at over fifteen thousand.”

Anakin’s eyes widened. “Fifteen thousand? Does Master Yoda even have a count that high?”

Obi-Wan shook his head. “She has him beat, though just barely. It’s the highest count I’ve seen since your own. I don’t doubt that if we tested her brother, he’d produce similar numbers. Perhaps even more, because unlike Nellith, he is apparently trained. You can understand why the Council doesn’t want two such powerful Force users running free in the galaxy unchecked.”

Anakin was silent for a moment. “What do you think it means?” he asked.

“I have no idea.”

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The hyperlane was right where Leia said it would be. The route was thankfully rather straight, and so the shuttle navicomputer had no difficulty plotting a course. Its various fail safes made it reluctant to jump into hyperspace along an unauthorized route, but R2 made quick work of it, overriding the navicomputer and sending the shuttle into hyperspace himself. Leia had to resist the urge to turn to Anakin and grin smugly as the stars outside dropped away and were replaced by the blue vortex of hyperspace.

Instead, she looked to the map on the dashboard. They would travel as close to the Janus system as possible before dropping out of hyperspace. Janus VII rested on the outskirts of the system, so it would take them only a few hours to reach it once they had re-entered real space. Then the real fun
“Is everyone clear on the plan?” she asked. “Have your men been briefed, General Skywalker?”

He nodded. “They have.”

“Good.” Leia stood. “Then I suggest we all get some rest. We should all be on our game for this mission.”

Obi-Wan and Anakin exchanged glances, obviously surprised to see her take charge. She ignored the looks and brushed past them out into the passenger hold. The Jedi thought of this as their mission; she wanted them to know it was really hers.

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Janus VII looked even bleaker in person. Leia watched their approach from the passenger hold, peering through a small, angular viewport. The clones, who had kept up their light-hearted chatter for most of the journey, grew quiet as they drew closer to the planet. Everyone waited for a ship to appear to shoot them down, or for a planetary defense system to kick in and stop them from even entering the atmosphere.

But nothing happened. Janus VII grew closer and closer, and the space around them remained quiet. Slowly, they entered the planet’s orbit and began their descent, its grey, barren features revealing themselves. They had come in over the western hemisphere, where they hoped to find the prison.

“Great spot for a vacation,” Leia mumbled.

Obi-Wan emerged from the cockpit. “Now’s your time to shine, Nellith,” he said. “Let’s see if you can’t find this prison, and your brother.”

Leia nodded and, with one last look to the wasteland outside, closed her eyes.

She could sense Luke, far closer to her now than he had been since her arrival in this time. It was as if she could simply reach out her hand and touch him. She stretched her senses out towards him, calling to him… but found herself blocked. He was there, his presence so close she could almost see him, but it was as if a wall had gone up between them. She knew he was on the other side, but she couldn’t call out to him, and he couldn’t hear her. When she tried to pinpoint his location, her mind drew a blank, like a file wiped clean. She had become blind to him.

She opened her eyes, her forehead creasing. “Something’s blocking me,” she said, looking to Obi-Wan. “I can sense Ben — he’s nearby. But I don’t know where, and I can’t reach out to him.”

Obi-Wan frowned, his hand going to his beard. “It sounds as if his connection to the Force has been severed.”

“How is that possible?”

“Any number of ways,” Obi-Wan said. “There are many contraptions that can block someone’s connection to the Force. My bet is that Dooku has him in one — dampening binders, perhaps, or a containment field. Frankly, I’m surprised he didn’t do this earlier. Your connection to your brother is what allowed us to locate him in the first place.”

Leia frowned, looking back out the viewport to the bleak landscape outside. They would still be able to find the prison; the shuttle was equipped with scanners that could look for any signs of
lifeforms or technology and zero in on them. It would take longer, but it would work.

What worried her was why Dooku had decided to cut Luke off from the Force. Something must have happened to change his plans.

“I have a bad feeling about this,” she said.

Chapter End Notes

happy holidays everyone!! I hope you all have a wonderful December (even though there's no new Star Wars movie this year)
Janus VII

Chapter Summary

Leia, the Jedi, and the clones infiltrate a Separatist prison, but things don't go quite as planned.

The prison loomed in the valley below, its dark stone walls contrasting with the light grey regolith that seemed to coat every inch of Janus VII. It had been easy enough to find; the shuttle’s scanners had a wide enough range that it had only taken half an hour. A large ridge on one of the surrounding mountains had provided an excellent landing spot, far enough away from the prison that it would likely go unnoticed. They would have to go in on foot.

Leia stood near the edge of the ridge, a filter mask placed over her mouth and nose. Though the atmosphere of Janus VII was breathable to most lifeforms, the planet’s regolith was so fine that it was easily inhaled, and could cause extensive damage to the lungs. Even the short walk from the shuttle to the cliff’s edge had kicked up a mushrooming cloud of dust, and Leia’s pants were already grey from the knees down.

She held up a pair of macrobinoculars pilfered from the bags of supplies in the shuttle’s cargo hold. Focusing on the prison, she zoomed in, examining its fortifications and defences. They were facing its western side; she could see the main entrance on the southern wall. There was no fence, but the front door looked tough and well-defended. There were blaster cannons mounted on the roof, facing all directions. A large hole in the ground on the northern side likely led to a hangar, sealed off by a magnetic field to protect the vehicles inside from the planet’s fine regolith.

Just from looking at the exterior, she could already tell that this prison differed a significant amount from the blueprints they had found of other Separatist prisons. That could make things more difficult, but they had accounted for such an event in their plans. They would simply have to improvise.

“What a wonderful planet.”

Leia turned at the sound of a voice to see Anakin walking down the shuttle ramp, pulling a mask over his face. Even with the mask in place, she could see the disgust on his face as he looked around at their dusty surroundings.

“Cheer up, Master!” Ahsoka said, sidling up alongside him. “It could be sand.”

Anakin kicked at the ground, sending up a plume of dust. “I don’t know if this is any better.”

Leia hooked the macrobinoculars onto her belt. “We’re gonna need to figure out a way in there,” she said, pointing with her thumb back towards the prison. “The main entrance is heavily guarded. I suggest going in through the hangar. We’re going to need—“

“Or,” Anakin said, cutting her off, “we can make our own entrance.” He held up his lightsaber, waving it in the air.

Leia raised her eyebrows. “We have no idea how thick those walls are. It could take forever to cut
a large enough hole.”

“It’s a good thing we have more than one, then.” He started off towards the rest of the group, already gathered on the far side of the ridge. “Come on, let’s get going.”

Leia glared after him, but grudgingly followed. They left Fox in charge of the shuttle, and Tup remained at the top of the ridge, surveying the prison with his own pair of macrobinoculars, while the rest of them began the uneasy descent down the mountain face. The ridge was only a couple hundred metres up, and the descent was gently sloped, but the face was bare, leaving few handholds. The slippery coating of regolith only complicated things.

The Jedi travelled with ease, practically bounding down the mountainside as if springs were attached to the bottoms of their feet. Even R2 was able to make it down relatively easy, extending two rocket boosters from his short legs and using them to guide his descent. Leia watched him soaring down the side of the mountain, eyebrows lifted in surprise.

“Since when can he do that?” she muttered.

She resorted to bending down into a crouch, one leg extended in front of her and a hand held out to steady herself, and sliding most of the way down. She was glad for the filter mask when a huge burst of dust surrounded her, following her all the way down the mountain. Both she and the clones, who had used a similar technique, were absolutely covered head-to-toe in the stuff by the time they made it to the bottom.

They jogged quickly across the wide rock field that separated them from the prison. Leia watched the cannons positioned atop the prison walls carefully, waiting for them to open fire. They could take the cannons out now, before they had the chance to fire, but doing so would likely alert everyone inside of their presence. They would have to let the prison make the first move.

As they grew closer to the imposing building, Leia couldn’t shake the uneasy sensation that began creeping up on her. There were no doubt dozens of cameras watching the area around the prison. Even if they hadn’t seen the shuttle landing, there was no way they would be able to miss seven people and a droid running across a barren field towards them. The cannons should have been fired the moment they came within range — but they hadn’t. They remained silent even as they reached the prison wall.

Anakin, Ahsoka, and Obi-Wan immediately set to work cutting them an entrance with their lightsabers. The blades pressed deep into the wall, the stone melting around the plasma, and for a moment Leia worried the wall was too thick — but slowly, a hole was cut. The troopers took up a defensive position around the Jedi, watching for enemies, but no one came to stop them.

“Am I the only one worried that we’ve met no resistance at all so far?” Leia asked.

“It is… unusual,” Obi-Wan agreed, his voice straining from the struggle of pushing his lightsaber through what had to be at least two feet of solid stone. Pulling it upward, his cut met the one started by Anakin, and he extinguished his blade, stepping away from the wall with a sigh. “I suggest that we exercise extra caution. I sense a trap.”

Leia frowned. Was that the uneasy feeling that continued to loom behind her, growing more powerful with each second that ticked by? “What sort of trap?” she asked.

“I don’t know. But my guess is that Dooku is involved somehow.”

Anakin and Ahsoka finished slicing the rest of the way through the wall, leaving a large oval shape
seared into the stone. Anakin reached out and, gently, used the Force to pull the oval from the wall, setting it down at his feet. “There,” he said, “Our own little door.”

The clones went through first, their rifles in the ready position as they scanned the hallway beyond. Leia pulled her blaster from its holster and stepped carefully through the hole, avoiding the edges that still burned red-hot. The Jedi followed her, and R2 used his rocket boosters to lift himself up and over the hole’s bottom lip.

Pulling the mask from her face, Leia looked around. They had cut into a hallway, near a small intersection. The inside walls were grey, with a floor made of hard tiling. Several doors lined the interior wall, but they were too large and spaced apart to be cells.

Leia reached into her mind, searching once more forLuke. He was still there, and growing closer, but when she tried to reach out to him, she found herself once again blocked. She wouldn’t be able to use their connection to guide them to him.

“We need to find a computer terminal,” she said. “With my connection to Ben blocked, I won’t be able to locate him, but his cell number should be logged somewhere.”

Obi-Wan nodded. “Then let’s get moving.”

They started off towards the intersection, the Jedi in the rear and the clones in the back, with Leia and R2 in the middle. They had taken no more than a few steps, however, when the sound of metal rolling against tile echoed down the hall towards them. A moment later, two rolled-up metal shapes rounded a corner in the intersection and came to a halt a few metres away from them. Within seconds, the balls had unfurled into two three-legged, hunched-over droids, a pair of twin blasters attached to each arm.

“Rollies!” Rex cried.

A blue, shimmering shield appeared around the droids, and then they both opened fire, a barrage of red laserfire screaming through the air towards them. Leia dove for the nearest doorway, tucking herself up within it. R2 followed her, whistling anxiously. She recognized the droids as droidekas; the Rebel Alliance had used a few Sentinel-models for security purposes, and Leia was well-aware of the droids’ capability for destruction. Though the firepower of the Clone Wars-era droidekas was slightly diminished from their more modern counterparts, they were still deadly and exceptionally difficult to disable.

The clones pressed themselves up against the walls and dropped to a crouch, quickly returning fire on the droidekas. The Jedi all ignited their lightsabers, using their blades to deflect shots as they held their position in the middle of the hallway. Peeking out from her hiding spot, Leia took aim at one of the droids and fired; unsurprisingly, her shot was simply absorbed by its shield.

The three Jedi moved with the practiced efficiency of trained warriors who had fought together many times before. They didn’t even need to speak to one another as they took on the droidekas. Leia watched, quickly realizing what their plan was — Anakin and Obi-Wan acted as the targets, drawing the droids’ fire, while Ahsoka, two shimmering green lightsabers grasped in her hands, jumped up and over the fighting, propelled by the Force. She landed lightly on the other side of the droids and destroyed them with ease, slicing them apart from the back. The shields disappeared, and the two droidekas fell over in a ruined slump.

“So much for no resistance,” Anakin said, extinguishing his lightsaber.

Leia stepped out from the doorway. “Let’s keep moving.” She pushed past the Jedi, stepping over
the destroyed husks of the droidekas, and continued down the hallway. She kept a close eye out for other droids, but none appeared.

Up ahead, the hallway widened into a large rotunda. She held her blaster at the ready, approaching slowly. The uneasy feeling that had been haunting her since the rock field increased, and she glanced quickly behind her. The three Jedi all had a similar look of concern on their faces. Obi-Wan came to stand beside her, pulling his lightsaber from his belt. Behind them, Anakin and Ahsoka did the same.

A second later, a door on the other side of the rotunda hissed open. A squad of B1s filed out, rifles grasped in their metallic claws. Standing behind the squadron was a man; he had slick white hair and a neatly-trimmed beard, and wore a dark brown cloak that billowed out behind him. Leia recognized him immediately as Count Dooku.

“Well,” he said, a sleazy smile stretching across his wrinkled face, “this is a pleasant surprise.”

“Dooku.” Anakin practically snarled out the name, stepping forward.

“Ah, Skywalker. I was rather hoping you would be a part of this little rescue mission.”

Anger flared in Leia, and she raised her blaster, aiming it at the man’s chest. “Where the hell is my brother?” she demanded.

Dooku raised an eyebrow. “Brother? Now, this is unexpected.” His gaze flickered between her and Anakin, the smile on his face widening, and Leia felt dread tighten her stomach. Luke said that he had told Dooku his real name; Dooku must have suspected that he was related to the great Anakin Skywalker, and now he was drawing the same conclusion with her.

“Oh, I do see the family resemblance,” he said. “Don’t worry, your brother is quite safe with me.”

He brushed aside his cloak, retrieving an intricately curved lightsaber from his belt. “You and your friends, however…”

Anakin immediately ignited his lightsaber, as did Obi-Wan and Ahsoka. Leia’s finger hovered over the trigger of her blaster.

“Nellith, go,” Obi-Wan said. “Go find Ben. Take Ahsoka, Rex, and Artoo. Anakin and I can handle Dooku.”

Leia hesitated only a moment before nodding. As she began to retreat, her blaster still tight in her hand, Dooku ignited his own lightsaber. Its blade was crimson red, the same as Vader’s had been. The sight sent nausea twisting through her stomach, but she quickly swallowed the memory and turned to run. Ahsoka, Rex, and R2 all followed. Behind them, the sound of blasterfire and clashing lightsabers erupted. She looked back, briefly, to see Jesse and Fives trading fire with the squad of droids, and Anakin’s lightsaber locked against Dooku’s.

They ran back the way they had come, metal footsteps following after them. Leia looked over her shoulder, haphazardly firing her blaster at the small group of battle droids behind them. The droids immediately returned fire, and she pressed herself into a doorway, R2 and Rex ducking into the one across the hallway. Peeking out, Leia let off several more shots, taking out one of the droids. Ahsoka’s lightsabers became a blur of green light around her as she blocked the droids’ blasts, sending several back towards them. Lasers roared through the air, many coming from Leia’s own blaster, until, in a few minutes, the group of droids lay in a crumpled, smoking heap. The hallway around them was scorched from the blasterfire.
They paused for only a few seconds to catch their breath before continuing on, their feet pounding against the tiled floor. In moments, they were back at the intersection where they had faced off against the droidekas. Turning right, they raced down the corridor, taking more twists and turns at random, putting space between them and Dooku.

“There has to be a computer terminal here somewhere,” Leia said, scanning the doors lining the hallway. Stopping in front of one, she pressed the button to open it. Inside was a sort of surveillance centre, with rows of consoles filling the room. A few RA-7 protocol droids manned the stations, and they all looked up sharply as Leia entered.

“Halt! Intruder!” one of the droids cried, beginning to hobble towards her.

She lifted her blaster and shot it. One of the other droids began to reach for something, likely a blaster, but it didn’t get the chance before Leia had left a smoking hole in its chest. The third one was dispatched in a similar fashion.

Ahsoka and Rex appeared with R2 in the doorway. “Nice work,” Ahsoka said, looking at the three protocol droids sprawled out on the floor.

Leia smirked and headed for one of the consoles. “Artoo!” she called, motioning the astromech over. “There’s a computer terminal here you can hook into.”

R2 rolled towards her, extending his scomp link and inserting it into the terminal. He turned it slowly as he searched through the computer’s database. Leia watched the console’s screen, her expression tight as R2 searched for any prisoners listed under the name Ben Lars. She cursed silently when none appeared, though she had known that would be the outcome.

“Is he being held under a different name?” Ahsoka asked, coming up beside her and frowning at the blank screen.

“Possibly,” Leia said. “Artoo, search all prisoner arrivals within the past two days.”

The sound of blasterfire sounded suddenly from the hallway. “We’ve got another rolly!” Rex called, and Ahsoka ducked out to go assist him. Leia kept one eye on the screen and the other on the door, blaster tight in her hand, as R2 completed the search.

After a moment, a list of a half dozen names appeared on the screen — and Luke Skywalker was among them. He was listed as being held in cell 3277 in Block C.

“That’s him,” she said, pointing to his name.

R2 beeped a question.

“Yes, I’m sure.”

He gave a skeptical whistle, and she shot him an annoyed glare.

“Twin telepathy,” she responded. “Do you think you could download a map of this place?”

R2 chirped an affirmative and, a few turns of his scomp link later, announced that he had acquired a full map of the prison, with directions to Block C from their current location.

“Let’s get going, then,” Leia said.

Outside in the hallway, the blasterfire had died down. She stepped out to see the droideka in a
smoking heap on the floor, and Ahsoka re-hooking her lightsabers to her belt.

“We know where he is,” she said. “Artoo has a map to lead us there.”

Ahsoka nodded, and looked to the droid. “Lead the way.”

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Five minutes and several destroyed battle droids later, they reached cell 3277 C. It rested in the middle of a long corridor, lined on both sides by cell doors. Standing in front of the door, Leia tried again to reach out to Luke. The block remained, and he felt no closer than he had when she had first arrived at the prison.

Unhooking one of her lightsabers, Ahsoka ignited it and drove the green blade into the control mechanism by the cell door. It exploded in a flurry of sparks and smoke, and a second later the door slid open.

The cell beyond it was empty. Leia stood in the doorway, her eyes raking over the room — a single metal bench against the far wall, and no sign that her brother had ever been there. “Shit.”

“Are you sure this is where he was being held?” Ahsoka asked.

“Positive,” Leia said. “They must have moved him without registering it.”

“How are we gonna find him now? We can’t check every cell in this prison.”

Leia stepped back, glancing around the hallway. Every single door looked exactly the same, save for the sequence of numbers above it, and her connection to Luke was useless in trying to pinpoint his location. They would have to try and do things in a more technical way.

A steady red blinking near the top of the nearby wall caught her eye — a security camera. Looking further, she saw more identical cameras positioned all along the hallway at regular intervals.

“The security cameras,” she said, looking to Rex and Ahsoka. “There was a security station back by the turbolift. We can use it to access the cameras, and maybe see when Ben was taken from his cell, and where they brought him.”

After a moment of thought, Rex nodded. “That could work.”

They hurried back towards the turbolift that had brought them to this level of the prison, in the centre of a three-way intersection. The crumpled forms of the two B2 battle droids who had been guarding the lift still lay in a pile in the middle of the intersection, sliced in half by Ahsoka’s lightsabers. A third droid, a B1, was still slumped over the security station positioned off to the side of the lift, its head blown from its body.

Leia pushed it aside, revealing the station’s computer terminal. R2 quickly connected his scomp link, accessing the files for the security camera directly outside cell 3277. Rex stood guard while Leia and Ahsoka watched the small screen inlaid on the station console, flashing brightly as R2 scrubbed through hours of security footage. He slowed as he reached the footage from the past twenty-four hours, and Leia watched intently, searching for her brother’s face.

And there he was. A group of four B1s stopped in front of the cell, opening the door. Two went in and, a moment later, they emerged with Luke in tow, his hands bound together in front of him. Though she couldn’t see his features clearly, he looked unharmed, if only a bit tired.
“That’s him,” she said.

As they led him away, R2 switched from camera to camera, following him down the hallway and into the turbolift.

“Can you access the cameras from other parts of the prison?” Leia asked.

R2 beeped and twisted his scomp link, and then a few moments later the screen switched to a view from inside the turbolift, showing Luke with his four guards. They watched as the turbolift descended several levels, and then stopped. The door opened, and Luke was herded out.

“What floor was that?” Ahsoka asked, leaning over the security station console to peer at the screen.

A few more turns of his scomp link, and R2 beeped out an answer.

“It’s the bottom floor,” Leia said. “Access the security footage from that floor.”

A moment later, and they had a view of another hallway, much narrower than the first. It continued on for a long way; the droids led Luke to a room at the very end, escorting him inside. They re-emerged only a second or two later, but Luke was gone. R2 sped through all the rest of the footage, up until the most recent recordings, but Luke never came back out.

“That’s where they have him,” Leia said, stepping away from the security station. “He’s on the bottom floor.”

Rex reached out, and pressed the button to call the turbolift.

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The containment field hummed softly, shimmering pale blue all around him. Though he was suspended and weightless within it, Luke had grown tired of being held upright, and he slumped within his binders, his head resting awkwardly on his shoulder.

He didn’t even know how long he had been there — he had quickly lost track of time, enclosed in the windowless room. He had slept very little, and had had no food or water since his last meal in his cell, some hours before being brought here. Worry for Leia pressed constantly on his mind; he hadn’t been able to warn her that Dooku knew she was coming, and it was likely that she was on her way. She might even be there already. Dooku could have her in his clutches at that very moment. Separated from the Force as he was, there was no way for him to know what was happening to her.

He had tried to push his senses beyond the containment field, if only for a moment, just to get a feeling if Leia was alright and potentially warn her away. The effort had exhausted him, straining him both mentally and physically to the point where he had passed out for a second. Still, he had tried again, and again, numerous times until he became convinced that it was impossible, or required training well beyond what he had achieved.

It was after that that he had finally slept, though it was restless and he was sure it had not been for long. He woke feeling as exhausted as he had when he had fallen asleep, and now, his head pressed into his shoulder, he felt as if he might just drift off again. But he needed to find some way to escape — he couldn’t just stay here, helpless, while Leia walked into danger. He lifted his head, trying to rouse himself—

Until the screech of shredding metal just outside the room did it for him. He whipped his head
towards the door in time to see it slide open, revealing a young Togruta girl standing in the hallway, a green lightsaber grasped in both hands.

She hurried into the room, stopping in front of the containment field. “Are you Ben Lars?” she asked.

Luke stared at her in confusion, wondering who the hell she was and who she was talking about, until he saw Leia step into the doorway and rush forward into the room, and he realized that Ben Lars must have been the name she had given for him.

“Yes.” He nodded, not taking his eyes from his sister. “Yes, that’s me.”

“Right, then,” the Togruta said. “Let’s get you out of here.” She walked over to the control panel on the far wall and, not even bothering with any of the buttons or toggles, sliced it apart with her lightsabers, until it sparked viciously and the containment field surrounding him dissolved.

With the field no longer suspending him, Luke dropped to the ground, his feet slipping from the pedestal below him. Leia reached out to catch him, and he fell to his knees, feeling the Force rush back to him all at once.

And there, in the middle of it all, was Leia, his sister, shining more brightly than anyone else in the galaxy.

She knelt beside him, her arms wrapped around his shoulders, holding him tightly. “Luke,” she whispered, and he could feel the relief in her voice. It was the same relief he felt — relief that she was alright, that she hadn’t fallen into Dooku’s trap and been captured herself. She lifted her head slightly, leaning towards his ear, and said softly, “I’ve told them my name is Nellith. Artoo is with us, but he’s not the Artoo we know. I’ll explain more later.”

Leia stood, pulling him up with her, while he tried to process the information she had given him. His legs were weak, but he was able to stand on his own. The Togruta walked over to them, hooking her now-extinguished lightsabers to her belt.

“My name is Ahsoka Tano,” she introduced herself. “I’m a Jedi Padawan. That’s Rex,”— she motioned to the door, where, for the first time, Luke noticed a clone trooper standing, rifle in hand, while beside him lingered a very familiar astromech — “and Artoo.” Rex gave a nod in greeting, and R2 chirped rather unappreciatively. Luke gave Leia a quick look, his eyebrows raised; he remembered meeting a clone named Rex shortly before Endor, and though he wasn’t sure if they were the same man, R2’s presence told him that it was a possibility he shouldn’t rule out. Leia gave a small shrug in return, as if to say, *Tell me about it.*

“Thanks for the rescue,” Luke said, looking back to Ahsoka. “Think you could, uh—?” He held up his hands, still bound together.

“No problem.” Unhooking the smaller of her two lightsabers, Ahsoka ignited it and, carefully, held the blade to the metal of the binders. The mechanism holding them together short-circuited, and the binders fell away from his wrists.

Rubbing the angry red rings left behind, Luke gave her a grateful nod. “Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it,” Ahsoka said. “Are you alright to run?”

Luke nodded. Though he was exhausted and weak, he had been through much worse. “I’ll be fine.”

“Then let’s get out of here.”
They headed for the door, where Rex handed Luke a blaster. It was an old model of hand blaster, one Luke had never seen before. It had been some time since he had wielded any weapon besides a lightsaber, but he could still shoot just fine. He stuck it in the back of pants, and followed everyone else out into the hallway.

Ahsoka pulled out a comms unit and turned it on, holding it to her mouth as they jogged down the corridor, heading in the direction of the turbolift. “Come in, Master,” she said. “Master, are you there?”

A moment later, a reply came through. “Hey, Snips.” The voice on the other side sounded strained and distracted, and Luke could hear a commotion of background noise, though he couldn’t discern what exactly it was.

“We have him,” Ahsoka said. “Coming back to you.”

“No, no, you get out of here,” the man said. “We’ll catch up with you. Comm Fox for a pickup just outside the prison.”

“Are you sure you’ll be alright?”

“Nothing we can’t handle.”

The line went quiet, and Ahsoka put her commlink away. They had reached the turbolift, and they all filed in once it arrived.

“Who was that?” Luke asked. “What’s going on?”

The turbolift rushed upwards. “That was my Master, Anakin Skywalker,” Ahsoka explained.

Luke’s gaze snapped to Leia, standing beside him, and she reached over, grabbing his arm. Their father was here, now?

“He’s with Master Obi-Wan Kenobi,” Ahsoka continued. “They’re dealing with Dooku.”

“We need to go help them,” Luke said, and Leia tightened her grip, as if in warning. “They can’t do it on their own.”

“Don’t worry about the Generals,” Rex said. “It’s nothing they haven’t done before.” The lift slowed to a stop and they all stepped out into the hallway. Rex pulled out a commlink and turned it on. “Come in, Fox,” he said. “Do you read me?”

“I hear you loud and clear, Captain,” came the reply. The voice on the other end sounded almost exactly like Rex, and Luke realized it was likely another clone.

“We’re gonna need a pickup,” Rex said. “Fly low towards the prison’s western side. Keep the engines hot and stay alert. We’ll be there ASAP.”

“Copy that, Captain.”

Rex returned the commlink to a pouch on his belt. He looked to R2. “Think you can lead us back to where we came in?”

R2 whistled an affirmative and trundled off down the hallway. They all followed after him.

“They’ll be alright,” Ahsoka said. “They always are.”

Luke could tell that she had faith in her Jedi compatriots, but he couldn’t help but look back as they walked away, though he had no way of knowing where in the prison the two Generals were. But one of them was his former Master, and the other was his father — not the twisted man that he would one day become, but his actual father. A man that Luke had never truly known. Luke was closer to him now than he had ever been, and though he knew he couldn’t, he wanted nothing more than to run off and find him.

Leia, as if sensing his conflict, looked to him, her lips pressed together in a tight frown.
Skywalker

Chapter Summary

Dooku reveals some information that plants a seed of distrust in Obi-Wan, and Luke and Leia discuss their next course of action.

Chapter Notes

a gift from me to you all on my birthday! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The sound of crashing lightsabers echoed in Obi-Wan’s ears. He kept a tight grip on the hilt of his weapon, sweat dripping from his face and his arms straining from the repeated blows and parries. The duel with Dooku had been dragging on, and Obi-Wan was beginning to tire; he could sense the same in Anakin, whose movements had started to slow. The fight may have been two against one, but Dooku’s masterful dueling skills ensured that they were evenly matched.

Fives and Jesse had dispatched all the droids who had accompanied Dooku, though more seemed to continually appear. Obi-Wan could see the two ARC troopers now, out of the corner of his eye, facing off against a droideka and a pair of B1s. He knew that they could handle themselves, but not forever. Even ARC troopers tired eventually.

He refocused his attention just in time to block a blow from Dooku. Despite his old age, the Sith master seemed to not even be out of breath. Though both Obi-Wan and Anakin were skilled duelists, even together they would not be able to take out Dooku — not here, and not like this, with a dozen battle droids behind them and a prison break happening elsewhere in the building. They needed to end this duel and get out.

Anakin, at least, seemed to understand this. His gaze met Obi-Wan’s, his face contorted with the effort of holding off a blow from Dooku, and Obi-Wan could see that he knew they would not win this fight.

Anakin’s comlink began to beep, notifying him of an incoming communication, and Obi-Wan jumped into his place, jabbing his lightsaber in Dooku’s direction as Anakin retreated to the edge of the duel, fishing his comlink out from his pocket. Obi-Wan managed to keep Dooku occupied while Anakin answered the communication; he didn’t hear any of the conversation that took place, but he hoped that it was Ahsoka or Rex, telling them that they had Ben and were on their way out.

A moment later, Anakin was charging back into the duel, his blade held high. Dooku spun away from Obi-Wan, bringing up his own lightsaber to block Anakin’s blow. Obi-Wan struck out with his ‘saber, but Dooku parried him effortlessly, using the Force to push Anakin away and free up his blade. Anakin stumbled and fell onto his back, while Obi-Wan dueled with Dooku, striking and blocking, the blue of his blade crashing again and again against the red of Dooku’s.

It was only a second or two before Anakin was back on his feet, but, without even taking his eyes
from Obi-Wan, Dooku reached out with his free hand and used the Force to send Anakin flying into a nearby wall. He struck hard, with a crack of bone against metal so loud that Obi-Wan could hear it. Anakin collapsed to the ground in a heap, unconscious.

Obi-Wan readjusted the grip on his lightsaber and took a deep breath. He would end this on his own.

His blade crashed against Dooku’s, the plasma sparking and squealing as it struck together. Dooku grinned, pushing harder, forcing Obi-Wan to take one, two steps back.

“Now isn’t this better, just the two of us?” Dooku asked. “I must admit, I was expecting the great Hero With No Fear to come along on this little rescue mission, but you, Kenobi… you were a pleasant surprise.”

Obi-Wan gritted his teeth, freeing his blade from the deadlock Dooku had put them in and striking out again. Dooku parried and struck back; Obi-Wan ducked, dodging the blow, and came back up with his blade swinging. Their lightsabers danced together, the crackling sound of their crashes creating a jarring tune.

“You knew we were coming all along.” Obi-Wan said it as a statement, not a question.

“You should have expected as much,” Dooku said. “After all, it could only be expected, for young Skywalker to come for one of his own.”

Obi-Wan frowned, blocking another quick series of strikes. “One of his own? Who are you talking about?”

A curious expression crossed Dooku’s face, one eyebrow lifting. “The man you came here for,” he said. “Remarkably powerful in the Force. As is his sister, I take it. The only prisoner here you could possibly be interested in.” He paused, bringing his lightsaber down hard towards Obi-Wan, who lifted his own blade quickly, blocking the blow. Their blades remained locked together, Dooku bearing down with more and more weight. “Or do you not know who he truly is?”

“We came here for Ben Lars,” Obi-Wan said, teeth gritting.

“Is that what you think his name is? Who told you that? His sister? The man himself told me a different story.” Dooku lifted his blade, and Obi-Wan nearly stumbled from the sudden release of his own lightsaber. Dooku struck out at him again, and he just barely managed to block it in time.

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“His name is Skywalker,” Dooku said.

Obi-Wan’s brows drew together, and he glanced quickly to Anakin, still unconscious on the floor. Dooku grinned.

“Yes, just the same as your young protégé,” he said. “Interesting, is it not? Especially considering how powerful they both are in the Force. A relation of some kind, perhaps?” He lifted his blade, and the two lightsabers clashed, again and again, Dooku pressing forward, Obi-Wan quickly retreating.

Obi-Wan slashed his blade towards Dooku. “You expect me to believe you, Count?”

“The question is not whether you believe me.” Dooku parried, and Obi-Wan blocked. The blades struck and held for a moment, until Dooku spun away, swinging his lightsaber towards Obi-Wan’s back in a wide, circular arc. Obi-Wan twisted his blade over his shoulder, blocking the attack, and Dooku stepped close, pressing Obi-Wan’s arm into an awkward angle. “The question is whether
you believe the girl.”

Obi-Wan winced at the strain in his arm, and used the Force to propel himself up and away from Dooku. He landed a few feet away, rolling the pain from his shoulder, and looked to Jesse and Fives, positioned nearby. With his free hand, he motioned one of them towards Anakin’s prone form.

“I trust her more than I trust you, Dooku,” Obi-Wan said, and it was the truth — but only just. “And as much as I am enjoying this conversation, I’m afraid it’s time for us to take our leave.”

Dooku strode towards him, crossing the space between them in several longs strides. Obi-Wan lifted his lightsaber, lunging forward and forcing Dooku back one step. Behind him, Jesse hurried towards Anakin. He could hear the ARC trooper grunting as he heaved Anakin up and over his shoulder.

Blue and red crashed once more in a series of quick blows and parries. Obi-Wan held his position, unwavering; he needed to give Jesse and Fives a far enough head start to get Anakin out. Seconds passed, and his breathing began to quicken, tired from blocking Dooku’s continuous blows. He could hear little over the constant hiss of striking lightsabers, but there came a point when he had taken all that he could.

Slowly, he began to give ground. Dooku would strike, and Obi-Wan would take a step back. He turned entirely to the defensive, keeping Dooku on the offensive. Strike after strike, Obi-Wan moved backwards, and Dooku followed.

He had only a short window to make his escape; if he missed it, he wouldn’t make it out. He paid close attention to his surroundings, half of his mind on the fight at hand and the other half on the hallway around him.

And there it was. One more step and he would leave the rotunda where the duel had been taking place. Dooku lunged forward once more, and Obi-Wan propelled himself backwards, creating a space of several feet between them. Reaching out, he used the Force to activate the controls inlaid in the nearby wall. A blast door descended in front of him, separating the rotunda from the hallway where Obi-Wan stood — with Dooku on the other side.

Obi-Wan slashed the controls apart with his lightsaber, effectively locking the door. He looked towards it, giving it a quick nod. “Until next time, Count.”

And then he turned and ran.

“Where are they?”

It was Rex who spoke, crouched near the shuttle’s descended gangplank, his rifle balanced on his knee. Ahsoka stood beside him, her gaze turned to the nearby prison. They were docked a good distance away, in the wide field between the prison and the distant mountains. Fox remained at the controls, while Tup manned the shuttle’s three laser cannons.

Leia sat in the passenger hold, her blaster still gripped in her hand. Luke was beside her, but neither of them spoke. She wanted nothing more than to talk to him, to tell him everything that had happened to her, but there were too many people around. It was too risky, and with a Jedi standing not even five metres away, she didn’t trust that any conversations they had through the Force wouldn’t be overheard.
Suddenly, Rex shifted, hoisting his rifle into his hands. “We’ve got clankers!” he cried.

Leia stood, peering down the gangplank. A small squad of B1s was pouring from the hole they had made in the prison walls. Immediately the droids opened fire, running towards them across the open field. Tup was quick to respond, unleashing a barrage of laserfire from the shuttle’s aft cannon. The ground near the droids exploded in a burst of grey dust, and several of them were sent flying.

Ahsoka ignited her lightsabers, descending further down the gangplank and using her blades to deflect any bolts that came too close to entering the shuttle. Leia hurried over and knelt near the top of the ramp, pressing close to the hull. She lifted her blaster and took aim, letting off several shots in the direction of the B1s. One hit, and the droid crumpled to the ground.

She could feel Luke right behind her, and could hear as he fired off his own volley of shots. Within minutes the squad had been reduced to less than half its original size, and two more shots from the shuttle’s cannons took the rest out. The expanse of field between the shuttle and the prison had been reduced to a mess of craters and scorched droids.

A moment later, another form appeared in the hole in the prison wall. Leia lifted her blaster, pointing it towards them, but then they stepped fully out of the hole, and she realized that it was one of the troopers who had stayed behind with Obi-Wan and Anakin. He had his blaster raised and at the ready, and took a moment to survey the scene in front of him before motioning back through the hole. The second trooper appeared a second later, with someone slung over his shoulder; he was followed by Obi-Wan, meaning the prone form on the trooper’s shoulder was Anakin.

Luke’s hand settled on her shoulder as the group quickly made their way towards the shuttle.

“They’re coming! Get ready, Fox!” Rex called.

Ahsoka hurried back up the ramp into the shuttle, and Luke and Leia followed. Rex remained where he was, motioning wildly for the others to hurry up. They ran up the gangplank into the shuttle, and it began to close as soon as Obi-Wan, bringing up the rear, had placed his foot on it. Outside, Leia could just see another group of droids tearing out from the prison, and they hit the shuttle with a barrage of laserfire as it lifted from the ground and soared into the sky.

The ship’s life support system immediately began to cycle out the dust particles that had filled the shuttle while the ramp was down. The trooper who had been carrying Anakin set him gently down on a bank of seats; though he had no apparent injuries, he was unconscious, and it seemed as if they hadn’t had the chance to fit him with a filter mask before making their escape.

Ahsoka hurried to his side, kneeling beside him and quickly placing a mask over his mouth and nose, just until the ship had finished cleaning the air. “What happened?” she asked, looking to Obi-Wan.

“Dooku threw him against a wall,” Obi-Wan explained. “He’s been unconscious for about ten minutes. We don’t have the facilities to deal with any serious injuries, so I suggest we find the nearest Republic ship and rendezvous with them as soon as possible.”

Luke, still standing beside Leia, looked as if he had been struck. His gaze never moved from Anakin, and Leia could see the open concern on his face. He began to take a step forward, but she reached out and grabbed his hand, stopping him. Now wasn’t the time for this.

Obi-Wan turned to look at them. His gaze settled on Luke, his expression unreadable.
“You must be Ben,” he said, and Luke nodded. Obi-Wan glanced over his shoulder to Rex, motioning the trooper forward. “Captain, I’d like for you to confiscate their weapons and detain these two in the cargo hold.”

Leia’s eyes widened. “What?”

Rex didn’t move. He still wore his helmet, likely as a protection against the dust still lingering in the shuttle’s air, but Leia could sense his hesitation and confusion. “Sir?”

Over near Anakin, Ahsoka stood, looking between Obi-Wan and Leia. “Master, what’s this about?”

“Ben and Nellith are being brought into the custody of the Jedi Order,” Obi-Wan explained.

“On what grounds, Master Kenobi?” Leia demanded.

Rex had finally moved, coming to stand in front of them, and he reached out his hand, silently asking for their blasters. Leia knew he was still confused — she had been his ally, and Luke was the one they had come to rescue. To turn on them now was… unexpected. But he was a good soldier, and Leia was sure that he trusted General Kenobi more than he trusted them. She did not begrudge him this. But still, she did not hand over her blaster, and neither did Luke.

“It is the duty of the Jedi to protect peace in the galaxy,” Obi-Wan said. His voice was stern, his expression hard. “That duty falls especially hard on our shoulders when the threat comes from those sensitive to the ways of the Force. Simply put, Miss Lars, I no longer trust you, or your brother. You are a threat. Perhaps not to me, personally, or to anyone else aboard this shuttle, but I know that you have not been entirely truthful.”

Realizing that they weren’t going to willingly give up their weapons, Rex reached out and grabbed them himself, pulling them from their holsters. Neither Luke nor Leia resisted; there was no point. They were outnumbered and outgunned, and Leia didn’t think either of them would be willing to hurt or kill anyone present. They were allies, and though it was frustrating, Leia could understand Obi-Wan’s distrust.

“I don’t know who you are,” Obi-Wan continued, as binders were slapped on their wrists. “I don’t know if you’re Separatists or common criminals, or something else entirely. But there has been far too much deceit for my tastes, and I would like to put an end to it.”

The binders put on their wrists were Force-dampening. Leia felt the same sensation she had in the cell in the Jedi Temple, cutting her off from her connection to the Force. Luke winced, no doubt feeling the severance more keenly than her, particularly after his long stay in the containment field. She had been alone in her cell at the Temple, but now, surrounded by people, she could more deeply understand the effects of being cut off from the Force. It was more difficult to read other’s intentions and emotions, even Luke’s. She could still analyse their expressions and body language, but she no longer understood them as deeply as before. It was unfamiliar, unsettling territory.

“Obi-Wan, please, this isn’t necessary,” Luke said. Leia could see the betrayal in his eyes — Obi-Wan had been his mentor, a teacher whom he had deeply trusted and respected. To be treated now like a dangerous stranger must have been painful.

“I’m sorry. You will be brought back to Coruscant and subjected to a fair and unbiased investigation by the Jedi Order. I’ve made my decision.” Obi-Wan gave a small nod, and Rex took Luke and Leia each by the shoulder and guided them to the hatch in the floor that led to the below-decks cargo hold. Bending down, he opened the hatch and stepped back.
“I don’t want to have to put you in there by force,” he said.

A moment later, Luke walked over and maneuvered himself onto the ladder. He climbed down awkwardly, his hands bound together, and he hit the ground below hard. Leia looked back at Obi-Wan, casting him one last hard look, before following her brother down into the cargo hold.

The hatch was closed above them, the clang of metal against metal reverberating throughout the ship.

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“Kriffing hell.” Leia kicked the ladder, her hands struggling against their restraints. “What do we do now?”

“Keep your voice down.” Luke walked over to her, putting both hands on her shoulder. The cargo hold was small, the ceilings barely high enough for him to stand up in, and much of the space was being taken up by boxes of supplies. There were no viewports, and the only way in or out was through the hatch above or the loading door on the far wall, which led only to open space.

Luke went to sit on one of the boxes, pulling Leia along with him. They sat beside each other, and he slumped down, letting out a deep sigh. “I just don’t understand why Ben would do this,” he said. “I thought he trusted you.”

“I did too,” Leia said. “I think Dooku must have said something to him during their fight — told him your real name, maybe. You said that Dooku knew it.”

Luke nodded. Though he had denied it, he knew that Dooku had thought he was related to Anakin Skywalker. It was likely Dooku had said something about that to Obi-Wan, or even Anakin. “But why would he believe Dooku?” Luke asked. “He’s a Sith!”

“I don’t know. Even if that’s not what made him change his mind, I think it’s a good bet that Dooku at least mentioned it. Which means that Obi-Wan, and likely Anakin as well, both know that you told Dooku your name was Luke Skywalker. And if they believe that… then we have some issues.”

“Well, Skywalker isn’t a completely unique last name. It doesn’t have to mean we’re related to Anakin.”

“Then what reason would I have to lie about it?”

Luke frowned. “Either way, whether they know my real name or not, I don’t think we’re going to be able to keep up whatever lie it is you’ve concocted for much longer. If they’ve stopped believing one part of your story, they’re not going to keep believing the rest of it. They’re going to ask us for the truth. And I think we should give it to them.”

“Are you crazy?” Leia said, her voice a harsh whisper. Luke could tell she had to work hard to keep from yelling and alerting those above them to their conversation. “You want to tell them who our father is? That we’re from the future?”

“I don’t really see another alternative,” Luke argued. “Whatever you told them obviously didn’t work.”

“It wasn’t working fine until you decided to tell Count Dooku your real name.”

“You don’t think they would have found out eventually? What were you planning to do once we
“Were back together?”

“Work on finding a way home.”

“How? I don’t even know how I got here, let alone you!”

Leia lifted her hands, pointing her finger at him. “I got here by following you,” she said. “I went to that damn temple on Raban and found the same thing I’m assuming you did.”

“That disc? At the bottom of the temple?”

Leia nodded. “I touched it, and the next thing I knew I was in a forest on some random planet twenty-five kriffing years in the past.”

Luke leaned back against the wall. “I’ve never heard of anything like this happening before,” he said. “Time travel isn’t supposed to be possible — not even through the Force. But that disc used the Force to send us here. It was unlike anything I’ve ever felt before. It wasn’t from the light or dark sides. It was just… the Force. Pure, and unbiased.”

Leia was frowning, her eyebrows drawn together. Luke sat up, turning towards her. “That’s why I think we should tell the Jedi the truth,” he said. “Not all of it — just what we have to. But I feel like we’re going to need their help. Maybe they know something about this artifact, something that can help us get home.”

“Do you really think it’s a good idea to tell them we’re from the future?” Leia asked. “Will they even believe us? Will they even want to help us?”

“I think so. It’s the best shot we have, Leia. We could try and figure this out on our own, but without the Jedi’s trust, we might not even have the chance.”

“The Jedi wouldn’t be able to detain us forever. Would they?”

Luke shrugged. “I have no idea.”

Leia sighed, her shoulders slumping, as if in resignation. “Obi-Wan is probably going to bring us in front of the Jedi High Council. They’ll want to know the whole story, but I don’t think we should tell it to them. We should talk to Obi-Wan first, alone — we’ll tell him we’re from the future and, if necessary, who our father is. Then we’ll see what he thinks we should do.” She had a concerned look on her face, the kind of look that told Luke that she was deep in thought. “If he even believes us,” she added.

“I’m sure we’ll find a way to convince him.”

“But we say nothing that could reveal too much. We don’t tell him when exactly we were born, or what year we’re from. We can’t say anything about the end of the Clone Wars or the Empire or Palpatine, and especially nothing about Darth Vader.”

“Not at first—“

Leia’s expression turned serious, though the concern remained. “Not ever, Luke. We have no idea what repercussions that kind of knowledge could have. It’s bad enough that we might have to tell Obi-Wan who our father is, but everything else? It could be disastrous.”

Luke frowned. During his time in the containment field, he had been thinking a lot about Qui-Gon Jinn, in between the worrying and the exhaustion — about the conversation they had had. He
could tell that Leia was desperate to return to their own time, and he understood how she felt. But he did not think it would be so easy for them to get home as she might hope.

“Leia, you need to understand,” he said. “Being sent here was no accident. It was the will of the Force, and it was done for a reason. I think that going home will be much more complicated than just finding something to send us back. There’s something here, in the past, that we need to do.”

Leia’s eyebrows drew together, her lips turning down in a deep frown. “What do you mean?”

Luke took in a deep breath. “I think we were sent here to save our father.”

Her face shifted, taking on the same expression it had that night in the Ewok village, when he had revealed to her who his father was. It was an expression he could describe only as one of horror.

“Not just him, Leia.” He reached out, taking her hands. He half-expected her to pull them from his grasp, but she didn’t. “The whole galaxy. We can stop Anakin Skywalker from becoming Darth Vader, we can stop the Empire from rising, we can stop all those horrible things that we know are coming. We can create peace, before the war even starts.”

Leia was silent. Luke could see her thinking, and knew that she was considering it — running through the scenarios in her mind. She was thinking of the Rebellion, of the war, of the years of fighting and struggling and loss — and of Alderaan. Even disconnected from her in the Force as he was, he knew that she was thinking of her home planet; he could see it in the miniscule changes in her expression, in the desperation and sorrow peaking through the cracks in her usually solid exterior. If there was no Empire, there would be no Death Star, and Alderaan would live. He hadn’t mentioned it; he had known that he wouldn’t need to. Though she rarely spoke of it, Luke knew that Leia thought of Alderaan, and of her adoptive parents, every day.

“You want to kill Palpatine,” she said.

The only way they could stop all of it from happening.

Luke nodded. “Without Palpatine, there is no Empire. Without Palpatine, our father never falls to the dark side.”

A moment passed, then two, and Leia’s face remained contemplative. The seconds stretched on, until finally, she looked at him. Her eyes were sadder than he could ever remember seeing them, and he knew that she had made her decision.

“We can’t, Luke,” she said. “Killing Palpatine will change history in such a monumental way that we have no idea what could happen. Maybe we do save the Republic and stop the Empire from ever forming, or maybe we make things even worse. Without Palpatine, the Clone Wars could never end — the galaxy could tear itself apart in a destructive conflict whose resolution is impossible. We could never be born, Luke. We kill Palpatine, and we might cease to exist.”

“So you don’t even think we should try?”

“The risk is too great,” Leia said. “If we knew for certain that it would work, that killing Palpatine would stop the Empire, with no repercussions, then I would do it in a heartbeat. Of course I would.”

“Leia, we have a chance to save the galaxy from two decades of tyranny. If we save our father, then we could be raised together, by our parents.”

“We don’t even know who our mother was, Luke, or how she died.”
“And that doesn’t bother you?”

Leia pulled her hands away, her face hardening. Luke leaned away, letting out a deep sigh.

“Of course it doesn’t,” he said. “Listen, I know you don’t care about our parents, but I do.”

Leia’s expression twisted into a glare. “I don’t care about our parents because our father was a mass-murdering Sith Lord who tortured me and had a hand in the destruction of my home planet. That doesn’t exactly incite many warm feelings.”

“But we could stop all of that from happening. If we just take a chance—“

“You don’t understand, Luke,” Leia snapped, interrupting him. “I’m not in a position to take chances. I left behind a galaxy still embroiled in a war that is nowhere close to ending. Han is still in that damned temple somewhere; for all I know, he could be ten thousand years in the past.”

Luke’s eyes widened. “Han went in with you?”

“Yes.” Leia was silent for a moment, taking in a deep breath and letting it out slowly, calming herself. “Luke, I understand why you want to do this. More than anyone. But we can’t. I can’t. I have to think of more than just myself, more than us.”

Luke stared at her, his gaze locked on hers, and he realized that she did understand. She was giving up the chance to save Alderaan, to save her parents — not theirs, hers. He wasn’t sure why she was doing it; he knew her to be the type to risk anything, to take every chance, if it meant she might be able to save even one person. Now they had the chance to save the galaxy, and she wasn’t going to take it. But he recognized that she had her reasons, that for whatever reason, she didn’t think that she could do it.

But he still could.

Chapter End Notes

school’s started back up, which means that updates will be a bit slow again. thank you all for being so patient and understanding! I appreciate every kudos and kind word you leave here, more than you can possibly imagine
The Truth

Chapter Summary

Luke and Leia request to speak to Obi-Wan.

It was several hours later when the Serenity dropped out of hyperspace above Coruscant. Obi-Wan sat at the desk in his small quarters, watching as the stars outside stabilized and the multitude of ships and satellites in orbit around the planet came into view. The voyage back to Coruscant from Janus VII had seemed longer than the journey there, though Obi-Wan knew that was only a trick of his tired mind. Despite his best attempts, sleep had alluded him; worries had plagued him, about Anakin and about the Lars twins. The former was being treated in the Serenity's medcentre, watched over by Ahsoka, while the latter two had been confined to the brig, in separate cells, their Force-dampening binders still on.

Obi-Wan knew that Anakin would be alright. He had regained consciousness shortly after their departure from Janus VII, and had no doubt been given a long soak in some bacta. There might be some residual injuries that would require further treatment, but nothing long-lasting. Still, Obi-Wan found it all too easy to worry about his former Padawan, and the recent revelations imparted upon him by Dooku made that no less difficult.

The implications of what it would mean if Dooku was right — if the man Obi-Wan knew as Ben Lars was really named Luke Skywalker — had been lingering in his mind since the duel. He didn't trust Dooku, but he struggled to come up with reasons as to why the Sith would lie about such a thing. And if he was telling the truth, that would mean that Nellith, and her brother, were lying. And if their name truly was Skywalker, then there were only a few reasons that Obi-Wan could think of as to why they would lie about it — that they were criminals who didn't wish for their names to be recognized (though Obi-Wan considered this unlikely), or that they were related to Anakin in some way that they didn't want anyone to find out.

Which just brought up more questions. Why would they wish to keep their relation to Anakin a secret? If anything, it might have helped their case; finding out she was related to one of their own would have given the Jedi Council far more reason to trust Nellith when she was first brought before them. It would also have helped to explain her strong Force presence. Though of course, there were those on the Council who trusted Anakin far, far less than Obi-Wan, and would likely feel the same about any potential relations of his suddenly crawling out of the woodwork. That, however, was not information that an outsider to the Jedi Order would be privy to, which means it would not be a reason for Nellith to lie about her identity.

Then, of course, there was the question of how the twins were related to Anakin, if at all. They were three years his senior, meaning they were most likely to be cousins of some kind, or perhaps even siblings. Cousins was the most likely; from what Anakin had told him, his mother Shmi had been separated from her family as a young girl, taken into slavery. It was possible she had had siblings, who had gone on to have children of their own. Though that wouldn’t explain the twins’ Force sensitivity. Obi-Wan had never met Shmi, but from what he had learned from Anakin and Qui-Gon, she had no greater connection to the Force than any average human. Qui-Gon had believed that Anakin’s Force sensitivity was due to his conception by midi-chlorians, meaning that he had no father. It was something of an outlandish theory, though Obi-Wan had come to accept it,
but perhaps it wasn’t the truth — perhaps Anakin’s impressive connection to the Force came from a father equally strong in the Force, who had had two older children.

That raised more questions about why the twins had been raised separately from Anakin, and why he didn’t know about them, but it was a theory that Obi-Wan believed made some modicum of sense. In any case, he had already sent a request to the analysis droids in the Temple Archives that Nellith Lars’ DNA sample be tested against Anakin’s for any possible relationship. The results should be ready in time for him to collect them himself at the Temple.

He stood as the Serenity entered Coruscant’s atmosphere and began its descent towards the surface. Exiting his room, he began to make his way down to the Star Destroyer’s hangar. The ship was part of Plo Koon’s fleet, though the Jedi General was not currently on board, leaving the Serenity in the care of Vice Admiral Brom Titus. It had been returning to Coruscant from a patrol of the recently-regained territory around Ruuria when it received the message for aid that Obi-Wan had sent out on all Republic channels in the area. They had rendezvoused at Celanon, docking their shuttle in the Serenity’s hangar so that Anakin could receive needed medical attention and the Lars twins could be securely detained. Obi-Wan and Ahsoka would be returning to the Jedi Temple in that shuttle, with Ben and Nellith in tow, while Anakin was to be transported in a medical shuttle.

Ahsoka was already in the hangar waiting for him when he arrived. She stood by the shuttle, R2 at her side, speaking with Rex, who straightened and gave a quick salute as Obi-Wan approached.

“General Kenobi,” he greeted. “The shuttle has been refueled and is ready for departure. Jesse and Fives are retrieving Ben and Nellith Lars from their cells, and will bring them directly here. ETA at the GAR dockyards is approximately ten minutes.”

Obi-Wan nodded. “Thank you, Captain.” He looked to Ahsoka. “And Anakin?”

“Already on the medical shuttle,” she said. “He’s been out of the bacta for about half an hour now. Still a bit woozy from the sedatives, but getting better. The med droid who assessed him said that he had a pretty major concussion and a couple of broken ribs; the ribs should be mostly healed now, but the concussion is probably going to require another dip in bacta. He inhaled a bit of that dust, too, but the med droid thinks the bacta cleared most of it out.”

“That’s good news. I’m glad to hear it.”

A moment passed in silence, and Ahsoka shifted from one foot to the other, her fingers playing at the hem of her sleeve.

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow at her. “What is it, Ahsoka?”

She stopped her fidgeting, clasping her hands tightly together behind her back, and forced her gaze to meet his. “Master,” she began, “I just wanted to know why you decided to arrest Ben and Nellith. You said you didn’t trust them, but I don’t understand why. We were helping them. It doesn’t make sense to me that we would go through all this trouble to rescue Ben, only to arrest him ourselves. How could they possibly be that dangerous?”

Obi-Wan sighed. “Ahsoka, this matter is much more complicated than it appears. Even if they are not fully trained, Ben and Nellith are both very powerful Force-users. The fact that they just seemingly appeared out of nowhere is… concerning. The Council has plans to further interrogate them, to determine who exactly they are and where they came from.”

“Do you really think that they’re a threat?”
Obi-Wan opened his mouth to respond, but across the hangar, a door slid open to reveal Ben and Nellith, hands still bound in the Force-dampening binders, escorted by Jesse and Fives. Nellith wore a sour look on her face, while Ben’s expression was far more neutral; it was easy to see which twin was the more level-headed of the two, or at least the best at masking their emotions.

“I’m not sure,” he said finally, watching as Ben and Nellith were led across the hangar to the shuttle.

Fives and Jesses led them right up the ramp into the passenger hold. Nellith avoided looking at Obi-Wan, but Ben’s gaze lingered on him. His expression changed little, and even with the Force-dampening binders it was difficult for Obi-Wan to read him. Their eyes met as Ben — or Luke, or whatever his name truly was — was escorted up into the shuttle, and Obi-Wan realized that Ben’s eyes were a shade of blue that was most familiar to him. The same blue of Anakin’s eyes.

He looked away quickly, back to Ahsoka, who was watching the twins with an equal measure of curiosity. Fives and Jesse remained in the shuttle with them, guarding them, until, a few minutes later, the ship shook slightly around them as it set down in the GAR dockyards.

Obi-Wan looked to Rex as the ship settled. “Thank you, Captain, we’ll take it from here,” he said. “Your help has been much appreciated.”

Rex nodded, and threw his arm up in a quick salute. “General. Commander.”

He remained standing by the shuttle as Obi-Wan ascended the gangplank, followed closely by Ahsoka and R2. Fox was seated at the shuttle’s controls, and he raised the gangplank as Obi-Wan and Ahsoka entered the passenger hold. They took their seats opposite Ben and Nellith, who sat with an ARC trooper on either side. No one spoke as the shuttle lifted and made its way from the Star Destroyer’s hangar, out into Coruscant. Obi-Wan kept his eyes fixed on Ben and Nellith, but they both avoided his gaze, whether purposefully or not; Nellith’s attention was focused on the floor between her feet, while Ben seemed enthralled by the world outside the viewports, watching the passing buildings with immense interest.

It was late morning on Coruscant, and the city was wide awake. Streams of vehicles moved at a steady pace in every direction, and though it was slightly overcast, weak streams of sunlight still glinted off the reflective sides of the skyscrapers. While war ravaged the rest of the galaxy, life here carried on.

The journey to the Temple didn’t take long; within ten minutes they were setting down in the Temple hangars. Obi-Wan had commed ahead to give forewarning of their arrival. As the shuttle settled, the ramp lowered to reveal Mace Windu standing nearby, accompanied by a complement of four Temple guards. He walked forward, greeting Obi-Wan and Ahsoka as they descended from the shuttle.

“Mater Kenobi,” Windu said. “I see that you were successful in retrieving Ben Lars.” He looked past Obi-Wan into the shuttle, where Jesse and Fives were pulling Ben and Nellith to their feet. “I am glad to hear of it, though Knight Skywalker’s injuries are regrettable.”

“We’ve been assured that he will make a full recovery,” Obi-Wan said, and Windu nodded.

Jesse and Fives led the twins down into the hangar, where they were passed over to the Temple guards. Obi-Wan gave the ARC troopers a quick nod of thanks. “Your help has been much appreciated on this mission,” he said. “You as well, Fox.” He looked to the third clone trooper, descending from the shuttle. “There’s a GAR shuttle waiting to take you to the 501st barracks. You all deserve some rest.”
All three troopers raised their arms in a quick salute. “General,” Jesse said, and then they turned and headed in the direction of the waiting shuttle. Obi-Wan looked back to Windu.

“I know the Council is eager to start, but I’m afraid I have some quick business to attend to first.”

Windu raised one brow, obviously displeased.

“It shouldn’t take more than a few moments,” Obi-Wan added quickly. “In the meantime, Ahsoka can deliver her report of the mission. It will give you most of the necessary background, I’m sure.”

Windu was silent for a moment, before finally nodding. “Very well. We will expect you in the Council chambers shortly.”

“Oh course.” Obi-Wan bowed slightly, and Windu did the same. Motioning to the guards, Windu set off in the direction of one of the hangar doors. The guards, closing formation around Ben and Nellith, followed after him. Ahsoka looked back at Obi-Wan, her expression concerned. He gave her a quick smile, and motioned for her to go.

As she turned to follow the others, Obi-Wan looked down at R2, still lingering at the base of the shuttle ramp. “You’ll come with me,” he said, and the droid beeped contentedly, rolling after Obi-Wan as he made for the exit.

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“Greetings, Master Kenobi.”

The JN-66 analysis droid bobbed its squat head as Obi-Wan entered the Analysis Room and took a seat. R2 rolled in behind him, letting out a trill of curiosity.

“I’ve come for the results of the last test I requested,” Obi-Wan explained. “I was told that they would be ready by now.”

“Of course.” The JN-66 began fiddling with some of the machinery in front of it, its multiple photoreceptors trolling quickly through the data. “Yes, the results were calculated just a short while ago. I am sending them to the screen in front of you now.”

Obi-Wan looked down as the data was quickly loaded onto the screen. Anakin’s name was displayed in large print at the top of the screen, with Nellith Lars’ printed slightly smaller beneath it. There followed a number of statistics and calculations that Obi-Wan skipped over, going straight to the bottom, where the results were displayed.

MATCH. Obi-Wan’s heart jumped at the sight of the bright green letters; so Dooku had been telling the truth. The Lars twins were, in fact, Skywalkers. His eyes jumped lower, where the exact nature of Anakin and Nellith’s relationship was displayed, and his forehead creased in confusion.

The phrase PARENT—CHILD stared up at him from the screen.

“I… I believe there’s been some kind of mistake,” Obi-Wan said, tearing his eyes from the screen and looking up at the JN-66.

“To what are you referring, Master Kenobi?”

“It says here that these two people are parent and child,” Obi-Wan explained, “but that’s impossible.”
The JN-66 looked down at its own screen, and a moment passed as it double-checked the information displayed. “I assure you, it is correct. Our analysis of the samples provided shows clearly that Anakin Skywalker is the father of Nellith Lars.”

“Father?” Obi-Wan repeated, incredulous. “That’s not possible! Nellith Lars is three years older than Anakin. She can’t be his daughter!”

“Regardless, that is what the DNA shows.”

“Is there some other possibility? Could they not be siblings instead?”

“No. The DNA shows, with one hundred percent certainty, that these two subjects are father and daughter.”

Obi-Wan frowned, his hand going to his beard. Beside him, R2 let out a confused beep. “I want you to run the test again,” he said, standing quickly.

“Master Kenobi,” the JN-66 protested, “I assure you that our results are correct. There is no ne—“

“Run the test again,” Obi-Wan repeated. “Please.”

A moment passed, and the JN-66 bobbed its head once more. “Of course.”

Obi-Wan turned and hurried from the room, R2 rolling quickly along behind him. “You must say nothing about this to anyone,” Obi-Wan said, glancing over his shoulder at the droid. “Most definitely not Anakin; not until more is certain.”

R2 whistled his agreement. Obi-Wan pressed a hand to his temple; he could already feel a headache coming on.

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Luke stood in the centre of the High Council Chamber, Leia beside him. He tried hard to keep his awe and excitement contained, but he could feel himself struggling. He was standing in the heart of the Jedi Order, before the most powerful Jedi to exist in this time. They were on Coruscant, in the main Jedi Temple — a place he had only ever dreamed of seeing. In the present, Coruscant was being torn apart by internal strife, and the Temple had long ago been converted into the Emperor’s private residence.

But now Luke was here, seeing it as it was in its prime. He had so many questions he wanted to ask, so many things he wanted to see — he could learn so much here, information that he could take back home and use to truly rebuild the Jedi Order. It could be as it once was, not some cobbled together imitation based on hurried lessons and pieced-together archival records. He wouldn’t have to keep scouring half-depleted databases or search for clues in ruins; he could learn firsthand and in great detail the ways of the Jedi, in a way he never could back home.

Though of course, if his plan worked as he hoped, that might not be necessary.

But the thought was still exhilarating.

Obi-Wan had arrived in the Chamber, taking his seat between the holographic forms of a Cerean and a Zabrak Jedi. He watched Luke and Leia closely, not taking his eyes away from them; his expression was unreadable, but Luke could see hints of confusion lingering beneath it.

A few seats away from Obi-Wan sat the Jedi who had come to collect them in the hangar, whose
name Luke had learned was Windu. And beside him was the familiar, wrinkled green form of Master Yoda.

He looked much younger than when Luke had last seen him, curled up on his bed on Dagobah, choking out his last words. It was just over two decades before Luke was to meet the wizened old Master, and though that was a significant amount of time in the lives of such short-lived organics as humans, it was short enough as to be almost meaningless to someone like Yoda. But the years that had lined Yoda’s face in exile were much more apparent now when viewed in contrast with the Jedi seated before him — still old, to be sure, with little more than a few wisps of gray for hair and gnarled claws that appeared almost arthritic, but he seemed centuries younger. Luke realized that he no longer carried the same sadness that he had on Dagobah; it was a sadness that had stooped his shoulders and lined his face, left him bone weary and finally, at the end, feeling every last year that he had lived.

It was the sadness of being the last of your kind — of bearing the weight of every death of nearly all Jedi in the galaxy, of watching the Order you had dedicated your life to crumbling to dust around you. It was the same sadness that had plagued Obi-Wan, that had aged him nearly as much as the harsh desert suns.

Yoda regarded Luke now with eyes free of such sadness, but free also of the warmth and familiarity that he had once seen in them. This Yoda was a stranger to him, the leader of an Order embroiled in a galaxy-wide war, suspicious of the two now placed before him.

“You have been brought before the Jedi Council to undergo an investigation.” It was Windu who spoke, a deep crease forming between his eyes. “We wish to discover who you truly are, and what your intentions are. If we deem you to be a threat, we will take the appropriate course of action.”

“We’re willing to cooperate,” Leia said immediately, with the easy confidence of a seasoned politician, “but we will speak only to Master Kenobi. Alone.”

A quiet murmur passed through the room, as the various Jedi Masters turned to speak to each other all at once. Obi-Wan, for his part, looked surprised. Windu and Yoda conferred for a moment, before looking back to Luke and Leia.

“Why is this, hm?” Yoda asked.

“We trust him,” Luke explained. “Forgive us, but the... nature of our situation leads us to take certain precautions.”

There was a moment of silence, before Obi-Wan spoke. “If the Council agrees, I will be more than willing to speak with them, to hear what they have to say.” His gaze remained sharp and piercing, never moving from them.

More quiet conversations, until Windu finally looked up, his eyes going first to Luke and Leia, and then to Obi-Wan. “We will allow it,” he said.

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They were brought to a room near the Temple’s ground floor. A set of shuttered doors led out into a small courtyard, filled with green plants and blossoming flowers. A warm breeze drifted through, carrying with it the scents of nature rather than the odors of the city. Several large ottomans were placed around the room, and Luke realized that this was likely some sort of meditation chamber.

Obi-Wan had followed along behind them, and he thanked the guards as they ushered Luke and
Leia into the room. “You can wait out here,” he said. The guards nodded, taking up positions on
either side of the door, and Obi-Wan stepped into the room. The door closed behind him.

There was a moment where nobody said anything. Obi-Wan looked at them, his hands clasped
together behind his back, his expression neutral. With his wrists still clamped in the Force-
dampening binders, it was difficult for Luke to discern any of Obi-Wan’s emotions or thoughts,
which served to make the nerve-wracking silence even more so.

It lasted only a few seconds. “If you wish to tell the truth,” Obi-Wan said, walking over and taking
a seat on one of the ottomans, “you can begin by telling me your real names. Because I know they
are not Ben and Nellith Lars.”


“Leia.” His sister gave no last name with her answer, which Luke figured was probably wise; he
knew she would be uncomfortable saying that her surname was Skywalker, and Obi-Wan would
likely just assume that was the case. Telling the truth and saying that her surname was Organa
would bring up questions that were far too difficult to answer.

Obi-Wan simply nodded, his lips pressing together into a tight line. “And who is your father?”

Luke blinked in surprise. Obi-Wan asked the question as if he already knew the answer, but he
couldn’t possibly know who their father was; as far as he knew, Anakin was three years younger
than they were, making it impossible for him to be their father. Perhaps he was just trying to figure
out how exactly they were related to Anakin by trying to find common relatives, though in that case
it would make more sense to ask them who their mother was. But when Luke looked at Leia, he
saw none of the confusion on her face that he felt.

In fact, she looked hardly surprised at all.

“You used the blood sample I gave to run a DNA test,” she said. “You already know who our
father is.”

Obi-Wan nodded. “Yes, and I apologize for the deception. But I would like for you to say it.”

Leia looked to Luke, and he gave her a quick nod. He didn’t know why she had given a blood
sample, though that hardly mattered at this point — what was done was done. He turned to Obi-
Wan.

“Our father is Anakin Skywalker,” he said.

Though he already knew this, Obi-Wan still took in a sharp intake of breath, as if in surprise.
Perhaps he hadn’t truly believed it until someone else had spoken it aloud.

“How is this possible?” he asked.

“We won’t be born until the end of the Clone Wars,” Luke said. “We were brought here, to the
past, by an artifact, in a temple on the planet Raban. I don’t know how or why it did what it did,
but I do know that it had something to do with the Force.”

Obi-Wan’s eyes widened. “The past? So… you are from the future?” Luke and Leia both nodded,
and his hand went to his mouth, in shock. “This… this isn’t possible.”

Leia gave a quiet laugh. “I certainly wish it wasn’t. But here we are; you saw the proof with your
own eyes. How else could we be three years older than our father?”
Obi-Wan was silent for a moment, his furrowed brows creating a deep wrinkle on his forehead. “You said that it was an artifact that you sent you here? In a temple?”

Luke nodded. “The temple was abandoned long ago. I don’t know if it was made by the Jedi or something else; I couldn’t sense clearly the light or the dark sides. The only thing that I found within it was this strange disc. I could hear voices speaking to me from it, and when I approached it, it lifted into the air and began to glow. I touched it, and the next thing I knew, I was waking up in a forest somewhere. That’s when I was captured by a group of Separatist droids.”

“That’s the same as what happened to me,” Leia said. “I found the same artifact when I went looking for him, and it brought me to Ucarro, I’m assuming to the same forest it brought Luke. That’s where I found his lightsaber.”

“So you’re saying that this disc used the Force to bring you here?” Obi-Wan asked.

“Yes,” Luke said, nodding. “I’m absolutely certain that it did.” He considered, for a moment, telling Obi-Wan about his visit from Qui-Gon Jinn, but he wasn’t sure how that would go over. It might be best to take things one at a time — time travel first, and then visits from dead masters.

Obi-Wan’s hand stroked slowly at his beard. “The Force is unusually calm around you,” he admitted, “which is not what one would expect given your… situation.” He paused a moment, deep in thought. “And you have no idea what reason the Force could have to send you here?”

Luke could feel Leia’s gaze on him, imploring him to say nothing — nothing about who their father would be come, or Luke’s plan to save him. He shook his head. “No. There’s nothing.”

Obi-Wan frowned. “I am inclined to believe you, that it truly was the Force that sent you here. The ramifications of time travel being proved possible are… unsettling. I must speak with the rest of the Council about this.”

“So you believe that we’re from the future?” Luke asked, almost surprised.

“As your sister pointed out, I have the proof of it.” He was silent for a moment, his gaze on Leia. “And you look very much like him.” He looked to Luke. “Though you have his eyes.”

Leia’s face whitened, her lips pressing into a tight frown. But she said nothing about it, instead attempting to change the subject. “I don’t think it would be wise for you to speak about this with the other Jedi,” she said.

Obi-Wan’s brows rose in surprise. “Unfortunately, I don’t think I have that option. The Council is highly suspicious of both of you, and will want an explanation.”

“They trust you,” Leia pointed out, “and you believe us. If you tell them that you know the truth of who we are, but agree it should be kept secret, they should trust that. It’s dangerous enough for us to reveal who we are to you; we have no idea the ramifications this could have, knowing even this small bit about the future. That would be multiplied tenfold if we told the Council.”

Obi-Wan let out a deep sigh. “I know more than just this bit, though,” he said. “Don’t I? The story you told me about your family, it wasn’t all lies, was it?”

Luke looked to Leia. She had told him some of the tale she had made up for the Jedi, and it had been easy to see the seeds of truth she had planted within it — their father leaving the Jedi Order before they were born, their mother dying when they were young, Luke being trained as a Jedi, Leia moving to Alderaan.
She nodded. “Most of it was true, yes,” she lied. “Except for the names.”

“So when the war is over… Anakin leaves the Order.” Luke could clearly hear the pain in Obi-Wan’s voice, and he had to hold back a wince; Obi-Wan likely thought that Anakin simply leaves the Order to raise a family. The truth was so much worse, however, and Luke could only begin to imagine how that must have torn him apart.

“Yes.”

“And might I ask, who your mother is?”

“Like I told you before, she died when we were very young,” Leia explained. “We never really—“

“Her name was Padmé,” Luke interrupted. Leia turned to look at him, but he avoided her gaze. His aunt and uncle had told him her name, when he was young and becoming curious about his parents for the first time. They hadn’t known anything about her beyond her first name, but Aunt Beru recalled how beautiful she was, with exquisite clothes unlike anything that could be found on Tatooine. They had only ever met her the once.

Luke hadn’t shared that with Leia yet; he knew that she was still struggling with the truth of who her biological father was, and she had never asked, so he had thought it would be best to wait until she was more adjusted. But with the Force-dampening binders still dimming their connection, he couldn’t tell what her reaction to learning the news was, and he avoided looking at her face to find out.

Obi-Wan’s face, however, was easy to read. Luke could see on it a strange mix of shock and understanding, as if the news was both unexpected and expected at the same time.

“You know someone by that name?” he asked, and Obi-Wan nodded.

“Padmé Amidala,” he said. “I knew that Anakin was dangerously attached to her, but I never expected…“

“That they would have children together?”

“Well, yes.” Concern joined the mix of emotions swirling visibly on Obi-Wan’s face. “And you said that she dies, when you’re both still very young?”

Luke frowned. It had likely been unwise to reveal that bit of information; he hadn’t even stopped to think that Obi-Wan might know their mother, though now it seemed obvious that it should have been a possibility to consider. He could think of that only for a moment, however — he knew his mother’s name now, and Obi-Wan knew his mother, and he was right there, sitting in front of him. Luke already had a dozen questions to ask about her, but he held back. Asking too much would likely make Obi-Wan question why they didn’t know this already, and they couldn’t explain that without giving too much away.

“She does, yes,” Leia said, “but I think it’s best if we leave it at that. The less you know, the better.

And I think it goes without saying, but Anakin can know none of this.”

Obi-Wan was still frowning, his mind no doubt reeling from the slew of information being pressed upon him. “Yes, yes, I agree with you there,” he finally said. “On both counts. But really, I think it would be best if we told the rest of the Council about this. It’s possible that one of them has at least heard something about an occurrence like this, even if it’s only myth and rumours. I assume that you do want to get back home, to your own time?”
“Yes,” Leia said quickly, nodding.

“I believe that the Council’s help would be indispensable,” Obi-Wan said. “And the fact of the matter is, they don’t trust you. My word might quell that distrust, but not forever, and even with my endorsement, they won’t simply let you go off on your own. Simply put, telling them is a necessity.”

Leia frowned, and Luke reached out, placing a hand on her shoulder. “I think he’s right,” he said. “The Jedi could be a great help. And just because we tell them we’re from the future, doesn’t mean we have to tell them anything else.”

Obi-Wan nodded his agreement. “In fact, I think it would be best if we keep most of this information to ourselves. The fewer people who know anything about the future, the better. Particularly when it comes to who your father is.”

Leia was still frowning, but after another moment of thought, she nodded. “Alright.” She wasn’t looking at Obi-Wan as she spoke, but rather at Luke. “If you think we should, then I agree.”

“Okay then.” Obi-Wan gave a somewhat strained smile, standing and motioning to the door. “Shall we?”
Obi-Wan stood once more in front of the doors to the Council chamber. He could hear quiet murmurs of the conversation taking place in the room beyond, and though the words were indistinct, he knew what was being discussed — Luke and Leia, the two strange visitors currently standing behind him, waiting for him to open the doors and lead them inside.

Anakin’s children.

He could see the relation quite clearly, now that he knew it was there to look for. Luke had his father’s hair and eyes, though Obi-Wan could see more of Padmé than Anakin in his face. Leia, however, looked very much like her father, though she had her mother’s colouring. She had his scowl, as well, and his temperament. It was almost jarring, to see features so familiar to him on someone else’s face.

Oh, Anakin, he thought, what do you get yourself into?

He should have expected that such a thing would happen; in a way, he supposed, he did. He knew that Anakin struggled with some aspects of life as a Jedi, especially when he was younger, but he had thought he was doing better. He was an excellent teacher to Ahsoka, and was absolutely indispensable to the war effort. Obi-Wan had thought that he was finally settling down into his position, dedicating himself to being the best Jedi he could be.

Of course, Obi-Wan hadn’t taken Padmé into account. He knew they got along well, and had suspected Anakin’s true feelings for her, but had never thought that they would act on those feelings — certainly not enough to produce two children and give Anakin cause to leave the Order. It was a revelation that left Obi-Wan shaken. The headache that had started earlier that day was quickly progressing into a migraine.

He turned away from the door, looking to the twins. The guards who had accompanied them down to the meditation chamber had left them at the turbolift, leaving the three of them alone in the atrium. “Before we go in there, I have one more question,” he said. It had been weighing on his mind since they had asked to speak to him, and him alone. “Why did you trust me enough to tell me this?”
It would have been easy for them to say that it was because he had helped to rescue Luke, but he had also put them in binders and openly declared his distrust of them. Based on that alone, he was as likely to believe them as he was to declare their story to be outright lies.

Luke and Leia cast each other a quick glance, the conversation passing between them occurring in seconds. “Experience,” Luke answered. “We knew we could trust you, even if you didn’t.”

Obi-Wan looked at them a moment, and then nodded. “I’m assuming you are referencing experience that I don’t yet have.”

Luke smirked. “My father wasn’t the only teacher I ever had.” He took a step forward, and motioned to the door, still standing closed before them. “Now, why don’t we get this over with?”

Obi-Wan would have liked to ask more, but he had a feeling that was as much as was going to be revealed to him, at least for now. So, he turned and took a step forward, pushing open the door to the Council chamber.

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The Jedi High Council watched as the trio re-entered the room, their conversation falling silent. Obi-Wan led Luke and Leia to the centre of the room, facing Yoda and the hard-faced Master Windu. Leia could feel the eyes of all the Jedi Masters on them, the suspicion of their collective gaze unmistakable. She straightened her back, clasping her hands in front of her with her head held high, the same position she had taken up every time she had ever spoken in front of the Imperial Senate. It was a lesson that had been instilled in her by Mon Mothma, when the current Chancellor was still just a Senator, and Leia’s political tutor — appear confident, and do not falter.

“I have spoken with Nellith and Ben,” Obi-Wan said, “and they have agreed to share with you what they told me.”

They had decided to continue using the false names that Leia had created, in the hopes of mitigating any adverse effects they might have on the future. After all, there was no knowing what could happen if Anakin were to learn the names of his children years before their birth, even if he didn’t know yet that they were his children.

Yoda nodded. “Eager to hear this, we are.”

“I think it’s best if I let them tell it.” Obi-Wan gave a quick bow to the Grandmaster, and then took his seat between the Cerean and Zabrak Jedi, giving the floor to Luke and Leia. She watched him go, and as he sat, he gave her a slight, almost imperceptible nod.

She looked to Yoda, his large eyes filled with a calm curiosity. “I’m going to keep this simple,” she said, “though I will warn you — this is going to be hard to believe. But it is the truth.”

“Well now I am curious,” Master Windu said, lifting one of his eyebrows. “Please, continue.”

“We’re from the future.”

As soon as the words left Leia’s mouth, she could feel the shift of emotions within the room. Shock, disbelief, confusion; the Jedi looked to one another, exchanging their thoughts with merely the creasing of a forehead.

Windu’s skepticism was plain to see on his face. “The future?”

Luke nodded, stepping into the conversation. “We won’t be born until the end of the Clone Wars.
My sister told you the truth when she first stood here before you — our father was a Jedi, but as it stands currently, he’s younger right now than we are.”

“And you expect us to believe you with no proof?” It was the Zabrak Jedi who spoke, his position relaxed as he reclined into his seat, very obviously not taking anything they had said seriously.

“There is proof,” Obi-Wan said, looking to his colleague. “I’ve seen it. Surely, Master Kolar, you believe me?”

“You must admit, Master Kenobi, that it is an outlandish claim,” Kolar argued.

Obi-Wan nodded. “That is true, and I don’t deny that had I not seen the proof myself, I would also struggle to believe such a tale. But I have seen the proof, and it is undeniable.” His gaze turned to Luke and Leia as he spoke next. “I believe them.”

“Would you care to elaborate on what this proof is?” The question was posed by a Kel Dor, his expression unreadable beneath his rebreather and eye goggles.

“I don’t think that would be wise,” Obi-Wan said. “Such proof would naturally contain elements of what is to happen in the future, and I’m of the opinion that the fewer people who know about it, the better. And the specific evidence I was provided with is of a particularly…. sensitive nature.” He paused a moment, looking around the room at his fellow Council members. “I am well aware of how implausible it seems. But I am asking you to trust me, and to trust Ben and Nellith.”


Despite the endorsement of the Grandmaster, several of the Jedi still seemed apprehensive. A hard look had settled on Windu’s face, and he scowled openly at Luke and Leia.

“Time travel isn’t possible,” he said.

Leia gave a quiet laugh. “That’s what we thought. Until this happened, of course.”

“How is it, then, that this happened?” the Cerean asked, his bushy eyebrows raised.

“It was the will of the Force,” Luke said. He had the same calm tone, the same easy composure that Leia had seen him use with Jabba the Hutt. His hands were clasped in front of him, and she could see no apprehension, no nervousness in him. Just a cool confidence, in himself, in her, and in the Jedi. “I discovered an artifact, in a temple that I believed to have been built by the Jedi. Though I’m not sure now that was the case, it’s undeniable that the Force was present there. The artifact was the only thing I found, and when I touched it, it sent me to Ucarro, where I was captured by a squad of Separatist droids.”

For all their uncertainty, the Jedi listened carefully as he spoke, all eyes of him. None of them said anything until he had finished.

“Where was this temple?” a Tholothian asked, a small crease forming between her brightly-coloured eyes.

“Raban,” Leia answered. “It’s a rather unremarkable planet in the Kastolar sector. I followed Ben there, looking for him, and discovered the same artifact that he had.”

“I’ve never heard of any Jedi temples in that region,” Windu said.

“As I said, I’m not sure anymore that it was a Jedi temple.” Though Luke’s voice was as calm as
ever, Leia could sense a hint of impatience beginning to creep in. “I don’t believe it was Sith, either. There were no markings anywhere in the temple, no signs of who built it or even that anyone had ever lived there. Though I could sense the Force there, it wasn’t light or dark. It was just… the Force.”

“Why were you searching for a Jedi temple?” the Cerean asked.

“Curiosity,” Luke replied. “I had heard stories, old folk tales about a strange temple. I thought it might have something to do with the Jedi, and I decided to investigate.”

“The will of the Force, you said this was,” Yoda pointed out, motioning to Luke with one gnarled finger. “Why is that, hm? Because of this presence in the Force?”

Luke nodded. “And other things, as well. As Master Kenobi observed during our conversation, the Force is peaceful around us. That’s not what would be expected of two people currently stuck in a time not their own. That leads me to believe that we are here for a reason — that the Force brought us here to do something.”

“And what might that be?” Windu asked.

“We’re… not sure yet,” Leia admitted. “As I’m sure you understand, the situation is complicated.”

“If I am being honest,” Kolar said, looking from Luke and Leia to Obi-Wan, “I find all of this vague and unconvincing. Master Kenobi, I mean no offence, but how could you expect us to believe this?”

“I understand your feelings, Master Kolar,” Obi-Wan said, “and I am sure they are shared by many others here. But I must ask — what reasons would there be to concoct such a complicated, implausible lie? If Ben and Nellith wished to hide their identities, I am sure that there is a much more reasonable path they could have taken. I assure you, I would not be sitting here agreeing with all of this if I had not seen undeniable proof that Ben and Nellith are from the future.” He paused, looking around the room at each of his colleagues. “As ridiculous and unreasonable as that sounds.”

“And yet we cannot see this proof ourselves?” a Togruta asked.

“As I said, I don’t believe it would be wise. It is evidence of who their father is. Nellith told us from the beginning that her father was once a Jedi, and he left the Order after having children. This proves her correct, but to reveal this evidence to you all would be to reveal that one of the members of our Order will one day have children and leave. We cannot expect nothing bad to come from so many learning such information.”

The Iktotchi sitting a few seats down from Obi-Wan scowled, the expression adding deep lines to his already-wrinkled face. “So we put our faith in two strangers?”

“You put your faith in me,” Obi-Wan retorted. “This is a situation entirely unheard of before, and I have come to you asking for your help. We wanted the truth about who Ben and Nellith are — this is it.”

There was a moment of silence, and none of the Jedi spoke. Yoda had kept his gaze trained on Luke and Leia throughout the entire conversation, and he finally looked away, to his fellow Jedi. “Believe them, I do,” he said. “Implausible this is, but not impossible. The Force carries with it many surprises. Remember that, we must.”

A wave of surprise passed around the room. Yoda, no doubt sensing this, smirked. “Trust Obi-
Wan, we must. And trust Ben and Nellith, as well.”

The room remained silent, and Leia could see the Jedi thinking, considering their Grandmaster’s words. Yoda was considered to be one of, if not the, wisest Jedi in the Order — if he trusted them, what reason did the others have not to?

Luke was the first to break the silence. “Thank you, Master Yoda,” he said, bowing his head. Leia followed suit.

“How do we know we can trust them?” Windu asked. “Though I have faith in Master Kenobi, his word is not enough.”

“All we want is your help,” Leia said, holding her hands open at her sides. Now was the time to bring out the Senator, the side of her that could use words to convince others to join her side. “That’s all we ask. You don’t have to trust us; you can put us in your cells, continue to investigate and question us. But I assure you, you won’t find any answers. You won’t find out who we are, because we don’t exist yet. You won’t find any other answers to where we come from or what we want, because we’ve already told you. We’re from the future, and we want your help in getting back home. My brother knows the Force, but what has happened to us is beyond the expertise of any one person. You can refuse to help us, you can keep us locked away for as long as you want, but our story won’t change.”

Windu didn’t reply, his eyes narrowed slightly.

“What do you suggest we do to help, then?” the Togruta asked, and Leia understood from her voice that it was a genuine question.

“I say we start with the temple,” Leia said, looking to the woman and away from the displeased face of Master Windu. “It’s likely that if we go back and find the artifact, it will send us home again.”

“And if the Force did send you here to complete something?” the Kel Dor asked. “Would it be willing to send you home without it being completed?”

Leia shrugged. “You know more of the Force than I do,” she said. “But the Archives in this Temple are one of the vastest collections in the galaxy. There has to be something about this Temple, or this artifact, somewhere.”

“I’ll speak with Master Nu,” Obi-Wan said. “It’s likely that she’ll at least know where to look for such information.”

Yoda hummed thoughtfully, and then shook his head. “No, not you, Master Kenobi,” he said, and all eyes turned to him. “From the war, we can no longer spare you. Someone else must take charge.”

Obi-Wan blinked in surprise, obviously taken aback. “With all due respect, Master Yoda—”

Yoda cut him off, raising one thin eyebrow. “Your former Padawan, perhaps? Injured, he is, and must remain on Coruscant for a short while. Handle this issue, he can.”

Leia’s heart stuttered in her chest, but she kept her expression neutral. The idea of having to work even more closely with Anakin made her heart pound and her hands curl into fists, but she quickly stamped the feeling down, careful not to let any of it seep out. Still, Luke glanced quickly her way, obviously able to sense her emotions, even with Force-dampening binders still clamped on their wrists. She avoided his gaze; if she had to see the concern in his eyes, she wouldn’t be able to keep
her composure.

“So then you have accepted to help us?” Luke asked after a moment, looking from Leia back to the Jedi.

“We will see what can be found,” Windu said, though his tone told them that there were no promises. “And then we will decide what our next step should be.”

“And what do we do until then? Wait around until you find something?”

“Yes.”

“We will be able to find accommodations for you here at the Temple, I’m sure,” the Cerean said. “As guests, not prisoners.”

Yoda nodded in agreement, and then gave a quick wave of his hand. The Force-dampening binders on their wrists opened and fell away, clattering to the floor. It was a relief, to have her connection to the Force back.

“Master Kenobi, update young Skywalker, you will,” Yoda said. “Rooms for our guests, we will find.”

The Jedi began to murmur quietly to each other, assuming that the conversation was done. Leia rubbed gently at the marks the binders had left behind on her wrists, and turned to speak to Luke, to tell him how surprised she was that this had worked. But he was still looking ahead at the Jedi, and as she turned to him he took another step forward.

“There’s something else,” he said, and many of the Jedi immediately quieted, though he seemed to speaking largely to Yoda and Windu. “I would like my lightsaber returned to me. It’s very important to me, and would not be easy to replace.”

Windu replied immediately. “Not yet. At the moment, you have no need for a lightsaber. I assume, however, that in your time, you are a member of the Jedi Order?”

“Yes. Though there are... some differences between your Order and mine.” A ripple of surprise passed through the room, accompanied discomfort — these leaders did not like the idea that their organization would ever change.

Windu nodded, his expression thoughtful. “You will get your lightsaber back when it is time for you to leave. But not before.”

Luke frowned, obviously displeased, but he still nodded in compliance.

“Then all is in agreement,” Yoda said. He looked to Luke and Leia, giving them a quick nod of acknowledgment. “We will meet again shortly.”

Obi-Wan stood and motioned to the twins. They both bowed once, quickly, and then turned and followed him from the room.

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The Temple’s residential level was located on one of the higher floors. It was a corridor just as ornate as all the others, the ceiling inlaid with a long skylight, and Luke stared in wonder as Obi-Wan led them along. The Temple was such a stark contrast to everything he had ever seen of the Jedi Order — Obi-Wan and Yoda, as he had known them, old men in worn robes living in hiding in
hovels on backwater planets; old temples, falling to ruins around him; the remains of archival records, snippets of information here and there that had somehow managed to survive the Empire. But this Temple was far from ruins; it was magnificent, full of a life that glowed brightly. When Luke reached out to the Force, connecting to all those around him, the staggering reply of thousands upon thousands of trained Force-sensitives nearly overwhelmed him.

Obi-Wan stopped them in front of a door. It was numbered, like all the others, and opened gently as he pressed his palm to the activation panel. Stepping aside, he motioned them in.

The room beyond was simple, but comfortable. A tall window climbed the far wall, revealing a stunning view of the Coruscant skyline. An open door off to the side led to a shared refresher, and beyond it another nearly identical room. Luke assumed that it was an arrangement most often used by masters and their students; from what he had gleaned, a master took only one pupil at a time. He wondered who the two beings to share these rooms had been.

“I’m sure you two would like a moment to rest and freshen up,” Obi-Wan said, remaining by the door with his hands clasped behind his back. “It’s been a… trying day. I will go and update Anakin and Ahsoka, and I’ll send Ahsoka down to help you settle in. I’m sure we’ll be able to find a change of clothes for you both, and Ahsoka will be able to take you later to get something to eat.”

“And after that?” Leia asked. “Are we supposed to just wait around until you find something in the Archives?”

“I’m sure there will be something for you to do,” Obi-Wan said, his tone placating. “In the meantime, perhaps you can think about why you might have been sent here, if there was even a reason at all?”

Luke sank slowly into the lush chair pushed against the wall opposite the bed. Of course, he already knew the reason they were here, though Leia disagreed. He was sure they would have another discussion about it as soon as Obi-Wan left. But there was nothing else he could think of — no reason important enough for the Force to send them twenty-five years in the past, except to save their father and end the Emperor’s tyranny before it even began.

Leia looked to him, her gaze piercing, as if she knew what he was thinking about. “We’ll try to think of something,” she said, not taking her eyes off him.

“There’s… one more thing,” Obi-Wan said. “You don’t have to tell me, if you don’t think you should, but I really must ask.” He looked to Luke, and continued, “Before we went into the Council chamber, you told me that your father wasn’t the only one to train you.” He paused a moment, as if unsure of how to keep going. “I am assuming that you meant me.” Though it was said as a statement, Luke could plainly hear the question underneath it.

He looked at Leia. He knew what she was thinking — that he should lie, tell Obi-Wan that he had meant someone else. It was bad enough that Obi-Wan knew who their father was; to reveal any more about the future to him would be downright foolish. But from the way Obi-Wan spoke, it sounded as if he already knew the answer, and sitting there, looking at the man who would one day be his teacher, Luke could feel only sadness, and guilt. They had already lied so much to him, about what was really going to become of their father, and even though he didn’t know the actual details, it was clear to Luke that just knowing that Anakin would one day leave the Order upset Obi-Wan deeply. But perhaps knowing that he might still have some connection with his former Padawan, and with his children — though not in the way he imagined — would provide some solace.

“You would visit sometimes, as we were growing up. You taught me a lot of what I know. Though we knew you as Ben, not Obi-Wan. It was… easier that way.”

Obi-Wan’s eyes widened, as if being struck by a sudden realization. “So it was you. You were to one I heard reaching out to me, asking me for help. You called me Ben.”

Luke blinked. He had forgotten about the plea he had sent to Obi-Wan, when he had first been captured by the Separatist droids. Obi-Wan’s confused response had been one of his first clues that something wasn’t right, but he had failed to remember it in the hectic confusion that had followed. “Yes,” he said with a nod. “That was before I had realized exactly where and when I was. I had been searching for Leia, trying to contact her, but I think she had yet to arrive in the past at that point, so I wasn’t able to find her. I found you instead, and thought that you were the same man who had taught me when I was young. Of course, you were the same man, you just didn’t know it yet.”

“I see.” The conflict was easy to hear in Obi-Wan’s voice, and he looked almost disquieted. “Does that mean…?” He trailed off, as if unable to complete his question. But Luke knew what he was meaning to ask.

“That you left the Order yourself?”

Obi-Wan nodded.

“No,” Luke said. “As long as we’ve known you, you have been a Jedi.”

There was a moment of silence, in which Obi-Wan seemed to work through this new information. Eventually, he spoke again. “I won’t ask anymore, because I’m sure you won’t tell me. But I am grateful for what you have told me.”

Luke nodded. “Of course.” He could still feel Leia’s disgruntled glare focused on him, but he ignored it, at least for the moment.

“I’ll leave you to get settled, then,” Obi-Wan said, obviously unsure of what to say in the light of this revelation. “I’m sure I’ll see you both again before I leave on my next assignment.”

“Thank you, Master Kenobi,” Leia said, bowing her head slightly. “For everything.”

He gave them a small smile, and then turned to leave the room. The door closed behind him.

It was not even a second later that Leia turned to look at Luke, her mouth twisted into a scowl. “You really are reckless,” she said. Striding over to the bed, she sat down and began to work at the laces on her boots. “Why would you tell him that? I thought we agreed that we would try to reveal as little about the future as possible.”

“Well it wasn’t exactly true, was it?” Luke retorted, trying to keep his voice calm. “Neither of us knew him growing up. Until I was nineteen, I thought he was only some crazy old hermit.”

“Then why did you tell him that? Haven’t we lied enough already?”

“And we’re going to have to keep lying. But I told him that to give him some comfort. You saw him when he learned that our father leaves the Order at the end of the war — he was heartbroken. I wanted him to know that he won’t be completely abandoned.”

“Even though he will be. We’ve already lied to him about why Anakin leaves the Jedi. And now we’ve added the lie that they keep in touch afterwards, which is just blatantly untrue — at least,
until Vader kills him on the Death Star. Won’t this all just make things worse, when he finally learns the truth?”

Luke shrugged. “Maybe. But it makes things better now, so doesn’t that count for something?”

Leia sighed, pulling her shoes from her feet and throwing them haphazardly on the floor. “I know you’re still planning on trying to kill Palpatine and save Anakin,” she said. “You can’t keep anything from me, especially not something that big. But I’m asking you to please reconsider.”

“I can’t do that,” Luke said, shaking his head. “I have a chance here to change things, to make them right. I can’t let it pass.”

“If you really think that this is why you’re here then what about me? I want no part of this, and yet, here I am.”

“I don’t think I’ll be able to do this alone. Leia, please—“

“No.” Leia stood, shaking her head. “I’m not going to help you carry out this impossible plan. All it will do is create more trouble. I’m going to focus on getting home.”

He opened his mouth to speak, but she cut him off before he could continue.

“And don’t you say anything about how we might not be able to get home until we complete whatever grand purpose the Force has given us. If the Force really wanted us to do something, it could be a bit clearer about what, exactly, it is that it wants. And until that happens, I’m staying out of it.”

Before he could say anything else, she had turned and walked away, into the small refresher joining the two rooms. She closed the door and, a moment later, Luke heard the sound of running water as the shower was turned on.

He leaned back into the chair and, covering his face with his hands, let out a deep sigh.

Chapter End Notes

I know the past few chapters have been a lot of talking and not a lot action, but I promise that will be changing very soon!!
Leia stood in front of the refresher mirror, still steamy from the hot water of the shower. Her long hair hung damp against her back, wetting the dusty clothes that she had been forced to put back on; the pack carrying her change of clothes had been misplaced in the confusion after Luke’s rescue, along with her blaster. Reaching out, she used the palm of her hand to wipe away the condensation from part of the mirror, revealing a slightly-smudged reflection of her face.

She stood there for a moment, observing her features, the same ones that had been staring back at her from the mirror for twenty-four years — the long face and rounded cheeks, the wide, dark brown eyes, the soft nose and thin upper lip. As a child, she used to stare at herself in the mirror, searching for any similarities between herself and her parents, though she knew she wouldn’t find any. She would imagine herself as having her mother’s nose and her father’s eyes, and had tried for a while to shape her smile to match her father’s, before accepting it wouldn’t work. As she grew older, she’d stopped looking for similarities in the mirror and had starting looking within herself, at her personality and the way her parents had shaped her values and ideals. That was what really counted, more than whether she had her father’s hair colour or her mother’s height. But she still remembered wondering what it would be like for someone to tell her she looked like her mother, or had her father’s laugh, when she was young enough to see such things as important.

Obi-Wan had told her this morning that she looked like Anakin — very much like him, in fact. It was a statement that had made her heart stutter and sent her into a cold sweat. It was like a confirmation that he was, truly, her biological father, though that was of course something she had known now for several months. But though it was a bit foolish, she had never considered that she might look like him. She had never known what he looked like beneath the mask, or before whatever disfigurement that had caused him to require it. When thinking about the fact that Darth Vader was her father, she had comforted herself with the knowledge that she was nothing like him, that she hadn’t inherited his evil. But the knowledge that she had inherited something else from him left her feeling unnerved and upset.

She felt foolish to be upset over having inherited many of her features from Anakin. After all, if her appearance hadn’t mattered when it came to her true parents, why should it matter now? It was irrational and she knew it, but she still felt upset, and as she stared at her reflection in the mirror, she found herself picturing Anakin in her head, and drawing comparisons between her face and his
— the shape of his eyes, his nose, the length of his face. She hadn’t inherited his colouring or his height, but there were enough similarities that she was now unsurprised by Obi-Wan’s comment.

Had Vader noticed the similarities himself, when he had stared her down in that small cell on the Death Star? Had he looked at her and seen shadows of the person he’d once been?

Leia looked down, away from the mirror and her reflection. Those questions had no answers, and dwelling on them would bring her nowhere. Quickly, and without using the mirror, she twisted her hair into a loose braid and strode from the refresher.

Luke was sitting in the same spot he had been in when she left. He had found a datapad, and was staring intently at it, but he looked up as she entered, and his expression was immediately apologetic. Like in her previous room, a small desk stood near the window. Pulling the chair away from it, Leia took a seat near her brother.

“I’m sorry,” he began. “I shouldn’t have pushed you, but—“

She held up a hand, and he stopped, falling silent. “I’m sorry too,” she said, “but I won’t change my mind. I know how much you want to do this, but I can’t. I just can’t.”


They stared at each other for a moment, silent. Leia loved Luke dearly, and considered him to be her closest friend, but often she struggled to see any similarities between the two of them — he was kinder than she was, more willing to see the good in others. But they were both stubborn, and set in their ideals — which, more than often, tended to overlap. Just not in this case.

“How do you think you’re going to do this?” she asked. “I doubt we’ll be allowed to leave the Temple unsupervised, and it’ll be impossible for you to get anywhere near Palpatine. Just trying will be enough for the Jedi to stop trusting us, and then I doubt they’ll keep trying to help us.”


Leia leaned back in her chair, crossing her arms. “If you die, I swear, I’ll bring you back so I can kill you myself.”

“You know that won’t happen.”

She frowned, but said nothing. She knew there was nothing she could do or say to change his mind, not yet. She would just have to keep an eye on him to make sure he didn’t get himself into trouble.

“There’s something else,” Luke said, his hands fidgeting with the datapad. “I want to apologize for not telling you about our mother.”

Leia took in a deep breath. She had been shocked, to hear Luke so casually tell Obi-Wan that their mother’s name had been Padmé, a piece of information she herself had not known. Even more shocking was that Obi-Wan had then spoken of Padmé Amidala, a name Leia had immediately recognized. She remembered her father speaking of a Senator Amidala, a friend from before the fall of the Republic, well-known amongst those Rebels old enough to remember the Clone Wars.

She chose her next words carefully. “How long have you known who she was?”

“For as long as you have,” Luke said. “All I knew before was that her name was Padmé. I asked my aunt once, when I was very young, who my mother had been. My aunt and uncle had only ever met her once, and had learned very little about her, but my aunt remembered her as being kind.
They only ever learned her first name.” He paused a moment, twisting his hands together, a deep
frown pulling on his lips. “I really am sorry. I should have told you this months ago, when we first
learned we were twins. You had a right to know.”

“I did.” She levelled a hard look at Luke, though she knew it was exaggerated. She wanted to be
mad, and she was — he’d had three months to tell her that he knew their mother’s name, and it was
something he should have found the time to discuss. But they’d never really had any conversations
about their mother, or their father, except for Leia to say that she didn’t care to speak of him. It was
no surprise, then, that Luke had assumed she felt the same about their mother. And truth be told,
she wasn’t sure how she felt about their mother — particularly knowing now that she was Padmé
Amidala.

Leia let out a sigh, finally uncrossing her arms. “But I understand why you didn’t tell me. Knowing
how I feel about Anakin… It makes sense. And I trust you would have told me eventually.”

“Of course I would have.”

“But I’m still annoyed you told Obi-Wan before me, though.”

Luke held his hands up in innocence. “He asked; you never did.”

Leia shook her head, letting out a short laugh. It was strange, knowing now that this woman she
had heard about so often when she was young was her mother. The identity of her biological
mother was never anything she had thought much about, not even after learning the identity of her
biological father — perhaps especially after. Being the daughter of Darth Vader had been bad
enough; she supposed that she thought her mother would be just as bad. But she wasn’t.

“She was a queen, you know,” she said. “She was from Naboo, and their queens are elected. She
was only fourteen or fifteen when she was voted in.”

“Fourteen,” Luke corrected, and when Leia looked at him in surprise, he held up the datapad he
had been looking at. “I’ve been doing some research. She’s had quite the impressive career. She
joined the Apprentice Legislature at eight years old, became the supervisor of Naboo’s capital city,
Theed, when she was twelve, then was elected queen, and afterwards she was asked to be the new
Senator for Naboo.” He let out a wry laugh. “Sounds like you take after her.”

Leia tensed, almost reflexively, but found that she didn’t quite mind the comparison. When Obi-
Wan told her that she looked like Anakin, it had made her skin crawl, but Luke telling her that she
resembled Padmé in any way had none of the same effect. Though she liked to think she had gotten
most of her skill for politics from her true parents, the thought that some of it might have come
from her biological mother was not entirely unwelcome. She gave a small smile. “Maybe.”

“How do you think she met our father?” Luke asked. “It seems strange, a former queen and a Jedi.”

“The Jedi worked closely with the Senate,” Leia explained. “That’s how my father knew Master
Kenobi. It’s likely that Padmé and Anakin met that way, though the way Master Kenobi spoke, it
sounded as if they’ve known each other for a while.”

“I wish there was someone we could ask.”

“Technically there is, but it would likely draw quite a bit of suspicion.”

Luke gave a wry laugh. “I think we’ve done enough of that for today.”

Leia nodded in agreement, just as a knock sounded against the door. She paused for a moment,
unsure, before remembering that Obi-Wan had promised to send Ahsoka down to see them. Standing, she went over and opened the door. The young Jedi Padawan stood just on the other side, her hands behind her back, a bag slung over her shoulder. She smiled at Leia, but there was an uncertainty behind the smile that told Leia Obi-Wan had given her the update.

“Ahsoka,” Leia said, taking a step back from the door. “Please, come in.”

Ahsoka nodded, stepping from the hallway into the room. She looked first to Leia, and then to Luke, bobbing her head in greeting. “Nellith. Ben.”

Luke smiled at her and stood, setting the datapad aside. “Hello, Ahsoka. I take it that Obi-Wan’s given you the news?”

“If by ‘news’, you mean he’s told me that you’re from the future, then yes,” Ahsoka said. “That’s… something.”

“I’m sure it was unexpected,” Luke said.

She snorted. “That’s one way to describe it, yeah. But… I trust Obi-Wan, and if he believes this, then so do I. And so does Anakin.”


“I never got to tell you earlier, with everything that happened,” Leia said, reaching out and placing her hand on Ahsoka’s shoulder, “but I wanted to thank you for all your help. Ben and I appreciate it, more than you can know.”

Ahsoka smiled again, this time with none of the discomfort. “I’m just glad that everything turned out alright. Except for that unfortunate bit near the end, of course.”

“We understand why Obi-Wan did what he did,” Leia said. “I know I would have done the same, in his position.”

“Well, I hope I’ll be able to help again. Though I have to admit, finding a way to get you back to your own time seems a bit more complicated than breaking someone out of prison.”

“I don’t doubt that,” Luke agreed, “but I’m confident that we’ll figure something out.”

Ahsoka was silent for a moment, and Leia could see her building up the courage to say what she wanted to say. It only took her a moment. “I know I’m not supposed to ask anything about the future,” she said, “and I don’t expect you to answer. But I have to ask — do things get better?”

Luke and Leia looked at each other, and then back to the young girl in front of them. She really was so young — still a child. But Leia remembered being her age and joining the Rebellion. She had been so ready for a fight, so eager to change things, and then when the fight had arrived, a few years later, she had learned how tiring war really was. Ahsoka was much younger now than Leia had been at the start of the Civil War, and she had already experienced so much war. She saw a galaxy tearing itself apart and the Order that was her home being beat down, and she wanted to know if anything changed. Of course she did.

“Yes,” Leia said. “In the end, things do get so much better.”

She didn’t tell her that things would get worse — much worse — before then. That was something Ahsoka needed to learn for herself, and she would, when the time was right. But the assurance that everything would turn out alright eventually was all she could give her — though Leia didn’t know
if Ahsoka would be there to see it.

It seemed enough for her now, and Ahsoka nodded. “I understand,” she said, and Leia felt that she did, at least in part. She was silent for another moment, before seeming to remember herself. “Here.” She hefted the bag off her shoulder, handing it over to Leia. “I brought you some fresh clothes. Get changed, and I’ll bring you to see Anakin. He’s eager to talk to you.”

Leia took the bag, forcing a smile onto her face. She wasn’t looking forward to this next part. “Thank you.”

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The clothes that Ahsoka brought were quite unlike the robes that most of the Jedi wore. Luke had been given a simple cotton shirt and black pants, and he was grateful to finally get out of the tunic he had been wearing since his journey to Raban.

Leia and Ahsoka were waiting for him when he emerged from the refresher. Leia had changed first, and wore a long, burgundy tunic that reached almost to her knees, and she’d done her hair up into a tighter, neater braid, twisted into a bun at the back of her head.

Ahsoka rose from her seat at the room’s desk when Luke entered. “Are we ready to go?”

Luke nodded, and gestured to the door. “Lead the way.”

Ahsoka made her way out into the hallway, and Luke waited until Leia had stood, going over and placing his hand on her shoulder as they walked out together. He could feel how tense she was, and though her face was worked into a careful expression of neutrality, he could see right through it, to the apprehension and fear on the other side.

“It’ll be alright,” he whispered to her, and felt just a modicum of the tension slip from her shoulders.

Ahsoka led them down the large hallway, towards the turbolifts that rested at the end. “We’ll be going to the Halls of Healing,” she explained. “Anakin is being held there until tomorrow morning, just make sure that everything has healed properly.”

“But he’s doing alright?” Luke asked.

“Yeah, he’ll be fine.” Ahsoka waved her hand, unworried. “He’s already causing arguments, which means he’s pretty much back to normal.”

“Has it been decided what we’re supposed to be doing?” Leia asked, eager to move away from conversation about Anakin. “The Council said they’ll be looking into the artifact, but they didn’t give us anything to do in the meantime. And I’d rather not just sit around.”

“That’s what Master Kenobi and Anakin were talking about when I left to get you,” Ahsoka explained. “So we can ask them when we get there.”

They reached the turbolifts, and Ahsoka pressed the button to call one. Leia remembered the Halls of Healing being very close to the living quarters, and they only had to travel down two levels to reach it. Anakin was staying in one of the private rooms, and Ahsoka led them to it, past the infirmary and the chambers that housed the Temple’s many bacta tanks.

Anakin was sitting upright in bed when they arrived, with Obi-Wan leaning against the window on the far side of the room and R2-D2 perched beside the bed. They seemed to have been deep in
conversation, but fell silent as Luke, Leia, and Ahsoka entered the room, the door hissing shut behind them.

“Hey, Snips,” Anakin greeted. “I see you made it back with the time-travelling twins.”

“Very good use of alliteration, Anakin,” Obi-Wan said, his voice tinged with sarcasm.

“Ben Lars.” Luke introduced himself, nodding to Anakin in greeting. Anakin had been unconscious during the escape from Janus VII, and Luke and Leia had been quickly thrown into the cargo hold after that; Luke had never actually gotten a chance yet to speak to his father. He could feel his heart pounding in his chest at just the sight of him. He had never seen a picture of Anakin, before he had become Darth Vader and ended up in a life-support suit; all he had was the quick vision on Endor, which had lasted only moments. When Luke had thought of his father, he had usually pictured an older version of himself, but Anakin looked far different from that image — at the current moment, he was younger than Luke himself, and though they had the same eye and hair colour, his features more closely resembled Leia’s than Luke’s.

“My sister and I are both very grateful for your help,” Luke continued, looking to Leia. She looked back at him, her jaw set, and pointedly kept her gaze away from Anakin.

“Anakin Skywalker.” He looked between Luke and Leia, his expression curious. “Where are you two from?”

“The Outer Rim,” Leia said, still not looking at him. “Somewhere you’ve probably never heard of.”

“I know the Outer Rim pretty well.”

“New Ator.” Luke said the name almost automatically. It was a sparsely populated agricultural planet, close to Tatooine. Revealing that his homeworld was Tatooine would be unwise, and would likely lead to some uncomfortable questions, but the nearby location of New Ator would help to explain away the traces of a regional accent that Luke knew he still had, and which Anakin could potentially recognize.

“I have. It’s in the Arkanis sector, correct?”

“Yes. Our father was originally from Ator, and New Ator had originally been settled by his people. That’s why he decided to live there, after leaving the Jedi.”

Anakin nodded, a thoughtful look on his face. Luke knew that he was likely thinking of Owen Lars, the step-brother he had only met once, and Luke’s uncle from whom he and Leia had taken their cover name. But Lars was a common enough last name, and Anakin, likely knowing this, didn’t press the subject anymore.

Sensing the conversation was over, Obi-Wan straightened and stepped away from the window. “As I’m sure Ahsoka has already told you,” he said. “I’ve given both her and Anakin the full update on your situation. Anakin will be taking over your case, effective immediately. I was hoping to be able to help for a short while, but it seems I’m urgently needed elsewhere. As you already know, the Council has asked for research to be done on both the temple on Raban and the artifact you found within it. I suggest you start there, with the Archives.” He looked to Anakin as he said this last sentence, his look pointed.

Anakin shrugged. “I think the best research could be done on the ground.”

“It doesn’t matter what you think,” Obi-Wan said. “Your injuries mean you won’t be cleared to
leave Coruscant for a few days yet. I suggest you take this time to find out what you can — if only to placate the Council.”

“I first heard about the temple through rumours,” Luke explained. “Old folk tales and the like. It might be useful to start there, researching the legends of the area.”

“The Temple Archives have records from all over the galaxy,” Ahsoka said. “They go back to the start of the Republic. There has to be something about this temple in there.”

“Ben and I can help with the research,” Leia suggested. “We’re the ones who actually have experience with the temple and the artifact; we know what to look for.”

Obi-Wan nodded, rubbing his hand across his beard. “Yes, I agree. You two can start research with Ahsoka this afternoon. Anakin can join you tomorrow, after he has been released by his attending med droid.”

Anakin scowled, but said nothing; it seemed as if he and Obi-Wan had already had that argument, and Obi-Wan had won.

“I wish I could help, but I’m afraid I have to oversee preparations for my departure tomorrow,” Obi-Wan said. “But if you require any assistance, I’m sure that Master Nu will be more than willing to help. No one knows the Archives better than she does.”

“How long will you be away for?” Luke asked.

“I’m not sure. Chances are it will be a while, and so you’ll likely be gone by the time I return.”

“With any luck, yes,” Leia said.

Luke nodded. He was sad to see Obi-Wan go; he would’ve liked to spend more time with the man who would one day become Old Ben. But just getting to meet him was enough. “It’s been an honour to work with you,” he said, “and I wanted to thank you again for your help in rescuing me from that Separatist prison.”

“Think nothing of it,” Obi-Wan said. “Really, most of the credit for that rescue should go to your sister, and Ahsoka, here. They’re the ones who planned it and got you out. Anakin and I were just distractions.”

“Glad to know this was all for a reason,” Anakin said, gesturing down at himself, though he had no visible injuries.

“I really am sorry that you got hurt on my account,” Luke said, wincing. He was glad that Anakin’s injuries were minor and healing well, but things could have ended up much worse — if Dooku had killed him, where would they be now? And it would have been Luke’s fault.

Anakin dismissed his comments with a wave of his hand. “It’s alright. It wasn’t your fault. Although if you get captured by the Separatists again, I can’t promise my help for a second time.”

His tone was light and joking, but Luke could hear the truth underneath it — after all, why should Anakin risk his life, more than once, for almost a total stranger? But though he could understand it, it still stung, to know that someone he thought of so fondly cared for him so little. “Believe me, I don’t plan on it happening again.”

Leia, who had been standing silently at his side, her arms crossed over her chest, finally seemed to grow impatient. “Are we almost done here?” she asked.
Obi-Wan looked a bit surprised by her brusque tone, but nodded. “Yes, I suppose so. Ahsoka can take you to the dining hall for something to eat, and then on to the Archives to begin your research. If things go well, it’s unlikely that I will see you again before your departure. So before you leave, I was wondering if I might have a word with you both, out in the hallway.”

Leia nodded, and strode quickly to the door, eager to get out of the room. Luke followed, and Obi-Wan came last, ensuring that the door closed behind them. The hallway was empty, but Luke could hear the quiet murmur of activity nearby.

“I know this must be difficult,” Obi-Wan said, his voice low to keep from being overhead. “Leia, you said that your father died a short while ago, and I’m assuming that was, actually, the truth.”

“Yes.” She said it softly, her hands fidgeting in front of her. Luke reached out and grabbed one, squeezing it in reassurance. To Obi-Wan, it would look as if he was comforting his sister over the death of their father, though both Luke and Leia knew he was comforting her for a much different reason. He may not understand it completely, but Luke was well aware of how distressing Leia’s emotions were when it came to their father.

Obi-Wan let out a sigh, his hand rubbing through his beard. “I won’t ask how he died,” he said, though just with that phrase he was showing that he desperately wanted to, “but I do appreciate that it must be very hard to see him again. However, it’s important that you don’t let your feelings be known. As you said yourselves, it’s bad enough that I know who your father is. If anyone else were to find out, especially Anakin… it could have some very dangerous, unintended consequences.”

Leia was silent, and Luke could see that her jaw was clenched. Thankfully, Obi-Wan saw her behaviour towards as Anakin as that of a daughter reacting to seeing her recently-deceased father again, not the hatred and animosity it truly was. But it would still have to change, before Anakin or anyone else began to question why she was having such a strong reaction to a man she barely knew.

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“Of course,” Luke said. “We understand how precarious the situation is.”

“I trust that you do,” Obi-Wan said with a nod. He opened the door to Anakin’s room and walked back in; Luke and Leia remained in the hallway. Luke could hear him saying his goodbyes to Anakin and Ahsoka, asking them to keep him updated.

He looked to Leia. “You need to learn to tolerate him,” he said, his voice barely audible, “because if you don’t, we’re all going to have a very difficult time.”

“Luke, you don’t und—“

“I understand perfectly, Leia. I’m not asking you to learn to love him; I’m asking you to be civil with him. We don’t need to draw any more suspicion onto ourselves.”

It was a moment before Leia spoke again. “You’re right. I’m sorry.” But her expression was still tight, as if she might start crying or yelling — or both — at any moment.

He might have been frustrated, but he still hated to see her so upset. Without another word, he pulled her into his arms, holding her tight. She let out a shaky breath, hugging him back, just for a moment, before pulling away.

He would make things right. For her, for their father — for everyone.
The Temple

Chapter Summary

Ahsoka gives the twins a tour of the Jedi Temple.

Obi-Wan accompanied them out of the Halls of Healing, leading them back the way they had come in, though Luke was sure that such a large wing would have more than one entrance. They stood in the grand hallway beyond, sunlight streaming in from the high windows, illuminating the area in warm yellow light. A few Jedi milled about nearby, and they nodded to Obi-Wan and Ahsoka in greeting, staring curiously at Luke and Leia, about whom news must have already spread throughout the Temple.

“I’m afraid that this is where we must part ways,” Obi-Wan said, looking to Luke and Leia, his expression remorseful. Luke had no doubts that he would have liked to stay on with them longer, to get to know the two people who were his close friend’s children. And Luke would have liked the same — this was, he knew, his last chance to really get to know Obi-Wan, but it wasn’t a chance that he was being given. The Force was pulling them in opposite directions, and they would both have to let it.

“I’m sorry that we couldn’t have known each other for longer,” Luke said, “but the Force is mysterious. Perhaps one day we’ll see each other again.”

This was a fact that they both knew to be true, but they couldn’t reveal that with Ahsoka present. Instead, Obi-Wan merely smiled, nodding in agreement.

“I will key an eye out, for both of you,” he said. “It’s been a true pleasure. I’ve asked Ahsoka and Anakin to keep me updated, and I hope to shortly receive the news that you’ve successfully returned home.”

“Hopefully you will, if things go well,” Leia said. “Thank you, General Kenobi, for everything.”


“I am glad to have been of help. But now, enough of that. It’s time for me to depart.” Obi-Wan bowed his head, first towards Leia, and then Luke. “May the Force be with you both. Now, and for always.”

It was a phrase that Luke had often heard uttered, but it had been so long since it had been spoken to him by another Jedi. He inclined his head, his hands clasped together in front of him, and repeated the same well-wishes. “May the Force be with you.”

“Goodbye, General Kenobi,” Leia said.

Obi-Wan lifted his head, looking to Ahsoka. “I’m sure that I’ll be seeing you in a short while,” he told her, and she nodded.

“Good luck, Master.”

Obi-Wan looked back to Luke and Leia and, with one final nod at them, turned and walked away.
down the hall. They watched him go for a moment, silent, until he turned a corner and disappeared.

“Do you know where he’s going?” Luke asked, tearing his gaze from the empty corridor and refocusing on Ahsoka.

She shook her head. “Not specifically. He said something about the Outer Rim, but that whole region is such a mess that it’s impossible to know where exactly he might be going.” She smiled reassuringly. “There’s no need to worry, though. Master Kenobi can handle himself.”

Luke gave a quiet laugh. “I’m well-aware of that.” He was quiet for another moment, thinking of his old mentor and friend, until Ahsoka’s hand on his shoulder pulled him from his mind.

“Come on,” she said, motioning with her head down the hall, in the opposite direction that Obi-Wan had gone. “I’ll give you the grand tour.”

She took off, with Luke and Leia following behind. Through the windows lining the hallway, Luke could see the tall, nearby buildings sparkling like jewels in the sunlight. Speeders and other vehicles zipped through the sky, criss-crossing the blue with lines of black.

“It would take hours to do a tour of the whole Temple,” Ahsoka said, “so I’ll only give you the highlights. You know where the residential quarters are, obviously; they’re just back that way.” She motioned behind them, the way they had come earlier. “That’s not all of them, of course. There’s several more floors of rooms. Most Jedi in the Order make the Temple their main home, so we have to have lots of space.”

“Are there some Jedi who don’t live at the Temple?” Luke asked, looking from the window to her.

“Well, there aren’t a lot Knights or Masters on Coruscant anymore, because of the war,” Ahsoka explained. “Most Jedi are on missions and assignments a lot of the time. But there are a few other temples spread across the galaxy, much smaller than this one, of course. There are some Jedi who make their homes there.”

“Have you ever been to one?”

She shook her head. “No. Now, come on, we’ve got a lot of ground to cover.” She quickened her pace, and Luke and Leia hurried to keep up. Ahsoka’s exuberance and excitement over the tour told Luke that this likely wasn’t an experience she had very often, showing visitors around her home.

“How often do non-Jedi stay at the Temple?” he asked.

Ahsoka looked back at him, not once slowing down. “Not often. The Temple isn’t open to the public, and the only non-Jedi who visit are usually politicians, like ambassadors or something. They only come every now and then, and they never stay for long.”

She brought them to a lift at the end of the hallway. They had to wait a moment before one arrived, and they shuffled inside, Ahsoka pressing the button to send the turbolift trundling upwards. “There’s mostly only dorms and classrooms on the floors above the Halls of Healing,” Ahsoka explained as they ascended. “When you get to the higher levels, though, things start to get interesting.”

The lift slowed to a stop and the doors opened. Beyond was another cavernous hallway, a trend that Luke was beginning to notice around the Temple. However, though it was tall, this one was much shorter than the others. On one side, a bank of windows looked out over the city, while on
the other there was a wide staircase, with steps twisting both up to the higher levels and down to the lower ones. The only doors in the hallway stood at the very end, the metal covered in elaborate etchings.

Ahsoka led them there, palming the controls so that the doors slid open. On the other side was a long, tall room, with thin windows set high near the tops of the walls. There were several sunken pits lining either side of a narrow walkway which crossed right through the middle of the room. A complicated apparatus hung over every pit, a few of which were occupied. Luke paused by one, watching the training taking place within it.

A Pantoran girl, perhaps ten or eleven years old, stood in the centre of the pit. A hologram stood opposite her, taking the shape of a robed, masked adversary, projected from the apparatus hovering above the pit. The girl was unarmed, but the hologram carried a lightsaber. As he watched, the hologram lunged for the girl; she ducked, avoiding its strike. It continued attacking, and she danced around it, bobbing and weaving to avoid its blade. After a moment, however, the holographic ‘saber managed to clip her in the shoulder. The hologram paused as a red light shone down from the apparatus, before the masked attacker vanished. The girl slumped down against the sloped wall of the pit, scowling.

“Holographic training,” Ahsoka explained. “It’s a good way for Jedi, especially young ones, to practice their moves, without the risk of getting hurt. Even hits from training lightsabers can be painful.”

She kept going, and Luke hurried to catch up. “Training lightsabers?”

“Yeah. You never used one?” She raised an eyebrow marking in curiosity. He shook his head. “It’s like a regular lightsaber, but the power is a lot lower,” she explained. “So instead of cutting off your hand, it’ll just leave you with a killer bruise. You’re telling me that you learned to fight with a fully-powered lightsaber?”

Luke nodded. “I never really had the option not to. My training was much simpler than what I’m sure most Jedi receive. I certainly didn’t have access to a holographic training centre.”

“I gotta say, that’s pretty impressive,” Ahsoka said. “Most Initiates practice for several years before moving on to a fully-powered lightsaber.”

“Initiates are apprentices?”

“Not quite. They’re Jedi younglings, who aren’t old enough to become a Padawan. That’s an apprentice.” They reached the end of the room, where another door stood. Ahsoka pressed the button to open it, leading them through to another room.

They came out in a narrow observation chamber, one wall made up of a thick pane of transparisteel. It looked into a large, high-ceilinged room, the walls and floor of which were completely blank. Indents in the wall hinted at the possibility of platforms which could be extended at will.

“This is the second part of the holographic training centre,” Ahsoka explained, holding her arms out wide and gesturing to the room before them. “It’s a simulation chamber, where all sorts of environments and challenges can be recreated. It’s often used as part of the training of Initiates, teaching them to be able to find their way in a variety of climates and environments, and to work together in challenging situations. Other Jedi use it, as well, to keep their skills up. Though that’s not really necessary anymore, with the war.”
“This is quite impressive,” Luke said.

Ahsoka grinned. “Oh, there’s much more to come.”

She led them back the way they had come, through the room with simulation pits and out into the hallway. They took the stairway that they had passed on their way through, climbing up one level. This hallway was slightly longer than the other, with multiple doors inlaid in the walls.

“This is the entrance to one of the class rooms,” Ahsoka said, motioning to the first door. “It’s also used as a briefing room sometimes. Down here are the entrances to some of the gyms.” She moved on, pointing out the other two doors in the corridor and pressing the panel to open one.

Beyond was a long room, the floor padded and racks of weapons lining the walls. There were staffs of various sizes, as well dozens of lightsabers, which Luke assumed to be the training lightsabers Ahsoka had mentioned earlier. Quite a few people were currently using the gym, and most of them appeared to be young, perhaps only twelve or thirteen. They were sparring using lightsabers, in pairs or even groups. An older Jedi, most likely a teacher, circled the room, inspecting their form and interjecting with suggestions every now and then.

“There are half a dozen other gyms like this,” Ahsoka said. “They’re used for classes, like this, and for practice by other Jedi.” She looked at Luke and smiled. “Maybe we can stop by one sometime, and you can show me how well you learned using a fully-powered lightsaber.”

“I’ll have to take you up on that offer,” he said, excited by the prospect.

“We can swing by later, after we’ve attempted to do enough research to satisfy Master Kenobi and the Council.”

“How old are they?” Leia asked, her gaze transfixed on the students. “They’re quite skilled.”

She was right. The students, though they were young, moved with practiced ease, and fought with skill. As Luke watched, one student swiped the feet out from under her partner, sending him to his back as she levelled her lightsaber at his throat.

“Most of them are probably thirteen,” Ahsoka said. “Some might be twelve. They’ll probably be ready to take the Initiate Trials in a couple of years.”

Except they won’t. The thought came unbidden to Luke’s mind, and his heart sank as he realized that, in less than two years, all of the students in this room would likely be dead. The end of the war was only a year and a half away, and with it would come the Jedi Purge, where almost all of the Jedi in the galaxy would be killed — many by his father’s own hand. None of these children would live long enough to complete their trials.

“How long have they been training for?” Leia asked, the sound of her voice pulling Luke from his morbid thoughts.

“Their entire lives,” Ahsoka said. “Most of us are brought to the Jedi when we’re very young.”

Leia’s shock showed on her face. “How old were you when the Jedi found you?”

“Two or three. That’s how old most Jedi are when they’re brought here. Some are only infants, but that happens rarely. It takes a couple of years for signs of Force-sensitivity to appear.”

“That’s so young. So, you never know your family?”
“The Jedi are our family,” Ahsoka said. “The Temple is the only home a Jedi ever knows. Now, don’t misunderstand — the Jedi aren’t baby stealers. Children are taken only with their parents’ permission. All the Jedi here were willingly given over to the Order by their families.”

Leia was frowning, the expression on her face familiar to Luke. It was the one she wore when she was thinking through an issue she disagreed with. “Is that really the best way to teach them? Do they have to be so young?”

“If you wait too long, they become closed off to the Force. Our minds are most malleable when we’re young; that’s when we’re the most open to the Force. The oldest youngling admitted to the Order that I’ve ever heard of was Master Skywalker. He was over nine years old when he was found and brought here to Coruscant. And from what I’ve heard, many of the Masters opposed it. They thought he was much too old to learn anything, though he certainly proved them wrong.”

Luke blinked in surprise. He remembered Yoda telling him that the was too old to be taught the ways of the Jedi, but he had been twenty-two at the time. For the same to be thought of a nine-year-old seemed almost absurd.

“Why did they agree to admit him, then?” he asked, curious.

“The Council believes him to be the Chosen One,” Ahsoka explained.

Luke stared at her for a moment. He looked to Leia, and saw the same confusion that he felt.

“Have you not heard about the Chosen One?” Ahsoka asked, seeing the expressions on their faces. “Wow, your father really didn’t teach you much about the Jedi, did he? The Chosen One is from an old prophecy that predicts the arrival of the one meant to bring balance to the Force by destroying the Sith. You do know about the Sith, right?”

“Yes, that part, we know about,” Luke said. “So the Council believes that Anakin is that person? The one who will bring balance to the Force?”

Ahsoka nodded, and Leia let out a short laugh, her brows raised skeptically. Luke shot her a warning look, and she quieted. “Sorry,” she apologized, “he just… doesn’t seem the type.”

“I don’t think he thinks so either,” Ahsoka said. “It’s a feeling shared by much of the Council. Although Obi-Wan believes it, and so do I.”

“Why, exactly, do they think he’s the Chosen One?”

“His midi-chlorian count is extremely high,” Ahsoka said.

Luke blinked, his mind trying to understand the strange word she had just spoken. “I’m sorry, his what count?”

“Midi-chlorian,” Ahsoka repeated, turning back towards the door they had just come through. “I’ll explain it on the way to our next stop.”

Luke frowned, casting Leia a curious look. She smirked, leaning towards him. “It’s quite weird,” she whispered, as they followed Ahsoka back out into the corridor.

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They travelled up another level, as Ahsoka attempted to explain the strange Jedi theory of midi-chlorians. Luke had never heard any mention of them anywhere, and Obi-Wan had never spoken of
them, but by the way Ahsoka spoke, the Jedi seemed convinced of their existence.

Luke wanted to ask more, but their conversation was waylaid by their arrival at the lightsaber crafting chamber. The long room was outfitted with more than half a dozen tables, and the walls were lined by shelves covered in storage containers of various sizes. A few Jedi sat here-and-there at the tables, and an ancient droid stood in the far corner, organizing the contents of one of the boxes.

Ahsoka launched into an explanation of lightsaber crafting, a topic in which Luke actually had some knowledge, having made his own lightsaber, based on the instructions that Old Ben had left behind in his hut on Tatooine. They didn’t stay long, however, until they were off to their next destination.

They continued up, past more gyms and classrooms, taking a brief stop at the surface vehicle garage, which featured top-of-the-line speeders and transports (at least for the time). A so-called contemplation garden rested at the very top of the Temple, part of it opening onto the roof. It was full of various plant and animal life, though they didn’t stay for long, so as not to disturb those Jedi meditating there.

They travelled down the long hallway that traversed the entire top floor of the Temple, and as they walked, Ahsoka spoke about the five spires that sat atop the Temple, explaining their various uses. Of course, both Luke and Leia had already seen the High Council chamber, located in the southwestern spire. The other spires were home to the Council of First Knowledge, the Council of Reconciliation, and the Reassignment Council, whose purposes Ahsoka explained to Luke with great patience. The centre spire, she said, was home to the Hall of Knighthood, where Jedi were bestowed with the rank of Knight or Master.

As the tour continued, it became clear to Luke just how little he knew about the old Jedi Order.

Of course, that was a fact he had always been aware of. His training had been too short to encompass everything he needed to know, and the Empire had left behind precious little to guide him. But he had never thought that the gap in his knowledge was so wide; before arriving at the Temple, he had not even been aware that the Order had a High Council, let alone all these other Councils. He thought he knew something of the Jedi, but while he knew the ways of the Force, he was beginning to realize that his knowledge of the Jedi themselves was very rudimentary. Yet it was an Order he claimed to be a part of.

He thus listened intently to every word Ahsoka said, trying to absorb as much information as possible. He studied every hallway they passed through, every door they walked by, trying to commit every room of the Temple to memory. He hoped that, if his plan to stop Palpatine and change the past worked out, then this knowledge wouldn’t be necessary — the Jedi would never fall, the Temple would never be transformed into the Imperial Palace, all that knowledge would never be destroyed. He wouldn’t have to rebuild the Jedi Order from nothing.

But old habits died hard, and he had made it a habit over the past few years to memorize every piece of information about the Jedi Order he came across. And if his plan didn’t work out, or go as planned, it was good to have this knowledge to fall back on. Though he tried to convince himself that he wouldn’t need — that his plan would work.

They visited more gardens, used for both contemplation and for growing food. The Temple was a largely enclosed system, Ahsoka explained, growing many of their own fruits and vegetables, and even raising some of their own animals in the menagerie. They passed by the Temple Archives, though they didn’t go in, as that was where they were to go and begin their research later in the day. There was a Temple museum located a few floors below the Archive, and though they had a
quick tour of the various ancient artifacts housed within, Ahsoka promised to bring Luke back for a more thorough visit, when they had more time. Then they were on the ground floor, in the main hall, the entrance to the Jedi Temple.

It was a marvellous structure, stretching half the length of the entire Temple and rising several storeys up. Giant columns marched in even rows up the centre and along the sides, and tall windows let in streams of golden light. The floor was tiled, and the sounds of footsteps walking across it echoed wildly in the vast room. Luke had never seen such an architectural feat; even the Massassi temple on Yavin 4 seemed to pale in comparison.

Ahsoka smiled at his awe-struck expression. “This isn’t even the best part,” she said.

They walked the entire length of the main hall, to the very end, where the wall transformed from shining marble to rough-hewn stone. A round tunnel had been cut through the stone, burrowing out to the other side; Luke could see the dim light shining through.

“This is the mountain on top of which the Temple was built,” Ahsoka said, holding her hands up, as if presenting the mountain to them. “It’s been a holy place for millennia. Before the Temple was here, there were dozens of shrines and smaller temples, which were all amalgamated into one building over time. The mountain is considered to be a nexus of the Force.”

“And you cut a tunnel through it?” Luke asked.

Ahsoka shrugged. “It would take a while to walk around. It’s easier higher up, when the peak is thinner, but down here, this thing is almost as wide as the Temple itself.”

She led the way into the tunnel, and Luke and Leia followed. Almost immediately after stepping beneath the stone, Luke could understand why it was called a Force nexus. It was as if he was being enveloped, with the weight of the Force pressing in on him from all sides. It was not necessarily a bad sensation, but it made it difficult to breathe, at least at first, until he could focus his mind, to allow the Force to flow through him rather than push against him.

He glanced over at Leia, and found her face twisted into a grimace, her jaw clenched. “Breathe,” he told her, grabbing one of her hands. “Just breathe. Don’t resist it. Let it flow through you.”

She took in a deep breath, letting it out slowly. Her eyes closed in focus, and he guided her along as they continued down the tunnel. Several other Jedi passed by them, regarding them with the same curiosity they had been met with throughout the entire Temple. Ahsoka watched them, curious, but didn’t intervene.

After a moment, Leia opened her eyes. Her face still showed some of her discomfort, but it was greatly lessened. She gave Luke a reassuring, thankful smile, and squeezed his hand gently before letting go.

They emerged on the other side of the tunnel a few moments later, the heavy presence of the Force dropping away as soon as they stepped out from beneath the stone. They were standing now in some sort of atrium, the side of the mountain towering high above them, before disappearing into the ceiling. A large, intricate set of doors stood on the opposite wall, which was covered in tall stained glass windows that filled the atrium with a warm green light.

“This,” Ahsoka said, stepping towards the doors, which were made in the ancient style and had to be opened manually, “is the best part of the Temple.”

She pulled them open, and Luke and Leia followed her through.
Luke thought at first that they had stepped outside. The area before them was full of life, teeming with so many trees and plants that it looked as if they were in the middle of a forest. A waterfall cascaded down from a stone edifice in the centre of the room, tumbling into a wide pool that leaked into a large stream, disappearing amongst the foliage. Several stone footpaths divulged in front of them, winding away into the forest. The air smelled of damp earth and flowers, many of the aromas unknown to him. Many of the plants that he could see were exotic and unfamiliar to him, their foliage presenting in all manner of colours. The sound of trickling fountains mingled with the roar of the waterfall, creating a peaceful white noise that immediately calmed him.

The sky seemed to hang blue above them, with soft, white clouds floating lazily through the air. It was a shock, then, for Luke to look further, beyond the multitude of trees and greenery, to the tall, floor-to-ceiling transparisteel windows that spanned the entire length of the area, covering three of the four walls and revealing the room to be one large greenhouse, rather than an actual outdoor oasis.

He was aware that he was staring in shock, and Leia was, as well, but he could hardly stop himself. The sight itself was incredible, but the fact that it was entirely indoors only lent to its splendour.

“This is… unbelievable,” he said, and Ahsoka smiled.

“It’s beautiful,” Leia agreed. “What is it that makes the ceiling look like that?”

“Honestly, I’m not entirely sure,” Ahsoka admitted. “Some sort of combination of a giant canvas and lights. This room is one of the most famous in the Temple.”

“I can see why,” Leia said.

Ahsoka led them down one of the paths, the uneven stones twisting through the trees. There was no barrier between the path and the forest, and Luke could see a few rough trails that wound through the plant life, but most of it appeared undisturbed. Benches and small clearings were spaced evenly along the path, and a few small wooden bridges traversed swiftly-flowing creeks. Fountains, some elaborate, some simple, could be seen, hidden amongst the shrubbery. In some places the path widened into a rotunda, with a gurgling fountain in the very centre.

“We call this the Room of a Thousand Fountains,” Ahsoka explained as they passed by one such fountain. “It’s used for meditation, contemplation, or just for some peace and quiet. It can also be used for lightsaber practice, and some of the Councils will occasionally hold meetings here.”

“It reminds me of the Isatabith rain forest,” Leia said, her voice almost reverent, in a way that told Luke exactly where the Isatabith rain forest used to be.

“Is that on New Ator?” Ahsoka asked. “That’s where you said you were from, right?”

Leia shook her head. “Alderaan.”

“Oh. I’ve never been there myself, but I’ve heard that it’s beautiful.”

“It is.”

Luke reached out and squeezed her shoulder, just once, before letting go. He could sense her gratitude for the gesture, and she turned to smile at him.

They walked for a while longer, and Ahsoka continued to talk, explaining what she knew about the plants that grew there, as well as various aspects of the Jedi Order. Luke knew that Leia was likely highly disinterested in most of the conversation, but she put up a good face, looking as if she was
listening intently — a skill she picked up in the Imperial Senate, no doubt. He was sure, however, that her thoughts lay elsewhere, as she gazed around longingly at the trees.

Eventually, they looped back around to the entrance where they had come in, though Luke didn’t realize this until they were standing once more in front of the door. As they prepared to leave, to go find one of the Temple’s many refectories for something to eat, Luke turned to look once more at the Room of a Thousand Fountains. It was truly a wonder, a testament to the strength and beauty of the Jedi Order, and the peace that they fought for. And in a few years, it might be gone. If he did nothing, it certainly would be.

“Luke, come on.” It was Leia who spoke, grabbing his arm and shaking him from his reverie.

He followed her out, with only one look back.
Guidance

Chapter Summary

Luke begins to plan, and Leia seeks some advice.

Chapter Notes

I have a few weeks off from school before I start summer courses, so I'll probably be able to get a couple chapters out in that time. But thank you guys for your patience with these long updates, and also for all your kind words and kudos! I appreciate it all so so much.

They spent several hours in the Temple Archives that evening, poring over records about temples on various planets and folk tales from numerous regions of the galaxy. They found no mention of a temple matching the description of the one on Raban, and nothing resembling the tales that Luke had heard on Chalacta, though his knowledge of Mid Rim folk stories was now vastly improved. Tired and frustrated, they decided to call it a night long after the sun had set. Ahsoka escorted Luke and Leia back to their rooms, to make sure they didn’t get lost, and said her good nights out in the hall, wandering off to her own room with a wide yawn.

Leia went right to bed, saying good night and disappearing into the other bedroom. Luke kicked off his boots and, though he was tired, he wasn’t ready to sleep yet. Grabbing the datapad he had been looking at earlier that day, he settled into the plush armchair. It faced the room’s tall window, displaying a beautiful view of Coruscant’s skyline at night. It was unlike anything Luke had ever seen before; the air traffic was as busy as it was in the middle of the day, and the lights on the innumerable buildings shined in a multitude of colours. They stretched on, beyond the horizon; it was a sight that he didn’t think he would ever grow accustomed to.

Palpatine was out there, somewhere on Coruscant, sitting in comfort while the galaxy crumbled around him, all according to his plan.

Luke revived the datapad, which was still open to the HoloNet News article that he had been reading while Leia was in the shower. He had originally been searching the news looking for any stories concerning their mother, after reading up on her biography, but while he hadn’t found any, there was one that had caught his eye.

Its headline stared up at him in bold letters, announcing that Chancellor Palpatine was to give a speech at a ceremony commemorating the victims of a forest fire on Galidraan, in just a few days.

The ceremony was to take place at Senate Plaza. Usually, so much attention wouldn’t be paid to a natural disaster on a small Outer Rim planet, but, as the article elaborated, Galidraan had originally been settled by Commenor, one of the galaxy’s most powerful Core planets, and so it was drawing more focus than would be typical — pulling in even the Chancellor. Which presented Luke with a unique opportunity.
The public would be allowed to attend the ceremony, meaning he wouldn’t have to worry about gaining access. It was unrelated to the war, so there would be a minimal military presence, especially from the Jedi. It was outside, so it might be easier to get to the Chancellor, and certainly to make his escape afterwards…

In all honesty, Luke wasn’t sure how well this attempt would work, if at all. But it was an opportunity, one that he didn’t think he could pass up. He still had time to hash out the details, to make it work. He’d just have to do it without Leia, or the Jedi Order, finding out.

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Ahsoka stopped by early the next morning to collect Luke and take him up on his offer of sparring practice. Leia was already awake and ready for the day, and she had heard her brother beginning to stir in the next room, but when she went over to greet Ahsoka after her arrival, he looked bleary-eyed and tired, as if he had slept poorly.

“Sleep alright?” she asked him, and he shrugged.

“Decently,” he replied.

She frowned, scrutinizing him. She’d never known him to have any problems sleeping; he’d been a soldier for five years, and soldiers quickly learned to sleep whenever and wherever they had the chance. It was a skill that even Leia had developed during her years in the Rebellion. But she figured if he was being troubled by their situation, she couldn’t really blame him — most soldiers didn’t end up being thrown twenty-five years into the past.

“We’re going to have a little duel,” Ahsoka said. “Do you wanna come along?”

Leia nodded. She would go watch for a little while, and then head to the Archives to get a head-start on researching. The sooner they found any useful information, the sooner they could get home.


“Not likely.”

Ahsoka took them up to one of the gyms they had visited yesterday, making simple small talk along the way. There were a few other people already there, even at that early hour, but they were able to find a mat for themselves near the back of the room. A small bench was pressed against the nearby wall, and Leia sat down on it, watching as Luke and Ahsoka prepared for their duel.

A shelf lined with lightsabers stood against the opposite wall, and Ahsoka directed Luke to it. “They’re organized by blade length,” she explained. “You’ll want one that suits your height, so I’d suggest taking from this shelf.” She pointed to one of the shelves higher up, though not near the very top. “Find one with a grip that’s comfortable for you.”

He shifted through the ‘sabers, trying out various handles. It took a moment before he found one that he was satisfied with. “I don’t suppose there’s any chance of me getting my own lightsaber back?” he asked.

“You’d have to ask someone higher up than me,” Ahsoka replied, “but I don’t think it’s too likely. Here, pass it over.” Luke handed her the lightsaber and, with a bit of effort, she managed to pry open the panel built into its side, allowing her access to the mechanics within. She fiddled with it for a moment, before closing the panel. “It was set to training mode, but I’ve turned it to full power. Based on our conversation yesterday, I think you can handle it. Besides, mine don’t have
Luke took the ‘saber back and pressed the activation button. A brilliant blue blade shot out, humming with energy. Ahsoka took a step back, and he gave it a few exploratory swings, spinning it around in his hand, feeling the balance of the blade. When she had first met him, in the months after the Battle of Yavin, she had sometimes watched him practicing, when she’d had the time. Drawn by curiosity over this boy who claimed to be a Jedi, she would watch as he faced off against a training remote. His moves had been awkward and bumbling at first, but over time, she’d watched as he developed a real talent, his skills growing more and more impressive, particularly after his run-in with Vader on Bespin.

He’d seemed so angry then. He had taken his anger out in practice, perfecting his skills. She had thought then that he was simply angry because of his defeat at Vader’s hands; she knew now that he had been grappling with the revelation that Vader was his father. It was a feeling she understood well. But Luke had had to deal with it alone; she didn’t.

Unhooking them from her belt, Ahsoka ignited her own two lightsabers. “Ready to go?” she asked, and though her back was to her, Leia could hear the grin in her voice.

“Of course.” Luke moved into a ready position, his blade held in front of him and his feet braced against the floor.

Ahsoka was the first to strike, lunging across the floor and swiping at him with one of her lightsabers. He blocked it easily, parrying with a powerful blow. She ducked to avoid it, swinging her blades as she moved, and he hurried out of their path. She struck next with both ‘sabers, and he blocked those as well. Seeming to realize that he could take it, she began to put more force into her blows, moving quicker and forcing him to work harder.

Still, he was able to keep up. He managed to block or avoid all her hits, though she was able to do the same with his. They were well matched, though Ahsoka had much more formal training than Luke. She was an active duellist, almost dancing around on the mat, a sharp contrast to the only lightsaber duel that Leia had ever witnessed, on the Death Star between Vader and General Kenobi. Ahsoka’s energetic style and dual lightsabers seemed to throw Luke a bit, as both were aspects that he hadn’t experienced in a duel before, but he managed to keep his head and stay on top of things. To Leia’s untrained eye, it seemed an impressive fight.

And it looked like she wasn’t the only one to think so. Focused on the fight as she was, she hadn’t noticed Anakin enter the gym, and didn’t until he was standing right by the mat, watching the duel. He was out of the medical gown he had been wearing the day before, and now wore a set of black Jedi robes.

She looked away from him, focusing her gaze on the duel which continued in front of her. But Anakin had already seen her, and he came over, taking a seat beside her.

“Your brother’s quite good,” he commented. “Your father must have taught him well.”

“He did,” Leia said, not looking at him. That was, technically, the truth, though not in the way that Anakin was thinking; the lessons Luke had learned from their father rested more in the vein of learning from your mistakes.

“Do you have any lightsaber training?” Anakin asked.

Leia shook her head, wishing that he would stop talking to her.
“Your father wouldn’t teach you?”

“I didn’t want to be taught.” She could feel her heart rate beginning to climb. Just being near him made her uncomfortable, but having him look at her, speak to her, made it worse, knowing what he would become and what he would do. She couldn’t look at him without picturing that awful mask over his face, or hear him without that mechanical breathing sounding in her ears.

“Why not?”

“It never interested me.” She stood, giving him a quick, strained smile. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to go to the Archives and get a head start on research.” She didn’t wait for a response, striding away as quickly as she could without looking panicked. She knew that Luke was watching her go, but she didn’t look at him, even though she could feel the concern practically radiating off him. A moment later, she heard him grunt as he hit the floor, Ahsoka likely taking advantage of his distraction to knock him off his feet.

The hallway outside of the gym was blissfully empty, and she paused for just a moment to catch her breath, before hurrying on her way, lest anyone, especially Anakin, try to follow her. She didn’t remember the exact way to the Archives, but she knew they were on the other side of the Temple, somewhere near the top. She would just walk until she found them.

She had no idea if she was allowed to wander about the Temple unaccompanied, but she didn’t much care. She just wanted to be alone. As she practically ran down the nearby staircase, she heard someone exiting the gym. It could be one of the other Jedi who had been practicing there, or it could be Anakin or Ahsoka or even Luke coming to look for her. She didn’t wait to find out. She raced down one staircase and then another, turning into the hallway and walking quickly away, disappearing around a corner.

After several turns, she still didn’t hear anyone pursuing her, and so she assumed that she had either lost them or they had never been after her in the first place. She kept walking, trying to keep her breathing steady and maintain the appearance that she knew where she was going. She got a few curious glances as she walked through the corridors, but nobody stopped her.

The more she walked, the better she felt. By the time she reached the mountain spire jutting up through the centre of the Temple, her heart rate had slowed and she felt much calmer. She paused in front of the rough stone of the mountain, exposed in the middle of the hallway, which curved to go around it. Her reaction had been unwise, she knew. Luke had asked her to be civil with Anakin, and she had promised him she would, but when it had come down to it, it had been nearly impossible. She had lasted only a few moments before she could no longer stand being near him. He looked nothing like the Vader she knew, but knowing what he would become made it impossible for her to see him any other way.

Anakin Skywalker was a war hero and, by the accounts of those who didn’t know the truth, a good man. But to Leia, all he was, and could ever be, was the man who would one day turn into Darth Vader. She couldn’t separate the two, not in the way that Luke could. But to keep the truth of their parentage from coming out, she needed to be able to.

Ahsoka had called the mountain a nexus of the Force. Luke spoke often of receiving guidance from the Force. Leia figured she could do with some guidance right about now.

Sighing, she placed her hand on the exposed stone of the mountain. Immediately, she could sense the Force pressing down on her, like she had in the tunnel to the Room of a Thousand Fountains, only several times stronger. It was uncomfortable, almost painful, like a pressure pushing against her head, trying to force its way through. She withdrew her hand, and the sensation retreated.
She remembered what Luke had told her, to allow the Force to flow through her instead of against her. Tentatively, she reached out and touched her hand to the stone. The feeling returned, but instead of removing her hand, she closed her eyes, taking in a deep breath and opening her mind, quieting her thoughts and reaching out to the world around her. The pressure slowly receded, though she could still feel the Force around her, more keenly than she usually could. She could sense the mountain, burning brightly in the Force, and all the beings in the Temple, from the Jedi to the plants in their gardens. Beyond the Temple, she could feel the thrum of life that encompassed all Coruscant, the billions of beings that called it home — crying and laughing and yelling, living their lives.

It was unlike anything she had ever felt before. It was overwhelming. Nothing she sensed called out to her, offering guidance. She let her hand slip off the stone, not knowing how to process everything she was feeling. She couldn’t. Breathing in deeply, she let it out slowly and opened her eyes.

It took her a moment to notice the blue translucent man standing a few feet away from her. He was tall, dressed in the robes of a Jedi with long hair pulled into a half-ponytail. He was watching her closely, and smiled when she looked over at him, her eyes widening.

“Hello,” he greeted.

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Luke grunted as Ahsoka helped him to his feet, her lightsabers extinguished and hooked back onto her belt. His own blade rested a few feet away, the blade deactivated. He grabbed it quickly as he stood.

“Sorry about that,” Ahsoka apologized. “I took you down a bit harder than I was planning to.”

“It’s alright,” Luke said. “I was… distracted.”

“That’ll cost you on a battlefield,” Anakin said, standing from where he had been sitting on the bench and walking over to join them. Luke had noticed him enter the gym partway through his sparring session with Ahsoka, but he had managed to keep his focus until Leia had abruptly gotten up and hurried from the room. He had been able to sense her anxiety and discomfort, and he’d been concerned. He’d focused on her for a just a moment too long, and Ahsoka had taken advantage of his distraction.

“That’s a lesson it seems I’m having difficulty learning,” Luke said. “Is my sister alright? Where did she go?”

“She said she was going to the Archives, to start on research,” Anakin explained, “though she did seem a bit anxious.”

“I think she just wants to get home,” Luke said. He was not nearly as good a liar as Leia, but while that might not have been the cause of her discomfort around Anakin, it certainly was true. “I’m sure you can understand how this situation might cause anyone some anxiety.”

Anakin nodded. “Yes, I suppose that’s true. You seem to be holding up alright, though.”

“My sister isn’t as… experienced with controlling her emotions as I am.”

“It would probably be a good idea to go find her, then,” Ahsoka suggested. “She seemed in a bit of a hurry.”
“You’re probably right.” He moved to return the lightsaber to the shelf, half-hoping that either Anakin or Ahsoka would chime in and tell him that he could hold onto it. They didn’t, and he placed it carefully back in its place. But he already had a half-formed plan to get it back into his possession.

He followed Anakin and Ahsoka from the gym out into the hallway. “Does she know the way to the Archives?” Anakin asked.

“Likely not the most direct route,” Ahsoka said, “and you know how easy it is to get lost in here. We can go and look for her at the Archives, and if she’s not there, then we can set up a manhunt.”

“She has a surprisingly good sense of direction,” Luke said, “so she might manage to find her way there.”

Ahsoka smirked. “Well then, hopefully she does.”

They set off, Ahsoka leading the way and Luke falling into step beside Anakin, his heart pounding like a nervous boy meeting his childhood hero. He still wasn’t used to his father being here. All his life, his father had been nothing more than a concept, an idea in his mind. That idea had been destroyed by the revelation of who his father really was, but even after Darth Vader became Anakin Skywalker once more, it never truly recovered. But now he had met the man his father had been before succumbing to the dark side, the man who matched what Luke had imagined for so long. He wanted to ask him so much, to learn every detail he could, but he knew that he couldn’t.

“I hope that I didn’t say anything to upset your sister,” Anakin said, drawing Luke from his thoughts with a start. “She seemed very… unsettled.”

“Why would anything you said upset her?” Luke asked, though he knew that Anakin’s mere existence upset her.

“I mentioned your father,” he explained. “Obi-Wan told me that he passed away recently. I know how difficult it is to lose a parent.”

He was talking about Shmi, his mother. Luke had never met her, but he’d heard many good things about her from Uncle Owen. That had also been the first, and last, time Owen met his step-brother, when Shmi died; Padmé, Luke’s mother, had been with him. Because of that it was an event that had long fascinated Luke as a child, and he’d often asked how his grandmother had died, but Uncle Owen had never told him. It seemed as if it had been hard on Anakin, though.

“Nellith’s relationship with our father was complicated,” Luke said. “They didn’t get along very well. I think she’s still angry with him.”

“Can I ask what about?”

Luke was silent for a moment, trying to think through his next words. “Our father… wasn’t always a very good man. He was better near the end of his life, but while we were growing up, things were difficult. I’ve learned to forgive him, but it’s been hard for Nellith. Honestly, I don’t know if she ever will forgive him.”

“You do sound like a Jedi,” Anakin said with a smirk. “But for a lot of people, forgiveness can be difficult. I think she just needs time to sort it out on her own.”

Luke nodded. “Maybe.” He had, after all, had more time to adjust to the truth about their father than Leia, and it had been difficult for him at the beginning, too. He’d struggled for a long time to accept it, and he hoped that, one day, Leia would come to accept it too. He just hoped it would be
sooner rather than later, before her unresolved issues with her parentage caused them any more trouble.

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“Who are you?” Leia asked, staring, wide-eyed, at the ghostly figure in front of her.

“My name is Qui-Gon Jinn,” the man said. His accent was Coruscanti, and he spoke gently in a deep, calm voice. “I was a Jedi, and Master to Obi-Wan Kenobi for a very long time.”

“But… you’re dead now.”

Qui-Gon Jinn nodded. “I am indeed.” He smiled again, and turned slightly, gesturing with his arm further down the hallway. “Will you walk with me?”

While Leia’s rationality would tell her to be wary of going for walks with ghosts, something told her that she could trust this man. She felt no ill-will from him, nothing that would tell her to be cautious. So she nodded, and stepped forward to join him as he began to walk away down the corridor.

They walked for a moment in silence, passing by a few Jedi who seemed entirely unbothered by the pale blue spectre floating through their Temple. Either this was a strangely often occurrence for the Jedi, or they couldn’t see him. That second possibility made her somewhat self-conscious of speaking to Qui-Gon, not wanting to appear to be talking to thin air, and so she refrained from saying anything until they were out of earshot of any other beings.

“Can anyone else see you?” she asked, looking up at him. He was quite tall, much taller than she was, and he walked with easy confidence.

“Just you,” he said. “And your brother.”

“My brother?” Leia asked, quieting as a pair of Jedi walked past them, waiting until they were further away before continuing. “How do you know about my brother?”

“I visited him, when he was still a prisoner of Dooku’s,” Qui-Gon explained, and Leia frowned. Luke had never mentioned any visits from dead Jedi. Qui-Gon continued, “I know quite a few things about you, Leia. Your father was Anakin Skywalker, who fell to the dark side and became Darth Vader. You were raised by Bail and Breha Organa on Alderaan, before it was destroyed by the Emperor’s Death Star. You were part of the Rebellion that took Palpatine down. I know many other things, as well, which you yourself don’t yet know.” He paused a moment, looking down at her for a long while before continuing. “I also know why you are so reluctant to forgive Anakin.”

“Because he was a monster.”

“That might be true of Vader,” Qui-Gon said, nodding, “but what about Anakin? Is the Jedi General who fights valiantly for the Republic a monster? What about the man who loves his wife dearly, or the ten-year-old slave boy that I knew on Tatooine? What about the man who saves his son’s life and kills the Emperor? Is he a monster?”

“Vader is responsible for the deaths of hundreds, if not thousands, of beings. He personally tortured me for hours. He had a hand in the destruction of my homeworld. His past and any good deeds he might have done don’t erase that.”

Qui-Gon was silent for a long time, as if deep in thought. They continued walking, meandering through the halls of the Temple. He took her up several flights of stairs, exiting out into one of the
rooftop gardens that Ahsoka had showed them the day before. There were a number of Jedi there, meditating in the peace of the garden, and Qui-Gon led her to a quiet corner, shrouded from the rest of the garden by a tall tree with thickly-leaved branches that hung from it like ropes. There was a stone bench nestled beneath the tree, and Qui-Gon sat, gesturing for Leia to join him.

“Do you know why Anakin fell to the dark side?” he asked, as she settled down beside him.

“No, and to be quite honest, I don’t much care,” Leia said, growing frustrated. “It doesn’t matter to me why he turned to the dark side. That won’t change anything he did.”

Qui-Gon nodded. “No, it won’t,” he agreed, “and I don’t expect that it will give you reason to forgive him. But it will allow you to perhaps understand him more, which might make forgiveness easier.”

Leia said nothing. She doubted that there was any information in the galaxy that could cause her to forgive Darth Vader.

“You are the one who sought guidance,” Qui-Gon said. “I am merely providing it.”

After a moment, Leia nodded. “Alright. Tell me why he decided to become a mass murderer.”

“He joined the dark side to save Padmé,” Qui-Gon began, ignoring her quip, “your mother. They met when they were both quite young and, several years later, right after the Clone Wars had begun, they married secretly. The Jedi do not allow members of our Order to marry, you see.”

“Why not?”

“The Jedi believe that attachment is dangerous, and that it will lead, ultimately, to the dark side. It is a view that I never fully agreed with, but in the case of your father, it unfortunately proved true.”

“He wasn’t my father.”

Qui-Gon was silent for a moment, assessing her, before continuing, “Anakin’s mother had died shortly before he married Padmé. He had had visions of her death for months, but Yoda and Obi-Wan warned him against trying to save her. He defied their orders and went to Tatooine, where he discovered that she had been kidnapped by Tusken raiders, a vicious people native to Tatooine. He found and rescued her, but she died in his arms. It was an event that affected him deeply. He didn’t have any more visions until several years later, when Padmé revealed to him that she was pregnant.”

With Luke and I, Leia thought, with some shock. When she thought of her birth parents, she always felt disconnected from them, particularly after learning her biological father’s identity. They were the reason she was alive, but they were always unimportant to her. But with that one sentence, she realized just how connected to both of them she really was. A woman who wasn’t her mother had carried her for nine months, bonded with her and loved her. She looked like her biological father. Their blood ran through her veins.

It was a thought that twisted her stomach into knots, and she placed her hands tight against her abdomen, breathing deeply.

“He saw visions of her dying in childbirth,” Qui-Gon continued, “and became desperate to prevent her from sharing the same fate as his mother. The Jedi did little to assuage his worries, and he turned to Palpatine, who offered him what he wanted — a way to cheat death. Anakin took his offer, and lost himself to the dark side. In the end, Padmé still died, and Anakin, in his grief, fell
even deeper into the darkness. It was only your brother who managed to pull him back out.”

Leia was quiet for a long while, her lips turned into a deep frown. “That’s… tragic,” she said finally, and it was. To give everything he had into saving the one he loved, and still not succeed; it was a depressing tale. But she still didn’t understand how it had turned him into a such a hateful, evil man. She had lost her family, her entire planet, and it didn’t cause her to become a murderer.

“That is just a simple version of the story,” Qui-Gon said, after several more seconds had passed. “There were many other factors at play. But the fact is, Anakin was afraid, and Palpatine was the one to offer him help.” He paused a moment before continuing. “Leia, I am not here to tell you how to feel about him. I’m only here to give you more of the story, so that your feelings might be more well-informed. Anakin Skywalker was not evil. He was not perfect, of course; no one is. But I do not think he was a bad man. He simply trusted the wrong people and made some very poor decisions, and it cost him dearly in the end.”

“It cost a great many other people, as well.”

Qui-Gon nodded. “It did, indeed.”

They were both silent for a moment, until Leia looked over at him. “Do you know why we’re here?” she asked. “Luke believes that we have some sort of purpose we need to fulfil, and he’s convinced that purpose is to kill Palpatine and stop the Empire before it rises — stop Anakin from becoming Darth Vader. But I’m not so sure.”

“About having a purpose here, or about killing Palpatine?”

“Both.”

“I will tell you what I told you brother,” Qui-Gon said. “I agree that you do have a purpose here. The Force would not be so peaceful around you otherwise. It was the Force that sent you here, that is certain, but I don’t know why. I don’t know if anything like this has ever happened before.”

“Do you think we were sent here to stop Palpatine?” Leia asked, after a moment had passed.

“I don’t know. My knowledge of the future is not all-encompassing. I know what occurs, as things stand at the moment. But events have been set in motion by your arrival here, and the future is no longer so clear. Things could change drastically, based on what actions you and your brother both decide to take. I do not know if that change would be good or bad.”

“What do you think we should do?” she asked.

“I advise you to be cautious. One wrong move, and the future could change in ways you did not intend.”

Which was exactly why Leia was against Luke’s idea of attempting to fix things. She looked down at her hands, her lips drawn tight together. Too much was at stake to risk with such a foolish plan.

She opened her mouth to ask another question, but when she looked over at Qui-Gon, he was no longer there.
Leia was not at the Archives when Luke, Anakin, and Ahsoka arrived, some minutes after their departure from the gym. They quickly searched the surrounding area for her, but found no signs of her presence. Either she had lied and gone someplace else, or she had gotten lost. Luke found the former possibility somewhat more likely.

“You two have a Force bond,” Anakin said, looking to Luke as they stood outside the entrance to the Archives. “You could use it to reach out to her and find out where she is.”

“Is that necessary?” Luke asked, one eyebrow raised. “I don’t think she’s lost; she might have just gone somewhere else first, to clear her mind. Like I said, she has a pretty good sense of direction. I think she’s just upset, and needs some time to herself.” He paused, looking Anakin to Ahsoka. “Unless she’s not allowed to be wandering about the Temple alone?”

The two Jedi looked at each other, as if conversing silently. “The Council never said anything against it,” Anakin said, after a moment had passed. “Some of the Council members might not be too keen about it, but I don’t really see the harm that could be done. You’re our guests, and we’re trying to help you. Besides, you’re practically a Jedi yourself.”

Luke nodded. “Then I think it might be best if we leave my sister to her own devices for now. If she is lost, I’m sure she’ll find her way here eventually. But I just think she needs some time.”

Anakin seemed unconvinced, but he shrugged. “She’s your sister; whatever you think is best.”

“Then we can start researching while we wait for her,” Ahsoka suggested. “We can catch Anakin up to speed on everything we know about the temple and the artifact you found there.”

They entered the Archives, finding a table on the first floor, in the long aisle that ran the length of the Archives, and sitting down. Luke began to describe the temple and what he knew about it, pulling up a map that they had found the day before of Raban, marking the temple’s approximate location on the planet.

“I was told by a local on Raban that the temple was there long before humans had settled the
“We did some reading about Raban yesterday, and discovered that the first settlement on Raban was established over five hundred years ago. There’s no mention of any civilization existing there before that, and there’s no sentient species native to the planet. Which means the temple was built more than five hundred years ago, at least.”

“We’re assuming it was built by the Jedi,” Ahsoka said, “but from Ben and Nellith’s descriptions, there were no symbols in the temple, or any other signs that would point to its origins.”

“The locals don’t seem to know either,” Luke added, “if they ever did. The temple’s just always been there, and it’s always been… hostile.”

Anakin raised his eyebrows. “Hostile?”

“The woman I spoke with said that it doesn’t like visitors,” Luke explained. “People go in and they wake up back outside, minutes, hours, even days after they walked in, with no memory of what happened. None of the people on Raban have any idea why or how it happens, and most seemed terrified by it. My guess is that it has something to do with the artifact. Like it’s protecting itself.”

“And that artifact is the only thing you found in the temple?” Anakin asked.

Luke nodded. “It’s quite a large building, extending for several levels below the surface. There are dozens of rooms and hallways and staircases, but none of them had anything in them. It looked like it had been carved out of the cliff side and promptly abandoned, without anyone ever having lived there. The artifact was on the bottom floor, in a room with an ancient wooden door.”

“What did it look like?”

Luke gave the best description he could of the strange oval disc he had found in the temple’s basement, calling out to him and glowing with cryptic blue glyphs. Anakin listened, his forehead creased as his eyebrows drew together, his lips turning down in a soft frown.

“And you’ve found no mention of this temple or artifact anywhere?” he asked.

Ahsoka shook her head, her lekku swaying with the movement. “Nothing. There was no mention of any temple in the document about the history of Raban, which was admittedly quite short, or in any documents about the history of the Kastolar sector. We started to go through the history of the entire Mid Rim, and though we haven’t gone through all of it yet, there’s been nothing so far. Some snippets about Jedi temples here and there, but none of them anywhere near Raban. Absolutely nothing for the artifact, either. We haven’t even found a description of anything like it.”

“I first heard about the temple through old folk tales from Chalacta,” Luke added. “I’ve been looking through records of stories and legends from the entire Kastolar sector, but there’s been nothing about any temples. Like I said, the locals on Raban seemed afraid of the temple, and that fear must have kept them, and anyone else, from ever writing about it.”

“Which makes things complicated for us,” Anakin said, frowning. He leaned back in his chair with a sigh. “Have you spoken with Master Nu yet?”

Ahsoka nodded. “She gave us all the documents about the Mid Rim and Kastolar,” she said, “though even she hadn’t ever heard of Raban before.”

“The Order is supposed to keep a list of all the Jedi temples in the galaxy,” Anakin said. “A registry, of sorts. I think access to it is restricted, but I’ll speak to Master Nu, see what I can do. If Raban’s temple is on that list, then it might be able to tell us something.” He stood. “You two stay here, keep looking for any information.”
He walked off, leaving Luke and Ahsoka at the table. They began going through the documents that they had started the evening before, with Ahsoka reading through the history of the Mid Rim and Luke researching Kastolarian folk tales. Every story seemed to be essentially the same, and some were even different variations of the same tale. Only a few minutes after Anakin’s departure, Luke was already beginning to grow bored when, across the glowing screen of his datapad, he caught sight of Leia entering the Archives.

He stood, setting the datapad down and waving her over. She hurried towards them. “Are you alright?” he asked as she approached. “I was worried, after you left so suddenly.”

She nodded. “I’m fine. I just... needed some time to myself. But there’s nothing for you to worry about.”

Luke could sense that there was something she was leaving unsaid, but he didn’t press her. She simply sat down, and asked them to catch her up on anything new that they had found.

A short while later, Anakin returned, Master Nu accompanying him, taking his seat across from Luke. He gave Leia a quick nod by way of greeting, which she returned with a tight-lipped smile. Master Nu remained standing by the table.

“Master Nu agreed to show me the temple list,” Anakin said. “There’s over a hundred of them, spread out all across the galaxy. But there’s not a single mention of a temple on Raban.”

“Does that really mean anything, though?” Luke asked. “There doesn’t seem to be any mention of the temple anywhere else in the Archives. It could be centuries, millennia old; so old that even the Jedi forgot about it.”

Master Nu shook her head. She was an elderly woman, with her white hair pulled back into a neat bun, dressed in a formal golden robe. “That’s not very likely. The Jedi Order is thousands of years old — older than the Old Republic. We have some of the most well-kept and ancient records in the galaxy; there have been wars and schisms and all manner of destruction, but we have managed very well to hold onto our history. Every temple that the Jedi have built has been recorded, and it remains in our records even after it is destroyed or falls into disuse. Jedi temples are not so easily forgotten — not by us, at least.”

“So what does that mean?” Leia asked, her brows furrowed.

“This temple you found on Raban appears nowhere in our Archives,” Master Nu said. “Whoever built it, it was likely not the Jedi.”

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It was late evening when Luke and Leia returned to their room. After Master Nu’s revelation, they had decided to focus more energy into finding any information about the artifact, but even that proved unsuccessful. Leia was beginning to believe that they would never find any hints or information regarding the mysterious temple on Raban; for all they had found, it seemed as if the Jedi had never even known of its existence. She was bone-tired by the time they decided to give it up for the night, and she wanted nothing more than to fall into bed and a deep sleep. But she had been waiting all day for a chance to be alone with Luke, to speak with him about her conversation with Qui-Gon.

As he removed his jacket and boots, she went and sat in the armchair by the window in his room. “I went for a walk, after I left the gym,” she said, diving right into it, and he looked at her, his boots halfway unlaced, “with someone who told me they were a friend of yours.”
He frowned, obviously confused. “Who?”

“Qui-Gon Jinn.”

Surprise and excitement mingled on Luke’s face. “Really? He came to you?”

She nodded. “I was standing near an exposed portion of the mountain that the Temple was built around,” she explained. “Ahsoka was certainly correct in calling it a nexus of the Force. I placed my hands on it and closed my eyes, and when I opened them, he was standing there.”

Luke walked over and sat on the bed across from her, his boots entirely forgotten. “What did you talk with him about?”

“He told me about his little visit with you, when you were still imprisoned by Dooku.” She tried to keep it from showing in her voice, but Leia had to admit that she was a little annoyed that he hadn’t told her about this. It was certainly not an insignificant occurrence, making contact with another dead Jedi, and she was used to him immediately telling her about such things.

Still, it seemed as if he could sense her annoyance, and gave an apologetic smile. “I did mean to tell you about it,” he said. “I was just never really able to find the right words. You have to admit, it’s a bit of a strange topic to bring up, conversing with the ghost of a dead Jedi master.”

“More strange than the fact that your father is a murderous Sith lord and you’re my long-lost twin brother?” Somehow, Luke had been able to find the words then, on a dark bridge in an Ewok village, only a few months ago.

He paused a moment, before nodding, as if to say, you’ve got me there. “He’s the one who made me believe that we had a purpose here in the past,” he said. “Qui-Gon, I mean. He said that it was because the Force was so peaceful around me, and he didn’t think it would be so if the Force hadn’t sent me — us — here for a reason.”

“He told me the same thing. I asked him if he agreed with you, that we here to kill Palpatine and stop the Empire… but he said he didn’t know. He told me that our presence has set events in motion, and the future is no longer clear.”

“Always in motion, the future is,” Luke said, his voice thoughtful. She looked at him curiously, and he added, “Yoda told me that, when I was preparing to abandon my training to go save you and Han on Bespin. He said that I had to decide how to serve you best.”

Leia was silent. Had they already changed the future? One more step in the direction he was heading, and Luke could actually achieve what he had set out to do — kill Palpatine, stop the Empire, keep Vader from falling. Save Alderaan.

She looked out the window, at the late evening Coruscant skyline. The sun had set the sky afire, reflected on the glass sides of the distant buildings. The sunsets on Alderaan had been the most beautiful in the galaxy. She would do anything to be able to see one again.

Almost anything.

If they killed Palpatine, they might be able to save the galaxy from more than two decades of tyranny and civil war — or they could fail, and make their own situation much worse. They could be caught, thrown in prison, tried for attempted assassination of the Supreme Chancellor of the Galactic Republic. The Jedi would be very unlikely to believe them if they claimed that Palpatine was a Sith, and they’d certainly stop helping them get back to their own time. They would be stranded.
As it stood, in their own time, the galaxy’s future looked bright — the New Republic was on the verge of triumphing over the remnants of the Empire. Peace would soon come to the galaxy, at last. True, Alderaan was gone — but even if they managed to change the future and keep the Death Star from ever destroying it, it wouldn’t be her Alderaan. For without Palpatine, Anakin wouldn’t become Darth Vader. Luke and Leia would never have to be hidden; she would never be given to Bail and Breha Organa. It’s likely she would never meet Han.

Her Alderaan was gone, and there was no bringing it back. Her future was ahead, and she knew what she wanted it to look like.

She didn’t say any of this to Luke. He knew already how she felt — he knew what she was feeling, right then. And he didn’t try to persuade her to feel otherwise. Their minds were both settled.

“Did he say anything else to you?” Luke asked. Only a moment or two had passed since he had last spoken, in which all of that had run through Leia’s mind, and he had understood it. The change of topic was thus, to both of them, entirely natural.

She nodded. “He told me about Anakin, and why he fell to the dark side.”

Luke leaned forward, immediately interested. “I’ve always wondered. Obi-Wan never elaborated much on it, and I never had the chance to ask Father myself.”

Leia tried not to wince when Luke said Father. He did it occasionally, though less so since discovering that it made her uncomfortable. Still, it slipped out every now and then, and Leia felt guilty of her reaction every time. That was how Luke felt about Vader, and there were so few people he could talk about it with, that she felt bad for begrudging him it.

“It was for Padmé,” she said, “to try and save her.”

She told him the whole story, as Qui-Gon had told it to her — Anakin’s visions of his mother, the secret marriage, the visions of Padmé dying in childbirth. Anakin’s growing desperation to save her, and Palpatine’s promise of rescue — empty, in the end.

“Qui-Gon wanted me to understand Vader more, to see why he became what he did,” Leia explained, when she was done. “He said it might help to forgive him, or at least begin to.”

“And did it?”

She shook her head. She wanted it to have — she wanted to be able to forgive Vader, to see past the black mask to the man he used to be, to the man he died as. She wanted to stop feeling like she did, like Vader was a heavy weight pressing down on her, reminding her constantly of the evil that ran through her veins. Like she could never be free of him. And she wanted to do it for Luke, because she loved him, and she hated the tension that existed between them over their father.

But she couldn’t. She just couldn’t, and it was impossible for her to see herself doing so.

“I can’t,” she said. “I’m sorry, but I can’t. It’s just too hard.”

Luke stood and walked over to the armchair, crouching in front of her and placing his hand over hers. “I know.”

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He had two more days.
That was Luke’s immediate thought upon waking the next morning, when the sun was just beginning to rise over that part of Coruscant. He had two more days until Palpatine was scheduled to give his speech at Senate Plaza; two more days until Luke had a chance to kill him. The day after tomorrow.

He had stayed up late again, working on his plan; it was beginning to come together. There were still details to iron out, but Luke hoped he could sort them out in time. And if not, well, he could always wing it — that worked out reasonably well during his last, and only, encounter with Palpatine. And this time, it would just be the two of them, with no Vader as a distraction.

He had another early morning sparring session with Anakin and Ahsoka, and so, though he was still tired, he forced himself out of bed and began to get dressed. Leia had decided the night before that she would not be coming that morning, wanting to avoid Anakin as much as possible, and would instead meet them for breakfast later on. Luke suspected that they were in for another day of tedious, fruitless research, particularly after the revelation of the day before.

Though Master Nu had told them that the temple on Raban was likely not a creation of the Jedi Order, they might still have some information on it in the Archives, though it would be more difficult to find. Anakin had been scheduled to meet with the High Council the evening before to update them on their progress and ask their advice on where to go next, and Luke hoped that they had thought of something. Though this distraction of research was welcome at the moment, to give him time to carry out his plan against Palpatine, it would be best if, as soon as the deed was done, he and Leia returned to their own time as swiftly as possible. Once they had collected any sort of information on the temple or artifact within it, he hoped that the Council would grant them permission to leave.

These were thoughts that ran through his mind as he made his way through the quiet hallways of the Temple. Ahsoka and Anakin had said that they would come collect him, but he didn’t know how long they would be and he didn’t want to sit in his room waiting for them. He had felt his anxieties building up, thinking about how soon the speech in the Plaza was, when he would get his chance to try and change history for the better. He needed to get them out.

He met no one else on his way. He remembered the path to the gym relatively well, though he made one or two wrong turns and had to turn around to correct them. It was early enough that most of the Temple’s inhabitants had yet to wake up, and Luke saw not even a single Temple guard, though he was sure they were up and about at all hours of the day. He made sure to remember the path he had taken, making a note of every turn.

There was no one else at the gym, either, when he arrived. The room beyond was dark as he opened the door, but the lights came on automatically when he entered. He shed his jacket, dropping it on one of the benches pressed against the wall, and walked over to the shelves that housed the lightsabers. It took a bit of rummaging, but eventually he found the ‘saber that he had used yesterday.

Stepping back from the shelves, he cast a quick glance around the gym. It took him only a moment to find what he was looking for — a box, in the far corner of the gym, overflowing with training remotes of various makes and models. Most of the time Luke had spent practicing with a lightsaber over the past few years had been done with a training remote, and he considered himself to be quite adept at deflecting their bolts. He chose one of the models that he had never seen before and brought it over to the training mat, setting it to its highest level and turning it on.

It floated up into the air, making quiet trills and beeps as it calibrated and warmed itself up. It seemed less advanced than many of the models Luke had trained with before, but that was to be
expected, and he didn’t mind; he was sure that the training remote Old Ben had made him use on the *Millennium Falcon* had been just as old, if not older, than the remote he was using now.

He readied his lightsaber, igniting it and holding it up in front of him. The remote let out a warning tone to alert him that it was about to begin firing, loosing its first shot a second later. Luke blocked it easily, and the bolt, which was not strong enough to be fatal, was absorbed into the ‘saber’s plasma blade. As soon as the first bolt was gone, another was released, and then another, and another. Luke’s arms swung wildly in order to block every shot, as the remote danced lightly around him, aiming from all angles. He quickly became enveloped in the training, his entire being focused on blocking the next shot, and the next, with little awareness to anything else. Within minutes his arms and shoulders were burning, but he paid it little mind.

He didn’t know how much time had passed when he realized that he was being watched. Catching one of the bolts with his blade, he glanced quickly to the side, recognizing Anakin’s tall, dark figure standing beside Ahsoka’s smaller, orange one. Reaching his hand out towards the remote, he used the Force to turn it off, stopping its barrage of lasers, and pulled the small round machine into his palm. Extinguishing his lightsaber, he turned to look at his audience.

“How long have you been standing there?” he asked, noticing that they were not the only ones to have entered the gym in the meantime. A small group of Jedi stood on the other side of the gym, entranced in their own training.

“Just a couple minutes,” Ahsoka explained. “We stopped by your rooms but you weren’t there, and Nellith said she didn’t know where you were, so we figured you had come here early.”

“That was quite a sight,” Anakin said, with a small smile on his face. “You’re pretty good at that.”

Luke’s chest swelled with pride at being complimented by his father, one of the greatest Jedi of his time. Such compliments were not something he had often experienced. “Thanks,” he said, trying his best to sound entirely nonchalant. He held up the remote. “I’ve spent a lot of time training with these things. I didn’t have many sparring partners, when I was first learning, so I did most of my training with remotes like this.”

“Well, you’re still a very good duelist, despite the fact,” Ahsoka said.

Luke grinned. “There’ve been a few hard-learned lessons along the way.”

“Was your hand one of those hard-learned lessons?” Anakin asked.

Luke blinked in surprise, looking down at his right hand. He still wore his black leather glove, as he had since the synthskin covering his cybernetic had been damaged during Han’s rescue from Jabba the Hutt. He knew that it looked a bit strange, to wear only one glove, but he figured that the gaping hole in the back of his hand, revealing a web of mechanics beneath it, might be stranger.

“I don’t mean to be intrusive,” Anakin added, when Luke failed to answer. “It’s just that I’ve noticed you always wear one glove and, well…” In explanation, he held up his own right arm which, like Luke’s, was covered in a black glove, while his other hand was free. “I figured you might have a similar injury.”

“Ah… right,” Luke said, nodding. He knew, of course, that his father had cybernetic limbs — Darth Vader, after all, was almost entirely cybernetics. He had just assumed that all his injuries that required cybernetics were from the same incident that had forced him into a life support suit. He wasn’t sure how he had failed to notice Anakin’s single black glove, but perhaps his mind, used to himself wearing such fashion, had simply registered it as normal. He flexed the fingers of his
cybernetic hand, the leather crinkling with the movement, his mind conjuring memories of the duel in which he had lost it, in the bowels of Cloud City. “This was one of the harder lessons.”

He didn’t say anything more about it, and Anakin didn’t ask.

“Well, since you’re already warmed up,” Anakin said, “why don’t we get right to duelling?”

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They sparred for well over an hour. Luke spent most of it duelling with Ahsoka, while Anakin stood off to the side, observing and making comments.

“You really are quite good,” he said, when the duel had stagnated into a draw. Luke took a step back, withdrawing his blade from where it had been locked against both of Ahsoka’s. “Which form were you taught?”

Breathing heavily from the strain of the long duel, Luke extinguished his lightsaber and reached up to wipe the sweat from his brow. “I… wasn’t really taught one,” he admitted. “Like I said, I never really did much sparring.”

“Not even with your father?”

“…Every now and then. My training was significantly more informal than I’m sure is customary here.”

“Hm.” Anakin nodded, his expression thoughtful. “You do have a very loose duelling style, but I could definitely see strong elements of Form V. It’s the same one that I use, and Ahsoka, too, which is why you two are so evenly matched. Did your father ever teach you about the lightsaber forms?”

Luke shook his head and, after a moment of brief surprise, Anakin launched into a quick rundown of the various forms used in lightsaber combat, of which there were seven. Some were more commonly-used than others, and all of them highlighted different aspects of lightsaber combat, using them to various ends. Form V, Luke learned, was based on strong defenses and counterattacks, and was thus more suited for lightsaber-to-lightsaber combat than most other forms, while also having the addition of allowing the deflection of blaster fire. It was, as such, one of the more versatile forms.

Anakin ran through a quick demonstration of several stances and moves utilized in Form V, also known as Djem So. He explained how Luke could integrate them into his fighting, to make it even more effective, particularly against other Form V users. They sparred for a bit, only briefly, for Anakin to demonstrate the effectiveness of the moves.

After a while, Ahsoka piped up that it was probably time that they get going, so that they would have time to change and eat breakfast before heading down to the Archives for the day. Anakin nodded in agreement, and Luke quickly deposited his borrowed lightsaber back on the shelf where it belonged and collecting his jacket before following Anakin and Ahsoka from the gym.

As they made their way back towards the residential quarters, he looked to Anakin. “I’m sure you can tell that my knowledge on the ways of the Jedi Order is somewhat sparse,” he said. “My father did a good job teaching me about the Force, but when it comes to the traditions of the Jedi themselves… not so much. I consider myself one, but the more time I spend here, the more I realize that I actually know very little about what the Jedi believe.”

“It’s understandable,” Anakin said. “Your father left the Order, after all. He must have had some
qualms about the way we do things, and so it makes sense that he wouldn’t teach all of that to you.”

“He left for my mother,” Luke explained, looking sideways at Anakin, gauging his expression. “He loved her, and the Jedi Order forbade that, so he left.” The change in Anakin was almost imperceptible — a slight tensing of the jaw, that’s it, but it was there. “I didn’t even know that such attachments were forbidden until I came here.”

“They are.” Anakin’s voice was terse as he spoke, and Luke noticed Ahsoka cast him a sidelong glance. He wondered briefly if she knew, about Anakin and Padmé; she must at least suspect, as Obi-Wan had.

“I was wondering, then,” Luke continued, after a moment had passed, “if you could teach me about them — the traditions and teachings of the Jedi. There’s no need for detailed history lessons or anything, just a few explanations on how things work here at the Temple, the Jedi’s rules for living and such. The main things you believe in. I just want to be able to better understand the Order that I claim to be a part of.”

“Would you join the Order, in your own time?” Anakin asked.

“I’m… not sure if that would be possible,” Luke said, “but I think I would like to try. I’ve always believed that the Jedi were on the side of good, and I believe in their ways. I just don’t know as much about them as I would like, and I never really had the option to, until now.”

“Your father never spoke ill of the Jedi?”

Luke shook his head. “Just because he disagreed with some aspects, doesn’t mean he disagreed with all of them. He taught me the basics of your teachings. But I would like to know more, if possible.”

Anakin nodded. “I think I might be able to help. I’ll try my best, at least.”

Ahsoka grinned, sidling up beside her master. “He always says that he’s a bad teacher,” she said, “but in my experience, he’s been pretty good. I think you’ll be in excellent hands.”

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Leia woke when Luke returned to the room, hearing him rummaging about in the shared refresher. She had woken when Anakin and Ahsoka came by to collect Luke, only to realize he wasn’t there. It was strange, and Leia had sat up for a while, concerned, but her lingering fatigue had eventually overwhelmed her and she’d fallen back asleep, roused only by the sound of Luke turning on the shower.

Slowly, she forced herself to get up, finding her borrowed brush and pulling it through her sleep-tangled locks.

“Good morning!” she called to Luke, through the closed ‘fresher door. She had heard the shower running, but it was off now, and he opened the door, sticking his still-damp head out to greet her.

“Morning.” He smiled widely at her before ducking back into the refresher, and she watched him go with one eyebrow raised.

“Where were you, earlier?” she asked, speaking loudly enough for him to hear. “Anakin and Ahsoka came by to get you, but you were already gone.”
“I just went to the gym early, by myself,” he called back. She frowned.

She had been concerned, over the past few days, about the plans he still harboured against Palpatine. He had certainly still seemed set on that path when they spoke the evening before. But she had seen no evidence of him planning or scheming; he went and sparred with Anakin and Ahsoka in the morning, and then spent the rest of the day with her, in the Archives, researching. And while that wasn’t going well at the moment, she hoped things would soon change, and they would be able to return to Raban and attempt going home. Before he actually had the chance to attempt anything against Palpatine.

But now… had he really been going to get a head start on his training for the day? Or had he had some other purpose?

She didn’t voice any of these concerns to him, and a few minutes later, they were both ready to depart. As they made their way to the refectory for a quick breakfast, Luke told her about his sparring session that morning. He seemed excited as he told her that Anakin had agreed to teach him more about the ways and traditions of the Jedi Order. She nodded absently, trying to push all thoughts of his true motives from her mind — she didn’t want him to know that she was growing suspicious.

They met Anakin and Ahsoka at the refectory, and they all sat together, eating the bowls of porridge and assorted fruit that were typical of a Jedi’s breakfast.

“I have some good news,” Anakin said, after they had gone through the somewhat painful (at least for her) niceties of greeting each other. “I wanted to wait until I could give it to both of you. As you know, Ahsoka and I spoke with the High Council last night about our progress. I told them what we had found, about the Raban temple potentially not being Jedi in origin, and they agreed to grant me access to the Ancients Vault. It houses the oldest documents possessed by the Order, and usually only Masters are allowed access. Apparently, some of the documents within are… delicate, in both physical form and subject matter.”

“And they think there might be something about the Raban temple in there?” Luke asked.

“It’s more likely that there might be something about the artifact you found within it,” Anakin said. “Master Nu will be accompanying me there today, to see what we can find.”

Leia hoped, desperately, that the Ancients Vault would hold at least some clue — something, anything, that they could use. It had already been a week since her arrival in the past; there was no way of knowing what had transpired in the present since. Had a week also passed? Was Han sick with worry, wondering where she was, what had happened to her? Was he himself even alright? Or had the artifact sent him hurtling through time as well, to the distant past or far future, where he couldn’t be retrieved? The thought sent a wave of nausea roiling through her. She needed to get back, to know that Han was okay, that the galaxy hadn’t descended further into chaos. The past was the past; what happened to the Republic, to Anakin, all of it had already transpired. But the future of her galaxy, of her husband, was still unknown.

When they arrived at the Archives, a short while later, Anakin went right to Master Nu, who took him to the Ancients Vault. No one else was allowed to come along, and so Luke, Leia, and Ahsoka found a table and sat down, retrieving the documents that they had been looking at during the previous days. Leia didn’t think they would find anything within them, but still, it felt better to do something than simply sit and wait for Anakin to return with news.

It was nearly an hour before he came back. Master Nu was not with him, but he held in his hand a datapad. He waved it at them triumphantly, a smile on his face.
“I think I found something,” he said.
The Stone

Chapter Summary

Anakin discusses his findings with the twins and the High Council.

“It’s a document,” Anakin said, placing the datapad in the centre of the table, in front of them all. “Or rather, it’s a copy of one. Some sort of diary or report, dating from the very beginning of the Jedi Order, thousands of years ago. The original was an actual book, but it was lost some time ago; all that remains is the few sections of pages recorded in this copy.”

“What does it say?” Luke asked, leaning forward to peer at the screen. On one half was a scan of a piece of paper, old and weathered, covered here and there with spidery black writing in a language he didn’t understand or recognize. The other side of the screen presented translations of the few pieces of legible script, written in somewhat-archaic Basic.

“It’s incomplete,” Anakin said. “Quite a bit of it is missing, but there’s enough left to understand what they were talking about.” Picking up the datapad, he began to read aloud.

“They arrived today, with it in tow. I was able to catch a glimpse as it was brought into the chamber. It had the appearance of a rock, smoothed by time and sea, but it was in fact made entirely of metal. The Masters gathered—’ It cuts off here, but continues further down the page. ‘Master Vrei will accompany the Stone to the temple. Only she will go. The Masters have decided that it will be better if only a few know of the temple’s location. It is not to be recorded anywhere.’”

Looking up, Anakin set the datapad back down. “The author then goes on to speak about a council convening and the gossip of the other lower-ranked Jedi. They mention ‘the Stone’ once more a few pages later, when this Master Vrei leaves with it, and that’s all.”

“Well, it sounds a lot like what we found in the temple on Raban,” Luke said. “Smooth, rock-shaped, made of metal.”

“It’s certainly closer than anything else we’ve found,” Leia agreed.

“They never say exactly what it does,” Anakin said, “but it’s obvious they considered it dangerous. Why else would they be hiding it away in a temple with a secret location? From the sounds of it, a lot of time was spent deciding what should be done.”

“So it’s safe to assume that the temple they refer to is the one on Raban,” Ahsoka said. “They locked this thing up and left it there for thousands of years.”

“Was the temple already there or did they build it for the express purpose of containing this... Stone?” Luke asked.

Anakin shrugged. “It doesn’t say. But it’s safe to assume that either way, it was promptly abandoned and forgotten about. I doubt that beyond these first few Jedi, no one even knew of the existence of the Stone or a temple hiding it, and hasn’t since.”

“Not even the High Council?” Ahsoka asked. “Not even Master Yoda?”
“It seems unlikely,” Anakin said. “It’s possible that this document is the only remaining mention of this artifact, and it was hidden away in the Ancients Vault. I don’t think anyone had touched it since it was put there when the Order built this Temple.”

“So what now?” Luke asked. This was the closest they had gotten to finding anything about the artifact or the temple on Raban. The document didn’t say whether the Jedi had created or found the Stone, as they called it, but they had certainly regarded it as dangerous. Enough to ensure that no future generations of Jedi even knew of its existence.

“I think we need to speak with the Council,” Anakin said, and stood.

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Anakin stood before the High Council, his hands tucked into the wide sleeves of his robes. The Council members regarded him carefully, their disbelief obvious — he could see it even on the faces of those Masters attending the meeting only through hologram, Obi-Wan included. He had just finished giving them a report on the document he had discovered in the Ancients Vault, and the mysterious information it held.

From the looks he was receiving, it was obvious that none of them had ever heard of this so-called “Stone” before, which, while unsurprising, was certainly unsettling.

“And you believe this… Stone to be the same artifact that Ben and Nellith Lars came across on Raban?” Master Windu asked, his eyebrows drawn together.

Anakin nodded. “The descriptions are remarkably similar. Ben and Nellith spoke of a round object, almost stone-like in shape, made of metal. The author of the document writes about the Stone being taken and hidden away in a secret temple, and while that temple isn’t described, it could very well be the one on Raban. Master Nu didn’t believe that the Jedi built it, as it didn’t appear in any of our records — but according to this document, that was done on purpose, to keep the location of the Stone a secret. It’s the closest we’ve come to finding any information on either the temple or the artifact.”

“Does it say anything about the origins of this artifact? Who made it, and why?” It was Master Koon who asked the question, the four fingers of his leathery hands steepled together.

“No. We have no idea who actually made the thing — the Jedi, the Sith, someone else.”

Master Yoda grunted, shaking his head as all eyes in the room turned to him. “No, the Sith, this was not. Before their time, this was.”

“So then you think it was the Jedi?” Anakin asked, almost disbelieving. It seemed very unlike the Jedi to construct such a dangerous object, and Anakin couldn’t even begin imagining how it was accomplished.

“It’s a possibility,” Master Windu said. “But we must remember, Knight Skywalker, that if the Jedi did build this Stone, it was the Jedi of a long time ago. The Order then was not the same as it is now.”

Anakin frowned, his forehead creasing. “What do you mean?” he asked.

It was a moment before Windu replied, a tense silence settling over the Council chamber. “The Sith did not yet exist, and the Order didn’t distinguish so strongly between the light and the dark, as we do now. Things were more… grey, and more dangerous.”
“But they were not entirely evil, as the Sith are,” Master Mundi pointed out. “What purpose would such an item serve?”

“It’s true purpose, we know not,” Yoda said.

“It’s possible that they created it for some other reason, and things went awry,” Obi-Wan suggested. “All we know is that it can send people back through time, possibly forward as well, and it can also send them to another location entirely.”

“It has means of protecting itself, as well,” Anakin added. “According to Ben, the Rabani locals told him that the temple doesn’t like visitors. People would enter and reappear outside minutes or hours later, with no recollection of what had occurred within the temple. I’m guessing that’s another aspect of its time-altering abilities.”

“One that could complicate matters,” Obi-Wan said, frowning.

“Well, the artifact allowed Ben and Nellith to find it before,” Master Ti said. “Why wouldn’t it do the same again?”

“Young Ben mentioned a purpose,” Yoda pointed out, “when first we spoke to him. Brought them here for a reason, the Force did. Not ready to send them back, the Stone could be.”

“So they would need to complete this purpose before returning home,” Windu said, contemplatively. He looked to Anakin. “Do they know what this purpose might be?”

Anakin shook his head. “No. They haven’t said anything about it to me, or to Ahsoka.”

“They could be hiding it,” Windu suggested. “Perhaps it has something to do with the war? They seemed very intent on keeping any information they know about the future a secret. Maybe they were sent here to change it.”

“They did say that they were born after the Clone Wars end,” Master Mundi said. “We don’t know when, that is, but we do know that it ends. Perhaps they’re seeking an earlier end to it, or a better one.”

“How could they do that?” Master Kolar demanded. “Especially if they insist on keeping us in the dark about it. They’re two unknowns, who dropped in from the sky — they can’t change the course of a galactic war!”

“You forget the results of Nellith’s midi-chlorian test, which Master Kenobi provided us with,” Master Ti said. Anakin remembered Obi-Wan telling him the results of Nellith’s test, while they were en route to Janus VII to rescue her brother — a count of over fifteen thousand, on par with that of Master Yoda. Master Ti continued, “They are both unusually powerful in the Force. We have no idea what they could be capable of.”

“Do we really think they could change the course of the war?” Master Fisto asked.

A terse silence settled over the room, and Anakin shifted uncomfortably. The implications of Master Fisto’s question were clear — the Jedi could use the Lars twins to bring an end to the Clone Wars, promises to get them back home be damned.

“They’re untrained,” Obi-Wan protested, breaking the silence. “Nellith has never even held a lightsaber before—”

“But Ben has,” Windu interjected, his gaze settling on Anakin. “I’ve heard that he’s actually quite
proficient, despite a lack of formal training.”

“This might not even be what they’re here for!” Obi-Wan said, obviously eager to defend the twins. “The fact is, we don’t know why the Force sent them here, and they probably don’t either. So there’s no point in discussing these hypotheticals.”

Anakin agreed with his former master, though the prospect of a quick end to the war was tempting. But he didn’t think the war was even the reason the twins were in the past, and either way, he didn’t know how pleased they would be with being pressed into service by the Jedi. Nellith, at least, seemed anxious to get home, and had little interest in anything to do with the Force. Which would make it curious if they were truly sent here to change the war; if the Force wanted a different outcome, surely there was an easier way of going about it, than sending a pair of half-trained siblings from the future?

No, Anakin didn’t believe their purpose here had anything to do with the Clone Wars.

“Even if it isn’t their true purpose,” Master Kolar said, “surely we all must see the possibilities? The boy, at least, could be useful; every day the situation grows more desperate. We could use warriors like him in the war effort.”

“So we’ve gone from not trusting Ben with his own lightsaber to recruiting him to fight for us?” Obi-Wan asked, incredulous.

“We are wasting time and resources helping them,” Kolar argued. “Can we not ask for something in return?”

“We cannot ask for them to risk their lives for us in a war that isn’t theirs,” Master Koon said, with a look of solidarity in Obi-Wan’s direction.

Anakin stood in the middle of it all, his hands clenched tightly into fists at his sides. He had wanted to ask the Council for permission to prepare a mission to Raban, to investigate the temple and potentially the artifact as well — but it seemed as if he wouldn’t be getting the chance.

“And if their purpose here is to change the war?” Master Windu asked. His tone was not nearly as angry as Master Kolar’s, sounding more curious than anything. “Would that not make this their war?”

Obi-Wan seemed prepped to rebuke, but fell silent as Master Yoda lowered himself suddenly from his chair onto the ground.

“Enough,” the Grandmaster said, his reedy voice no louder than usual but immediately commanding the attention of the entire room. “Meditate on this, I must. Reconvene later, we will.”

Without another word, he began to make his way across the chamber to the door. The Masters of the Council were silent for a moment, a look passing between them, before those members physically present in the chamber stood, and those attending through hologram flickered out of existence, one by one. Obi-Wan’s eyes met Anakin’s, briefly, before his blue projection disappeared.

Anakin trailed out of the room behind the Masters.

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It was some time before Anakin returned from his meeting with the High Council. Luke had gone
with Ahsoka and Leia to have lunch, and he came and found them in the refectory where they were eating. He joined them at their table, not bothering to grab food of his own, his lips pressed tight together.

“You look like you have bad news,” Ahsoka said, putting down her fork.

“Well, my news isn’t great,” he said. “I was right about the Council not knowing anything about the Stone, and they seemed concerned. I mentioned what you told me, Ben, about the temple supposedly not liking visitors, and suggested that it might be a… defense, of sorts, to keep people from finding it. I was hoping to get permission from the Council to begin planning a mission to Raban, to investigate the temple and see if we can send you two back home, but then we got into a discussion about whether or not you had a reason for being here, and what that might be, and it quickly devolved into an argument.”

“So… you weren’t able to ask about going to Raban?” Leia asked.

Anakin shook his head. “Master Yoda said something about needing to meditate on the matter and adjourned the meeting. He said they’ll reconvene later, but I don’t know if that includes me or not, or if it’ll even happen today.”

“So what do we do now?” Luke could hear the frustration in Leia’s voice; he knew how anxious she was to get things moving. He tried to appear similarly, but deep down, he was pleased with the delay — he was worried that, with the Council’s permission, they would have left tomorrow, before he got to carry out his plan. Now it seemed like he would still have time.

“We wait and see what the Council decides.”

Leia scowled. “Decides what? What our purpose here is? We don’t even know that!”

“Master Yoda is very wise,” Ahsoka said. “I wouldn’t be surprised if he figures it out, or at least comes up with some ideas.”

“The Council is worried that if you haven’t fulfilled your purpose, the Stone won’t let you go back,” Anakin explained. “So if we could figure it out, that would be helpful. If you have any ideas of what it could be—”

“We don’t,” Leia snapped, interrupting him. Luke looked at her, his eyebrows drawn together, but she avoided his gaze.

Anakin was silent for a moment, stunned, before continuing. “I know this a delicate subject, but… do you think it might have anything to do with your father? He’s here now, with the Jedi, isn’t he?”

Leia stood rapidly, the dishes on the table clattering. “It doesn’t have anything to do with him,” she said. Taking a deep breath, she seemed to calm herself, at least somewhat, before continuing, “I’m tired. I’m going to go back to my room to rest for a bit.”

Luke watched her go, concerned, but he didn’t move to follow her. He knew her well enough to know that when she felt this way, she just needed time to be alone.

“I’m sorry,” Anakin apologized, his face twisted into a grimace. “I know your father isn’t an easy subject for her, but I know you’re both anxious to get back home. I figured that if we knew what purpose exactly you had here in the past, it might speed things along, as far as the Council is concerned.”
“Don’t worry about it,” Luke said. “She’ll be alright.”

There was a moment of silence, and Luke awkwardly pushed around the food on his plate.

“Do you agree with her?” Anakin asked eventually. “That it has nothing to do with your father?”

Luke looked up at him, and it was a few seconds before he replied. “I honestly don’t know. I’ve been trying to think of reasons why we were sent here, but I haven’t been able to come up with anything.” The lie felt sour in his mouth, but he couldn’t even begin to conceive of telling the truth, especially to Anakin, of all people. If the Jedi believed him, that Palpatine was a Sith Lord, then they would likely offer their help, and his goal of saving his father and the galaxy would be much more easily reached.

But if they didn’t believe him — and he was inclined to believe that they wouldn’t — then they’d lock him up and his plan would become impossible to carry out.

Anakin looked as if he wanted to press more, but he didn’t. “Well,” he said, “you can think about it some more. And in the meantime, we can get started on those lessons I promised. We have some time to kill, before the Council makes their decision.”

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They didn’t go to the gym, where they had done all their sparring sessions so far. Instead, Anakin led Luke and Ahsoka to a meditation chamber on the ground floor, much like the one in which Luke and Leia had divulged the truth of their identities to Obi-Wan. The shuttered doors which led out into a small, peaceful courtyard were open, and the gentle songs of the birds who lived there drifted into the room.

They spent a moment rearranging the large, plush ottomans that dotted the room, pushing three of them together into a sort of triangle shape. Luke sat in one, crossing his legs as Yoda had taught him to do in meditation, and Anakin and Ahsoka sat before him, side by side. Ahsoka had decided to tag along for some experience in teaching, in preparation for the day where she might have a Padawan of her own to impart lessons upon — that is, if Luke was successful in changing the future.

“We’ll start with the basics,” Anakin said. “Do you know the Jedi Code?”

Luke shook his head, wincing internally at the fact that he didn’t even know something that was considered to be basic knowledge. This experience in the past had taught him just how misinformed he was on many things to do with the Jedi — and yet he had been planning to reignite the Order, a task that seemed laughably impossible now that he was faced head-on with what the Jedi Order truly had been.

“It’s a set of rules,” Anakin explained, seemingly unbothered by the fact that Luke knew so very little. “They teach the Jedi how they should live and behave. There’s a mantra, which sort of envelops the main aspects of the Code: There is no emotion, there is peace. There is no ignorance, there is knowledge. There is no passion, there is serenity. There is no chaos, there is harmony. There is no death, there is the Force.”

Luke listened carefully, trying to commit the mantra to memory. “So… the Code teaches against emotion and passion?”

“It teaches to not give in to anger, or fear. We are forbidden from forming attachments, as such attachments often lead to the fear of loss, and then anger, and then the dark side.”
Luke remembered, with some embarrassment, his duel with Darth Vader on the second Death Star. He had given in to anger, then, and fear — fear that he would lose Leia. It was his love for his sister that had nearly driven him to the dark side, to killing his father.

But it was his love for his father that had brought him back. And while it was Anakin’s love for his wife that caused him to turn to the dark side, it was his love for his son that had turned him back to the light, even after so many years.

“Then love is forbidden?” he asked.

“We are taught to be compassionate towards all living things,” Anakin said, “so in a way, we are encouraged to love.”

“But only so long as that love isn’t directed at one single being?”

Anakin was silent for a moment, before nodding. “Yes, I suppose that’s right.”

“So the Jedi believe that attachment leads to fear and anger,” Luke said, still trying to puzzle the lesson out, “and fear and anger lead to the dark side. But love can cause people to do great things, as well. That isn’t worth the risk?”

Anakin shook his head. “Not for the Jedi. The lure of the dark side is powerful, and it can be difficult for many to resist. Attachment, trying to protect the ones you love, can make that lure even more powerful.” He paused for a moment, letting out a deep breath. “Not everyone can follow the rule against attachment, and so some leave — like your father. He left to be with your mother, didn’t he?”

Luke nodded, and something about his face must have shown more of his thoughts, because Anakin asked, “You don’t agree with this rule?”

“I’m… not sure,” Luke admitted. “I agree that attachments can be dangerous, but they can also be forces for good. To ignore that side of them out of fear seems… unwise.”

It was a moment before Anakin seemed ready to reply, but just as he started to do so, the door to the meditation room whirred open. A Temple guard stood on the other side and behind them, to Luke’s surprise, was Leia.

“Apologies for interrupting,” the guard said, her voice muffled by the expressionless mask she wore. “Master Yoda has asked to speak with Ben and Nellith Lars.”

Luke looked from the guard to Anakin, and rose from his seat. Anakin moved to do the same, but the guard held out her hand, stopping him. “He wishes to speak to them alone,” she explained.

Anakin settled back onto his seat, and Luke went to join his sister out in the hallway.

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The guard brought them to a room not too far away, in a more secluded part of the Temple. She pressed the control pad to open the door and then stepped aside, allowing them to enter alone. Once they were across the threshold, she allowed it to close behind them.

The room was very similar to the other meditation chambers in the Temple that Leia had been to, though it was much smaller, with only enough room for three ottomans. The shutters along the far wall were mostly closed, letting in only thin slats of light.
Master Yoda sat in the centre of the room, on one of the ottomans. His small legs were crossed underneath him, and his eyes were closed. He didn’t stir as she and Luke stepped further into the room.

“Master Yoda,” Luke said, after a few seconds had passed.

The ancient creature in front of them took in a deep breath through his nose, and finally opened his eyes. “Ben, Nellith,” he greeted, in his strange, creaky voice. “Sit.” He motioned with one three-clawed hand to the other two ottomans in the room, positioned beside each other.

As Luke sat down, he crossed his legs, like a Jedi about to enter meditation. Leia simply curled her legs up beneath herself, her hands in her lap. There was a beat of silence, in which no one said anything; Yoda looked at them, and Leia felt as if his gaze was penetrating deep within her.

“Difficult to see, the future is,” he said eventually, his gaze softening. “Even more difficult to understand, even for those who know it well.”

“The future is always in motion,” Luke said, repeating what he had told Leia the night before.

Yoda’s expression changed, almost imperceptibly, and he regarded Luke silently for a moment before grunting and nodding. “Changed things, your presence here has,” he said, “even if you do not know it. A reason for being here, you think you have.”

Luke nodded. “Yes. But we don’t know what.”

“Because of the war, some on the Council believe. Or because of what comes after?” He paused, and his eyes met Leia’s directly, staring at them for a moment, before looking away, towards Luke. “Dark things, you both have seen — terrible things. Filled with sadness, you both are. Wish to stop these things, you do?”

Leia started to shake her head, but Luke leaned forward, obviously eager. “Do you think we can?” he asked. “If we could do something that would change what we know happens, do you think it would work?”

“Know this, no one can,” Yoda said, his expression transforming into one of grave seriousness. “Careful, you must be. Difficult to know, the will of the Force is. Want you here, it does — but for what reasons?”

“Do you know why?” Leia asked.

Yoda hummed quietly. “Knowledge is as important as action. Learn here, you will — about others, and about yourselves.”

Leia frowned, glancing sideways at Luke; the expression on his face was one of confusion and curiosity.

“You speak as if you already know what we have to learn,” he said. “Do you know who we are — who our father is?”

Yoda looked at them, his lips twitching in a small, barely-noticeable smile. After a moment, he spoke, “Go and speak to the Council now, I must. Much to discuss, we have.” Slowly, he eased himself off the ottoman, grabbing his cane from where it had been resting beside him.

Making his way across the room, he paused by the door, turning back and looking directly at Luke. “Good to see you, it has been,” he said, before hobbling out into the hallway. The door closed.
behind him.

Leia looked at Luke, who still wore that curious expression on his face. “Well, he’s as straightforward as ever,” he said sarcastically. Leia scoffed.

“That’s certainly one way to put it.”
The Council reveals their decision, and Luke sets his plan in motion.

It was mid-morning the next day by the time they heard back from the Council.

Leia was in her room, sitting at the desk, when there was a knock on the door. Luke, as usual, had left early that morning to go spar with Anakin and Ahsoka. Leia herself had only just finished getting ready for the day, having woken up much later than was usual for her; the stress of the past week seemed to have finally caught up to her, knocking out all her energy. But with nothing to do but wait for the Council’s decision, she had allowed herself that small indulgence. The knock sounded just as she was settling in to do a quick exploration into the HoloNet News, ostensibly as a way to pass the time until Luke was done with his lesson, but also because of pure curiosity — the news would capture many of the day-to-day goings-on of a government and galaxy at war that were often missed in history lectures.

But it would seem as if that would have to wait. She assumed the knocking on the door was Ahsoka, or perhaps another Temple guard, like the one who had come to fetch her the afternoon before, to bring her to speak with Master Yoda. She was slightly caught off guard, then, to find Anakin standing outside of her door, alone.

“Knight Skywalker,” she said, taking a small step back as the door opened.

He inclined his head, just slightly. “Nellith. The Council has informed us that they’ve made their decision, and has asked to speak with you and Ben. I’ve come to escort you to the Council chamber.”

“Where’s Ben?” Leia asked, hoping he might miraculously materialize beside her. The thought of being alone with Anakin, if only for long enough to walk to the Council chamber, caused a feeling of dread to coil in her stomach.

“He’s already on his way with Ahsoka,” Anakin said. He stepped out of the doorway, motioning further down the hallway. “We should get going; we don’t want to be late.”

Leia nodded, her throat tight, and stepped out into the corridor, allowing the door to her room to close behind her. Anakin started off, allowing Leia to fall into step beside him as they walked. They were silent, and Leia’s fingers moved anxiously at her side as they made their way down the hallway. She hoped that Anakin would be quiet the entire way, and she wouldn’t have to try and make conversation with him. But when they reached the turbolifts at the end of the residential quarters, he pressed the call button and turned to look at her, intent clear on his face.

“I wanted to apologize,” he began, “for upsetting you yesterday by bringing up your father. I know it’s not an easy subject; Ben told me about your… complicated relationship. I shouldn’t have asked about him.”

Leia was caught off guard by the sincere apology, and it took her a moment to reply. “I… thank you. I’m sorry if I’ve been… rude.”
Anakin shook his head. “It’s alright. I didn’t have a father, and I doubt I’ll ever be one myself, but I can understand how hard forgiveness can be.” The turbolift arrived, and they stepped into it together, Anakin pressing the button to take them trundling upwards. “The Jedi believe strongly in forgiveness,” he continued, after a moment. “Revenge is not our way. But even without seeking revenge, some things are too difficult to forgive.”

“I would take revenge if I could,” Leia said, avoiding looking directly at Anakin. She had thought about killing Vader before, as a way to try and get out some of the roiling anger she often felt towards him. The Emperor had gotten there before she could, and though now it might seem as if she had gotten her chance, if she really wanted it, with Anakin Skywalker standing right beside her, she couldn’t take it — not only because if she killed him at this point in his life, she would also kill herself, but also because she didn’t know if she could bring herself to do it. As difficult as it was for her to be near him, she had to accept one intrinsic truth — Anakin Skywalker was not Darth Vader. Not yet.

“Well, then I suppose it’s a good thing you aren’t a Jedi,” Anakin said. “But you have to be careful not to hold onto your anger. I may not know much about fathers, but I do know about anger. You can’t let it control you. You’ll only end up losing yourself.”

Leia didn’t know whether those words carried more or less weight, knowing they were being spoken by the man who would one day become Darth Vader. But she could hear the ring of truth within them.

The turbolift slowed to a stop, and they both stepped out into another corridor. They had a bit more walking and another lift ride before they reached the chambers of the High Council, but they were both silent for the rest of the way.

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“We have decided to grant permission for you to go to Raban and investigate the temple there,” Mace Windu said, looking between each of the four people gathered at the centre of the Council chamber, “and, if possible, for you to attempt to return Ben and Nellith Lars to their own time.”

Anakin felt himself visibly relax at the news. He hadn’t been present while the Council discussed what should be done, and though he didn’t really think they would decide to keep Ben and Nellith in the past, it had still worried him. It was difficult these days, with the war as it was, to guess what the Council might do. But, thankfully, they had decided otherwise.

“Thank you, Masters,” Anakin said, bowing his head. Beside him, Ben and Nellith each did a quick imitation, giving their own thanks.

“Careful, you must be,” Yoda said. “Dangerous, this artifact is. Unknown, its potential is.”

Anakin nodded. “We understand.”

“The sooner this is done, the better,” Master Windu said, his expression taking on the same slight grimace it usually did when he was around Anakin. “I suggest you begin preparations immediately.”

“We’ll start right away. With luck, we’ll be able to leave tomorrow.”

Nellith brightened at this. She had seemed tense on their walk to the chamber, and though he was sure part of it had to do with her situation, Anakin was almost certain that some of it was caused by him. And while he admitted he had been a bit callous, mentioning her father to her so flippantly, he
wasn’t sure it deserved this sort of reaction. Not that it mattered much — soon enough, and with luck, she would be back in her own time.

Windu nodded. “Good. You are dismissed — except for you, Knight Skywalker. We would like to speak with you a bit longer.”

There was a moment of hesitation before Ben, Nellith, and Ahsoka turned and began to trickle from the room. Anakin remained standing where he was, his arms tucked together. He glanced over his shoulder to watch his three companions recede, his gaze meeting Ahsoka’s right before she walked out the door. Her forehead was creased in confusion, and he gave her a small smile of reassurance, right before she disappeared.

“We want to speak with you about the Stone,” Windu said, once the door had closed behind the dismissed trio.

“What about it?” Anakin asked, his smile slipping into a frown. “I don’t really know much—”

“When you arrive at the temple on Raban,” Master Kolar said, interrupting him, “we want you to try and retrieve it.”

“The Stone?”

The Zabrak nodded.

“We’ve decided that it’s too dangerous to leave it unattended,” Windu explained. “Ben and Nellith found it, and there’s no saying if anyone else will, too.”

“But… if we remove it from the temple, it won’t be there in the future for Ben and Nellith to find,” Anakin argued. “They’ll never come to the past, and we won’t learn about the Stone’s existence.”

“That doesn’t matter,” Windu said. “You’re to try and retrieve it, by any means necessary. We can deal with any repercussions or paradoxes later, but getting it is the first step.”

“Why not just send someone to guard it?” Anakin asked. “Is it so important that we have it, no matter the consequences?”

“We can’t spare anyone for such a task,” Master Kolar said. “Need I remind you that we’re in the middle of a war?”

Anakin nodded, his mouth pressed tight together. The reminder told him more than just why the Jedi couldn’t spare personnel to guard the Stone — the war was likely also likely the reason they wanted it. Things were growing desperate, and with the potential to control time at their fingertips… there was no saying what could be accomplished.

“I understand,” he said, apprehension tight in his stomach. “I’m just worried that it might be difficult to not only retrieve but also transport such an artifact. We have no idea what it’s capable of, or what might happen if we remove it from the temple. It’s been there for thousands of years.”

“Do what you can,” Windu said. “Tell Padawan Tano about this, but don’t mention it to the Lars twins. We can’t trust them not to interfere.”

Anakin nodded again, just once. He felt uneasy about the entire situation, but he knew it would be pointless to try and argue with the Council. He had hoped that Master Yoda, Obi-Wan, anyone, would try and dissuade such a course of action, but it was likely that they, too, were growing desperate for an upper hand in the war, or were simply outnumbered. Either way, the Council
seemed to have made up their minds about this — or at least, Windu and Kolar had, and Anakin knew that Master Windu was already not very fond of him.

“That’s all,” Windu said. “You’re dismissed.”

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Luke woke long before the sun.

They had stayed up late the night before, planning the details for the trip to Raban. Though that meant that Luke had only gotten a few hours of sleep by the time he woke, he wasn’t tired — he was far too focused for that.

He got out of bed and dressed as quietly as he could, not even turning on the bedroom light, lest it alert Leia. He had expected to feel nervous, but he didn’t. A strange calm had settled over him, much like it had when he had turned himself in to Vader before the Battle of Endor. There was a task to be done, and he was going to complete it. He trusted in the Force to see him through.

He dressed simply in the cotton shirt and jacket that the Jedi had given him. Once clothed, he crept silently into the corridor, using the Force to slow the door as it closed behind him, silencing its hum. He recalled the path he had taken to the gym, only a few mornings ago; it had been early then, as it was now, and the way had been devoid of Temple guards who might question what he was doing wandering about at such an unusual hour.

Now, as then, the path was unguarded. He didn’t lose his way once, and arrived at the gym several minutes after he had left. The lights came on automatically as he entered, illuminating the great room devoid of any other beings. He moved quickly, going to the shelves that housed the training lightsabers and retrieving the one that he had been using during his sessions with Anakin and Ahsoka. Tucking it into his jacket, he made his way back out into the corridor.

While this part of the Temple was, for the moment, unguarded, the rest might not be so. He moved slowly and quietly as he made his way down the hallway towards the stairs. Every corner he approached, he reached his senses out ahead of himself, trying to determine if there was anyone just ahead; for a good long while, there wasn’t, and he made his way unaccosted.

He opted for the stairs, thinking them less conspicuous than a turbolift. He wasn’t going all the way to the bottom floor, but still, the Temple was large and the gym was high enough that it took him a good while to make his way carefully down. Every few flights he paused, taking a moment to study his surroundings and make sure he wasn’t about to come across a patrolling group of Temple guards. It was only as he reaching the last flight of stairs that he sensed anyone.

Two beings, walking leisurely down the hallway just below him, in his direction. The staircase was open, loping past each level it crossed as it spiralled downwards. Luke retreated a few steps, crouching and hiding himself in the shadows, so that he was obscured from view but still able to see a small section of the corridor below. He focused his attention on shrouding his presence in the Force, lest the two beings sense him. Doing so made it difficult for him to sense them, but after only a moment he could hear their footsteps, echoing in the vast emptiness of the Temple.

They came into view shortly after, revealing themselves to, rather expectantly, be Temple guards, their lightsaber pikes extinguished but held at the ready in both hands. Luke pressed himself further into the shadows, if that was even possible, and, closing his eyes, threw up and reinforced every shield he had ever put in place, protecting himself in the Force.

So focused was he on this, that he didn’t sense the person creeping up behind him, not until their
hand was on his shoulder. Jumping, he turned to face his assailant, expecting to be met by the expressionless white mask of a Temple guard. Instead, he found himself facing his twin sister, her eyebrows raised in a suspicious look above her dark eyes.

“Leia.” The name came out in a whisper, to prevent the now-retreating guards from overhearing. “What are you doing here?”

“What are you doing here?” Leia asked, letting her hand fall from his shoulder and standing from the crouch she had dropped into. “Sneaking around the Temple, avoiding guards?”

“I wasn’t sneaking around,” Luke argued, though he most definitely had been.

“You were trying to find a way out,” Leia said. “You have a plan, don’t you? To go kill Palpatine?”

He silently cursed the fact that she was able to read him so simply; it often worked to their collective advantage, but not in this particular situation.

“For your information, I already know a way out. And I’m still going to take it. But I’m not going to kill Palpatine.” Even as he said, he knew she would never believe it. Lying had never been a strong skill of his, even more so when it came to lying to Leia; she could read him like an unlocked datapad, even when most people couldn’t.

“Really? Then where are you going? You obviously don’t want the Jedi to know, wherever it is.”

“There’s an event, at the Senate Plaza, happening later this morning,” Luke explained. “It’s some sort of ceremony, about some natural disaster that happened recently. Our… our mother is going to be there.”

The lie came quickly, in part because it was only a half-lie. He had known that Padmé Amidala was going to be attending the ceremony from the moment he had first learned about it; he had discovered it while searching the HoloNet News for mentions of her. The entire time that he had been planning, he had also been preparing himself for the moment that he would see his mother, in person, for the first time in his life. He knew that, if things went as he wanted them to, he wouldn’t have a chance to actually meet and speak with her, giving up his one chance to get to know a bit of the woman his mother had been. But the chance to stop Palpatine was even more valuable; he could be selfless, and give up this one thing, to try and make the galaxy better.

“You’re going to see her,” Leia said.

“I’m going to try to,” Luke replied. “I didn’t really think I could convince the Jedi to allow me to go without telling them the truth, hence the sneaking.”

“And if you get caught?”

“I’m going to try my best not to.”

Leia was silent for a moment. The guards had disappeared, and Luke knew he had only a small window to get where he was going, lest they go for another round, or any of their colleagues appear. Thankfully, Leia didn’t seem to need long to decide whatever it was she had been thinking over.

“I’m coming with you.”

“You don’t need to—” Luke started, but Leia cut him off.
“I want to,” she said. “She’s my mother, too.” Though she didn’t say it out loud, Luke could understand the message implicit in her words that she didn’t trust him — not when it came to this. And he couldn’t refuse her without raising her suspicions more and likely causing her to keep him from going altogether, by whatever means.

So he simply nodded, and stood. “Then let’s go. We have to be quick.”

He descended the rest of the stairs into the corridor below, Leia following close behind him. It wasn’t the ground floor, but the one above it. He stayed close to the walls as he moved along the hallway, making his way to the back of the Temple. The main lights hanging high above them in the ceiling were off, the only illumination coming from the bright city lights shining through the numerous windows lining the corridor. He could hear Leia’s footsteps behind him, and though they were quiet, they seemed almost thunderous, echoing in the vast empty space.

They reached the back of the Temple quickly. The hallway curved to continue on, but Luke didn’t turn, going instead to the tall window laid into the wall. It looked out over the Temple’s back entrance, not nearly so grand as the entry hall at the front of the Temple. Due to the height of the ceilings on the ground floor, they were still quite high up, but the exterior wall had a slight slope to it before dropping onto a wide ledge that wound its way around the entire Temple. Outside, darkness still hung over Coruscant.

The window was easy enough to open; it had to be done manually, a testament to its ancientness, but all it involved was the turning of a latch and a push against the pane and it swung open. He stuck his head out, gauging the distance to the ground. Immediately beneath the window the wall was sheer, before sloping out slightly and ending at the ledge. From this angle, it was impossible to see how far it was from the top of the ledge to the ground.

He retreated back inside, turning to look at Leia. She had an uncertain expression on her face, mixed with a good amount of incredulity.

“You can’t be serious,” she said, having obviously deduced what his plan was.

“Both the entrances will be guarded,” Luke explained. “There might be others, but I don’t know where they are, and they might very well be guarded too. And it’s not that high up.”

Leia moved past him, poking her head out the window and surveying the situation for a moment. “So we’re just supposed to slide down this wall, jump off that ledge, and hope we don’t hurt ourselves?”

“Of course not,” Luke said. “We’re going to slide down this wall, jump off that ledge, and use the Force to cushion ourselves.”

She pulled her head back inside. “Well maybe you can do that, but I can’t.”

“It’s easy enough. As you’re falling, just pull the Force around you; imagine it slowing you down and protecting you, like a bubble.”

“I’m not sure I want to risk my life with that.”

“I’ll go first, onto the ledge” Luke suggested. “Then you come, and I’ll jump down onto the ground and help you down.”

Leia took a moment to consider and, seeing no other option, nodded. “Alright. Let’s do it.” She stepped to the side, gesturing him towards the open window. “Into the garbage chute, flyboy.”
It took him a moment to recognize the phrase, and as he did, he grinned. “Hopefully it smells better at the bottom.”

The window was big enough for him to fit easily through. He went feet-first, hoisting himself out onto the exterior window ledge and crouching there for a moment before dropping down. He drew the Force around him as he fell, using it to cushion himself as he hit the slope of the wall and slid down it, landing on his feet on the ledge. He looked back up, gesturing for Leia to come down.

She climbed out the window onto the ledge and, with a nod from Luke, jumped. He reached out, guiding her gently down the sloped wall, until she came to a rest on the ledge beside him.

“Not so bad, huh?” he asked.

“I think that was the easy part,” she said, peering over the edge to the ground below. It was much higher than the window had been, and was a straight drop down a good dozen metres or so.

“We can do it,” Luke said. “I’ll go first, and then—”

“No.” Leia shook her head. “Let’s go together.”

Luke looked at her, eyebrows raised. “What, you don’t trust me?”

She smiled and grabbed his hand. “Of course I do.”

He realized he wouldn’t be able to convince her otherwise, and so he nodded. “Alright. But I might not be able to help you out as much if I have to look after myself, too.”

Leia nodded, casting another glance over the side of the ledge. “I think I can handle it.”

“Then let’s go.”

He counted down from three, and on one, they both leapt over the side, their hands still clasped together. As they fell, Luke reached for the Force, pulling it around himself like a shield and extending that shield over around Leia. He could sense her doing the same, and focused on strengthening both shields, so that when they reached the ground, several seconds later, they both landed gently.

“See?” she said. “I told you I could handle it.”

“I never doubted you for a minute,” Luke said, casting a quick glance around. The Temple stood in the centre of a large, bare platform, which was surrounded by the tightly-packed buildings typical of Coruscant’s surface level. As it was, it left them horribly exposed. “Come on, we have to go.”

They took off at a quick jog, crossing over to the edge of the platform. It was disconnected from the other buildings by a wide gap, which in the darkness seemed to have no bottom. While Coruscant was a planet where most people got around by speeder rather than by foot, Luke knew from studying maps of the Temple district that if they could make it onto the roof of the building resting just beyond the gap, then beyond it there would be a footpath. And somewhere along that footpath he was sure they could find somewhere to call an air taxi to take them far away.

“So what’s the plan now?” Leia asked, surveying the gap. “More jumping?”

“Yep. Hold on.” Grabbing her around the waist and pulling her tight, Luke waited until she had wrapped her arms around his shoulders, grumbling something unhappily beneath her breath, before leaping. He used the Force to propel his jump, letting it carry them up over the gap and onto the
roof of the adjacent building. They didn’t even pause to catch their breath before they were hurrying across the roof and, as they had off the Temple ledge, jumping together from the roof onto the footpath below.

“And where do we go now?” Leia asked.

“We find an air taxi, and we go somewhere inconspicuous,” Luke explained. “In a few hours, the Jedi will be looking for us, and the event doesn’t start until later this morning. We need somewhere to wait until then, where the Jedi won’t find us.”

“I think I know a place we can go,” Leia said.

The place she alluded to was a diner in a part of Coruscant known as CoCo Town, a dilapidated industrial district full of factories and haggard-looking workers. The diner was seedy, with stained seating and marked tables, but it certainly wasn’t the most disreputable place Leia had ever been, nor Luke. But as they sat down at a small, chipped table, Luke raised his eyebrows at her, obviously wondering how she knew about such a place.

“I used to send my aides here to meet with informants, when I was still in the Imperial Senate,” Leia explained, saving him the trouble of actually asking. “The owner was a Rebel sympathiser. I never came here myself.”

“Well, it definitely seems like the kind of place the Jedi wouldn’t know about,” Luke said.

It was still very early in the morning, but the diner was never closed, serving workers going to and coming from shifts that started and ended at all hours. The waitress droid came by to take their order, and they both ordered some food; Luke requested a cup of caf, but Leia stuck to tea.

Of course, neither of them had arrived in this time with money that would be legal tender here. Leia, however, had been wearing a pair of gold earrings inlaid with nova crystal; they had been a gift from Han only a few weeks ago, to help her rebuild her Senatorial wardrobe, all of which had been lost during the war. She had been wearing them the morning she felt Luke disappear, and hadn’t taken them off since. And it was a good thing too — she had been able to sell them to a pawnshop in one of Coruscant’s wealthier districts, receiving a hefty sum for them directly in credits. They’d used the money to buy nicer clothes, now in bags beside them, to allow them to more easily get in touch with Padmé Amidala. Leia knew the Senate, and you couldn’t get too close to a Senator for too long dressed the way they were.

She waited until the drinks had arrived before speaking again. The tea wasn’t the best, but the morning air had been cold and the hot drink was a comfort. “So,” she began, holding the mug in both hands, letting it warm her from the inside and the out, “what’s your plan to meet her? This is a public event, but they won’t let just anyone close to a Senator, especially not with the war.”

She didn’t believe him when he said that his goal was just to meet their mother. She knew how intent he was on trying to fix the galaxy, and on saving Anakin. He wouldn’t give it up so easily. She didn’t know if Palpatine was going to be at this event or not, but if he was, his presence would be all the confirmation she would need about Luke’s real reason for being there. And if he wanted to continue as originally planned and try to take out Palpatine, she would have to stop him.

It wasn’t that she didn’t want to stop the Empire — she had more reason than anyone to want to stop them before they even rose. But the risk, to her, was too great, and not worth it. By killing Palpatine and changing history so drastically, there was no telling what they could lose — their
lives, their friends. Han. Leia just couldn’t find it in herself to do it.

“There’s going to be a reception afterwards,” Luke said, “held in the Senate Building, for a few invited guests. Politicians, businessmen, other such important people. I figured it would be easy enough to find my way in. Padmé is one of the main organizers of the event, so she’ll almost certainly be there. I didn’t think I’d be able to talk to her for long, but even if it’s just for a couple of minutes, or a few seconds… that’s enough.”

Leia nodded. He sounded genuine enough, and she thought that maybe part of his plan did involve getting to meet Padmé, even if that wasn’t the main reason. “Well, it might be easier with me. I know the Senate and galactic politics; I might be able to come up with a lie that will get us a longer conversation with her.”


Leia could have pressed the issue further; they had already had the discussion about how she didn’t mind learning about their mother, not as much as she did with their father. But she knew their mother wasn’t the real reason behind this excursion, and so she let it pass with a smile.

“It’s alright,” she said. “I understand.”

Even if she didn’t.
Senator Amidala

Chapter Summary

Luke and Leia meet their mother.

They arrived at Senate Plaza shortly before the event was due to begin. It wasn’t expected to be particularly well-attended — there weren’t many who cared about forest fires on Galidraan, when the galaxy was in the middle of a war. Still, a sizeable crowd had already gathered, filling up a large portion of the plaza. Some of the more important guests had been provided chairs, set up near the stage, and a somewhat restless group of people lingered behind them. Luke knew little about the customs of Galidraan, but from the similarity in their dress, he assumed most of the people there were Galidraanian ex-patriots. Guards stood near the stage, but they wore a uniform unfamiliar to him, one that he guessed meant that they were Senatorial guards of some sort. There were, thankfully, no signs of any Jedi.

The large raised disk of the Senate Building loomed before them, casting a shadow over the last-minute preparations taking place on the stage. Luke had seen the building at a distance from within the Temple, but it was much more impressive up close. Of course, it had to be large enough to hold the representatives of every member planet of the Republic, and it was hard to appreciate the scale of that until presented with it face-on. Several giant statues lined a wide walkway that made its way to the building, and beyond the statues, dozens of colourful flags flew from tall flagpoles. Luke wasn’t sure of their meaning; there weren’t enough for them to be the flags of the Republic planets.

“Does it look much different?” he asked Leia quietly, leaning towards her. They were both dressed in the clothes purchased with the money received from Leia’s earrings, their old outfits stored in a short-term locker at a somewhat-disreputable storage facility back in CoCo Town. Leia wore a loose silver dress with wide sleeves, simple but refined, with jewelry that was cheap but looked expensive. He had on a high-collared dark blue shirt, matching pants, and a long, steel-grey vest, with his own black boots. It was, he figured, a pretty decent look.

“Not too much,” she replied. “The building itself is the exact same, and the statues were left as they are. Of course, the plaza was renamed Imperial Plaza. All of the flags here were replaced with the Imperial flag, and a giant statue of Palpatine was erected, right up there.” She pointed to the end of the walkway, where the stage now stood. “It was torn down, after Endor.”

Though they stood near the back of the crowd, they had a good enough view of the stage. Cam droids flitted about in the air, preparing to capture the beginning of the speeches, and a pair of amplifier droids could be seen resting on the stage, waiting to begin. They didn’t have long to wait; only a few minutes after Luke and Leia had arrived, a group of people filed onto the stage, most of them taking up the seats that had been placed there for them.

They were all dressed extravagantly, in beautiful fabrics and fanciful robes. Palpatine was not among them, and for a moment Luke’s heart lurched — had there been a change of plans? Was he not going to make an appearance?

But then he caught sight of Padmé Amidala, walking onto the stage with her colleagues, and he forgot all about Palpatine. His mother wore a dress of deep green velvet, the skirt embroidered with
gold designs that were difficult to see clearly at such a distance. Her brown hair was curled and piled onto her head in a complicated up-do, and though she was far away, Luke felt as if he could see every detail of her face perfectly.

She walked to the centre of the stage, the amplifier droids rising to hover in front of her. The crowd, which until then had been murmuring quietly, grew completely silent. The cam droids focused in on Padmé and, hands poised at her sides, she began to speak.

“Fellow Senators,” she greeted, looking out into the crowd, “Galidraanians, friends. Thank you for coming to this important event. In the midst of war, unrelated disasters such as the one currently affecting Galidraan are often forgotten. People are left to needlessly suffer, in ways that hurt not only them and their planet, but the Republic and the galaxy as a whole. But today, we hope to take a step towards rectifying that.”

She continued speaking, but Luke lost track of her words, absorbed only in listening to the sound of her voice. It was soft, but firm and commanding, with an underlying kindness that made it not unlike Leia’s. He knew from pictures of her that she was beautiful, and it was even more obvious in person, even from such a distance.

“You look like her,” Leia whispered, leaning towards him. He looked down at her in surprise, and she smiled, her gaze focused on their mother. “You have her face shape and mouth, and I think you might have had her nose, too, before yours got broken.”

Unconsciously, Luke reached up and touched his crooked nose, made so during his run-in with the wampa on Hoth. He had often wondered when he was young where he had gotten certain features of his from; Aunt Beru had told him some superficial resemblances he had to his father, such as his blue eyes and fair hair, but she hadn’t known him nor Padmé well enough to give more detail than that. To get those details now was exhilarating, and strange — he had his father’s chin, and his mother’s mouth.

“You have her colouring,” he told Leia. “And her height.”

The smile remained on Leia’s face, but he could see her tense up a bit. He remembered what Obi-Wan had told her, about her looking like Anakin; that must be what she was thinking of now, how if he looked more like their mother, she looked more like their father. But after a moment she seemed to shake it off, the smile widening a bit. “I think I’m a bit shorter than she is,” she said. “There must be someone else quite short somewhere in the family tree.”

As they were whispering to each other, Padmé began finishing her speech. She had only spoken for a few minutes, simply to introduce the event, and as she stepped away from the front of the stage, she called one of her colleagues forward, an older woman who was the senator for the Thanium sector, where Galidraan was located. Padmé took up one of the empty seats at the back of the stage. There was still no sign of Palpatine.

Luke didn’t listen to what the Thanium sector senator had to say, placing all his attention on his mother instead. He watched how her face changed as she listened, how she sat, how her hands moved, clasped together in her lap. Every detail of her was one he never wanted to forget, as he tried to suck up a lifetime’s worth of information in as little time as possible.

After the Thanium senator, the senator for Commenor stood and gave a somewhat long-winded speech. He was a younger man, with slicked-back black hair and a booming voice. As he carried on, and the Chancellor still didn’t appear, Luke became distracted from his observations of Padmé by the worry that Palpatine wasn’t going to show. What then? The plan was for them to leave for Raban the next day; this was his only real chance to try and stop Palpatine and, with him, the
Empire.

But as the Commenorian senator finally drew his speech to a close, he stretched his arm out to the side of the stage, and announced, “And now, to offer his support, please welcome the most esteemed Chancellor Sheev Palpatine.”

The crowd erupted into loud claps, joined by the senators on stage, as Palpatine ascended the stairs to the right of the stage, seeming to appear from nowhere. Both Luke and Leia remained still and silent as he took his place in front of the amplifier droids. A pair of red-clad bodyguards remained at the bottom of the stairs, reminiscent of the crimson warriors who had been present in the throne room on the Death Star II. Palpatine himself, however, was wholly different.

The man who stood in the centre of the stage smiled and waved warmly at the applauding crowd, his head uncoiled to reveal neatly groomed, if thinning, grey hair and a kind, slightly-wrinkled face. He looked much like the man who had been shown in Imperial propaganda and news programs, hiding the fact that the true Emperor was decrepit and horribly disfigured. But whatever accident or evil had led to that disfigurement, it had yet to happen now.

“Thank you, Senator Kurn,” Palpatine said, “and thank you all, for coming to this important event.” Even his voice was different — instead of the reedy, strained tones that had taunted Luke on the Death Star, it was warm and full, the voice of a trusted authority figure. He continued, “As Senator Amidala so wisely put it, it is of utmost importance that we not let these tragic events fall to the wayside — not despite of the war, but because of it. In these troubled times, it is all the more important that we remember the true purpose and meaning of the Republic: standing together, for the betterment of all.”

He continued on for several minutes, but Luke didn’t pay any more attention; he didn’t care for anything this man had to say. Instead, he merely watched Palpatine, trying to figure him out. He knew from experience that he was a powerful Sith Lord with skills that could not have been learned except over a very long period, with dedicated training. He had already been powerful by the time the Empire rose from the ashes of the Clone Wars, meaning he must have spent most of his life learning the dark side of the Force — yet the Jedi knew nothing of these skills, despite working rather close to Palpatine ever since his election as Chancellor over a decade ago. No one, not even Master Yoda, had sensed the darkness in him.

Luke didn’t dare probe too deep around Palpatine, lest he alert the Chancellor to his presence. Still, he could feel something just slightly off about him — the voice was too warm, the smile too inviting, and the smallest amount of cold emanated from him, like a breeze just barely too cool. But Luke didn’t know if he was sensing these things because they were truly there to be felt, or because he simply knew they should be. Was Palpatine truly that skilled, as to hide the truth of his being even from someone who knew it to the absolute fullest extent, as Luke did?

For a long time now Luke had wondered how the Jedi could have allowed Darth Sidious to come to power. He had thought it was largely because the Jedi Order hadn’t known to look for darkness in Palpatine, and so they had never found any. But Luke knew it was there, and he could find only the barest of hints — if they were even there at all.

Palpatine’s speech ended a short while later, and he descended from the stage. It didn’t seem as if he was going to stick around for the rest of the event; Luke could see him making his way away from the stage, flanked by his crimson-robed guards. Luke had figured this was what was going to happen — Palpatine was a busy man, too busy to spend much time at admittedly unimportant events such as this. He likely wouldn’t be at the reception afterwards either. Luke’s original plan had been, at this point, to discreetly follow Palpatine and take him out whenever the opportunity
arose. Though he’d had to alter it with Leia’s appearance, he was still confident, even with Palpatine walking away. He had an idea of where the Chancellor might be going.

He glanced down at his sister; she was staring straight ahead, her jaw clenched. She said nothing to him, but he realized, seeing the anger burning behind her eyes, that she knew. She knew what he meant to do. He looked away quickly.

She didn’t say anything until the event was over. It wrapped up shortly after Palpatine’s departure, with the various senators making pleas for people to donate whatever they could and raise awareness about the plight of Galidraan and other planets suffering similar disasters. The senators descended slowly from the stage, spending a few minutes approaching and speaking with some members of the crowd. Most of the public began to disperse, trailing from the Plaza. They moved around Luke and Leia like a stream around a rock; Leia made no moves to leave, and neither did Luke. They remained where they were, as the Plaza drained slowly around them.

As the senators and the more important guests turned and began to walk towards the Senate Building for the reception, Leia finally spoke, though she still didn’t look at him. “You lied to me,” she said, her voice cold.


“I knew this wasn’t just about our mother. I knew you hadn’t given up on getting Palpatine.”

“I never said I would.”

She finally looked at him, her expression a glare so sharp that he took a step back. “You still lied to me, when you told me that you were sneaking out just to see our mother.” She shook her head, laughing weakly. “I knew you were lying, then — you can’t lie to me, not very well. But I still hoped that maybe it wasn’t true. But obviously not, if Palpatine was here. You came for him.”

“It wasn’t just about him, Leia,” Luke explained. “I really did want to see our mother. Palpatine’s not even going to be at the reception—“

“You know I can’t let you do this,” she said.

He still didn’t entirely understand why she felt that way, but he knew well by now that he wouldn’t be able to change her mind, and so he simply nodded. “I’m still going to meet our mother,” he said. “I’m not going to let you stop me from doing that.”

She was silent for a moment, before nodding, seeming to accept this.

They made their way towards the Senate Building in silence, a new plan already forming in Luke’s mind. The chances of it working seemed slim; he would need an intervention from the Force, to get away from Leia’s watchful eye.

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It had been many years since Leia had last set foot in the Senate Building on Coruscant. Her arrest and accusation as a rebel right before the Battle of Yavin would have certainly ended her senatorial career, even if the Emperor hadn’t disbanded the Imperial Senate shortly thereafter. Since then, the Senate Building of her time had fallen into disuse, and with the New Republic deciding not to make their capital on Coruscant, was likely to remain so, at least for the time being. There were some talks of turning it into a museum, but the people of the New Republic had more pressing concerns than deciding what to do with an old oversized building.
It was strange, returning here after so many years, to find it so changed.

Most of the other reception guests had already disappeared into the building. At the entrance, a pair of blue-clad Senate guards were standing sentry, their faces half-obscured by their metallic helmets. It wasn’t the main entrance to the building, but rather a side door, one mostly used by people who worked in the building, rather than visitors.

One of the guards held out a hand as Luke and Leia approached, stopping them.

“Identification, please,” he said, stepping to the side to block them from the entrance.

Leia glanced sidelong at Luke, but he gave her a confident nod of assurance. Raising his hand, he passed his fingers in front of the guard’s vision, telling him in a calm, even tone, “You don’t need to see our identification.”

She remembered his attempts at this trick in Jabba’s Palace, during their rescue of Han. She also remembered how it hadn’t worked as planned, and held her breath in the few seconds after he spoke.

Thankfully, the guard seemed to be much more weak-minded than Jabba the Hutt. After a moment, he stated monotonously, “I don’t need to see your identification.”


The guard moved to the side, unblocking the door. His companion said nothing, obviously pulled into the trick alongside their colleague. Luke and Leia moved through the door unaccosted, and it closed silently behind them. Now that they were in the building, they were unlikely to be stopped by anyone, and so it would be easy enough for them to move freely. There were so many Senators and aides and legislators constantly moving through the building that there was no one person who could know everybody; no one would see them and think that they didn’t belong, particularly if they moved with enough confidence.

“Do you know where we’re supposed to be going?” Leia asked, speaking quietly as they moved through the hallway. She didn’t recognize this particular part of the building, but she knew that it was a less-important area, being on the ground floor and not very busy. Still, she knew that no matter where you were in the Senate Building, guards were never very far away.

Luke shook his head. “No. But I’m sure we’ll figure it out.” He looked down at her. “Where would these sorts of things usually take place?”

“There are rooms, near the main entrance,” Leia said. “They’re used mostly for receiving important visitors, people who wouldn’t usually be at the Senate but are attending a session or other function for one reason or another. I’m sure they would also be used for receptions after events like this, but that didn’t happen much in the Imperial Senate.”


She motioned further down the hallway. “The main entrance should be just up ahead.”

They continued on for a bit longer, crossing the path of one Senate guard. Neither of them broke their stride as they passed by, and the guard ignored them. Not much further ahead, the corridor widened slightly, opening into a large entry hall. While not nearly as grand as the main entrance of the Jedi Temple, it was still grand enough, made of gleaming multi-coloured marble with wide, elegant columns that marched up either side. The crest of the Galactic Republic was emblazoned on the tile floor, in the centre of the room.
A few doors lined the walls, nestled between the pillars. Most were closed, but one was open, and the sounds of chatter pouring out were audible even on the other side of the hall. It was there that Leia led them, their footsteps echoing on the stone floor. A guard stood to the side of the door, but she didn’t move to stop them as they approached. It was likely assumed that anyone already inside the building would be welcome at the reception taking place just past the threshold.

The room beyond was a decent size, with a few tables and chairs scattered throughout. One, pressed against the wall, offered a selection of various refreshments, with choices that would be consumable to most species in the galaxy. A good number of people milled about, some sitting but most standing, moving from person to person, making polite but amicable conversation.

Leia spotted Padmé almost immediately. She stood near the centre of the room, speaking to a rather large group of beings. They listened to her with careful attention, and she seemed to talk easily, her arms gesticulating as she spoke. Leia glanced at Luke, who was just as focused on Padmé as the politicians she was talking to, if not more. Reaching over, she slung her arm through his, pulling him away, perhaps just a bit too roughly.

“Just followed my lead,” she muttered, her eyes doing a furtive scan of the room. “Be sure to act like you belong here.”

While Luke was a skilled and well-respected soldier and Jedi (at least in their own time), he had little experience with politicians, and most certainly didn’t know how to behave like one. Leia, on the other hand, had been groomed her entire life to one day take on a position of power. While he might be more at home in the Jedi Temple, this was her area of expertise.

As she cast her eyes around the room, she searched for familiar faces. Many people spent their entire lives in the Senate, beginning as aides or junior legislators and working their way up to senator, some of them serving terms that stretched into decades. She knew numerous people in the Imperial Senate who had also served during the Clone Wars; it was entirely possible that some of them could be there now, and knowing a few names would put them at an advantageous position.

She paused in her wandering, grabbing a glass of some pale and bubbly liquid off a passing server droid; Luke did the same. A quick sniff proved it to be alcoholic, and she lowered it slightly, merely holding it in her hands rather than taking a sip. Luke, on the other hand, took a generous gulp.

“Nervous?” Leia asked, one eyebrow cocked.

“A bit,” he admitted.

“Well, it can’t be any worse than facing down a squad of stormtroopers.”

“Oh, no, I think it’s much worse.”

She gave him a sympathetic pat on the arm. “It’ll be alright.”

Luke grimaced, making his uncertainty clear, and took another deep sip of his drink.

“I see you’re enjoying the Monffessino,” a nearby voice said, speaking suddenly, and Luke and Leia turned in tandem towards the man who had spoken. He was human, middle-aged, and wearing dark purple robes of crushed velvet. He was adorned in an astounding amount of gold jewellery, with several pairs of earrings in each ear, a half dozen necklaces, and wide rings that clinked together as he moved his hands. “It’s a sweet, airy wine,” he continued, lifting his own glass of the sunshine-coloured liquid to inspect its contents, “a specialty of my homeworld, Ryndellia.” He
lowered his glass, smiled at them both, and, without waiting for comment, reached out and shook each of their hands. “Senator Fevrik Cinn,” he introduced.

“Nellith Lars,” Leia greeted, without skipping a beat. She had never heard of Fevrik Cinn before, but that was unsurprising; Ryndellia was a rather unimportant Mid Rim world near Naboo, known almost solely for its wine, of which Leia had never been fond of. “Representative for Raban. This is Ben Solo, the representative for New Ator.” She gestured to Luke.

“A pleasure to meet you both,” Fevrik Cinn said. “Forgive me my ignorance, but where is Raban? I’m afraid I’ve never heard of it.”

Leia smiled politely. “Few have. We’re a small agricultural planet, located near Sneeve in the Kastolar sector, close to Hutt Space. I work under Senator Jollin Resbin. I’ve come in his stead; Kastolar, as I’m sure you understand, is very interested in this issue. The Mid and Outer Rims both go overlooked far too often.” Leia had met the Sneevel Senator Resbin some time ago, as a teenager, though she had remembered his name only after searching for it on the HoloNet.


“It is,” Luke said with a nod. “In the Arkanis sector.”

“So you’re with Senator Rika Orailus, then?”

Luke nodded, though he was obviously unsure if that was even the name of the current Arkanisian senator; Leia herself didn’t even know.

Cinn gave a quick, snorting laugh. “She’s a piece of work, isn’t she?”

Luke smiled uncomfortably. “Oh, yes… she’s certainly a character.”

“That’s one way of putting it,” Cinn scoffed. “Have you two been here long? There aren’t many in this particular circle I haven’t met.”

Leia shook her head. “This is the first session, for both of us.”

Cinn made a low humming noise in the back of his throat. “I guess that’s why they’ve got you going to these events,” he said. “They’re important, don’t get me wrong… but not many in the Senate think so. They’re seen as a pointless waste of time, especially when we’re in the middle of a war. Now come on, I’ll introduce you to some people. I’m assuming that, if this is your first session, you won’t have met many of them.”

He took them around the room, introducing them to this and that senator or aide or businessperson. Leia began to wonder if he had some sort of ulterior motive for treating them so kindly, but she soon realized he just wished to seem important, showing them all the people he knew, acting as a self-important liaison between various groups. She had met many others like him in the Senate.

Some of the senators he introduced them to Leia had heard of before, but many were unknown to her. As the introductions were made, a pattern quickly emerged — most of them were from Mid or Outer Rim worlds, with only a handful from anywhere closer to the Core than the Expansion Region. Most of the businesspeople seemed to have interests mostly in regions well beyond the Core, as well. While the Senate might say otherwise, it was obvious that only those whose planets or business interests were affected by disasters like the one on Galidraan really cared. It was a trend startlingly familiar to Leia, being one that she had seen often during her time in the Imperial Senate.
After a while, Cinn excused himself, obviously spotting some more important prey, and left them with a group of senatorial aides, who welcomed them both warmly into their conversation. They discussed politics for a bit, and Leia was thankful now for the time she had spent over the past few days reading the HoloNet News and catching up on the goings-on of the time. Luke remained mostly silent, his few comments vague and monosyllabic. After a few minutes, she could sense him growing restless, his gaze constantly darting over to where Padmé stood, conversing now with an entirely different group of people.

“With things the way they are, events like these are becoming more important,” Leia said, hoping to steer the conversation in a more beneficial direction. “I heard that Senator Amidala helped lead the efforts to organize today.”

Tai Chur, the young aide to the Pantoran senator Riyo Chuchi, nodded, the gold ornaments in her pale hair clinking from the movement. “The idea was Senator Tiovata’s,” she said, referring to the senator from the Thanium sector, “but Senator Amidala was a strong supporter. Without her, I doubt it would have happened.”

“Her speech was very well done,” Leia said. “You could tell that she actually cared about Galidraan, and other worlds like it.”

Tai nodded. “She does. She’s advocated for other similar issues in the past; she’s one of the senators that very obviously wants to actually create some change in the galaxy. Have either of you met her before?” She looked between Luke and Leia and, when they both shook their heads, smiled. “I could introduce you, if you’d like. She’s worked with Senator Chuchi a few times before.”

“That would be wonderful,” Leia said.

They waited for a break in Padmé’s conversation before heading over, Tai taking the lead, with Luke and Leia following closely behind.

“Senator Amidala,” Tai greeted as they approached, bobbing her head. “I wanted to compliment you on your speech this afternoon. You spoke well.”

Padmé nodded her head once. “Thank you, Tai,” she said.

“This is Nellith Lars and Ben Solo,” Tai introduced, gesturing to them both in turn. “Nellith is the representative for Raban, while Ben is the representative for New Ator. They’re both new to the Senate this session.”

“Oh?” Padmé looked at them both, and Leia felt her heart tighten a bit; she may not consider this woman to be her mother in any way other than biological, but it was still something of a shock to finally meet her. Padmé reached out, and shook each of their hands. “Senator Padmé Amidala. It’s a pleasure to meet you both.”

She was even more stunning in person, and as their hands touched, Leia was struck with an overwhelming feeling of familiarity. She knew this woman — she had met her before. And while, logically, she knew that to be true, she could feel it now. This was the woman of her memories; beautiful, and kind, but not yet so terribly sad. It was not hard for Leia to guess what would cause that sadness, one day not so far away.

“It’s an honour.” Leia was a bit surprised to hear Luke speak first, and glanced quickly at him. He was usually very good at hiding his emotions, but even without their connection, Leia could see the awe in his face. To him, Padmé was his mother, and this was a moment he had dreamed of his
entire life. But he wasn’t able to do it as her son. Padmé had no idea that, at that very moment, she was standing in front of her two future children. While it was not as apparent as the awe, Leia could see the sadness that caused within her brother.

“I was very impressed with the event today,” he continued, and Padmé smiled.

“I’m very glad,” she said. “It really is an issue that needs more attention; the Outer Rim is a region that has long been overlooked, and the fires on Galidraan are just the latest incident. And it’s only gotten worse with the war.”

Luke nodded. “I’m from the Outer Rim. Back home, people feel as if the Republic doesn’t care about them. Crime is rampant, and in some parts, slavery is still prevalent, especially in those places under the control of the Hutts. And the Republic isn’t doing anything to help. There are planets in my own sector being run by the Hutts; people are suffering, and nothing is being done.”

As he spoke, Leia realized that these opinions were not simply made up. Tatooine had always suffered, no matter who was in charge; to the people there, and on many similar planets, the Republic had been little different from the Empire.

“That’s exactly what I’m talking about,” Padmé said. “I’ve met slaves before; I was shocked to learn that such practices still exist. The Republic needs to help find a solution, and that’s what I’ve been trying to do since I came to the Senate, but it’s been difficult, and the war has only made it worse.”

“The war needs to end before any real solutions can be found,” Leia said. “The longer it continues, the worse things are going to get, for everyone in the galaxy.”

“I agree wholeheartedly,” Padmé said.

Before the conversation could continue, her attention seemed to be caught by something or someone on the other side of the room. “You must excuse me,” she said, looking to the three of them apologetically. “There’s someone I need to speak to.”

“Of course,” Tai said, and the group parted to allow Padmé through.

Luke and Leia both turned to watch her go, hurrying towards someone standing near the door. Leia’s heart began to beat wildly, as she quickly recognized who exactly it was who had caught Padmé’s attention.

Her father, Bail Organa, had just walked into the room.

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Leia knew she was staring, but she didn’t care; she couldn’t pry her eyes away from her father, watching as he conversed with Padmé. It had been five long, hard years since she had seen him last, and she wanted nothing more than to run to him, to throw her arms around him and never let go.

She could feel Luke standing beside her, and could sense the concern emanating from him. He had continued to speak with Tai for a few minutes after Padmé’s departure, before the aide had excused herself and left them alone. Leia hadn’t paid their conversation any mind, and had acknowledged Tai’s departure only with a quick nod of farewell. Her father — her real father — was standing only a few metres away from her.

Slowly, Leia nodded. “My father.” The words came out half-choked with tears, but she held them back.

“Are you alright?”

“Yes. I’m fine.” Suddenly remembering, she quickly looked to him. “Are you? I mean, you just met your mother!”

He smiled, his gaze crossing the room to where the woman in question stood. It was a peaceful smile, but a sad one, too. Padmé had likely already forgotten them; she had been kind to them, but she was a busy woman, with more on her mind than two random supposed representatives. She was their mother, but in a way, she also wasn’t — not yet.

“I’m alright,” he said, after a moment had passed.

“Is this how you’ve been feeling, this entire time?” Leia asked, looking back to Bail. Her heart ached with longing, to go to him and speak to him as she had before, as a daughter to her father. She wanted to tell him everything that had happened to her these past five years — the Death Star, Hoth, Bespin, Luke, Endor… Han. She didn’t think he would approve so much of her former smuggler of a husband, but the thought of the two of them meeting brought a smile to her face.

But none of that could happen. Like Padmé, Bail was her father, but not. One day he would come to love her with all his heart, and her him, but that day had yet to come. And it was not one she herself would live again.

“Yes,” Luke said simply. She wondered how he had done it — spending every day with his father, but knowing he would never be able to say the things he wanted, that the relationship was entirely one-sided. She felt a surge of guilt, knowing that she had not been as understanding as she should have been. But it was a difficult feeling to understand, until you had felt it yourself.

Across the room, Bail and Padmé seemed to have finished whatever conversation they had been having, and were moving away from each other.

“I’m going to go talk to him,” she said, glancing at Luke briefly. “Just for a bit.” She waited only long enough to see the beginning of his nod before she was heading towards her father, her heartbeat quickening with every step.

He had paused to grab a drink from a server droid, and she stopped in front of him, not needing to fake the smile on her face.

“Senator Organa,” she greeted. “Representative Nellith Lars, of Raban.” She stuck her hand out towards him, and he took it, shaking it.

“Well, it seems you know about me, but I’m afraid I don’t know about you,” he said, giving her a polite smile as he released her hand.

She had known it would hurt, to have him look at her with no recognition, but the flood of pain that entered her heart still left her staggering. His voice was so achingly familiar, but it held none of the love she was accustomed to hearing in it. She was a stranger to him. Her smile began to slip, but she quickly forced it back into place.

“I’ve only just started at the Senate this session,” she said. “I work under Senator Jollin Resbin, of the Kastolar sector. But I heard about the work you did regarding the refugee crisis last year. I found it very inspiring.”
“I’m glad to hear it,” Bail said. “How have you been finding the Senate so far?”

It wasn’t the conversation that Leia would like to be having with him, but it was enough. She just wanted him to keep talking, so she could keep hearing his voice, and seeing his face. It was a much different face than the last time she had seen him — younger, still showing the signs of some stress, but less troubled. His hair was no longer shot through with grey; like the rest of him, his appearance was both familiar and strange.

They talked for a time about nothing particularly important. She spoke about her first weeks at the Senate, drawing mostly from her own experiences. They discussed the event and the speeches of the day, as well as a few other ongoing issues. It was a nice conversation, but impersonal, and the longer it went on, the sadder Leia became. She was trying to think of ways to end it when, suddenly, the room around them grew quiet.

Bail paused, mid-sentence, his eyes going to the door, situated behind Leia. She turned, her heart stopping in her chest at the sight of Anakin Skywalker and Ahsoka Tano entering the room, both of them looking immediately to her.

She looked away, her eyes quickly scanning the room, searching for Luke. He wasn’t where she had left him, and she spun, seeking him out. Her heart dropped.

He was gone.
Chapter Summary


“Master Skywalker, Padawan Tano.” Padmé pushed her way through the gathering crowd to the front of the room, where Anakin and Ahsoka stood. “To what do we owe this… unexpected pleasure?”

Leia cursed softly under her breath and looked to Bail Organa. “I’m afraid you must excuse me,” she said, her voice quiet. He looked confused, but nodded, and she began to make her way over to Anakin and Ahsoka. Everyone in the room had stopped what they were doing to watch the proceedings with the Jedi, and she mumbled apologies as she shoved her way past them.

“Senator Amidala.” Anakin bowed slightly in greeting, every inch of his comportment formal and polite. “We apologize for interrupting your event, but the matter is somewhat urgent.”

“I think it’s more urgent than you realize,” Leia said, stepping out of the crowd in front of him. All eyes simultaneously turned to her, and a wave of mutters passed through the room. “We need to find Ben.”

Anakin frowned. “He’s not here?”

“Not anymore,” she said. “But I have an idea of where he might have gone. It would be best if we moved quickly.”

“What?” Padmé looked wildly between the two of them, her eyebrows furrowed deep together. Leia realized quite suddenly that, for perhaps the first time in her entire life, she was standing in the same room as both of her biological parents — with her real father only a few feet away. Now, however, wasn’t really the time for such revelations.

“What’s happening?” Padmé asked, no doubt wondering why a random representative from a minor world seemed to know Anakin, and he her.

“There’s not really time for explanations,” Leia said and, without waiting for a response, turned and hurried out the door. Behind her, she heard Anakin mutter softly, “I’ll explain on the way.” Leia stopped only briefly to confirm that Anakin, Ahsoka, and Padmé were all following her before taking off in the direction of the turbolifts nearby.

As she jogged, three sets of footsteps sounding behind her, she could hear Anakin softly speaking to Padmé, likely explaining who Leia, and her brother, actually were.

They reached the turbolifts quickly, and she pressed the button to call for one.

“What’s going on, Nellith?” Anakin asked, as they waited for the lift to arrive. “Where’s Ben?”

“In trouble,” Leia replied simply. “I’m afraid he’s going to try and do something stupid.” She would have preferred not to involve the Jedi in this, but it seemed as if they were far beyond that. Now, all that mattered was that she actually get to Luke on time — if he was where she thought he
was. If he succeeded in stopping Palpatine, there was no telling what could happen to both their past and their future. And if he didn’t succeed… there was no telling what could happen to him.

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The upper corridor was quiet. The Senate wasn’t in session that day, and so there was almost no one in the building, save for those attending the reception on the ground floor. Luke passed no one as he made his way along the silent hallway. During his planning, he had spent some time studying maps of the inside of the Senate Building. He didn’t know it perfectly, but he knew well enough where he was intending to go.

Like the Senators, Palpatine’s main offices were in the Senate Office Building, on the other side of the Plaza. But the Chancellor also had a small sitting room in the Senate Building, to conduct last-minute meetings before sessions and other affairs. Luke had expected Palpatine to go to his main offices, but when the Chancellor had instead headed towards the Senate Building, and failed to make an appearance at the reception, Luke surmised that his sitting room was his most likely destination.

He didn’t know its exact location, only that it was somewhere on this floor. He had expected a higher guard presence, especially if the Chancellor actually was there, but he had been walking for some time and had yet to encounter anybody. A sense of foreboding began to coil in the pit of his stomach, but he ignored it; that was too be expected, based on what he was planning to do. But it had to be done.

The feeling only grew as he continued to move along the hallway, and he reached into the interior pocket of his vest, making sure that his stolen lightsaber was still there, more for comfort than out of any fear that it had disappeared. It was still tucked safely away, but its reassurance did little to assuage his worries. He began to realize, perhaps a bit late, that something wasn’t right.

He was considering what actions he should take — getting out his lightsaber; turning around; carrying on — when he rounded a corner and walked directly into someone else.

He stumbled back a bit, and began to apologize, but stopped dead when he realized that the other person was none other than Chancellor Palpatine himself.

“My apologies, young man,” Palpatine said, reaching out and grasping Luke by the shoulders, as if to steady him. “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine.” Luke took an automatic step back, distancing himself from the Chancellor. Palpatine, unperturbed by this, simply smiled and stepped around him, making to carry on his way down the corridor.

He was alone, unaccompanied by any guards or aides. There was no one else in the hallway with them, and Luke could hear no distant voices or footsteps that would indicate there was another being even on this floor. This was confirmed when he reached out, just briefly, with the Force, and sensed no one nearby.

He turned, staring down Palpatine’s retreating form, and called out after him, “Sidious!”

Palpatine stopped, turning slowly back around. The smile had disappeared from his face, replaced by a much more serious and unsettling expression. “I’m sorry?” His voice was still kind, but Luke could hear the warning behind his words.

“I know you’re Darth Sidious,” he said.
The smile returned, this time full of nothing but malice, and for the first time, Luke could see the similarities between this man and the one from the Death Star II. “Well, aren’t you clever?” Palpatine said, his voice mocking. “I must admit, I was rather hoping I would get to meet you. But where is your companion?”

“You know me?” Luke asked, clenching his hands into fists at his sides. He had done this before — he had faced Palpatine and survived, even if just barely. But that didn’t make it any easier to not be terrified.

“I don’t. But it would have been impossible for me to not notice you and your friend at the Galidraan event this morning, and how you both looked at me. I am impressed; no one has ever put it together before. Which begs the question: how did you?”

“Does it matter?”

Palpatine’s lips curled back from his teeth, transforming the smile into more of a snarl. “Oh, my dear boy, it matters quite a bit.”

“Well I’m afraid that your secret isn’t very safe with me.” Luke began to reach into his vest, to retrieve the lightsaber, but before he could move his arm more than a few inches, he felt himself suddenly frozen, as if all of his muscles had simultaneously seized. As he had reached for the lightsaber, Palpatine had moved his own arm, which now stretched out towards Luke, the apparent source of his paralysis.

“I’m afraid that it will, in fact, be quite safe with you,” Palpatine said, letting out a vile cackle. He moved closer, and a sudden tightening gripped Luke around the throat, cutting off his airway. He had heard of Vader doing such things, but had never experienced it before himself. He could feel himself beginning to panic, as he tried desperately and failed to bring air into his lungs. Had he not been paralyzed, he would have fallen to his knees.

“Now tell me,” Palpatine said, leaning close so that his face was mere inches from Luke’s, “who are you?” The grip around his throat loosened, just enough so that he could suck in small mouthfuls of air and choke out an answer.

But he didn’t answer, and as the seconds ticked by, pain began to radiate in his head. Palpatine’s face was twisted into an expression of rage and contempt, and the pain only continued to grow worse. Soon, it began to feel as if his head was going to explode.


Luke had felt such pain at Palpatine’s hands before, when he was tortured with lightning, but this was, in many ways, much worse. He could barely breathe, and as the pain grew, his vision began to darken at the edges. There was a presence then, creeping its way into his mind, allowed in as his consciousness ebbed away and his shields collapsed. It rifled through his thoughts, searching, and as it worked, he was powerless to stop it. After a moment, it retreated, apparently finding what it wanted.

In front of him, Palpatine smiled. “Thank you,” he said.

The grip on Luke’s throat tightened, and the pain in his head overwhelmed him, and he fell to the ground, unconscious.

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Leia felt it as Luke slipped into unconsciousness. Panic seized her heart, and she willed silently for
the turbolift to move faster. She had tried to tell him how foolish it was to go after Palpatine alone; but of course, he hadn’t listened, and now he was injured, or worse. If she hadn’t gotten distracted by her father, then none of this would have happened.

The lift finally came to a stop, on one of the building’s higher levels. As soon as the door opened, Leia hurried out into the hallway, Ahsoka, Anakin, and Padmé close behind her.

“This is the level with the Chancellor’s meeting room,” Padmé said. “How do you know he’s here?”

“He’s my brother,” Leia replied, quickening her pace. Luke was unconscious, but she could still sense him, up ahead. As far as she could tell, he was alone; there was nobody else on this level, besides them. “I know him pretty well.”

They hurried along the corridor, with no one there to stop them. The fact that there weren’t even any guards present was highly unusual, and Leia was certain that Palpatine had had something to do with that. Which meant that, somehow, he had anticipated Luke’s arrival. The implications of that, and what he might have done to her brother, were unsettling.

Moving quickly as they were, it didn’t take long for them to reach Luke. Rounding a corner, Leia spotted him immediately, curled up on the ground. There was no one else in sight.

“I’m going to go get some guards,” Ahsoka said, turning and running back in the direction they had come.

Leia dropped to her knees beside her brother. His face was pale, and she could see the beginnings of bruises ringing around his neck; someone had choked him. She leaned over him, shaking his shoulder gently.


Anakin appeared beside her, dropping to a crouch. “We need to get him back to the Temple,” he said. “The healers there will be able to help him.”

“Who did this?” Padmé asked. “How could they have gotten in here?”

Leia had a pretty good idea of who had done this, and how, but she kept her mouth shut.

“I don’t know,” Anakin said. “But I’m sure we’ll find out when Ben wakes up.” He reached over, squeezing one of Padmé’s hands. Leia pretended to be too absorbed in her brother to notice the small gesture, but she saw Padmé squeeze back.

Letting go, she looked to Leia. “We’ll find out who did this,” she promised.

Leia was positively certain that they wouldn’t, but she still nodded, pretending to be reassured.

Ahsoka returned a few moments later, with a small group of guards in tow. They spread out, weapons drawn, to do a sweep of the floor, though Leia knew they wouldn’t find anything.

“I’ve called for a med-speeder,” Ahsoka said. “It’s on its way now.”

“I’m coming with you,” Padmé announced, “to the Temple. This incident poses a threat to the security of the Senate, and I need to know everything that happened as soon as possible.” She turned to the nearest guard, who had remained with them. “Is the building being evacuated? We need to conduct a thorough search of every level.”
The guard nodded. “It’s already underway, Senator. The Chancellor has also been notified.”

Leia looked back down at Luke’s pale face, and sighed. He certainly knew how to make things more complicated.

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Luke woke as the med-speeder set down at the Jedi Temple. Leia hadn’t left his side the entire time, and as he began to stir, she stood, reaching for his hand. He was strapped into a repulsorlift gurney, a med droid stationed at his head, monitoring his vitals. It had hooked him up to some oxygen, and as he woke he breathed deeply and erratically, not yet realizing that he was no longer choking.

“It’s alright,” Leia said gently, squeezing his hand in reassurance. His breathing evened out, and he looked at her, blinking slowly in confusion.

“What happened?” he asked. His voice was barely audible, strained and raspy. The bruising around his neck had already deepened to a sickly purple-yellow colour.

“We found you on one of the upper levels in the Senate Building,” Anakin explained. He had accompanied them on the journey to the Temple; the med-speeder wasn’t big enough for everyone, and so Ahsoka and Padmé had followed in another vehicle. “You were unconscious.”

The door to the speeder opened to reveal a group of robed Jedi healers waiting for them on the platform. Anakin and Leia exited first, and the healers moved forward to begin unloading Luke, still strapped to the gurney. Ahsoka and Padmé arrived while they were doing that, and the four of them followed after the healers as they pushed Luke into the building.

They had landed on the side of the Temple closest to the Halls of Healing, and so it didn’t take them long to get there. One of the masters from the Jedi High Council was waiting for them when they arrived; Leia recognized him, but couldn’t remember his name.

“Master Koon,” Anakin greeted, bowing briefly to the Kel Dor Jedi.

“Knight Skywalker.” Koon returned his greeting. “The Council received your message regarding the incident at the Senate. We are… concerned.”

“Rightfully so,” Padmé said.

Koon seemed a bit surprised to find her there, but bowed to her politely. “Senator Amidala. I take it you’ve come to see to the interests of the Senate.”

“We need to make sure that whoever did this doesn’t pose a threat to anybody else,” she said. “As you said, the incident is very concerning. It’s not often that people are attacked within the Senate Building.”

Master Koon nodded, and looked to Anakin. “I leave the questioning regarding this attack to you,” he said. “As soon as you’re done, and as soon as Ben is able, the Council would like to see you.” He looked at Leia, and then over to Luke, who was being carefully examined by a healer and his droid. “Especially you two.”

“Of course, Master,” Anakin said, and he and Ahsoka both bowed as Koon departed.

Leia moved over to Luke’s bedside, and Anakin, Ahsoka, and Padmé followed, leaving enough room for the healers to do their work.
“Your injuries are not severe,” one of the med-droids said, having completed a full scan of Luke. “There will be no need for bacta submersion.”

“I am going to bandage up your neck with bacta, however,” the healer said. A small cart of medical supplies had been brought over, and he began to rummage through it, searching for the right supplies. “How did this happen?”

“I… don’t remember,” Luke said. His voice was still raspy, and was likely to remain so for some time.

The healer stopped their searching and shuffled closer to Luke, leaning forward to inspect his neck more closely. Gently, he reached over and tilted Luke’s head to the side for a better look. “It definitely looks like someone — or something — was choking you. Not with a rope or anything abrasive, but there aren’t any marks of fingers either.”

“A Force choke?” Anakin suggested. “That likely wouldn’t leave any distinctive marks, beyond the bruising.”

“Possibly,” the healer agreed, nodding. He resumed his riffling, and after a few moments produced a long, thin bacta patch. Peeling back the cover, he placed it carefully around Luke’s neck. “The bruising should be mostly gone by tonight,” he explained, leaning towards the med droid and checking one of its readouts.

Anakin looked to Luke, as the healer read the report. “So what happened?” he asked. “Who attacked you?”

Luke thought for a moment, and then shook his head. “I don’t know. I remember being at the reception in the Senate Building, and leaving to go somewhere, but I don’t remember where or why. The next thing I remember is waking up just a few minutes ago in the shuttle.”

“So you have no idea who attacked you?”

Luke shook his head again.

The healer looked slightly alarmed at that, doing another quick look-over of the med droid’s scan. “There’s no signs of any head injuries,” he said, “and you weren’t unconscious for very long. There’s nothing here to suggest memory loss.”

“Well, if the bruising was caused by someone Force choking you, then it had to have been a Force user,” Padmé said. “Can you use the Force to affect someone’s memories?”

Anakin thought for a moment. “It’s possible.” He looked to the healer. “Isn’t it?”

The healer frowned, a thin line appearing between his eyes. “Let me see.” He reached over, and placed a hand against Luke’s forehead. “I’m going to search your mind, and see what I can find. Is that alright?”

Luke nodded, and the healer closed his eyes. Leia could feel him reaching out through the Force, but what exactly he was looking for, she didn’t know. Luke’s face scrunched up slightly, wincing as if in pain, and she reflexively reached out to take his hand, squeezing it in comfort.

The healer was done after only a couple of minutes, withdrawing his hand. “I couldn’t find much,” he said, taking a step back, “but there were signs of… interference. Someone had been riffling around in your mind, and they took care to erase almost all traces of their presence.” He was silent for a moment, his face grim. “Whoever did this… they had to be extremely powerful. I’ve never
Leia frowned. That all but confirmed her strong suspicions that Palpatine was the one who had attacked Luke — and it seemed as if her brother was realizing that as well, based on his grimace.

“How could they have gotten into the Senate Building?” Ahsoka asked, her tone anxious. It certainly must have been discomfiting, to learn that someone so powerful and malicious in the Force had been able to get into the heart of the Galactic Republic. Had she not already known he was there, Leia would have doubtless felt the same unease.

“It’s much easier than you’d think,” Luke said, and Anakin scowled.

“We’ll discuss that later,” he said, and Leia had the sudden, unsettling feeling of being scolded by a parent. He looked at the healer. “Is there anything else we should know?”

The healer shook his head. “All the signs point to this being an attack by a Force user, but I have no idea who they are. You’re quite lucky they didn’t do more damage.” He looked to Luke, frowning. “Unfortunately, I don’t think your missing memories will come back, but just be thankful they didn’t take more of them.” He glanced quickly at one of the machines by the bed. “Your oxygen levels are back to normal, so I can release you. Just rest, and don’t strain yourself.”

Luke nodded, and the healer removed the tubes from his face that had been feeding him oxygen. “Thank you,” he said.

The healer bowed. “Come back if you feel even a little bit worse.” Luke nodded again and, with a quick farewell to everyone else, the healer turned and walked away, followed by the med droid, off to care for other patients.

Leia helped Luke down off the bed. He leaned heavily against her as his feet first touched the ground, but he quickly strengthened, and she let go. They followed together as everyone else made their way out of the Halls of Healing. Anakin and Ahsoka led the way, heading in the general direction in which Leia knew the Council chambers to be.

“Do you think it was Dooku?” Ahsoka asked, before seeming to think better and adding, “No, it couldn’t have been. No way he could even land on Coruscant, let alone make his way into the Senate Building.”

“Dooku?” Padmé’s eyebrows shot up in surprise. “You think he’s involved in all of this?”

“We know he is,” Anakin said. “Or at least he was; he held Ben prisoner for a time. That’s how the Jedi got involved — Nellith was looking for him, and came to us for help. But Ahsoka’s right. It couldn’t have been him.”

“His apprentice, maybe?” Padmé suggested. “He does have one, right?”

“He did,” Ahsoka said. “But I thought Ventress was dead.”

“She is,” Anakin said. “She died at Sullust, so it can’t have been her either.”

Padmé shrugged. “Maybe he has a new one.”

Leia had never heard of this Ventress before, but she did know that Dooku had been in the market for a new apprentice. Luke had mentioned something about Dooku offering to take him on as an apprentice, and so it was entirely possible for the Jedi to believe that he had found a new one. Both Luke and Leia, of course, knew the true identity of Luke’s attacker, but neither of them said
Anakin nodded. “That’s possible. No one would have encountered them yet, so it would have been easy for them to slip into the Senate Building.”

“But would an apprentice be powerful enough to do what they did to Ben?” Ahsoka asked.

Anakin was silent for a moment, before shaking his head. “No, you’re right. It couldn’t have been an apprentice.”

Ahsoka’s eyes widened. “Do you think… Dooku’s master?”

“It’s a possibility,” Anakin said. “The Jedi Order has known for over a decade about the existence of a Sith Master, but no one’s ever seen them before. No one’s even come close, until now.”

Anakin, Ahsoka, and Padmé all looked to Luke, and Leia felt her heart drop. They were getting scarily close to the truth, though she was confident they couldn’t possibly guess the Sith’s identity. She just hoped they wouldn’t try to get it out of Luke.

“Potentially,” she added quickly.

“But why Ben?” Ahsoka asked. “Do you think he was purposefully targeted?”

“Maybe they wanted to finish whatever Dooku had started,” Anakin said, “either by killing Ben, or recapturing him.”

“Then why’d they leave him there alive?”

“Maybe they didn’t get to finish the job. Or maybe it was a warning. About what, it doesn’t really matter right now. What matters is that someone, likely a Sith master, tried to attack Ben, and so it’s all the more important that we get you two home as soon as possible.” Anakin gave them both stern looks. “Though I would like to know what, exactly, you were doing at the Senate.”

“I would, too,” Padmé said. “Not many people sneak into the Senate just to attend a reception.”

“Well, I would hate to disappoint,” Leia said, “but that’s exactly what we did.”

Luke shot her a look that asked what, exactly, she was planning on saying, and she gave him one back that she hoped told him to just trust her.

Anakin raised his eyebrows skeptically. “Can I ask why?”

Leia glanced at Padmé, her expression purposefully suspicious. “It’s not really a reason we can share openly.”

“So… it has to do with… where you’re from?” Anakin asked, working slowly through the question so as not to give anything away.

Leia nodded.

Anakin seemed to consider things for a moment, looking surreptitiously at Padmé. He came to his decision quickly. “You can trust Senator Amidala,” he said. “She is a good ally to the Jedi.”

Leia knew already that they could trust Padmé, as she could have trusted her own (real) father. Padmé had been a good friend to him, and he had always spoken so highly of her.
“We wanted to see our mother,” she said simply.

The look on Anakin’s face changed from skepticism to shock. “Your mother?”

Leia nodded. “She worked in the Senate, around this time,” she explained. “We were hoping that she might be there, when we heard about this event.”

“So you snuck into the Galactic Senate, just because you hoped your mother would be there?” Anakin asked.

“It was our only chance,” Luke said, quickly catching on to Leia’s story — which was mostly the truth, just with some key details left out. “We’re leaving tomorrow, so if we didn’t do it now, we would never be able to. We never really knew her; she died when we were young. This was our only chance to actually meet her, even if it was just for a few moments.”

Anakin frowned, a deep line forming between his eyes. Ahsoka had a sympathetic look on her face, but she also seemed unsure, looking to Anakin and Padmé as if for guidance. Leia was certain that Padmé wasn’t going to be the one to offer that guidance, though, based on the look of pure confusion on her face.

“I’m... I’m sorry, I’m not sure I understand,” she said, her gaze moving from Leia to Luke to Anakin and back again. “Are you saying you went to the Senate to see your mother... who’s been dead for most of your lives?”

“We’re from the future,” Leia said, deciding that there was no point in beating around it or trying to explain it any other way.

There was a beat of silence, in which Padmé seemed to be frozen from shock. “What?”

“We’re from the future,” Leia repeated. “My brother and I. We’re not going to be born until after the Clone Wars. An artifact we found used the Force to send us back in time.”

“That’s...” At a loss for words, Padmé looked to Anakin, and let out a short, disbelieving laugh. “That’s absurd.”

“Trust me,” Ahsoka said, “we’re all well aware of that.”

“How is this even possible?”

“I can tell you the details later,” Anakin said, “though I’m not sure they’ll help.”

Padmé laughed again, looking to Anakin. “I hope you know the only reason I’m even considering believing this is because you seem to.”

“Believe me, it took me a while to come around to the idea of it as well,” he said, before turning back towards Luke and Leia. “So, you went to potentially see your mother, and that’s it? No other reason for going to the Senate?”

They both shook their heads. “Just for our mother,” Luke said.

They had reached the hallway that led to the turbolift for the High Council’s meeting chamber. Padmé left them there, departing with a Temple guard who would escort her out. Her farewells were polite, and Luke watched her go, apparently unable to look away. Leia felt some of the same sadness that she knew he was experiencing; it was unlikely that either of them would ever see Padmé again, and while Leia still didn’t think of her as her mother, she was still someone that Leia
admired. To know she would be dead in less than two years was… saddening.

Anakin was quiet for a moment, letting out a deep breath, before continuing towards the turbolift. Leia couldn’t tell if he had believed their story or not.

“Well,” he finally said, after several seconds had passed, as if sensing her thoughts, “it’s not me you have to convince.”

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Unfortunately, the Jedi Council was not as quick to accept their story as Anakin seemed to have been. Most of the Council members had doubtful looks on their faces as Luke and Leia finished explaining why, exactly, they had felt the need to leave the Temple without permission and sneak into the Senate Building to attend a random reception.

“All of that… for the chance to see your mother?” Windu asked, voicing the doubts that it was likely his fellow Council members also felt.

“Yes,” Luke said. His voice was still raspy, and the bacta patch made his neck feel stiff and awkward, but it helped to ease the soreness of the bruises. A faint headache pounded behind his eyes, but he ignored it.

He knew, of course, that that wasn’t true — that they hadn’t gone to the Senate only for their mother. He remembered his plan, to take out Palpatine; he remembered pretty much everything, up until he left the reception. Leia had been distracted by Bail Organa, and so he had taken his chance to slip out, to go confront Palpatine. But he couldn’t remember anything after that. He had been sure upon waking up that it had been Palpatine who had attacked him, and that had only been confirmed by the healer’s examination. Palpatine was the only one he knew strong enough in the dark side of the Force to do what the healer said had been done.

Which begged the question — why had he let Luke live?

“I don’t know if he passed along this information, but we told Master Kenobi of how our mother had died when we were very young,” Leia explained. “We never knew her. And while the Jedi seem to have little regard for mothers, that isn’t the case with most beings. We had a chance to actually meet her, and so we took it.”

Windu’s lips pressed tight together, and Luke hoped silently that Leia would be able to hold off on insulting the Jedi any further, at least until they were done defending themselves.

“Why, then, did you not request permission to go?” Windu asked. “Particularly if Master Kenobi, as you say, already knows the details about your mother?”

“We agreed it would be best to keep our father’s identity a secret,” Luke said. “I assume the same should go for our mother.”

“If we had asked to go see her, would you have allowed it, without any more details?” Leia asked, eyebrows raised.

Windu and the rest of the Council remained silent.

“They’re right, about their mother,” Obi-Wan said. He was the only Jedi Master in the room without even a hint of suspicion on his face. He knew, of course, that Padmé was their mother, and that she was a Senator. He was thus the most likely out of anyone to believe their story. “She does work at the Senate, and they were right to keep her identity a secret. I believe that their intentions
in sneaking into the Senate were entirely benevolent.”

“So once again, we are expected to trust them based solely on your word, Master Kenobi?” Kolar asked.

Obi-Wan nodded. “Precisely.”

“Believe them, I do, as well,” Yoda said, nodding. “But disturbing information, this has revealed. A Sith Master, on Coruscant there is; after Ben’s life, they are.”

“You believe, then, that it was the Sith Master?” a Togruta woman asked.

“I do.”

“We must do whatever possible to discover this Sith’s identity,” a Cerean Jedi said.

Anakin took a slight step forward, from where he had been standing behind Luke and Leia. “All of Ben’s memories of the attack were erased. Any information he might have had about his attacker’s identity has been lost.”

“And it cannot be retrieved?” the Cerean asked, bushy eyebrows raised.

Anakin shook his head. “No.”

“There must be something,” a Nautolan man said. “They were in the Senate Building!”

“They were after Ben,” Kolar said, leaning forward and motioning with a wide sweep of his arm towards Luke. “Perhaps we could use him to draw them back out—“

“We will not be using him as bait,” Obi-Wan interrupted. “We cannot ask him to risk his life like that; it’s far too dangerous. I suggest that Ben and Nellith depart for Raban with Anakin and Ahsoka tomorrow, as originally planned.”

“We have a chance here to find the Sith Master and put an end to him, and possibly Dooku as well!” Kolar cried. “We cannot let it pass by.”

“And we cannot ask someone who is not part of our Order risk their lives for us,” the Togruta said, with a nod of agreement towards Obi-Wan.

Windu looked directly to Luke. “You have said yourself that you consider yourself a Jedi. Would you be willing to do this?”

Luke was ready to say yes. Together with the Jedi Order, he was almost certain that they could take out Palpatine. He could lead them to him, force him into an altercation… The Empire and the war could be stopped here and now.

But then Leia’s voice sounded in his mind, and he turned to look at her, finding her expression nearing on distress.

_You can’t, _she told him, speaking to him through the Force. _Please, Luke, don’t try and do this._

He wanted desperately to say yes... but the look on her face made his heart clench. She was genuinely terrified of what might happen, and he couldn’t do that to her — not without actually talking to her first.

He back looked to Windu, and shook his head. “I’m sorry. I can’t. We need to get home.”
Windu seemed almost disappointed, but he still nodded. “I understand.” He looked around the room at his fellow Council members, as if seeking their approval as well. Some were obviously displeased, but nobody voiced any objections. “Then you will go to Raban tomorrow, as planned.”

Luke could feel Leia’s relief at the decision.

Whatever they were, he hoped her reasons were good.
They left the Council chamber in silence. Luke and Leia trailed behind Anakin and Ahsoka, none of them speaking until they were in the turbolift, slowly descending to the lower levels.

“You were lucky,” Anakin said, glancing over his shoulder at them. “The Council is not always so understanding.”

Leia scoffed. “Some of them certainly don’t seem as if they are.” The Jedi in the chamber were not the same as the ones from the stories her father had told her as a child. They had been afraid; paranoid.

“You have to understand,” Anakin said, “the war has not been easy. The Order has had to become cautious as a result.”

Leia had the feeling that, somewhere along the way, the Order had lost themselves, letting their fear of the dark side take over everything. She glanced at Luke; he was frowning, a slight crease between his eyes. She could tell he was thinking, mulling everything over, but he said nothing. She looked back towards Anakin and Ahsoka.

“How did you find us?” she asked. “At the Senate?” Their appearance at the reception had been far too fortuitous to be a coincidence.

“Obi-Wan,” Anakin explained. The turbolift had slowed to a stop, and he stepped out of the opening doors, waiting to the side for everyone else to exit. He fell into step beside Ahsoka, back at the head of the group, as they continued down the corridor. “It didn’t take us long to realize you were no longer in the Temple, once we noticed you were missing. We did a quick search of the surrounding areas and reviewed the security cam footage, but that didn’t give us anything conclusive. So, I contacted Obi-Wan. He could only speak for a short while, but he suggested that we check the Senate.”

“When we learned there was an event going on at the Plaza today, we figured that was as good a place as any to check,” Ahsoka chimed in.

“I was wondering why he thought — correctly — that you might be at the Senate, but knowing now that your mother works there, it all makes sense,” Anakin said. He was silent for a moment, before twisting slightly to look back at them. “Did you get to see her?”

Luke nodded. “Briefly,” he said. “She didn’t know who we were, of course… but it was nice.”

Anakin nodded and looked back to the front, his lips pressed tight together. Leia thought that perhaps he was thinking of his own mother.
The rest of the walk was quiet. Anakin and Ahsoka took them back to their rooms, where new clothes had already been delivered for them, so that they could change out of their fancy senatorial outfits.

“We’ll let you get changed and have a bit of a rest,” Anakin said, lingering in the doorway. “One of us will be back in a couple hours to collect you. We still have some planning left to do before our departure tomorrow morning.” Ahsoka was already waiting out in the hallway, and he turned to go join her, before seeming to remember something. He looked back, a bit of a grin on his face. “Oh, and it would probably be best if you don’t leave this room unaccompanied. You’re on thin ice as it is, and it’s better to be safe, right?”

With a quick nod, he ducked out of the room, the door swishing closed behind him.

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Luke removed his vest, tossing it onto the bed before sitting down in the armchair, letting out a deep sigh. Without speaking, Leia took a seat at the desk. They both knew that they needed to have a talk, but it was a moment before either of them said something.

He was the first to break the silence. “I need to know why, Leia,” he said, leaning forward and resting his elbows on his thighs. “Why won’t you let me try and fix things? With the Jedi actually on our side… we might be able to succeed.”

“I’ve already told you why,” Leia replied, her expression grim.

“The risk is too great. Taking out Palpatine won’t ensure that the Empire, or anything like it, never arises. There’s always been a tendency, especially in the Rebellion, to idealize the Republic. But it’s broken, Luke. You have to see that, especially after today. The Republic ignored the Outer Rim, just like the Empire did. Killing Palpatine won’t change that — it’ll still be broken, with or without him. If anything, things could end up much, much worse.”

“But they could also end up better,” Luke argued. “You’re not even willing to try. That’s not like you. The Leia I know would do anything — anything — to try and save the galaxy.”

“The galaxy has been saved, Luke. Palpatine’s already dead, and Vader with him. The Empire still exists, yes, but it’s only a matter of time before they’re gone, too. We’ve already won, Luke! Or at least we had, until you decided to go and take matters into your own hands. Now Palpatine has your memories, and there’s no telling what he’ll do with them.”

Luke frowned. The thought of Palpatine rooting around in his mind — it sent a sickening chill down his spine. “We don’t even know what memories he took,” he argued. “We have no idea what he knows.”

“But whatever it is, it can’t be good. He left you alive, Luke, when he could have just as easily killed you. He must have something planned. Chances are, we’ve already messed with the past enough to drastically change the future.”

“So we need to fix it. We stop Palpatine, and whatever he’s planning won’t happen.”

“I don’t think that’s quite how this works.”

“Well we need to do something!”

“What we need to do is go home before we make things worse!” Huffing, Leia stood, quickly pacing the room, her hand held to her face. “Kriffing hell, Luke, do you even understand the
“Of course I do! That’s why I want to at least try and fix the situation. Palpatine might know who we are; he might know that I’m the reason he dies. Do you think he’s just going to let that happen? He could make sure that we’re never born, Leia. If we just leave and try to go back home, we might end up in a galaxy where we don’t exist anymore!”

“And who’s fault would that be?” She was yelling now, the anger and fear visible on her face. “You’re the one who felt the need to try and face Palpatine on your own. Stars, Luke, I thought you were smarter than that! And don’t tell me that it’s because you wanted to make the galaxy a better place; the galaxy was doing fine. You did it because you saw a chance to have your parents back, and you didn’t want to let that go. You were selfish.”

Luke almost laughed. “Selfish? Sure, the galaxy’s alright now, but what about the last twenty years? What about the trillions of beings who were killed and enslaved and subjugated by the Empire? What about Alderaan? I had a chance to save them, Leia. And I still might, if we let the Jedi help us. If anything, you’re being selfish.” It was a childish remark, but he could feel the anger curling in his veins, and he needed to get it out.

Leia shook her head, practically collapsing back into her chair, her head in her hands. “Luke, you don’t understand,” she said and, to his surprise, he could hear tears in her voice.

His anger began to melt away, almost as quickly as it had come. It was rare, that he got so mad at Leia, and it took very little to send that anger slinking back into the shadows. “Then explain it to me,” he said, his voice much softer than it had been just a moment before.

She was silent for a moment, before letting her hands fall away into her lap. She wasn’t crying, not outright, but he could see the tears glimmering in her eyes when she looked at him.

“I’m pregnant,” she said.

It was Luke’s turn to be silent. He straightened, brows rising in surprise, and, after several beats of silence, the only thing he could think to say was, “Oh.”

He was surprised, not just by the revelation, but by the fact that he was surprised at all — he hadn’t seen it coming. It wasn’t often that anything about Leia surprised him.

“How… far along are you?” he asked, after several more seconds had passed without either of them speaking.

“Just over three months,” she replied. She had used the silence to compose herself somewhat, clearing her throat and wiping the tears from her eyes. “I’ve only known for a couple of weeks, though. Things have been… hectic.”

“Does Han know?”

Leia shook her head. “I didn’t get the chance to tell him. I meant to, but… I wasn’t sure how. I mean, he’s not the type of person who ever really planned on being a father.”

Luke gave her a sympathetic smile, and reached out, taking her hand. “I think he’d be ecstatic,” he said. “After you gave him time to freak out a little.”

Leia gave a teary laugh, swiping her hand furiously across her watery eyes. “Do you understand now?” she asked. “I’m fine with risking my own life; I’ve done it before.” Her hand brushed lightly across her abdomen. “But I can’t risk his.”
“His? You think it’s a boy?”

Leia nodded, and Luke’s smile widened. He was going to have a nephew.

“I understand,” he said, squeezing her hand. “I’m not going to force you to do this. Whatever we go home to, we’ll deal with it, together.”

But even as he said it, he knew that he couldn’t leave things like this. If he didn’t do something, Leia and her child likely wouldn’t have a galaxy to go home to.

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They left early the next morning, when the sun was only just beginning to rise over the sleepy city. Luke had bundled his few belongings together with Leia’s into a single bag, but he had kept his stolen lightsaber tucked into the interior pocket of his jacket. He had been planning on returning it to the gym, before anyone discovered he had taken it, but then had thought better of it; he didn’t know if the Jedi were going to return his own lightsaber, and he might need a weapon in the days ahead.

Anakin and Ahsoka arrived together, accompanied by R2-D2, to take the twins down to the hangar. Luke hadn’t seen R2 since he had arrived on Coruscant, and his presence was somewhat of a comfort, though he knew that the little astromech wasn’t exactly the droid he knew.

“It’s good to see you again, Artoo,” Leia greeted, giving him a quick nod.

R2 returned the greeting with a somewhat suspicious trill, his photoreceptor swivelling between the two of them. Luke understood the hesitation — he had seen them both taken prisoner, after all — but it still stung a bit to not be trusted by one of his best friends.

“Artoo, be nice,” Ahsoka whispered, giving the astromech a gentle nudge, and R2 whistled indignantly back at her.

“Are you all ready to go?” Anakin asked, and both Luke and Leia nodded. Luke gathered the single bag containing their possessions, and they started off for the hangar.

The Temple was just starting to rouse for the day, its inhabitants creeping out of their rooms for breakfast or early morning practice. They passed only a few beings as they traversed the great corridors. Luke tried to linger as much as possible, soaking in the sights of the towering ceilings and carved columns. He hoped that he would come back, whether in his own time or not, but he had no idea when that might possibly be. The Force always had a way of disrupting his plans, and he had no doubts that this time would be no different.

“Will Captain Rex and his men be joining us again?” Leia asked, walking beside Anakin and Ahsoka at a brisk pace as Luke wandered along behind them.

Anakin shook his head. “The Council thought it best not to involve them,” he explained. “This is a… sensitive issue, and soldiers can be terrible gossips.”

Leia gave a quiet laugh. “Yes, that’s true.” Luke grinned; there had been no such thing as secrets in the Rebellion.

It didn’t take long for them to reach the hangar; there was little turbolift traffic at that time of day, and it wasn’t located very far from the dorms in any case. A few droids and mechanics bustled about, working on the shuttles and speeders docked there. Luke was unsurprised to see several members of the Jedi High Council gathered there, waiting by the shuttle that was to take them back.
“Masters,” Anakin greeted as they approached the Council members, both him and Ahsoka bowing respectfully. R2, with little formality, trundled up the open gangway into the shuttle, to begin preparing it for take-off.

“Knight Skywalker,” Master Yoda said, returning the bow. “Good luck on your mission, we wish you.” He looked to Luke and Leia, his wrinkled lips turned up slightly in something resembling amusement. “And to you, as well, in returning home.”

“Thank you, Master,” Luke said, nodding his head in gratitude. “It was an honour to be able to see — to meet you.”

The smile widened, and the Grandmaster chuckled deep in the back of his throat. “Meet again, we may,” he said. “But know this already, you do.”

Luke gave a smile of his own. “If the Force wills it,” he said, knowing full well it did — at least for Yoda. Luke, on the other, would likely never see his former mentor alive again. At least if he did end up going home.

“The Council and the entire Jedi Order wishes you well, and a safe journey,” a Togruta Master said. “Your time with us has certainly been interesting.”

Her sentiments were followed by a chorus of bows and wishes of farewell from the other gathered Masters. Windu, the serious man whose trust seemed impossible to gain, wasn’t present, having been off-planet for the entirety of their time on Coruscant, but Luke could still sense a sliver of animosity from the Masters. They were kind and polite in their farewells, but it was obvious that they were glad to be rid of both him and Leia. He supposed he couldn’t really blame them; they had been disruptive and unexpected visitors in the midst of a war. And while it wasn’t unexpected, it still hurt to know they continued to see him as an outsider.

“Thank you,” he said, returning their bows; Leia did the same.

“Before you go,” a Cerean Jedi said, reaching into the folds of his robes, “I believe this belongs to you.” Pulling his hand out, he produced Luke’s lightsaber.

His heart was flooded with relief at the sight. He had hated not having his own weapon, and he took it from the Cerean gratefully. Its shape and weight was familiar in his palm, and he was immediately comforted. “I… Thank you,” he said. While the Jedi might not see him as one of them, this showed that they trusted him, at least somewhat. He hooked the ‘saber onto his belt, its dangling weight a strong reassurance. He left the stolen ‘saber alone, tucked into the interior pocket of his jacket.

“It is a fine weapon,” the Cerean said. “You may not be a member of our Order, but you have the skills and spirit of a Jedi.”

Luke said nothing, merely bowing his head once more in thanks. With final nods of farewell, the members of the Council turned and began to make their way from the hangar. Only Yoda looked back at them, just briefly, a wry smile still on his face. They quickly disappeared out of the hangar doors.

“Well, then,” Ahsoka said, once the Masters were gone, gesturing with both arms towards the waiting shuttle. “Shall we?”
Raban looked the same now as it would twenty-five years in the future — two continents, covered almost entirely in yellow grassland, inhabited the northern and southern hemispheres, divided by a pale blue ocean that swam around the planet’s equator. A planet with almost no strategic or resource importance, Raban had been left entirely alone in the Clone Wars, as it would be in twenty years’ time during the Galactic Civil War.

“I can see why the Order decided to hide the Stone here,” Anakin said, reading the results of the shuttle’s planetary scan. “There’s nothing here but grass and animals, and a few small, scattered settlements. The place was probably entirely uninhabited when the Order built the temple.”

“And not many people would ever care enough about such an agricultural backwater to actually conduct any serious investigations about the strange goings-on that started when people settled here,” Luke said, leaning forward into the cockpit to examine the rotating holographic map of Raban. “It’s the last place anybody would ever expect to find something so unusual, which is what made it the perfect hiding spot.”

“Until now,” Ahsoka said, one eyebrow marking quirked.

Anakin nodded, his lips pressed tight together. “Until now.”

Glowing dots marked the settlements on the map; the brighter they were, the larger the settlement they represented. The dots on Raban were few and far between, and most of them were only tiny pinpricks of light. Luke scanned the northern continent, searching for the village he had visited when he had come here himself, where the old mechanic Mayzee Lanith had pointed him in the direction of the temple. He found it after only a few moments; it was one of the brighter dots, located just a bit to the north of the coast.

“Here,” he said, jabbing it with his finger and halting the map’s slow rotation. “This is the village I visited. The temple is just to the southwest of it, along the coast.” He drew a line down to the coast, pointing out the approximate location of the temple.

“Alright, then,” Anakin said, grabbing hold of the shuttle’s control yoke and easing it down towards the planet. “Let’s find ourselves a temple.”

It wasn’t difficult to find. They flew low and slow, following the planet’s jagged coastline to where both Luke and Leia remembered the temple to be. With such flat terrain and no trees to block the view, it wasn’t long before the temple came into sight, jutting out of the ground at the top of a coastal cliff.

It looked just as it had the last time Luke had seen it: a roughhewn building made of dark stone, built into the cliff on which it sat. Anakin landed the shuttle a short way from the temple, descending the gangplank. Without even exiting, Luke could already sense it — the temple, and the artifact within.

Slowly, everyone filed from the shuttle, out into the tall grass. He could tell that they all felt the same uneasiness he did; the temple’s presence in the Force was almost overwhelming. It was the same feeling he remembered having the first time — the temple inhabited a grey area between the light and dark. It might have been built by the Jedi, but it, and the artifact it held, had never belonged to them. They both belonged purely and unequivocally to the Force.

“It feels… strange,” Ahsoka said, her forehead crinkled slightly as she studied the temple.

“The Jedi built this temple, but it was never theirs,” Luke explained, starting off towards the stone edifice. “It’s neither light nor dark.”
“It’s just… the Force,” Anakin observed. “In its purest form. I’ve never felt anything like it.”

R2 whistled nervously. Luke remembered the droid’s discomfort at this very situation during Luke’s initial investigation of the temple. Whether that was because he had remembered something bad happening there, or just a general feeling of discomfort, Luke couldn’t tell.

“Artoo should stay here, with the shuttle,” he suggested. “There are lots of stairs in the temple, and they’d be difficult for him to navigate.” R2 trilled his approval of this plan.

“Artoo has rocket boosters for stairs,” Anakin said, “but you’re right, someone should stay with the shuttle. If things go bad, we’ll need someone to call for help.”

Luke blinked, and looked to Leia. Rocket boosters? he mouthed, shocked, and she nodded with a grin. He could think of a few times when those would have been handy.

“Does that sound good to you, buddy?” Anakin asked, looking to R2. “If you don’t hear from us in two hours, contact the Temple on Coruscant and request for them to send help.”

There was no need for anyone to tell R2 twice. He beeped a cheerful affirmative, and promptly rolled himself back up the gangplank into the shuttle.

The rest of them continued towards the temple. The closer they got, the stronger the feeling from the temple grew. And while Luke knew the cause was the Stone, it was still unsettling.

“We should be on our guard,” he said as they approached the open archway that led into the temple. “We know what’s in there, but we still don’t fully know what it’s capable of, and it’s been hostile to visitors in the temple before.”

Everyone nodded their agreement. Leia gave him an uncertain look, her mouth turned down in a slight frown. Everything will be okay, he told her, reaching through the Force.

And hopefully, it would be. Leia wanted to go home and, with luck, she would be able to. But he couldn’t; not yet. If he didn’t stay and try to fix things, the galaxy she went home to likely wouldn’t be a good one.

But he could fix it. He had to.

Chapter End Notes

a lot of you had guessed already that Leia was pregnant, so congrats on being right!

also, I've been looking forward to writing the next chapter since I started this fic, so it'll (hopefully) be good :)


Chapter Summary

Things do not go as planned in the Rabani temple.

Chapter Notes

I'm leaving tomorrow for vacation and won't be back until Sept 2, and while I'm away I likely won't have much chance to write, so the next chapter is going to take a bit longer than usual. I've also realized that my goal for finishing this fic by the end of the summer is almost certainly not going to happen, so I've extended it to the end of the year.

It was full daylight now, unlike the first time that Leia had visited this temple, but the stairwell was still dark as the four of them slowly made their way down. They each had a glowrod, casting light into the darkened corridors that they passed. Leia tried to remember the route she had first taken to the artifact; she remembered reaching the bottom of these stairs, and then making her way through numerous hallways, where she had lost Han before ending up at the very bottom of the temple.

“I went this way,” Luke said, shining his light down one of the corridors that shot off from the stairwell.

“I went all the way down to the bottom of these stairs,” Leia said. “They don’t go all the way to the floor with the artifact, but this is probably the most direct route.”

Luke nodded in agreement, and they carried on. Anakin had stopped for a moment, peering into the hallway, but he caught up quickly.

“What are all those rooms for?” he asked.

Leia shrugged. “All the ones that I saw were empty. I didn’t see any signs that anyone had ever actually lived here.”

“From what we know now, I doubt anyone ever did,” Luke said. “I think all these halls and rooms were created to confuse people — to get them lost.”

“Well,” Anakin said, “then let’s try our best not to get lost.”

They reached the bottom of the stairwell quickly. “There’s more stairs down here,” Leia said, pointing with her glowrod into the dark hallway that now opened up before them. She led the charge, with Luke close beside her and Anakin and Ahsoka following behind. The numerous glowrods brightened up the hallway considerably, but darkness still lingered in the corners and the many empty rooms that they walked by.
They moved through the hallways quickly, climbing down staircases as they found them. Leia kept her guard up, expecting at any moment to begin hearing the whispering voice of the artifact in her ear; it had guided her to it the first time, voices of her past and future that lured her deeper into the temple and separated her from Han.

But they never came. They descended further and further into the temple, and the air around them remained still and quiet. She glanced at Luke, and he glanced back, a small frown on his lips. Worry began to pull at her heart; he had talked about the temple rejecting visitors before, making sure that they never found the artifact. Without the whispering voices to guide them, Leia was beginning to suspect that the artifact now no longer wanted them to find it.

She didn’t voice these concerns, but she knew that Luke felt them as well. Silently, she pushed on, hoping that she was wrong. They descended another staircase into a hallway identical to all the others, and she swung her glowrod around, searching for the next set of stairs to take them deeper down.

But there were none.

They searched through every doorway, glancing into every room they passed, but found only empty chambers; none of the doors led to stairs.

“Shit,” Luke swore, stepping out of yet another empty room. “This one’s a dead end.”

“There must have been a second staircase in one of the other hallways,” Leia said. “We’ll have to go back up, search all the hallways until we find another way down.”

Anakin cursed quietly under his breath, and they turned to go back up the stairs. They all paused, however, realizing at the same time that there were only three of them standing there.

“Where’s Ahsoka?” Anakin asked, casting his glowrod wildly about the hallway, as if she was merely hiding in a darkened corner.

Luke did the same, quickly searching all the nearby rooms. “I don’t know. She followed us down here, didn’t she?”

“She must not have,” Anakin said, and he turned and hurried quickly back up the stairs, calling, “Ahsoka! Ahsoka!”

Luke followed him, and Leia hurried after them both. “This is what happened with Han,” she said quietly, coming up beside Luke in the upper hallway. “He was just behind me, we went down a set of stairs, and when I looked back at him, he was just… gone.”

“It’s the temple,” Luke said, casting a nervous glance at the bare walls that surrounded them. “It doesn’t like visitors.”

They searched each of the rooms in this hallway, finding no sign of Ahsoka or a second descending staircase. They climbed up again, doing the same sweep, only giving each room a quick glance before carrying on to the next. Leia stepped away from yet another empty room, turning back to face everyone else — and found only Luke standing in the hallway, looking at her.

“Where’s Anakin?” she asked, and Luke shook his head, his expression already one of grim resignation.

“I don’t know.”
Leia swore loudly, and hurried over to her brother, grabbing his hand. “We have to keep going,” she said. “We have to find them, and then find some way out of here.”

Luke nodded, and they hurried on, climbing another set of stairs. They didn’t let go of each other as they searched yet another hallway, calling out for Anakin and Ahsoka. They finally found another descending staircase on this level but, by silent agreement, both avoided it; they had both concluded that it would be better to make their way out of the temple, rather than deeper in.

Finding the ascending staircase, Leia made to climb it. She took the first step, her hand still holding Luke’s, but as she lifted her foot to take the second, suddenly stumbled forward, as if pushed from behind. She threw out her hands to catch herself, letting go of Luke. Pushing herself back to her feet, she turned to face him — but he was gone.

“Luke!” She knew searching for him would almost certainly be pointless, but she still found herself scanning the hallway for him, peeking through empty doorways. There was, of course, no sign of him. It was as if he had simply evaporated.

She went back to the staircase and climbed. If she could only get back to the stairwell that had brought them down from the entrance, then she could get out of the temple easily enough. Hopefully, Anakin, Ahsoka, and Luke would be able to do the same — wherever they were.

As she stepped into the hallway, she heard it — not a whisper, but a cry, loud and clear, as if it was coming from one of the nearby rooms. It was the cry of a baby.

“Hello?” Leia took one tentative step forward, listening for hints of movement from any of the rooms. There was nothing, but the crying continued. She followed it, slowly, hesitantly, until she found the room where it was coming from.

Stepping through the doorway, she found herself walking from the temple on Raban into her childhood home, the royal palace on Alderaan. Instead of a dark, stone-walled room, she found her childhood bedroom from the Aldera palace, with tall, elegant windows that showed the vista of distant mountains. A woman with gracefully braided dark hair stood in the centre of the room, her back turned to Leia, something cradled in her arms. Leia took one more step into the room, and realized that the woman was softly singing; it was a lullaby that was achingly familiar to her.

“Mirrorbright, shines the moon, its glow as soft as an ember…” The baby’s crying quieted, and the woman rocked it gently, turning slowly as she paced the room, singing all the while. “When the moon is mirrorbright, take this time to remember those you have loved but are gone…”

The woman faced Leia now, not seeming to notice her presence, and Leia’s heart jumped in her chest as she saw her mother. A small smile pulled at Breha Organa’s lips as she sang peacefully to the infant cradled in her arms. Tears sprang to Leia’s eyes; it had been so long since she had heard her mother’s voice…

She blinked, a stray tear rolling down her cheek, and when she opened her eyes, her mother was gone, replaced by another woman — herself. She looked much like Leia did now, and like her mother, she held a baby in her arms, and she was quietly singing *Mirrorbright* to the swaddled infant.

“Those who kept you safe and warm… the mirrorbright moon lets you see those who have ceased to be…”

This was a Force vision, or something like it. Leia took a step back, as this other self continued to sing to her baby. A child laughed suddenly behind her, and she spun around to see a young girl, her
long brown hair flying loose behind her, running past. Leia stepped out of the room into one of the palace hallways, with its high, vaulted ceilings, and she watched as the girl threw herself into Bail Organa’s arms. Her father spun the child around, both of them laughing and smiling — and then the man wasn’t Bail anymore, but Anakin, and he held in his arms not a child, but a woman. Padmé, Leia realized, with her hair twisted into twin buns. The palace corridor had fallen away, replaced by what looked to be the entrance hall to the Galactic Senate, with its towering columns. They, too, were laughing and smiling, and Leia heard Anakin tell Padmé, “This is a happy moment... the happiest moment of my life.”

Leia turned to leave, to look away from this moment, and found she was now in an unfamiliar apartment, with what looked to be the mountains of Chandrila visible in the distance through the windows. There was another child standing in front of her, watching her. This child was a boy, perhaps six years old, with dark wavy hair and a startling intensity in his eyes as he looked directly at her. There was fear in those eyes, and pain and anger, and Leia felt compelled to go to him, to take him in her arms and comfort him. She moved towards him, but before she could reach him, he disappeared.

She spun, looking for him, and her surroundings transformed into the cavernous room of a Senate. Not the one on Coruscant, or even on Chandrila, though it was similar enough. She was in one of the pods, sitting beside an older woman, much older than Leia was now. Her hair was greying at the roots, and she was dressed regally, appropriate for a Senate session. Her expression was stony, and she didn’t seem to notice Leia, keeping her gaze forward. Leia realized, looking at her, that once again, this woman was her. As she watched this older version of herself, a voice suddenly sounded around them; it was one she didn’t recognize, yelling in anger.

“Senator Leia Organa is none other than the daughter of Darth Vader himself!” it declared. It was immediately followed by a vicious uproar of voices and protests, and then Bail Organa’s voice, slightly tinny as if from a recording. He spoke calmly, but seriously.

“Your father has become Darth Vader,” he said.

The older Leia’s eyes shimmered with tears, and she closed them, bowing her head. Leia felt ill to her stomach, watching this, but within seconds, the older version of herself was gone, vanishing with the Senate, replaced by Luke.

But this wasn’t her Luke. He was far too old and worn, with a greying beard on his wrinkled face. Only his eyes seemed to be the same, but they were filled with tears; he looked right at her, and hung his head. “I’m sorry, Leia,” he said, his voice watery. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

They were outside. Luke had fallen to his knees in front of her, and in the distance, she could see a tall building burning. Corpses were strewn across the ground around them, and Leia looked to her aged brother in fear, wondering what horror had happened there.

“I’m sorry,” he repeated, and then he, and the gut-wrenching scene around her, disappeared, as if blown away by the wind. In their place stood a man, tall and imposing; he wore black robes and a faceless mask, and held in his hand a crimson lightsaber, the blade of which sparked, as if unstable.

He seemed to observe her for a moment, and the feeling of him was the same as Vader — cold, dark, oppressing. “Mother,” he said, his voice modulated through the helmet.

Fear clenched her heart, and she turned to run. The world around her was dark and she stumbled, unable to see. But someone caught her just before she hit the ground, their arms strong around her. She looked up to find the world bright again, and Han looking down at her.
He was old, his hair entirely grey, but the smell and feel of him was so familiar, she wanted nothing but to remain there in his arms, to let this awful nightmare fade away. “I saw him,” he said, his voice changed by age. “I saw our son.”

She took a step back, looking up at him, and then stifled a scream as that shivering red lightsaber pierced through his chest, and he fell away from her. Her legs became unable to hold her, and she crumbled to the ground, shaking violently. Burying her head in her hands, she looked up only when a pair of hands came to rest gently on her shoulders.

It was Luke, young once more. He smiled, and she felt relief course through her as he leaned forward to kiss her forehead. It was alright, he was alright.

“No one’s ever really gone,” he said, and then blackness overtook her.

△▽△

It was the whispering that had drawn him away.

Luke had been holding Leia’s hand, intent on staying close to her, when it began. It wasn’t like the quiet voices that had murmured past his ear, drawing him to the Stone, during his first visit to the temple. This was far more real, as if actual people stood in one of the rooms just down the hallway, having a hushed conversation.

He was about to mention it to Leia when she stumbled, her hand slipping from his. The whispering immediately grew louder, and he looked in the direction it was coming from. To his surprise, he saw his Aunt Beru standing at the end of the corridor, holding her arms out to him. He felt a warm breeze brush his face, carrying with it the dry scents of home, of Tatooine.

He hadn’t meant to wander away from Leia. But he had taken one step towards his aunt, and then another, and another, as if his feet were being moved forward by themselves. As he drew closer, she had turned and walked away, disappearing down a nearby staircase. He had followed her quickly, not wanting to lose sight of her.

But she had disappeared. He stepped off the steps, not into another hallway in the Raban temple, but onto Tatooine, to the dusty salt flats that had surrounded his childhood home. It was evening, with the second of the double suns already halfway below the horizon. He stood not too far away from the little hutch that marked the entrance to the Lars homestead, where he had spent his largely unremarkable childhood.

None of this was real, he realized. It couldn’t be; these were visions, produced by the Stone or the temple, designed to lead him astray. He turned to leave, to find his way out, and instead found himself standing face-to-face with Obi-Wan.

He was young, perhaps a few years older than he had been during the Clone Wars, but there was such sorrow and weariness on his face that he looked decades older. He was wearing a dusty cloak, the hood pulled up over his head, and he was holding a small bundle in his arms — a baby. He walked past Luke as if he wasn’t even there, and Luke turned to watch him as he handed the bundle off to Aunt Beru, who looked much younger than Luke ever remembered seeing her. She smiled, and Luke realized that he was the baby; he was watching Obi-Wan bringing him to Tatooine, after his mother had died and his father had become Darth Vader.

And then Tatooine and Aunt Beru disappeared, replaced by a planet that was the antithesis of the desert world — Dagobah. Luke could feel the fine mist of rain on his face, and he could smell the vapors that rose from the surrounding swamps. Yoda stood in front of him, old and weary, but with
a fond smile on his face.

“Young Skywalker,” he said, craning his neck to look up at Luke. “Much to learn still, you have.”

And then Yoda was gone, blowing away with Dagobah, and in his place Luke found a mirror image of himself, perhaps a bit older than he was now, but not by much, holding a baby in his arms. He stood in an unfamiliar home, and as the baby fussed, he spoke softly to it, rocking it gently. He spun slowly, pacing as parents do when trying to soothe an infant, and when he faced Luke again, he was holding not a baby, but the hands of a child; a boy, perhaps ten years old, his tear-stained face crumpled in frustration.

The vision Luke knelt in front of the boy, looking him eye-to-eye. “You have to learn to control it, Ben,” he said, and the boy nodded, sniffing.

Yoda’s voice sounded from somewhere unseen, faint and almost inaudible. “Much anger in him…”

Then the boy vanished, and a suddenly much older Luke was left kneeling on the ground, his expression one of pure devastation. They were outside somewhere, and it was nighttime, though an eerie orange glow illuminated everything. Muffled screams echoed through the air, and Luke could hear the distant sound of crackling flames. There was a burning building, far away, and the ground around him was littered with corpses. Behind him, a child began crying.

He turned to see a small girl, not even ten years old. She was crying, her face wet with tears and her expression one of panic. As he watched her, a voice suddenly came from nearby. (His voice? he wondered, but he couldn’t tell).

“I’ll come back, sweetheart. I promise.”

Luke turned and ran. Whatever this was, whatever the Stone wanted to show him, he didn’t want to see it. As he ran, the outdoor scene vanished, replaced by the dim Rabani temple corridor. Finding a staircase, he hurried down it, to the hallway below. A figure stood there — Vader, dressed in his black suit, his crimson lightsaber in his hand. His mechanical breathing echoed off the walls, and he took a step towards Luke, reaching out his other hand.

“My son…” he said.

Luke stumbled back, and Vader disappeared, replaced by another black-clad figure, one Luke didn’t recognize. He wore a mask, as Vader did, but without the same mechanical breathing. Silver lines circled the eye holes, and where the mouth should have been there was just a smooth expanse of black metal. He, too, held a red lightsaber, but with a strange cross-hilt and a blade that quivered erratically.

Turning, Luke hurried back up the stairs.

He was on a plateau, surrounding by the blue of the sky and the ocean. The grass beneath his feet was a vibrant green, and he could hear crashing waves, a gentle sea mist blowing across his cheeks. A figure stood nearby, wearing a worn, grey cloak with the hood pulled up. Luke remained where he was, watching them. After a moment, the figure turned around, revealing himself to be an old man. His face was wrinkled and covered by a somewhat shaggy grey beard; he looked at Luke with such sadness in his bright blue eyes, and Luke was horrified to realize that this old man was himself.

Another girl appeared — or perhaps it was the same one, though she was much older now. She stopped right in front of this older version of him and, to Luke’s seemingly constant surprise,
pulled his father’s lightsaber out of her bag, stretching it out towards him.

“We need your help, Master Skywalker,” she said, and then her voice grew much quieter, as if it was just an echo. “You didn’t fail Kylo; Kylo failed you.”

And then the girl was gone, and the older him turned and walked away. His robe had fallen away, and Luke could see his father’s lightsaber hanging at his side. The plateau was replaced by a landscape of white; what looked like snow began to fall, clinging to Luke’s hair and clothes, but he didn’t feel any cold. As the older him disappeared in a flurry of white, he heard him begin to say, “If you strike me down…”

The whiteness overtook his vision, and everything fell away.

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Ahsoka was back on Shili.

She remembered this place, though just barely. The shadowed figures of dozens of adult Togruta stood around the room, and Master Koon stood just in front of her. His hand was stretched out to her, and she reached for it, unhesitant.

“Come with me, young one,” he said, closing his fingers around her hand and leading her away.

Shili fell away, and she was standing on the surface of what she recognized to be Christophsis. She could see Anakin and Obi-Wan in the distance, and Anakin raised his hand, calling her over. She began jogging towards them, but the ground suddenly dropped out from under her, and she ended up on her knees in a dark room.

Looking up, she realized she was kneeling in some sort of court. Several shadowed figures loomed above her, their voices echoing around her.

“Ahsoka Tano,” they said, “you have been charged with sedition against the Jedi Order and the Republic itself.”

“This court will decide your fate.”

She knew this was a vision; it couldn’t be anything else. And while she recognized the glimpses of her past, she did not recognize this. The Force was trying to show her something, to convey some message; but what?

Ahsoka struggled to her feet, her heart thundering in her chest; could this be her future? The court disappeared into darkness, and she found herself standing on the front steps of the Jedi Temple, the setting sun behind her.

Anakin was there, looking at her with such intense sadness on his face. He held her Padawan beads in his hand.

“I can’t stay here any longer, not now.” It was her voice speaking, though her mouth wasn’t moving; it came from somewhere else, unseen.

Anakin’s face scrunched up, and then he and the Temple were retreating, as if she was being pulled far, far away. “Anakin!” she cried, reaching out for him; she couldn’t leave him, not like this.

She was on an unfamiliar planet now, in a dusty town of worn-down people. A dark-skinned girl
with braided hair stood in front of her, holding her hands. She smiled, and it was a smile that lit up
the entire galaxy.

“Thank you, Ashla,” she said, and she leaned forward, kissing Ahsoka’s cheek.

Ahsoka closed her eyes, and when she opened them, the girl and the planet were both gone. She
was on a ship instead, the vastness of space visible outside the transparisteel window. Bail Organa
stood before her, his hands clasped behind his back.

“What am I going to call you, if I can’t call you Ahsoka?” he asked. Behind him, through the
window, a planet appeared, growing steadily bigger. She couldn’t recognize it, at least not from
this distance.

“Fulcrum,” she heard her own voice say. “You can call me Fulcrum.”

The ship was plunged into darkness, as if all the lights had simultaneously gone out, and she spun
around, frantically looking for a way out or a source of light. She found it when a lightsaber ignited
right in front of her, its blade the colour of blood. Lightning flashed, illuminating the imposing
figure holding the sabre — they were tall, dressed all in black with a billowing cape and a skeletal
mask over their face. They said nothing, and despite the lightning and the buffeting wind, she
could hear only a deep, unsettling, mechanical breathing.

“Who are you?” she demanded, reaching instinctively for her own lightsabers. She pulled them
free, holding them in front of her, but not yet igniting the blades.

“Ahsoka.” When the creature finally spoke, it spoke with the voice of her Master — of Anakin. She
took a step back, startled, and the creature took one step forward. “Ahsoka,” it repeated. “Do you
know what I’ve become?”

There was a flash of lightning, once more illuminating the face of this monster. A crack had
appeared in its mask, through which she could see its eye — yellow, but human, and horrifyingly
familiar.

“No!” she screamed, and this time it really was her speaking, not some disembodied voice.

The monster that was her master lunged forward, swinging his blade. She stumbled back,
surprised, and with no time to ignite her own blades, closed her eyes to wait for the impact — but it
never came. When she opened her eyes, she was back in the temple on Raban, lying on the stone
floor.

A figure clothed in white robes loomed over her, a staff in one hand and their hood pulled high over
their head, obscuring their face. A white and green convor circled lazily above their head, and as
Ahsoka struggled up onto her elbows, the figure pulled back their hood, revealing themselves to be
an older version of herself. Her montrals were taller and her facial markings more developed, but
her mouth was quirked in a familiar smile that Ahsoka recognized only because she knew how it
felt on her own lips.

The convor stopped its circling, coming to rest on the older Ahsoka’s shoulder as she leaned
forward to peer at her younger counterpart.

“You have quite a journey ahead of you, young one,” she said.

And then this older self, the convor, and the temple all slipped away.

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He felt the warm, dry breeze of Tatooine brush his face. It had been a strange sensation, standing in a windowless hallway deep underground, but Anakin had recognized it immediately. Somewhere behind him, in the distance, he could hear someone calling his name; Ahsoka, he thought at first, but after a moment of listening, he realized it was his mother.

But that was impossible. He turned, looking away from Ben and Nellith, just for a moment, hoping he could see the source of the voice — and he found himself on Tatooine, in the Slave Quarter of Mos Espa. He could see the door to his childhood home, and his mother stood in front of it, looking just as she had on the day that he had left Tatooine to join the Jedi. She was smiling, though he could see the sadness behind it.

“No matter where you are, my love will be with you,” she said. “Now be brave, and don’t look back.”

As she spoke, the sky around them grew dark, as if a sand storm was approaching. The wind began to whip faster, and his mother fell to her knees. Anakin ran to her, gathering her up into his arms; she now looked as she had when he had seen her last, right before her death, with wounds on her face and her body frail in his grasp.

“Don’t look back,” she told him, her voice barely above a whisper, reaching her hand up to touch his face.

He could feel the tears begin streaming down his face, hot and angry, just as they had when this had happened the first time. He knew it wasn’t real; it couldn’t be. His mother had been dead for two years already. This had to be some trick of the Force. But that didn’t stop the flood of emotions from surging through him as he held her corpse for the second time.

A hand was on his shoulder suddenly, and he jumped slightly from the shock. His mother and Tatooine vanished, and he turned to see Palpatine looking down at him, a sympathetic smile on his face. Slowly, he helped Anakin to his feet.

“My dear boy,” he said, “everything will be alright.” A shadow fell across Palpatine’s face, and for a split second, his smile seemed to turn sinister. Anakin blinked, confused, and the Chancellor disappeared, replaced by Padmé.

“Ani,” she said, her hands going to her his face, running her fingers through the hair behind his ears. They were standing in the entrance hall of the Senate Building, hidden behind a rounded column. “I’m pregnant.”

His heart dropped to his stomach. What was this? Some alternate reality? The future? Before he could consider it more, Padmé was collapsing in front of him, vanishing right before she hit the ground. The columns seemed to slip into the floor, and he became surrounded by darkness. In the distance, he could hear screaming — Padmé, crying out in fear and pain, and then the cry of a baby. He began to run, trying to find her, but the screaming never grew any closer.

He tripped, falling onto his hands and knees. He remained kneeling there for a moment, breathing hard, his mind reeling. A pair of feet stepped into his field of vision, and he looked up to see Palpatine standing over him. The Chancellor’s face was horribly disfigured, and Anakin had to keep himself from recoiling in shock and fear.

“I pledge myself to your teachings,” he heard his own voice say, from somewhere unseen. “To the ways of the Sith.”

A nauseating smile spread itself across Palpatine’s wrinkled lips. “Henceforth,” he said, his voice
strained and reedy, “you shall be known as Darth… Vader.”

An awful, deep, mechanical breathing echoed through the room, and Anakin struggled to his feet. He needed to get away, he needed to get out of here… But then Obi-Wan was there, bathed in orange light, his face distraught as he stared Anakin down.

“You were my brother, Anakin!” he cried. “I loved you!”

And then Anakin was burning, his entire body engulfed in flames. He screamed, falling to the ground and writhing in pain, but he could find no relief. There would be no relief. Obi-Wan vanished, and a tall, black-suited figure appeared, looking down at him, its mask like the face of death.

“Anakin Skywalker is dead,” it told him, in its deep, unnatural voice, and he knew that this creature was himself. He could see through its eyes — through the deep red lenses of its helmet, through the pain and suffering that clouded its mind.

He lumbered to his feet, feeling stiff, and found himself standing in the bowels of some building, pipes and steam all around him. That awful creature, that bastardization of himself, was there, holding in its hand a red lightsaber. To his surprise, Ben was also there, facing off this Vader and holding aloft a blue lightsaber. He seemed terrified, but there was a determination and anger in his voice as he spoke.

“You killed my father,” he said.

“No,” Vader said, in his awful mechanical voice. “I am your father.”

Anakin felt the shock that he could see on Ben’s face, suddenly bruised and battered, wind whipping through his hair.

“Luke…” that same awful voice continued. “Join me, and we can rule the galaxy together as father and son!”

From somewhere far away there came the sound of clashing lightsabers, and Anakin turned to see Ben — Luke, his son — battling against the horror that Anakin was one day to become. His lightsaber was green now instead of blue, and he fought well, if a bit unorthodoxly. They were in a room on some sort of ship, space visible in the wide windows behind them, and as their lightsabers clashed, there was a bright flash of light, and an electrifying pain suddenly coursed through Anakin’s body.

He fell to the ground, and Luke appeared above him, cradling him in his arms. Though the pain had dulled, it still lingered, pulsing slowly through his entire body.

“I can’t leave you here,” he was saying. “I’ve got to save you.”

Another voice spoke, no longer mechanical and more like Anakin’s actual voice, though significantly weaker. “You already have, Luke,” he said. “You were right about me. Tell your sister… you were right.”

Anakin’s eyes slipped shut, and consciousness slid away.

Chapter End Notes
the lullaby in Leia's vision and the scene in the Senate both come from Bloodline by Claudia Gray. the line "I'll come back, sweetheart. I promise." comes from the novelization of The Force Awakens by Alexander Freed, and the unfamiliar planet and the girl with braids from Ahsoka's vision are both from the novel Ahsoka by EK Johnston.
A Change of Plans

Chapter Summary

Things become pretty seriously derailed.

Luke woke slowly, consciousness coming back to him like the slow drip of liquid through a sieve. The first thing he became aware of was that he was outside, his face pressed to the cool earth and his nose filled with the scents of dirt and grass.

The second was that he had no memory of how he came to be here.

He opened his eyes, squinting in the bright light, to find himself lying on the ground, surrounded by the tall whispering grass outside the temple on Raban. It was still the middle of the afternoon, with the sky clear above him and the sun warm on his back.

He pushed himself slowly to his knees, looking around. The temple was not too far away, with the shuttle still docked beside it, and Leia was just coming awake beside him. He could see two dents in the tall grass a few feet away, where he assumed Anakin and Ahsoka lay.

Reaching over, he touched Leia gently on the shoulder. “Are you okay?” he asked, and she made a small grunt of discomfort. Slowly, she sat up, brushing dirt and grass from her hair.

“What the kriff happened?” she asked, blinking as she took in the fact that they were now outside the temple.

Luke shook his head. “I’m not sure. I don’t remember anything that happened in there.”

He remembered entering the temple, and starting down the staircase, but after that, his memory was blank. He didn’t think they were attacked; both he and Leia were unharmed, and there were no signs of a struggle in the grass around them. He remembered, with some discomfort, what Mayzee Lanith had told him when he first came to Raban — about people going into the temple and waking up, minutes or hours later, with no memory of what happened inside.

There was the sound of rustling from nearby, and Luke stood, pulling Leia up with him. He walked over to the two indentations in the grass, finding, as expected, Anakin and Ahsoka. Ahsoka was just beginning to stir, but Anakin was already awake, propped up on his elbows as he looked around in the confusion.

“Are you alright?” Luke asked, reaching out his right hand for Anakin to take. He did so, and Luke helped pull him to his feet.

“Yeah, I’m alright,” he said, dusting off the seat of his pants. “Confused, but alright.” He looked down at Ahsoka, who had turned over onto her back and was grimacing up at the bright sky. “What about you, Snips?”

“I think so,” she said, accepting his offered hand and standing. “What happened? I remember going in, but nothing after that.”

They all looked back to the temple, which looked no different than it had before they entered, with
its unassuming stone spire.

“The temple doesn’t like visitors,” Luke reminded them, frowning. “The woman who told me that, she said that people go in and reappear back outside with no memory of what happened in there.” He gave the temple a distrustful look. “I guess it didn’t want us inside.”

“But you were able to find the Stone before,” Anakin pointed out. “Obviously, it you wanted you inside then. Why not now?”

Luke opened his mouth to speak, but Leia beat him to it.

“It’s not ready to send us back,” she said. “Last time, it let us in because it — or the Force, or whatever — wanted us to come here, to the past. But it doesn’t want us to go back.” She sounded distressed, and Luke couldn’t blame her; the implication that they couldn’t just go back home whenever they wanted was troubling.

“Not yet,” he added.

“So what do we do now?” Anakin asked.

Luke looked to Leia. Her eyes were still trained on the temple, a slight frown on her face. He looked back to Anakin. “I don’t know.”

Just then, the ramp to the shuttle descended, and R2 appeared at the top. He beeped loudly at them, wondering what they were doing over there, and they all began to wade through the tall grass towards him.

“Artoo,” Anakin said, greeting his astromech with no small amount of relief. “How long have we been gone?”

R2 whistled a response, and the eyebrows of everyone standing around him collectively shot up.

“Two hours?” Anakin asked, voicing the surprise they all felt. “It’s been that long?”

R2 swiveled his head and trilled an affirmative, adding that he had been beginning to grow worried. He then trained his photoreceptor on Luke and Leia, beeping out a rather rude question that translated, roughly, to, “What are they still doing here?”

“The temple kicked us out,” Luke said, at the same time that Anakin scolded the droid.

“Why do you think it did that?” Ahsoka asked. They had all made their way up the ramp into the shuttle, taking a seat wherever one was free. “I mean, why wasn’t it ready to send you back?”

Luke was silent for a moment, unsure of what to say. He knew the answer, but he also knew that Leia wasn’t comfortable with him disclosing it — at least, she hadn’t been before. He looked to her, but she refused to meet his gaze, keeping her eyes trained on her hands, which were gripped tightly together in her lap.

“Well, I’m not—“ he began, but was stopped once again by Leia suddenly speaking up.

“It’s because we’re not done here,” she said. “There’s still something we need to do.”

“So your brother has said,” Anakin said, one eyebrow slightly raised. “But are you going to tell us what, exactly, this mysterious task is?”

Leia’s eyes finally met Luke’s and, slowly, almost imperceptibly, she nodded. He looked at
Anakin, his heart thumping in his chest.

“We haven’t been entirely honest,” he explained. “Especially with you, Anakin. Obi-Wan knows some of the truth; not all of it, but what he does know, he agreed was best to keep secret. But with things the way they are... I think it’s become necessary for us to tell the truth.” His gaze flicked back to Leia. “All of it.”

There was a brief moment of tense silence, broken by Ahsoka. “Well, that certainly sounds ominous.”

“Much of it is information that the Jedi Council should also have,” Luke said. “We’re not going to be able to go this alone; we’ll need your help, and theirs. I think it would be best to wait until we’re back on Coruscant to tell any of you anything. The news is probably going to be... overwhelming.”

Anakin looked rightfully unsure, but he still nodded his assent. “Then let’s head back to Coruscant.” Standing, he took his seat in the shuttle’s cockpit, Ahsoka going to sit beside him. Together, they began the shuttle’s start-up sequence, while R2 began the calculations for the jump to hyperspace.

Left behind in the back of the shuttle, Luke’s eyes met Leia’s. She didn’t say anything, but she didn’t have to; he knew that she wouldn’t protest to telling Anakin the truth, but he knew she was undeniably not happy about it.

“I’m sorry,” he told her, meaning it absolutely. She had wanted desperately to go home, and he understood why.

She gave him a small smile. “It’s not your fault,” she said. “I should have been more prepared for this outcome. And now there’s nothing we can do but keep moving forward.”

“Can you do that?” he asked.

“I don’t really have a choice, do I?”

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The shuttle hummed softly as it propelled itself through hyperspace. Leia sat in the back, her legs stretched out on the bench and her hands resting on her stomach. Luke was sitting on the bench across from her, looking out the small viewport in silence. There was nothing to see besides the swirling blue of hyperspace, but Leia suspected that he wasn’t focused on the view.

She herself was continually fighting off bouts of nausea, trying to calm the thoughts that circled endlessly in her mind. They had failed to go back to their own time. She suspected that Luke was right in suggesting that it was because the Force still wanted them in the past, but she still wasn’t sure about why. Luke was adamant that it was so they could stop Palpatine and save their father, but that plan still didn’t sit well with her. By now she was over her fear of changing the past — they were way beyond that point. But the more she thought about it, the more it didn’t make sense.

It had been three hours since they left Raban, with several more hours to go before they reached Coruscant. Anakin had contacted the Jedi Temple to let them know that they would be returning, but had yet to receive a response. But Leia had spent those past few hours thinking, about their failure and why the Force might want to keep them in the past.

Luke had already saved their father. Anakin Skywalker had died as himself, in the light once more, or so her brother claimed. With the Sith gone, the Force had been brought into balance. Why would it risk that, all for the chance of once more being brought into balance, just in a different way?
Fewer people would suffer, yes, but Leia didn’t think it would be accurate to think of the Force as being particularly concerned with such things. She didn’t even know if it was accurate to think of it in such sentient terms.

Her mind kept going back to what Yoda had said to them, after Anakin had first told the Council about the Stone. He had spoken cryptically, implying that he knew, or at least guessed, who their father was, but what Leia remembered most clearly was what he had said after questioning their reasons for being here.

“Knowledge is as important as action. Learn here, you will — about others, and about yourselves.”

But learn what?

She looked to Luke, wondering if perhaps he might at least have an idea. Swinging her legs over, she moved to stand up, to go over and ask him, but before she could, Anakin appeared from the cockpit, his face grim.

“I’ve heard back from the Council,” he announced, both Luke and Leia looking to him. Ahsoka poked her head out of the cockpit to listen, though Leia assumed she already knew what Anakin was about to say.


Anakin grimaced, somewhat unsure. “Complicating news,” he answered eventually. “The Council has informed me that they have heard from Obi-Wan, and his position isn’t good. He’s attempting to retake the planet Kamarr in the Expansion Region, but he’s run into problems and needs back-up. And seeing as Kamarr is in the Tolmses sector, we’ll be passing right by it on our way to Coruscant, and so the Council has asked Ahsoka and I to go and assist. The rest of the 501st is already en route, and will be reaching Kamarr shortly after we do. But that means that we don’t have time to return to Coruscant, so you two will have to come along.”

“Why can’t someone else do it?” Leia asked, frowning. A distraction like this was not what they needed.

Anakin shrugged. “We’re already all the way out here, and the Republic is desperate to get control of Kamarr back.”

“But the Council knows how important it is that we get back,” Leia argued. “They know that Ben’s life is in danger, and probably mine too.”

“I know, Nellith, but this isn’t really up for debate,” he said. “The Council has made their decision. I’m sorry.”

Leia crossed her arms, slumping back with a huff, wondering just how many more delays they were going to run into before they could get home.

“Listen, we’ll do everything we can to make sure you two are safe, and that this ends quickly,” Anakin said, after a moment’s pause. “This is an active war zone, and it’s not going to be pretty. You two can stay up on the Resolute, which will remain in orbit around the planet. From what I understand, the fighting is mostly ground-based—“

“We’re not going to stay on the Resolute,” Luke said, interrupting him. “We’re going to help, however we can.”
Leia nodded her agreement. If they were going to do this, they might as well do it proactively, and try to finish it faster.

“\textquote I appreciate the sentiment,” Anakin said, “but you have to understand: This is war. It’s not going to be an easy fight. It’s dangerous.”\textquote"

“We’re well-aware of that, thanks,” Leia said, trying not to roll her eyes. “We have some experience.”

“We can help,” Luke added.

Anakin was silent for a moment, thinking it over. He looked to Ahsoka, who merely shrugged, and then back to Luke and Leia. “Alright,” he said eventually. “If you’re so sure. But no one will be able to look out for you the whole time; you’re probably going to be on your own for a lot of it.”

Leia gave a quiet laugh. “Don’t worry. We can handle ourselves.”

Anakin nodded, still obviously somewhat unsure, but he seemed to realize it was pointless to try and argue with the both of them. He turned to R2, who had been sitting off the side, observing them all this entire time.

“Artoo,” he said, “change our course for Kamarr.”

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Anakin filled them in on the situation the best that he could on the journey to Kamarr, but the Council had been brief in their own report, and so there was very little that he could pass on to them. What he did know, however, was that Kamarr was a vital planet in the war effort, not because of any important strategic location, but because of its resources. Kamarr was a key supplier of kalmium, a metal used extensively in the production of blasters, and thus of great significance to both the Republic and the Separatists.

They came out of hyperspace in the Kamarr system to find it relatively peaceful. A Star Destroyer floated nearby, and Luke could see more in the distance.

“The Republic has the planet blockaded,” Anakin explained. He was sitting in the cockpit, Ahsoka beside him, while Luke and Leia leaned in somewhat awkwardly. “They managed to accomplish this quite easily, but the trouble’s been on the ground. They haven’t been able to take the capital city.”

He pressed a few buttons on the dash, likely transferring their clearance codes to the patrolling Star Destroyer. A few moments passed, and then a voice came through giving them the all-clear. Anakin directed them down towards the planet, to the side currently encompassed in nighttime. Luke could see only a few pinpricks of light down on the surface, sparsely dotting the darkened landscape.

Anakin brought them down a short distance away from one of these pinpricks. It was a village, little more than a cluster of small buildings, the warm glow of their lights piercing the darkness. A few tents were set up around the perimeter, and a number of other shuttles and LAAT gunships were docked nearby. There seemed to be a great flurry of activity around the village, despite the late hour, with dozens of clone troopers marching about, going from tent to tent and building to building.

From what Luke could see, the landscape was one of a desert. The area around them was barren and rocky, and the dark shapes of sand dunes rolled in the distance. Beyond them, just faintly, the
sky was beginning to lighten, harkening the still-long-off arrival of dawn.

A group of figures approached the shuttle, illuminated by the ship’s exterior lighting. As they grew closer, Luke realized that they were Obi-Wan, accompanied by two clone troopers, each of them carrying rather large packs. Obi-Wan himself, Luke noticed with some confusion, was wearing a thick jacket and gloves, and though his hood was pulled back, his cheeks were flushed from cold. Looking up into the cockpit, he waved, and then made the motion for them to hold, likely to discourage them from lowering the ramp.

“What’s the temperature out there?” Leia asked.

Anakin quickly checked the shuttle’s readouts. “Just barely above freezing,” he replied.

Luke raised one eyebrow. “So it’s a cold desert?”

“Must be. Hopefully they have extra coats.”

They did. Once Obi-Wan and the troopers were positioned under the ramp, Anakin lowered it just long enough for them to hurry inside, though it was more than enough time to let in a frosty blast of air that left Luke shivering to his bones.

Dropping his pack to the floor, Obi-Wan smiled. “It’s good to see you all,” he said. “Your arrival here is most welcome.” He gestured to the pack he had unceremoniously dropped, and to the ones being carried by his companions. “We have some jackets for you; you’re going to need them.”

The cold weather supplies were doled out; in addition to jackets, each of them got a hat and a pair of gloves. Both Luke and Anakin were quick to put all their new clothes on, and while Leia zipped up her coat, she shoved her gloves and hat into her pockets. Though it had been several years since he had left Tatooine, Luke had yet to develop any ability to handle cold very well; he supposed the same was true for Anakin. His only comfort was that at least it didn’t seem to be as cold as Hoth.

“Will it get warmer when the sun comes up?” Anakin asked.

Obi-Wan gave a quiet laugh. “I suppose it would, if the sun ever did come up.”

He was met by a wall of blank and confused looks, and laughed again, gesturing for them to follow him. “I’ll explain on the way to the main operating centre.”

The ramp was lowered once more, and they stepped out into the brisk night, R2 trundling down after them. The sand on the ground around them was packed down tight, and so it didn’t shift and roll under their feet, which was welcome. There was a gentle wind blowing, but to Luke’s surprise it wasn’t the sharp, cold sting that he had been expecting, but was instead much gentler, and significantly warmer.

“The planet is tidally-locked to its sun,” Obi-Wan explained, leading them away from the landing area and into the camp proper. “The same side always faces the sun, meaning that one side — this side — is always in darkness. One side freezes, the other burns. The only thing that makes this area habitable is warm winds from the sunny side. But the further you go in that direction—” he pointed off to the distance, away from the far-off dawn, “—the colder it gets, until it’s too cold for survival. Most people live in the perpetual twilight that exists between the two sides, and there’s some odd bits of native flora and fauna there, but we are currently just outside the farthest permanent settlement on this side of the planet.”

Luke had known that planets like this existed; they themselves weren’t overly rare, though what was unusual was to find one that was inhabited, as they were notoriously difficult for eking out a
living on.

“So I’m guessing the only reason anyone actually lives here is because of kalmium,” Leia said, coming to the conclusion of Luke’s thoughts.

“Exactly,” Obi-Wan said with a nod. “And it’s why we’re here, too.”

The main operating centre turned out to be a cantina, commandeered by the Republic forces. There were dozens of clone officers inside, monitoring equipment and dealing with the administration of fighting a war. The cantina’s tables had been rearranged, pushed together to hold the necessary equipment and to make space for the large holotable that took up much of one side of the room. The bar, however, was still in place, with bottles of alcohol lining its shelves.

“Think we have time for a drink?” Luke quipped, and Obi-Wan laughed, shaking his head.

“Not likely.”

Inside the cantina was warm, and Luke took off his hat and gloves, unzipping his coat but not removing it fully.

“What happened to the people who lived here?” Leia asked, looking around the repurposed cantina.

“They were all evacuated a few days ago,” Obi-Wan explained. “The fighting has been pretty fierce, up until now. Many of them fled before we got here, but those who remained were sent to the other side of the planet, where it’s more stable.”

He brought them over to the holotable, where a hologram of the planet was hovering, one side shaded darker than the other.

“This is Kamarr,” Obi-Wan said, motioning to the planet. “We’re currently here.” He pointed to a small glowing light, a good way into the dark hemisphere. “And this—” he pointed to a larger light, straddling the border between light and dark “—is the capital city, Notta. This is the only remaining Separatist stronghold on the planet; we take this, and we take Kamarr. The only issue is that the city is very well-defended, and the Separatists won’t give it up easily.”

Leia was staring at the map, her gaze one of intense focus. It was a look that Luke recognized well; he had often seen it on her face during the Civil War, when she had been discussing strategy with Rebel Command.

“Couldn’t you just lay siege to it?” he suggested. “They can’t stay in there forever.”

“Most of the Separatist forces are droids,” Anakin explained. “They don’t need food, or water, or anything. They could live in that city for months.”

“The same cannot be said of the several hundred civilians still within the city,” Obi-Wan added. “Their planet was already ravaged when the Separatists arrived, and things only got worse when we got here and the entire planet became one big battleground. Most of Kamarr is a desert; nearly all the water comes from moisture vaporators. Supplies have already been disrupted, and people have been forced to ration their water severely. If we lay siege to the city, even for one week, and cut off all their supplies, hundreds of people will die.”

“So we have to take the city quickly, and by force,” Anakin said, and Obi-Wan nodded.

“That’s the current plan. But doing so would require more troops than we had, hence why you’re
all standing here now.”

“Do you have a map of the city?” Leia asked, leaning forward and bracing her hands against the holotable.

“We do.” Obi-Wan pressed a few buttons on the console, and the planet disappeared, replaced by a three-dimensional map of Notta. It was a decently-sized city, rather average by most galactic standards. It didn’t look as if it had been particularly well-planned, with the narrow, winding streets and tall, shambling buildings typical of quick, largely unsupervised growth. The most distinct feature, however, was the wall that surrounded the entire city, several metres tall.

“How many entrances to the city are there?” Leia asked.

“Only a few,” Obi-Wan said, pointing out the four gates in the city wall, one facing in each direction. “There are gun emplacements all along the wall, as well, and constant patrols.” Pressing another button, several dozen guns materialized on top of the wall, evenly spaced out. “Traffic into and out of Notta is strictly controlled, and requires a pass authorized by the Separatist general in charge of the city. From what little information we have, there also seems to be a shield generator somewhere within the city. It’s not turned on at the moment, but it’s likely powerful enough to create a shield that can cover the whole of Notta.”

“How many Separatist forces are within the city?” Luke asked, his eyes darting across the map, trying to formulate a plan.

“A few thousand, at the very most,” Obi-Wan replied. “We vastly outnumber them, particularly with Anakin’s reinforcements, but—“

“But the second you try to attack Notta, the shield generator goes on, and you end up with a city under siege,” Leia said.

Obi-Wan nodded, obviously a bit surprised by her insight. “Precisely.”

“So we need to take down the shield generator,” Anakin said, his gaze serious and contemplative.

“Well, that should be easy enough,” Luke said, receiving a slew of shocked glances in return.

“Easy?” Anakin asked, baffled. “We have to somehow get into the city, find the shield generator without getting caught, and somehow destroy it. It sounds at least a bit challenging to me.”

Leia’s lips curled up in an amused grin. “Don’t worry about it,” she said. “We’ve played this game before.”
The Guide

Chapter Summary

The team departs for Notta, and picks up a guide along the way.

The native Kamarrans, with no day and night cycle to centre themselves, had apparently had a very unique system for telling time, whose main characteristic was that it didn’t actually feature a concept of time. They had died out long ago, however, taking their concepts of time with them. Kamarr’s new inhabitants had looked to Coruscant to centre themselves in time, and so the hour on Kamarr corresponded directly to the hour on Coruscant, specifically to that of the Senate Building.

As it turned out, they had arrived on the desert planet in what was considered late morning. The lights that lined the streets of the village did their best to mimic the sun, reaching their brightest at noon and eventually dimming to a soft golden glow at evening. Most of them went out after “sunset”, though some remained on to maintain visibility in the streets. Only every third light was still illuminated when Luke and Leia finally re-emerged from the cantina, having spent the entire day inside with Anakin, Obi-Wan, and Ahsoka, planning their mission to Notta.

A veritable tent city had sprung up around the village while they were inside; the 501st had evidently also been hard at work, setting up the space and infrastructure needed to house a whole extra legion. Anakin and Ahsoka would be staying with their men, and they left everyone outside the cantina, wishing them a good night. They would be seeing each other again early the next morning.

Luke and Leia were spending the night close to Obi-Wan, in one of the repurposed village buildings. The streets were much quieter than they had been earlier; the only other people out were troopers on patrol and those who had been unfortunate enough to pull night duty. The temperature was no lower than before, but Luke still pulled his jacket tight around his body to protect against the uncomfortable chill.

“I hope you don’t feel me rude for saying so,” Obi-Wan said, “but I am sorry that you weren’t able to go back. The Council updated me on what happened on Raban; it’s quite unfortunate.”

“It seems as if the past isn’t done with us yet,” Luke said. “But if there’s one thing this mishap has taught us, it’s that we actually need to try and do what the Force sent us here to accomplish. It’s obvious now that that’s the only way for us to get home.”

Obi-Wan quirked one eyebrow. “And what is that?”

Luke took a moment before answering. “We’re going to tell Anakin the truth,” he said, “about who we are. And about other things; things that you don’t even know.”

Obi-Wan’s curiosity turned to concern, and he looked between the two of them. “Are you sure that’s wise?” he asked.

“You were there, when the Council discussed the appearance of the Sith Master,” Leia said. “They have Luke’s memories. Chances are, they know who Luke and I are, and more. If everybody else
knows too, then that’s one less weapon that this Sith Lord has.”

They walked along in silence for a moment, Obi-Wan seeming to consider her argument.

“I think the reason we’re here has to do with Anakin,” Luke added. “What we need to do... we can only do it if he knows who we are.”

There was more silence, but finally, Obi-Wan nodded. “I trust you both. If you feel this is what needs to be done, then you should do it. I just want to make sure you’ve thought about the ramifications of this. Once you tell him, there’s no going back. Your lives could be drastically.”

“I think they already have been,” Leia said softly, under her breath.

“This is the only way,” Luke said. “We’ll wait until we’re back on Coruscant, before we tell anyone, and we’ll make sure we tell Anakin first. It’s... going to be quite the shock.”

“If you’re so sure, then I won’t do anything to stop you.”

“How do you think he’ll react?” Luke asked. Despite the time he had spent with the man who would one day be his father, he still knew precious little about him. He knew Anakin’s past and future, but not who he was; what made him laugh, what annoyed him, the things he enjoyed. Even having spent so much time with, he still existed largely in Luke’s mind as the far-removed and legendary Anakin Skywalker. The fact that he was Luke’s father only worked to make him even more unknowable.

Obi-Wan considered this question for a few seconds before answering. “I think he’ll be surprised, of course. He’ll also probably be a little angry, at first, that you didn’t tell him earlier. He’ll feel deceived, but it won’t last long, not once you tell him why you withheld the truth from him. Then I think he’ll be curious, if not still a little... unsure. I don’t believe being a father was ever something he planned to do, certainly not to two children older than he is. But quite honestly, I think I’ll be on the receiving end of most of his anger, once he learns that I’ve known this for quite some time.”

Luke tried to take some comfort in that, but no matter how good Anakin took the news that they were his children, there was no way he would react well to learning the rest of his future.

They had reached their destination. It appeared to have once been something of a seedy hotel; a sign out front, no longer illuminated but still legible in the dim light, proclaimed that there were vacant rooms available. The interior was quiet; no one sat behind the lobby’s front desk, and all but a few of the lights were extinguished. A set of rickety stairs climbed the wall to their left.

Obi-Wan led them up to the second level, where perhaps a dozen doors lined a narrow, darkened hallway. Reaching into his coat pocket, he retrieved a card key and passed it to Luke.

“You’ll both be staying in this room here,” he said, motioning to a door on the right side of the hallway. Orange rust strains creeped along the edges of the metal door, and the palm pad that granted access to the room was of such an outdated style that even Obi-Wan was likely to recognize it as such. “The accommodations aren’t the best,” he continued, “but it’s better than sleeping out in a tent.”

Luke swiped the card against the palm pad and, after a moment, it beeped and the door noisily slid open. The room beyond sported only the most basic, cheapest furniture, with two tiny beds and a single chair by the window, not even cushioned. The bedding looked as if it had been replaced with military-issue blankets and pillows, uncomfortable but with less of a chance of infestation or
mysterious stains.

“This’ll do fine,” Leia said, no doubt remembering her flooded room on Hoth. Luke didn’t remember his bunk on Hoth with any particular fondness, either; their short stay on the ice planet had been freezing and overcrowded. This hotel room was luxurious compared to many of the places where they had slept during their years with the Rebellion.

“Thank you,” Luke said, looking to Obi-Wan, who smiled. It was a warm smile, though Luke could see a tinge of concern in it.

“You shouldn’t worry about Anakin,” Obi-Wan said, after a moment. “He’ll be alright.”

Luke simply nodded, while the corners of Leia’s mouth tensed slightly, both of them knowing that wasn’t at all true.


“Good night,” Leia said, but Luke remained silent, until Obi-Wan disappeared into his own room and they were left alone.

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Leia woke the next morning far earlier than she needed to. Her eyes had already been open for some time, staring up at the darkened ceiling, when Obi-Wan’s soft knock sounded on the door. Luke, still sleeping peacefully in the bed beside her, mumbled something incomprehensible and rolled over.

Throwing off the covers, Leia quickly pulled on her shoes and hurried to the door. They had both slept in their clothes, and so she needed only to throw on her vest to be fully dressed. She opened the door to let Obi-Wan in, flipping on the light at the same time. Luke groaned in protest, but managed to sit up, his eyes bleary and his hair mussed from sleep.

Obi-Wan was no longer wearing his Jedi robes. Instead, he wore a simple light-coloured shirt tucked into dark pants, with a black fur-lined jacket. Only his boots appeared to be the same, and his lightsaber was nowhere in sight, though Leia was certain he had it hidden away somewhere.

“I hope you both slept well,” he greeted.

“Well enough,” Leia lied.

While Luke woke himself up a bit more and pulled on his shoes, she redid the messy braid in which she had slept, her practised fingers making quick work of the tangled locks. Retrieving her blaster from where she had tucked it beneath her pillow, she slid it into the holster at her thigh, and then put on the cold weather gear that Obi-Wan had given them the day before. Within minutes, they were both ready to go.

They left their small pack of belongings in the room; with luck, they should be back before long. Obi-Wan had brought them each ration bars, and they ate them quickly as he led them out of the hotel into the cold morning. The brisk air and dark sky reminded Leia of early mornings on Alderaan, when she and her father would wake before the sun to go on hikes in the mountains. The sunrise had always been beautiful, cresting over the mountaintops to bathe Aldera in the valley below in golden light. But there would be no sunrise this morning.

Anakin and Ahsoka were waiting for them in the cantina-turned-operations-centre, alongside
Captain Rex and another clone trooper Leia didn’t recognize.

“Good morning,” Ahsoka greeted as they approached, a cheery smile on her face despite the daunting mission ahead of them.

“Good morning,” Obi-Wan returned. The two troopers saluted, and the unfamiliar one stepped forward. His plasteel armour, battered by numerous scratches and dents, was covered in certain areas by a distinctive orange paint, and he held a similarly-coloured helmet under his arm. Obi-Wan turned to Luke and Leia. “I don’t believe you two have met Commander Cody?”

Luke shook his head, and Obi-Wan continued, “Well, then allow me to make some introductions. Nellith, Ben, this is Commander Cody, my second-in-command. Cody, Ben and Nellith.”

Cody nodded in greeting. Though his facial features were, of course, identical to that of all other clones, he was distinguished by a large, raised scar that followed the curve of his left brow bone, right above his eye.

“General,” he said, reaching out with his free hand to present a small deck of datacards, “I was able to get the passes you requested. The work is a little spotty, but they should hold.”

“Thank you, Commander.” Obi-Wan took the cards, and handed one each to Anakin, Ahsoka, Luke, and Leia. “These are your new identifications. Hopefully you won’t have to use them, but do take care not to lose them.” Leia thought she saw him give Anakin a rather pointed look.

She looked down at the thin card in her hands, which proclaimed her to be Kiddy Wellenn, a local baker. While it was unlikely that any of the Separatists in the city would recognize the name Nellith Lars, they had decided not to take any risks, after their romp through a Separatist prison and the attack on Luke. Curious, she peered over at her brother’s identification; it stated his name as Olik Cade, a mechanic. She wondered if there were an actual Kiddy Wellenn and Olik Cade who lived in Notta, or if the identities were entirely fabricated. She tucked the card carefully into the inside pocket of her jacket.

“We can take you as far as five klicks outside the city,” Rex said. “You’ll have to walk the rest of the way.”

Anakin nodded. “Then we should get moving.”

They went outside the cantina, where two landspeeders were waiting. Rex took one, Anakin and Ahsoka climbing in with him, while Cody and Obi-Wan took the other. “You’re with me,” Obi-Wan said, looking to Luke and Leia.

“No Artoo?” Luke asked, as they settled into the speeder. Obi-Wan was sitting in the front with Cody, while Luke and Leia piled into the back.

Obi-Wan shook his head. “An astromech would be a bit too conspicuous in a city under occupation. Though I’m sure he still raised hell about being excluded.”


The speeders lurched into motion. They were uncovered, and though they moved slowly through the small village-turned-military-camp, they gradually picked up speed once they left the dilapidated buildings and tents behind, barrelling out into the open desert. The wind whipped through Leia’s hair, the sound of it precluding any conversation, but she was alright with that. Her body was tensed with pre-mission anticipation, though she felt little nervousness. It was as if she had been dropped back into the middle of the Civil War, running an important mission, with Luke
by her side. She only wished Han were there.

As they made their way across the desert, the landscape gradually changed from that of a sandy waste to a rocky field. The boulders started out small, but quickly grew larger and larger, until they were as large as buildings and they had to slow to avoid a collision. At the same time, the sky became progressively lighter, changing from black to dark blue, the stars fading more with each minute. The distant sunrise on the horizon grew ever closer, though Leia knew they would never reach it. Notta stood in the small zone between day and night, existing in a sort of perpetual twilight. It would continue to grow lighter, but the night would never fully recede.

They drove on for some time, until the distant sky began to grow gold from the nearing sun. On the horizon, bathed in the soft light of a false morning, Leia could see Notta. It seemed to materialize out of the desert, an unexpected oasis. Cody slowed the speeder to a stop, in the shadow of one of the large rock formations dotting the landscape, and Rex pulled up beside them.

It had been hard to notice when the speeder was in motion, with all the wind, but once Leia climbed out, she realized that the temperature had risen by several degrees, even in the shadows. The light was dim, with the sky still dark above them and the far-away sun blocked by the massive boulder; it was for that reason that she didn’t notice the figure lurking in one of the crevices of the formation, shrouded by shadow, until they stepped forward.

Her gut instinct was to reach for the blaster at her hip, and she saw Luke do the same, his hand going to his lightsaber. Obi-Wan, climbing out after them, gestured for them to leave their weapons.

“This is the contact I was telling you about,” he said, and the figure, though hesitant at first, moved closer. Leia had thought them to be human at first, but she realized as they came closer that they were actually Chagrian. They lacked the tall distinctive horns sported by the males of the species, marking them to be a woman, though she still possessed the fleshy lethorns that hung over her shoulders. Her blue skin appeared dark in the low light, and though she had no hair on her head, the hood of her jacket was pushed back.

“Pamani Laasken,” she introduced, giving them all a nod. Anakin and Ahsoka had dismounted, and came over to stand near everyone else. “I’ve been here on Kamarr, acting as a contact for the Republic, since the start of the war.” She looked now to Obi-Wan. “Your message said you wanted to find the shield generator?”

Leia knew very little about Chagrians; she might quite a few during her years in the Imperial Senate, the most prominent being Mas Amedda, Palpatine’s former Grand Vizier who had later become something of a thorn in the New Republic’s side. What she did know about the species, however, was that they were amphibious, and it was thus very unexpected to find one on a desert planet, of all places.

Obi-Wan nodded. “Do you know where it is?” he asked her.

Pamani grinned, her white teeth contrasting starkly with her skin. “Planning something big, are you?” she asked. “I think I can help; I’ve got a pretty good idea of where the generator is.”

“Excellent.”

Obi-Wan went over the speeder, where Cody had remained, and they talked for a moment in hushed tones. Cody and Rex would be returning to the village, to oversee the final preparations there. But if all went well, they would be seeing them again before the end of the day.
Finishing their conversation, Obi-Wan gave both clone troopers a nod, and stepped back from the speeders. Everyone else moved out of the way, pressing themselves to the rock formation, as Cody and Rex restarted the speeders. With final salutes and nods, they pulled away, heading back in the direction they had come and leaving them stranded in the middle of the desert, with no way to go but forward.

“Shall we?” Pamani asked, motioning towards the distant city.

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The walk to Notta was long and cold. The sediment that covered the ground in this region was more like gravel than sand, and it slowed their progress, their feet crunching on the rocks that tumbled beneath them. Though they were now essentially in the twilit border between light and dark, there was still a slight chill to the air, as one might experience in the early morning or late evening on a typical temperate planet. Here and there, bits of hardened grass stuck out from amongst the rocks, the green of their stalks so pale as to almost be white, and small creatures skittered about the boulders.

As they walked, Pamani discussed their plan for getting into the city. The four gates would be well-guarded, and only those with valid passes — which they didn’t have — would be allowed to enter. That meant they would have to sneak in. They couldn’t go over the wall; the entire thing was patrolled constantly, and the various gun emplacements were particularly well-guarded.

Which left them only one other way.

“We’re approaching the city from the northeastern side,” Pamani explained. “We’ll be far enough away from the northern and eastern gates, but there would still be a chance of guards on top of the wall spotting us if we approached out in the open. Which is where that will come in.” She pointed off to the right, away from the city.

There, nestled amongst the boulders and rocks, was a pipeline. It was a good distance away, but still close enough that Luke was shocked to realize that he hadn’t noticed it before. It appeared to be half buried in the dirt, so that all could be seen was a half-dome, like the back of a snake slithering through the sand. It continued on towards the city, eventually disappearing into the wall. Looking the other way, Luke could see no end to it.

“What is that?” Leia asked. They had all come to a stop, observing the strange structure.

“That is the pipeline used to carry water to Notta from the moisture farms that exist all over the planet,” Pamani said. “However, most of the farms were abandoned months ago, and so it’s almost entirely dried up. Bad news for those of us living in the city, but good news for anyone who wants to get in or out without being spotted.”

“The Separatists don’t know about it?” Ahsoka asked.

“Oh, they do. But they think it’s only necessary to guard the entrance in the city, and we figured out the patrol schedule weeks ago. Come on, we have to hurry.” She took off at a brisk jog towards the pipe, and they followed close behind her.

The pipe was much bigger up close than it had appeared from a distance; Luke could just barely see over the top of it to the other side. The giant sections were welded tightly together, and the metal, though scratched and dented from constant exposure to the harsh desert elements, seemed thick and tough. “We’re supposed to climb inside?” he asked, looking to Pamani, who nodded.
“There’s a service hatch just up ahead,” she said.

They walked alongside the pipe for a minute or two, the hatch quickly coming into sight. It was placed on top of the pipe, with a few metal rungs on the side to allow someone to climb up and reach it. Pamani went first, twisting the hatch open. Pulling a glowrod out from one of her jacket pockets, she turned it on and placed it carefully between her teeth. Using both hands, she gripped the edge of the hatch and lowered herself down into the pipe, disappearing.

Obi-Wan went next, followed by Leia, Ahsoka, and then Luke. He jumped down, landing in a crouch just below the hatch. There was a layer of water on the floor, high enough to cover the toes of his boots, and his landing sent up a small splash, wetting the hem of his jacket. The water was ice cold, and he was very thankful that his boots were waterproof. He moved quickly out of the way to make space for Anakin, who did the exact same thing he did, sending up a spray of chilly water.

They each had brought with them a small pack of supplies, which included a bit of food, water, and a glowrod, among other things. Luke pulled his out, turning it on just as Pamani reached out and flipped a switch on the wall that closed the hatch, shutting out the small bit of natural light that had been trickling in.

She pointed her glowrod down the pipe, towards the city, and quickly checked a portable chronometer. “We should be reaching the entrance to Notta just as there’s a gap between the patrols,” she said. “Let’s get moving.”

She led the way. The pipe was tall enough for all of them to be able to strand comfortably, and wide enough that they could walk two abreast. It was damp, and smelt of rust and stale water, with the sound of their footsteps sloshing along echoing in the metal tunnel and the light of their glowrods bouncing off the walls, casting strange shadows around them.

They walked for perhaps half an hour, mostly in silence. Leia walked beside him, and he could tell from the way she moved that she was tense, her gaze unfocused. He assumed, at first, that it was simply apprehension about the potential danger they were walking into, though he had never known her to balk at such risks before. But then, after a while, he realized that her gaze — on Pamani, leading the charge at the front of the pack.

He reached out through the Force towards his sister, probing gently at her consciousness. She let him in without protest, only shooting him a quick glance out of the corner of her eye.

Are you alright? he asked.

*I can’t help but feel like I’ve seen her before,* Leia replied, her lips tightening slightly into a barely-visible frown, her eyes remaining focused on their Chagrian guide. *Like I should recognize her from somewhere.*

*Is this a good or bad feeling?*

It was a few seconds before Leia answered. *I don’t know.* She turned to look at him fully now, a slight crease of worry between her eyes. *But I think we should be on our guard.*

He nodded his agreement, and retreated, allowing their connection to sink into the background of his mind. But his gaze remained on Pamani, and he wondered just who, exactly, she was.

It was a very literal light at the end of the tunnel that announced their arrival in Notta. The end of the pipe was covered in a tightly-woven grate, and Pamani motioned for them to stop several
metres ahead of it and to turn off their glowrods. They did so, shrouding themselves in shadow, and she stepped forward, slowly and quietly, inching her ways towards the grate so that she could peer through.

She watched for a moment before looking back and motioning them forward; evidently, the coast was clear. She pushed against the grate, and it lifted from the top, like an old-fashioned hinged door. It seemed heavy, and Luke reached out with his hand, using the Force to keep it up. Pamani was momentarily surprised, but then gave him a nod of thanks before she slipped out of the pipe and vanished.

Anakin went next, followed by Ahsoka, but before Obi-Wan could leave, Luke grabbed him by the arm with his free hand, holding him back.

“Are you sure we can trust her?” he asked, his voice quiet. His conversation with Leia had unsettled him; even before she knew of her Force abilities, Leia had had the keenest intuition out of anyone Luke had ever met. If she felt uncertain, then he was inclined to believe there was good reason for it.

Obi-Wan looked confused. “Of course. She’s been a trusted agent of the Republic for many years.” He gave Luke’s shoulder a reassuring pat. “There’s no need to be nervous. I’ve been working with her since I arrived here, and she’s not led me astray yet.”

Luke wasn’t sure if being an agent of the Republic made her more or less trustworthy.

Obi-Wan turned and disappeared out of the mouth of the tunnel. Leia cast Luke a look that told him Obi-Wan’s words had done little to change her own convictions, before she followed him out.

Luke edged towards the end of the pipe. The little water that had gathered in the bottom trickled out slowly into a large, but practically empty, pool. The others were gathered together just below the mouth of the pipe, and Anakin reached out, taking over holding up the grate so that Luke could jump down. There was no ladder, and the pipe was a bit high up, so he cushioned his landing just slightly with the Force, to muffle it and ensure he didn’t injure himself.

The pool was located outside, and the sky hung above them, painted with breathtaking shades of red, orange, and pink. The air here was noticeably warmer than it had been even just an hour’s walk outside the city. The water on the bottom of the pool was gathered in scuzzy puddles, and numerous tunnels branched off along it, likely leading to a plant where the water, if it existed, would be treated and then sent on to the city’s homes and businesses. But like the pipe they had just crawled out of, they were entirely empty.

Pamani urged them forward with a wave of her hand, and they hurried as quickly and quietly as they could to the other side of the pool. There was a ladder here, and they all climbed it as fast as possible. A fence surrounded the pool, tall and crackling with an energy that promised electrocution to anyone who got too close. Pamani walked along it for a while, seeming to search for something, before stopping and swiftly kicking aside a section of the fence, creating a hole that was just big enough for an average sized humanoid to crawl through. Obviously, she had done this numerous times before.

She gestured them through, and they quickly made their way beneath the fence, one by one. Once on the other side, they ducked into a nearby alleyway, Pamani leading them on a dizzying rush through various twists and turns, until they emerged safely onto a busy thoroughfare. Vehicles trundled down the road, and though the sidewalks weren’t crowded, there was still a great deal of beings out and about. They all slowed their pace considerably, allowing themselves to melt into the background.
They walked along for a while before turning off onto a side street, where Pamani ducked into a doorway and motioned them to follow. They did, the five of them squeezing into the small room on the other side. It looked to have once been a home, though now it was sparsely furnished with little more than a few tables and chairs, covered with various equipment.

Pamani walked over to one of the tables, turning on a holographic map of the city, much like the one Obi-Wan had pulled up the day before. A small red light blinked near the centre of the city. “This is where my contact says the shield generator is,” Pamani said, pointing to the light. “From what I understand, it used to be a warehouse of some kind, and is very well-defended.”

“Who’s your contact?” Leia asked, eyeing the map with some suspicion.

“Someone who works in the area. I’ve known him since I got here; we can trust him. His intel’s never failed me before.”

Leia nodded, though Luke could tell she still wasn’t convinced. “Alright, so who’s going to deal with the shield generator, and who’s going to take out the guns?” she asked.

In their packs of supplies, each of them had a number of small but powerful explosives which, once set and primed, would go off with the press of a button. The plan was to take out both the shield generator and as many of the guns as possible, as quickly as possible, and they would need to split up to do that.

“We’ll need more people for the shield generator, if it’s as heavily guarded as Pamani says,” Obi-Wan said. “Stealth will be more important for the guns, and that will be easier with fewer people.”

“I can take the guns,” Anakin said, nodding to Obi-Wan. “You go with Pamani to the shield generator.”

“Alright. Who else is coming with me?”

“I’ll go with Anakin,” Luke volunteered, seizing upon this last opportunity to spend time with his father, before things were changed between them forever.

“Then Ahsoka and Nellith, you’re with me,” Obi-Wan said, and both of them nodded their assent. “We need to be quick about this. By the time our troopers get within range of the city, the guns and the shield generator need to be down. Once all the explosives are in place, we’ll meet back here. We’ll set them off only once everyone has returned.”

They all nodded their understanding, and Obi-Wan looked at them slowly, from one to the next. “May the Force be with us,” he said.
Reunion

Chapter Summary

The team splits up to take out the shield generator and the guns, but it isn't long before things go wrong.

Chapter Notes

apologies for how long this chapter took, but I hope the length makes up for the wait!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They reached the warehouse where the shield generator was housed with no difficulties. It was midday, according to Leia’s chronometer, and the streets of the city were busy, making it easy for them to blend in. They had passed several patrols of droids on the way, but after several weeks of uneventful occupation, the droids had little suspicion for anyone. The guard presence increased quite a bit as they neared the warehouse; the building itself was difficult to see, surrounded by others, but the large shield generator on top, looking like a giant satellite dish, was unmissable.

With a gesture from Obi-Wan, the four of them stepped off the main road into an adjacent alleyway, hidden for the most part from those passing by.

“Our goal is to take down the entire building,” Obi-Wan said. “It would be too difficult to try and get access to the shield generator itself, so we need to focus on its power source and the warehouse. We take those down, and we take down the generator.”

Pamani nodded. “It’s not a very big warehouse, and from what I understand, it’s not a very sophisticated shield generator. This shouldn’t be too difficult.”

Obi-Wan frowned slightly. “Let’s hope,” he said. “So we get in, we place the bombs, and we get out, as fast as possible. And let’s try to be as stealthy as possible. We don’t need the entire city knowing we’re here.”

Leia and Ahsoka nodded their understanding and, after a quick check to make sure the coast was clear, they slunk out back onto the street, making their way towards the warehouse.

It was located near the city’s dockyards, though with Notta under siege, they were practically empty. Leia guessed that the warehouse had once been used for storing goods and supplies being shipped into and out of Notta. As such, it had only the most basic setup for security; a simple fence around the perimeter was about the extent of the building’s defenses, much less than would be expected near most shield generators. There was, however, a rather heavy guard presence, likely to make up for this fact.

They had come around the back of the warehouse, on the opposite side of the main entrance. Several buildings stood near the fence, with only a few feet of empty space between them. They slunk in here, crouching in the shadow of one of the buildings, so that they were out of sight of
anyone on the street. The fence was made of tightly-placed horizontal bars of metal, much like the fence that had surrounded the pool where they had entered the city. But unlike that one, this one wasn’t electrified. Pulling out her smaller shoto lightsaber, Ahsoka made quick work of cutting a small entrance for them, just big enough for them to crawl through. Obi-Wan was quick to grab the freed bars before they clanged to the ground, instead setting them quietly aside.

It wasn’t far from the fence to the back wall of the warehouse, only one or two quick pumps of the legs. They only had a short window before a patrol was likely to come around the corner and spot them, so they moved quickly, clambering through the hole in the fence one by one and running to the warehouse. A back door was placed not too far away, and they hurried along the wall towards it.

It was locked, but a quick slash of Obi-Wan’s lightsaber across the control mechanism took care of it. The door slid open and they slipped through, into the warehouse. It was dark inside, with no windows and only a few lights located high up on the tall ceiling. They emerged near a large pile of crates, and they ducked quickly behind it to take stock of the situation.

The warehouse seemed to have been at least partially full when the Separatists took charge of it. Dozens of crates were pushed up near the walls, to make room for the large group of machinery in the centre of the warehouse — the power station for the generator.

Since the shield needed only to be big enough to cover the city, this station was much smaller than that which Leia had infiltrated on Endor, though the machine still towered halfway to the ceiling of the warehouse, sparks of electricity jumping from the coils on top.

A few droids circled the station, blasters at the ready in their hands. Leia could see two more near the main entrance, but, thankfully, there weren’t any close to them. None of the guards seemed to have noticed the now-open back door.

Obi-Wan looked at them, nodding for them to get ready. Leia swung her pack onto her front, opening it up to allow easy access, and Pamani did the same. A moment later, they were off.

They moved low and slow, creeping along the walls of the warehouse, hidden largely behind the scattered crates. Obi-Wan and Leia went one way, while Ahsoka and Pamani went the other. Obi-Wan’s lightsaber was extinguished, but he held it tightly in his hands, ready to ignite it at a moment’s notice. He kept an eye out for the guards, moving in front, while Leia snuck along behind him, placing the bombs. She stuck them near the base of the walls at regular intervals, locking them into place and activating them before moving on.

Every now and then there were gaps in the crates, and Obi-Wan would pause for a moment to ensure that no one was looking their way before they dashed across to the next hiding place. Leia was tense with anxiety; it couldn’t be too much longer before someone would discover the hole in the fence or the busted door, even with the lower intelligence of the droid guards. They needed to move quickly.

They passed close to one of the guards circling the power station. Obi-Wan held up his hand for her to stop, and she paused, settling onto her knees and crouching low. She kept her breathing shallow and quiet, but as she shifted into a hunched position, her pack jostled slightly, the unused bombs still inside clinking against each other. It was a quiet sound, one that in any other spot would have gone unnoticed, but it was a pile only one crate thick that separated them from the guard, and it was loud enough to make it pause in its wanderings and look their way.

Obi-Wan didn’t hesitate. He moved quickly, coming out of his crouch and going around to grab the droid, placing one hand over its vocoder to keep it from making any noises of alarm. He pulled the
droid back over behind the crates with them and, with one hand still over its face, grabbed his lightsaber and placed it, unextinguished, against the droid’s head. As quick as lightning, the blade ignited and then disappeared, leaving a smoking hole in the metal skull, the droid slumping lifelessly in Obi-Wan’s arms. He set it gently on the ground, and then motioned for them to keep going.

Leia counted the seconds in her head, waiting for one of the other droids to raise the alarm, but nothing happened. Evidently, none of them had seen what had just transpired, but how long would it be until they noticed their comrade was gone? She didn’t have a lot of experience dealing with droids, but Obi-Wan, who did, seemed to move a little quicker than before, and so she suspected that their time was running out. She quickened her pace, moving as quickly as she could while remaining quiet. Pull out another bomb, lock it in place, activate it, move on to the next, and over and over again.

There were still a few bombs left in her pack when she heard a sudden mechanical cry of alarm on the other side of the room. Peeking her head up above the crates, she watched as all the droids converged quickly on a spot near the opposite wall. A moment later, Ahsoka appeared, lightsabers blazing as she slashed into the droids. They’d been spotted.

“Time’s up,” Obi-Wan said, pulling out his own lightsaber and jumping up to go join the fray.

Placing her pack on the ground in front of her, Leia hunched down and quickly activated the remaining bombs. Then, snatching up the pack and leaping across the crates, she hurried to the centre of the room and placed the bag full of activated charges down beside the power station.

Most of the droids were occupied with the two Jedi, not seeming to notice either Leia or Pamani, who, having seen what Leia had just done, was busy activating her own remaining bombs. Leia pulled out her blaster, and was taking aim at one of the droids attacking Obi-Wan and Ahsoka when the front door to the warehouse suddenly creaked open, and the room was filled with a sudden new barrage of blasterfire as more guards poured in from outside.

Leia ducked low and ran off to the side, taking refuge once again amongst the crates. Poking her head up, she squeezed off a few shots in the direction of the new arrivals, managing to strike one droid before ducking back down into safety.

The sound of laser shots echoed around the room, many of them striking the crates that kept her protected. She was pinned down; she might be able to make it to the back door by running along the wall behind the crates, but that opportunity wouldn’t last long. More and more droids were coming into the warehouse, and she could hear Obi-Wan and Ahsoka’s lightsabers moving nonstop, slicing through droid after droid.

She poked her head around the crates just far enough to see what was going on. Ahsoka and Obi-Wan were standing back to back, surrounded by droids, and she could just barely see Pamani’s blue head across the room, sticking out from amongst some crates as she let off a few of her own shots.

“We need to get out of here!” Leia yelled, her voice just barely audible above the constant blasterfire. Still, Pamani was able to hear her, and she nodded in understanding.

“Go!” Obi-Wan yelled. “We’ll meet you back at the rendezvous!”

Leia didn’t like splitting up, but it seemed like their only option. If they waited here any longer, none of them would be able to get out. Staying low, she took off at a run, sticking close to the wall, behind the crates. Shots flew past above her head, and she turned back to see a group of droids firing after her. She shot back, but didn’t look long enough to see if she had hit any of them.
She didn’t know if Pamani was following her, and she didn’t stick around long enough to find out. She reached the back door, blaster bolts ricocheting off the doorframe as she barreled through. All the droids had been called in to the warehouse through the main entrance, and so the back was thankfully void of any guards. She ran across to the fence, clambering through the hole; she could hear an exchange of blasterfire behind her, but didn’t turn to look.

She took off at a run, shooting down the alleyway, blaster bolts following her until she was out of sight. She kept running, charging through various alleys and thoroughfares, only slowing somewhat to finally replace her blaster in its holster. She didn’t know if the droids would attempt to follow her; their awkward, inflexible metal bodies would make it difficult for them to climb through the hole in the fence after her, and it would take them a while to go around through the main gate. Still, she didn’t stop running until she reached one of the main streets, her chest heaving.

Keeping her head down, she moved slowly through the crowds, doing her best to look like an average Nottan citizen out running their daily errands. She didn’t know the exact location of Pamani’s house, only the general area, but she was confident she could find it, if only she kept moving and didn’t draw attention to herself.

She was still a good distance away, however, when the ground suddenly shook and the air was filled with the loud boom of a not-so-far-off explosion. Screams erupted in the crowd around her as people began running, and Leia turned in the direction of the explosion to see a large plume of black smoke rising into the air, coming from what she knew to be the warehouse. Cursing, she began to run with the crowd, while droids looked around in confusion, unsure of what to do. She let the crowd carry her quite a way down the street, before finally pushing her way out, slipping into a narrow side alley.

Stepping deftly into a doorway, out of sight of the street, she pulled out her comms unit. She hoped desperately that Obi-Wan and Ahsoka had made it out of the warehouse before it blew. They weren’t supposed to set off the bombs until everyone was back at Pamani’s, including Luke and Anakin. With the warehouse blown up, Notta would go on high alert, and if Luke and Anakin weren’t done on the wall, they could find themselves suddenly swarmed and overwhelmed by guards sent out to look for insurgents.

“Obi-Wan, come in,” she said, holding the comms to her mouth. She didn’t worry about being overheard; the crowd made enough sound to cover her speaking. “Obi-Wan, are you alright? Come in.”

The comms unit crackled, and a moment later Obi-Wan’s voice came through, flooding Leia with relief. “This is Obi-Wan,” he said. “Ahsoka and I are alright. We’re on our way to the rendezvous. Did you set off the bombs?”

“No, it wasn’t me. I thought you might have done it, with the mission compromised.”

“I was planning to, once I got a hold of Ben and Anakin to confirm that they were done. But I haven’t been able to reach them yet.” He paused a moment, the comms unit going silent before crackling back to life a moment later. “Where’s Pamani?”

“I don’t know,” Leia said. “I lost her back at the warehouse.” Her first thought had been Pamani; she knew the city much better than Leia did, and could have easily made it back to her house in no time, where the detonators for the bombs were hidden. Leia didn’t trust her, and hadn’t since the first feeling of distrustful recognition. She was certain that she knew her from somewhere; not in this time, but in her own, years ago…
The image came to her suddenly, hitting her like a punch to the gut. Mas Amedda, Grand Vizier to Emperor Palpatine, standing on a dais in front of a room of people in glittering outfits and freshly-pressed Imperial uniforms. He was speaking, saying something that Leia couldn’t remember, and beside him stood Pamani Laasken, wearing the white uniform of an Imperial Security Bureau officer. Leia remembered her father’s voice in her ear, telling her that Laasken was Amedda’s niece and the liaison between the ISB and Palpatine, as well as a staunch Imperialist.

Amedda had been loyal to Palpatine since his election as Chancellor. Leia suspected that the Grand Vizier had known the truth of Palpatine’s identity, if not now then certainly during his time as Emperor. Pamani had called herself an agent of the Republic; did that mean she worked for the Republic, or for Palpatine? Was she loyal enough to him and her uncle to work with them against Jedi, the face of the Republic’s war effort? She had helped them place the bombs at the warehouse, so she couldn’t be trying to stop them from retaking Kamarr. Why, then?

Luke. The thought entered her mind almost as if someone else had placed it there. He and Anakin were alone, up on the wall, vulnerable. The perfect place for someone to strike. Palpatine had Luke’s memories; he knew that both Luke and Anakin were the cause of his eventual downfall. And Leia knew he would do anything to keep that from happening.

She held the comms unit back to her mouth. “Obi-Wan, we need to find Ben and Anakin, now. I think they’re in trouble.” Not bothering to wait for his response, she put the comms unit away and took off at a run, heading for the wall.

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They were almost done. They had been making their way along the wall, sneaking from gun to gun, and there were only a few more to go before they would be back where they had started. The wall was long and well-patrolled, and the gun emplacements were numerous, but they had taken their time and managed to keep from alerting most of the guards. Those who had noticed them had been taken care of swiftly, their bodies stashed quickly out of sight.

Things seemed to be going well, until the sound of a distant explosion caused Luke to pause. He turned to look back at Anakin, who was working on the gun behind him. Their eyes met and, without an exchange of words, they both ducked down behind the emplacements, hiding in the shadows as best as they could. Luke could hear numerous footsteps clanging along the wall a short distance away, and he braced himself, expecting a battalion of droids to descend on them any minute — but then the footsteps quieted and disappeared.

A few more moments passed, and nothing happened. It seemed as if the explosion, whatever it was, had drawn the guards on the wall down into the city, away from them.

He stood, looking to Anakin. “Do you think it was the shield generator?”

“I don’t know what else it could have been,” Anakin replied, casting a somewhat nervous glance at the plume of black smoke now rising in the centre of the city. “What I wanna know is, why did they set their bombs off early?”

“Let’s hope it wasn’t anything too serious,” Luke said, continuing on past Anakin to the next gun. They had been splitting up to place the bombs, sticking close together but leap-frogging around each other from one gun to the next.

Luke could still sense Leia, burning bright somewhere in the city down below, which helped him not to worry. Things had simply gone slightly awry, he told himself; it happened all the time. But he still couldn’t shake the feeling that something was very wrong.
He knelt down, retrieving another charge from his pack and locking it into place on the base of the gun. Only a few more to go and they could head back down into the city, and find out what happened.

But then he sensed it — a sudden presence up ahead, just a short distance away, appearing as if out of nowhere. It was immediately familiar — and unfriendly. Luke stood, dropping the pack at his feet and unhooking his lightsaber from his belt. He glanced back at Anakin, to see him doing the same.

He stepped forward to stand beside Luke. “I sense it, too,” he said.

The presence was moving towards them. The wall curved just up ahead, and the tall parapets on either side made it impossible to see very far. Still, Luke had a good idea of just who it was coming towards them, and he suspected that Anakin did too. He braced himself, settling into a ready stance, his lightsaber extinguished but held at the ready in front of him.

It was a moment later that Count Dooku rounded the corner and stopped, just a few metres away from them.

“Well, now, isn’t this a wonderful surprise?” Dooku said, grinning at the two of them. “It must be my lucky day; I was hoping I would find both of you here.”

Luke suspected that luck had very little to do with it.

“Dooku,” Anakin growled, taking one step forward. “Let’s not play games. You knew we would be here — how?”

“Informants are everywhere, my dear boy,” Dooku said. “You must learn to not be so trusting.”

“Pamani,” Luke said, realization striking him. “She’s the one who told you we were here.” So Leia’s suspicions had been right.

Dooku nodded. “Very smart.”

“She’s a double agent?” Anakin asked, and Dooku tilted his head.

“One could say that.”

“I take it your master sent you here,” Luke said, and Dooku’s eyes shifted to him. “Much easier than coming himself.”

“My master is far too busy for such tasks, as I’m sure you’re well aware,” Dooku replied.

“Sidious is just too cowardly to reveal himself to anyone,” Luke shot back, and out of the corner of his eye, he could see the look of surprise that Anakin shot him.

“Sidious? Is that the name of the Sith Master?” he asked. “You knew and you didn’t tell anyone?”


Luke gritted his teeth. Had Palpatine told him what he had seen in Luke’s memories? Did Dooku know everything that Luke hadn’t had a chance to tell Anakin yet? He could feel Anakin’s gaze still on him, but he couldn’t bear to turn and look at him.

“I’m sure there are a great many things Sidious hasn’t told you, Dooku,” he said. “Has he told you
that he replaces you? You weren’t his first apprentice, and you won’t be his last. What did he send you here for? To bring me back to him?”

Dooku said nothing for a moment, his expression guarded; a slight twitch of his cheek was the only sign that anything Luke said had actually gotten to him.

“You’re a threat,” Dooku said, reaching for his belt and withdrawing his lightsaber. “You’re to be brought back to him, so he can deal with you himself.”

“You think he’ll kill me?” Luke asked, grinning. He was being foolhardy, he knew, but he needed to find out — what did Dooku know, and what did Palpatine himself know? “He tried before, and failed. He tried to turn me before, and failed. Why would he succeed now? Did he see, in my memories, how he died? Did he see his failure?”

“He did.” Dooku took a few steps forward, his gaze still focused singularly on Luke. Anakin was watching them both, his shock and confusion palpable. “And do you think he will allow it to happen, now that he knows?”

“Why does he think he can stop it?” Luke asked.

“Because this time,” Dooku said, igniting his lightsaber, “you will not have your father to save you.” And he turned to Anakin, and lunged.

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Leia’s breath was coming in ragged puffs as she tore through the streets of Notta. Her lungs burned and her legs strained with effort, but she didn’t stop; she needed to find Luke, she needed to get to him. The wall was visible just up ahead, at the end of the narrow alley. The surrounding buildings pressed close to the wall, but she could see a stone staircase, ascending its side up to the top. There were no guards anywhere; the explosion at the warehouse had drawn most of them away, as well as sending almost all the city’s inhabitants scrambling into the safety of their homes.

She didn’t know where, exactly, Luke was on the wall. With her heart pumping and her mind racing, she couldn’t focus herself well enough to draw too strongly on their connection. All she knew was that he was alright, for now. She just needed to get onto the wall, and she could—

An arm suddenly shot out from one of the small side alleys that slithered between the tightly-pressed buildings, slamming into her chest and knocking her, winded, to the ground. She gasped, heaving for air, as Pamani stepped out to loom above her, her eyes narrowed.

“And where are you going?”

Leia scrambled to her feet. “Let me guess,” she said, her voice slightly wheezy, “you listened in on the comms channel I opened with Obi-Wan, and realized I knew your plan.” There was no other way Leia could think of for Pamani finding her; things had happened too quickly. She had to have known that Leia was heading for the wall.

Pamani grinned. “Smart girl.” And she swung, her closed fist rocketing towards Leia.

Leia ducked out of the way, just in time, and as she came back up, she swung her own fist towards Pamani. The punch was sloppy, and she wasn’t expecting it to hit (it didn’t), so she was already stepping back out of the way as Pamani aimed a kick at her side. While Pamani was regaining her balance, Leia lunged again, this time managing to land a punch against Pamani’s cheek.

“You’re the one who set off the bombs at the warehouse early,” she said, as Pamani staggered
Pamani looked vaguely surprised at the mention of her uncle, but said nothing. She swung her fist, and Leia blocked it with one arm, kicking out at Pamani’s stomach. She struck, but the kick was weak, causing her only to stumble back a few feet. It had been a while since Leia had done any hand-to-hand combat.

“You and your brother are threats to the Republic,” Pamani said. “You may have managed to deceive the Jedi, but you haven’t done the same to everyone, especially not after your brother’s little incident at the Senate.”

She put all her weight behind her next punch, aiming it at Leia’s face, and it struck. Her head whipped to the side, and she stumbled slightly, managing to catch herself before she fell. Her cheek burned fiercely, and she struck back, landing a solid hit in Pamani’s gut. They were well-matched; though Pamani had a good few inches on her in height, their weight was very similar—which meant that this might last a while.

“So you were sent here to get rid of us?” Leia asked, dodging another blow and striking back with a strong kick that found its mark in Pamani’s side.

“In a way.” Pamani replied with her own kick, whose high arc meant that her booted foot found purchase in Leia’s ribs; that one was certainly going to bruise. “I was sent here when my uncle learned that General Kenobi would be here. He knew that Skywalker had been saddled with you and your brother and hoped — rightly — that if he showed up here, you would be with him. And I’d be here too, to let him know and to help take care of you.”

Leia suspected that most of the information about them had actually come from Palpatine, and Mas Amedda had merely been the messenger for his niece.

Pamani threw a hard punch, which landed squarely against Leia’s jaw. Recovering quickly, she swung and missed. Her side was already smarting painfully, but she ignored it and pushed through. More punches and kicks, jabs and blocks; her breath, already short from her run across the city, was coming even shallower now.

Normally, Leia would try harder to reason with Pamani, to convince her that what she had been told was wrong. But she knew that in fifteen, twenty years, this woman would still be as blindly loyal to Palpatine and to her uncle as she was now, even with all the atrocities and horrors that would be committed in the meantime. Leia had known many, many people like this, and she knew that nothing she said would change her mind.

And so she shut up, and focused on the fight.

She punched, and Pamani struck back; they blocked and dodged and kicked, moving around each other in a complex, tireless dance. At one point, Pamani managed to land a kick directly to Leia’s stomach. She staggered back a few feet, her heart seizing with fear — the baby — but then another punch was coming and she couldn’t think about that, couldn’t get distracted, or they would both end up dead.

The fight continued to drag on, and Leia was beginning to grow impatient. She could feel bruises forming all over her body, and her bottom lip had split, filling her mouth with the coppery tang of blood. She didn’t have time for this; while she was down here sparring, anything could be happening to Luke up on the wall.

Evidently, Pamani was beginning to feel the same way.
She moved quickly; so quickly, that Leia was surprised she even noticed. But she did. She watched, as if in slow motion, as Pamani reached into her jacket and withdrew a blaster. She barely paused to take aim before firing, but Leia was already ducking out of the way. The bolt sailed past her, exploding into the wall behind her, and Leia charged Pamani, grabbing her around the middle and tackling her to the ground.

She wrapped her hand around the wrist that held the blaster, forcing it to the ground. Pamani struggled underneath her, trying to free her arm, but Leia held firm. A strong punch from Pamani to her jaw caused her grip to loosen slightly, and suddenly the blaster was at her head. She spun away and kicked at Pamani’s hand, causing her arm to swing back and the blaster to fly from her grasp.

Leia rolled off from on top of her, and Pamani scrambled towards the blaster, lying just a few feet away. Moving as if someone else was controlling her body, Leia reached for her holster and withdrew her own blaster. Pamani’s fingers were closing around the metal grip of her weapon, and Leia lifted her pistol; no time to aim properly, she simply pointed and squeezed the trigger.

The bolt struck Pamani just as she was turning around, hitting her in her chest. It was a few seconds before she fell, during which time she and Leia simply stared at each other, both in shock. The blaster slipped from her fingers, clattering to the ground, as she stumbled and then collapsed onto her back, and was still.

Leia walked over to her slowly, her grip still tight on her own blaster. Pamani was dead by the time Leia reached her, her eyes staring, unseeing, up at the orange-hued sky.

Her eyes had been blue, a few shades lighter than her skin, and now she was dead, decades before she was supposed to be. The thought was unsettling, and so Leia pushed it away to be dealt with later, once Luke was safe.

“I’m sorry,” she said to the body, and then she holstered her blaster and walked away, heading for the stairs.

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The lightsabers crashed together, blue on red. Anakin had just barely managed to ignite his blade in time to block Dooku’s strike, and the two now duelled, their sabers whirling about in a blur of colour. Luke pressed the activation button on his lightsaber, the shimmering green blade erupting from the hilt. He ran towards the fray, bringing his saber down in a wide arc towards Dooku, but the Sith blocked it expertly, not even turning to look at him.

He swung again, at the same time as Anakin, and Dooku jumped back, his blade slicing through the air as he did so, so that Luke had to duck to avoid being cut. He looked quickly to Anakin, who nodded. He seemed not to have realized the threat against him that Dooku’s words had carried — this time, you will not have your father to save you — but Luke had. It seemed as if Palpatine intended to somehow remove Anakin from the picture; after learning that Anakin would be his downfall, he had likely decided to skip him altogether and go right to taking Luke as his apprentice.

But would he go so far as to order Dooku to kill him? Padmé wouldn’t fall pregnant for almost another year; if Anakin died now, there was a chance that Luke and Leia would cease to exist. Was Palpatine willing to risk that?

Knowing that Luke would also be part of his downfall, Luke suspected that he was.

Either way, Dooku fought viciously. Though the fight was two-on-one, Dooku seemed to have no
trouble managing, blocking and evading blows that came simultaneously from two directions while striking back with attacks that nearly managed to hit Luke numerous times.

After several hours of sparring at the Temple together, he and Anakin were familiar with each other, and were able to quickly settle into a rhythm, so that they worked together instead of against one another. Luke tried to recall everything he had learned in the past couple of weeks, as well as everything from before. He recognized Dooku’s fighting style as Form II — graceful, effortless, well-suited for duels; apparently even duels where the practitioner was outnumbered.

The adrenaline of the fight kept him from growing tired, even as it continued to drag on, with no apparent changes in advantage. His mind became focused on his next move — the swing of his blade, the changing of his footing. He was keenly aware of Anakin beside him, paying attention to what he did and changing his own moves accordingly. The outside world ceased to exist — there was nothing beyond this fight.

He was therefore deeply surprised when a blaster bolt suddenly came tearing towards them, seemingly out of nowhere. It was aimed at Dooku, and the Sith diverged his attention from Anakin and Luke just long enough to swing up his blade to absorb the bolt. Luke looked, following the trajectory of the bolt back to its origin, and saw Leia standing not too far away, her chest heaving and her pistol still held out in front of her.

She fired again, and this time Dooku managed to deflect the shot, sending it back towards her. His aim was slightly off, however, and so it sailed harmlessly above her head.

“Leia!” Luke called. Dooku had already revealed his name to Anakin, and so there was no longer any point in trying to hide his sister’s as well. “What are you doing here?”

“I came to see if you were in trouble,” she yelled back, her gaze still focused on Dooku as she let off yet another shot, “and evidently, you are!”

Anakin decided to take advantage of Dooku’s momentary distraction to lunge for him. Leia’s third shot went wide, and Dooku was able to spin around to block Anakin’s strike. Luke swung, but Dooku jumped to the side, avoiding his blade. Out of the corner of his eye, Luke could see Leia inching her way closer, blaster still aimed at Dooku.

He remembered, quite suddenly, the stolen lightsaber still tucked into the inside pocket of his jacket. He looked fully towards Leia, his eyes meeting hers. Anakin was raining down on Dooku with a barrage of attacks, keeping him distracted long enough for Luke to reach into his jacket, retrieve the lightsaber, and toss it through the air towards Leia.

She caught it easily with one hand. She had never fought with a lightsaber before, but the blue blade ignited easily as her fingers curled around the hilt. Putting her blaster away, she practically leapt through the air as she swung the blade towards Dooku, bringing it down with all her might.

Dooku, caught off guard, could manage only to weakly attempt a block, the weight of the strike causing him to stumble back a few feet. Anakin swung again, and Dooku lifted his blade to shield himself, but with his balance thrown, Anakin was able to take ground, pushing Dooku back again. And then Luke struck, doing the same, and then Leia, and then Anakin again, until Dooku was standing pressed up against the tall parapet, his blade held defensively in front of him, keeping them from coming any closer.

To Luke’s surprise, he began to laugh. A grin spread across his face as he looked at the three of them, standing in a semi-circle in front of him, their blades all pointed at his chest.
“Now, this is wonderful to see,” he said. “The whole family, working together.”

Luke’s heart stuttered, and he looked automatically to Anakin, whose face showed anger and annoyance — but also confusion. Dooku saw it, too, and his smirk widened.

“Don’t tell me they haven’t told you the truth?” Dooku said, feigning shock.

Anakin’s jaw clenched visibly. “Told me what?” he asked, through gritted teeth.

“Anakin—” Luke started, but Dooku cut him off.

“That you’re their father.”

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There was a beat of silence.

“What?”

Leia thought that Anakin would protest; that he would claim it couldn’t possibly be true, that Dooku was lying. But beyond that first expression of disbelief, he said nothing. She looked, quickly, to Luke. He had a stricken expression on his face, and she could plainly see the pain he felt — this isn’t how he had wanted to do this. She remembered what he had told her, about the duel on Bespin when Vader had revealed the truth of his parentage to him. Even she could see the echoes of that moment here, and she knew how much it must hurt him.

But his expression was nothing compared to Anakin’s. His face showed confusion and betrayal and pain beyond belief, and when he looked at her, tearing his eyes from Dooku, she knew he was remembering everything she, and Luke, had ever said about their father — their complicated relationship, the anger she felt towards him, how upsetting discussing him was to her. How she would take revenge against him, if she could.

She hated her father, and he knew it. He knew that she hated him.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” he asked, his voice barely above a whisper. Evidently, despite the pain it caused, he had little trouble believing what Dooku said.

“We were going to,” Leia started. “Anakin, you have to understand—“

She didn’t see Dooku shift his stance and lift his arm back. She didn’t see him jabbing his blade forward, aiming for Anakin, who, in his distress, had lowered his guard.

Luke did.

Leia saw her brother leaping forward, pushing Anakin out of the way. She saw Dooku’s blade, the crimson colour of blood, strike Luke through the stomach. She felt a scream stick in her throat as the blade pierced right through him; it was gone the next second, as Dooku retracted it.

She began to move forward, towards Luke, but it was like moving through waist-deep water, with every movement painfully slowed. She didn’t see Obi-Wan and Ahsoka arriving, didn’t hear Obi-Wan call out to them. She didn’t see Dooku, in a whirl of black fabric, jump up and over the parapet, disappearing on the other side of the wall. She didn’t see Anakin hesitate a moment, his mouth open as if to speak, before giving chase with Ahsoka.

She saw Luke falling back, an expression of shock on his face, his hands hovering above the
charred wound in his stomach.


She reached him, finally, collapsing to her knees beside him. He was still conscious, staring up at her, his blue eyes wide with fright. His mouth was moving; he was trying to say something to her, but she couldn’t hear him above her own screams.

She reached out, cradling his face in her shaking hands. All she could think was, *No, please, please not him. Not him too.*

“*Luke!*”

**Chapter End Notes**

I'm hoping to finally finish this fic with chapter 30 (or shortly thereafter), which means that things likely will be wrapped up before the end of the year. :)


The Son and the Daughter

Chapter Summary

Luke and Leia each have a very important conversation.

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry that this chapter took so long to come out. It was a bit tough to write, and I had to do it in between working on a pretty important paper for school (which is due on Tuesday and which I haven't actually started writing, so please pray for my soul). But I hope you all enjoy it!

Luke woke with a soft inhale of breath, his eyes opening wide to stare at the ceiling above him. It was white, and beams of yellow light played across it, catching motes of dust in their rays. He watched them dance in the air, and as he watched, he tried to remember — where was he? What had happened?

Slowly, he sat up. He expected to feel a twinge of pain in his abdomen, but there was nothing. He was in a bed, with a soft blanket covering his lower half. He sat there for a moment, wondering why he had been expecting pain…

Then he remembered Dooku, lunging for Anakin. Luke had jumped in front of him, and Dooku’s blade had pierced him through the stomach. Even in his shock, before passing out, Luke remembered seeing Leia’s face above him, contorted with fear. Had it really been that bad?

He moved the blanket aside, looking down at his stomach. He was dressed in a simple white medical robe, and he moved apart the flaps, looking for any signs of injury to his midsection, but there were none. No lingering wound, no scar, no bandages. He took a few tentative swallows, searching for the distinctive after-taste of being submerged in bacta, but there was nothing.

How long had he been out? Long enough not only for a prolonged dib in bacta to cure him entirely, but also for the side effects to subside? He didn’t even know how long that would take, but he assumed it would be more than a few days.

There was no one else in the room. It was small, with two other beds, both of which were empty and showed no signs of having been recently occupied. Various bits of machinery were scattered about, though none of them were connected to him. He was in a medcentre, then. The curtains over the window were drawn back, but the light coming through was so bright that he couldn’t see out of it. He wasn’t on a ship, then, but somewhere planetside.

He looked around, searching for some sort of button to call a med droid or healer, but found nothing. Slowly, he swung his legs over the side of the bed and stood; he was weak, but would be able to move about with few problems. Walking over to the door, he palmed the controls to open it and stumbled out into the corridor.
He was in the Jedi Temple’s Halls of Healing, in the wing where the private rooms were located. He recognized the hallway from the time he and Leia had visited Anakin here, after Luke’s rescue from Janus VII. All the doors lining the corridor were closed, and while last time he had been able to hear the constant buzz of activity in the surrounding wards, now it was eerily silent. Medcentres were usually filled with the constant sounds of conversation and mechanical beeps and trills, but he heard none of that now.

He headed down the hallway, towards the infirmary. This was one of the largest areas of the Halls of Healing, where less serious wounds and ailments were treated. On each of Luke’s past visits, it had been a flurry of activity, with droids and healers moving to and fro between beds occupied by ill younglings and initiates with training injuries. But there was no one here now; all the beds were unoccupied, and there was not a single healer or med droid in sight.

“Hello?” he called out, though he didn’t expect anyone to answer. “Hello?”

Nothing.

Closing his eyes, he sat down on the floor and crossed his legs. Reaching out through the Force, he searched for the signs of any nearby presences or life forms. There were none in his immediate vicinity, and when he tried to stretch his reach beyond the Temple, he found that he couldn’t. It was as if existence simply ended outside the Temple walls.

He tried searching for Leia’s familiar brightness, but it was as if she, too, were gone. He could find no one — Leia, Anakin, Obi-Wan, Ahsoka, Yoda. They were all somewhere far, far beyond his reach. But they couldn’t all be dead.

He suspected, his heart clenching with fear at the thought, that it was actually the opposite.

Then, quite suddenly, he realized that he did sense someone, somewhere else in the Temple. They were on the opposite side of the building, several floors up, near the roof, but they were, inarguably, there. The presence was familiar to him, but while he couldn’t recognize it entirely, he knew that it was not threatening.

Standing, he made his way out of the infirmary and into the corridor. Like in his room, bright light was pouring in from the windows, but he couldn’t see out of them. The silence that hung in the air was almost suffocating, as if no sound had reached this place in centuries. Even his footsteps seemed to make no sound on the stone floor, though he didn’t know if that was because he was barefoot or if it was some strange feature of this... place. For wherever he was, he didn’t think it was actually the Jedi Temple.

He moved through the Temple slowly. It looked no different from the one he knew, save for the windows, but the absolute lack of any other beings was disconcerting. He could still sense that one presence, high above him, and he made his way towards them cautiously, unsure of what he would find.

As he walked, he tried not to think about what any of this meant. Why he was here — and what here actually was. Some vision of the Force, he assumed, but the thought that it might be something much more real crossed his mind and made him slow his steps several times; he wasn’t sure he wanted to find out. At the same time, he hoped that whoever it was waiting for him up there — and he had the strangest feeling that they were waiting for him — would have some answers.

He took the stairs rather than the turbolift; whether because he was concerned that they wouldn’t work in this strange place, or because they would add a jarring piece of normalcy, he didn’t know. Maybe he simply wished to prolong his arrival. As he stepped off at the proper level, he could
sense that the presence wasn’t very far away now, and his nerves spiked.

He found them in one of the meditation gardens. The plants here were as vibrant as they were in reality, though he could hear no sound from or see any trace of the birds and other small creatures that usually lived there. The light coming through the windows that surrounded the garden was almost blinding, but he could still see the man sitting cross-legged in the centre of the garden, at the base of a tall tree.

His back was turned to Luke, and so he wasn’t immediately recognizable. He wore the sandy-coloured robes of a Jedi, and his long hair was light brown, shot through in places with silver. He looked to Luke to be entirely alive, which was something of a surprise; he had half expected to find a Force ghost.

“Hello?” Luke said, speaking tentatively, feeling awkward at disturbing the man.

The man, whose head had been slightly bent, seemed to look up. After a moment, he stood, and turned to fully face Luke. A gentle smile crept across his now-familiar features, and Luke took a step back in shock.


“Qui-Gon?”

Qui-Gon Jinn bowed his head, and then stepped to the side, gesturing to a nearby stone bench. “Will you come sit with me?” he asked.

After a moment of dumbfounded silence, Luke nodded, and went to sit on the bench. Qui-Gon settled down beside him with a deep sigh. There was a beat of silence, before Luke spoke first.

“I’m dead, aren’t I?”

Qui-Gon left out a small, amused breath, and shook his head. “No,” he said. “Not yet.”

“Not yet?”

“Anyone could die at any moment.” Qui-Gon gave him a gentle smile. “You’re just closer than usual right now.”

Not exactly words of comfort. “Will I die?”

Qui-Gon shrugged. “I don’t know.”

Very reassuring. “So, what is this place?” Luke asked. “You’re most definitely dead, but we’re both here… is this the afterlife?”

“No,” Qui-Gon said, “but close. This is nothing more than a vision, albeit a very powerful one. You’re not here physically, and neither am I, though it looks like it. It’s just easier for me to manifest here.”

“Is this that Netherworld of the Force you mentioned?”

“If this were the Netherworld of the Force, we would not be as corporeal as we are now,” Qui-Gon explained, “but the two places are connected. This place is a fabrication of the Force, between the Netherworld and the real world.”

“Does this always happen when someone is close to death?”
“I don’t know. My own death was rather quick.”

Luke was silent for a moment, looking around at the peaceful garden. If he was about to die, then this might be one of the last things that he saw. He could imagine quite a few far worse last sights.

“Why am I here?” he finally asked. “If I’m about to die, why is the Force showing me this? Why did it send you here?”

Qui-Gon breathed in deeply, letting the air out slowly through his nose. It was a very lifelike action, for a man more than ten years dead. “I don’t have all the answers,” he said. “When we die, we become one with the Force, but that does not mean we are able to understand it completely. So, I will tell you what I think and hope that, because we are both here, that this is what the Force wants you to hear.”

Luke nodded, and Qui-Gon took a moment, as if gathering his thoughts, before continuing.

“Luke, you are the last of the Jedi. It will be up to you to preserve our order and our way of life. If you fail, the Jedi will be relegated to mere myth and legend; we will cease to exist.”

“Thanks for the reminder.”

Qui-Gon gave a quiet laugh. “You feel yourself unprepared for this. But what you don’t realize is that you know absolutely everything you need to. The Jedi have been around for a very long time, and they have changed much since their inception. They were not always as they were at the end, and they do not have to be so in the future.”

Luke frowned, his brows drawing together. “What do you mean?”

“The Jedi were never perfect,” Qui-Gon explained, “particularly at the end. They were fearful, and they strayed from their original purpose. Fear of the dark side overwhelmed them. Even Master Yoda was distracted. I could see all of this happening even before my death.

“The Jedi have long seen the Force as a dichotomy — light and dark, diametrically opposed, always in competition. They spoke of bringing balance to the Force by destroying the dark side; only the light can exist, and all opposition must be snuffed out. But this isn’t true. The Force must be in balance, yes, but this isn’t achieved by destroying the dark or the light side. The existence of both is what brings balance.”

“So… the Sith should exist?”

Qui-Gon shook his head. “Not necessarily.”

He stood suddenly, reaching up into the branches of a nearby tree and pulling down two small, brightly coloured fruits. He held one in each hand, stretched out before him.

“Imagine a scale,” he said, holding the fruits at an even level. “On one side is the light, and the other is the dark. All those years ago, when the Jedi eradicated the Sith, the scale was tipped.” He raised one hand, lowering the other. “There was no longer balance. But then Sidious rose, far more powerful than anyone expected, and he eradicated the Jedi. The scale was tipped again.” His hands switched, with the low one now higher and the high one now lower. “This lasted until you came; you saved your father, and together you defeated Sidious. The Sith are no more, and you are all that remains of the Jedi.” The two hands came together again, one only slightly higher than the other.

“It’s close — closer than it’s been in centuries. But it took the eradication of the Sith and the almost complete destruction of the Jedi to get here. If things remain as they are now, the balance might keep for a while; decades, perhaps. Even if you rebuild the Jedi Order, as you intend to, it might last. Eventually, however, the scale will become skewed—“ he moved his hands again, the higher one rising even further, “—and the Force will seek to correct itself.” The other hand rose to meet its counterpart.


“Exactly.” Qui-Gon finally dropped his arms, letting the fruit fall to the ground. “The Jedi have long seen the light side as the only true path to understanding and utilizing the Force. The Sith only saw the dark side. They both believed that to have balance, the other must be destroyed. They both were wrong.”

“Are you saying that I shouldn’t rebuild the Jedi?”

Qui-Gon shook his head. “The galaxy will always have need for Jedi. I’m merely saying that perhaps it’s a good thing you might not be able to recreate the Order as it once was. Think about it, Luke — would you have been able to save your father, if you had acted as a true Jedi?”

Luke thought for a moment. If he had ignored his love for his father, not tried to save him… would Palpatine still live? Would he himself have fallen? He remembered Yoda’s and Obi-Wan’s protests, as well, when he had insisted on abandoning his training to go save Leia and Han. If he had listened, done as they said… would his two dearest friends be dead now?

Slowly, he shook his head. “Then what do I do?”

“That is entirely up to you.”

Qui-Gon’s brows suddenly furrowed, and his gaze became very distant, as if he were straining to listen to some far-off sound. After a moment, it passed, and he looked to Luke, renewed concern on his face. “I sense that our time here is coming to an end,” he said. “But before we part ways, there is something I must show you. I don’t know if I will be able to once you are back in the physical universe, but it will be difficult for you to believe me if I were simply to explain it to you. But this is something you must see, if you are to truly understand why the Jedi Order must be changed.”

Luke frowned, apprehensive, but he still nodded. Qui-Gon reached up, placing both hands on either side of his head.

“Just relax,” he said, “and open yourself up to the Force.”

Luke took in a deep breath, letting it out slowly through his nose. As he did so, he emptied his mind, allowing the Force to flow in unhindered, like the rush of a gentle stream—

—and then the world fell away in a flash of blinding light.

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She had barely slept in three days.

Her eyes stung with exhaustion, and her body ached from the lingering effects of her fight with Pamani. Leia knew she should be getting more rest, but every time she tried, her mind rebelled; she kept seeing the moment when Dooku’s blade had pierced Luke’s abdomen, kept imagining what she would do if he died. How could she return home without him?
And so, instead of resting, she remained by his side, watching as he floated in the bacta tank, unconscious, much as she had after he was attacked by the wampa on Hoth.

Med droids had been coming and going all day, checking his vitals and the diagnostics from the bacta tank. The Resolute’s medbay was small and crowded, but a private room had been found for Luke. Leia didn’t know if it was because he wasn’t a clone, or because his injuries had been so grievous, but she didn’t ask. She had hardly left the room since he had been placed there early the day before.

She barely registered it when the door behind her opened, thinking it was just another med droid. She was sitting in a chair by the tank, her head held in her hands, and she nearly jumped out of her skin when a very human voice suddenly spoke.

“How is he?”

It was Anakin. She didn’t turn to look at him, but she lifted her head, letting out a deep sigh. She hadn’t seen him since the duel with Dooku, when he and Ahsoka had raced off after the Sith.

Obi-Wan had helped her carry Luke off the wall, to somewhere safe, before he had gone to set off the explosives on the guns. She had heard the explosions, crouched on the dirty floor of the shop with her brother dying in her arms. It was some time before Obi-Wan had returned, a clone medic in tow, and by then Leia could hear the telltale sounds of battle out on the streets. The Republic’s troops had arrived.

They had been brought first to a field hospital just outside the city’s walls; she had refused to leave Luke’s side the entire time. She noticed only as they were climbing into a shuttle up to the Resolute that Obi-Wan had vanished, gone back to the city to help with the battle.

It had taken nearly two days of pitched fighting for the Republic to take the city. Obi-Wan, Ahsoka, and Anakin had stayed down on the surface that whole time, while Leia had remained up on the Resolute, watching helplessly as Luke fought to survive. She had heard that Anakin, Ahsoka, and the rest of the 501st were shipping back up to the Resolute that morning; they would be leaving for Coruscant within the day, while Obi-Wan and his men would be staying behind to wrap things up. She had been expecting Anakin to come find her — just not so soon.

“She’ll live,” she replied simply, several moments after Anakin had spoken. She could feel herself growing tenser by the second; she knew the conversation that was coming, and she was absolutely dreading it.

“I’m glad to hear it,” Anakin said, taking a few more steps into the room. “I heard that it was pretty touch and go for a while.”

She nodded. “The lightsaber injured several of his organs and his spine,” she explained, regurgitating the information that she had made the med droid tell her four times. “He had to have surgery. They’re hoping the bacta will heal the rest, but if not, he’ll probably need more operations. He was… pretty weak.”

The med droid had said something about a previous injury, likely sustained a few months ago, that was never properly treated. From what the droid had said, it had been rather serious, and had probably been causing him some pain for a while now.

Leia remembered how he had looked, returning to Endor after his experience on the Death Star II; he had been drained, his face pale despite the smile on his face. She had seen him wince a few times, but when she had asked he had said it was nothing serious, and he would have it checked out
in the morning. She couldn’t remember if he’d actually done so. The med droid had said the
damage resembled that sustained from severe electrocution.

She didn’t tell Anakin any of this.

They lapsed into silence, and Anakin came to stand beside her. She didn’t offer him a seat, and he
didn’t ask. They both watched Luke for a moment, before Anakin finally broke the silence.

“Leia—“ he began, but she cut him off quickly.

“We didn’t grow up together,” she said, clasping her hands together tightly in her lap. “We didn’t
even meet until we were nineteen years old, and we only found out we were twins a few months
ago. But even still, the thought of losing him… terrifies me. All my life, even when I didn’t know
it… he was there. He was always there, like a… a presence in my mind. Even in the darkest
moments of my life, I was never alone — because he was there.”

There was a pause. Anakin said nothing, as if waiting for her to continue. She took a deep breath,
trying to steady her trembling hands, and allowed herself a moment to gather her thoughts.

“We were born two days after the formation of the Galactic Empire,” she began. “The Clone Wars
were ending, and Chancellor Palpatine, granted extreme emergency powers, had dissolved the
Republic and named himself Emperor. He claimed that the Jedi had been plotting against the
Republic, and had attempted to assassinate him. So, he had them all killed. Within days, nearly
every Jedi in the galaxy was dead.” She heard Anakin’s sharp intake of breath, and the
thump as he collapsed into the chair beside her.

“H-How? How could he do that? Palpatine is a good man!”

“Palpatine is Darth Sidious,” Leia said. “And he had help.” Anakin already looked so shocked and
distraught, and she almost felt pity, for what she was about to tell him. But he needed to know.
“Obi-Wan survived, and so did Yoda. Our mother — Padmé — died when we were born. Luke and
I were separated, sent to different families and hidden.”

His eyes slipped shut at the mention of his wife’s fate, and Leia could see his lip trembling. With a
shaky voice, he asked, “From who?” She could hear the fear in his voice; he suspected what she
was going to tell him, and it frightened him.

“From Emperor Palpatine. And from you.”

He barely moved, though she noticed his shoulders tensing and his eyes screwing shut just a bit
tighter.

“You fell to the dark side trying to save Padmé,” she started.

And she told him everything Qui-Gon had told her about Anakin’s fall, that day he had come to her
in the Temple. Anakin’s visions of Padmé, and Palpatine’s manipulations of him; everything she
knew, though there were some significant gaps in her knowledge. She didn’t know how he came to
depend on a life support suit for survival, but she still told him of it. The exact sequence of events
was also unclear to her, with so much of it being shadowy machinations that never made it into the
history books, but she told it in a way that she hoped made sense.

“After Padmé died, I was adopted by Bail and Breha Organa of Alderaan. Bail had been friends
with Padmé, and they were very good parents; the best I could have hoped for. Obi-Wan took Luke
to Tatooine, to Owen and Beru.”
Anakin’s gaze shifted to Luke, floating serenely in the bacta. He had moved on from distress to simply looking… sad. She could scarcely recall ever seeing someone look so sad.

“We both had happy childhoods. We were both well-loved, and safe.”

And then she told him everything that had happened leading up to their first meeting, and everything that had happened after — the Rebellion and the droids; the Death Star and her torture at his hands; the destruction of Alderaan and her rescue; Obi-Wan’s death and the battle above Yavin IV. It took her a long time, and though he never said anything, she could tell he was listening closely. He didn’t ask her to stop, though his face was contorted as if in pain, and so she told him everything else.

Hoth and Luke’s training under Yoda. The trap on Bespin and Luke’s duel with him there, where he had revealed that he was Luke’s father and then cut off his hand. The second Death Star and the mission to Endor. Luke’s desperate attempts to save him, and his eventual success. The Emperor’s death, and Anakin’s own. She spared him no detail; not only did he need to know the truth, but he deserved to, as well.

“But even after all of it, Luke believed you could be saved,” she said. “He always believed that there was good in you. He was going to save you, or he was going to die trying. And he nearly did. But in the end, he succeeded. You killed the Emperor, but died in the process. This all happened about three months before we were sent here. The Rebellion has become the New Republic, and though the Empire still exists, we’re close to defeating them, once and for all.”

She didn’t tell him anything about the baby.

Anakin said nothing for a long while, and it was a moment before Leia realized he was crying. The tears fell silently, leaving streaks on his cheeks, but he made no move to wipe them away. It had been well over an hour since she had begun, and he hadn’t said a word the entire time. Now that she was done, she felt suddenly awkward; she wanted to get up and leave the room, leave him to his tears and his remorse. She didn’t want them; they wouldn’t change anything that had happened to her. But she forced herself to stay.

Finally, he spoke.

“You told me you hated your father; now I understand why. Hearing this… it makes me hate myself.”

Leia’s voice was quiet. “I think you did.”

He looked at her, his eyes red-rimmed and full of pain. “I won’t apologize to you. Not because I’m not sorry — I am, desperately so — but because I know you don’t want to hear it. I don’t blame you; it won’t change anything that happened to you, or your brother.” He paused a moment, letting out a shaky breath, and she noticed that his hands were trembling. “I know you’ve been struggling to learn how to forgive your father — to forgive me. But the more you told me about the things I’ve done… or will do… the more I realized… I don’t want your forgiveness.”

Leia blinked, surprised.

Anakin continued, “I understand that Ben — Luke was able to forgive me. But even though I don’t know him very well, I know that he’s a good man; much better than most. And it’s very hard to be a good man. But more than that… I don’t want to be absolved for the things I did — will do. From what you said, I’m sure that I’ll always be considered as one of the evilest men in the history of the galaxy. But you know both sides of me now; the man I am now, and the man I’ll become. I want to
be sure that both of those men will be punished, even if that punishment is just that my only daughter will never forgive me.”

Leia sat completely still, unable to look at him directly. She realized, her nails biting into the palms of her hands, that she wasn’t angry. She wanted so desperately to be angry; she wanted him to cry and apologize and beg for her forgiveness. She wanted to tell him no, to scorn him, to watch him crumble with pain at her rejection. She wanted to hurt him like he had hurt her.

But Anakin Skywalker was a good man.

“Your brother saved my life,” he said, after several moments had passed without her saying anything. “And because of it, he nearly died. I want to do everything possible to make sure that wasn’t in vain.”

She finally looked at him. He looked… devastated. But there was a familiar set to his jaw, a hardness in his eyes; he was already working out how to change the situation, how to make things better. It was something she recognized from herself.

What was he going to do? Stop Palpatine, find a way to keep himself from falling, save Padmé? Leia supposed that things were already going to be changed; now that Anakin knew the truth, he wouldn’t simply let events transpire as they once had. The future was going to be changed, no matter what.

“So what do we do now?” she asked.

He looked a bit surprised that she said we, but he didn’t mention it. “I’m… not sure yet,” he admitted. “But I promise you, I’ll do everything I can to keep that future from happening.”

She could sense that he was being incredibly genuine; he desperately wanted to change things, to improve the future. But she had a feeling — though not necessarily a bad one — that while the future was going to change, it wasn’t going to be in a way that any of them expected.
Coruscant hung outside the viewport, bright and glittering orange against the backdrop of white stars. Leia leaned against the sill of the viewport, watching as the *Resolute* grew steadily closer to the planet. They had left the Kamarr system only a few hours after her conversation with Anakin, and it had taken them the better part of a standard day to get back to the Core. Luke was still in bacta; Leia had spent most of the journey by his side, leaving only after hearing the announcement that the ship had come out of hyperspace. Her legs had been growing sore, and the hissing sound of Luke’s ventilator had been beginning to grate on her nerves.

The sound of approaching footsteps came from behind. She looked back, and was unsurprised to see Anakin coming towards her. She hadn’t seen him since their conversation; he had gone to attend to his duties, and she had ventured out of Luke’s room only once or twice throughout the entire journey. She straightened a bit, crossing her hands together on the sill, automatically adjusting her posture into that of a Senator, a diplomat. Now that Anakin knew the truth, she was unsure how to act around him.

“Leia,” he greeted, nodding his head at her. He said her name so gently, as if he was afraid of it coming out wrong.

She nodded back. “Anakin.”

“I’ve alerted the Temple that we’ll be needing medical transport once we dock,” he said, launching right into business. Leia was relieved; a part of her had been worried that he would want to discuss his future, and her past, even more, and she wasn’t sure that she was ready for that yet. He continued, “I’ve been told that the healers are already preparing a bacta tank for Luke in the Halls of Healing. The droids in the medcentre on board have already sent his file to the med droids in the Temple.”

“That’s good to know. Thank you.”

“Once we’re back at the Temple, Ahsoka and I will be going almost directly to the Council
Chamber, to give them our report about what happened on Kamarr,” Anakin said. “I’m sure they’ll want to speak with you, as well, and I was wondering… were you and Luke planning on telling the Council everything you told me?”

Leia nodded. “We were.” She looked at him, noticing his tightened expression. “But we don’t have to tell them everything.”

“I think they need to know about Palpatine,” he said, “and I don’t mind if they know that I’m your father. But I would rather….” He trailed off a bit, either unwilling or unsure how to end his sentence.

“That they not know about Vader?” Leia finished, and he nodded.

“I told Ahsoka, about Palpatine and being your father. And I was going to tell her about Vader… but I couldn’t bring myself to do it. I knew it would upset her, and I didn’t want her to see me differently. I don’t… I don’t want to hurt any more people than I already have — or will. I want to stop Palpatine, and stop that future from happening, to make sure I don’t hurt anyone else.”

“I understand.” She paused a moment, looking out at Coruscant, now so close that it filled almost the entire viewport. “Will you tell Padmé?” she asked, not turning to look at him.

He gave a deep sigh. “I’m not sure about telling her any of it,” he admitted. “I’ll most likely tell her about Palpatine, but you and your brother, Vader… I haven’t decided yet.” He placed his hands on the sill beside her, leaning heavily on them. “You told me that I would have visions of Padmé dying in childbirth, and that I fell to the dark side to try and save her. But despite that, she still died. Do you… do you know why, exactly? If I hadn’t fallen, would she have lived?”

Leia shook her head. “I don’t know. All I know is that she died when Luke and I were born. I can’t tell you how to keep it from happening, or if that’s even possible.” A moment later, she added, quietly, “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault.”

“For what it’s worth,” Leia said, “I think you should tell her. At this point, I don’t think it’ll cause much harm.”

Anakin seemed to consider this for a moment, before nodding. “Thank you.” He glanced briefly out the viewport, at the rapidly approaching planet, before looking back at her. “There’s one more thing that I wanted to ask you.”

She nodded, encouraging him to continue.

“You told me that at the end of the Clone Wars, nearly all of the Jedi are killed,” he said, dropping his voice to just above a whisper. “That the attack was organized by Palpatine, but… it wasn’t carried out by him, was it?”

Leia took a deep breath, and shook her head. “No. I’m… not entirely sure about all the details here; I wasn’t there, obviously, and most of the records about it were never made available to the public. Most of them were then destroyed by the Empire when it became clear that they were going to be defeated. But my — Bail Organa was on Coruscant the day it happened, and he told me some of what he saw. The Jedi Temple was on fire; he went to see what was happening, and was turned away by clone troopers. As he was about to leave, a Padawan appeared. The boy began fighting the troopers, and managed to kill a few of them, before being shot.”

Anakin was silent for a long while. “The Padawan… he was shot by a clone trooper?”
“Yes.”

“I… I don’t understand. The clone troopers are loyal to the Republic, to the Jedi. They would never turn on us, even if Palpatine told them that the Jedi were traitors. They would certainly never kill a Padawan.”

“I’m sorry,” Leia said. “That’s all I know.”

Anakin leaned against the sill, staring out the viewport for several moments, before abruptly stepping away and straightening. “I should go find Ahsoka,” he said. “I’ll see you when we dock.”

With a quick nod in farewell, he turned and hurried away.

Leia watched him until he was gone, a frown still tugging at her lips.

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It was the late evening on Coruscant, and the weather around the Temple District was dreary. The world outside was masked in grey; Leia stood near a window outside the Council Chamber, her gaze focused on the distant horizon. It looked as if it might rain soon.

Luke had been successfully transferred to the Halls of Healing, to a waiting bacta tank. The healers had given him a quick examination upon his arrival, and had overall been satisfied; he would need a few more days in the bacta, but his condition was improving well. They expected he would make a full recovery, in time.

As soon as Luke was settled, Anakin had come to fetch her up to the Council Chamber. She still didn’t know what he was planning on telling the Council, and it seemed as if he didn’t either.

The door to the Chamber opened, the old metal hinges creaking. It was Master Windu. “The Council will see you now,” he said, turning to retreat back into the Chamber and leaving the door open behind him.

The three of them, her, Anakin, and Ahsoka, filed in one by one, taking up their places in the centre of the Chamber, surrounded by the circle of Masters in their chairs. As usual, a good many of them were attending via hologram, including Obi-Wan, who was still settling affairs on Kamarr. Windu settled into his seat, resting his elbows on the armrests and steepling his fingers together in front of him.

“Master Kenobi has already told us what he can about what transpired during the Battle of Notta,” he said. “However, he lacks details about what happened leading up to the fight with Dooku, which resulted in Ben Lars’ injuries. So please, tell us what you know.”

Leia looked at Anakin, and he looked back; she nodded, encouraging him to start.

“Dooku attacked us while we were placing bombs to destroy the gun emplacements on Notta’s walls,” he began. “Master Kenobi and Ahsoka weren’t present, but L— Ben and Nellith were. We fought him, all three of us, and during the fight, Dooku revealed a… rather shocking truth.” He paused a moment, as if to collect his thoughts, before continuing. “I’m sure that many of you have suspected this, but the twins’ names aren’t Nellith and Ben Lars. They’re Leia and Luke Skywalker, and they’re my children.”

A stunned silence fell over the Council Chamber. Several of the Masters exchanged incredulous looks with each other, but Windu, Yoda, and Obi-Wan all kept their gazes fixed on Anakin.
“You’re certain of this?” Windu asked, his eyes flicking momentarily to Leia.

Anakin nodded. “I am.”

Obi-Wan shifted slightly in his chair, before speaking out. “I can vouch for the truth of this. I said that I had proof, when it was first revealed to us that the twins were from that future. This was my proof — the truth of their parentage. I learned it after running a test to compare a blood sample taken from Leia with Anakin’s own sample. While rescuing Luke from the Separatist facility on Janus VII, Dooku had told me that his real name was Luke Skywalker. I thought perhaps that they were siblings, or cousins, so I decided to order the test to prove this. And while the test did prove that Anakin and Leia were related, it was not in the way that I expected.”

To Leia’s surprise, Anakin didn’t tense or scowl upon learning that his former master had known this truth for so long. She supposed that they must have spoken at some point, before Anakin had left Kamarr. It made sense; he had, after all, not asked her for any proof that Dooku hadn’t been lying. Though perhaps he had simply sensed that it was the truth — the same way she had known that Luke had told the truth, when he had revealed to her that they were twins, that long-ago night on Endor.

“Do you still have the results of this test?” Windu asked. Though his questions made it seemed as if he was doubtful, Leia could tell that he believed them; he was merely asking for confirmation. Leia wouldn’t begrudge him that; she likely would do the same, in his position.

Obi-Wan nodded. “I can request that they be sent to all of you. We could also perform the test again—” He looked to Anakin and Leia, “if you would both be willing.”

“No, of course,” Leia said, at the same that Anakin nodded his assent.

Windu shook his head. “I don’t think that will be necessary. I trust that you all speak the truth. Though I am curious: who is your mother?”

Leia glanced at Anakin, who nodded. “Padmé Amidala,” she said. “It’s a… complicated story.”

Windu seemed unsurprised, leaning back slightly in his chair, his gaze on Anakin. “I’m sure it is.”

“But why reveal this now?” the Togruta master asked. “Obi-Wan knew this all along, but kept it secret, fearing the repercussions that such revelations about the future might cause. We all agreed. Why tell us now?”

“Dooku was the one to reveal our parentage to Anakin,” Leia explained. “My guess is that he learned it from his master, who learned it when he attacked Luke in the Senate and forcibly took his memories. But even if Dooku hadn’t revealed it, my brother and I were planning to do so ourselves.”

“Why?” Master Plo Koon asked.

“The Stone refused to send us back home. We entered the temple, and two hours later, we woke up back outside, with no memory of what had happened while we were in there. This seemed to confirm my brother’s suspicions, that we had been sent to the past in order to accomplish something. We told you that we didn’t know what that reason was, but that wasn’t true. I’m afraid we’ve been keeping quite a bit from all of you — Obi-Wan included. Luke believed that he knew what our purpose was, but I disagreed, and so he tried to do it on his own. This is why he was at the Senate, the day he was attacked. He was trying to find and kill the Sith Master.”

Several people spoke at once. Someone asked, “At the Senate?” while another cried, “You know
who they are?” Windu, his face impassive, held up his hand, calling for silence. Yoda kept his piercing gaze on Leia, large eyes narrowed slightly. When quiet had been restored, Windu gestured for Leia to continue.

“The Sith Master is Chancellor Palpatine.”

Chaos erupted. Two of the Masters jumped up from their seats, and nearly all began yelling. Even Windu looked stricken, turning quickly to Yoda and speaking quietly to him. Yoda, for his part, looked very grave, his wrinkled lips pursed together. Obi-Wan was staring at her, his shock easy to see despite his holographic form. Most of the comments seemed to be expressing disbelief, though, to Leia’s surprise, very few appeared directed at her.

Finally, Yoda seemed to have decided that his fellow Council members had adequately expressed their shock, and forcefully tapped his gimer stick on the ground. Silence descended almost immediately, and those Masters who had stood in outrage promptly sat back down. “Enough,” Yoda said, his creaky voice immediately commanding the attention of the entire room. “Calm we must be, and rational.” He looked to Leia. “Certain of this, you are?”

She nodded. “Absolutely.” And she told them everything (nearly) that she had told Anakin: the end of the war, the creation of the Empire, the destruction of the Jedi; Palpatine’s tyranny, the Death Star, the Rebellion. She mentioned Vader only briefly, and did not let on that he was Anakin; instead, in this version, it was Luke who killed Palpatine. What was important was not Vader and Luke’s quest to save him; it was Palpatine’s evil and the dark future he would create.

When she finally finished, there were questions immediately.

“How can we be certain that she tells the truth?” Master Kolar demanded.

“The entire Jedi Order could not have been so easily defeated!” the Cerean master cried.

“We must act immediately!” a Nautolan exclaimed.

“Silence!” Windu bellowed. “These accusations are very serious, and, naturally, must be investigated carefully. I suggest—”

“‘The truth, she speaks,’” Yoda said, interrupting his colleague. “Pain in her eyes, I see, and darkness in her past. Difficult to sense, the truth can sometimes be. But occasionally, very clear it is.”

“I sense the truth of this, as well,” Windu said, “but with all due respect, Master Yoda, it would not be wise to go confront the Chancellor about this based solely on the accusations of one woman, regardless of how truthful we find her to be.”

A murmur of agreement passed through the room, regarding both the truth of Leia’s words and the need to find more solid validation of them.

“Finding evidence of this would be nearly impossible,” the Togruta argued. “Not one of us sensed the darkness within him! He has been a public figure for decades, and no one ever suspected this of him. He has no doubt taken a great many precautions to protect his identity.”

“We must confront him!” the Cerean suggested. “If confronted by the Jedi High Council, he will have no choice but to admit the truth!”

A quiet hum of debate circled the room. Leia frowned; if they were going to do this, they needed to do it properly.
“I would recommend caution,” she said. “Palpatine is very cunning, and he would do anything to keep his identity secret. The galaxy never knew the truth while he was alive. I don’t even know if the Jedi Order ever learned the truth, while they still existed. If you confront him directly, chances are, he will find some way to worm his way out. He justified the destruction of the Jedi by claiming that they attempted to assassinate him, that they turned against the Republic. He could do so again.”

“So what would you recommend?” Windu asked. “You and your brother are the only ones here who really have any knowledge of how to defeat him.”

Leia thought for a moment. “There’s no need to rush. Palpatine won’t begin to make his move for over a year. While the sooner he’s dealt with, the better, we need to ensure this is done properly. I don’t think we’ll get a second chance; we can’t underestimate him.”

Windu nodded. “We won’t.”

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Leia was given the same rooms she had shared with Luke. A fresh set of pyjamas and some new clothes had been set on her bed. The small bag of possessions that her and Luke had brought with them to Raban and then on to Kamarr had gone missing at some point, and she had been wearing a borrowed pair of ill-fitting fatigues since she got up to the Resolute. She was glad to finally be out of them, stripping in the shared refresher. She kept the door to what had been Luke’s room firmly closed.

It felt as if she had spent the past four days hovering in limbo, and she couldn’t wait for things to begin moving again.

Though she was bone-tired, she allowed herself to take a long, hot shower. Her showers on the Resolute had been quick and efficient, and she couldn’t recall actually washing her hair during any of them. As such, it felt as if she hadn’t been properly clean in days. She languished under the hot water until the room was filled with steam and the skin on her fingers had puckered, and she finally felt washed.

She climbed out and dried herself quickly, leaving the now sauna-like refresher to get dressed in the bedroom. The pyjamas were soft, made of a light fabric that hung loosely on her body. She stepped back into the refresher, where the open door and efficient fans built into the ceiling had managed to clear much of the steam from the mirror. She stood in front of it for a moment, looking at herself.

The pyjamas covered much of her figure. She was nearing her fourth month of pregnancy now, and was just beginning to show. The bump was easily hidden, noticeable only if she wore tight-fitting clothing, and even then, it could easily be overlooked. Still, it had been over two weeks since she had come to the past — two weeks since she had seen Han. Would he notice, when she eventually got back? She supposed he would, if she stayed here for very much longer. He wasn’t quite so oblivious as that.

How long would it take, for them to figure out a way to properly deal with Palpatine? What would Han think, if she returned obviously pregnant? She didn’t know how he would handle the news that he was going to be a father — that was what had caused her to delay telling him in the first place — but when he learned that she had known for some time, and not told him when she had had the chance, she knew that he would feel hurt.

A stab of guilt spiked through her heart, and she hurried from the refresher, closing the door behind
her. And what if they couldn’t go back for a very, very long time? What if she had the baby here? What would Han think then, if she returned with a baby? Would she even be able to bring the baby back with her — would the Stone allow it?

She shook her head, as if to get rid of such thoughts. She couldn’t worry about that; not yet. Lying down on the bed, she pulled the covers up over herself and shut her eyes, but despite the exhaustion weighing down on her body, it was a long while before she slept.

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Leia woke up quite late the next morning, when the sun was already high in the sky. She felt groggy and dazed, and as if she could sleep for several more hours. It took a moment for her to realize what, exactly, had woken her up; someone was knocking on the door, and their knocking was becoming steadily more insistent as the seconds ticked by.

“I’m coming!” she called, rubbing a hand over her face as she mustered the willpower to stand up. “I’m coming!”

She slapped her hand on the control panel for the door, and it slid open to show Anakin standing in the hallway.

“Anakin,” she said. “Hello.”

“Ah, hi,” he replied, eyeing her no doubt tangled mess of hair. “Did I wake you up?”

“Yes. But it’s probably past time I was up anyways.”

“Well, then, I’m glad to have been of service,” he said. “I just came by to make sure you were alright. I know it’s been a… tough few days.”

Leia gave a quiet snort of laughter. “That’s one way of putting it. But, uh, thanks. I’m okay.”

He nodded, a bit awkwardly. “That’s good.” A few moments passed, during which neither of them said anything. “There’s something else,” he said eventually. “I’m going to see Padmé tonight, to talk to her. I’ve decided to tell her the truth.”

“All of it?”

“Yes. Yes, I think so. Would… would you like to come?”

Leia opened her mouth to answer, only to find she didn’t know what to say. She stood there for a moment, mouth open, while she tried to sort out her thoughts. Did she want to go? The prospect of going and spending time with both of her biological parents, just her, with no Luke, was… uncomfortable. But it was probably the only time she would ever get the chance, and part of her — quite a large part — wanted to get to know Padmé better, if not because she was her biological mother, then because she was such a legend of both the Republic and the Rebellion.

She nodded. “Yes. Sure.”

Anakin smiled. “Alright then. I’ll, um… I’ll let you get dressed.” He took a step back, and nodded his farewell, before heading off down the hallway.

Leia watched him go for a moment, before ducking back into her room and closing the door.

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They left that evening, shortly after dinner, taking a landspeeder from one of the Temple’s rooftop hangars. Leia was quite surprised that they were simply allowed to leave, without clarifying to anyone where, exactly, they were going, or without any attempts to sneak away, but she supposed that at this point, with the truth pretty much out in the open, Anakin likely just didn’t care anymore.

The sun was just beginning to dip below the horizon, and though the air that whipped around them was cool, it was not cold enough to be unpleasant. The sky was still spotted with grey rain clouds, but Leia could see bits of orange light attempting to peak through. Sunset had always been her favourite time on Coruscant, when the vibrant colours of the setting sun had bounced off the glass-sided buildings.

She had spent most of the day in the Halls of Healing, sitting beside Luke. Ahsoka had come to sit with her for a while, in the mid-afternoon; she had said that the Council was still deliberating what, exactly, their next step was. It was likely to be another day or two before they decided anything. From what it sounded like, the Council debate over the issue was getting heated.

Right now, however, most of her own thoughts were tied up with her biological parents. The first few minutes of the drive with Anakin were silent, the Temple gradually growing smaller behind them as they headed into the Senate district.

She looked over at him, watching him for a moment. He seemed a bit nervous, his grip tight on the control yoke.

“What will happen, now that the Council knows about you and Padmé?” she asked.

“I’m… not sure,” Anakin admitted. “I think that at the moment, they’re more concerned about Palpatine. But once that’s over…”

“Will they expel you from the Order?”

He shook his head. “I don’t think so. They certainly won’t be happy with me, but I don’t think they’d go so far as to kick me out. You know that they believe I’m the Chosen One?”

Leia nodded.

“That makes me too valuable for them to just kick me out. Though, once we take care of Palpatine, maybe they’ll believe that balance has been restored to the Force, and they won’t need me anymore.”

“Would you leave?”

He didn’t need to think long before answering. “Yes. In a heartbeat.”

They didn’t talk the rest of the way there. Anakin took them to one of the tall buildings that housed the senators’ apartments, within few of the Senate building itself. Leia recognized the surrounding area at once; Chatham House, the residence of the Alderaanian Senator, was located in one of the neighbouring high rises. She wondered if Bail was there right now, enjoying his dinner while reviewing important paperwork, as was his usual habit.

Padmé’s apartment was on one of the top floors of the building, with a wide, open balcony jutting out into the sky. There was a small landing pad for shuttles and speeders, currently unoccupied, where Anakin set them down. Padmé had been waiting for them, sitting on one of the couches in the centre of the balcony; she stood as they climbed out, walking over to greet them.

Leia guessed that Anakin had told her that she would be coming along, as Padmé looked
unsurprised to see her, though if the confusion on her face was anything to go by, she hadn’t been told why Leia was there.

“Anakin,” she greeted, giving her husband a warm smile. So she had been told that Leia knew about their marriage, then. She looked to Leia, and gave her a polite nod. “Nellith, how are you? I heard about your brother. I’m so sorry that he’s been hurt again.”

“I’m well,” Leia replied. “Thank you for your concern. My brother was lucky; he’s expected to make a full recovery.”

“That’s good to hear.” Padmé turned to enter the apartment, gesturing for them to follow. It was an elegant space, decked out in what Leia assumed to be the latest trends in interior decoration. Warm, dim lighting gave the place a comfortable feel, despite the obviously careful placement of every piece, which could have otherwise made the apartment feel cold and impersonal. Still, Leia could spot little bits and pieces that showed that someone did, in fact, live there: a shawl draped over the back of the couch, a discarded datapad on the dining room table, a collection of pictures on the wall.

Leia paused by the pictures, observing them for a moment. There were quite a few of them. In one, an elderly couple stood arm in arm, smiling warmly at each other. In another, two little girls had been caught mid-laugh; one, the younger, had a halo of light brown, curly hair and round, rosy cheeks, while the older had straighter, darker hair, and a somewhat more subdued expression. The two little girls appeared in another photo, this time with two adults, whom Leia assumed to be their parents. She also recognized the elderly couple in a few other photos, though in some they looked quite a bit younger, and were accompanied by two young girls. Leia recognized one of the girls as Padmé; this was her family, and, by extension, Leia’s too. That elderly couple was likely her grandparents, and the two little girls were cousins, perhaps.

She stepped away from the wall, hurrying to join Anakin and Padmé in the living room. Anakin had sat down on the couch, and Leia settled for the nearby armchair.

“Would either of you like something to drink?” Padmé asked, not yet taking her own seat. “Tea, caf, water?”

“Tea would be lovely, thank you,” Leia said.

Padmé nodded. “Threepio!” she called, turning to look towards another room. “Threepio! Could you make a pot of tea, please?”

Leia’s heart nearly jumped into her throat at the name, but she managed to school her expression into one of neutrality. Surely it was another droid; there was more than one C-3PO unit in the entire galaxy. And while it was quite the coincidence that Padmé happened to have owned one as well, it would have been an even bigger coincidence had she owned the exact same 3PO unit as Leia.

But no, there he came now, hobbling out of one of the adjacent rooms.

“Of course, Senator,” he said, inclining his head slightly. “Which type of tea would you like? Might I recommend the Gatalentan—“

“All tea is fine, Threepio, thank you,” Padmé said, cutting him off.

Leia let out a somewhat strangled laugh, which she managed to turn into a cough at the last moment. Yes, that was certainly her 3PO; she would recognize his neuroticism anywhere. Perhaps
it wasn’t actually a coincidence that he had been in Padmé’s possession before hers; he had once also been her father’s droid, after all, and Bail and Padmé had been close friends.

“Are you alright?” Padmé asked, as 3PO went off to complete his task. Leia nodded, and cleared her throat quite forcefully.

“Perfectly fine, thank you,” Leia said, though she felt a bit light-headed. Grandparents, cousins, and now Threepio? She was beginning to think that it might have been a mistake for her to come. It was too late now, however.

Satisfied, Padmé settled down onto the couch beside Anakin. She didn’t sit on the entirely opposite side, but she didn’t sit particularly close to him either; while she knew of Leia’s awareness of their marriage, she was still wary of it. “So,” she said, looking from Anakin to Leia. “Anakin told me there was something he needed to tell me, and that it involved you.”

Leia and Anakin met eyes, staring at each other for a moment, as if waiting for the other to start. Leia broke first, taking a deep breath and forcing herself to look Padmé in the face before beginning.

“Yes,” she said. “The thing is, we… weren’t entirely truthful with you, my brother and I. We told you our names were Ben and Nellith; they’re not. My name is Leia, and my brother’s name is Luke. We told you that we were at the Senate because we were hoping to see our mother. That is the truth, but not all of it. We didn’t tell you who our mother is.”

Padmé’s brows furrowed, a small crease appearing between her eyes, but she didn’t look away from Leia, waiting for her to continue.

“You’re our mother, Padmé.”

She let out her breath in a sharp little exhale, and looked immediately to Anakin. He nodded, grabbing one of her hands.

“It’s true,” he said.

“I don’t understand,” Padmé said, shaking her head and looking back at Leia. “You told me your mother died when you were young; that you never really knew her. Is that…?” She trailed off, unable to finish the question.

“Unfortunately, that was the truth,” Leia said, feeling a small lump form in her throat. How could she tell this woman that she dies in just a couple of years; that she never gets to see her children grow up? Her hand went almost unconsciously to her own stomach. “You die when Luke and I are born, less than two years from now. Neither of us know you.”

Padmé’s hand went to her mouth, in shock, and she braced the other against her leg, leaning forward slightly. Her face was pale, and she looked somewhat like she might be sick. “I can’t believe this,” she whispered, tears shining in her eyes.

It was at this moment that C-3PO returned, a tray carefully balanced in his hands. The dishes clattered as he set it down on the table, wisps of steam unfurling from the spout of the teapot. “I selected the delightful herbal blend gifted to you by Senator Tiovata,” he explained. “I considered brewing the Alderaanian black tea, but I figured it was far too late in the day—”

“Thank you, Threepio,” Leia said, interrupting him. “I’m sure it’s delicious.”

3PO looked quite taken aback at being addressed by her, but he took the hint that he was being
dismissed and, with a nod, turned and left the room.

It was several moments later that Anakin finally spoke. “I’m sorry, Padmé. It’s the truth. And…
there’s more that you need to know.”

Leia watched as Padmé’s expression hardened, steeling herself against whatever other bad news
the future held.

Anakin told her everything that Leia had told him: Palpatine, the end of the war, the destruction of
the Jedi. To Leia’s surprise, he also told her of his own fall to the dark side, and his transformation
into Darth Vader. She watched Padmé’s face shifting through various stages of shock, distress, and
grief, learning about the horrible fate that would befall them, their children, and the entire galaxy.

By the end, Padmé was crying openly, her face scrunched up as the tears flowed down her cheeks.
She looked at Anakin, shaking her head in disbelief. “This can’t be true,” she said. “It can’t be.
Please tell me it isn’t true, that none of this happens.” She reached out with shaking hands, cupping
Anakin’s face. “Not you. Please, not you.”

“I’m sorry,” Anakin said, his own voice heavy with tears. “I’m sorry, I can’t. But we’re going to
fix it. I promise, we will.”

Leia, feeling as if she was intruding, quietly reached over and poured herself a cup of tea. The
teapot, well-made, had kept the tea remarkably hot, though it had been some time since 3PO had
brought it out. The warmth emanating from the cup gave her some comfort as she wrapped her
hands tight around it, and stepped softly out of the living room. The two of them needed some time
alone together, to discuss things more.

She went out onto the balcony, taking a seat on one of the couches. From there, she could still hear
their voices, laden with emotion, but she couldn’t make out any of their words. The sun had set, but
the Coruscant sky was still illuminated by the light from buildings and the speeders that zipped by
above them. Several lamps cast a warm glow across the balcony, and Leia sat there, her cup
cradled in her hands, staring at nothing in particular, until the tea had gone cold and her fingers
were stiff.
A Promise

Chapter Summary

Anakin and Padmé have a conversation, and Luke is pulled from the bacta.

Chapter Notes

happy new year everybody!!
also how 'bout that rise of skywalker huh

“What are we going to do?”

Padmé felt weary, exhaustion pressing down on her like a weight on her back. Her face was tight from dried tears, and though she had stopped crying, a painful lump still lingered in her throat. Her head was beginning to pound, and though she just wanted to lie down and close her eyes, she knew she wouldn’t sleep for a while yet.

“We’re going to stop Palpatine,” Anakin said, one hand on her knee, a comforting warmth. “The Council knows about him, and they won’t allow him to remain in power. With him gone, hopefully we can avoid the future that Leia told us about.”

Padmé was silent for a moment, before standing. She walked around to the back of the couch, looking out to the balcony, where Leia had retreated some time ago. She could just see the shape of her, curled up on one of the balcony couches, seemingly asleep. It felt as if her and Anakin had been talking for hours; the sun had set completely, and Coruscant was entirely enveloped in night.

Quietly, she took a few steps forward, to see Leia more clearly. Behind her, she heard Anakin rising and coming to stand at her side.

“It’s odd, to look at her and know she’s our daughter,” Padmé whispered. From here, she could tell that Leia was asleep, her chest rising and falling rhythmically. “She’s a grown woman — the same age as I am. Neither of us has known her for very long. But she’s ours.”

“She doesn’t consider us her parents,” Anakin murmured back. “We didn’t raise her. She didn’t know about us, or even Luke — her twin brother — until she was already an adult. And it’s because of me.” He turned, striding away back into the living room. He didn’t sit down, however, instead bracing his arms against the back of the couch.

“This is why we need to stop Palpatine,” he said, as Padmé slowly approached him, leaving Leia to sleep in peace. “So that we both have the chance to get to know her, and Luke; so that neither of them have to suffer.”

“Will stopping Palpatine keep you from falling?” she asked.

“I hope so. From what Leia said, it was Palpatine who manipulated me, led me to believe the dark
side was the only way to save you. Without him, and knowing what might have been, hopefully I can avoid making those mistakes again.”

“I just…” Padmé let out a deep sigh, shaking her head. “I can’t believe it. I trusted him; he’s from Naboo, he was our Senator before me. How could it be possible, that he’s a Sith?”

“We all trusted him,” Anakin said. “He fooled us all, even Master Yoda.”

Padmé took a shaky breath, going back around the couch to collapse onto the cushions, running a hand over her tired eyes. After a moment, Anakin came to sit beside her.

“What do we do, once he’s gone?” she asked. “What happens with the war? With everything?”

“Luke and Leia will, hopefully, be able return to their own time then. We’ll continue fighting the war, until it’s over. The Council knows about the two of us now, and once Palpatine’s gone, they’ll want to do something about it. I don’t know what, but I’ve decided…” He paused a moment, his fingers digging into the fabric of the couch. “I want to leave the Order. I’ll stay until the war is done, if I can, but eventually, I’m going to leave.”

Padmé stared at him a moment, shocked. “But you love being a Jedi. Why would you leave?”

“I may not have a choice,” he said. “If they make me choose between the Order and you… I’ll choose you, no matter what.” He took her hand in his, running his thumb over her knuckles. The skin of his palm was rough, calloused from years of wielding a lightsaber and working with his hands. His other hand, the one made of metal and gears, covered in the sturdy leather of his glove, remained in his lap. He flexed it, stretching out the mechanical fingers.

Padmé had heard of people who had lost limbs, but sometimes still felt pain in them, phantoms of the flesh and bone that was. She sometimes wondered if Anakin ever experienced that; she imagined it would be odd, to feel both the cybernetic limb and the memory of its biological predecessor.

He continued, “After learning about my future — our future — I feel as if I need to do everything I can to keep it from happening. With Palpatine gone, hopefully I’ll be safe, but I’ve decided I won’t let anything keep me from being with you anymore. We’ve hidden our love, allowed the Jedi to keep us apart, and it ends disastrously. I can’t allow that to happen. I need to be with you, to protect you, and our children.”

Padmé shook her head, freeing her hands to cup his face. “Anakin, I don’t—”

“Padmé, you need to listen to me,” he said, reaching up to cover her hands with his. The grave look on his face gave her pause, and she leaned back a bit, apprehensive. “I cannot allow the future that Leia described to happen. Even with Palpatine gone, the risk of me falling to the dark side will remain. You have to promise me: If — when — you become pregnant, if I begin to experience visions of you dying… you have to promise me, Padmé, that you’ll kill me.”

She stood up, practically jumping to her feet; for a moment, her vision began to grow black, her head swimmingly light. “You can’t ask me to do that,” she said, rounding to look at Anakin as her vision cleared. “You can’t ask that of me. You can’t put that on me, that isn’t fair—“

“Padmé, you’re the only one I can ask. Please. If not for me, if not for yourself, if not for the entire galaxy — then for our children. For Luke and Leia. Padmé, Darth Vader will destroy everything and everyone we know and love. If I know about it and still allow it to happen… I don’t want to be that man, and I’m afraid I won’t have the strength to end him myself.”

He took her hands, clasping them tightly. He was looking at her like a man begging, not for his
own life, but for the lives of those he loved.

Would she still love him, she wondered, if that dark future came to pass? If he fell to the dark side and carried out such unspeakable horrors, would she still love him?

The part of her brain that insisted on being rational proclaimed that it didn’t know; but the part that was connected directly to her heart declared that yes, she would still love him. Not despite the horror he would become, but because she would know, always and forever, that there would still be a piece of her Anakin in him. No matter how lost he became, how misguided, how twisted, he would always, at his very core, be good. She had to believe that; if she didn’t…

“I won’t do it, Anakin,” she said. “I could promise you right now that I would, but I’d be lying. If that happens, Anakin, I won’t allow you to fall, but I won’t kill you. I can’t. I would always believe that there was still good in you, and the fact that Luke, that our son, manages to save you and bring you back to the light is proof of that. To kill you, even as… as Vader, would be to kill Anakin Skywalker, and I could never bring myself to do that.”

He bowed his head, still gripping her hands as if they were his only lifeline. She knelt down in front of him, forcing him to meet her eyes.

“I love you, Anakin,” she said. “I will always love you, and as long as I have breath in my body, I will believe that there is good in you.”

He leaned forward, burying his face in her shoulder, his body shaking with quiet tears. Padmé reached up, looping her arms around him and pulling him close. Tears welled in her own eyes, and she allowed them to fall.

“We’ll be alright,” she whispered. “I promise, we’ll be alright.”

She hoped that it was a promise she could keep.

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Neither of them noticed that Leia had woken. She had been wakened by the sound of their voices as they spoke out on the balcony, and had gotten up after they’d gone back to the living room, intending to join them. Hearing their conversation, however, she had paused, lingering near the doorway to the balcony, hidden by the darkened shadows.

Her heart had clenched as she had listened to them speak — to Anakin asking Padmé to promise to kill him, to Padmé refusing, insisting that there would always be good in him. It was a conviction that reminded her so much of Luke; a conviction that had, ultimately, saved his life, and the galaxy as a whole.

She watched and listened until Padmé was kneeling in front of Anakin, cradling him as he cried. She could watch no more after that, and returned silently to the couch, lying back down and closing her eyes again.

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Luke was pulled out of the bacta the next day, in the early afternoon. He was kept unconscious the entire time, a deviation from usual protocol, which had the patient waking up while still in the bacta. The unknown extent of Luke’s spinal injury made this impractical, however, as well as a dangerous, and so the Jedi healers waited until he was out of the tank and stabilized in bed before removing the IV line that kept him sedated.
She knew it would take a while for him to come around, but Leia insisted on staying by his bedside the entire time. She hadn’t been allowed in the room while he was taken out of the tank, but the healers assured her that everything had gone well. A med droid had performed a quick scan, showing that everything appeared to be in order; no major injury to the spine had been detected, though they would have to wait until they could properly examine his mobility to be sure. But the wound to his abdomen had healed fully, leaving only a rather nasty-looking scar that the healers were confident would eventually fade.

There still appeared to be some lingering damage to his system, however, the result of the mysterious months-old injury discovered by the medics on the _Resolute_. Leia fully intended to question him about that at some point, though not until he had recovered from this most recent ordeal.

It was almost an hour before he began to stir, his hands twitching on top of the bedcovers and his forehead wrinkling. Leia noticed immediately, taking the hand nearest to her. It was his cybernetic one; the glove he usually wore over it had been removed back on the _Resolute_, and Leia was no longer quite sure where it was. The damage caused to the synthskin by the blaster bolt he had taken on Jabba the Hutt’s barge was still there, exposing the wires and inner workings of the mechanical appendage. She wondered, in the back of her mind, if he was ever going to get it repaired.


He awoke quite suddenly, his free hand twisting into the sheets; the one in Leia’s hand jerked, and she tightened her grip on it. He called out, his eyes wildly searching the room for someone.

“Ben!” he called.

His breath was coming fast, and Leia stood, pressing the call button for the healers before placing her other hand on his shoulder in an attempt to calm him.


His eyes met hers, and after a moment, his breathing began to calm. “Leia.” It came out as an exhale, the tension loosening instantly from his body. “Where am I?”

“The Halls of Healing in the Jedi Temple,” Leia explained, settling back into her seat, though she didn’t remove her hand from his. “We got back to Coruscant a couple of days ago. You’ve been in bacta for a while.”

“A while? How long?” His voice was raspy from disuse, and he coughed a few times, clearing his throat.

Leia thought for a moment, counting back the days in her head. “Five days. You were pretty seriously injured, Luke. They weren’t sure at first if you were going to make it.”

Luke seemed unsurprised by this, merely nodding. “Yeah, I know.” A moment passed in silence, a frown tugging at his lips and creasing his forehead, before he spoke again, “Leia, listen, there’s some—”

The door to the room opened, admitting a healer and a med droid. “Good to see you’re awake,” the healer said, coming to stand by Luke’s bedside. The droid rolled over to the various machines hooked up to Luke, monitoring his vitals, and performed a quick scan of them all.

“How are you feeling?” the healer asked.

Leia let go of his hand, leaning back in her chair while the healer and the med droid performed their examinations. They checked his motor capabilities, getting him to wiggle his toes and move his feet; he could do both tasks with ease, though it was a bit more difficult for him to lift his legs any great height. Still, he could move well enough that the healer could safely say his spine hadn’t suffered any permanent damage.

“You won’t need to go back into the bacta tank,” she said, “though you’ll be needing plenty of rest. I’ll also be applying a bacta spray twice daily to the wound, to help along the healing. With time, however, I’m confident that you’ll recover completely. You’re very lucky.”

Luke nodded, a slight frown on his face. “Yes, I think I am.”

The healer made quick work of her remaining duties, checking the wound on his stomach once more and applying the spray to his injured back. Both she and the med droid left soon after that, with strict instructions for Luke to stay in bed and rest.

Once the door was closed, and Luke and Leia were alone once more, it was a moment before either of them spoke.

“She’s right, you know,” Leia finally said. “About you being lucky. The medics on the Resolute weren’t sure you were going to make it, when you were brought up. You had to have surgery, and they nearly lost you a few times. It was… scary.”

“I know. I’m sorry.”

Another pause.

“What happened, these past five days?” Luke asked, turning his head to look at her.

“Dooku got away,” Leia said. “We got off the wall, and the explosives on the guns were set off; the battle started immediately. You were sent to a field hospital just outside the city, and then up to the Resolute. I went with you. A couple days later, the battle was won, and the Republic had control of Kamarr again. Obi-Wan stayed behind — he’s still there — but Anakin, Ahsoka, and the rest of the 501st pulled out, and we all returned to Coruscant. We got in two days ago.”

She paused a moment, catching her breath, before continuing, “While we were on the Resolute, I spoke to Anakin. I told him everything.”


“Everything: about us, and Palpatine, and the Empire. Even Vader. He knows it all.”

“How did he take it?”

“Not… well. He was upset, as is to be expected. But he’s quite determined now to stop Palpatine, at any cost. So is the Council.”

“The Jedi Council knows?”

“Not about Vader, but everything else. They’ve been deliberating for over a day now about what, exactly, they should do. A lot of them want to confront Palpatine as soon as possible, I think, but I tried to convince them to wait, to plan their next move out carefully.”
Luke lifted himself onto his elbows, and struggled for a moment into a sitting position. “I need to speak with them. They can’t—“

“I know,” Leia said, putting both hands on his shoulders and easing him back against the pillow. “They’ve agreed to wait and speak to you, before they take any action. So, you can relax, and rest, at least until tomorrow.”

Luke still seemed agitated, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth, but he made no more arguments; likely he knew that they would be futile. Leia waited until some of the tension had dropped from his shoulders before speaking again.

“Padmé knows too.”

His head whipped towards her. “What? Did you go see her?”

Leia nodded. “With Anakin. We went last night. She was quite upset, as well, but her and Anakin worked things out, eventually. I have no doubt that she’ll want to be more involved, as things take shape.”

He seemed to brighten at this, and Leia smiled. If they failed, and nothing good came of their efforts, at least Luke would have had the chance to be with both of his parents.

She stood, patting his shoulder. “You should rest now. You just spent five days in bacta; I’m sure you’re exhausted.”

Luke nodded, giving her a small, tired smile.

“I’ll come back in a few hours, to see how you’re doing,” Leia promised. She turned to leave, but he reached out, grabbing her arm and stopping her.

“Leia.”

She looked back at him, and it was a moment before he asked, “Are you alright?”

She was silent for a moment, caught off guard, before smiling and nodding. “I’m alright. And I’ll be even better once you’re fully recovered — so rest.”

He nodded. “I’ll try my best.”

He let go, and she walked over to the door, pressing the control pad to open it and stepping out into the hallway. Just before closing the door, she turned to look at Luke, and found him looking back at her, a distant expression on his face. Noticing her glance, he smiled, and waved her away.

She forced herself to smile back, and closed the door.

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Leia was gone. Luke sat quietly on the bed for a long time after she had left, staring at nothing in particular. He had wanted to tell her, to share with her what Qui-Gon had shown him; had actually meant to, before they were interrupted by the healer. Part of him wished he’d had the courage to still do it, once the healer and the med droid had left… but no. He was glad he hadn’t done it; not yet.

He could still see the images that Qui-Gon had shown him, as if they were still playing out right in front of him.
Ben. His nephew, Leia’s son, dressed all in black, an inhuman mask covering his features. Looking far too much like his grandfather for Luke’s comfort, going by the name Kylo Ren.

He would be responsible for the end of the Jedi, a second time around. He would help lead the rise of a new empire, a First Order. He would rain death and destruction across the galaxy.

There would be a loss of peace. A loss of balance.

He had seen little more than that. All he knew was that, as things stood, the galaxy was doomed to fall once more into conflict, and Leia’s son, her as-of-yet unborn child, would be at the centre of it all.

How could he tell Leia all of this — that everything they had suffered under the Empire would come again, largely at the hands of her own son? It would destroy her, confirm her worst fears about the evil she feared ran in their blood. Would stopping Palpatine and saving their father be enough to save her son as well? No matter what happened, or how things changed, she would have this baby. And what would happen then?

He would need to tell her, he knew. She had a right to know.

That wouldn’t make it any easier.

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Anakin was waiting in the hallway near Luke’s room when Leia emerged. She was unsurprised to see him there, leaning against the wall, and he straightened, taking a step towards her.

“How is he?” he asked. “I heard that they’d pulled him out.”

“He’s alright,” Leia replied, heading off down the corridor. Anakin quickly fell into step beside her. They had returned to the Temple quite late the night before; neither of them had spoken much, Leia feigning to still be half-asleep. She hadn’t said anything about the conversation she’d overheard, and she wasn’t quite sure if she should.

“The healer thinks the injury to his back is mostly healed,” she continued. “He’s expected to recover fully.”

She noticed his shoulders slump slightly with relief. “That’s good. I’m glad.”

“I also caught him up to speed with everything that’s happened,” Leia continued. “He very much wants to keep the Council from acting too quickly, but I told him that going to speak with them can wait. He needs to rest, if he’s going to recover properly.”

“I believe the Council is quite anxious to meet with him, as well,” Anakin said, lowering his voice somewhat, to keep from being overheard. “They want to speak to someone who has actual experience facing off against Darth Sidious.”

They made their way out of the infirmary and the Halls of Healing, into the corridor, where things were somewhat quieter, though a good deal of beings still mingled about. They walked for a moment in silence, until they reached a less-trafficked corner, illuminated by a great big alcove window. A plush bench was squeezed into the alcove, and Anakin sat on it, motioning for her to join him. She did, and it was another moment before he spoke again.

“I’ve never seen the Council take so long to decide something,” he said. “This series of events is entirely unprecedented. The fact that a Sith Master has been lurking right under their noses, serving
in the most powerful position in the galaxy… it’s challenging the way many of them viewed both
the Republic and the Jedi Order itself. I have a feeling that things are going to change drastically
because of this.”

“Let’s hope so,” Leia said. “Things changing is what we need.”

Anakin nodded. “Hopefully the change is good.”

Neither of them spoke for a while. A small group of young Padawans walked by, most of them
looking to be perhaps eight or nine years old, lead by a somewhat harried-looking teacher. Several
of them greeted Anakin as they passed, wide grins on their young faces as they politely bobbed
their heads. Anakin smiled back, greeting most of them in turn with his own nod.

Watching him, his entire face brightened by his smile, Leia wondered, briefly, what kind of father
he would have been.

The children passed, but Anakin’s smile didn’t fade. Left alone once more, he turned to look at her,
a somewhat speculative look on his face.

“I’ve been meaning to tell you,” he started, “you did very well in the fight with Dooku. If you
hadn’t shown up, I think things might have turned out far worse. I know you’ve said that you don’t
want to train as a Jedi; that you have no interest in such things. But I think you should reconsider.
You have a very obvious natural talent, and if you were to hone it a bit more, you could
accomplish so much.” He paused, and his tone was slightly apprehensive when he spoke next. “I
could train you, if you’d like.”

Leia stared at him for a moment, unsure of what to say. Luke, of course, had offered to train her
before, but she’d always refused. It hadn’t felt necessary, and she’d been too busy anyways; they’d
had a war to finish, a galaxy to fix, a government to create. She could fight well enough without a
fancy laser sword and telepathy.

“I’m… not sure,” she said eventually. The thought was appealing: she remembered how she felt
fighting Dooku, the heavy weight of the lightsaber in her hand. It was unlike anything she’d ever
experienced before. It had felt… right; like something she had been born to do. In a way, she
supposed she had been.

“Just think about it,” Anakin said. “If you don’t want to train with me, then train with your brother.
At least a little bit, to get a feel for it.”

Leia nodded. “I’ll think about it,” she promised.
A Voice Out of Time

Chapter Summary

Things are finally set in motion, but Luke and Leia both face worries and doubts.

The next day, the Jedi Council asked to see them.

Luke was still too weak to walk. He could support himself for perhaps thirty seconds, long enough to get halfway across the room, before becoming too exhausted to keep going. Leia had suggested that maybe they should wait until he was a bit stronger, but he refused; this business with Palpatine was urgent, and needed to be sorted out as soon as possible.

A repulsorlift chair was found for him to use. He had changed out of his robes shortly before Anakin and Leia arrived to collect him, into something more appropriate for a meeting with the Jedi High Council. Both the shirt and jacket he had been wearing on Kamarr had been damaged by Dooku’s lightsaber, and so he was once more lent a set of clothing; this time, a set of lightly-coloured Jedi robes that reminded him of the clothes he had worn on Tatooine.

“Ever use one of these before?” Anakin asked, as Luke settled into the repulsorlift chair.

“Once, as a kid,” Luke replied. “My uncle had one buried in the garage, and I found it. It was old, but it still worked, so I decided to take it out for a joyride.” He laughed, shaking his head. “I got in so much trouble for that one.”

Anakin grinned, though something about his expression looked like he had been caught off guard. “Owen’s father, Cliegg, used a chair,” he said.

Luke nodded. “Yeah, I know. It was his.”

The conversation trailed off, and Leia looked between the two of them a bit awkwardly. Luke focused on figuring out the controls of the repulsorlift chair; they weren’t very complicated, and it only took him a moment.

Anakin led the way out of the Halls of Healing, heading to one of the turbolifts that would take them up to the Jedi Council Chamber. It was late morning, and the Jedi Temple was fully awake. A great number of beings moved about in the hallways, most of them taking some time to exchange polite greetings with Anakin. Luke and Leia both remained silent, with Leia keeping pace beside Luke’s chair. None of them spoke again until they were in the lift, the doors closed firmly in front of them.

“Has the Council made a decision?” Luke asked. “Is that why they want to speak with us?”

“I don’t know,” Anakin replied, shaking his head. “It’s possible. They could also just want to discuss their options with you. You two know more about Sidious than anyone else.”

Luke hoped that it was the second possibility.

“What do you think should be done?” he asked, turning and craning his neck slightly to look at Anakin.
Anakin glanced briefly back down at him, before looking away again, his eyes on the lift doors. “I think we should kill him,” he said, his voice hard. “The sooner, the better.”

Luke could feel Leia flinch beside her, though whether it was because of his words, his tone, or both, he didn’t know.

“Would the Council approve of such action?” she asked.

“Likely not,” Anakin said. “But it’s what I think needs to be done.”

The lift came to a stop and the doors slid open, preventing further discussion. Two Temple guards stood on either side of the door to the Council Chamber, which was wide open, inviting them to enter. They stepped into the chamber one after the other, with Luke going last. The Masters of the Council were already gathered there, and watched as the three of them took their places in the centre of the chamber. The murmured conversation that had been taking place died down into silence.

Obi-Wan was the first to speak.

“I’m glad to see you’re well, Luke. As are we all.”


“It was an unfortunate incident,” Master Windu agreed. “The Council would like to apologize on behalf of the entire Order, that it took place while you were in our care.”

“No apologies are needed,” Luke said. “It wasn’t your fault.”

Windu was silent for a moment, before nodding. “I trust that you have been updated on the current situation?” he asked.

“Yes. Leia’s told me about everything that’s happened.”

“Good. Let’s begin, then.” He looked to Yoda.

Yoda adjusted his grip on his gimer stick, his thin lips pressing tight together. “Move against Palpatine, we will,” he said. “No other choice do we have.”

A gentle rumbling passed through the room; it was obvious that not all of the Masters agreed entirely.

“We have no hard proof that what you have said about him is true,” Windu added, “but given the nature of the accusations, we have concluded that such proof would be impossible to procure. We trust you both, and none of us could in good conscience allow Palpatine to remain in power with such an accusation against him.”

“So what will you do?” Leia asked.

“We were hoping you might be able to help us with that,” Windu said, looking to Luke. “You’re the only one here who’s faced him before.”

“He’s the most powerful Force user I’ve ever met,” Luke said. “And he’s cunning. He knows that I know who he is, and he’ll be expecting me to tell you. He’ll be planning for this. We just have to figure out a way to outwit him.”

“He’ll have contingency plans in place,” Leia added. “We need to move very carefully. You won’t
be able to just march into his office and kill him. Without proof of who he actually is, it’ll look like a coup by the Jedi and the public will turn against you. He’ll make sure of it.”

Windu leaned forward, his elbows on his knees and his hands clasped together in front of him. “So then what do you recommend?” he asked.

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The plan had, more or less, fallen into place. The Council, aware that Luke’s experience was entirely invaluable, had decided to wait until he was fully recovered before making their move. That would require at least a week; while his actual injuries were almost completely healed, it would take time for Luke to fully regain his strength, and be ready for action.

One week — it seemed both like an eternity, and not nearly enough time. It felt impossible that they would be ready to strike in only one week, but that’s what needed to happen. The longer they waited, the more time they gave to Palpatine to prepare his own plans.

It had been a day since their meeting with the Council. The healers had told Luke that he would need to work at getting stronger, and so Leia had offered to walk with him around the hallways of the Temple. Already he was doing better than the day before; though he moved slowly and needed to hold onto her for support, he was actually able to walk.

It was the middle of the day, and the hallways were quiet; most of the Jedi, Leia suspected, were hard at work. They walked in silence for a while, taking slow, careful steps across the dark tile. Warm sunlight filtered in through the windows that lined the corridor, illuminating the innumerable dust motes that floated gently through the air. There was an alcove just up ahead, furnished with a bench, much like the one Leia had sat in the other day, with Anakin.

“How are you feeling?” she asked, looking to Luke.

He gave a smile. “Alright,” he said, though his breath was a bit laboured, his face pale.

“Do you want to sit down?”

He nodded, not bothering to lie, and Leia guided them to the bench, allowing him to sit before settling down beside him. The light coming in through the window was warm on her back, and she closed her eyes, breathing deeply.

“Are we really ready to do this?” she asked, after a moment, opening her eyes and looking at Luke. “Will this really change anything?”

He didn’t have to ask her what she was talking about. “I think we’re ready.” A pause as he turned to her, his eyes meeting hers. “We have to be.”

“Anakin asked me to train with him.”

Anakin’s question had been weighing on her for the past couple of days, but she had had little time to consider it beyond her first few thoughts. But she was tempted to accept his proposal, to allow him to train her, knowing now what was — hopefully — about to happen.

Luke blinked, surprised. “What, as a Jedi?”

“No, as a Velusian water dancer. Yes, as a Jedi.”

“When did he ask you this?” he asked, ignoring her snide comment.
“About two days ago, when I left your room after you first woke up. He was waiting for me in the hall. He wanted to know if you were alright, and then he asked me if I would want to train with him.”

Luke was silent for a moment, before nodding. “You know I’ve always wanted you to train as a Jedi. You’d be good at it — the fight with Dooku was proof of that.”

“That’s what he said.” She reached into her vest, and pulled out the lightsaber that Luke had tossed to her, back on top of the wall at Notta. “I meant to return this,” she said, turning it over and over in her hands, enjoying the heavy weight of the cold metal, “but I couldn’t. I’d never used one before, until that fight, and it felt so much different than I imagined.”

“So all along, all I had to do to convince you to train with me was toss you a lightsaber in a life-threatening situation?”

Leia laughed, then quieted. “Do you think I should?” she asked. “Train with him? You’re too weak to do it, and with everything that’s about to happen—”

“I think you should,” Luke said, cutting her off. “And I think that you want to.”

“I’ve always thought of you as the one with all the talent, with the ability to control this… this power,” she said. “And even when I learned that I had it, too, I never thought that I would ever be able to do what you can. I didn’t want to be a Jedi, so I didn’t think I could learn it anyways. And I still don’t want to be a Jedi; I could never leave the Senate. But… I do think I would like to learn.”

She didn’t know if what she was saying made any sense, but she knew that Luke would understand.

He nodded. “And you should. Anakin can teach you while we’re still here, and then I can continue when we get back home, if you’d like. Though I’m not sure I’ll be as good a teacher as him.”

Leia smiled, and stood. “I think you’ll be better,” she said, reaching out her hand, to help him to his feet. “Now come on, let’s keep walking.”

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She had her first lesson early the next morning. Anakin had been pleased, when she’d told him she would take him up on his offer, though he hadn’t said anything; he’d merely smiled, and told her he would come collect her in the morning, bright and early.

She had expected him to take her to one of the gyms, as he had with Luke, but instead he led her up to one of the Temple’s rooftop gardens. She hadn’t been in one since her conversation with Qui-Gon Jinn, what felt like ages ago, and she didn’t think that it was the same one, but it was just as beautiful. Life teemed in every nook and cranny, green and fragrant and breathtaking. It was, she suspected, an excellent place for quiet contemplation and reflection; not so much for lightsaber practice.

“Here?” she asked quietly, casting a quick glance around. She didn’t see anyone, but the sheer amount of foliage could have hidden any number of beings, and she didn’t wish to disturb someone’s meditation. “This doesn’t seem like the best place for a lightsaber lesson.”

“We’re not here for a lightsaber lesson,” Anakin said, his voice much louder than hers. It was almost startling to hear, in such a peaceful place. “We’re here for a meditation lesson. And don’t worry about disturbing anyone; we’re the only ones here.”
Leia didn’t even bother to ask how he knew that, too busy struggling to repress a groan. “No offense, but that’s not really the sort of Jedi stuff I’m interested in learning. That’s more Luke’s area.”

“I know. Which is why we’re starting with it. You can’t expect to be a great Jedi if you don’t learn meditation.”

“I’m not exactly interested in being a great Jedi,” Leia said. “I’m not looking to devote my life to this or anything. I just want to be half-way decent at fighting with a lightsaber.”

“A large part of lightsaber duelling is remaining calm,” Anakin said. “To do that, you need to meditate.”

“I dunno,” Leia muttered under breath. “I think I’m doing a good job of remaining calm right now.”

“Very funny,” Anakin replied, leading her into one of the garden’s clearings. The ground was paved with rough-hewn stones, with small, wispy plants poking up between the cracks. He gestured to the middle of the clearing. “Sit down.”

“And let me guess,” Leia said, lowering herself down, “legs crossed, hands on knees, eyes closed?”

Anakin grinned. “See? You’re already doing great!”

He sat down across from her, mirroring her position. It was one she had seen Luke take up fairly often, sometimes for hours at a time. She could already imagine the backache that would cause her.

Anakin closed his eyes, taking in a deep breath and letting it out slowly. Leia watched him for a moment, until one of those eyes peeked open and glared at her. “Eyes closed,” he ordered.

She did as he said, shrouding herself in darkness.

“Breathe in deeply,” he continued, and she did, “and let it out.”

The air hissed from her lungs, whistling past her lips. She could hear Anakin doing the same. They repeated that a few times, her chest filling and emptying, until some of the tension began to loosen from her muscles and her body relaxed.

“Empty your mind,” Anakin said. “Reach for the Force, and let it in.”

Leia took in another breath, forcing all thoughts from her mind. She remembered what she had done, the day she had met Qui-Gon Jinn — or, more specifically, the day his ghost had appeared to her. She had been touching the spire of the mountain around which the entire Jedi Temple was built; Ahsoka had called it a nexus of the Force, and she couldn’t have been more right. Leia still distinctly remembered the feeling of the Force pushing down on her, a pressure inside her mind. She had been able to open up to it, to allow it to flow through her, as Luke had told her. It had been both exhilarating and terrifying.

She could always feel the Force, somewhere in the back of her mind. It had only been a few months ago, during her conversation with Luke in the Ewok village, that she realized that’s what she sensed. It had been nearly overwhelming by the mountain, when she had opened her mind to it. She did so now again, expecting once more to experience that inrush of sensation — but while her awareness of the Force piqued, she wasn’t overrun. Instead of rushing over her, the Force seemed to linger at a distance, just out of reach.

She tried to stretch her mind out towards it, to invite it in, but it was like something was holding her
down. No matter how hard she strained to reach it, it always remained just out of reach.

She sighed, shifting on the uncomfortable stones. There couldn’t have been any of those plush ottomans from one of the meditation rooms out here?

“I can feel you struggling from here,” Anakin said, breaking the silence.

Leia cracked an eye open to see that his were still closed, his face impassive. “Clearing my mind doesn’t exactly come naturally to me,” she replied.

“So practice. Meditation is a skill; it’ll take more than one minute to get it.”

“I’ve done it before,” Leia said. Her eyes were still open, and so she saw Anakin’s open as well, a look of curiosity in them.

“When?”

“A couple weeks ago? It was here, in the Temple. I was in the gym watching Luke and Ahsoka spar, and you came in and started talking to me; I don’t even remember what you said, but I practically ran away. I ended up in front of the mountain; you know, the one the Temple is built around?”

He nodded. His expression looked slightly more uncomfortable, and Leia felt a small prick of guilt. He had thought she’d run away because she didn’t like speaking about her father; now he knew she’d run away because he was her father. She felt a wave of awkwardness rolling over them, and so she continued speaking, to try and cover it up.

“I put my hand on it,” she said, “and it was like being bombarded by the Force. It was terrifying; I’d never felt anything like it before. But I remembered something Luke had told me, about allowing the Force to flow through me, not at me. So, I did, and it worked.”

Anakin’s eyebrows rose up. “Worked? Worked how? What happened?”

She felt it would be prudent to perhaps not mention Qui-Gon; she had heard no talk of conversing with the ghosts of long-dead mentors by anyone except Luke, and she didn’t particularly want to be the bearer of yet another shocking revelation.

“I felt it, the Force,” she said instead. “More strongly than I’ve ever felt it before. I could sense everyone in the Temple, and on Coruscant. It was… incredible.”

“And that was your first time?”

“Not using the Force, or sensing it. I’ve done that before. But never on such a scale.”

Anakin nodded, his expression thoughtful. “But now you’re struggling. Why?”

“Probably because I’m not touching a nexus of the Force.”

“Well, those aren’t exactly easy to come by, so you’ll have to learn to do this without one,” he said. “What’s holding you back?”

Leia shook her head. “I don’t know. I can feel my connection to the Force — I always can — but it feels like it’s so far away; like it’s impossible to reach.”

“Don’t worry about doing it right,” Anakin said. “Reach for it, but don’t struggle for it. Let it come to you; coax it out, like a scared tooka.”
“I never really liked tookas.”

Anakin gave her a look. “Just try it.”

She closed her eyes, breathing deeply and letting it out through her mouth. She let her muscles relax once more, ignoring the discomfort of the stones beneath her. She could smell the fragrance of dozens of flowers, and hear the rustling and singing of birds in the tree branches, but she ignored all of that as well. She forced her mind to empty, searching once more for the Force and finding it easily, though it still lingered out of reach.

She stretched her mind towards it, not straining, but beckoning. She tried very hard not to imagine a frightened tooka hiding under a table.

The seconds ticked by into minutes. It took all her focus to remain still, to keep her mind open and clear — until it didn’t. She couldn’t pinpoint when it happened, but at some point, all distraction seemed to melt away, taking the need to focus with it. Nothing existed beyond herself, and beyond the Force. It was as if she floated there, suspended, the only being in the universe. The Force still lingered just out of reach, but she didn’t struggle for it. She simply sat there, and waited.

She didn’t know how long it lasted — ten minutes, thirty minutes, an hour, more. But the change was sudden; one second, the Force still drifted in front of her, seemingly unreachable, and the next, it was surrounding her, covering her very being. It felt as if she let out a gasp, though she didn’t know if she actually did or not.

It was as it had been when she had stood in front of the mountain, before Qui-Gon had appeared to her. She could sense every living thing in the Temple, down to the smallest seed struggling to germinate in the soil beneath her. Beyond that, she could sense the entirety of Coruscant; the life that thrummed on its surface enveloped her like a blanket across her shoulders.

She breathed in, the air spreading from her lungs to every crevice of her body, filling her entirely. She could feel the balance on which the Force hung: life and death, love and hate. Light and dark.

“Mama.”

The voice was so quiet at first that she barely even noticed it. But then it spoke again: “Mama.”

It was a child’s voice, a little boy’s, and Leia could feel that he was calling out to her. It was distant, as if coming from somewhere deep within her own mind. She listened, straining to hear more, and a few seconds later, the voice came again. It changed with every word it uttered, growing from the voice of a child to that of a man.

“Mama. Mom. Mother.”

That last word was said with such anger, such poison, that Leia could feel it pierce through her chest. Her breath caught in her throat, and she felt the sting of tears in her eyes, though they were still closed.

Then, again: “Mother.” It was much quieter, with none of the anger, none of the poison; instead, it brimmed with such sorrow and hopelessness that Leia felt a sob trying to work its way up from within her chest. She knew, deep down, whose voice this was, but she didn’t want to admit it, even to herself. Some part of her hoped that if she didn’t say it, didn’t even think it, it wouldn’t be true — she could pretend it had never happened.

“It’s too late,” the voice whispered, heavy with unshed tears. “Your son is gone.”
Leia opened her eyes, her breath escaping from her in a ragged gasp. The Force receded immediately, retreating to the back of her mind, and the voice vanished, leaving behind not even an echo. A tear escaped from her eye and rolled down her cheek, but she quickly wiped it away. Her breath was shaky, coming hard and heavy, and her heart pounded in her chest.

Anakin was still sitting across from her. His eyes opened, regarding her with a mixture of confusion and concern; no doubt he had either heard her rapid breathing or could sense her fear.

“Leia?” He was immediately at her side, one hand on her shoulder. “Leia, what’s wrong? What happened?”

She stood quickly, allowing his hand to fall away. “I just—“ she began, but paused, not sure what to say. She couldn’t even begin to explain this to him; didn’t even want to. “I just need a minute.”

She didn’t wait for a response, simply turning and hurrying from the garden, before he could even think to try and stop her.

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Master Yoda was waiting for him in one of the meditation chambers. It was much like the one where they had met before, shortly after their discovery of the Stone, though Leia had been with him then. As then, the shutters on the far wall were half-closed, and the light that shone through fell across the room like slashes.

“Wish to speak with me, you did,” Yoda said. A few ottomans were arranged throughout the room, and he sat on the one closest to the windows. His position said that he had likely been meditating, though his eyes were open and alert.

“Yes, Master,” Luke said, going to sit on the ottoman closest to him. After their meeting with the Jedi Council the other day, he had asked to meet privately with Yoda. He had felt that, out of everyone, the Grandmaster of the Jedi Order might be able to help him. “I was hoping to seek your advice,” he continued, “as well as your opinion on something.”

“Troubled, you are.”


Yoda hummed, deep in the back of his throat, before nodding for Luke to begin.

Luke took a deep breath, centering himself, before starting. “I have known for a long time now that my destiny was to be a Jedi. It’s the only thing I ever could be; it’s what I wanted to be. And I knew that one day, soon, it would fall to me to begin repairing the Order. No one else could do it. And even though I was… unsure about many things, I knew that I would succeed. I was so confident that I could bring back the Jedi.”

Yoda’s long, pointed ears perked slightly. “And now?”

“Now… I fear I’m doomed to fail.”

“Fail? Why?”

“I know so much less than I ever imagined. I was taught well, but it wasn’t enough. I hardly know anything.” He looked away for a moment, out the window, to the small sliver of world visible through the shutters. The image of his nephew, cloaked in darkness, flashed through his mind. “But it’s more than that. I’ve… had a vision.”
A furrow appeared on Yoda’s already well-wrinkled forehead. “Of what?”

“The future. My future, and the galaxy’s. It was… bleak, and I’m afraid that it was all my fault.”

“How?”

“It’s something I should have been able to stop. But I didn’t. I’m worried that, even though I know about it now, I’ll still be powerless to stop it.”

“Difficult to foresee, the future is,” Yoda said. “Always in motion, it is. Though know this already, you do.”

Luke did know. The perpetual movement of the future was something he had been all too aware of recently.

“You must not allow fear to control you,” Yoda continued. “Let go of fear, you must.”

“I’m worried that might just make things worse.”

Yoda’s lips pressed together slightly. “Listen to the will of the Force, you must,” he said, “and to your own.”

Luke frowned. He wasn’t at all sure what his own will was, never mind that of the Force. He had been so sure before, that the Force had sent them here to change the future — to stop the Empire, to keep their father from falling to the dark side. Restore balance.

But if things were just going to fall out of balance again… what was the point?

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He left Yoda feeling little more assured than when he had gone in. If anything, he felt distinctly worse. He didn’t quite know what to do next; the plans to take down Palpatine were moving swiftly ahead. Obi-Wan was on his way to Coruscant to assist, as were several other Jedi Masters who had been deployed. Padmé had been brought (unofficially) into the fold, promising Anakin that she would keep an eye on Palpatine as best she could. They had agreed to make their move in approximately a week, a timeframe which would give Luke more than enough time to recover; already he was feeling much better. Things were moving quickly, and they were moving well.

Except that Luke now found himself plagued by doubts.

He returned to the suite of rooms he shared with Leia. He’d been released from the Halls of Healing just that morning; he could walk well enough on his own, though slowly, and with frequent breaks. Leia had been gone by the time he got to their rooms in order to take a shower; her first lesson with Anakin had been this morning. She still wasn’t back when he had left to go meet with Yoda, but she was now. As soon as he opened the door and stepped inside, she emerged from the refresher that separated their rooms.

Her face bore a disarmingly stricken look, and Luke could tell immediately that something was wrong — not just by her expression, but also by the tumultuous wave of emotions he felt rolling off her. Instantly, his own worries and fears were gone.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“I had my first lesson with Anakin this morning,” she said. Despite the look on her face and the roiling emotions he could sense within her, her voice was calm and steady, as if numb to the shock.
“Was it that bad?”

Leia shook her head. “It wasn’t bad. It went… well. He had me meditating.” Her mouth screwed up slightly in distaste; Luke had suspected she might not be so fond of the more spiritual side of Jedi training.

“So what’s the matter?” he asked, going to sit down at the desk chair. After a moment, she followed him, settling into the nearby armchair.

“It took me a while to get into it — the meditating — but once I did, I… heard things.”


“Like the things I heard in the temple on Raban, before the Stone sent me here,” Leia explained. “A voice, from out of time, speaking to me. It was a… child. My son. He called out to me, and then he told me, ‘It’s too late. Your son is gone.’”

Luke’s blood ran cold. Her son — Kylo Ren. Somehow, his voice had projected itself through time and the Force to her. He forced himself to look at her face; she looked… scared. She was afraid for her son, for the future of her unborn baby; her arms were wrapped tightly around her abdomen, as if that might protect him.

“Leia,” he said, his voice quiet, “there’s something I have to tell you.”
Motherhood

Chapter Summary

Luke and Leia discuss his vision, and Leia has a frank conversation with Anakin.

Leia held her head in her hands, her eyes shut tight. She felt very much like she was going to be sick, and she feared that if she opened her eyes and forced herself to face the world, she would be.

Was this how Anakin and Padmé had felt, learning about their future? Leia had thought she understood—she had, after all, learned that her biological father was an evil Sith Lord only a few short months before. But this was much, much worse.

Luke had told her of the vision Qui-Gon had shown him — her son, fallen to the dark side, leading a new Empire across the galaxy. Her son, a new Vader.

She had worried about such a possibility, when she had first learned she was pregnant. Vader’s blood ran in her veins, and it would run in the veins of her child. She and Luke had been able to overcome the evil of their heritage, but she had worried about her child being able to do same. Evidently, such worries were well-founded.


She lifted her head, opening her eyes. He was kneeling in front of her, his face serious. “I’m not going to let that future happen,” he said. “We’re not going to let it happen.”

“But how can we stop it?” she asked, feeling every bit as hopeless as she knew she sounded.

“We’ll teach him well, both of us. The future isn’t set in stone; who knows how things will change. We don’t know what circumstances lead to his fall in the first place. Maybe stopping Palpatine is what needs to change; by saving our father, we save your son.”

“Or maybe that’s what leads to his fall.”

Luke frowned, a small crease appearing between his eyes. “There’s no way for us to know that, Leia,” he said. “What leads to his fall, what stops it. We just have to do our best. But knowing that it happens — that will make it easier to stop.”

She nodded, and fell silent for a moment.

“Do you think it’s my fault?” she asked, after a few seconds had passed.

Luke shook his head. “We don’t know enough to place blame on anyone, least of all ourselves.”

Leia could tell that he didn’t quite believe his own words — she could see that he blamed himself. It occurred to her, faintly, that he had known of this for some time; he had seen this vision before he was pulled from the bacta, some days ago now, and he hadn’t told her. Not until she brought it up herself. A small flare of anger and indignation rose within her, but she suppressed it, for the moment. Right now, she was far too distressed by the news to think any more about this; they
could sort it out later.

She reached up, taking one of his hands in hers. “What do we do now? Keep going, with our plans unchanged?”

It was a while before Luke responded. “I don’t think we have any other choice. Things have progressed too far; we can’t stop them now. Besides, our ultimate goal remains the same: stop Palpatine, save Anakin, change the future. We can still do that, and save your son.”

Her free hand went to her abdomen, pressing gently, reassuring herself that, at least in this moment, her baby was alright. She could feel him, a bright spot in the Force, gentle and beating. She wished desperately, not for the first time, that Han was there, to hold her and tell her that it was alright; that their son would be alright.

Finally, she could hold it in no longer, and a sob escaped from her, sudden and choking. Luke moved immediately, wrapping his arms around her and pulling her into a hug, though it was awkward, with him on the ground and her in the armchair. Still, it was a comfort, and she allowed herself to cry, held in her brother’s arms.

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Anakin found her that afternoon, around lunchtime. Leia was quite glad he had found her; she’d realized that she needed to talk to him, to explain herself, but he was gone by the time she had gotten back to the garden. She didn’t know where to look for him, after that, and part of her didn’t want to find him, and so she’d sat down on one of the benches to wait — for what, she didn’t know.

That was where he found her, sometime later. He smiled, a bit shyly, upon seeing her, and she scooted further down the bench, wordlessly inviting him to sit down beside her. He did.

“I went looking for you, when you didn’t come back,” he started, after a moment had passed. “I could tell you were upset, and I wanted to make sure you were alright. I found Luke, eventually, and he told me you’d come back up here.” He paused, looking at her. “Are you alright?”

She shook her head, feeling her eyes begin to sting with the return of tears. She blinked, willing them away. “No,” she whispered, “but I shouldn’t have left so suddenly like that. I’m sorry.”

“There’s no need to apologize,” Anakin said. “I know things are… difficult.”

Difficult with regards to him, he meant, and Leia knew it.

“You really aren’t what I expected,” she told him. It was obvious, she knew, but she felt it needed to be said. “Or what I tried to make you. I feel… I know I judged you too harshly, when we first met, and I’m sorry for that.”

“You told you. There’s no need for you to apologize to me, or to forgive me.”

“I know, and I don’t. Forgive you, I mean. Or rather… I don’t forgive Vader. Because the truth of the matter is that you aren’t him — not yet. The awful things that you do haven’t happened yet, and it seems… unfair to place so much blame on you for them.”

Anakin was silent for a moment, looking at her. Eventually, he said, “I don’t mean to be unappreciative, but what brought on this change?”

Leia took in a deep breath, letting it out as she spoke. “I’m pregnant.”
She had been debating whether to tell him; she hadn’t wanted to at first, but things felt different now. They had changed, with the revelation about her son. Anakin wanted to know why her feelings towards him had changed, and she felt that he deserved the truth.

He said nothing at first. Unsurprisingly, he seemed a bit shocked, and it took him a moment to either figure out what to say or regain the ability to say it. “Did you just find out?”

Leia shook her head. “I’ve known for a while; since before I came here. Obviously, I’m not very far along — just about four months.”

“But why tell me now? Why not before, or — never?”

“Until recently, I was planning not to tell you. But… well, I found out I was pregnant not too long after I learned that you were my biological father. I’ve spent a lot of time worrying that my child will end up like Vader — that there’s evil in my blood, and there will be nothing I can do to stop it from manifesting.” She paused for a moment, taking in a deep breath. Anakin, sensing that she wasn’t yet done, said nothing, waiting silently for her to continue. “I had a vision — well, I don’t think it can even be called that. When we were meditating this morning. I heard someone calling to me — a child, and then a man. He called me mother, and then told me, ‘It’s too late, your son is gone.’”

She could feel tears welling up in her eyes once more, but held them back; she’d cried enough for one day. “It seems, then, that my fears were correct — my son will fall to the dark side.”

“You can’t be sure of that,” Anakin said, and she shook her head.

“No, I am. Luke is, too.”

She told him of the vision Luke had seen, of a new Empire with her son at the helm, though she omitted any mention of Qui-Gon Jinn.

Anakin’s shoulders slumped as she spoke, and he closed his eyes briefly, as if he were in pain. “But surely you can stop that,” he said, after a moment. “Maybe, by changing my fate, you’ll change his, too.”

“That’s what I hope. But even knowing that it’s such a strong possibility — even stronger than I originally feared — is… distressing.”

He nodded. “I understand the feeling.”

Leia realized he was probably one of the few people who did.

“I wanted to tell you because it’s made me see things differently,” she said. “I’ve spent much of my time here thinking that you were inherently a bad person; that there was an evil inside of you, and becoming Vader was just you letting it free. But now I realize that’s not true. You, Anakin Skywalker, are not evil, though Vader might have been.” She placed her hand on her abdomen, feeling for the softly-glowing light within her. “My son isn’t inherently evil; I know that. So how could you be as well?”

Anakin smiled gently, placing a hand on her shoulder. He paused a moment, giving her the chance to move away if she wished, but she didn’t, and so he left it. “I know you don’t see me as your father,” he said, “and quite honestly, I don’t see myself as your father, either. Not really. But I want you to know — I’ll do everything I possibly can to ensure that you, and your baby, have a good future.”
Leia smiled back. “I know.”

He was right; she didn’t see him as her father, and she likely never would. But for the first time, she felt that a rapport had been established between them, one that went beyond mere civility and tolerance, even going so far as to reach real warmth towards one another.

Anakin took his hand away, letting out a deep sigh, as if he had been holding his breath for the past several minutes. “I have to admit, this wasn’t how I was expecting this to go,” he said, “but I’m glad. Not just because you’ve accepted me — though that is nice — but because I think that this will finally allow you to find some peace. At least, I hope it will.”

Leia laughed. “I think it will.”

A few moments passed in comfortable silence, during which Leia could feel some of the tension loosening from her shoulders; she had been so tightly wound up since that morning, and was only just now beginning to realize it.

“I’m wondering,” Anakin said, breaking the silence, “if I might be so bold as to ask you who the father is. I’m… curious.”

Leia looked at him, and smiled again. “My husband.”

He blinked, surprised. “Oh. I didn’t realize you were married.”

“Well, I never told you, did I? His name is Han.” Her smile softened, involuntarily, at the thought of him. “He’s a scoundrel, but he’s a good man.”

“It seems as if you love him a great deal.”

She nodded. “I do. Even when he’s annoying the hell out of me.”

Anakin grinned. “I’m glad. And while I might not be the best judge — I think you’ll make a wonderful mother.”

“I… thank you.”

“Anytime. Now, what do you say we get back into it? There were a few more things I wanted to talk about today — though I promise to stay clear of meditation.”

Leia gave him an appreciative smile. “Sounds great to me.”

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The next afternoon, Luke and Leia went with Anakin to see Padmé. Luke had expected some level of sneaking to be involved; though the Council might know about Anakin’s secret relationship, they certainly didn’t approve, and Luke wouldn’t think that they would want him traipsing out to go visit his wife. To his surprise, however, they simply walked into one of the Temple hangars and requested the use of a landspeeder.

Anakin must have noticed his confused expression, because he grinned and explained, “The Council has bigger things to worry about right now than my secret marriage. Though I’m sure they’ll get to it eventually.”

Luke was a bit surprised at how flippantly he treated what even Luke knew to be a serious transgression against the Order, but he let it slide without comment. After all, it was because of that
flippant-ness that Anakin was willing to take him to see Padmé.

And unlike last time, she would be aware of who he really was.

The notion of that was exhilarating; for most of his life, he had thought he would never even know his mother’s full name. Then, when he and Leia had arrived in the past, he thought he might be able to meet her, if only for a moment, but never in the proper context of a son meeting his mother.

He tried to rein in his expectations. It was unlikely that Padmé saw herself as his mother; they were practically the same age. He understood that; really, it would have been strange to be mothered by someone who, for all appearances, was only a year or two older than he himself was. But it would be nice to actually get to know her, to fill in the blanks that surrounded that part of his life and heritage.

The skies of Coruscant were, as always, full of traffic, even with it being the middle of the day. Padmé’s apartment wasn’t far from the Jedi Temple, but it still took them a fair amount of time to get there. They were silent for most of the way; Luke found himself too distracted to even attempt a conversation, and it seemed as Leia and Anakin felt the same, or were at least aware that now was not the time for half-hearted discussions about the weather.

When they finally reached the apartment, Anakin docked the speeder on a small landing platform attached to the balcony. Even from the outside, Luke could tell that it was an elegant apartment; exquisitely upholstered couches furnished the balcony, with a small fountain burbling quietly in the centre and two tall, golden statues on either side of the landing platform, the type of thing you might expect to find in a museum, rather than an apartment.

As they all disembarked from the speeder, Padmé appeared in the archway leading to the rest of the apartment. She was wearing a loose indigo velvet gown, shot through here and there with threads of gold. Her hair was thickly braided, with a gold metal headband and bits of gold beading throughout the strands, and she wore gold fabric slippers on her feet. It was the sort of outfit one might expect to see at a gala; Luke suspected that Padmé considered it to be more like loungewear.

She smiled at them as they approached. “It’s so good to see you all again,” she said. Stepping forward, she took one of Luke’s hands in her own, just briefly. “Hello, Luke.”

He smiled back at her, and they all walked into the apartment, Padmé leading the way. A tea set had been laid out on the living room table, as well as a rather impressive spread of fruits, crackers, and various cheeses, one of which Luke recognized as having the distinctive blue hue of bantha cheese.

“I had some food laid out,” Padmé said, unnecessarily, “just in case.”

“That’s very kind,” Leia said, smiling politely.

They all sat down, settling into the plush couches and chairs that furnished the living room. There was a beat of silence, slightly awkward, which both Padmé and Leia attempted to break at the same time.

“We’re very glad—“ Leia said.

“I’m sure that—“ Padmé started.

They both stopped, looking at each other for a moment, before both smiling. “Please,” Padmé said, “you first.”
Leia nodded her thanks. “I just wanted to say that we’re very glad we were able to come see you. I know you must be very busy.”

“Of course,” Padmé said. “I’m glad that you were able to come. From what Anakin has told me, you’ve been quite busy yourselves.” She stumbled slightly over Anakin’s name, obviously unused to referring to him as such in front of other people.

“Well, if things go well, we should be returning to our own time soon,” Luke said, “so it was best that we take this chance while we still can.”

Padmé smiled and nodded. “That’s very true.” Leaning forward, she lifted the lid from the teapot, checking that the tea was steeped enough, before asking, “Would anybody like a cup? It’s a wonderful blend from Gatalenta; one of my favourites.”

They all agreed, and once all the tea had been poured, Padmé leaned back, her cup cradled delicately in her hands. “I’d like to know more about you two, if that’s alright,” she said, looking between Luke and Leia. “I know some stuff, of course, but not as much as I would like.”

Luke nodded, immediately willing. “What would you like to know?”

“What were your childhoods like?” Padmé asked. “Your family, your friends, your dreams. I know you grew up separately, and in vastly different situations.”

“That’s one way of putting it,” Luke said, with a quiet laugh. “I grew up on a farm on Tatooine, raised by my aunt and uncle, Beru and Owen. You met them once, I think.”

Padmé nodded. “I did. They were both very kind.”

Luke smiled, a bit sadly, remembering his aunt and uncle; they were the closest things he had ever had to parents. “They raised me well. There was no shortage of love in my life.” He paused a moment, taking a sip of his tea; it was fruity, with hints of an earthy spiciness, and quite nice. He continued, “They told me what they could about you, when I was old enough to ask. They knew your name was Padmé, and my aunt talked about how beautiful your clothes had been; more beautiful than anything that could be found on Tatooine. After that, I would imagine that you were some rich lady from a Core World, and that one day you’d show up on Tatooine with my father and you’d take me, and Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru, away to your homeworld to live all together. Sometimes I’d imagine that you were a princess or a queen. I guess I was closer to the truth with that one than I realized.”

He laughed slightly, shaking his head at the fanciful imaginings of a small boy stuck on a harsh planet. Padmé’s smile had grown sad; he knew it must be difficult for her to hear these things, but he was glad she allowed him to say them. He’d never told anyone about them before, the fantasies he had used as a child to help makes his chores pass by quicker — not even Leia had known about them. Though they’d had the exact same start in life, they’d ended up in very different places, both physically and mentally. Leia had never cared about who her birth parents were, had never wondered where she came from; at times, it felt as if Luke had spent his entire childhood wondering.


“Far from it.”

He told her all about the rest of his childhood on the farm; his daily life, his friends, the ever-present threat of Tusken Raiders. Anakin tensed slightly at the mention of them; Padmé seemed to
notice, as well, placing her hand on his knee and giving it a gentle squeeze. He relaxed almost immediately.

“As I got older,” Luke continued, “I began to long for some way out; an escape. I didn’t want to spend the rest of my life on a moisture farm. I tried to convince my uncle to let me apply to the Imperial Academy — a military school — but he never let me. I suppose I should thank him for that; who knows what would have happened if he’d let me go.”

“What happened to them, Owen and Beru?” Anakin asked. “I don’t think either of you ever said.”

“They died,” Luke said, sombre. “They were both killed by the Empire, when they learned that we’d bought the droids carrying the Death Star plans. The only reason they didn’t kill me, too, was because I wasn’t at home; thankfully, neither were the droids.”

He quieted, remembering how he had found their charred corpses smouldering outside their home. It was a sight that still sometimes crept, unbidden, into his mind; he could still smell the rancid smoke. He’d buried them both that day, on the land where they had spent so much of their lives.

Leia reached over, placing a hand on his shoulder. They’d been a great comfort to each other, in the weeks and months after the Battle of Yavin, in the moments when they had finally allowed themselves to feel the weight of their respective losses. They still were.

Padmé and Anakin remained quiet, giving them some time. After a moment, Padmé placed her teacup on the table and stood.

“Could I show you two something?” she asked.

Luke blinked, pulled from his memories, and nodded. “Of course.”

The two of them, along with Anakin, stood, and followed Padmé as she led them to a wall back over by the balcony entrance, covered in mounted holo displays. Luke had briefly noticed the holos upon their arrival, but hadn’t had time to pay much attention to them. Now, he realized that they were family pictures.

“I noticed these the last time I was here,” Leia said, her eyes darting around the wall of holos. “They’re of your family?”

Padmé smiled. “Yes. But they’re your family, too.”

Luke blinked, looking at the holos. The thought, somehow, had never occurred to him — that Padmé would have a family, a living family, and that they would be his, as well.

“This is my mother and father, Ruwee and Jobal,” Padmé said, pointing to a picture of an older couple. “Your grandparents. And this one is from when I was a child.” She pointed to another picture, featuring the same couple, much younger this time, as well as two small girls. One of the girls, the smallest, sported a mass of unruly brown curls and a wide, toothy grin. “That one’s me,” Padmé said. “I was maybe four or five here. And that’s my older sister, Sola. She has two daughters of her own now, Ryoo and Pooja — your cousins.”

There was a picture of the two girls, smiling together. The elder of the two seemed to not even be ten years old. It was odd for Luke, to think that he had two cousins; not only that, but an aunt, and grandparents as well, all of whom could very well still be alive back in his own time.

Padmé went on, telling them more about her family — parents, sister, nieces, brother-in-law, grandparents, aunts and uncles. In the span of perhaps five minutes, Luke gained dozens of
relatives — far more than he ever thought he would have.

Perhaps, if they were able to change things, he would grow up knowing all of these people. They would visit each other during holidays; he would play with his older cousins, spend time with his grandparents. It was a concept that was entirely foreign to him; as a child, he’d had no extended family. It had always just been him and his aunt and uncle.

But even if they didn’t manage to fix things, and he and Leia went back to a world unchanged, at least some of these relatives would still, in all likelihood, be alive. And though Luke hoped — desperately — that that wouldn’t be the case, he still made a note that, if it did, he would go and find them.

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They spoke until late in the evening. Padmé told them everything about her childhood and life, including how she and Anakin had met, and later fallen in love. Leia spoke a bit about her own life, in particular the development of her political career. Padmé, at least, seemed interested in that, and they spent a good while discussing the pros and cons of being a young politician.

None of them spoke about what might happen to them if they managed to alter the future, though Luke knew they were all thinking of it. Would they be able to stop Anakin from falling? Would Padmé survive? Would Luke and Leia grow up with their biological parents, in a galaxy at peace? Would they even exist?

There was no way for them to know this; not until they’d stopped Palpatine, and Luke and Leia had gone back to their own time. Luke knew which future he would prefer, but the fact that Padmé was even telling them all of this history was an acknowledgement that it might not happen. She could still die, Anakin could still fall, Luke and Leia could still end up growing up apart. The galaxy could become better off, or worse.

Either way, it was nice to learn all of this stuff about the woman who was — would be — his mother. It was reassuring, in a way.

They left Padmé’s apartment long after the sun had set, and the lights of the ecumenopolis glittered like stars, replacing the real ones hidden by light pollution. Luke watched them pass by as they made their way through the ever-present Coruscant traffic. He felt… lighter; more at peace. No matter what happened, he had gotten the chance to get to know his mother, something he had always thought impossible. For that, at least, he would be thankful.

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Obi-Wan had already arrived at the Temple by the time they got back. He was waiting for them just outside the hangar, along with Ahsoka, a rather sour look on his face.

“Enjoy your visit?” he asked, quirking an eyebrow, his voice laden with sarcasm. There was no anger there, just disapproval. Obviously, he still wasn’t quite over Anakin’s hidden relationship with Padmé.

“It’s good to see you, too, Master,” Anakin said, just as sarcastic. “I’m glad to know everything went well on Kamarr.”

“You have some nerve, going to see Senator Amidala right now,” Obi-Wan said, ignoring Anakin’s quip. “You must know that the Council isn’t exactly happy with you at the moment. They’re already been discussing whether or not you should be expelled from the Order.”
“They should be focused on the more pressing issue at hand,” Anakin replied, “namely, the Sith Lord currently sitting at the top of the Republic.”

“Thankfully, most of them seem to have realized that. But as soon as that’s taken care of, Anakin, you will be disciplined, and I don’t think your position as Chosen One will protect you very well. Very few of the Council members put much stock in the old prophecies, and that will be even truer once Palpatine is out of the way.”

“I’m aware of all of this, Obi-Wan. What’s your point?”

“That you should be more careful,” Obi-Wan said, “and not flaunt your secret marriage before the entire Order!”

“I figured I should spend time with her while I still can. The Force only knows how all of this will turn out; I could be dead in a week’s time.”

It was the first time anyone had acknowledged that they might not all make it out of this, and it seemed to stun everyone, including Obi-Wan, into silence.

Luke decided to be the first to break it, before they both started arguing again. “It’s not entirely Anakin’s fault. I was the one who wanted to go see her, and I convinced Anakin to take us.” That wasn’t exactly the truth; Padmé had actually been the one to suggest the visit, and Anakin had taken very little convincing to agree. Still, he felt a need to defend his father. He knew from Leia that Anakin was considering leaving the Order, once Palpatine and the war were taken care of, though it seemed as if he was reluctant to share that information with his former master.

Obi-Wan was silent for a moment, before giving Anakin a withering look of warning. “I would strongly recommend you not do this again; at least not until things have calmed down. If you feel the need to, you can keep in touch with Padmé, but I would suggest you do so discretely. By comm, perhaps? I know you both have one of those.”

“Thanks for the permission, Master,” Anakin said, snidely.

“Believe it or not, Anakin, I’m trying to help you. Maybe, just this once, you can listen to my advice.”

With that, Obi-Wan turned and walked away down the hallway.

“I’m sorry, Master,” Ahsoka said, stepping forward. She had slunk off to the side during the argument, and Luke couldn’t blame her for it; it had been a rather frosty altercation. “I accidentally let slip that you had gone to see Padmé. I thought you two had mostly worked things out.”

“It’s alright, Snips. I thought so, too.” He sighed, looking in the direction that Obi-Wan had gone. “The worst part is, I’m afraid he has something of a point.”

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Anakin was woken early the next morning by his comm beeping.

He didn’t know what time it was; a quick glance out the window told him it was shortly after dawn, around the time he was planning on waking up anyways. He and Leia had another training session that morning.

Reaching over, he found his commlink on the bedside table; its red light was blinking steadily with an incoming transmission. He pressed the button to allow it through.
“Hello?” he asked, his voice raspy from sleep.

“Anakin.” It was Padmé. She sounded anxious, and he sat up, immediately awake.

“What is it?”

“I think we have a problem,” she said. “Palpatine’s left Coruscant.”
Chapter Summary

With Palpatine gone, a new plan is drawn up.

“Where could he have gone?”

It was Mace Windu who posed the question, looking around the room at the various Jedi gathered there. They weren’t in the Council Chamber, but rather one of the strategy rooms in the Temple’s eastern wing, whose holotable and leveled seating were much better suited to a last-minute emergency meeting. Most of the Council was in attendance, despite the early hour, as well as Anakin, Ahsoka, Luke, and Leia. Luke stood beside Leia on one side of the table, nervously tapping his fingers against its surface.

“We don’t know,” Anakin said, leaning his hands against the holotable. The projector was currently on, but inactive, showing a slow-spinning hologram of the Jedi Order symbol. “There’s any number of places Palpatine could be. Pad — Senator Amidala and Senator Organa went to see Mas Amedda, to see if they could get any information out of him, but he was apparently very tight-lipped.”

A few of the Jedi shifted uneasily at the mention of Padmé Amidala, and Windu’s lips pressed down slightly in a frown. Across the table, Obi-Wan shot Anakin a look, evidently telling him to watch himself.

According to Anakin, it was Bail Organa who had alerted Padmé to Palpatine’s abscondment. Apparently, he had contacted Vice Chair Amedda the night before to try and schedule a meeting with Palpatine for the next day. Amedda had gotten back to him early that morning to let him know that Palpatine had had to leave Coruscant rather suddenly, and would be unavailable for the foreseeable future. Bail had then contacted Padmé to discuss the unusualness of the Chancellor leaving Coruscant unannounced while the Senate was in session; Padmé had then called Anakin.

“Amedda knows that Palpatine is Darth Sidious,” Leia said, and the room’s attention flipped from Anakin’s indiscretions to her. “It was his niece who betrayed us to Dooku on Kamarr. Even in our time, he’s still loyal to Palpatine — or was, until Palpatine’s death. Chances are, he knows exactly where Palpatine has gone, but there’s no way he’s going to tell anyone. We’ll have to find the Chancellor ourselves.”

“Do either of you have any ideas as to where he could have gone?” Obi-Wan asked, looking to her and Luke.

“I don’t think he’s gone into hiding,” Leia said. “That would require an explanation to the public, or at least the Senate; he would have to admit something’s wrong, that he’s in danger. He would then have to pin blame on someone — the Jedi, most likely, which he’s supposed to do in about a year’s time, at the end of the Clone Wars. But I don’t think he’s ready to do that yet; he doesn’t have all of his pieces in place.”

“Pieces? Such as?” Windu asked.
Luke was the one to answer. “A new apprentice, for one. Dooku is old, and he’s already starting to fail him; he was supposed to kill Anakin on Kamarr and bring me to Palpatine, but he ended up nearly killing me instead. Palpatine’s looking for a replacement.”

Obi-Wan asked, “So you think he’s going in search of a new apprentice?”

“Not exactly, no.”

“What do you mean?” Plo Koon asked.


Obi-Wan’s eyebrows raised. “You?”

Luke nodded, as all eyes turned to him. “Palpatine tried to turn me once, back in my own time. I resisted him, and it lead to his death.” He glanced, just briefly, towards Anakin. The Council didn’t know that it was actually Anakin who had killed Palpatine; they didn’t know that he would become Darth Vader, and it was largely because of him that Luke had resisted falling to the dark side. “On Kamarr, after he killed Anakin, Dooku was supposed to bring me to Palpatine. My guess is that he wants to try to turn me again.”

“But why worry so much about killing Anakin?” Koon asked.

Luke shrugged. “To get him out of the way,” he suggested. Across the table, Obi-Wan frowned slightly, and Anakin tensed; they both knew exactly why Palpatine would want Anakin out of the way. Palpatine had Luke’s memories, and in them he had seen his demise at the hands of Anakin, his apprentice. It seemed as if the Chancellor had decided to skip right over Anakin and go straight to Luke, thus preventing his eventual death.

“But if Chancellor Palpatine wished to turn you,” Shaak Ti said, “why would he leave Coruscant?”

“He knows we’re coming for him,” Luke explained, “and that we won’t let him go so easily. He knows we’ll come after him, but he wants it be done out of the way, off Coruscant, where it won’t make such a scene. He’s drawing us out — me, specifically.”

“But drawing us where?” Windu asked.

Luke thought for a moment, before straightening as realization dawned. “He has my memories, from the attack in the Senate,” he said. “He knows about the Stone and what it does.”

There was a brief moment of silence, which Obi-Wan broke. “You think he’s going to Raban?”

“It would make sense,” Leia said. “It’s the best way to draw us out. He knows we’re aware that he has Luke’s memories, and that he therefore knows about the Stone. That puts the Stone at risk, and he knows that the Jedi won’t just stand by and allow him to come into such power.”

“We have to go after him,” Luke said. His words were followed by several nods and murmurs of agreement from around the room, though several of the Jedi still looked apprehensive.

“It’s an obvious trap,” Agen Kolar argued. “He’s luring us away to give himself the upper hand.”

Yoda looked directly at Luke and Leia. “Certain you are, that he will go to Raban?” It was the first time he had spoken for the entire meeting.
Luke nodded. “Leia’s right. Palpatine is aware that we can’t allow him to get the Stone. If he does, there’s no telling what he could with it; his power would be limitless. Even if his main intention is to get to us, he’ll almost certainly try to get the Stone, as well. We can’t allow that to happen. We have to go after him.”

“You believe he’s after you specifically,” Windu said. “I suggest, then, that you remain behind.”

Luke shook his head. “I can’t do that. Not only do I have more experience with Sidious than anyone else, but I can’t allow myself to sit back and let others risk their lives for me. I’ve faced Sidious before; I’ll do it again.”

“You still haven’t fully recovered from your injuries,” Obi-Wan pointed out. “It would be unwise for you to go after him, especially if he is as driven to turn you as you believe he is.”

“I’m well enough.” He wasn’t yet one hundred percent — likely not well enough to face off against a Sith Lord — but he had no other choice. They could no longer delay it. Leia cast him a look, obviously letting him know what she thought of that, but he ignored her.

“If Luke really is what Palpatine wants,” Anakin said, “then he should come with us. After all, we shouldn’t ignore the Chancellor’s wishes.”

Windu still seemed as if he disagreed, but all he said was, “If you are certain you won’t endanger the mission.”


Windu nodded. “Then it seems as if our next move is clear.”

Obi-Wan grinned, stepping away from the table. “We spring the trap.”

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After some more discussion, it was decided to send only a small strike team to Raban — those most familiar with the situation.

They were set to leave late that morning, shortly before noon. Normally, they would allow for a bit more time for preparation, but there was no time to spare. They needed to get to Palpatine before he got to the Stone, because while he was attempting to lure them away, Luke had no doubt that he would not hesitate to take the Stone, if given the chance.

Luke and Leia were given twenty minutes to pack their things. They had very few of those, and needed only to go back to their room to collect their lightsabers and Leia’s blaster. Though the ‘saber Luke had given to her was still relatively new to her, Leia handled it with ease, hooking it to her belt, as Luke did.

“Maybe you can build you own, when we get back home,” he suggested, with a smile and a nod to her ‘saber.

Leia didn’t smile back. “Maybe,” she said, and then, after a moment, “Are you sure you’re okay to go? The healers said you would need at least a week to recover, and it’s only been a few days.”

“I’ll be fine, Leia. I’m already feeling much better than I was. I’d never be able to live with myself if I sat this out just because I felt a little under the weather.”

“You were stabbed, Luke. You almost died.”
“Almost being the operative word. I’m fine; I swear.”

“You said that after Endor, too, but you were decidedly not fine then.”

Luke frowned. “I was fine enough.”

“No, you weren’t; not according to the healers. The med droid said you had lingering damage from some sort of catastrophic injury. What the hell happened to you, Luke?”

“Sidious happened, that’s what. But I’m fine now, and we’re going to go deal with him — once and for all.”

Leia was silent for a moment, obviously still upset. But one thing they had in common was their stubbornness, and they both were able to recognize when the other wasn’t going to back down. “Just be careful,” was all she said.

“I always am.”

A scoff told him exactly what she thought of that.

They met the others in the hangar at the decided upon time — Anakin, Obi-Wan, and Ahsoka. Mace Windu and Yoda were there, as well, along with R2-D2 and, to Luke’s surprise, Padmé.

“Padmé,” he said, coming to a stop beside the group. “When did you get here?”

“Just now,” Padmé replied.

“Senator Amidala will be accompanying you to Raban,” Windu explained, casting a somewhat disgruntled look at both Padmé and Anakin. “She insisted.”

“It will be good to have a representative of the Senate there,” Padmé said, in a way that told Luke she’d already gone over this point several times. “This is, after all, essentially a coup.”

Windu nodded; either he was conceding the point, or he was giving up the fight. Either way, it gave Padmé what she wanted.

Luke smiled. “Glad to have you along.”

“Your priority is Chancellor Palpatine,” Windu said, looking to Obi-Wan, who, by default of being the highest-ranked Jedi, had been placed in charge of the mission. “If Dooku, or anyone else, is there, you can do what you must, but your priority must be to find the Chancellor and take him into custody.”

Obi-Wan nodded. “We’ll see it done.”

“We’ll be sending Master Koon and the 104th along behind you for backup, if needed,” Windu continued, “but try not to need it.”

“Understood.”

“Rest on you, the fate of the galaxy does,” Yoda said. “Fail, you must not.”

It was Luke who spoke. “We won’t.”

R2 beeped an enthusiastic agreement.
Yoda smiled, just slightly. “Then may the Force be with you.”

A chorus of replies went around the group and, with silent nods, Windu and Yoda took several steps back, watching as the departing party boarded the *Eta*-class shuttle that had been put aside for their use — the same one that they had taken to rescue Luke from Janus VII. Anakin and Ahsoka took the pilots’ seats, joined by R2, with everyone else settling into jump seats in the back. The ramp ascended and, after a few moments, they received the clearance for takeoff. The shuttle’s engine hummed to life as they lifted slowly into the air and made their way out of the hangar.

Through the viewport, Luke could see Windu and Yoda watching their departure, their robes fluttering in the wind. They disappeared from view a moment later as the shuttle exited the hangar, taking to the skies above Coruscant. Down below, the Jedi Temple became smaller and smaller, though it remained visible, its architecture far too distinct to become lost among the other buildings of Coruscant.

Watching it fall away below them, Luke had the overwhelming sensation that he would never see it again — at least, not in this time.

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It had only been a few minutes since they’d entered hyperspace. Ahsoka had left the cockpit, going with R2 to sit with the others in the back, but Anakin had remained in the pilot’s chair, going over the navigation and double-checking instruments that didn’t really need to be checked.

He was unsurprised to sense Obi-Wan’s arrival in the cockpit, shortly after Ahsoka’s departure. His former master lingered for a moment near the entrance, before stepping fully inside.

“Do you mind if I join you?” he asked, motioning to the empty co-pilot’s chair.

Anakin nodded, and Obi-Wan reached over, closing the cockpit door before settling into the seat. For a moment, neither of them said anything.

“I would like to apologize for our argument yesterday,” Obi-Wan began. Anakin finally tore his gaze from his instruments and looked at him; the light of hyperspace cast him in a vibrant blue hue. Obi-Wan continued, “I hope you know that I only wish to look out for you.”

“I know,” Anakin said, “but I can look after myself. I’m not your Padawan anymore.”

“Yes, and sometimes, it’s difficult for me to remember that. Part of me will always see you as my student. But I want you to know, Anakin — I am proud of you. You have grown into a good man.”

“But not a good Jedi.” Anakin’s gaze darted to the cockpit door, beyond which the living, breathing proof of his failure as a Jedi sat.

“We all have our imperfections.”

“You don’t hate me, do you?”

“Anakin.” Obi-Wan’s gaze softened considerably. “I could never hate you.”

“Not even knowing about… what I become?”

“You are doing your best to stop that future. We all are. That in itself is a noble act worthy of admiration. There are many people who, when confronted with darkness in their future, would
simply give up and allow it to happen, believing it to be inevitable.”

“I won’t let it happen to me, Master. I promise.”

Obi-Wan smiled at him, though Anakin could see the sadness that lingered in his expression. “I know, Anakin.”

He moved as if to get up and leave, but Anakin stopped him.

“Obi-Wan. There’s something else I have to tell you.”

Obi-Wan hovered just above the chair for a moment, as if apprehensive, before sitting back down.

“Yes?”

“When this is done — when Palpatine is taken care of, and the war is over — I’m considering… leaving the Order.”

Obi-Wan was silent for several seconds, before simply saying, “Oh.”

“I don’t want to — I would never leave the Jedi if I had any other choice. But if the Council makes me choose between the Order and Padmé, I will choose Padmé. I love her, and I won’t leave her.”

“I… see.”

Anakin waited for a moment, to see if Obi-Wan would say anything else, but when he didn’t, he continued, “I hope you can forgive me for this.”

Obi-Wan’s hand went to his face, covering his mouth; it was a tic he did often, when disconcerted or deep in thought. “Yes,” he said, after several more seconds had passed. “Yes, well… why don’t we discuss this more later? When things are more certain?”

He was avoiding the conversation. Anakin pushed down the rising annoyance within him, and simply nodded. “Yeah. Yeah, sure. Okay.”

With a nod, Obi-Wan stood and went to the door of the cockpit. He stood there for a moment, breathing deeply, before finally opening it and continuing on to the back hold.

Anakin’s hands rested on his thighs, clenched tightly into fists. He forcibly relaxed them, stretching his fingers out, focusing on the creak of the leather glove on his right hand. With a deep, centering breath, he refocused his attention back on the navigational instruments.

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Leia woke with a gasp, her breath coming short and quick. She had fallen asleep, reclining on one of the benches in the back of the shuttle. She stared up at the ceiling for a moment, eyes focused on the dark metal and swinging handholds. Already, the dream that had woken her was fading — a dark figure, a red lightsaber. A nightmare of the past, or a vision of the future? She couldn’t tell, and the details were too blurry now to try and figure it out.

She sat up, swinging her legs over the bench. The rest of the shuttle was quiet; Padmé had gone to the cockpit to be with Anakin and Obi-Wan was meditating on the opposite bench, while Ahsoka tinkered with R2, speaking quietly to the astromech as she worked. It took Leia a while to find Luke — he was sitting on the floor at the very back of the shuttle, resting against a pack with his eyes closed and his arms folded over his chest.
He was asleep; she could tell that even from this distance. Everyone was trying to get in their last moments of peace before they arrived at Raban.

“Ahsoka,” Leia said, keeping her voice quiet.

Ahsoka looked up from her work. “Yeah?”

“How far out are we?”

“Last I checked, it was about two hours. Maybe an hour and a half now.”

Leia nodded. “Okay. Thanks.”

Ahsoka got back to work, and Leia stood, going over to where Luke was dozing. His breathing was deep and even, his face peaceful, despite his uncomfortable position. One of the greatest skills learned in the Rebel Alliance had been how to sleep anywhere, at any time.

Leia sat down beside him, nudging his leg just slightly. He was awake almost immediately, sucking in a surprised intake of breath and blinking rapidly. He looked to his right, saw her, and immediately relaxed.

“Leia,” he said, clearing his throat. “What is it? Are we almost there?”

“About an hour and a half left,” Leia replied. “I’m sorry to wake you.”

Luke shook his head, rubbing a hand over his eyes. “Nah, it’s okay. Is there any particular reason for it, though?”

For several seconds, she said nothing. There hadn’t been — at least, not consciously. But her dream, however vague, had disturbed her, and she knew now what had made her go and sit beside him. “I just…” she began, somewhat uncertainly. She glanced over her shoulder at Ahsoka and Obi-Wan; neither of them were paying any attention, but she still dropped her voice, just in case. “I wanted to know why you didn’t tell me earlier, about your vision of my son. Would you have told me, if I hadn’t come to you about it first?”

Luke let out a deep sigh, sitting up straighter and running his fingers through his hair. “Of course I would have told you. I was always planning to. I just… I wanted to make sure I could do it right.”

“I don’t think there is a right way to tell someone that sort of thing. You should have told me as soon as possible.”

“I know; I agree. I was never planning to keep it from you for very long. If I was, I never would have told you when I did; I would have just let you figure it out on your own. But I wanted you to know what I’d seen. I never wanted to hide it from you.”

Leia frowned, looking away and down at her hands. She knew he hadn’t done it to purposefully hurt her; she would never think anything like that of him.

When she didn’t say anything, Luke continued, “But you’re right, Leia. I shouldn’t have kept it from you for so long. I’m sorry.”

“Thank you.” She looked back up. “Just don’t do it again.” A moment passed, and she added, “You’re not hiding anything else from me, are you?”

He shook his head. “I’m not. I promise.”
“Okay.” She let out a long sigh, feeling infinitely more relieved. “You should go back to sleep. You’re gonna need all the rest you can get.”

Luke smirked. “We’re quite the pair, aren’t we?” he asked. “Me, recently stabbed. You, four months pregnant. Both of us, going off to potentially fight a Sith Lord.”

“As if any of that could ever stop us.”

“You’re right. If I ever get pregnant, I’ll be sure to fight every Sith Lord I come across.”

Leia rolled her eyes, smacking her hand into his face and pushing it away. “Just go to sleep.”

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They came out of hyperspace just over an hour later. Raban looked just as peaceful as it had before, with no outward signs of any sinister occurrences down on the surface. Luke had been sitting on the bench beside Leia as they exited hyperspace, but as space calmed around them, he stood, going to the cockpit where Anakin, Ahsoka, and R2 were.

“So far, so good,” Anakin said, glancing back at him just briefly. A map of Raban was pulled up on the dash in front of them, with the location of the temple marked. “It doesn’t look like there have been any major disturbances.”

“I doubt Palpatine would want to draw the attention of the locals,” Luke said.

“What do we do if he isn’t there?” Ahsoka asked, as Anakin began guiding them down towards the planet.

“He’s there,” Luke assured her. “I know he is.”

A sudden beeping began on the dashboard, and Ahsoka leaned forward to check the alert. “We have an incoming ship,” she said. “Fighter size, approaching from behind.”

Anakin immediately threw up the shields — a smart move, as a barrage of laserfire began only seconds later.

“Obviously unfriendly,” Ahsoka said, unnecessarily.

“Is it just one?” Anakin asked, and Ahsoka quickly checked the readouts.

“Appears so.”

Anakin pulled up on the yoke, lifting the shuttle from its gentle descent. Luke gripped the doorframe to steady himself, and R2 let out a whistle of alarm.

“We’ve come under fire from an enemy fighter,” he explained, glancing back into the hold at everyone else.

“Just one?” Leia asked, repeating Anakin’s question.

“For now.”

Anakin pushed the ship higher, dodging more fire. “Hold on!” he cried, and then slammed the yoke to the side. Luke was nearly thrown off his feet as the shuttle banked hard to starboard, spinning around to face their attacker.
It was a starfighter, but not one that Luke recognized. More laserfire streaked their way, which Anakin dodged expertly, while Ahsoka took control of the guns. She fired back, but missed. The starfighter continued barrelling towards them, and Anakin pulled up to allow it to pass beneath them, before turning sharply once more and pursuing.

“Looks like a Rogue-class,” Ahsoka said, letting out another barrage of laserfire. “That’s a Separatist ship.”

“And it’s not a droid fighter,” Anakin said. “That ship is manned by a living being.”

“Palpatine?” Ahsoka asked. Whoever was flying that fighter was a skilled pilot; they were able to easily dodge all of Ahsoka’s fire.

“I doubt it,” Luke said, stepping forward to lean against the back of Ahsoka’s chair. Obi-Wan had arrived at the entrance to the cockpit, and watched as Ahsoka let off another slew of fire. Luke continued, “He’d want to meet us on the ground, not up here.”

“I agree,” Obi-Wan said. “I sense that this is our old friend the Count, acting as a welcoming party.”

The fighter suddenly veered off to the side, heading for the planet. Anakin immediately followed, with Ahsoka firing all the while.

“Then let’s go say hello,” Anakin said.

“He’s not trying to take us down,” Luke observed.

Obi-Wan nodded in agreement. “He’s leading us to the temple; letting us know that we’re in the right place, so to speak.”

They entered into Raban’s orbit, the gravity of the planet gradually pulling them down towards its surface. Looking at the holomap, it was obvious that Obi-Wan was right — they were heading in the direction of the temple. The shuttle shook violently as they entered the atmosphere, the black of space fading away into the bright blue of a daytime sky; they were going too fast for a planetary descent, but they couldn’t slow down for fear of losing Dooku.

Clouds formed around them, shrouding the shuttle in white. The starfighter ahead of them disappeared in the haze, and when they emerged on the other side, it was gone.

Anakin slowed slightly, and they all craned their necks, trying to see where it had gone. Far below them, a yellow grassy plain stretched out to the horizon; above them, there was nothing but cloud.

Sudden laserfire struck the shuttle in the rear, rocking the ship violently and setting off a slew of alarms.

“He’s gotten through the shields,” Anakin said, frantically flipping toggles to shut off the alarms. “A couple more hits like that, and we’re done.”

The shuttle wasn’t made for dogfighting; they hadn’t anticipated any sort of aerial threat. Anakin made a beeline for the surface, trying to get closer to the ground. He weaved this way and that, dodging the near incessant laserfire, while Ahsoka did her best to track the starfighter’s position.

“He’s almost directly behind us, and gaining,” she announced.

Anakin set his jaw, letting out a small grunt of frustration. “Alright. Everybody strap in.”
Obi-Wan and Luke both retreated to the hold with little protest, buckling themselves into their seats and relaying the message to Padmé and Leia to do the same. There were viewports in the side of the ship and, through them, Luke could see the scenery of Raban racing by — and then suddenly begin tilting at an angle.

He felt his body start leaning towards the rear of the ship, as the horizon gained a sharper and sharper tilt. They were going even faster now, and within seconds the ship was completely vertical — and then it kept going.

“Anaki—“ Obi-Wan’s cry cut out into a scream as the ship flipped upside down.

R2, unsecured, let out a similarly high-pitched shriek as he began plummeting towards what had once been the roof of the shuttle.

“Artoo!” Luke reached out, grabbing the astromech with the Force and holding him steady. R2’s scream continued regardless.

They hung upside down for a moment that felt like an eternity, before finally flipping back around and levelling out. For a few seconds, none of them moved; Luke kept R2 hovering in the air, his shriek gradually dying down. The sound of the shuttle’s laser cannons firing seemed to bring them all back, and Luke dropped R2 gently to the ground; the droid swiveled his head for a bit, as if disoriented, and let out a woozy chirp.

Through the viewport, Luke could see the starfighter veering away from them, its left wing engulfed in smoke. It continued on for a moment, before its engines seemed to give out and it plummeted to the ground, rolling upon impact into a rather brutal crash.

He unbuckled and stood, heading for the cockpit. Leia and Padmé both got up and followed him, though Obi-Wan remained in his seat, looking a bit green.

“We got him,” Anakin announced, as the three of them piled into the cockpit. “And there’s our destination.”

Straight ahead, looming tall on the horizon, was the temple. Even from this distance, Luke could see that there was a ship docked nearby.

Someone else was there, and he hoped desperately that it was Palpatine.

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They set down not far from the other ship. Luke recognized it immediately as another *Eta*-class shuttle, though a slightly different model from theirs; instead of being painted red and white, this one was all in greys and blacks. They disembarked, stepping out into the tall grass that surrounded the temple, flattened slightly by their landing.

Luke vividly remembered the odd sensations he had had while standing in front of the temple before — it gave off a strong Force signature, but one that was difficult to place. The temple, and the artifact within it, belonged neither to the light nor the dark.

He sensed that same thing now, unlike anything else he had ever sensed within the Force. Before, he had thought it strange; a unique effect of the Stone. But he remembered Qui-Gon’s words to him, spoken in that strange place between life and death.

This lack of allegiance within the Force wasn’t strange or unusual. It was *balance*. 
His breath left him in a sharp exhale at the realization. This — this feeling — is what Qui-Gon had meant.

“Someone needs to go and check out the crash of that starfighter,” Anakin said, pulling Luke’s attention from the temple.

Anakin was looking away from the temple, off to the distance, where a thin plume of smoke could be seen rising into the sky. “If that was Dooku, we’ll want to take him into custody.”

“Our priority is the Chancellor,” Obi-Wan reminded him.

“Which is why I propose we only send one person,” Anakin said. “This might be our best opportunity to take him in.”

Obi-Wan frowned. “And who do you propose to do this?”

“Ahsoka.” Anakin’s hand slapped down on his Padawan’s shoulder. “She’s more than capable.”

“Anakin, you can’t send a Padawan alone to capture a Sith apprentice,” Obi-Wan argued.

“Okay, recon, then. She’ll just go and investigate; see if he’s injured, or if it really was him at all.”

“I can do it, Master Kenobi,” Ahsoka said. “If it is Dooku, and he’s uninjured, I won’t engage.”

Obi-Wan still seemed less than pleased, but he realized that he was outnumbered and relented. “Alright. But I’m giving you strict orders to do just that — do not to engage. If Dooku is there and he’s uninjured, try not to let him sense you, and come right back to the shuttle and contact us.”

Ahsoka nodded, once. “I understand, Master.”

“There’s a jumpspeeder in the shuttle,” Obi-Wan said, motioning back to the ship. “Take that, and a pair of macrobinoculars.”

Ahsoka nodded again, and disappeared back into the shuttle to retrieve her supplies.

“The rest of us will go into the temple,” Obi-Wan said, looking to everyone else. “Artoo, you’ll stay with the shuttle.” The astromech had remained on the gangplank, unwilling to get the long grass tangled in his treads. He beeped in something like relief at Obi-Wan’s order. Obi-Wan continued, looking directly at him, “If Ahsoka contacts you and tells you that Dooku was on that starfighter, you’re to contact Master Koon and the 104th to let them know we need backup. If we’re in the temple for more than two hours, you contact the 104th. If anything strange happens at all—”

R2 cut him off, letting out an irritated chirp that essentially let him know that he understood.

Obi-Wan nodded. “Okay, then.”

Ahsoka re-emerged from the shuttle, pushing along a small, compact jumpspeeder, with a pair of macrobinoculars hanging from her neck.

“Be careful out there, Snips,” Anakin told her, as she mounted the speeder and slipped a pair of goggles over her eyes.

“You too, Skyguy. When I get back from checking this fighter out, do you want me to come find you in the temple?”
Obi-Wan shook his head. “Stay up here with Artoo. I don’t know if our comms will work down there, but try and contact us regularly with status updates. We’ll do the same.”

She nodded. “Alright.”

“May the Force be with you,” Obi-Wan told her.

With a two-fingered salute, she revved up the engines of the jumpspeeder and took off, heading in the direction of the rising smoke.

They all stood silent for a moment, watching her disappear into the horizon, before Obi-Wan turned to face them all.

“Well, then,” he said. “Shall we get this over with?”
They moved through the temple in silence.

The stone hallways were cast in vibrant blues and greens from the shine of their lightsabers. Luke and Leia took the lead, being the only ones with actual experience in the temple. As before, the Force moved languidly around them, a soft murmur in the back of Luke’s mind. And while it was not outright malevolent, it still instilled in him a sort of discomfort. Something wasn’t right; he had been able to tell that as soon as they had stepped into the temple. Beyond the usual ebb and flow of the Force that he had felt on his first visit, there was a darkness, lingering in the heart of the temple; a darkness that hadn’t been there before.

They didn’t speak as they made their way through various hallways and down numerous staircases. Palpatine was waiting somewhere below them, deep within the temple. They could all sense it—even Padmé, with no Force abilities, seemed on edge.

By an unspoken agreement, they all stuck close together. Luke, Leia, and Anakin all remembered—or rather, didn’t—what had happened on their last visit. Luke didn’t know how Palpatine had managed to get past the temple’s defenses; some sort of Sith trick, perhaps?

Or did the temple want him there, as it had with Luke and Leia?

The prospect of that made Luke uneasy, but he hoped that, if that were the case, the temple would want all of them there, as well. They hadn’t discussed what they would do if the temple ejected them, and Luke hoped that they wouldn’t have to.

They descended deeper and deeper. There was no way of knowing if they were going the right way, though Luke suspected that there wasn’t really a right way; both he and Leia had taken different paths to reach the Stone, on their first visits. If the temple didn’t want them there, there would be very little they could do about it. It would get rid of them, one way or another.

As they made their way through, the only sounds were the quiet hum of four lightsabers and their footsteps on the stone floor. Luke didn’t know what would happen, if the temple did reject them. Would it all just suddenly go black, and they would wake up outside? Would they be attacked? Would they just wander mindlessly until they ended up back where they had started? He moved cautiously, not letting his attention drift for anything; if something did happen, he didn’t want to be
They had just stepped off a staircase into another hallway when he began to hear the whispers. He had heard them, on his first visit to the temple—soft voices, unfamiliar to him and speaking in a language he didn’t understand. As the first whisper brushed past his ear, he stopped; Leia, walking along beside him, did the same, as did the others.

“Did you hear that?” he asked.

Leia nodded. “Whispers. I heard them the first time I was here.”

“I did, too.”

“I didn’t hear anything,” Anakin said.

“Neither did I,” Padmé added.

“Nor I.” Obi-Wan reached up, stroking a hand through his beard. “Do you still hear them? What are they saying?”

Luke shook his head. “I can’t understand them; they’re too unclear. But I remember, the first time I was here, that the deeper I went, the louder and... more familiar they became. Like voices of people that I know.”

“The same happened with me,” Leia said.

Obi-Wan nodded. “Then let’s keep going. But keep your wits about you.”

They carried on, making their way through the maze-like corridors. Luke remembered how, before, it had felt like the voices were guiding him, drawing him forward—towards the Stone. There was only one way to find out if they would do the same this time.

As they continued, the whispers grew louder. The voices became familiar, though the words they spoke became only marginally clearer. He thought he understood a word here, a name there, but the voices were too jumbled together for him to really parse anything out. The Force itself became cloudier; while it had faded into the background when they entered the temple, it began to re-emerge, stronger now, rumbling like an approaching thunderstorm.

“The Force…” Anakin said, his brow furrowed. “I’ve never felt anything like this before.”

“It’s certainly unusual,” Obi-Wan agreed. His face had a slightly pained expression. “I can sense the dark side at work here.”

He was right, Luke realized. The darkness he had sensed when they had first entered the temple had grown stronger—an overt presence, rather than a distant insinuation. There was evil there, lurking within the eye of the storm. Palpatine’s doing, no doubt.

“We should hurry,” he said.

They picked up the pace, descending deeper and deeper into the temple. The whispers began to grow almost urgent, which told Luke that they must be going in the right direction. They went down another corridor, took another staircase—and then, sunlight.

It trickled in through one of the doors lining the hallway, and they hurried towards it. Luke recognized the short set of stairs beyond, and knew immediately where they lead—the corridor at
the very bottom of the temple. He glanced back at the others, and nodded, before extinguishing his lightsaber. He didn’t put it back on his belt, but lowered his hand. The others did the same, and Padmé dropped her blaster.

Luke was the first to descend the few steps to the hallway beyond. The whispers reached a crescendo, and he had to keep himself from wincing as they practically yelled within his mind. The windows lining the exterior wall of the corridor let in ample sunlight, as well as a gorgeous view of the open ocean. The water was calm, and the waves gentle. At the end of the hallway, just as Luke remembered, was a single door—large, and made out of wood in the ancient tradition.

Standing in front of the door was Palpatine.

△▽△

Ahsoka brought the jumpspeeder to a stop about half a klick away from the starfighter wreck. A plume of dark grey smoke was still pouring up into the sky, allowing her to pinpoint the crashed ship quite clearly. Stepping off the speeder, she pushed her goggles up onto her forehead and flicked on the macrobinoculars, holding them up to her eyes.

The fighter was in quite a bad state, with both wings bent at odd angles and the nose half-buried in the dirt. The cockpit seemed to be mostly intact, and there were no signs of disturbance around the wreck. The canopy hadn’t been ejected, which meant that whoever had been piloting the craft was likely still inside.

She dropped the macrobinoculars and climbed back atop the speeder, quickly covering the rest of the distance to the wreck. She stopped not far from the crash, unhooking her main lightsaber as she dismounted. An alarm was beeping faintly, coming from the cockpit. Ahsoka held her ‘saber at the ready, unignited, and approached the ship with caution.

Peering through the canopy, she couldn’t see much; smoke seemed to be coming in through the dash, clouding up the cockpit. Igniting her lightsaber, she swung it down onto the largest of the canopy’s three transparisteel viewports. It shattered instantly, sending small shards flying. Ahsoka reached out, using the Force to slow them and send them falling harmlessly to the ground.

Smoke came pouring out of the cockpit, and the beeping alarm became much louder. Ahsoka stepped back, waiting a moment for the smoke to clear, before leaning forward and looking into the cockpit.

Count Dooku sat in the pilot’s chair, head lolled back, covered in shards of transparisteel. He was unconscious, a small trickle of blood running down the side of his face. Ahsoka looked at him, and wondered how she was going to get him out of the cockpit and back to their shuttle—he was quite a bit taller than Anakin, and certainly taller than she was, and he had to weigh at least eighty kilograms.

As she was contemplating this, Dooku began to stir, groaning softly and furrowing his brow. After another moment, his eyes opened.

Ahsoka grinned, crouching down so that she was at eye-level with him. Upon seeing her, he let out a rather pitiful excuse for a snarl, before giving a sharp wince. She couldn’t tell if he was injured anywhere beside his head, but it had been a pretty rough crash, and she suspected he might be.

“Hello, Count,” she greeted. “Have a nice flight?”

△▽△
Palpatine turned towards them. He was wearing a black cloak, with the hood pulled up and over his
eyes, but Leia could still see the awful grin spreading across his thin lips. When he was Emperor,
she had only seen him in person a handful of times; he had been notoriously reclusive, staying
largely out of the public’s eye, but Leia remembered quite clearly the awful, bone-chilling
sensations he had caused in her on those few occasions. She felt that same thing now.

“Ah,” he said, and Leia was almost surprised to hear him speak in the smooth, steady voice of the
Chancellor, rather than the thin, reedy croak that he would have as Emperor. “Just the family that I
was hoping to see. I suppose you’ve come to stop me?”

“It’s over, Palpatine,” Obi-Wan said, stepping forward to the front of the group.

“Ah, Kenobi. Of course you would come along, too; always holding Skywalker’s hand.”

Leia could still hear the voices; if anything, they were louder now, practically yelling in her ears.
She tried to tune them out, to let them fade into the background, but it was almost impossible. She
kept catching bits and pieces of words and voices that were familiar, but for the most part, they
remained indistinguishable. Her gaze kept slipping past Palpatine to the door behind him, beyond
which sat the Stone. Close as they were, she could practically feel its power, pulsing within her.

“You can’t win this, Sidious,” Luke declared. Leia looked at him, and found that his own eyes kept
drifting to the door. A quick glance around the room confirmed that they were the only two
affected. She forcibly pushed down the swell of unease that thought awakened in her.

Luke continued, “The Jedi know the truth of who you are now, and they won’t allow you to remain
in power any longer, no matter what you do to us here. The galaxy won’t stand for a Sith as
chancellor.”

“Oh, but they have before, haven’t they? I’m to become emperor, after all. I’ll simply have to
execute my plans earlier than originally anticipated.”

“You will not destroy the Jedi,” Obi-Wan said. “Not this time. We will not allow it.”

Palpatine laughed. “You cannot possibly hope to stop me. You have no idea what I could do—and
when I have the artifact that brought you two here, my power will increase tenfold.” He glanced at

“You want to try and control time?” Padmé asked, her horror obvious in her voice. “Your
arrogance is astounding, Palpatine.”

“Do you all not wish to do the same?” Palpatine asked, spreading his arms wide. “Is that not why
you’re here? To change your fates?” He looked quite pointedly towards Anakin, and grinned.

“I was prepared for you to come after me,” he continued. “Hoping for it, actually. I had such high
hopes for you, Anakin, but now that I know what a failure you will be to me… I’ve decided to
spare myself the disappointment.”

He swung his arm, and a lightsaber came flying out from within the folds of his robes, slamming
into his open palm and immediately igniting. The blade was scarlet, and Palpatine’s grin became
somehow more sinister, highlighted in red.

Leia had expected that Palpatine might have a lightsaber—he was, after all, a Sith Lord—but the
sight of it still surprised her. She moved to raise her own lightsaber, glancing at the others, just
briefly.
Palpatine lunged, his blade raised high, crossing the distance between the door and the stairs in mere seconds. Leia instantly made to get out of the way, igniting her ‘saber. Three other blades shimmered to life, as everyone fell into defensive positions.

Palpatine went straight for Anakin, swinging his lightsaber down in a devastating arc. Anakin’s blade rose up to meet it, just barely managing to stop the blow. Palpatine swung again, and Anakin ducked out of the way, spinning so that they switched places—Anakin with his back to the door, and Palpatine with his to the stairs.

The narrowness of the corridor meant that everyone else had to scramble out of the way to avoid being struck by an errant blade. The five of them now stood between Palpatine and the door to the Stone. Padmé, armed only with a blaster, retreated to the back of the group, beside the door. Anakin took a few steps back, coming to stand beside Leia.

She hazarded a quick glance at Anakin. For them to have any chance, they would need to get Palpatine surrounded. He met her eye, and nodded.

Palpatine’s hood had fallen back, revealing the rather normal face of a trusted public figure, made horrendous by a twisted sneer. This time, Anakin was the first to move. His blade crashed against Palpatine’s, holding together for a moment before slipping apart. Palpatine swung, and Anakin blocked and parried. They became little more than blurs of light, red and blue, crashing again and again against each other.

Anakin was trying to put Palpatine on the defensive, giving more and more power into each blow. He lifted his ‘saber high over his head, and used both hands to bring it down on Palpatine. Palpatine raised his own blade, blocking the strike, but Anakin didn’t relent; he kept bearing down on the Sith’s blade, his face twisted with exertion.

Somehow, through the flashing of the contending blades, Palpatine’s eyes met Leia’s. His irises were a sickly yellow; she had never seen them like that before. He cackled, just loud enough to be heard over the crackling ‘sabers, and raised his free hand. A moment later, Anakin was being sent sprawling backward, propelled by a violent push through the Force. His blade extinguished as he hit the ground hard, and Leia made to turn to him, to make sure he was alright—

Palpatine came charging at her, his lightsaber held at the ready, and she quickly spun back around to block his blow. She hadn’t settled into the proper stance, and her grip was weak, causing her to stumble back as his blade cracked against hers. Her back hit the wall, and within seconds, Palpatine was striking again—but it was not her own lightsaber that blocked it, but Obi-Wan’s.

Leia took the opportunity to slip out of the way, heading for the opposite end of the hallway, towards the stairs. Padmé had helped Anakin to his feet, while Luke had joined Obi-Wan in facing off against Palpatine. The hallway was soon filled once more with the sound of crashing lightsabers. Though Palpatine fought against two opponents, he barely seemed encumbered; he blocked blow after blow, his lightsaber a blur of crimson.

The duel had cut Leia off from Anakin and Padmé, and from the door to the Stone. The voices still raged in her head, and beyond the duel, she could see the door. She needed to get to it—the voices were guiding her to it, drawing her in, as they had before. She stared at the door, her gaze undistracted by the duel happening only feet away from her, unable to draw her eyes away…

Anakin moved suddenly, breaking her focus, as he charged to join the fight. Palpatine glanced, just briefly, towards him, and then ducked out of the way of a blow from Luke. Rising up, he aimed his blade high, and struck Obi-Wan directly in the right shoulder, his blade piercing all the way through to the other side.
Obi-Wan cried out in pain. Anakin, his own lightsaber raised mid-strike, faltered only slightly, but it was enough time for Palpatine to remove his blade and spin to block Anakin’s swing. Obi-Wan stumbled slightly to the side, his lightsaber falling from his grasp and his hand going to the wound. Leia went immediately to his side, putting a hand on his uninjured shoulder to steady him, while Luke used the Force to pull Obi-Wan’s lightsaber into his hand.

All of Palpatine’s focus had been placed back on Anakin. Leia watched, helpless, as the two of them duelled. Palpatine had put Anakin on the defensive, and Leia could tell he was struggling to keep up. He was just barely managing to block on time, and his counter-attacks were weak; Palpatine moved too quickly, with too much power, for Anakin to be able to properly take him on one-on-one, even with all his skill.

Luke ignited Obi-Wan lightsaber and charged forward, slashing at Palpatine with both blades. Though Palpatine’s back was turned to him, he sensed the incoming attack, and jumped deftly out of the way, before spinning back around to face both father and son.

Leia helped Obi-Wan settle onto the floor, as far from the duel as possible; his face was ashen, his breath shallow. The wound made his right arm practically useless; he wouldn’t be able to fight anymore.

Even with an extra lightsaber, Luke and Anakin were faring no better than they had before. Leia rose to her feet, determined to go help them. Luke crossed his blades, blocking a powerful blow from Palpatine, and before he could uncross them and parry, Palpatine was kicking out at him. His foot connected directly with Luke’s abdomen, and extra power from the Force sent Luke rolling backwards, his lightsabers extinguished.

Palpatine spared no time in getting back to business with Anakin. Leia hurried forward, helping Luke up; the kick had knocked the wind out of him, and he sat there for a moment, gasping wildly for breath. Within moments, Palpatine had Anakin backed up against the wall, their blades locked together. With every second that passed, the crossed lightsabers were pressed closer and closer to Anakin.

Leia stood, ready to go to Anakin’s aid—and then Padmé stepped forward, blaster raised. Neither Anakin nor Palpatine seemed to notice her as she took aim and fired. Her aim was true, the bolt sailing directly towards Palpatine—until, quick as lightning, he spun out of the way, and the bolt struck harmlessly into the wall, leaving a blackened streak.

Palpatine snarled, reaching out a hand towards Padmé. The blaster fell from her grasp as her hands immediately went to her neck, her mouth opening and closing as she gasped for air. Anakin, enraged, let out a growl and lunged at Palpatine, but the Chancellor simply sidestepped out of the way and kicked out at Anakin, using the Force to once more send him flying.

Padmé began to lift up into the air, her feet swinging as they tried to find purchase. Leia moved to charge Palpatine, her blade raised, but before she could do anything, Palpatine was throwing Padmé up against the wall, and then sending her roughly to the ground. Leia could hear the crack of her skull as it hit the stone.

Luke had gotten back on his feet, his lightsaber in hand, and went over to Anakin, helping him to stand as well. Together, they moved on Palpatine. He turned to face them, a vicious sneer on his face. He easily blocked Luke’s blow, spinning out of the way of Anakin’s, then swung his blade towards them both. Luke dodged, ducking low to avoid being sliced open, while Anakin twisted his arms to be able to block the strike.

Obi-Wan was attempting to get to his feet, a sheen of sweat on his pale face. He had used to the
Force to pull his own lightsaber back into his hand. Gently, Leia pushed him back down. “Stay here,” she ordered. Padmé was still crumpled on the ground over near the door, but the duel between Palpatine, Anakin, and Luke effectively blocked Leia off from her.

The small space of the hallway greatly limited what anyone could do. Leia hadn’t seen many lightsaber fights in her day, but even she could see how constrained all three of them were being. And while this worked to their disadvantage, it also worked to their advantage, slowing Palpatine down considerably. Transport this fight to a much more open space, and Leia suspected that Palpatine would have taken care of them in minutes.

Lightsaber in hand, she stood by Obi-Wan, watching as the duel progressed. She could see that Luke was beginning to slow; with his recovery still incomplete, this was far too much exertion for him to handle. His blows were weakening and his reflexes were becoming delayed. Leia’s breath caught in her throat as he just barely managed to step back in time to avoid a swing to his chest. The near-constant swirling and thrusting of three burning-hot plasma blades made it near impossible for her to step in.

Sticking close to the interior wall, Leia began inching her way towards Padmé. All three combatants were far too absorbed to notice her, which she was thankful for, as it meant that Palpatine’s attention remained elsewhere—but it also meant that she had to duck to avoid being struck by an errant swing from Anakin. She crouched low, the blade passing just above her head, and made a split second decision, dropping deeper onto her knees and then rolling forward into a somersault that carried her the rest of the way to Padmé.

Her chest was rising and falling in the steady rhythm of breath, and Leia let out a small sigh of relief at the sight. She couldn’t see any blood, and placed her hands on Padmé’s shoulder, giving her a gentle shake. A few seconds later, her eyes were cracking open, and she groaned slightly.

“Oh, good,” Leia said. “How are you doing?”

“Not great,” Padmé mumbled, a hand going to her forehead.

“Yeah, well, just stay here for now.”

She helped Padmé to sit up, so that her back was resting against the wall. Her gaze slipped, just briefly, to the door; the voices were still there, and for a split second, she felt the irresistible urge to reach out and open—

There was a cry, and Leia’s eyes snapped away and over to the fight. The cry had come from Luke; he stumbled to the side, his hand going to wall to steady himself, and Leia noticed a cut had been slashed across the backs of both his legs.

“Shit.” She stood, ready to head his way, but paused when Palpatine straightened and lowered his lightsaber, extinguishing the blade.

“I grow tired of this,” he spat. Something in the way he spoke, in the way his lip curled, made Leia take a step back, almost unconsciously.

He tucked his lightsaber back into his robes and raised his arms, his fingers curled like claws, pointing in Anakin’s direction. It all happened in a matter of seconds, so quickly that Leia couldn’t even begin to process what was going on—but Luke seemed to realize instantly.

“No!” he cried, and pushed off from the wall, moving as if to stop Palpatine.

Lightning shot from Palpatine’s fingertips, arcing through the air directly towards Anakin. He
didn’t even have time to even consider defending himself; the lightning slammed into his chest, sending him crashing to the ground.

“Ani!” Padmé cried.

Even from where she was standing, Leia could feel the static in the air. “Shit!” She ignited her lightsaber, but there was little she could do. A few stay bolts jumped towards her, and she stepped even further back, until she was pressed up against the door.

Anakin writhed on the ground, his mouth open and his eyes squeezed tight in soundless pain. Palpatine gritted his teeth, as lightning continued to pour forth from his fingers. Leia glanced quickly to Luke, and saw the resolve in his face. A moment later, he was propelling himself forward, barely even limping, despite the wounds to his legs, his lightsaber raised high above his head—

Palpatine swung his arms towards him, sending a jolt of lightning his way. It struck him not in the chest but in the abdomen, and only briefly—just one zap, enough to send him to his knees, doubled over in pain.

“Now, now,” Palpatine crooned. “You remember how that feels, don’t you? I suggest that you stay down.”

He returned his attention to Anakin, immediately restarting his torture. A scream finally managed to make its way past Anakin’s lips, choked and awful. Padmé had taken her blaster back up, and was struggling to her feet, one hand pressed to the wall. Luke was still on his knees, chest heaving. He was too weak—another blast like that could kill him. But Leia knew him well enough to know that he wouldn’t stay down.

The wood of the door was hard against her back. The voices were practically screams now, and she screwed her eyes shut, trying to block them out, but it only seemed to make them louder. The Stone was so close—just beyond the door.

She opened her eyes; Palpatine hadn’t let up. She didn’t know how much time had passed—minutes or mere milliseconds—but she did know that Anakin wouldn’t be able to take much more.

Keeping her lightsaber ignited, Leia reached for the doorknob with her free hand, not daring to take her eyes off Palpatine. Slowly, she turned the knob and took a step back, feeling the door open behind her. The voices immediately stopped, as if brutally silenced.

The next few seconds seemed to happen impossibly slowly.

Palpatine’s head snapped up, his eyes immediately landing on her. The lightning stopped, and he let out an enraged howl. He charged for her, stepping over Anakin’s prone body, his hands raised menacingly.

Then Luke was on his feet, racing on a course to intercept Palpatine. He reached out, placing his hand on the Sith Lord’s shoulder—he must have used a Force push, because the touch sent Palpatine falling to the side and slamming viciously into the wall. He slumped to his knees, and Luke hurried over to him, lightsaber pointed directly at his head.

Leia went to her brother’s side, leaving the door, still partially opened, behind her. Palpatine lifted his head, and was met by the tips of two lightsabers.

Padmé had gotten to her feet, and rushed over to Anakin, pulling his head into her lap. He was still conscious; Leia could hear him groaning. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Obi-Wan struggle
to stand, as well. A moment later, he had joined her and Luke over Palpatine, his own lightsaber at the Chancellor’s throat, held in his uninjured arm.

“Enough, Sidious,” Luke said, reaching down to pry Palpatine’s unignited lightsaber from his hands.

Palpatine laughed, in a way that could really only be described as cackling. “You are fools,” he declared, his voice mocking. “You won’t kill me. It’s not the Jedi way.”

“No,” Obi-Wan admitted. “We will let the Senate decide your fate.”

Leia wanted to argue against that—she wasn’t a Jedi, and would gladly kill this monster—but then the voices suddenly came roaring back into her head, pressing against her mind like a swarm of mynocks and cutting off any argument in her throat. This time, they brought with them a sense of unease, which was only amplified by the smug grin on Palpatine’s face. Almost reluctantly, she looked over her shoulder at the door—it was still partially open, but otherwise undisturbed. Still, something had changed; she could sense it. Beside her, Luke shifted slightly. Did he sense it, too?

Palpatine laughed again. “Do you think it will be as easy as that?” He looked to Luke and Leia, his horrible yellow eyes peering up at them. “You both know better than that.”

“We stopped you once,” Luke said, taking a half-step forward, his blade inching closer to Palpatine’s throat. “It will happen again.”

“Is that what you believe?” Palpatine asked, a look of almost pity on his face. “There are ways to cheat death—ways that the Jedi could never dream of.”

Leia’s blood chilled in her veins. Cheating death? Qui-Gon Jinn had said that Anakin fell to the dark side trying to find a way to save Padmé from death; Palpatine had promised to give it to him. Leia had just assumed that had been a lie—no one could cheat death. But had he been telling the truth? The thought was almost too horrible to consider.

The voices had grown into a roar, blocking out all other sound. Leia’s heart began to beat faster in her chest and her breath quickened as a sense of all-encompassing dread settled over her. Slowly, she twisted her head, looking back towards the door—and had to choke back a scream.

△▽△

A figure stood in the doorway, dressed in a dark cloak. Though the hood was pulled up, shrouding much of their face, Luke recognized them instantly—Palpatine, with the pallid skin and blue lips of a corpse. He looked at them and smiled, an eerie echo of the flesh-and-blood man sprawled at their feet.

“How is this possible?” Leia asked, her voice weak.

“It’s a vision,” Luke said. “It has to be.” It couldn’t be real; it just couldn’t.

Padmé stood, quickly helping Anakin to his feet, and together the two of them began to back away from the figure, towards the stairs. But the ghostly Palpatine didn’t move.

“You cannot hope to ever stop me,” the real Palpatine said, his voice full of venom.

“Bold words from a man in your current position,” Obi-Wan said, though even he eyed the apparition nervously.
In response, Palpatine merely laughed. Luke glanced back over his shoulder at the spectral figure; an almost gleeful smile was stretched across its ghastly face. As he watched, it turned and retreated into the room, the wooden door not even wavering as it slipped past.

“Where’s it going?” Anakin asked. Padmé had helped to settle him onto the floor, his back propped up against the wall, and though he still looked weak, he was at least capable of holding himself upright.

“Stay on him,” Luke told Leia and Obi-Wan, with a glance down at Palpatine, before stepping away and heading in the direction of the door. The voices that had haunted him all throughout the temple were back with a vengeance, practically screaming within his head. They seemed to almost grow excited as he drew closer to the door.

He kept his ignited lightsaber poised at the ready, and approached cautiously, stopping just outside the door and pushing it open the rest of the way with a nudge of his foot.

Darth Vader stood within the room, with no sign of the corpse-like Palpatine. The voices silenced as soon as Luke laid eyes on his father—his father, as he had known him. Vader’s heavy mechanical breathing filled the room, echoing off the stone walls, and he stared at Luke from behind the soulless red eyes of his mask.

The Stone hovered in the centre of the room, the pale blue markings etched into its surface glowing faintly. Luke did his best to ignore it.


He started to move across the room towards Luke, and as he moved, his form shifted. His mask became sleeker, and the various buttons on his life support suit melted away into a long black robe, belted at the waist. Luke recognized this figure immediately from the vision Qui-Gon Jinn had shown him.

Kylo Ren came to a stop directly in front of Luke, his masked face only inches from his own. “Hello, Uncle,” he greeted, the vocoder in the mask transforming his voice into something only distantly human.

Behind him, Luke heard Leia take in a sharp, almost wince-like breath, but he didn’t dare turn around to look at her. A girl’s voice spoke, though Luke was quite certain she spoke only in his mind: “You didn’t fail Kylo; Kylo failed you.”

Though he knew it was impossible, he had the distinct feeling that he’d heard that somewhere before.

Then a man’s voice—Kylo Ren’s, unmodulated by the mask: “Let the past die. Kill it, if you have to.”

“Do you see?” his nephew asked, leaning closer. “Do you understand what I will become?”

Kylo Ren glanced over Luke’s shoulder—to Leia, he assumed. Palpatine let out a loud, almost joyous cackle.

Ren ignited his lightsaber, revealing a crackling, unstable blade the colour of blood. He charged past Luke, heading directly, it seemed, for Leia. But when he swung his blade, it was aimed at Palpatine.

Palpatine merely continued to laugh as the blade came racing down towards him—and
disappeared, right before making contact. Kylo Ren had vanished as quickly as he had appeared.

“What the hell is going on?” Padmé demanded.

“It’s the Stone,” Luke said, looking back into the room. No other apparitions had appeared—yet—but the Stone remained in the centre of the room, hovering just a couple feet off the ground. “It’s… acting up—projecting images through the Force.”

“Why?”

Luke shrugged. “I don’t—“

“I believe it’s trying to tell you something.”

It was Obi-Wan who spoke—but not the Obi-Wan of this time: The Obi-Wan that Luke had known, looking exactly as he had right before his death at Darth Vader’s hands.

“Ben!” Luke cried, staring at his former mentor in awe. “What are you—“

He realized then that Ben looked different from the other times that Luke had seen him, after his death. His form, instead of being faintly blue and transparent, was solid and opaque now, the form of a living being.

Ben smiled. “Unfortunately, I’m not actually here.” He had appeared near the stairs at the end of the hallway, and took a few steps forward now, giving a polite nod to his contemporary counterpart. Obi-Wan, for his part, looked far too stunned to do anything more than stare back.

He came to a stop beside Palpatine and, without a word, Obi-Wan and Leia both took a step back, moving out of his way. Ben kneeled down, and Palpatine raised a hand, as if to fend him off, but before he could do anything, Ben had reached out, placing a hand on Palpatine’s forehead. The Sith Lord immediately went slack.

“What are you doing?” Obi-Wan demanded, but Ben said nothing.

A moment later, Palpatine’s eyes had rolled up into his head, and then slipped closed, as he slumped back in unconsciousness. He wasn’t dead—Luke could still feel his oppressive presence in the Force—but Ben had forcibly shut his consciousness down.

“As you might have guessed,” Ben said, standing, as if he hadn’t just knocked a powerful Sith Lord unconscious with the touch of his hand, “I’m not even the real Obi-Wan Kenobi, just as those were not the real Darth Vader or Kylo Ren. I’m merely an… imitation.”

Though Palpatine—for the moment—no longer posed a threat, Obi-Wan and Leia both kept their lightsabers ignited, their wary gazes trained on Ben.

“So, who are you then?” Luke asked. He cast a somewhat nervous glance over his shoulder. “Some sort of manifestation of the Stone?”

“You could say that. You could also say that I speak for the Whills, for the Ones, for the Force itself… The situation is not so easily explained.”

“So then what are you trying to tell us?”

Ben came to stand just in front of Luke, a soft smile on his face. Though he looked identical to the man and mentor that Luke had known, he could tell now that this wasn’t the same person—this
apparition carried none of the sorrow that had weighed Ben down, in both life and death.

“The past is the past, Luke,” Ben said, glancing over at Palpatine’s unconscious form. “To focus on changing it is to spend your life constantly looking back.”

“Then why did the Force bring us here?” Luke asked. “There has to be a reason!”

“You were once chastised for always looking to the horizon,” Ben said. “But that is not necessarily a bad thing.” He took a step forward, placing his hands on Luke’s shoulders; Luke almost expected them to pass right through him, but they landed solidly. “In your time, you are the last of the Jedi. A thousand generations live in you, and it’s up to you to ensure that they live on. By sending you here, I hoped you would come to understand what you have to do.”

Qui-Gon’s words echoed in his ears. “Maintain balance,” he said, and Ben nodded.

“And that is not something you can do on your own,” he said, glancing towards Leia.

“What are you saying?” Padmé asked, her brows furrowed. “That we can’t change our future?”

Ben turned to look at her, a smirk on his face. “You can always change your future. But you can never change the past.”

“Our past, you mean,” Leia said.

“But the present, right now, is our past,” Luke argued. He gestured to his parents. “The things we do here, now, change their future.”

Ben nodded. “That is a possibility. But it’s not why you’re here.”

“I’m getting very confused,” Anakin admitted.

“So then what’s our purpose?” Leia asked; Luke could hear the annoyance beginning to grow in her voice.

“The past is an excellent teacher,” Ben explained. “Just because you cannot change it, doesn’t mean you cannot learn from it.”

\textit{Darth Vader. Kylo Ren.}

Realization passed over Leia’s face, at nearly the same time as it came to him.

“What happens now, then?” he asked.

Ben gave him a knowing look. “I think you know what you have to do.”

He did.

Luke glanced over his shoulder at the Stone. It still hovered, glowing, in the centre of the room. “But what about Palpatine? We’ve already changed things, just by being here. History is already on a different course.”

Ben smiled, as enigmatic as ever. “You don’t need to worry about that.”

He gave Luke’s shoulder a gentle squeeze, before sliding past him into the room—and disappearing. As soon as he vanished, the voices started up again, though they were much softer now, being little more than whispers that flitted past his ear.
“What does that mean?” Obi-Wan asked, finally lowering his lightsaber and extinguishing it. Leia did the same.

“It means it’s time for us to go back,” she said.

“But everyone here—everything you’ve done,” Padmé argued. “What happens to that?”

“I’m… not sure.”

“Well, evidently, things will not remain as they were,” Obi-Wan said. “As you said, you have already changed the past.”

“And it seems as if we have a chance of changing it even more,” Anakin said, looking to Palpatine. He was still slumped over, unconscious, and with no signs of stirring anytime soon. “We stop Sidious, and everything changes—for us, and for you.”

Luke frowned. “I don’t think it will be that simple. We weren’t sent here to change the past—that was made clear enough.”

“But you did!” Padmé cried. “Even if it wasn’t your original purpose.”

“That’s true,” Luke said with a nod. “It’s impossible to say what will change for us, or what our galaxy will look like when we get back.” He went over to Palpatine, looking down at his slack body. “You have what we came for; you can take Palpatine back to Coruscant to face trial.” He looked over at Padmé, Anakin, and Obi-Wan. “You can change the galaxy for the better, or at least try to.”

“But you won’t be coming with us,” Anakin said, and Luke shook his head.

“We don’t need to. This isn’t our time, and we’ve been here long enough.” He looked at Leia, and she smiled, nodding. The voices were getting louder, slowly but steadily. He could feel them pulling him towards the door, towards the Stone.

“Will the Stone even send you back?” Anakin asked.

He smiled, just slightly. “I think so.”

Anakin cast a wary glance into the room holding the Stone. “And afterwards? What do we do with it?”

“The Order is anxious to get their hands on it,” Obi-Wan said, “but I’m not sure that’s wise.”

Luke nodded. “I agree. It should be left alone, as is. I’m not even sure the temple would allow you to remove it.”

Obi-Wan ran a hand over his beard. “No, I suspect you’re right.” He let out a deep sigh. “I suggest that we not linger here. The Force only knows how long the Chancellor will stay unconscious.”

Padmé left Anakin’s side, going over to Luke. Reaching up, she placed a hand on either side of his face, and smiled, though it was full of sadness. “I hope that we can make things right for you,” she said. “For both of you.”


Anakin forced himself to his feet, and hobbled over to them, clapping a hand on Luke’s shoulder. Padmé reached her arms across his back, helping to support him, and Leia took a few steps
forward, coming to stand beside Luke.

“I’m more thankful for the two of you than you could ever know,” Anakin said, “and I’m very glad to have gotten the chance to get to know you.”

“Us, as well,” Leia said, and Luke could tell that she genuinely meant it. He looked at her, and smiled.

“Give our farewells to Ahsoka,” he said.

Anakin nodded. “We will.”

“Thank you,” Leia said, “for everything.”

He smiled, and though there was sadness in it, there was also unimaginable warmth. “Who knows,” he said, “maybe we’ll be seeing each other again very soon.”

“Maybe,” Luke said—though some part of him, not so deep down, felt as if that sentiment were too good to be true. He looked over to Obi-Wan, who gave them both a polite nod.

“We’ve already had our fair share of farewells,” he said, “so I’ll simply wish you both the best of luck.”

Luke smiled and nodded. “Thank you. I wish the same to you—to all of you.” He looked at each of them in turn, committing their faces to memory, before he and Leia stepped back together, and turned and headed for the door. It was still wide open, with the Stone hovering in the centre of the room. The voices were much louder now, and they grew almost excited as the two of them approached the room.

They stepped over the threshold, and the voices quieted, though they didn’t entirely go away. Luke looked back to see his parents and Obi-Wan watching them, their faces a mix of sadness, uncertainty, and hope—the same things Luke himself was feeling.

Anakin nodded, one final goodbye, and Luke turned back to face the Stone. The glowing had grown brighter, and Luke reached over, taking Leia’s hand in his. The voices, though still quiet, seemed to clarify; many of them were immediately recognizable to him, and much of what they were saying became understandable. By the way Leia’s grip tightened on his hand, he knew that she was hearing the same thing, too.

“There’s good in him. I know... I know there’s still...

The Force will be with you, always.

Tell your sister... you were right.

No one’s ever really gone.

I know what I have to do, but I don’t know if I have the strength to do it.

Some things are stronger than blood.

And I am all the Jedi!

The voices continued to echo around them. They looked at each other, and nodded. Together, they stretched out their hands and pressed their fingers to the cool metal of the Stone—
Chapter End Notes

There are going to be, at most, two more chapters, before everything is all nice and wrapped up.

I hope you all stay safe and healthy!
Divergence

Chapter Summary

Luke and Leia return to their own time, and take stock of what’s changed—and what hasn’t.

Chapter Notes

there’s one more chapter to go after this! it’s quite short, and is already mostly written, so you can expect it to be posted in the next few days :)

Leia woke slowly.

Sunlight filtered in through her eyelids, bathing her field of vision in bright red. It took a moment for her memories to come trickling back—Palpatine, the temple, the Stone. Her and Luke had tried to go back.

She opened her eyes to see a brilliant orange sky spread out above her.

The tall golden grass of Raban whispered around her, wet with dew; she could feel dampness spreading on her legs and back, sending a shiver up her spine. The air had the crisp cold of early morning—it was dawn.

She laid there for a moment, absorbing the sights around her, sorting slowly through her memories. She still remembered everything as she had before—her childhood on Alderaan, the Empire, the Civil War. Han.

Did that mean that they hadn’t made it back? Or had they made it back, but nothing had changed? Or had her memories just stayed the same?

She sat up slowly. Her vision swam, and she blinked her eyes hard to clear it. There was a slight tenderness to her body, as if she’d been tossed around a bit, but she was otherwise unharmed. The baby was okay; she placed a comforting hand to her belly, and took a few deep, calming breaths, before standing.

The temple stood not too far away, its dark stone bathed in morning light. She’d been set down a short distance out from it, much like when it had ejected them on their visit with Anakin and Ahsoka.

The Millennium Falcon was docked beside the temple, alongside Luke’s X-wing. Her heart leapt at the sight of it: they’d made it back!

And if the Falcon was there, then so was Han.

Someone groaned behind her, and she spun to see Luke sprawled out in the grass, his face twisted in a slight wince.
“Luke! Are you okay?” She knelt down beside him, helping him to sit up. The wounds on the back of his legs weren’t bleeding, having been cauterized by the lightsaber that had inflicted them, but they were still pretty nasty.

“I’m fine,” he said. “But you? You’re not hurt?”

She shook her head. “No, I’m okay. But Luke—we made it back!”

He stared at her for a second or two, seeming to work out what she was saying, before a smile broke out across his face. “We did?”

“We did!”

He began trying to stand, and she helped him to his feet, motioning to the Falcon and his X-wing—

“Leia?”

She looked over her shoulder to see Han sitting up in the grass, only a few feet away.

“Han!” she cried. Quickly making sure that Luke was steady enough to stand on his own, she ran to her husband, falling to the ground beside him and throwing her arms around his neck. An immense amount of relief flooded through her; he remembered her.

The relief was immediately followed by the realization of what, exactly, that meant.

He leaned back a bit, just barely managing to catch her, and let out an amused, if somewhat confused, chuckle. “It’s good to see you, too.” He let Leia cling to him for a moment, before pulling away. “And you, too, Luke! Glad to see you’re not dead.”


“How’d we end up back out here?” Han asked.

Leia’s brows furrowed, her overwhelming joy at seeing Han again subsiding slightly. “Did you just wake up out here?”

Of course he had. Why else would he be sitting out here in the grass?

“Yeah. Did you not just wake up here?”

“No, we did, but—Han, what’s the last thing you remember?”

He frowned, giving her an odd look, but complied. “You and I were going into that temple, looking for Luke. Because, you know, we though he might be dead. Then the next thing I know... I’m back out here.”

Leia stood, glancing up at the quickly brightening sky, before looking to Luke. “It’s dawn. It was dawn when he and I went in.”

“So the temple did to him what it did to us before,” Luke said. “It might only be minutes, or even seconds, since the two of you went in.”

She hadn’t even considered that might be a possibility. For so much of their time in the past, she’d worried about what she was missing, what was happening while she was stuck there—but she hadn’t missed anything.
“What the hell are you two talking about?” Han demanded, standing, eyeing them both up and down. He paused on Leia, something like alarm appearing on his face. “You weren’t wearing those clothes before.”

Leia resisted the urge to cover her abdomen, suddenly incredibly self-aware. She was a full month more pregnant than she had been when Han had last seen her, only a few minutes ago. Thankfully, her pregnancy still wasn’t that visible yet, and she prayed he wouldn’t notice; this wasn’t how she wanted him to find out. “Uh, no, I wasn’t.”

“It’s a bit of a long story,” Luke supplied. His face was steadily growing paler, no doubt from the strain of standing on his injured legs.

“Look, Han, we’ll explain everything,” Leia said, “but we should get to the Falcon. Luke’s hurt, and—”


“Part of that long story. Come on.” She went over to Luke, slinging his arm across her shoulder, and the three of them began making their way towards the Falcon.

She could still feel the Force pulsing around the temple, but it was quieter—gentler—and no longer carried the same unease within it. She knew what lay within its walls now, and it seemed as if the Stone was no longer interested in them. It felt peaceful now—balanced.

R2-D2 stood at the bottom of the Falcon’s gangplank. As they approached, he let out a stream of beeps and trills, expressing both his relief that Luke was alright and his confusion as to how they had gotten there so quickly.

“Long story, bud,” Luke said, giving the astromech’s dome a little pat.

“Artoo, how long has it been since Han and I went into the temple?” Leia asked

R2 whistled a response.

Her eyebrows shot up. “Three minutes?”

Only three minutes—but to her and Luke, it had been a month.

R2 beeped sadly, turning his photoreceptor to Luke.

“Don’t worry,” Luke told him, starting up with gangplank into the Falcon’s hold. “I’ll be alright.”

When they finally finished telling their story, it was a moment before Han said anything.

They hadn’t told him everything—nothing about his and Leia’s son. Luke and Leia had silently agreed it would be best for her to tell him that, alone. After she finally told him she was pregnant. The news that there was a possibility your child was going to grow up and fall to the dark side would likely be a bit easier to digest once you actually knew you were going to be having a child.

Luke leaned back, watching Han carefully. They were sitting at the booth in the Falcon’s main hold, mugs of crappy instant caf in front of them. Leia had helped to apply bacta patches to the wounds on Luke’s legs, and he could already feel them beginning to work. In an hour or two, he’d be well enough to fly his X-wing out himself. R2 sat beside the table, either unwilling to leave
Luke just yet or too curious not to hear what had happened; perhaps it was a bit of both.

Han drummed his fingers against the dejarik board, his brows furrowed slightly, and took a sip of caf that had almost certainly gone cold.

Seeming to sense that he wasn’t going to speak—at least not for another minute or two—Leia decided to be the first one to break the silence. “What do you remember, Han? About Palpatine, the Empire, the war?”

Luke himself had all his memories, as did Leia. That lead him to believe that nothing had changed—that they had failed to alter the past. But they couldn’t be certain. They wouldn’t know whether their continued remembrance was because nothing had changed, or some side effect of their travel through time—not until they found out what Han remembered.

Though Luke had a sneaking suspicion of what the answer might be, he still held his breath as he waited for Han to speak.

Han shrugged, shaking his head. “I remember everything. Or, well, what I assume must be everything. My history’s not exactly great, but I do know about the end of the Clone Wars; the Jedi being wiped out, Palpatine becoming the Emperor, all that fun stuff. And it’d be pretty hard for me to forget the past few years with the war and the Rebellion.”

Luke’s breath came out in a big puff of air. Han remembered everything; history hadn’t changed. He had thought that would be the outcome, after everything that Ben’s apparition had told them in the temple, but it was still a disappointment.

“So nothing changed,” Leia said, a deep frown creasing the corners of her mouth. “It’s not exactly surprising, but… how? How can this be possible?”

Luke shook his head. “Ben said we didn’t need to worry about it. Obviously he—whatever he was—knew this was going to happen.”

“So, what?” Leia asked. “He made sure the past would remain unchanged?”

Luke shrugged. “I mean, why not? He said that he was some kind of… manifestation of the Stone. We already know that it can alter memories; it did it to us and to Han, and to Force knows how many Rabani villagers. Once it sent us back, it could have done the same to everyone left behind.”

“Everyone? For the past to truly be unchanged, it’d have to erase the memories of more than the people who were at the temple. Every member of the Jedi High Council knew that Palpatine was Sidious, and they were almost all on Coruscant. Do you really think the Stone is powerful enough to alter their memories from halfway across the galaxy?”

“We have no idea how powerful it is,” Luke argued. “It could be the most powerful object in the galaxy!”

Han, seeming to decide that this conversation was out of his depths, got up to go make more instant caf.

Leia’s frown deepened. “Okay, so say it did alter everyone’s memories. Did they all just lose a whole month of their lives? That would raise some pretty serious questions. Or did they just forget anything they learned that had to do with the future? Would they remember us, then?”

Luke sighed. “I’m not sure, Leia. But it makes sense, based on everything we know about the Stone. And I’m not sure how else we could explain this.”
“Well, we already know that the Stone can send people through time,” Leia said. “What if it can do more than that? What if, once we left, it sent the entire galaxy back in time one month, to before we even got there? Everything we did there would end up not happening!”

Luke raised his eyebrows and opened his mouth, ready to express his skepticism, but Leia cut him off before he could even speak his first word.

“You said it yourself,” she said, leaning back and spreading her arms wide, “we have no idea how powerful it is. It could be capable of anything.”

“That’s true, but… I just don’t think that’s it.”

“So you think it’s more plausible that everyone had their memories erased?”

“I do, yes.”

Leia scowled at him for a moment, fingers tapping against the untouched mug of caf in front of her, before her eyes suddenly widened in realization.

“Alternate reality,” she said, and Luke’s eyebrows raised even higher.

She pushed the mug out of the way and leaned forward, hands flat on the table. “Think about it. Nothing has changed for us here—the past is the same, which means we can’t have been there. And we weren’t; not in this universe. But when we went back and started changing things, we created a… a split, a divergence in reality. So, somewhere, out there, maybe there’s a universe where things are different, because of us.”

Luke stared at her for a moment, his mouth hanging open slightly. It sounded crazy… but so did an artifact in a random temple sending them back in time. And it made sense. The other explanations were plausible—but this one felt… right.

He let out a quiet, astounded chuckle, leaning back in his seat. “I mean, we’ll never know,” he said. “There’s no way for us to prove this.”

“What about that Chagrian woman?” Han said, reappearing in the hold with a steaming cup of caf in his hands.

They both looked to him, and he shrugged. “I heard most of what you were saying. You both talk pretty loudly.” He slid back into his place in the booth. “But you know, the Chagrian—Mas Amedda’s niece, or whatever. The one Leia killed on that Kamarr planet.”

Leia’s expression was tight. “Pamani Laasken.”

Han nodded. “Yeah, that’s the one. You said she was part of the ISB, that you saw her a few years ago, so she’s technically supposed to be alive right now, or at least some time recently.”

“But not if Leia killed her on Kamarr during the Clone Wars,” Luke said, continuing the thought. “Han, you’re right!”

Han shrugged nonchalantly, grinning. “I’m just here to help.”

“If she’s still alive,” Leia said, “then I’m right. The Stone either reversed everything we did in the past… or we created an alternate timeline.”

“But if she died during the Clone Wars, then I’m right. The Stone just erased everyone’s
memories.”

Han raised a finger, cutting back into the conversation. “Well, how do we find out which it is?”

“I have access to files on almost every ISB member,” Leia said. “At least the most important ones. Threepio should be able to access them from my office. If Pamani Laasken is alive, she’ll be in those files.”

Leia moved to stand, but Luke moved quicker, slipping out of the booth. “I’ll go contact Threepio,” he said, giving Leia a rather pointed look that he hoped conveyed the message he wanted.

*Talk to him. Tell him.*

She sat back down and, after one last begrudging glance at Luke, looked to Han.

Luke headed for the cockpit, R2 trailing along after him.

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“Han, there’s something I have to tell you.”

He had just started taking a sip of his caf, and raised a curious eyebrow at her from above the mug. “That sounds quite ominous,” he said, lowering the cup.

Leia almost winced. It shouldn’t be ominous; telling him she was pregnant should have been happy, even with Han’s reservations about fatherhood. She knew he would be a great father, even if he didn’t. But after everything she’d learned about their son’s potential future, it felt as if a dark cloud was looming over them, with a storm threatening to start at any moment.

Ominous, indeed.

“It’s not entirely bad,” she said, as much to convince herself as him. “But because of everything that’s happened, it’s become… complicated.”

He watched her, eyebrows still raised, waiting for her to spit it out.

One of his hands was resting on the tabletop, and Leia reached over, grabbing it with both of hers. She took a deep breath. “I’m pregnant.”

His expression didn’t change. It was a moment before he said anything. Leia’s grip tightened on his hand, a result of her mounting anxiety, and that seemed to jolt him out of it.

“I…” he said, rather lamely. “Wow. Really?”

“Yes, really. I’m about four months along.”

“Four months? Were you four months, uh… before?”

“Before I got sent into the past?”

He nodded, still looking slightly dumbstruck.

“No. But I am now.”

“Ah. I see.” His eyebrows finally lowered, settling into a crease between his eyes. He shifted so
that he was fully facing her, and brought up his other hand, placing it atop hers. “Did you know, before you, um... left?”

She worried her lip between her teeth, before, slowly, nodding. “Yes,” she whispered.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I was... worried.”

He frowned. “About what?”

“How you would react. I thought you would be upset.”

“Upset?” His voice was incredulous. “Leia, why would I be upset? Sure, the idea of being a father might scare the shit out of me... but I love you. And I’ll love our baby.”

Leia felt like she might cry, though she knew it was stupid. She needed to learn to have more faith in him. “Well, you're not exactly the archetype of the family man, are you?”

He smiled, leaning forward to press a kiss to her cheek. “No, you’re not wrong. But I’m willing to learn.”

She wrapped her arms around his neck. “I love you.”

She could feel the grin on his face as he replied, “I know.”

They stayed like that for a moment, pressed together, until Han pulled away. He brushed the hairs from her face, his grin replaced a frown of concern. “What did you mean when you said, ‘It’s not entirely bad’? Is something wrong?”

The relief she’d been feeling was immediately washed away by more dread. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “Not yet,” she said.

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She explained it to him slowly, as best as she could. First, the voices she had heard while meditating with Anakin, then Luke’s reveal about his vision, and finally the apparition that had appeared to them in the temple. Han listened silently throughout it all, a look of growing concern on his face.

“I don’t know how or why our son falls,” Leia said, “but I know that it’s a possibility, and it’s one that I feel we will have to try very hard to avoid.”

“Luke knows about all of this?” Han asked, and Leia nodded.

“He’s going to help us. He and I will teach our son to not only control the Force, but to understand it.”

Han’s eyebrows raised. “You? What, are you going to be a Jedi now, too?”

“No. But I do want to learn more about the Force. I already started training, when we were in the past. I feel like the more I know, the more I can help both our son and myself.” She reached up, gently cupping his face. “But don’t worry. I won’t leave you.”

Han smiled. “Oh, I’m not worried about that. I’m worried about you and Luke becoming even weirder than you already are.” Despite his joking tone, she could still hear the anxiety in his voice
—not about her, but about their child.

“All three of us will do everything we can,” she said, hoping to give him some of the reassurance Luke had given her. “We have the advantage of knowing this is a possibility, and so we’ll do everything we can possibly think of to keep it from happening. We won’t let our son fall to the dark side.”

“I know,” Han said, “because I know that once you’ve set your mind to something, absolutely nothing can stop you.”

She wrapped her arms around him, pulling him into another hug. He pulled her towards him, holding her tight.

“I love you,” she whispered, face buried in his shoulder.

“I love you, too.”

For the first time, she began to feel hope.

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3PO had already been in Leia’s office when Luke commed him, so it didn’t take the droid long to find the information Luke was after. Still, Luke was slow to return to the hold; Han and Leia needed at least a little bit of time alone. He didn’t know if she was going to tell him the whole truth about their son—including what might become of him in the future—or just that she was pregnant, but either way, they deserved to have that conversation without an audience.

He sat in the cockpit of the Falcon for almost an hour. At first, he watched the waving grass and distant roiling waves of the ocean, but eventually he dozed off. Despite the caf, he was exhausted; the fight with Palpatine had taken its toll on him, and, technically, he hadn’t slept in years, since his short little nap on the shuttle to Raban.

R2 was the one to wake him, about half an hour later. He let out several annoyed whistles and trills, declaring that he was bored and that Luke had been snoring. Luke didn’t even know if droids could get bored or if R2 was only saying that, but he took the hint.

“Allright,” he said, standing up. He’d been curled up in the pilot’s chair, and though he felt slightly more rested, his already-sore muscles felt even worse. His legs, however, seemed significantly better. “Why don’t we go check up on them?”

R2 followed him back out into the main hold. Han and Leia were still seated side by side at the table, arms wrapped around each other. They weren’t particularly exuberant, but neither of them seemed absolutely devastated, either. R2 let out a sharp whistle, alerting them to his and Luke’s presence.

They pulled apart, looking towards the arrivals. Leia’s eyes were a little red, but not overly puffy; she hadn’t cried much, if at all. Han looked a little crestfallen, but both of them held a glimmer of hope in their faces that lifted Luke’s own spirits.

“Are you two alright?” he asked, going over and settling down across from them.

Leia nodded. “Yeah. We’ll be just fine. What about you? What took you so long?”

Both Han and Leia leaned forward slightly. “And?” Leia asked.

“Pamani Laasken was arrested on Corulag two weeks ago,” Luke said. “She’s currently on Chandrila awaiting trial. She’s still alive, which means Leia was right. Either the Stone reversed everything we did in the past… or we created an alternate timeline.”

Leia let out a loud exhale of breath, flopping back against the seat.

“Which do you think it is?” Han asked, looking to Luke.

“Personally, I’m more inclined to believe the second option,” Luke said, shrugging. “But we’ll probably never know for sure which it is. There’s never been any proof that alternate realities even exist. They’re little more than crack conspiracy theories. But it seems more… reasonable, somehow. It makes more sense.”

“Well, if you ask me, they’re both crazy,” Han said.


“So, what now?” he asked. “Do we try and take this Stone thing back with us, or what?”

Luke shook his head. “No. We already discussed this back in the temple, before we came back. I doubt we could take it even if we tried, but I don’t think we should. It’s the sort of thing that’s best left alone.”

“That’s it, then? You two spend a month in the past, come back, and then just… what?”

“We go home,” Leia said, placing a hand on her husband’s shoulder, “and we try to make the best future we can.”

“Before we do any of that,” Luke said, standing, “I have someone I have to go see first.”

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Mayzee Lanith was sitting at her workbench, just as she had been when Luke first walked into her shop. She looked up at the sound of his approaching footsteps, her eyes magnified by the goggles balanced on her nose.

“You’re back already,” she said. A small screw was sticking out of the corner of her mouth. “That was quick.”

“Not from my perspective,” Luke said, coming to stand in front of her worktable.

She raised one thin, white eyebrow at that. “Did you discover the secrets of the temple?”

Luke nodded. “I did. And I don’t think it’ll be bothering you, or anyone else on this planet. Not anytime soon.”

“Is that so? How do you reckon that?”

He had stood in front of the temple for a while, after disembarking from the Falcon. He had been able to feel the Force rippling around the stone edifice, as he had every other time he’d stood in front of it—but this time, it felt different. He’d placed his hand against the cool, dark stone of its exterior, sensing the same presence within the Force, the same lack of either light or dark… but quieter, somehow. As if the Stone, or whatever thing controlled it, had gone into hibernation.
He didn’t know why; perhaps the act of sending two people into the past and then back into the future had weakened it. It had lain mostly dormant for thousands of years, only ever using as much power as was needed to frighten a few dozen villagers. Sending two people through time twice was no doubt more challenging, and while the Stone was certainly powerful, everything had to have limits.

Almost everything about it was still a mystery to him—and likely always would be. The less he, or anyone else, knew about it, the better. The Stone was a relic best left to be forgotten.

“Its dangers aren’t gone for good,” he said, “but they’re gone for now. The people of Raban should face no trouble from that temple, at least not for a while.”

Mayzee let out a somewhat-skeptical harrumph. “That’s all rather vague.”

Luke shrugged. “It’s all that I can give you. I’m sorry.”

“Well, it’s better than anything else.” She took the screw out of her mouth, and gave him a solemn nod. “I am glad to see that you made it back alright.”

He returned her nod. “Thank you. I know it’s not much, but I hope that this might bring you some peace.”

Her eyebrows raised, her expression doubtful. “Maybe,” she said.

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Luke sat in the cockpit of his X-wing, punching the proper coordinates into the ship’s navicomputer. Han and Leia had already left on the Falcon, heading back home to Chandrila. Luke had promised to follow them, so that Leia could keep an eye on him and make sure he was actually taking the time to recuperate. He had every intention of keeping that promise—he knew that if he didn’t, she would have his head.

As the navicomputer finished its calculations, he took one last glance out the cockpit at the golden planet of Raban. Its quiet, insignificant existence would help to ensure that the Stone remained a secret, unknown to the rest of the galaxy.

R2 was strapped into the droid socket behind the cockpit, and as the hyperspace calculations were loaded up, he beeped out a question.

“No,” Luke said, checking that all other systems were a go for their jump. “I don’t think we’re gonna go back to chasing after old Jedi legends and relics.”

R2 let out a curious chirrup.

“Well, the Republic needs all the help it can get with finishing off the Empire,” Luke explained, “and… I don’t think I need all those old legends and stuff anymore. I have some new plans.”

R2 warbled another question, his surprise obvious even in binary.

Luke grinned. “You’ll see,” he said. “Besides, there’s some other things I wanna look into. But don’t worry—I’ll be sure to bring you along for that, too.”

Seemingly satisfied, R2 let out a few more beeps, letting Luke know the interrogation was over.

The words that Palpatine had said in the temple had been haunting him—claims of being able to
cheat death, of being unstoppable. They would be easy enough to dismiss as the ravings of an arrogant man… save for the apparition that had accompanied them. Palpatine’s own gruesomely animated corpse.

There was something there. And Luke would find out what. He would do whatever it took to protect the galaxy, and keep his nephew’s dark future from coming to pass.

*Whatever it takes.*

With a deep breath, he pressed forward on the hyperdrive. The X-wing shot forward, leaving Raban and its temple far, far behind.

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Ben Solo was born five months later.

A month after his birth, the Galactic Concordance was signed, officially bringing an end to the Civil War that had ravaged the galaxy for the past five years. Luke went to Chandrila for the signing, and was able to visit his nephew in person for the first time.

It was the day after the signing. The streets of Hanna City were still full of revelers, laughing and dancing in celebration of the Empire’s true end. The night before, the dark sky had remained lit by fireworks until the early hours.

Luke sat in Leia’s living room, holding his nephew in his arms, and he tried not to think of the horrible visions he had seen.

“It was all for him, wasn’t it?” Leia asked, watching her brother cradle her son. She didn’t have to clarify what, exactly, she was talking about. “So we could save him.”

“Yes,” Luke said, softly. Ben was sleeping, his small face the absolute picture of peace. Though he was only a month old, he already had a head full of dark hair; he’d been born with it, Leia said. “Him, and the galaxy.”

They were silent for a moment, both of them thinking of the darkness their failure could bring.

Luke decided to break the silence. “I’m going to open an academy, once everything has settled. I’d like you to be my first student.”

They had continued her training for a bit, after their return, until Leia’s pregnancy had made her unable and the war had made them both too busy. It would be a while yet before they could pick it back up, but he wanted to know if she was still willing.

She smiled. “Of course,” she said. “Where’s this academy going to be?”

“I’m not sure yet. You won’t have to live there; I know how busy you are.”

“You know, you could have the temple on Coruscant, if you wanted,” Leia said. “The Republic would give it to you, no question.”

He shook his head. “I don’t want it. I want my Jedi to be new; different from the old Order. Besides, it’ll be a while yet before we’re big enough to fill that temple.”

She nodded. “I understand.” Taking a sip of her tea, she leaned back against the couch. She looked tired, as was to be expected, but not unhappy. “Your academy’s going to take a while to put
together. What are you going to do in the meantime, now that the Empire’s gone?”

Luke was silent a moment, before answering, “I’ve been thinking a lot about what Palpatine said, when we were in the temple on Raban. I’ve started looking it into, to see if it could possibly be true—that he did find a way to cheat death. That he could have, somehow, survived Endor.”

“Luke,” Leia said, “you saw him die yourself. There’s no way he could have survived.”

“I know. But I need to know for sure. I haven’t found anything yet, but I have a feeling… Leia, this could be the key to saving Ben.”

She looked at him, obviously still skeptical, but nodded.


“Why Ben?” he asked, glancing up at his sister.

Leia smiled, her face filled with tenderness as she looked from her son to her brother. “I named him after my only hope.”

She wasn’t just talking about Obi-Wan, he knew.

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Ben woke crying in the middle of the night. Luke was staying at Han and Leia’s apartment, in their guest room, across from the nursery. He’d been woken a few times already by the baby’s crying, the last not even thirty minutes ago; he’d heard either Han or Leia get up to go soothe or feed him, before stumbling back to their own bed. It seemed that Ben didn’t sleep well.

Luke pushed aside his blankets and stood, going out into the hallway and stepping across to the nursery. It was nearing dawn; grey light was beginning to seep in past the edges of the curtains. Ben was fussing in his crib. A door connected the nursery directly to Han and Leia’s room; it had been propped open slightly, but there were no sounds of movement from the other room. Both parents were likely exhausted beyond belief. Luke went over to the crib and, shushing quietly, lifted the baby up into his arms.

He had little experience with babies. He wouldn’t be very good at feeding or changing diapers, but he could at least offer some comfort.

Ben continued to whimper slightly. Luke pat his back and swayed gently from side to side, and, after a moment, the baby quieted. Luke could tell he wasn’t asleep yet, though, so he stayed where he was, patting and swaying.

A soft blue light fell over the darkness of the nursery.

Luke turned to see his father standing near the door, his translucent form glowing softly.


Ben began fussing again, and Luke shifted him so that he was cradled in his arms. The baby immediately fell quiet, his eyes focusing on his grandfather’s ghostly form, with as best an
approximation of awe as such a tiny face could muster.

“You’re a grandfather now,” Luke said, and a small, sad smile flitted across Anakin’s lips.

He looked young, like he had when Luke knew him in the past. Nothing like the man he had become. “I am,” he said, “but not really. Leia is my daughter by blood, and little else.”

“I’ve been trying to contact you.”

“I know. It’s… difficult for me to manifest myself in this way. Time moves differently for me; what is months for you is only moments for me.”

Luke gave a quiet chuckle. “Yeah, I have some experience with that.”

“Your trip through time caused quite the stir in the Force,” Anakin continued. “It took a while to settle, and for me to figure out what, exactly, had happened.”

“Do you remember anything? From when Leia and I were in the past?”

Anakin shook his head. “No. It never happened to me, as far as I know.”

Luke couldn’t help the disappointment that shot through him, though he had been expecting that answer. “Do you know what did happen? We tried to fix things—to keep the Empire from rising. To keep you from falling. But nothing changed.”

Anakin raised an eyebrow. “That’s not true.”

Luke looked down at the baby in his arms. Ben was still watching his grandfather closely. Luke had no idea if that was a sign of his Force sensitivity—that he could see these ghosts—or if anyone would be able to see them. “I know,” he said. “It was for him.”

“Yes,” Anakin said, “and no.”

Luke’s head shot up. “What do you mean?”

“As far as I can tell, the minute you landed in the past, you created an alternate reality. Time diverged—one path led to where we are now, and another led somewhere completely different. I don’t know where, exactly.”


Anakin shrugged. “Like I said—I’ve spent a while trying to figure out what happened. The Force was kind enough to humour me with an answer. I know that, even though you couldn’t change your own past, you still succeeded. And you might yet succeed even more.”

“If we save Ben.”

Anakin nodded. “Yes. If you keep him from making the same mistakes that I did… you can save both him and the galaxy.” He took a few steps forward, looking down at his grandson’s face. “Luke… You, your sister, and Ben—you are the legacy of the Jedi. And you’re my legacy, as well. You can fix our mistakes. You can redeem us.”

Luke met his father’s eyes. “We will.”

The door to Han and Leia’s room slid open, revealing Leia standing in the doorway.
“Leia,” Anakin said, an almost guilty look on his face.

“How long have you been standing behind that door?” Luke asked.

“A while.” She shrugged.

“You don’t need to apologize to me,” she said, cutting him off. “You’ve already done so, more than once, and that’s more than enough.”

“I… apologized to you, when you were in the past?”

She nodded. “I don’t forgive Vader; I’m not ready for that yet. I don’t know if I ever will be. But I don’t forgive Anakin, either… because there’s nothing to forgive.”

Anakin looked as if he might cry, if that were even possible for a ghost. “I’m sorry I couldn’t spare you those hardships,” he said.

“You said it yourself,” she said. “You did, somewhere. I’ve made my peace with what happened, and I hope that, one day, you’ll be able to find peace, too.”

Anakin looked over at Ben, and smiled. “I will.” He looked from his son to his daughter, and Luke could see that there was hope in his eyes—hope for his children, and for his grandson.

He vanished, his form dissipating as gently as it had arrived.

The light of dawn peered in through the curtains.

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